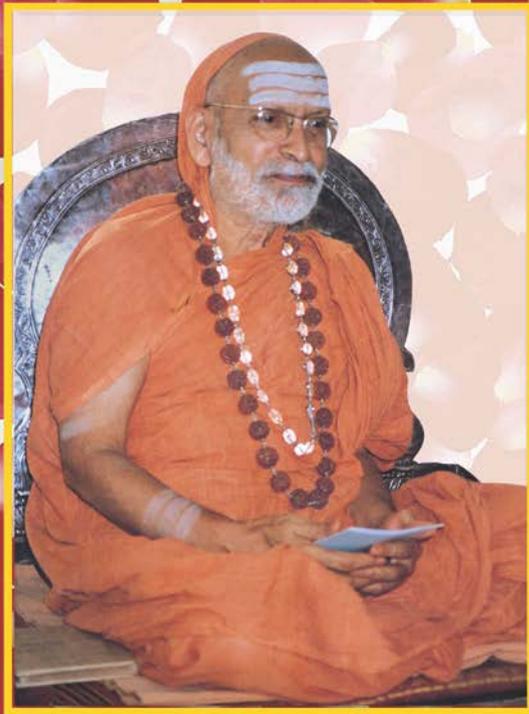


# *Exalting Elucidations*



*of*  
HIS HOLINESS JAGADGURU  
SRI ABHINAVA VIDYATHEERTHA MAHASWAMIGAL

# ***Exalting Elucidations***

*of*  
*His Holiness Jagadguru*  
***Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal***



*Published by*  
**Sri Vidyatheertha Foundation**  
Chennai  
[www.svfonline.net](http://www.svfonline.net)

*First Edition:* 2004 (3000 Copies)  
*Reprint :* 2009 (2000 Copies)  
2014 (2000 Copies)

*Digital Edition:* 2016

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*Published by*

**Sri Vidyatheertha Foundation**

G-B, Sai Karuna Apartments

49, Five Furlong Road

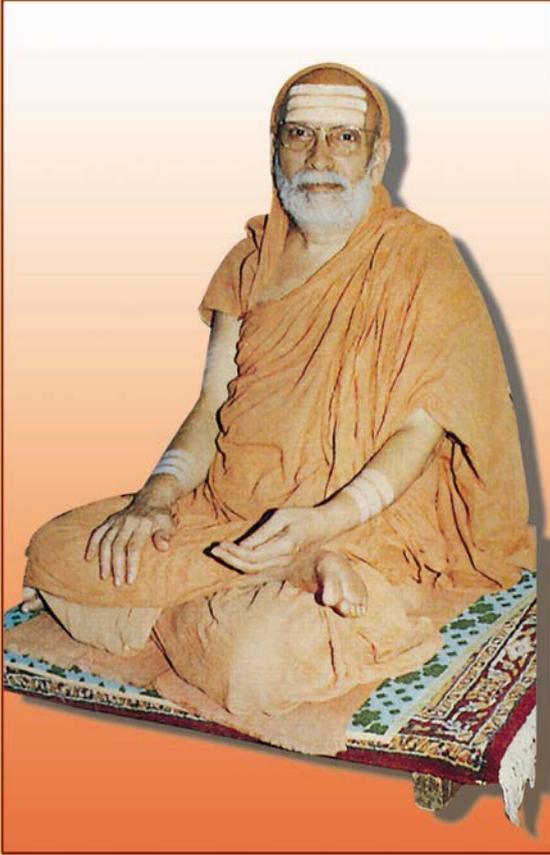
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## *Dedication*



*O Lord! We dedicate to You, with utmost reverence  
and humility, what is actually Yours.*

## Publisher's Note to the Digital Edition

His Holiness Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal, the 35<sup>th</sup> pontiff of Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetam, reverentially referred to as *Acharyal* in this book, was a living testimony to the scriptural declarations regarding a Self-realised soul, a *jīvanmukta* and above all, an ideal *Guru*. He was a non-pareil *yogin* and had been frequently abiding in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the pinnacle of *yoga*, ever since His teens.

Various classes of people came to *Acharyal* for guidance and succor. *Acharyal* graced them in myriad ways. His numerous benedictory addresses in multiple languages, parables conceived by Him on the spot, teachings and personal interactions with the devotees were all characterized by lucidity, cogency, practicality, humour and accurate exposition of the intricacies of the *Vedas*, *Itihāsas*, *Purāṇas* and other scriptural texts. His very life was a teaching for all. This book “Exalting Elucidations” primarily features the dialogues between *Acharyal* and disciples. Incidents from *Acharyal*'s life, His discourses, His parables and experiences of devotees with Him have been included in the various chapters as suppliments to the dialogues.

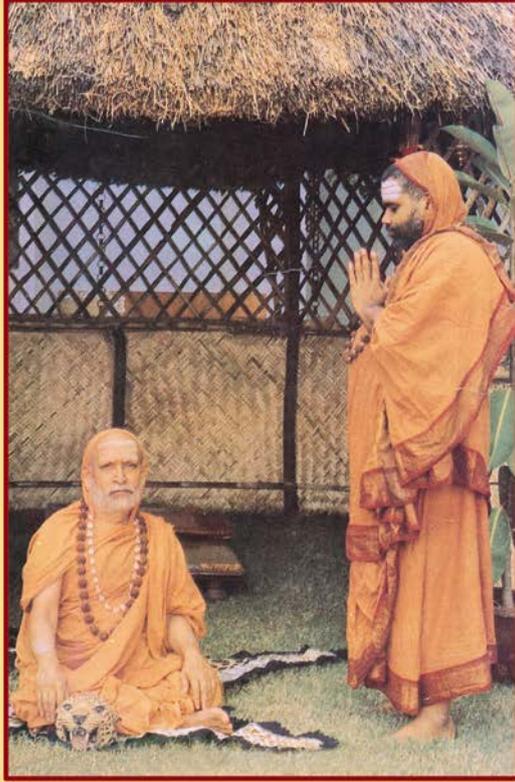
We at Sri Vidyatheertha Foundation deem it a great privilege, blessing and good fortune to publish the digital version of this book in commemoration of the birth centenary of Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal.

Chennai

*Trustees*

29.10.2016

**Sri Vidyatheertha Foundation**



*H.H. Jagadguru Bharathi Theertha Mahaswamigal  
paying obeisance to Acharyal*

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## A NOTE TO THE READERS ABOUT THE DIALOGUES

### **Background:**

The dialogues published here largely consist of the clarifications graced by *Acharyal* to the disciple who compiled them. The said disciple had the good fortune of witnessing almost all the other dialogues and of hearing the remaining few questions and answers from the persons who have spoken with *Acharyal*. He first made public a portion of what he has included here in 1977, in the first volume of '*Jagadguru of Sringeri*' and then presented almost all of the present material in 1981 in the Tamil book, '*Jagadguru Bathilalikkirar*.' An English version of the Tamil book was included by him in 1984, in Volume II of '*Crest Jewel of Yogis*'. In this book, the disciple has added more of *Acharyal*'s replies and rectified a number of errors that had crept into the previous publication. Since the portions relating to the dialogues were prepared, computer-typed and also proof-corrected by him, the responsibility for any deficiencies here are just his. He had no role to play in the rest of the material included in this book.

### **Some points:**

1. The dialogues have been grouped under 41 heads. Some of the chapters comprise the questions posed on different days and by different questioners. On the other hand, some, such as the one titled 'Māyā' contain the record of what *Acharyal* taught a disciple in a single session.
2. At times, a portion of an answer in one chapter is similar to that found in another chapter. However, at no time, has any elucidation given by *Acharyal* been repeated. What appears similar pertains to *Acharyal*'s words on different occasions or to different persons. Notwithstanding the similarity, the contextual

significances are different. Because of this and because the grouping of questions and answers is such that each chapter can be read independently, the slight overlap is quite in order.

3. Rarely, in a single chapter, there appear answers with some overlap. This is because of the difference in the questioners and because what is brought out by *Acharyal* is not identical. For instance, in the chapter titled 'Jñānin', there are three references to an enlightened sage's happiness and sorrow. However, in the first instance, *Acharyal* speaks of how they cannot lead to rebirth. In the second answer, He presents the reason for their presence. In the third, He talks of how the sage is not swayed by them. Thus, all the three are important.

***Publishers***

## CITATORY ABBREVIATIONS

AG	<i>Aṣṭāvakra-gītā</i>
AU	<i>Amṛtabindu Upaniṣad</i>
B	<i>Brahmajñānāvalīmālā</i>
BG	<i>Bhagavad-gītā</i>
BGB	<i>Bhagavad-gītā-bhāṣya</i>
BP	<i>Bhāgavata Purāṇa</i>
BU	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
GK	<i>Gauḍapāda-kārikā</i>
JU	<i>Jābāla Upaniṣad</i>
KU	<i>Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i>
LV	<i>Laghu-Vākyavṛtti</i>
M	<i>Mānasollāsa</i>
MB	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
MNU	<i>Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad</i>
MS	<i>Manu-smṛti</i>
MuU	<i>Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad</i>
MukU	<i>Muktika Upaniṣad</i>
NBS	<i>Nārada-bhakti-sūtra</i>
NN	<i>Nitya-nīti</i>
P	<i>Pañcadaśī</i>
PS	<i>Puruṣa-sūkta</i>
SL	<i>Śivānanda-laharī</i>
SPM	<i>Samayocita-padya-mālikā</i>
SPSS	<i>Śrīmadrāmāyaṇa-pārāyaṇa-samāpana-śloka</i>
SU	<i>Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad</i>
SV	<i>Śloka-vārtika</i>
TA	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka</i>
TU	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
VC	<i>Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi</i>
YS	<i>Yoga-sūtra</i>
YV	<i>Yoga-vāsiṣṭha</i>

## DIACRITICAL MARKS

अ	a	ऊ	ū	ऐ	ai
आ	ā	ऋ	r	ओ	o
इ	i	ॠ	ṛ	औ	au
ई	ī	ऌ	ḷ		
उ	u	ए	e		

क	k	ठ	ṭh	ब	b
ख	kh	ड	ḍ	भ	bh
ग	g	ढ	ḍh	म	m
घ	gh	ण	ṇ	य	y
ङ	ṅ	त	t	र	r
च	c	थ	ṭh	ल	l
छ	ch	द	d	व	v
ज	j	ध	dh	श	ś
झ	jh	न	n	ष	ṣ
ञ	ñ	प	p	स्	s
ट	ṭ	फ	ph	ह	h

. (anusvāra) ṁ

: (visarga) ḥ

## INTRODUCTION

A seeker in the path to Self-realisation is often confronted with myriad doubts at different stages of his spiritual discipline. By what process is he to get his doubts dispelled? Bhagavān advises, “Know That through prostration, enquiry and service. The wise ones who have realised the Truth will impart Knowledge to you.” Bhagavatpāda expounds the qualification, “who have realised the Truth”, as, “The considered view of the Lord is that Knowledge imparted by only those who have full enlightenment becomes effective, not any other.” Therefore, it behooves a spiritual aspirant to seek solutions from a Self-realised *Sadguru* to progress in the path of liberation.

Our *Acharyal*, His Holiness Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal, the 35th pontiff of Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetam, was a living testimony to the scriptural declarations regarding a Self-realised sage and a *jīvanmukta* and, above all, an ideal *Guru*. He was a nonpareil *yogi* and had been frequently abiding in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the pinnacle of *yoga*, ever since His teens. His own perfection apart, His compassion, wisdom and complete freedom from egoism, made Him empathise with His disciples, guide them in *sādhanā* and raise them to the sublime heights of spiritual greatness.

*Acharyal* always accorded prime importance to spiritual aspirants. Here is an example. On one occasion, three *brahmacāri*s from North India arrived in Sringeri seeking clarifications from *Acharyal* on spiritual issues. It was very late in the evening, just minutes before *Acharyal* would normally have proceeded for His evening bath. After giving them a patient hearing, *Acharyal* began His reply in earnest. The question and answer session progressed and it was over two hours before *Acharyal* finally clarified the celibates’ doubts. Even as the discussion was in progress, *Acharyal* remarked to one of His close disciples, who was a witness to the discussion, “How sincere they are! They are leaving shortly and so,

I do not mind My evening bath getting late. Their requirements deserve top priority.”

*Acharyal's* elucidations to devotees consistently bore the stamp of His direct experience of the Truth, His complete mastery of *yoga*, His unparalleled erudition in the *śāstra-s* and His thorough understanding of the requirements of the aspirants. A collection of such replies in the form of dialogues between the disciples and *Acharyal* forms the main chapters of this book. More details about the dialogues can be had from the “Note to the Readers about the dialogues” page.

During the 35 years that He adorned the Sringeri Sharada Peetam, from 1954 to 1989, *Acharyal* graced devotees with hundreds of speeches in various languages. Each one is a treasure trove of knowledge. Extremely fortunate are those who have heard the nectar-like words of *Acharyal*, on at least one occasion. Select excerpts from the published benedictory addresses of the Jagadguru have been incorporated in the various chapters of this book. They, invariably, shed more light on the topics discussed in the dialogues.

*Acharyal's* very life is a teaching to all of us. Disciples, who had the invaluable privilege of personal contact, or even a short acquaintance with our *Acharyal*, could readily comprehend His easy accessibility, childlike simplicity, universal love, intense devotion and deep erudition. Without exception, all devotees experienced His unfailing blessings. The supplications and submissions made to *Acharyal* by devotees seeking benefits, be they spiritual or material, have borne fruits by His sagacious advices, blessings or even His mere physical presence. An attempt to publish a host of such incidents recorded so far would, by itself, warrant a voluminous publication. Hence, a few select instances of devotees' experiences with *Acharyal* have been included in the appropriate chapters of this book.

*Acharyal* had the innate ability to effortlessly render even highly complex scriptural topics easily and thoroughly intelligible

by means of stories conceived by Him or based on the *Veda*-s and other works. Several of His edifying parables have been appended to the dialogues.

To sum up, each chapter in the book features the dialogues as its principal component. The supplements falling under the classifications viz., ‘Discourses of Acharyal’, ‘Incidents from Acharyal’s life’, ‘Parables of Acharyal’ and ‘Experiences of Devotees’ follow this. Readers are sure to observe differences in writing styles in the supplements, especially in the portion concerning the experiences of devotees. The variation in style is natural since the narrators’ written accounts have been retained, with minimal editing.

I received tremendous co-operation from the team that comprised Sri E.R.Ravikumar, Kum.Rathna Kamakshi, Sri V.Subrahmanian and Dr.V.Jayashankar in the selection, editing and proof-reading of the portions that supplement the main dialogues. My thanking them for their sincere and tireless efforts would only be tantamount to insulting their unflinching devotion to our *Acharyal*. I have to also acknowledge the assistance rendered by Kum.M.Srividya and Sri R.Gopalakrishnan in typing the portions of the book in digital form. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Sri A.Ramaswamy, I.A.S., Sri K.Srinivasan, Sri K.Suresh Chandar, Kum.Meenakshi Lakshmanan and a few other devotees whose sincere compilation, over the years, of experiences of devotees with *Acharyal* has been extensively used in this book. All of us have witnessed the rapturous joy, which suffused disciples when recollecting and narrating their treasured personal experiences with *Acharyal*.

The idea of supplementing the dialogues with *Acharyal*’s teachings and several of devotees’ experiences was conceived of by me just some ten days ago. I would like to believe that it was divine grace that was responsible for such a proposition suddenly dawning on me. Once again, solely by divine grace, the task taken has been completed in such a short span of time. The treasure of valuable data available with us on our *Acharyal* is so huge that, at

each stage of the book, I was thoroughly discontented with myself for indiscriminately cutting down information.

Not satiated with the amount of information already packed in the book, each one of our team members came up suggesting more and more data to be included, as everything appeared highly pertinent. Ultimately, my decision was by default - I bowed down to time and space!

I own up complete responsibility for the deficiencies in the selection and editing of supplements to the main chapters, the printing and every possible error in this publication. I may sound humble, though I really am not.

I pray that, in His infinite compassion, *Acharyal* accepts this book that contains several flaws, as a garland of assorted flowers, fresh and faded, offered by one who is bereft of true devotion.

**CHENNAI**  
**17.11.2004**

**G. RAMASUBRAMANIAN**

# 1. GURU

Disciple : Is a *Guru* necessary for one who desires *mokṣa* (liberation)?

*Acharyal* : Very much.

D: What is the chief characteristic of a *Guru*?

A: A *Guru* should be a *jñānin* (one who has realised the Truth). Further, he should be interested in the well-being of his disciple.

D: Nowadays, many pose as sages. Such being the case, how is one to identify a real *Guru*?

A: No specific rules exist regarding this. If we are very sincere, *Īśvara* Himself will lead us to a *Guru*. We can see for ourselves whether the person whom we wish to have as a *Guru* is a *jñānin* and desires our well-being. Though it is difficult to conclude whether one is a *jñānin* or not, we can use the description of a *jñānin* contained in the *Bhagavadgītā* as a yardstick. However, while doing this, it should be remembered that the description was not given to select *jñānin*-s.

D: What should be the attitude of the disciple towards his *Guru*?

A: He should not view the *Guru*, *Īśvara* and *Ātman* as different. It is said:

Īśvaro gururātmeti mūrtibhedavibhāgine... namaḥ <sup>1</sup>

(M, I.130)

(Salutation to Him who is manifest variously as *Īśvara*, *Guru* and *Ātman*.)

The disciple should always follow the instructions of his *Guru*. Even if others opine otherwise, he should treat his *Guru*'s commands as final.

D: Can one who has not attained *jñāna* bestow the knowledge of the *Ātman* on another?

A: na nareṇāvareṇa prokta eṣa suvijñeyo bahudhā cintyamānaḥ |  
ananyaprokte gātiratra nāsti <sup>2</sup>

(KU, I.2.8)

(One cannot comprehend the *Ātman* even by deep enquiry if one is taught by a person who has not realised the *Ātman*. When taught by the teacher who is a *jñānin*, one attains liberation.)

D: Is it wrong on the part of a spiritual aspirant to listen to others commenting adversely on his *Guru* or *Īśvara*?

A: Yes.

D: What should he do in such a situation?

A: If the man who criticises is amenable to reason, he may be asked not to criticise. If not, the disciple should leave his presence.

D: What may a person desirous of going to a *Guru* and leading a spiritual life do prior to the attainment of a *Guru*?

A: If *upanayana* has been performed, he can do *gāyatrī-japa* to the extent possible. He can also worship *Īśvara* mentally. There is no restriction in doing this. The method of performing such mental worship has been elucidated in the *Mṛtyuñjaya-mānasapūjā-stotra*, *Śiva-mānasapūjā-stotra*, etc. It is good to develop devotion towards *Īśvara* by dedicating the fruits of all actions to Him. Firm dispassion

should be acquired by means of discrimination. Sincere prayer is potent in enabling one to get a proper *Guru*.

- D: At what age should spiritual practices be commenced?
- A: The earlier we start, the better. Were not Prahlāda and Dhruva young boys when they began their spiritual practices?
- D: Is the *Guru's upadeśa* necessary for one interested in material life?
- A: Is a doctor necessary for one affected by a disease?
- D: Yes.
- A: If a man desires pleasure in worldly life, does he get it to the extent that he wants? Not at all. Even to attain worldly happiness, would it not be wise to seek guidance? The blessings of a knower of the Truth are extremely potent. Hence, whatever may be the way of life desired, it is advisable to seek the grace and guidance of a saint.
- D: Though some people wish to carry out the instructions of their *Guru*, they do not always act accordingly. They also have a wrong idea that they can get happiness through some other means. How are such thoughts to be prevented?
- A: Will not even a worldly man have an impression regarding a saint to the effect, "He is much more knowledgeable than I am?"
- D: Yes.
- A: Will not a *Guru* consider the well-being and the difficulties of his disciple?
- D: Yes.
- A: The *Guru* is concerned with our welfare. He knows more than we do. He has understood our difficulties. Since this is so, if he gives us some advice, will it not be for our own

good? If the disciple firmly establishes such an idea in his mind, he will act according to his *Guru*'s instructions. When difficulties arise in following the instructions, he should think, "It is good for me to act as per his instructions." Then, vacillation will cease.

- D: Some people hesitate to disclose their problems to their *Guru*. So, when it is difficult to carry out his orders, they get the doubt, "My *Guru* has given this advice for my own good. But there are certain difficulties in following it. I am of limited capacity. How then am I to act as per his instructions?"
- A: Is it not sheer foolishness if a man hides facts about his disease when he goes to a doctor? Therefore, we should spell out our difficulties to our *Guru* without any hesitation. It is our duty. Even if that is not done, as the *Guru* is a knower of the Truth, his instructions will be only in accordance with the will of *Īśvara*. This being the case, whatever he says will be appropriate for us. If we do not have the capacity to follow his instructions, even that capacity will be obtained by his grace. An ideal disciple will indeed act as per his *Guru*'s instructions and not give place to thoughts such as, "Is it possible for me to do as he says? Shall I try something else?" If we follow our *Guru*'s instructions, it does not mean that we are unintelligent. It only implies that we have surrendered ourselves, for our own good, to a power superior to us.
- D: Is it possible for even a heinous sinner to progress in spiritual life if he obtains a great *Guru*'s grace?
- A: If the blessings of *Īśvara* and the *Guru* are got, even the worst sinner can progress. However, we should not be careless thinking, "We will progress in life just by the power of grace."
- D: Sometimes, even those who have committed many ill-deeds become the recipients of the blessings of great souls. Certain others are quite moral. Still, they are seen to be deprived of

similar blessings. Holy ones are not guilty of favouritism. Why then should such disparity be observed?

- A: We should infer the cause from the effect. A certain person is morally inferior to another. Yet, it can be seen that he enjoys divine grace to a greater extent. There should be some reason behind this. What could it be? The cause may be analysed thus: “If the present life of the sinner is looked into, no reason can be found. However, enquiry into this birth alone is insufficient as there has been a birth previous to this. There, he might have done very many good deeds. Therefore, he becomes a recipient of divine grace in this birth. Hence, it can be inferred that even though he may not be leading a morally sound life now, as he is receiving a saint’s blessings, he should have acquired *pun̄ya* (merit) in his previous birth itself.” It is wrong to infer that a saint is partial. Nothing remains to be attained by a *jīvanmukta* (one liberated while alive). “I have a liking towards this person. Therefore, I should shower my blessings on him. The other individual is not a favourite of mine. So, I need not bless him” – such notions are not entertained by him. Whether he chooses to bless others or not, he stands to gain nothing, as he has attained what is to be attained.
- D: If it is only due to merit acquired in the previous birth that one gets divine grace, will not grace become an object “bought” by *pun̄ya*?
- A: The light of a lamp falls on its surroundings. One may study the *śāstra*-s in that light, while another may pay no attention to it and sleep. The great souls are always showering their grace. Each one can derive benefit depending on one’s own mentality. If one takes a big vessel to a pond, one can bring a large quantity of water. Just because a small vessel can hold little water, it does not mean that the vessel itself is the limit for the capacity of the pond. Similarly, if a man has acquired merit in his previous birth, he might get the good company of a great soul. However, he may not fully utilise the

opportunity. Another one, though not having got the same opportunity may, by exploiting the available chance to the greatest extent possible, soon become the recipient of the grace of a sage.

- D: If the *Guru* has blessed his disciple with his *pādukā*-s, how should the disciple respect them?
- A: Whatever reverence he has towards his *Guru* should be there towards the *pādukā*-s also. Everyday, after devoutly prostrating before them, he should place sandal paste and flowers on them. It may seem good to perform *abhiṣeka* to them daily. If, however, they be made of wood and if the disciple desires that they be with him for long, he himself can decide how sensible it would be to offer *abhiṣeka* daily. If he pays respects to his *Guru*'s *pādukā*-s with sincerity or if he prays to them with true devotion, he shall get the fruits of the very same actions done directly in his *Guru*'s presence. Hence, he should never be careless as regards the *pādukā*-s.
- D: If a disciple desires to meditate on the *pādukā*-s, how should he proceed?
- A: He can meditate on the *Guru*'s feet as adorned by the *pādukā*-s.
- D: How should a disciple conduct himself in the presence of his *Guru*?
- A: He should have a reverential attitude towards him. He should serve him whenever he gets an opportunity. However, he should also get his permission before doing so. If any clarification is required, he can ask him when he is not engaged in any activity. He should be very sincere in his studies, always thinking that it is his great fortune to learn from his *Guru*. He should constantly keep in mind the instructions of his *Guru* and lead his life accordingly.

## □ Incidents from *Acharyal's* Life

*Acharyal, His Holiness Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal, the 35th Jagadguru of the Sringeri Sharada Peetam, was a great yogin and a jīvanmukta par excellence. Acharyal's very life was a living testimony to the scriptural declarations regarding a perfect sage and an ideal Guru.*

It was a cold winter night at Sringeri and the whole village was fast asleep. In His abode at Narasimhavanam, on the banks of the gently flowing Tunga, *Acharyal* was seated motionless, engaged in rigorous penance. His breathing was hardly perceptible. His very silence was radiating peace and He was radiant with *tejas*, like a *yogin* of yore. Hours lapsed but the sage was blissfully oblivious of the passage of time, absorbed as He was in the infinite Brahman, a state which scriptures describe as *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the acme of *yoga*. He had been sitting in *samādhi* for protracted lengths of time on the preceding days too. The intensity of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* of the preceding days had been such that He was disinclined towards everything concerning the external world. That day, however, He was hardly aware of even partaking of food. He needed assistance to complete His evening bath. By the evening, His mind was so intoxicated by the bliss of Brahman that even His *āhnika*, which He normally performed with so much punctiliousness and concentration, fared very badly. Before retiring to His room in the night, He skipped His food as He felt too disinclined to eat. There, *Acharyal* sat down and straightaway went into *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. The night was almost over and the Sage showed no signs of waking up from His trance.

*Acharyal* would have continued to be in that state, lost in Brahman and lost to the world, until His body would have fallen off, on its own. Fortunate are we, as the divine design was different. Impelled by a *preraṇā*, His *Guru* arrived at the scene before the night ended and chanted the *Praṇava* to awaken His disciple from *samādhi*. Slowly, *Acharyal's* chest heaved to accept some air and His eyes opened. He became aware of His body and the presence of His *Guru*.

*Paramacharyal* spoke to *Acharyal* the next morning, “I knew that Your mind was becoming more and more absorbed in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. Though You have transcended any need for *samādhi*, I did not interfere. Last night, however, the Lord made it clear to Me that Your *samādhi* had become so intense that You would not emerge from it on Your own. Unless aroused from *samādhi*, You would remain in it till physical death.

“As impelled by Him, I came to Your room before the night ended. Telling Your attendant to remain outside, I entered alone. The Math staff have been under the impression that You have been unwell since yesterday. So, the attendant assumed that I had come to check on Your condition. I found You seated motionless, deep in *samādhi*. With great difficulty, I succeeded in awakening You. Regulate Your *samādhi* and the introversion of the mind. Else, today itself, Your *nirvikalpa-samādhi* will become such that You cannot be aroused from it at all by anybody. Do not leave Me by entering irreversible *samādhi* and discarding Your human form. There is so much to be done by You for Me, for others and for the Math.”

The *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* describes the sixth and seventh planes of Knowledge thus: “In the sixth plane, one emerges from *nirvikalpa-samādhi* only when awakened by the persons nearby. Such a *yogin* is termed a *brahmavidvarīyān* (greater knower of Brahman)... The *yogin* who has reached the seventh plane called *turyagā* never emerges from *nirvikalpa-samādhi* either by himself or in response to the efforts of another. Such a *yogin* is called a *brahmavidvariṣṭha* (best knower of Brahman).”

*Acharyal*’s state of establishment in the Absolute was of such a high order. He was only a teenager then.

[Excerpted from *Yoga Enlightenment and Perfection*]

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## □ Experiences of Devotees

So powerful was *Acharyal*’s *ātmānusandhāna* that it had a profound impact on those nearby, provided they suitably attuned

themselves. I vividly recall one such instance. I was accompanying *Acharyal* on His Kundapur camp. I was going in the pilot jeep when I noticed that *Acharyal* had ordered His car to stop. His Holiness asked me to sit in the front seat of His car and sent His attendant Mahabala to the jeep. No conversation ensued. *Acharyal* lost Himself in the contemplation of the import of the *Upaniṣad*-s. The effect on me was extreme, to say the least.

[Sri P.S.Venkatasubba Rao]

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*Not only was Acharyal an accomplished yogin and a jīvanmukta, He had the power to confer samādhi and steadfastness in it upon His disciples at will.*

After receiving *mantropadeśa* from *Acharyal* at Madras in the year 1971, I made my first trip to Sringeri in the next year. At Sringeri, apparently innocently, *Acharyal* asked me to describe my meditation to Him. He heard me with patience. “At the time of initiation, by the will of *Īśvara*, *śakti-pāta* (transfer of spiritual power) has occurred” He said. “You will not have obstacles to your spiritual progress. Till now you have been doing *saguṇa-dhyāna* (meditation on God with qualities). Now I will teach you *nirguṇa-dhyāna* (fixation on the Brahman sans attributes). When you sit for meditation, dissociate yourself with the body and the senses. Only the rise and fall of thoughts will be perceived. Segregate yourself from all thoughts. Then realise yourself to be of the nature of perfect bliss. I will show you how to do so.” Saying so, He closed His eyes. His body became motionless and His eyes were half closed. He was quite unaware of His surroundings and radiated peace. Five minutes later, *Acharyal* opened His eyes and said, “Go and try *nirguṇa-dhyāna*.” “I intellectually comprehend what *Acharyal* says”, I said, “but I am at a loss to understand how exactly to proceed.” “Try it”, *Acharyal* smilingly replied, “everything will become clear to you.”

I prostrated before *Acharyal* and went to the *adhiṣṭhāna* housing the *samādhi*-s of our *Paramacharyal* and *Parameshti Acharyal*. I

sat down for *dhyāna*. Almost instantaneously, I lost awareness of the surroundings and the body. Only the rise and fall of thoughts were recognisable. Slowly, the frequency of the thoughts became less and soon the mind was totally tranquil. I felt as though I was merging into pure *ākāśa* and became unlimited in size. There was an extraordinary experience of bliss. Suddenly, there was a transition and even the conception of *ākāśa* vanished. All distinctions disappeared without a trace. I am at a total loss for words to describe that state. All I can say is that I was lost in an ocean of unalloyed indescribable bliss. When I began to regain my external consciousness and opened my eyes I could perceive nothing apart from me. Everything seemed to be in me like bubbles on the surface of the ocean. This unique experience lasted a while before gradually fading away.

In May 1974, *Acharyal's* grace led me to a major milestone in my spiritual discipline. Roughly ten days prior to my departure from Sringeri, *Acharyal* called me to accompany Him for a walk up the Kālabhairava hill. The attendant had gone in front and so there was no one with *Acharyal* at that time except myself. Addressing *Acharyal* I said, "By *Acharyal's* blessings I am repeatedly able to get the meditative state which *Acharyal* has subsequently identified as *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. When I come down from that state, as I have told *Acharyal* earlier, I feel as if there is nothing apart from me. This experience, however, is not steady. It fades away after a while and I would like *Acharyal's* benediction for that state to become steady." *Acharyal* looked upon me with compassionate eyes and said, "After you complete your engineering studies that state shall become steady." So unlimited was His mercy that just after a few days after making this statement, He told me of His own accord, "Your surrender to Me has generated satisfaction. I bless that that state become steady from now on." Can the blessings of the omnipotent One ever be in vain? What He said came to pass and the steadiness of the experience continues to this day.

[A disciple]

*Acharyal's extremely striking personality attracted anyone who had His darśana even once.*

Once a young lawyer happened to visit Sringeri. Coming to Narasimhavanam, he told a disciple of *Acharyal*, “I came here for sight seeing. I am an atheist but am curious to see what the head of this Math is like. Can I see Him? However, as I have no respect for *samnyāsin*-s, I will neither remove my shirt nor prostrate before Him.” The disciple replied, “*Acharyal* will be giving *darśana* in a few minutes. Anybody can go in. You can decide for yourself whether you want to go or not.” The disciple went inside and, in a few minutes, the door was opened for people to enter for *darśana*. The lawyer followed a group of devotees into a room. He stood right at the back. In a few moments, *Acharyal's* eyes fell on him. *Acharyal* beckoned to him, holding a fruit in His hand. The lawyer stepped forward, abruptly prostrated and remained so. Some time lapsed. But the lawyer did not show any signs of getting up. Finally, *Acharyal* Himself asked him to rise. He got up with tears in his eyes and, in a choked voice, requested *Acharyal* to bless him. *Acharyal* gave him His blessings and also *prasāda*. Then the man went out. The disciple whom the lawyer had earlier spoken to emerged and closed the door. He found that the lawyer was the sole man in the veranda. The lawyer moved up to the disciple and said, “Are you wondering why I behaved in this fashion?” The disciple said, “No, I have seen such things happen often.” Such is the magnetic personality of our *Acharyal*.

[Sri K.Srinivasan]

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In the summer of 1967, at the end of my first year classes at the management institute in Calcutta, I went to Delhi to visit my parents. It so happened that His Holiness was at camp in Delhi at that time and my mother was very particular that I should go to seek His blessings. I mentioned to her that I was extremely allergic to meeting and wasting time on such supposed holy men, Swamijis and *samnyāsin*-s. However, after much persuasion by her, I agreed,

but I told her that under no circumstances would I go in the traditional mode of visiting Him (which is wearing a dhoti and *aṅgavastra*) that I would go just as I was, in a shirt and a pair of trousers or that I would not go at all. My mother perforce had little choice and she accepted what I said with a somewhat heavy heart.

After the morning bath, we went off to visit His Holiness. At that time, His Holiness was staying in the house of the then Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha. There, people had congregated to meet His Holiness, but somehow, almost miraculously it seemed that we were called in immediately for a personal audience with Him. His Holiness was seated on a silver *āsana* in a corner of a fairly large room in the front portion of the house. When we were ushered into the room, He immediately beckoned to us to come to Him. It was at this point that, suddenly, a spontaneous transformation came over me. The innate purity of His nature and the great power of His *tapas* was such that I suddenly felt unclean and rather out of place in the vestments that I had come in, and therefore I was extremely reluctant to go forward. He was kindness itself and repeated several times that I should come forward and made me sit within a couple of feet from Him. His first response on my sitting down was “Why did you not come to see Me in Calcutta, my son? Your mother had shown Me a photograph of you, and I was watching everyday to see whether you are among the hundreds of people who came by.” This was but one more surprise, which left me totally dumbfounded. In the first instance, I never really thought we could get in to see Him so quickly. And in the second instance, I certainly did not expect that He would remember me from the photograph that He had seen. Of course, at the time I had no idea of His Holiness’ phenomenal memory capacity and His punctilious attention to even matters of the smallest detail. Ordinary people often imagine limitations in great souls which are really not there, because they judge them by their own limited abilities and attitudes.

As I started to recover my power of speech, spontaneously I felt one should be very honest in the presence of whom I now

started feeling was a very unusual person and of one of great spiritual magnitude. I launched into my explanation as to why I had not come to see Him in Calcutta. I explained to Him rather tersely that I had heard that He saw only people of wealth and high social standing and that I had really little use for meeting such personalities, no matter how spiritual or famous or eminent they were considered to be. There was pin-drop silence from all the servitors around. In my estimate never before had any been quite so irreverent and that too in so explicit a manner, in front of His Holiness. I fully expected to be told to leave the room, never see His face again - in other words, some form of the Hindu equivalent of excommunication on the spot.

His Holiness' response was totally unexpected. He just smiled and said, "I am told you are a student of business administration, is it not?" I said, "Yes." He then asked me, if it was not true that I had to study some elements of law as part of my course work. I again said, "Yes." And He said, "Is it not also true that in law, as it is practised in the land, hearsay information is not considered evidence?" I began to see what He was driving at, and said He was correct. He then asked me that as a man endowed with considerable education and a fair degree of discrimination, was it not expected of me, to have come there personally to see whether the allegations were really true or unfounded. He was so logical and reasonable that I had really nothing left to say, and I agreed with Him. What I also found remarkable at the time was that His Holiness used not the arcane letter and word of traditional *śāstra*-s of which I knew little at the time and for which I had even less regard. He used the very branches of secular learning with which I was fairly conversant and for which I had high regard, to make His point. This was another surprise to me. I had really not expected His Holiness to have such an immense understanding of and familiarity with the various branches of secular knowledge.

At this stage it suddenly seemed as if the flood-gates of a dam had opened, and I then asked Him in very homely language as to what I should do to improve myself in my spiritual practices. His

Holiness immediately said that being a Brahmin, I had already been initiated into the *Gāyatrī-mantra* and it was sufficient for me to repeat this. He then also told me to go to the seashore whenever I had the opportunity, sit on the beach, and observe the waves coming in. I asked Him, “Holiness, then what?” He said, “And observe, and observe, and observe.” “But Holiness, I am not anywhere close to the sea”, I said. He replied “Then go and look at the blue skies when there are no clouds.” “And then, Holiness?” I asked. “And then look, and look, and look and that would be the *sāadhanā* for you”, was the reply from Him. Since I had absolutely no acquaintance then with formal methods at *dhyāna*, and I had heard the word “*samādhi*” in only a vague sort of way, the full significance of what His Holiness told me totally escaped me. It has been my experience since that time that His Holiness’ words were never uttered in vain and they always bore fruit sooner or later.

[Sri Nagendra Rao]

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*Strange it may seem, Acharyal’s formal lessons in Vedānta commenced long after He had attained perfect establishment in the Supreme, before He was 20. As a student, in His pūrvāśrama days and as a samnyāsin, Acharyal applied Himself with great ardour to the study of the śāstra-s. His razor-sharp intellect, His keen zest for learning and His unmatched humility - all enabled Him evolve as an erudite scholar in almost every branch of śāstra be it Vedas, Vedānta, or Tarka. He used to preside over the annual vidvat-sadas at Sringeri and moderate the scriptural discussions. On many an occasion, He had to give the final ruling on topics that were debated upon by the participating scholars.*

*Acharyal visited Calcutta for the first time in 1967. As per Acharyal’s directives, a vidvat-sadas was organised there. People had heard of the scholarliness of Acharyal’s Guru, Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekhara Bharathi Mahaswamigal, and had not yet glimpsed Acharyal’s greatness.*

There was, at that time, a great scholar of the *Nyāya-śāstra-s*, in Calcutta. Though he was a renowned scholar, he was an atheist. *Acharyal*, however, was particular that he be invited. The scholar told the Math officials who approached him with an invitation to the *sadas*, “I have two conditions. Firstly, I will not participate in the prayer. Secondly, I will not prostrate before the Swamiji. I will participate in the *sadas* provided these two conditions are met.” The conditions were agreed to and the scholar did participate in the *sadas*.

The *sadas* commenced, and this scholar was the first person to deliver an exposition on a topic. He spoke for an hour and when he finished, looked at His Holiness. *Acharyal* did not offer any comments. A few other scholars too spoke that day.

*Acharyal* did not address the *Pandits* on the second day too. At the end of the day’s session, the haughty scholar remarked to a Math official, “What is this? You have placed a statue in front of me. This Swamiji does not have anything at all to say. The reason must be either that He is not able to understand what I am saying, or that He is unable to think of appropriate arguments to counter mine. Anyway, I will attend this *sadas* one final time tomorrow.”

On the third day of the *sadas*, after this scholar had spoken for about 20 minutes, *Acharyal* asked him, “Have you finished?” When the man answered in the affirmative, *Acharyal* began His exposition. *Acharyal* spoke for one and a half hours and addressed every argument that the scholar had brought up.

At the end of it, the scholar got up, took off the turban that he had been wearing and placing it at the lotus feet of *Acharyal*, prostrated before Him. The thoroughly humbled man remarked, “I have only read in books that great scholars existed in ancient India. I have never heard such an extensive and brilliant exposition of *Tarka*. Today I have seen Goddess Sarasvatī Herself in front of me!”

[Sri A.Ramaswamy]



*Acharyal had an inimitable method of imparting spiritual advice and His method was unique for each person.*

Apart from *Acharyal's* gracing me with meditative experiences and peace of mind, I have also had the good fortune of being taught by Him. He was so concerned with imparting knowledge to His disciples that He even put up with a lot of inconvenience. When *Acharyal* was at Bangalore in the year 1983, He taught me the *Māṇḍūkya-upaniṣad* with the *Kārikā-s* of Gauḍapādācārya and Bhagavatpāda's commentary. This He did in spite of His ill-health. I have also heard portions of the *Pañcadaśī*, *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*, *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya*, *Sūtra-bhāṣya*, etc., from the holy lips of my *Guru*. He not only resolved doubts by eventually answering them with lips but also by dispelling them by His mere presence. Quite often, I have noticed that He has clarified points which I have sought to ask Him even prior to my actually asking Him.

His grace has not been confined to my waking state alone. In the later half of 1974, I had a series of dreams in which *Acharyal* expounded the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* along with Bhagavatpāda's commentary. He explained some verses one night and, on the next night, continued from where He had left. This went on till the end of the chapter was reached. At that time, I had not come across Bhagavatpāda's commentary on the *Gītā* at all. Later, when I procured a copy of the same, I found that it contained what *Acharyal* had taught.

During May 1975, I submitted to *Acharyal* that I had, on successive nights, dreams of *Acharyal* gracing me by teaching Bhagavatpāda's *bhāṣya* on the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*. *Acharyal* asked, "Do you recall the clarifications that you heard?" "By *Acharyal's* grace, I remember them fully as also the words of the *bhāṣya* on the verses dealing with the practice and fruit of meditation", I replied. *Acharyal* sent for the *Gītābhāṣya*. He then asked me to recount the commentary on one of the verses. I obeyed. *Acharyal* read out a passage from Bhagavatpāda's introduction to the chapter and asked me to explain it. Without making any

comment on my response, He instructed me to resolve, according to what I had heard, an apparent contradiction in a verse. Finally, He asked me in which of the two senses a word had been used in the *bhāṣya*.

When I finished replying, *Acharyal* was all smiles. Patting me on my shoulder, He said, “Your answers fully conform to what I would have told you if I were teaching you the *bhāṣya* now. There is no doubt that God graced you by teaching you through those dreams. Because of your devotion to Me you see Me as having effected them but I am just an ordinary man. I can particularly appreciate your experience because I had a similar experience of Lord Śiva teaching Me *yoga* in successive dreams when I was young.”

[A disciple]

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I felt an urge to have some traditional lessons from *Acharyal*. I went to Sringeri and made known my desire. Right away, His Holiness agreed and said that He would begin the lesson at three o’ clock in the afternoon. Some *saṁnyāsin*-s and Pandits also came for the classes. The text taken for exposition was the *Śrī-dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra* of Bhagavatpāda. Having given a lucid exposition of the first verse, *Acharyal* decided to explain the second verse the next day. Actually He was having a sore throat. Still He chose to teach me saying, “I have a sore throat. But you have come all the way from Bangalore for this. Hence I will teach.”

In the course of the lessons, an aged *saṁnyāsin* posed some questions to *Acharyal* which were based on *Tarka*. *Acharyal* said, “These lessons are meant for Venkatasubba Rao. Hence, I am giving only those details that will benefit him. *Tarka* is not important for him. If you seek to understand the text from the standpoint of *Tarka* then I am willing to explain that one point itself for 14 years giving a different interpretation on each day.”

On the third day, *Acharyal* said, “This is enough. In fact what I taught you on the first day was itself sufficient for you. I took up the second verse on the subsequent day to ward off any possible feeling you may get that the absence of continuation of the second day is inauspicious”.

[Sri P.S.Venkatasubba Rao]

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In the year 1984, *Acharyal* was scheduled to leave Sringeri for Kaladi via Bangalore. A *brahmacārin* from Rishikesh came a little after noon for *Acharyal*'s *darśana*. *Acharyal* had already left for His afternoon bath. The *brahmacārin* told me, “I have seven questions pertaining to *Yoga* and *Vedānta* which I wish to pose to His Holiness. They are very important to me. I contacted numerous scholars, practitioners of *Yoga* and *samnyāsin-s* at Rishikesh, Uttarkashi, Haridwar and Kashi but none was able to satisfy me. A scholar at Kashi directed me to Sringeri, saying, ‘If the Jagadguru of Sringeri cannot satisfactorily answer you then there is none in the world who can.’ That is why I have come most eagerly to Sringeri.”

I told him, “*Acharyal* will be starting on a tour today. If you wait here, you can have His *darśana* just prior to His departure. However, there is no time today for you to have a lengthy private session with Him.” He said, “I will gladly wait to behold Him even if it be for just a moment.” He then told me one of the questions that he had in mind and requested me to tell *Acharyal* about him. I fulfilled his request shortly after *Acharyal* completed His *bhikṣā*.

I promptly submitted the information conveyed by the student to *Acharyal* who replied, “The question that he conveyed to you is good and pertinent. As there is no time to spare today, he could, if he wishes, meet Me at Bangalore and pose his queries to Me there. If I happen to know the answers, I shall tell him. Else, I shall readily admit that I am not in a position to help him.” In about half an hour, *Acharyal* came out to the front veranda of Sacchidananda Vilas,

His abode. Some devotees, inclusive of the *brahmacārin*, were there.

The *brahmacārin* prostrated before *Acharyal*. His Holiness looked at him with compassion, raised His right hand in a gesture of blessing and said, in Hindi, “May you be happy.” He then moved on. I quickly conveyed to him what *Acharyal* had told me. Almost before I finished, he said, “The answers to all my questions became fully known to me the moment His Holiness blessed me.” In the car, of His own accord, *Acharyal* informed me, “When I saw that *brahmacārin*, I was struck with his sincerity. So, I requested Ambal, ‘Please provide him the answers he desires now itself’. The kind of sincerity that this spiritual aspirant has, deserves to be rewarded.” When I submitted to *Acharyal* what the *brahmacārin* had said, *Acharyal* joined His palms and said, “Ambal is so gracious.”

[Excerpted from *Edifying Parables*]

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*Acharyal was a perfect disciple and was ever intent on serving His Guru. The following episode shows us how ideal was Acharyal as a disciple too.*

In 1946, *Acharyal* once went to behold *Paramacharyal*, taking me with Him. As He approached the door of *Paramacharyal*’s room from one side, He noticed that His *Guru* was reading a book. Not only did *Acharyal* not enter, He did not even want to stand next to the door on the side where He could be seen. So, He walked round the building and came to the other side of the door. Then, He moved a foot of His slightly forward, leaned, peeped in and, finding that *Paramacharyal* was still reading, immediately stepped back. Then, He stood motionless and silent. After a few minutes, He again looked inside as before and withdrew. About 15 minutes passed thus before *Paramacharyal* happened to notice Him on looking up prior to turning a page.

Immediately, *Paramacharyal* called our *Guru* in. *Acharyal* entered and respectfully submitted that I had come for *darśana*. *Paramacharyal* rose, walked out of the room and began talking to me. To enable us to converse in private, *Acharyal* moved out of earshot. *Paramacharyal* was scheduled to take a *Vedānta* class for our *Guru*. So, after some time, our *Guru* returned to have a word with *Paramacharyal*. As He approached, *Paramacharyal* told me, “The *Guru* is coming. Do *namaskāra*.” As instructed, I prostrated before *Acharyal*. Then, *Paramacharyal* and *Acharyal* spoke to each other for a few moments. Thereafter, *Acharyal* walked backwards till He was out of His *Guru*’s range of sight; He was unwilling to even turn His back towards *Paramacharyal*. Such was His reverence for His *Guru*. *Paramacharyal*, on the other hand, declared to me while *Acharyal* was leaving, “Do not think He is just a Swamigal. He is God. He is My *Guru*.”

[Sri D.S.Subbaramaiah]

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During *Acharyal*’s first visit to Madras, my elder sister and her husband performed *pāda-pūjā* at the place where He was camping. Blessed with the *pāda-pūjā-prasāda*, my sister submitted to *Acharyal*, “My mother who is now 86 years old has poor vision. In her life, she was fortunate to have had the *darśana* of Their Holinesses Sri Nrisimha Bharati Mahaswamigal, Sri Sacchidananda Shivabhinava Nrisimha Bharati Mahaswamigal and Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal. But for her ill-health she would have come here and had Your *darśana* too! I seek Your grace on her behalf.” *Acharyal* was overjoyed and said, “What a blessed soul your mother is! She had the rare opportunity to have the *darśana* of three great *Guru*-s! It is not fair that I should expect her to come here and see Me. It is I who should visit her. I should meet the one who has met My *pūrvācārya*-s!” His Holiness then paid a visit to my sister’s house in T.Nagar. He posed kind enquiries to my mother, spoke to her for some time about the *pūrvācārya*-s, blessed her and left. I was humbled by *Acharyal*’s

obvious compassion in visiting my mother and His reverence for His *pūrvācārya*-s!

[Smt. Lakshmi Sambamurthy]

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*Various classes of people came to Acharyal for guidance and succour. These included people suffering from physical ailments who would have Him play the role of a divine doctor, persons with various problems for which they would like Acharyal's guidance and sacred intervention, people desirous of progressing in the spiritual path as also those who have attained realisation. Acharyal would respond to each of them in the most appropriate manner. Indeed, all His disciples uniformly felt that each one of them was the favourite disciple of our revered Guru.*

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## 2. ĪŚVARA

- D: Some people get a doubt as to whether *Īśvara* really exists or not. This is because they are unable to see Him. Cannot *Īśvara*, by some means, reveal to them His existence so as to induce *śraddhā* (faith) in them?
- A: *Īśvara* Himself seems to have been caught in a fix. If He were to give *darśana* to them, He would have to assume some form. On seeing the form, people may say, “You have a form. Therefore, you are not omnipresent and cannot be *Īśvara*.” If He does not give them *darśana* by assuming a form, they may say, “We do not see *Īśvara*. Hence, there is no *Īśvara*.” Thus, there are some people who will not believe in *Īśvara* regardless of whether He takes a form or not. In this situation, what indeed can *Īśvara* do? Variety is the nature of the world. We have the group of atheists also. Faith in *Īśvara* can be induced and further developed, but there is no use in attempting to induce it by force. Arguments could be advanced and the true experiences of many devotees could be cited. Many wonderful incidents that have taken place could be narrated. What has been made known in the *śāstra*-s could be quoted. Still, if one does not believe that *Īśvara* exists, what can be done?
- D: Can a devotee see *Īśvara*?
- A: You mean with form?
- D: Yes.

- A: *Īśvara*, though without form, can take one for the sake of His devotees. If we have limitless devotion, we can definitely see *Īśvara*'s form. There is no doubt at all about this.
- D: Does *Acharyal* mean that one can see *Īśvara*'s form mentally or that one can perceive Him even with the eyes?
- A: *Īśvara* is capable of giving *darśana* both ways.
- D: Does *Acharyal* say that He can be seen, talked to and touched?
- A: Yes. If there is pure devotion, *Īśvara* is sure to reveal Himself. When He does appear, why cannot one talk with Him?
- D: Can this happen even in this *kaliyuga*?
- A: What link is there between a devoted person seeing *Īśvara* and the *kaliyuga*?
- D: Who can get *Īśvara*'s vision?
- A: He who longs exclusively for *Īśvara* can see Him. Limitless devotion compels *Īśvara* to come to us.
- D: How can one know whether the experience one had in connection with *Īśvara* is real or not?
- A: For him, who has had a real experience, such a doubt will not arise.
- D: What about the others? Can they not think that his experiences stem from hallucination or self-hypnosis?
- A: What does one who has had the experience lose by others not accepting it? The acceptance or rejection by others does not affect the experience of that person in the least. Though this is the case, I will give a more direct answer to your question.

Suppose that *Īśvara*, while appearing in a vision, gives a fruit or some other object to His devotee. If the fruit remains with the disciple even after *Īśvara* disappears, then it can be

realised that the experience was real. Such an experience changes the mentality of the devotee. Though the experience may have lasted only for a short duration, its impact lasts long. Further, those who have had such experiences become capable of transforming others. If the person who has had the divine experience is quite healthy, why should he start concocting things all of a sudden? If a man is to get involved in self-hypnosis, he can do that any time. On the other hand, special experiences of the kind being considered are not had whenever one desires them. By such an analysis, a true experience can be differentiated from a hallucination.

- D: Why is there so much suffering in this world? Since it is *Īśvara* who created this world, is He not responsible for these troubles?
- A: A man experiences misery only because of his past deeds. One's actions must bear fruit. Due to the fructification of one's previous misdeeds, one suffers in this birth. It is wrong to say that *Īśvara* is the cause of these sufferings. Human beings have the freedom to follow the injunctions of the *śāstra*-s or to transgress them. Man acquires *puṇya* (merit) or *pāpa* (demerit) as a result of his actions and *Īśvara* just gives the fruits of those actions. When it is said that it is the foul deed of a previous birth that causes suffering in this birth, one may ask about the cause of the suffering experienced in that previous birth. The answer is, "It is the *karma* (action) of the births prior to that birth." As *saṃsāra* (cycle of birth and death) is beginningless, it is improper to seek to identify a first birth in which we started life without any *karma*. While creating the universe at the commencement of each *kalpa*, *Īśvara* just brings forth what was in the previous *kalpa*. He does not "create" anything fresh.
- D: It is said that *Īśvara* is aware of the past, present and future. If He knows what is going to happen, then it means that people's future actions are completely predetermined. If that

is the case, man is fully bound by the dictates of destiny and cannot be held responsible for his actions. On the other hand, if man has freedom to decide the course of events, then the future is not pre-fixed. In such a case, even *Īśvara* cannot know the future with certainty. Therefore, how can one say that He is omniscient?

- A: The world is a play of *māyā*, while *Īśvara* is the Controller of *māyā*. In this sense, everything goes on according to His will, which appears both as the free will of people and as fate. If considered in this way, the statements that He is omniscient and that everything need not occur according to just fate can be simultaneously true.

The issue can be considered in another way too. Let us suppose that a boy does not at all prepare for an examination. Then, can we not say with certainty that he will not pass? Just because we say this, can it be said that the student does not have the freedom to read or not to read? Definitely not. In the same way, if we take it that *Īśvara* has understood His creation in its entirety, then also there is no difficulty in asserting that *Īśvara* is omniscient and that destiny alone is not the deciding factor.

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## □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

Even as a child, *Acharyal's* faith in God was exemplary. One evening, on being asked what He would like to do when He grew up, He said that He would strive to realise God. The friend then challenged His conviction that God exists on the ground that neither He nor those He knew had seen God.

**He:** Can you prove that there is no God? Would you say that something does not exist just because you have not seen it? For instance, have you seen Bombay? No. Does it then follow that Bombay is non-existent?

**Friend:** I have not seen Bombay. But I have seen many who have. That is why I believe that Bombay exists.

**He:** Very well. Likewise, our ancient sages who had seen the Lord have given clear indications to that effect. What is wrong if we unreservedly accept their words? Their experience cannot be set aside and so we must concede the existence of God.

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

I had read of Śiva having given *darśana* to those who pined for Him. After *Acharyal* had initiated me into a *Śiva-mantra*, I began to repeatedly pray to the Lord for a vision of the Divine. The heart was burning within while I put up a semblance of normalcy as far as the external world was concerned. Meditation and thought of *Acharyal* alone provided solace. One day I could no longer bear the grief of non-perception of *Īśvara*. I went to the temple nearby and vowed, “O Śiva! Long have I craved for You but You have not responded. Life without You holds no meaning for me. Bestow Your grace on me today itself, if You will. Else, I shall cast off this worthless body by jumping from the roof of my house.” Later, I went to the *pūjā* room at home and sat in meditation. That day’s concentration was particularly wonderful. When I regained awareness of my body it was around 9.30 p.m. The Lord had not come. I started to rise to go up to the terrace. Suddenly, I beheld a bright disc of light. The disc expanded and a sweet sound of “*Om*” was heard to the accompaniment of the tinkling of a bell. From the light, the glorious form of Śiva seemed to condense, seated on a bull. To say that I was enthralled and transfixed would be an understatement. “What do you wish?” was the melodious voice I heard. The Lord had graced me. What more could I want? “Nothing”, I replied. Beaming a captivating smile, Śiva, the perfect One, vanished. What was all this but the effect of *Acharyal*’s blessing conferred on the day of my initiation itself!

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## □ Parables of Acharyal

A minister, who was an atheist but had great regard for Me, came to see Me. During his conversation with Me, he commented, “Our ancients were very wise, indeed. Long ago, people were discharging their duties properly. Though some of them might have erred, generally speaking, policemen were not required in large numbers to maintain law and order. The reason was that people had faith in *Īśvara* and the *śāstra*-s. Consequently, they feared His punishment.”

“Nowadays, people like me proclaim that God does not exist and that *dharmā* is meaningless. We thought that people would be captivated by such rhetoric and that they would be guided by us. However, our scheme backfired. People fear none now and heedlessly violate the law of the land. They give very little importance to ethics. We eliminated God from the scene but could not get a suitable replacement to ensure discipline. I feel that the ancients wisely conceived a God and propagated what they had imagined.”

As can be seen, even an atheist will do well not to deny God!

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### 3. WORSHIP OF ĪŚVARA WITH FORM

- F (Foreigner): Do Hindus worship many Gods?
- A: We believe that there is only one Supreme Lord who has no form and who is responsible for the creation, sustenance and annihilation of the entire universe. However, He assumes many forms for the sake of His devotees. With whatever name and in whichever form His devotees seek Him, accordingly do they worship Him. You might have heard of Indra, etc. These terms refer to divine positions held at different times by the souls that have acquired adequate virtue. You should not confuse the occupants of such posts with the previously mentioned Supreme Being.
- F: Will *Acharyal* kindly say something about worship of images?
- A: We do not worship mere stones. If we did, then, on seeing a stone idol, we would have addressed it as, “O Stone” and not as “O Lord.” We use idols as aids to our worship, realising that it is He who resides in them. In the temple deities, divine presence is installed through the *kumbhābhiṣeka* performed to consecrate the idols. This is strengthened by the sincerity and *tapas* (austerity) of the priests performing the *pūjā* and by the special characteristics of certain idols. Though without form, *Īśvara* is capable of giving *darśana* to His devotees. He indeed does so.

- F: During *pūjā* I saw *Acharyal* pour water, milk, etc., on the *Śiva-liṅga*. What do these acts signify?
- A: During *pūjā*, we ceremonially worship *Īśvara*. In its course, we give Him a bath and that was the *abhiṣeka* that you saw. We wipe Him with a cloth and then offer Him food. Though the limitless and formless *Īśvara* is not in need of anything, our devotion makes us perceive and worship Him in idols. In terms familiar to you, *abhiṣeka* is a ‘shower- bath’ that we give *Īśvara*.

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### □ Parables of Acharyal

God is formless but, for the sake of His devotees, He assumes different forms.

A person was on his way to his place of work, wearing a shirt, trousers and a tie. A friend tapped him on the shoulder and said, “I am really glad to see that you are dressy. This is the type of dress that is needed for you to be successful as a sales representative.” The man came home in the evening, changed into a dhoti and sat down to chant the *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*. A friend who dropped in just then remarked, “It is true that while going to work, you have to dress like an Englishman. But it is this dress that suits you. I prefer to see you like this.” The story reveals that a person, when attired differently, pleases different people. The *purāṇa*-s describe numerous manifestations of the Lord. The scripturally-described forms of Śiva, Viṣṇu, etc., do have implicit meanings.

For instance, Śiva has ten hands. The ten hands denote the ten directions, inclusive of top and bottom, and convey the omnipresence of God. Śiva is well known as the three-eyed One. The sun, moon and fire constitute these eyes. He has the crescent moon in His crest. This moon stands for knowledge. Śiva’s wearing it in His matted locks is a pointer to the Lord being endowed with pure knowledge. “God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent

and there is naught but Him”, is a common inner meaning of the *Purānic* descriptions.

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A person purchased a mud idol of Vināyaka and began worshipping it on *Vināyaka-caturthī*. At the end of three days of *pūjā*, he carried the idol and immersed it in a river. This was seen by a friend of his who had hardly any knowledge of idol worship and was puzzled by what he saw.

Friend : You were worshipping the idol with great faith. Yet, now, you have thrown it into the river. Why?

Worshipper: Originally, the idol had no sanctity and was just a beautifully-shaped piece of mud. Then, at the commencement of worship on *Vināyaka-caturthī* day, I duly invoked Lord Gaṇeśa into it. Thereafter, it became sacred. Treating it as the Lord Himself, I performed *pūjā* to it. At the end of the stipulated period of worship, I requested the Lord to withdraw His special presence in it. The idol lost its sanctity and became just a piece of mud. It was that mud piece which I immersed into the river.

Friend : How is it possible for a mere piece of mud to become holy and then revert to its original state? Further, how can a devotee have the capacity to effect such transformations?

Worshipper: Consider an example. There is an ordinary man with whom we are all familiar. We are able to meet him whenever we wish. If he desires to see a high-ranking government official, he has to struggle to get an appointment. At the suggestion of people like us, he contests an election and, because of our votes, wins.

He then gets appointed as a minister. Thereafter, if we want to see him, we have to fix up an appointment. The very officials whom he had difficulty in meeting, now come to him and carry out his orders. He is provided with security and good accommodation. After his tenure as minister, he contests an election again. This time, the people do not vote for him as before and hence he loses. Thereafter, as before, he becomes a common man. The special privileges and the authority of a minister are not his any longer.

People like us, by our votes, cause this ordinary man to become a minister and then we revert him to his earlier state. Likewise, in response to the devotee's *āvāhana*, invocation, the Lord specially graces an idol and the idol then becomes holy. Having accepted the devotee's worship, the Lord withdraws His special presence in response to the devotee's request; the idol loses its sanctity.

An idol in a temple may have originally been a part of a rock on a hill; people might have walked over that rock and may have even urinated on it. A sculptor fashions what is an ordinary rock into a beautiful idol by chiselling it. Even then it does not become holy. It, however, becomes sanctified when it is duly consecrated in a temple. Thereafter, people worship it. The very sculptor, who earlier delivered hammer blows to it, prostrates before it and does not so much as touch it.

Friend : Why did you make reverential offerings to the idol during your worship? After all, it did not even move a millimeter to accept anything.

Worshipper: When a venerable guest comes to our house, it is in our holy tradition to receive him with honour.

He is offered a seat and his feet are washed. He is fed. Devotees see in the idol not just mud or stone but the living presence of God. They hold that God does accept what is offered to Him, though the idol itself does not stretch out its hand to take what is given. That is why, in the course of my worship, I offered God a seat, just as I would, to a holy one who comes to my house. Then I offered *pādya*, water to wash His feet. Subsequently, I fed Him; this was my offering of *naivedya*.

Suppose a guest proves unworthy of the respect that is shown to him by misbehaving with a female in the host's house or by pilfering costly items. It is likely that the host will hand him over to the police. In the case of God, there is no possibility of His ever proving unworthy of the devotee's worship. Hence, devotees never discard the idol they worship in the middle of the *pūjā*.

Friend : On *Vināyaka-caturthī* day, Gaṇeśa is worshipped in many places at the same time. Which idol does He choose to specially abide in? What influences His choice?

Worshipper: All idols wherein God is properly invoked become sanctified. Wherever there is a drop in pressure, air rushes there. Likewise, God who is everywhere, specially occupies all the idols where He is worshipped, regardless of the number and the location of such idols.

Friend : In some places, the food that is offered is very small in quantity and in others, it is very large. Is not the former insufficient for a deity and the latter excessive?

Worshipper: No. In the *Veda*-s, it is said that the offering gets modified in accordance with the wishes of the

*devatā* to whom it is offered. What is important is that if a devotee were to resolve to offer a certain number of *modaka*, say 1000, in a *Gaṇapati-homa*, that is the number he must offer. He should not think, “This is too much for Gaṇeśa to eat”, and offer less. Actually, the Lord needs nothing but accepts and becomes sated with whatever is offered by a worshipper with devotion.

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

Though actually devoid of birth and immutable, God manifests for the good of the world. He thereby makes it easy for people to see Him outside themselves. For instance, numerous people had the good fortune of beholding Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in the *Tretā* and *Dvāpara yuga*-s. Now, people can take advantage of idols and pictures. When one sees a picture, such as of Kṛṣṇa or Śiva, the concerned form easily comes to his mind.

However, such visualisation, does not, by itself, constitute deep meditation and the clear apprehension of God within oneself. When one observes a picture briefly, closes one’s eyes and tries to hold the form steady in one’s mind, one is usually unsuccessful. On visualising the divinity’s head, one fails to see the deity’s feet; when the feet are seen, the hands do not come to mind; when a hand is apprehended, some other part is not visible. This is a common problem.

What is a remedy for such inability to meditate on a form of God? If one were to see a picture for long and to close one’s eyes, the form would get imprinted rather clearly in the mind. Then one could meditate upon the form that has got impressed upon the mind. With adequate practice, one succeeds.

Some ask, “What is the need for temples?” It is true that they are not necessary. But for whom? If a person can behold God wherever he happens to be seated, a temple is superfluous for him.

On the other hand, consider the case of a man who is unable to focus on God even when he goes to a temple. What would his condition be if there were no temples at all? Thus, for a person of this kind, a temple is essential.

Bhagavatpāda recognised this. His explanation of the Truth is lovely. He avers, “Intrinsically, God has no form. But He can take on any form.” God comes to some in the guise of a friend. He came to Vasudeva and Devakī not as the Supreme but as their son. To Kāṁsa, he appeared in the role of an enemy. We cannot know in what form He will come to us.

The best course for us is to recognise that everything has got God for its essence. We should contemplate on God as immanent and as possessed of a form and make it our aim in life to experience Him. Alternatively, we should strive to make this our last birth by directly realising that we are intrinsically God, the non-dual absolute reality, devoid of attributes. Only then will our lives, as humans, become truly significant.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

In 1976, in the course of His evening walk, *Acharyal* casually chanted the *dhyāna-sloka* of *Śrī Narasimha-mantra* and told a disciple, “God who is formless and of the nature of absolute existence, consciousness and bliss (*Saccidānanda-svarūpa*) appears as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Ambā and so on for the sake of devotees. The form of Narasimha described in this *dhyana-sloka* is itself suggestive of the actual non-difference between Śiva and Viṣṇu. That Narasimha is an incarnation of Viṣṇu is well known. Here, He is spoken of as being with Lakṣmī, the consort of Viṣṇu, as bearing the *cakra*, the weapon of Viṣṇu, and as having the hoods of Śeṣa as His umbrella, like Viṣṇu. Further, He is said to be in the middle of the ocean of milk. This too fits Viṣṇu. However, Narasimha is presented here, like Śiva, as three-eyed. He bears the *pināka*, the bow of Śiva. Further, like Śiva, and unlike Viṣṇu, Narasimha is described as very fair.”

## □ Experiences of Devotees

Some years ago, when I accompanied *Acharyal* from Narasimhavanam to the Śāradāmbā temple I learnt a great deal. *Acharyal* prostrated before Ambā and sat down. I could clearly see His lips moving. Next He was silent and nodded His head slightly. He paused a while as if He was listening and then continued to move His lips. People who saw Him would have been left with no doubt that He was engaged in actual conversation with Ambā. After some time, I saw in the place of Śāradāmbā's deity, a beautiful live form of Lord Narasimha. It appeared as if the sacred man-lion had made its actual manifestation. I was in no state of meditation as my eyes were quite open. I repositioned myself and again had the same vision. I did move myself to two or three positions but the results were the same. It was only later that I learnt that *Acharyal's iṣṭa-devatā* is Lord Narasimha. Perhaps this replacement of Ambā by Lord Narasimha, as far as I was concerned, was to make known *Acharyal's iṣṭa-devatā* to me.

[A disciple]

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A pious lady, an ardent devotee of *Acharyal*, had lost her husband and she had no children. She once dreamt that Lord Kṛṣṇa, in the form of child Mukunda, came and slept on her lap. However, she did not add much importance to this dream. Subsequently, when she went to Sringeri and had *Acharyal's darśana*, she expressed her mental agony that she was not blessed with a child to support her in her old age. *Acharyal* said, "What is this! The Lord Himself has chosen to become your child and you are talking like this in spite of His having made it known to you!" Only then did she realise the significance of that dream. Then, as advised by His Holiness, she started worshipping an idol of the Lord (as child Mukunda) with *vātsalya-bhāva*. Subsequently, by *Acharyal's* grace, her mental agony completely vanished and her mind was filled with the joy derived from the worship.

[Smt. Narayani Ammal]

Once during a *pūjā* session, I noticed that it took longer than usual to pull back the curtain which had been drawn to enable *Acharyal* offer *naivedya* to the Lord in private as per tradition. Later, when I had the *darśana* of His Holiness, I was curious to find out what caused the unusual delay in opening the curtain during the *pūjā*. Straightaway, I posed my question to *Acharyal*. He said, “The *naivedya* was very hot. How could I offer it to the Lord? So, I had to wait for some time for it to cool down before I offered it to Him.” *Acharyal*’s devotion to God was unparalleled. To see Him perform *pūjā* was a bewitching sight. He never thought of the idols as mere images of God. He always felt the living presence of God in them. Naturally, He did not wish to offer a *naivedya* which was hot and would hurt the Lord.

[Sri A.Ramaswamy]

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Once *Acharyal* visited Madurai and stayed there for some days. On a particular day, when *Acharyal* was returning to His place of stay after paying a visit to a devotee’s house, He asked His driver to stop the car in front of my house. Then His Holiness got down from the car and walked into my house. I was not there at home and only my mother and my wife were there. They could not believe their eyes when they saw *Acharyal* entering the house. Both of them were panicky, and they were at their wit’s end. *Acharyal* posed kind enquiries to them and went around the house. He entered the *pūjā* room and noticed the *Mahāmeru* kept there. He then understood from my wife that I was a *śrīvidyā-upāsaka*. His Holiness then blessed my *pūjā* room and left.

When I returned home, my wife informed me of His Holiness’ sudden visit to our house. I rushed to the Math and was fortunate enough to have His *darśana*. *Acharyal* said, “I happened to go through your street today and I felt that I could visit you. You were not there. I saw your *pūjā* room. Are you a performer of the *navāvaraṇa-pūjā*?” I answered in the affirmative. Then His Holiness asked me if I could chant the *mantra*-s and describe the

procedures involved. I politely submitted to His Holiness that I would like to obtain a formal permission from my Guru, Sri Kalyanarama Sastrigal, who taught the *mantra*-s to me. Acharyal was pleased and said that it was only appropriate on my part to seek the *Guru*'s permission.

Unfortunately, Sri Sastrigal was, at that time, hospitalized and in a state of coma. Nevertheless, I paid a visit to the hospital and was by his side when he suddenly came out of that state and recognised my presence! I presented the matter to him. He was very happy and told me that I was fortunate to have got this opportunity to chant the *mantra*-s in the presence of His Holiness. He insisted that I do so at the earliest opportunity. Soon after uttering these words, he again lost his consciousness and slipped into coma. I realised that it was God's will that he came out of it and gave his permission!

On a day fixed by *Acharyal*, I chanted the *mantra*-s. His Holiness was very happy and blessed me. I sought His blessings for the early recovery of Sri Sastrigal from his illness. *Acharyal* asked me in detail about the illness and then gave me *prasāda* saying, "I wish to see him one day." I took the *vibhūti-prasāda* to the hospital and applied it on Sastrigal's forehead. By His Holiness' grace, he recovered fully in a week's time!

Subsequently, I took him for *Acharyal*'s *darśana*. On seeing him, *Acharyal* asked him with affection, "How do you feel now? Have you fully recovered?" Sri Sastrigal was moved by the genuine affection and with tears flowing down his cheeks, said, "It is only due to *Acharyal*'s grace that I am standing before Your Holiness." *Acharyal*, with His characteristic humility, said, "What have I done? It was Śrī Candramouliśvara who saved you!"

[Sri G.S.Mani Iyer]

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## 4. MARRIAGE

- D: The expenses of marriages rise sky-high if dowry is involved. Many parents suffer as a result. What is *Acharyal*'s view about dowry?
- A: Dowry is not sanctioned by the *śāstra-s*. *Kanyā-dāna* (gift of a girl) itself is a great gift. No dowry is necessary to make that gift complete. The *śāstra-s* say that *kanyā-dāna* can be done even during the impurity period of one year after the death of the girl's father. From this, one can understand how worthy that gift is. The practice of accepting dowry has arisen only because of greed. It should be eliminated.
- D: Does *Acharyal* advise disciples to refrain from seeking dowry?
- A: That is My advise to all, whether they are disciples or not. Nowadays, many say that dowry should not be accepted but only a handful put their statement into practice. Only when people choose to abstain from demanding or giving dowry will this evil practice come to an end.
- D: What is the opinion of *Acharyal* as regards lavish spending on marriages?
- A: The *śāstra-s* say that in a marriage ceremony the *mantra-s* should be chanted properly. Nowhere have the *śāstra-s* prescribed that a grand reception party be held or that expensive silk sarees and different varieties of jewels be

bought. New clothing does not mean expensive costumes. If huge expenditure is incurred in marriages, the *śāstra*-s are not to be blamed. If people spend money extravagantly, is it not their fault?

- D: Among the subjects of Brahmins, such as *Vadamal* and *Brihacharanam*, can a person belonging to one subject marry another belonging to a different subject?
- A: The *śāstra*-s do not say anything about such subjects. As far as the *śāstra*-s are concerned, people belonging to the same *gotra* should not marry among themselves. However, the *śāstra*-s do not prohibit inter-subject marriages.
- D: In some places, there exists the practice of a girl marrying her uncle or uncle's son or some other relative. Some scientists opine that such alliances are not conducive to the health of the offspring. Is there any injunction in *śāstra*-s that such marriages should take place?
- A: In the first place, while there are explicit instructions with regard to *upanayana* and *samnyāsa*, there is no explicit injunction in the *Veda* that one should get married! However, it can be understood, after going through the Vedic *mantra*-s pertaining to marriage as also *Smṛti* texts, that the *Veda*-s permit marriage. There is no rule in the *śāstra*-s that one should get married to one's relative. Nor is matrimonial alliance between relatives totally prohibited. It is My contention that it is not proper for one to get married to one's uncle. Getting married to relatives has come into vogue by practice. People can themselves decide whether such alliances should be encouraged or not.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

Man has got what is known as “*pitṛ-ṛṇa*” or obligation to his forefathers. These days, people want their family line to keep growing. The same feeling was there even in our forefathers. By

begetting good citizens, they brought about the growth of their family line. Hence, continuing the family line is also a duty. So, the student is asked to do that by getting married.

Nowadays, the answer to the question, “Whom should you marry?”, is considered to be, “One should marry a girl who appeals to the mind and the eyes.” Today, some people deem it unnecessary to consider even whether the *gotra* of the boy and the girl are the same or whether the boy and the girl are very closely related to the extent forbidden by the *śāstra*-s. We now hear that, according to medical science, the farther the relationship between a husband and wife, the better, as the chances of a familial genetic defect affecting the offspring is less. However, when it comes to a lustful one, it is said, “Those afflicted by lust have neither fear nor shame.” As such people have neither fear nor shame, they may do anything. However, once they get married, they begin to think ways of obtaining a divorce! This is not how things should be.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we see that Rāma had Sītā for His wife while He was at Ayodhya; She was His wife in the forests and He continued to have Her as His wife even when Rāvaṇa abducted Her. Thus, Rāma, under all circumstances, had only one wife. Further, Sītā was the crest jewel amongst chaste wives. Rāma and Sītā were an ideal couple. By imitating Them, people can lead a grand, married life.

During the marriage ceremony, it is said, “While engaging in any religious act, while earning money and while enjoying worldly pleasures, you should not desert me.” Making this promise, the couple get married. However, nowadays if it is asked, “Who uttered these words?”, the answer would be “The priest who conducted the marriage.” This is because the boy and the girl are unaware of the promise; it is the priest who has learnt, by rote, the words concerned, who utters them. This is the level to which we have degenerated. Just because the import of a rite is not obvious to someone, it does not follow that the rite is without significance.

One possessed of strong *vairāgya* and a burning desire for liberation from the snares of *samsāra* would do well to lead a life of *brahmacarya*. To such an aspirant, married life is a mere obstacle serving no useful purpose. This is not to derogate married life. Even Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa led lives of householders. It is the householder who sustains a *saṁnyāsin*. By leading a life of detachment, in spite of being in the midst of worldly activities, the householder not only raises himself up spiritually but also becomes a great source of good to the world. By dedicating all actions to *Īśvara* and acting as an instrument in His hands, the married man is not tainted even though he is in the midst of the world. By constantly performing *vicāra* and *dhyāna*, he can definitely go along the path of spirituality. There have been householders who have been *jñānin-s* and such people are there even today. The scriptures sanction *saṁnyāsa* for those householders who have attained strong dispassion with regard to worldly life.

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### □ Parables of Acharyal

A pilgrim, on the way back to his town, halted at a *dharmasālā*. He appeased his hunger there with the free meal offered to him. Then, desirous of doing good and acquiring *punya*, he joined the inmates in serving food to the pilgrims who had come there. Thereafter, he helped in cleaning up the place. Before retiring for the night, he engaged in conversation with the others, expressed his sympathy to those who voiced their personal problems and also gave them beneficial suggestions. He behaved as if the choultry was his home and the persons there were his family members. Yet, his mind was fully at peace and he left the next morning without the least hesitation or regret. After he returned to his home, a person asked him, “Where did you spend your last night?” “At the *dharmasālā*”, he replied. “What transpired there?”, asked his relative. “Nothing of consequence. I ate there, slept and left. That is all.”

A married man has many duties and responsibilities and has to face many a problem affecting his family. The scriptures and Bhagavatpāda graciously advise him to lead his family life without attachment. He ought to be like the pilgrim during his stay at the *dharmasālā*. He will then perform his duties and face family problems effectively and efficiently but without any mental agitation.

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

In the year 1970, I had been to *Acharyal* to submit to Him about the marriage of my first daughter. *Acharyal* initiated her into a *Kṛṣṇa-mantra* and blessed that she would be married into a very good family. Within three months of her doing the *japa*, her wedding took place with great pomp and show. Her in-laws are well-to-do people and are also great devotees of Sringeri Math.

[Smt. Ganga Bhagirathi Natarajan]

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Once I submitted to *Acharyal* the responsibility that had fallen on me, consequent on the demise of my father, of fixing suitable bridegrooms for my youngest sister, my daughter and my brother's daughter. His Holiness closed His eyes for a few seconds and directed me to perform *Saṅkaṭa-hara-caturthī- vrata* commencing from the next *Kṛṣṇapakṣa-caturthī* day and said that the divine grace of Lord Mahāgaṇapati would remove all impediments. Accordingly, I commenced the *vrata*. After the first *pūjā*, I happened to go to Bombay. There, for a few days, I attended the *Rāmāyaṇa* lectures of Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar.

On one night, I had to drop Sri Dikshitar at his place of stay when he enquired whether I would be staying in Bombay till the end of His *Rāmāyaṇa* discourse. I told him that I was flying back to Bangalore the next day, as I had to perform the *Saṅkaṭa-hara-caturthī-pūjā* on the following day, as directed by His Holiness. He immediately said that there was a suitable bridegroom in Salem and

if I could show him the horoscopes of all the three girls, he would be able to say as to which of them would match with that of the boy. I showed him the horoscopes. He suggested that I send all the three horoscopes to the father of that boy and that, in his opinion, my daughter's horoscope agreed very well with that of the boy in Salem.

I returned to Mysore and, on the day of the *pūjā*, wrote to Dr. Ramanatha Iyer of Salem who is also a staunch devotee of Sringeri Math. He readily replied confirming the agreement of my daughter's horoscope with that of his eldest son. They offered to come after about 10 days. He and his family came on the *caturthī* day in the bright fortnight and we settled the marriage the same day in the month of May. On the 10th of June 1959, again a *śuklapakṣa-caturthī* day, the marriage of my daughter took place. In the marriage-pandal itself, the proposal for my sister's marriage was finalised and, as the bridegroom was away in Bhopal and was expected in January 1960, that marriage took place in February 1960. Thereafter, the monthly *pūjā*-s were continued and in September 1960, the marriage of my brother's daughter was also performed in Bombay. Therefore, as the objective of the *vrata*, the settlement of the three marriages, had been fulfilled after due conduct of the monthly *pūjā*-s, *Acharyal* directed that I could complete the *vrata* and perform *sahasra-modaka-gaṇapati-homa* and continue to do the *homa* every year.

[Sri P.R.Harihara Iyer]

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## 5. GAṄGĀ

- D: It is believed that the river Gaṅgā effaces one's sins. Does it actually do so?
- A: Yes. Why is there any doubt about it?
- D: If Gaṅgā removes one's sins, can one commit any sin and then get rid of it by bathing in the Gaṅgā?
- A: A dip in the Gaṅgā will remove those sins that are unknowingly done or knowingly done once for which we are repentant. It is not fair to expect Gaṅgā to free one from an intentional sin done with the presumption, "I will bathe in the Gaṅgā and get rid of it." However, just because of the above statement, one need not have even an iota of doubt regarding the greatness of Gaṅgā. Crores of people travel long distances with the firm faith that they will be purified by a bath in the Gaṅgā. *Īśvara* does not let their faith go unrewarded.

There is a story in this connection. Once, Pārvatī asked Śiva whether Gaṅgā would remove the sins of all. As an answer, Śiva took on the appearance of an old man and took Pārvatī, in the garb of His aged wife, to the banks of Ganges. He told Her that He would pretend to be drowning and that She should raise an alarm. Accordingly, She screamed to attract the attention of the passers-by and sought the rescue of Her husband. The people around rushed to His rescue. The disguised Pārvatī, however, stopped them and, as earlier

instructed by Śiva, said, “Only that person who has not the slightest trace of sin can touch My husband.” Only one among the throng dived in without the least hesitation and rescued Him. Surprised, Pārvaṭī asked the rescuer if he was free from all sins. The man replied, “Did I not have a dip in the Gaṅgā before saving your husband? My sins vanished at that very instant.” Śiva then told Pārvaṭī, “What doubt need be there that sins are washed away if one has faith like this person?”

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal* had traversed the length and breadth of the country on more than three occasions. Whenever He toured North India, He had always utilised the opportunity to visit places where the holy Gaṅgā flows. These include visits to Haridwar, Allahabad and Banaras. At such times, He would proceed to the river Gaṅgā very early in the morning for a bath in the holy waters. He would perform His morning ablutions and prayers on the banks of the sacred river, sitting in silent contemplation for hours together, lost to the world and in communion with the Infinite. He has often spoken of the efficacy of bathing in Gaṅgā as a means of purification. He has said, “Gaṅgā does purify people. When the faith of the person who resorts to her is intense, he is greatly benefitted by her. This, however, does not mean that one will be redeemed if one commits sins deliberately and then bathes in the Gaṅgā.”

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

Once I came to know that *Acharyal* was to visit Kashi. I very much wanted to go there, have His *darśana* and have a dip in the holy Ganges in the august presence of *Acharyal*. Somehow, I could not make the trip at all! That night I had a vivid dream. In that I found myself in Kashi among a group of devotees well known to

me waiting at the river bank. *Acharyal* who stepped into the holy river Gaṅgā, looked at us and said, “You people can also bathe.” We then had our dip. The dream ended there. I was so happy that my wish was fulfilled at least in the dream. Later, when I happened to meet one of those devotees who had actually gone to Kashi during that time, I requested her to share with me her experiences over there. I was in for a surprise when she narrated the incident that took place at the bank of Ganges. It perfectly tallied with what I saw in my dream. I realised that out of His compassion His Holiness had granted my wish in the dream.

[Smt.Alamelu Krishnan]

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## 6. SOCIAL AND CIVIL REGULATIONS

D: Is it necessary for a spiritual aspirant to take note of the social and civil regulations, for no sin accrues by not adhering to them?

A: These regulations should be followed as faithfully as the scriptural injunctions. It is we who set up these rules and that too, only for our convenience. Hence, it is unbecoming of a wise person not to follow them.

D: How will any sin accrue by not obeying these laws?

A: No sin may accrue but if we transgress these codes of conduct, we will have to face appropriate punishments. For instance, there is a rule that one should keep to the left of the road while driving. If we overlook this, we may meet with an accident. This is, of course, a form of punishment.

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

There are norms relating to the attires of a policeman, a soldier, an office-goer and a *purohita*. When the norms are observed, there is an elegance. On the other hand, if an official were to go to his office with a *pañcakaccha* Dhوتي for a lower garment and a *brahmavastra* for an upper garment and with a bundle of *darbha* grass in his hand, people at this place of work would

wonder where they should send him, to a lunatic asylum or to a place where religious rites are conducted. Alternatively, if a *purohita* were to put on trousers, a shirt and a cap and enter a house to perform religious rites, the inmates would not know where to seat him.

Suppose a policeman were to wear a Dhoti, don a tie, put on a cap and stand on the road, what would people say? “Everything seems topsy turvy. Below and above this man’s waist, we see products of different cultures. Is he mad?”, they would wonder. On the other hand, if he were to come wearing the appropriate uniform, people would think, “Oh! A policeman has come. Let us be careful.”

Though dress regulations are normally applicable, there do exist justifiable exceptions. A man belonging to the C.I.D may disguise himself as a woman and go about in a saree. Alternatively, though not having studied the *Veda*-s, he may disguise himself as an orthodox *purohita*. A member of a drama troupe may, while performing on stage, don an attire that is totally unsuitable for his normal, day-to-day life. There is the rule that only a person who has duly got a degree in law and registered himself as a lawyer can defend in the High Court, a person accused of a crime. Nevertheless, there is an exception. A person who is accused of having committed a murder can conduct his own defence. It is a major offence for a person to cut open the abdomen of another with a knife. However, this rule too has an exception. A qualified surgeon is permitted to not only cut open the abdomen of a patient but to also take out a piece of the patient’s intestines. Thus, even with regard to activities, there are rules and exceptions. As in the case of worldly matters, there are norms and exceptions with regard to what is ordained by the scriptures. Worldly and scriptural rules of conduct should be carefully observed.

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## 7. CONVERSION OF RELIGION

- D: There are many people who have left the Hindu fold and joined other religions. If some of them desire to return to *sanātana-dharma* is it possible to take them back?
- A: Whatever has been specified in the *Veda-s* should be the basis of our conclusions. It has not been said in the *śāstra-s* that one can leave the fold of *sanātana-dharma*. He who turns away from *sanātana-dharma* becomes a *bhraṣṭa* (one who has fallen or one who has disobeyed the commands of the scriptures). So, there is no question of one actually quitting *sanātana-dharma*.
- D: If a man desires to relive as a Hindu, what should he do?
- A: Expiations for various sins have been prescribed in our scriptures. First, he can take appropriate steps to expiate the sin of not having followed *sanātana-dharma*. For example, if he takes a dip in the holy Gaṅgā and maintains faith in our *śāstra-s*, we have no objection to treating him as a Hindu once again.
- D: Will it not be better if there exists, with steps, a method of reconverting one to Hinduism?
- A: Not at all. It will be directly contradictory to our idea, based on *śāstra-s*, that he has not left *sanātana-dharma* at all.
- D: Foreigners have never been Hindus. Can anything be done to admit them into the Hindu fold?

A: Manu has opined that if a righteous king conquers a foreign land, the people of that country too become suited to follow the *sāmānya-dharma*-s (general codes of conduct) prescribed by the *śāstra*-s. Accordingly, we are ready to treat as Hindus those foreigners who have faith in our Hindu religion.

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

Once a proselytizer told a man that he had changed the latter's religion and caste. A few days later, the "converted" person invited the proselytizer to dinner. The convert served pork to his guest. The guest asked, "What is this?" The host replied, "It is pork, sir." "What! Pork!" exclaimed the guest. "Take it away from my plate. I do not eat such things." The host was not to be put off. "You told me that you had converted me. Why should you not accept what I give you?" he objected. "Pork is impure", replied the proselytizer. "Just as you changed my religion and caste by sprinkling water on me, I have also changed pork into mutton by sprinkling water on it. So, from your standpoint, it should be mutton, and not pork. It is surprising that you are not prepared to eat it", argued the host. The proselytizer had no reply.

The *śāstra*-s do not accept that a Hindu can be genuinely converted to any religion by some process, such as sprinkling of water. If a person ceases to follow *sanātana-dharma*, he becomes a *bhraṣṭa*, a fallen one. For various sins, expiations are prescribed. One can expiate for having discarded one's scripturally-prescribed duties and carry on as if the "conversion" had never taken place.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

After the India-Pakistan war of 1965, many Hindus got converted to Islam. *Acharyal* was proceeding to New Delhi at that time. While in New Delhi, *Acharyal* addressed a huge congregation one day. Somebody from the crowd stood up and asked *Acharyal*,

“So many Hindus have been converted to Islam. What does Swamiji have to say about this?” *Acharyal* said in a firm tone that rang through the crowd, “A Hindu is always a Hindu. Nobody can convert a Hindu.”

*Acharyal* thus made a firm statement in consonance with *sanātana-dharma*, and yet, made sure that His statement did not create any communal tensions.

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

*Acharyal's sympathies were thoroughly cosmopolitan. He belonged to all, irrespective of caste or creed.*

Once, a Muslim man had the opportunity to have *Acharyal's darśana* in Bombay. Being conversant in Sanskrit, he introduced himself to *Acharyal* in Sanskrit. *Acharyal* was surprised and spoke a few sentences in Sanskrit to encourage him. The man was very happy and told *Acharyal* that he had been yearning to have *Acharyal's darśana* for a long time and added that his father, who was in Calcutta, too had the same desire. *Acharyal* told him that his father could have His *darśana* when He visited Calcutta. *Acharyal* then asked for some stones to be brought. Giving them to the man, He said, “These were given to Me by some Muslim devotees who had returned from Mecca. You can keep them. If your father requires one, you can give it to him too.” The man then asked *Acharyal* if he could watch the *Candramouliśvara-pūjā* that night. *Acharyal* was pleased with his devotion and readily consented. At the end of the *pūjā*, *Acharyal* blessed him by giving flowers, which, to this day, have been preserved by him in his Koran book. He also wears the stone given by *Acharyal* on his ring. When he met his friend who was a devotee of *Acharyal*, he said, “I met my Prophet at Bombay recently!” The man's father later remarked, “I was at Mecca when *Acharyal* visited Calcutta. If I had known that He was coming here, I would not have gone to Mecca at all!”

[Sri Chandramouli]

When *Acharyal* was camping in Rameswaram, two Muslim devotees came for His *darśana*. They prostrated before Him. A conversation ensued between *Acharyal* and one of the devotees.

Acharyal : What is your name?

Devotee : Allah Bhasha.

Acharyal : What is its meaning?

Devotee : It means, Allah's devotee.

Acharyal : Where is Allah?

Devotee : He is everywhere.

Acharyal : Does he then exist in Me?

Devotee : Yes, he verily is there in You. My prostrations made before You, are really for the Allah residing in You.

The devotee thus expressed his deep devotion to *Acharyal*. With His characteristic compassion, *Acharyal* conferred His blessings on him for begetting progeny. This benediction was surprising, as this devotee's wife had undergone abortion six times earlier. The devotee had in fact, visited *Acharyal* only to seek His blessings for a child. His wife was then in the family way. Can the words of the omnipotent One ever go in vain? The man was soon blessed with a son.

The devotee, overcome with joy, wanted to do *pāda-pūjā* to express his gratitude and requested *Acharyal's* permission for the same. However, keeping the fact that such ceremonial worship does not conform to the principles of Islam in mind, *Acharyal* told him that it was not necessary. As the man was insistent, in order not to disappoint him, *Acharyal* accepted his *kānikā*.

[Sri K.V.Santhanagopalachariar]

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## 8. GUIDELINES FOR PERFORMING ACTIONS

D: On many occasions, it is not clear to us as to what exactly we should do. We are at cross roads in deciding what is right and what is wrong. What should we do in such cases?

A: Sometimes, even though knowing what is right and what is wrong, the mind is clouded by confusion because the evil path seems easy while the righteous path appears difficult. If the confusion is due only to this reason, we should choose only that which is proper. Whether convenient or not, righteous conduct is always the best.

Sometimes, the alternatives may not be contradictory to the *śāstra*-s or tradition. Then any alternative can be chosen. To know what is right and what is wrong, we should understand the views of the scriptures. Lord Kṛṣṇa has said:

jñātvā śāstravidhānoktaṁ karma kartumihārhasi ॥<sup>3</sup>

(BG, XVI.24)

(It behoves you to act here after having known the dictates of the *śāstra*-s.)

Even if our knowledge of *śāstra*-s is next to nil, we should observe how great souls act in similar circumstances and follow them. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* says:

yathā te tatra varteran | tathā tatra vartethāḥ ।<sup>4</sup>

(TU, I.11.3)

(You should conduct yourselves as do the great ones there.)

If there be ambiguity, the *Guru* should be consulted for clarification. If he is inaccessible, the opinion of the pious and erudite ones should be sought and adhered to. In the case of a doubt demanding immediate clarification added to the non-availability of a knowledgeable person for consultation, we should sincerely pray to *Īśvara* and decide upon that which appeals to our intellect. We should, however, be cautious to check the mind from leading us along the erroneous path on account of the influence of desire.

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### ❑ Experiences of Devotees

*Acharyal* has said, “One should perform all one’s actions in a meticulous manner. Even a minor task ought not to be performed carelessly. The time allocated to it may be small and other tasks may receive priority over it but, when one is engaged in it, one must treat it as important.”

One day, *Acharyal* sat down in a coconut grove and asked me to read the first 50 verses of *Vidura-nīti* and select compositions of *Bhagavatpāda*. As I began chanting verses from the *Vidura-nīti*, *Acharyal* partially closed His eyes. When I came to the 22nd verse, I heard a swishing sound. Before I could react, a big leaf-stalk and a coconut fell from a tree in the vicinity and landed on the ground with a big thud less than a meter from *Acharyal*. So concentrated was He on the import of the verses that He was totally oblivious of what had happened.

After reading from the *Vidura-nīti*, I passed on to the compositions of *Bhagavatpāda*, such as *Maniṣā-pañcaka* and *Brahmānucintana*. *Acharyal* listened motionless with a light smile. He opened His eyes only a few moments after I had finished. Suddenly, He winced in pain. Unseen by me, and unfelt by Him,

an army of ants had been biting Him on His legs and hands. His feet were red and swollen.

He knew by rote the verses that He had asked me to read out and had Himself mentally recited them on hundreds of occasions. Yet, He concentrated upon them with such intensity that He remained totally unaware of even loud extraneous sounds and injury to His body. He was never inattentive to anything taken up by Him.

[Excerpted from *Edifying Parables*]

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

Quite often, one has to face situations that one does not desire. In spite of this, one must maintain an attitude of equanimity whether praised or criticised, helped or troubled. Friends and foes, heat and cold and similar pairs of opposites must not be allowed to disturb one's state of equanimity. Anger, desire and greed must be eradicated by proper analysis, devotion to *Īśvara*, *dhyāna*, company of sages and the like.

Brooding over the past is a habit that must never be indulged in. If one has done something wrong there should be repentance. A firm decision should be taken not to repeat the mistake but, on no account, must there be any brooding over the past. Thoughts of the future must be restricted to the absolute minimum.

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## 9. REBIRTH

D: The *śāstra*-s say that rebirth exists. Is there any rational evidence in favour of this?

A: Yes. There are many logical reasons supporting rebirth. One person suffers much in this world, while another lives happily. What is the cause? We see such differences even in young children who have done nothing in the present birth to justify such joy or misery. In order to properly account for such differences, one must accept the existence of rebirth. It is only proper to say that we suffer now as a result of sins committed by us in our previous births and that we have joy now due to the virtuous deeds of our past.

Some people have memories of their previous births. I learn that scientists are investigating this aspect. Some of the investigated persons who recalled their previous births described certain incidents and scenes that were subsequently verified. Without prior experiences, how could such memories be present? Such memories support the existence of rebirth.

Our *śāstra*-s prescribe certain *prāyaścitta*-s (expiations) to get rid of some diseases. On the performance of the ordained expiatory *karma*-s, cures are seen. How can the remedial *karma*-s directed to nullify the sins of a previous birth cure a disease of this birth if there were no rebirth at all? If it is said that mere faith cures the disease, it cannot be explained why,

when the *prāyaścitta*-s are performed with faith but not in accordance with the prescriptions, the desired result is not obtained.

Some children extraordinarily exhibit certain skills. They could not have acquired their proficiency in the few years of their present life. Their parents or grandparents may not have developed the same skills. They should, therefore, have developed their skills in an earlier life. The case of such precocious children favours the existence of rebirth.

If we do not accept rebirth, we would be forced to conclude that, “*Īśvara* is partial for He has kept some people happy and some others unhappy. He has no mercy either because beings experience misery.” Nobody associates such defects with *Īśvara*. So, it is logical to accept rebirth.

A newborn babe drinks its mother’s milk even without being taught by anyone to do so. This is because of its knowledge that satisfaction can be obtained from mother’s milk. Not even a fool would involve himself in an action if he does not find utility in it. Therefore, even the child trying to drink its mother’s milk should be aware of the satisfaction that it will be obtaining thereby. Such an awareness could not have arisen in this birth prior to its suckling for the first time. Therefore, the child should have acquired that knowledge only in the previous birth. This too serves to establish the existence of rebirth.

If we do not accept rebirth, it has to be said that after death a man shall dwell forever in heaven or in hell. Is this logical? Not at all. As a general rule, that which has a beginning must have an end. Therefore, stay in heaven has to have an end since it has a beginning.

Further, consider the case of a baby that has suffered a premature death. It could have acquired neither *puṇya* nor *pāpa*. Will the baby be condemned to hell, or will it make its way to heaven? If its destination is hell, it has to take up

punishment for no fault on its part. If we accept the other alternative, heaven, we are led to concede that the baby experiences heavenly pleasures even though it has no *punya* to its credit. If there were a rule that one without *punya* or *pāpa* would be in heaven forever after death, every mother would do well to kill her baby as soon as it is born! The non-acceptance of rebirth would result in such absurd conclusions.

What I have mentioned here are just a few reasons from amongst a host of them that establish rebirth on a logical basis.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

In the life of My *Guru*, one special feature was that He did not acquire the knowledge of the Truth from the teaching of someone. It manifested right from His birth.

Arjuna asked, “O Kṛṣṇa! What end does a person attain who is endowed with faith but who does not strive and whose mind has slipped from *yoga* without his having attained perfection in *yoga*?”

The Lord answered, “He who has failed in *yoga* is born in the house of the pure and affluent. Alternatively, he is born in the family of wise *yogin*-s. Such a birth is indeed very difficult to obtain in this world. There, he gains the knowledge that was acquired in the previous birth.”

We see some people having different kinds of mental tendencies. Some, owing to tendencies stemming from past lives, perform only good deeds. Some others, regardless of how much competence they possess, constantly do what is wrong. Why? In accordance with Duryodhana’s statement, “I act as impelled by some god who abides in my heart”, they are dragged by the force of past actions.

In the case of My *Guru*, His introversion did not stem subsequent to His taking *samnyāsa*, studying the *śāstra*-s and practising spiritual disciplines. It manifested right from His birth. How does one become a *Mahāpuruṣa* or a great soul? When the accumulated good tendencies of numerous previous lives manifest in a person, in a particular life, that person becomes a *Mahāpuruṣa*.

Manu has said that no matter how old one is, one must not cease to learn. A person may get the doubt, “I am old. There is no occasion for me to utilise in this life what I have learned. Must I then strive merely to end up straining myself? Is it not much better for me to sleep happily instead?” To this, Manu says, “Knowledge must be acquired by the wise, with dedication, though they may be old. Though it may not yield any fruit now, it will be easy to acquire in another birth.”

No matter what your age may be, you must learn. While the learning may not be beneficial in this life, you may again be born as a human in a future life. You may then get an opportunity to acquire knowledge. If mental impressions of past learning are there, the mind instantaneously grasps what is taught.

The *śāstra*-s state, as illustrated by the verse of Manu just considered, that efforts made in previous lives to acquire knowledge play a vital role in determining the ease with which we acquire knowledge now. So, if we are able to easily acquire knowledge, it can be inferred that we must have developed suitable mental impressions in a previous birth. Thus, on seeing a sage, we infer, “This man must have essentially perfected himself in his previous life. However, owing to some obstacle to his enjoying the fruit of his effort and getting liberated, he has been reborn and so is now present before us.”

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Let us consider some other arguments to substantiate the stance of the *Veda*-s for establishing the existence of the *Ātman* apart from the body. It is said, “*One man experiences troubles right from his birth, while another is happy. What is the reason? How*

*does the first act occur? How does the body subsist? Why is there no knowledge after death? In the cases of lamps, seeds, sprouts etc., it is seen that when the causes are similar, the nature of the objects produced is also uniform. If it is said that the variation is due to karma, then it is clear that Ātman must have existed earlier.”*

This requires elucidation. Though human bodies are of the same kind, some experience sorrow, disease and the like right from birth while some others having wealth remain happy. Why is it so? It has to be perforce conceded that virtue and sin are the causes. If merit and demerit are respectively responsible for pleasure and pain, these experiences could not have existed right from birth. After all, the cause and the effect cannot come into being at the same instant. Hence, virtue and sin must have been acquired in a previous birth.

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## □ Experiences of Devotees

*Acharyal has said, “The negative effects of sins done in the previous births can be reduced to a great extent by means of medicines, japa, homa, pūjā, dhyāna and satsaṅga (company of great souls)”. In the case of certain devotees, Acharyal Himself prescribed the expiatory rites to be performed for freedom from their afflictions.*

During the early ‘90s, I was suffering severely from vertigo. When I had attacks, I would not be able to stand, sit or even lie down owing to the dizziness, and could feel my eyeballs going round and round at a fast pace. Allopathy did not help. Homeopathy proved futile and *Āyurveda* too failed.

Accompanied by my father, I went to Sringeri to have the *darśana* of Acharyal. My father informed Acharyal of my problem and asked Him as to what must be done to combat it.

Acharyal immediately sent for a certain book. When it was brought, He started to look through its pages. While looking into the book, He said to my father, “This problem is troubling her

because in some earlier birth, she did not complete a *vrata* (sacred vow) she had undertaken.” I was seated a little away, and was thinking about *Acharyal’s* statement. He lifted His head up slightly and looking at me over His glasses, clarified, “This is given in the book!” Thereafter, He prescribed a *prāyaścitta* (expiatory rite) consisting of a *homa*, which He explained to my father.

The *prāyaścitta* detailed by *Acharyal* was later performed by my father, after which I became completely free of the ailment.

[A disciple]

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## 10. MODIFYING THE ŚĀSTRA-S

- D: With the passage of time, strict adherence to the scriptural injunctions is becoming difficult. Can the *śāstra-s* be slightly modified to put them in tune with the present-day trends?
- A: We should never be shortsighted in our views. Just because accepting bribe has become a common affair, are we justified in enacting legislation to permit it? That would only help its intensification. We should, likewise, not seek to modify the *śāstra-s*. Consideration of changes in our ways of living is inherent in our *śāstra-s*. “Follow to the utmost extent possible” is what they command. We, in our present condition, should abide by them to the maximum extent possible.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa has said:

svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt ।<sup>5</sup>

(BG, II.40)

(Even a little of this *dharma* saves one from great fear.)

In the light of this, how are we justified in attempting to modify the *śāstra-s*?

Further, it can never be said that the performance of *sandhyāvandana* and the like are impossible in the present times.

This apart, one who wishes to bring about a change in *śāstra-s* should be a knower of the past, present and future. Without

even knowing the mechanism by which *karma-s* yield fruit, how can we change the *śāstra-s*? We just cannot. This is because we are incapable of asserting with certainty, “Follow this. Even if it be difficult now, you shall derive benefit from it later.” We are unaware of what is in store for us in the future birth, nor are we aware of the happenings of the previous births. In short, we are not omniscient and so are incompetent to modify the *śāstra-s*.

- D: *Yāga-s* are being performed at several places. Expenditure is incurred for them. Some people raise the objection that the money could have been utilised to uplift the downtrodden instead of wasting it on *yāga-s*. Is the objection valid?
- A: The expenditure on *yāga-s* is but an insignificant fraction of what we spend on material pleasures. How can we object even to this? Further, gratified by the holy offerings, the Lord showers on us His returns that are many times greater than our meagre offerings. For instance, pleased by the *yāga*, *Īśvara* brings about sufficient and timely rains. It cannot therefore be said that expenditure on *yāga-s* is a waste.

We sow seeds and reap the crop. As against this, is it sensible to say that sowing seeds is a waste and that we could have eaten the seeds instead? Like seeds sown, *yāga-s* yield precious fruits. The *śāstra-s* do not expect a poor person to perform a *yāga* involving much expenditure. That the scriptures command us to adhere to *dharma* to the maximum extent possible by us is a pointer to this. The expenses in *yāga-s* are therefore only for our betterment. It is improper to look upon these expenses as wastage.

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## □ Parables of Acharyal

A lawyer argued, “Your Honour, my client should not be treated as guilty. It is true that he stole. But there is a reason for that. He was forced to commit the theft because his family was

starving. With the stolen money, he not only helped himself but also his family. While stealing, he did not destroy any property. In fact, he did not even damage the lock as he used a duplicate key. The money that he took away was meagre compared to the rich man's hoard of black money. My client performed a service to the Government by unearthing black money. This apart, the wealthy man has so much cash that this little depreciation ought to mean nothing to him."

How would the judge respond to such an argument? He would presumably declare, "I am not interested in such arguments that ignore the law of the land. Stealing is an offence under the Indian Penal Code. Even you admit that your client did steal. So I am duty-bound to punish him." Then he would hold the lawyer's client guilty and send the thief to jail.

Judges determine whether an act is a punishable offence or not by relying on the penal code and not on fanciful arguments that disregard the penal code. Likewise, to determine what is *dharma* and what is *adhharma*, a person must turn to the *Veda* and not to mere reasoning that is independent of the scriptures.

The penal code, having been formulated by humans, may require occasional revision. However, the *Veda*-s, which emerged from *Īśvara*, are ever flawless and need no modification.

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## 11. SCRIPTURAL INJUNCTIONS

- D: How are we to perform *sandhyāvandana* during a train journey? The train may not be proceeding in a uniform direction.
- A: Does not the train halt at stations?
- D: Yes. But, what if it does?
- A: If it stops for a sufficient period at a particular station and the requisite cleanliness can be ensured, *sandhyāvandana* can be performed there.
- D: What is to be done if the journey is continuous?
- A: In such a case, there being no alternative, *sandhyāvandana* should be performed mentally.
- D: Does this rule hold good even for *pūjā*?
- A: Yes.
- D: Can we do meditation during a journey?
- A: If the mind is adequately under control, meditation can be performed anywhere.
- D: Can hotel food be consumed in the course of a journey?
- A: There is an intimate relationship between the food consumed and the state of the mind. It is therefore better for a spiritual aspirant to avoid hotel food not only during travel but

always. One could manage with fruits and the like during journeys.

D: While on a sojourn, it is sometimes difficult to do *anuṣṭhāna* as at home. What should one do?

A: In such cases, *anuṣṭhāna* can be carried out to the extent possible. This is what the scriptures say.

D: Will *Acharyal* kindly enlighten us on the nature of food to be consumed by a spiritual aspirant?

A: Only *sāttvika* food should be taken. *Sāttvika* food gives peace to the mind and strength to the body. Onion, garlic, coffee, tea, intoxicating drinks and the like should never be consumed. Care should be taken to avoid eating beyond necessity. This does not, however, mean that we should fast till our energy is sapped. Food is meant to sustain the body and keep it in good health. A *mumukṣu* (one aspiring for liberation) would do well to refrain from taking dishes merely for taste.

Defective food is of three types. Onion etc., are bad by nature. Presence of hairs, dirt etc., constitutes the second defect. The bad mental condition of the cook and the server falls in the third category. Food cooked by a person indulging in sinful activity is inadvisable for a *mumukṣu*. It is best to eat pure food cooked at one's house.

D: Is fasting on certain days a good habit?

A: Yes. Taking only fruits and milk or fully fasting on certain days like *ekādaśī* is beneficial. By fasting on such occasions, one acquires sound health, apart from securing *puṇya*.

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## ☐ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal's upanyāsa-s* clearly bear the stamp of His realisation. Since *Acharyal* regarded only a genuine practitioner as

competent to preach, He was meticulous in His *anuṣṭhāna*. He would get up before sunrise, bathe and proceed for His morning *anuṣṭhāna* which would be up to 9 a.m. Only after that would He give *darśana*. In the afternoon, after giving *tīrtha-prasāda* and finishing His duties, He would go for His afternoon bath followed by *anuṣṭhāna* and only then partake of *bhikṣā*. He would bathe, without fail, in the evening and perform *anuṣṭhāna* for the third time.

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

The faith *Acharyal* had in the *Veda*-s and the respect He showed towards those who conducted their lives strictly in accordance with scriptural injunctions are beyond description. As I was fortunate enough to accompany Him during His tour of Andhra Pradesh, I witnessed a number of incidents relating to these aspects. For instance, whenever He visited a village or a town in Andhra, He would invariably pose the question, “Is there any *agnihotri* living in this place?” If the answer was ‘Yes’, He would express His desire to pay a visit to the house concerned! Whenever He visited any such house, He would praise the *agnihotri* for his faith in performing such rites and specially bless him and his family. He would also advise the people who accompanied Him to such places, to be sincere in *nitya-karmānuṣṭhāna*.

Once during His camp at Tenali, He heard about a sincere *agnihotri* and decided to visit his house. The person concerned was informed of *Acharyal*’s visit and he was, naturally, delighted. When *Acharyal* visited his place, He asked the man to take Him to the place of his *agnihotra* worship. The building he lived in as also the shelter where he performed *agnihotra* were in a dilapidated condition. Appreciating his strict adherence to his *dharma* despite his penury, *Acharyal* instructed the officials of the Math to construct a new house at the expense of the Math and offer it free of cost to the sincere *agnihotri*. We were all moved at the

compassionate gesture of *Acharyal*. Within months, the construction was ready for the *agnihotri* to occupy!

[Swami Jnanananda Theertha]

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## □ Parables of Acharyal

A Yogi lived in a small Ashram. Daily, he used to beg for food and partake it. He was thus leading a calm and peaceful life. The king of the land had a great regard for the sage. One day, he invited the ascetic to his palace for *bhikṣā*. The *samnyāsin* said, “O Sovereign! I have been eating only food procured by begging. I do not know how my mind will be affected if I consume anything in your palace. Hence, I feel that it is best for me to decline your invitation.”

However, in response to the ruler’s repeated requests, he relented. When the ascetic was washing his hands after his meal, his eyes fell on a necklace of pearls. Noting that nobody was watching him, he picked it up and put it in his *kamaṇḍalu*. Then he went to the main hall, blessed the king and returned to his hermitage. Only after some time, he began to ponder over what he had done.

Meanwhile, the queen complained to the king about the loss of the necklace she had left in the bathroom. The king analysed the situation and concluded that one of the servants must have pilfered it. In order to extract the truth from them, he applied third degree methods. They kept on pleading innocence. When one of them suggested that the hermit might be the thief, the monarch became infuriated.

At the Ashram, the ascetic was thoroughly ill at ease. “What a foul deed I have committed today! For whose sake did I steal the necklace? If I wear this and go for *bhikṣā*, certainly no one will offer me food. If I leave it here itself, someone may steal it. Why did I become a kleptomaniac? I have beheld many necklaces but have never been affected by desire for them. The fact that a longing

has arisen today implies that my mind has become impure. What could be the cause?”, he pondered. It dawned on him that the food he had eaten that day must have been the reason for his mental defilement.

He induced vomiting and then went to the king. On seeing the commotion in the palace, he asked for the reason. The king replied that no one had admitted to stealing a missing necklace. The *yogin* said, “How will these innocent ones plead guilty?” “Here, take the necklace”, continued the remorseful ascetic. “I, the thief, have brought it for you.”

The shocked king asked the *samnyāsin*, “You are a great sage. Is it proper for you to have taken the necklace? Further, what made you bring it back? I am thoroughly confused. Please elucidate.” The sage replied, “In the beginning, I refused your invitation to have *bhikṣā* in your palace. However, I finally gave in to your request. The result is that so many people have got unnecessary beatings and I have also earned a bad name. O King! You have stored so much rice in your granary. I wonder whether you have rightfully collected it.” “I am sorry to say that unfair means have been employed to collect so much rice”, the monarch replied truthfully. “I ate this rice for only one day and even that was enough to spoil my mind” sighed the *yogin*. “Such being the case, I shudder to even think of its effect on all of you who take it daily. So, please do not invite me for food hereafter. I will get my food by begging as I have been doing hitherto.” “Cannot begged food also be impure?”, queried the sovereign. “The food may be impure but it is so only till it is put into my begging bowl. Such is the verdict of the *śāstra-s*”, clarified the sage.

This story illustrates that food does influence the mind. Eatables are classified as *sāttvik*, *rājasik* and *tāmasik*. *Sāttvik* food is pure and confers strength and good health; curd is an instance of a *sāttvik* product. *Rājasik* food stimulates desire and anger; an example is a pungent item. *Tāmasik* food leads to sloth, sleepiness, etc. Putrid food and ort are instances of *tāmasik* eatables. The mentality of the cook and the presence of defiling factors, such as

a strand of hair, also have a bearing on the purity of food. Care should be taken to consume only properly-prepared, *sāttvik* food.

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## 12. UPANAYANA

- D: Can *upanayana* be performed during *dakṣiṇāyana*? (*Dakṣiṇāyana* is the period of the progress of the sun to the south.)
- A: For Brahmins, *upanayana* should not be performed during that period.
- D: We come across *upanayana* of two brothers being performed simultaneously. The father gives the *upadeśa* to one son while an elderly relative gives it to the other. Some consider this wrong. What is *Acharyal*'s view?
- A: Simultaneous performance of the *upanayana* of brothers, one being initiated by the father and the other by another relative, is not in accordance with the *śāstra*-s.
- D: When should *upanayana* be performed?
- A: The boy should be initiated even when he is young. It is said that a *brāhmaṇa* should be invested with the sacred thread at *garbhāṣṭama* (the eighth year from the period of pregnancy). However, specific occasions have been prescribed for better results. If a boy is initiated at the age of five, he attains *brahma-varcas* (spiritual splendour). Postponing the investiture is certainly not good. But there is no need to think as follows: "This boy has passed the age specified for the performance of *upanayana*. He need not, therefore, be invested with the sacred thread henceforth."

- D: Which is the appropriate time to start the morning *sandhyāvandana*?
- A: A short while before sunrise.
- D: Does *Acharyal* advise that one should wake up early in the morning?
- A: Yes. In the morning, the period just before sunrise is most suitable for *anuṣṭhāna*. Going to bed between ten and eleven at night and waking up between four and five in the morning is a very good habit.
- D: If, due to some reason, the *sandhyā* (twilight) period passes without *sandhyāvandana* being performed, can that particular *sandhyāvandana* be given up?
- A: Even it be late, *sandhyāvandana* should not be neglected. If delayed, it should be performed by offering the *prāyaścittārghya*. This does not mean that one must not strive to do it at the proper time.
- D: What if one is ill?
- A: If consciousness and control over the mind are present during the illness, it can be performed mentally.
- D: Should one bathe before *sandhyāvandana* in the morning?
- A: Yes. A bath before the morning *sandhyāvandana* is compulsory. During illness, *mantra-snāna* can be done. If illness is severe, at least the *sandhyāvandana* should be performed mentally.
- D: How many times should *gāyatrī-mantra* be chanted?
- A: As many times as possible. But there is a lower limit, such as hundred and eight times during the morning *sandhyāvandana*. One should not, normally, chant fewer times than the limit. In case of an emergency, when there is no way out, the consideration is entirely different.

D: Are *samidādhāna* and *brahma-yajña* included among the *nitya-karma-s* of a *brahmacārin*?

A: Yes.

D: The necessity of attending school, college, office etc., often precludes the performance of *mādhyāhnika* at the proper time. When, then, should it be done?

A: *Mādhyāhnika* can be performed after the morning *sandhyāvandana* itself. This is in case there is no other option.

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## □ Experiences of Devotees

*Many devotees sought Acharyal's guidance to solve their problems, both religious and secular. Every time, the solution given by Acharyal was the best and pragmatic.*

A person, known to me, had two children, the elder one a daughter and the younger, a son. He was in a dilemma about a *dharmic* issue and he approached me for solution. As per the *śāstra*, the *upanayana* for a boy should not be performed before performing the *kanyādāna* of a girl who is elder to him. The scriptures also emphasise that the *upanayana* of the male child should take place before he completes 14 years of age. Due to unavoidable reasons, the marriage of his daughter could not be performed even until the age of 17. The father was in a fix because the son had, by then, reached 14 years of age, which is the upper limit for performing the *upanayana*. The father did not know if he should go ahead with the *upanayana* or postpone it indefinitely. I could not find a solution to this and submitted the problem to *Acharyal*. On many an occasion, I had sought and received *Acharyal's* advices on such complex *dharmic* issues. *Acharyal* analysed the issue and said, "As the boy has already reached fourteen years of age, *upanayana* should not be postponed any further. Let it be performed even if the girl has not got married." I

conveyed the same to the father and the *upanayana* for the boy took place without further delay.

[Swami Jnanananda Theertha]

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A person employed in the Math's *gośālā* had a large family to support and he was finding it difficult to make ends meet. Added to this, his second son was deaf, dumb, blind, lame, etc. The worker felt that he was like a vegetable. Everything for the boy had to be done by someone else. The worker did not know whether *upanayana* should be performed for him or not. Some Pandits, whom he consulted, were not able to give a definite answer and so he decided to consult *Acharyal* Himself. *Acharyal* patiently listened to his tale of woe and said, "*Upanayana* should be performed, but because the boy cannot perform his *nitya-karma*, it will suffice if you do some extra *Gāyatrī-japa* daily on his behalf." Not stopping with this, *Acharyal* went out of His way to see that the *upanayana* was conducted at the Math itself. He arranged for a priest, and provided a place, money and even food for the conduct of the function. All this He did, despite His busy schedule during the Sri Shankara Jayanti celebration.

[Sri K.Srinivasan]

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## 13. FATE AND FREE WILL

D: Do we have the power to overcome fate? On the one hand, the *śāstra*-s say that one can conquer fate. For instance, in the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*, it is said:

śubhāśubhābhyāṁ mārgābhyāṁ vahantī vāsanā sarit |  
pauruṣeṇa prayatnena yojanīyā śubhe pathi ||<sup>6</sup>

(YV, II.9.30)

(The river of tendencies flows along the auspicious and evil paths. By means of effort and manliness, one should direct it along the auspicious path.)

This shows that free will is more powerful than fate. On the other hand, the *śāstra*-s also say:

yadabhāvi na tadbhāvi bhāvi cenna tadanyathā |<sup>7</sup>

(P, VII.168)

(What is not destined to happen will not happen. What is to happen will not be otherwise.)

Will *Acharyal* kindly clarify the position?

A: First of all, one should know what *prārabdha* (fate) is. This should be understood along with its mechanism of fruition. Those actions of the previous births that are yielding fruits now constitute the cause of this birth. It is this set of actions that we call *prārabdha*. It does not force one along a good or evil path. *Karma*-s that have started yielding fruits gradually

lead one by stimulating tendencies of likes and dislikes in the mind. Hence, Lord Kṛṣṇa has said:

sadṛśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi ।  
prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati ॥<sup>8</sup>

(BG, III.33)

(Everybody, including a knower, acts according to his nature. Nature compels beings. What can restraint do?)

Having explained this verse, Śāṅkarabhagavatpāda raises the following objection: “If everyone acts as compelled by nature, there is no place for *śāstra*-s at all. Such being the case, what is the purpose of the *śāstra* saying, ‘Be righteous’?” He then points out that the next *śloka* provides the response. That verse is:

indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau ।  
tayorna vaśamāgacchetau hyasya paripanthinau ॥<sup>9</sup>

(BG, III.34)

(Attachment and aversion are rooted in the senses, towards their objects. One must not come under their sway. They are indeed one’s foes.)

Thus, it is clear that if we conquer likes and dislikes, we will no longer be under their sway. So, we should shed likes and dislikes and then voluntarily function in keeping with the scriptural teachings. You asked whether *prārabdha* (fate) could be overcome. The reply is, “It can positively be overcome.” If it is that *prārabdha* cannot be overcome, man cannot be held responsible for his actions at all. He would not have any choice.

I earlier said that the *karma* that is now fructifying is *prārabdha*. It is what we did in the previous births. Hence, *prārabdha* cannot be stronger than effort. We can change the tendency created by our earlier actions by suitable exertion in this birth. However, if the tendency caused by the *karma* of our previous birth is very strong, we will have to put in a

proportionally stronger effort to counter it. This is true in most of the cases. Of course, one's freedom is not absolute.

An illustration is a cow tethered to a post. It can roam about freely only to the extent of the length of the rope. It cannot go beyond. Similarly, the fate of the country, the free will of other people and our former actions place a limit to our freedom.

A person may board a train but the train may meet with an accident. In the same way, sometimes, one might have answered a question paper satisfactorily but the expected result might not materialise. One should not give room to worry on seeing all this. Almost anything may be attained in spiritual life by effort. One may be destined to be a householder but with the blessings of a *Guru* and by effort, one can lead the life of a *brahmacārin* and, later, that of a *saṁnyāsin*. Though the consequences of earlier *karma*-s have to be experienced, the intensity of *prārabdha* can be decreased by the grace of *Īśvara*. The negative effects of *prārabdha* can also be reduced to a great extent by means of medicines, *japa*, *homa*, *pūjā*, *dhyāna* and *satsaṅga* (company of great souls).

- D: If, according to one's horoscope, one would live for eighty years, does it mean that one will not die before that? Similarly, if another is to have a very short span of life, can he not live beyond that age?
- A: The reply to your questions is in the negative.
- D: Does *Acharyal* then mean that the horoscope is read wrongly or that casting of the horoscope is itself wrong?
- A: Neither.
- D: In that case, all that is predicted with the horoscope as basis is useless. Further, palmistry is not sensible. Hence, no purpose is served by the *Jyotiṣa-śāstra*. Is this *Acharyal's* view?

A: Not at all.

D: Will *Acharyal* kindly explain?

A: The horoscope merely indicates the effect of *karma*-s that one had done in the previous births. In this birth, by exercising free will, we can definitely change the course of events. If we earn the grace of the Lord, like Mārkaṇḍeya, then we can live longer than we are destined to. Similarly, by falling into evil ways, we can spoil our health and die earlier than we are supposed to. Further, we hear astrologers say, “If one acts as follows, the effect of that *karma* will be reduced.” If the verdict of the horoscope is immutable, what is the use of such expiations?

Nobody need to fear a horoscope. It is only an indicator of what is to come. We can certainly alter destiny if it is unfavourable. Another point to be remembered is that destiny can very well be favourable. In such a case, our efforts will readily bear fruit.

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### □ Parables of Acharyal

The fields of two farmers were identical in size and had similar kinds of soil. They worked equally hard, tilled their lands well and sowed seeds of uniform quality. The rainfall over the fields was neither excessive nor scanty and so the crops grew well. At the appropriate time, they commenced their harvesting. Before they left for their homes on an evening, they were able to behold with joy large heaps of grains, the result of their efforts. There was hardly any difference in the yields obtained by them.

That night, while they slept, there was a very heavy downpour on one land and only a light drizzle on the other. The next morning, when they went to their lands, one was dismayed to find that the rain had ruined his grains while the other felt relieved that his heaps of grain were intact.

Thus, notwithstanding the similarity in their efforts, the results they obtained were markedly dissimilar. It was the unfavourable destiny of one farmer and the favourable fate of the other that led to the loss of the former and the gain of the latter. Those who have faith in the *Veda*-s and *śāstra*-s and are logical do not regard the experiences of humans as just fortuitous.

Two students wrote an examination. The boy who had studied better answered all except two questions well. The other managed to answer just two questions correctly. The examiner was an impartial but lazy man. He scrutinised two of the first boy's answers. They happened to be the incorrect ones. Assuming the other answers too to be incorrect, he awarded the boy low marks.

Then, he took up the second boy's answer book. The answers he selected for checking happened to be the correct ones. Taking it for granted that the remaining answers were also correct, he awarded the boy concerned high marks. On seeing the results, the boy who had studied better grieved, while the other rejoiced. Thus, hard work fetched a poor result and poor preparation yielded good marks. Here too the hand of destiny is seen.

Dyumatsena was destined to be blind and live in a forest. By Sāvitrī's efforts, he regained his sight and his kingdom. Aśvapati was not destined to have sons, but obtained them. Satyavān was to die young, but he lived long, he sired sons and ruled the Shalva kingdom for many years. This story is a striking example to show that what is destined to happen can be markedly changed by human effort.

Mārkaṇḍeya was fated to die at the age of 16 but lived on because of his devout worship of Lord Śiva. Śuka, the son of Vyāsa, was such a great *yogin* that he attained disembodied liberation at the time of his choice. Numerous instances of the alteration of the course of fate by personal effort and by the grace of God can easily be cited.

Neither destiny nor personal effort singly determines the course of human life; there is great interaction between the two.

Destiny or actions of the past that have begun to fructify, human effort and divine grace together govern what happens now. Manu has compared destiny and personal effort to the two wheels of a chariot; a chariot cannot move on a single wheel.

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## ❑ Experiences of Devotees

*Innumerable are the instances where devotees overcame their unfavourable destiny on account of Acharyal's intervention.*

Dharmatma Sri Vaisdyasubramanya Iyer, an ardent devotee of the Math, had the sacred *darśana* of *Acharyal* when His Holiness was camping at Nepal. Subsequently, when he boarded a plane and sat down to read a newspaper, he was shocked to find that he could not read anything. He realized that he had lost his eyesight. He then went to Sitapur for treatment. The day he was scheduled to be operated, Sri Padmanabha Upadhyaya, the devout Personal Assistant of His Holiness, had brought the *prasāda* graced by the Jagadguru. At the hospital, local anaesthesia was administered to Sri Iyer and the surgery commenced. “Śāradā, get me knife number two”, instructed the doctor. As Sri Iyer had some degree of awareness, he heard the doctor's voice. He was heartened to hear the divine Mother's name, Śāradā, when the surgery was about to begin and deemed it a special blessing. *Acharyal's prasāda* had arrived and, in the theatre, ‘Śāradā’ had come. The doctor told him later that the designated nurse had not arrived and so a nurse from Lucknow whose name was Śāradā had taken her place. Sri Iyer's sight was restored to him by the grace of His Holiness and this is an incident he simply could not forget. He then sought the blessings of His Holiness that he retain his sight till the completion of certain construction work at Kalady that had been delegated to him by *Acharyal*. *Acharyal* graced Sri Iyer that his sight would not fain even after the completion of the work at Kalady and would enable him to do many other good deeds also.

It was *Acharyal* narrated the above incident to me. He then said, “Look, shall I tell you a hundred such cases? People call these

miracles. I do not call them miracles. There was a *Rajasaheb* who had no children. His father came to My *Guru* Sri Chandrasekhara Bharathi Mahaswamigal with a supplication for progeny for his son. My *Guru* directed the supplicant to Me for obtaining *prasāda*. I prayed to the Mother and gave *prasāda*. The *Rajasaheb* was soon blessed with a child. Everyone said, “All this is due to Your grace”. But can I claim it to be so? There was a boy, who never spoke anything, like Jaḍabharata. When I spoke to him, he spoke to Me in reply. Such things do happen. It is wrong to claim that we cause them. When people express their problems to Me and seek remedy, I simply submit their problems before *Īśvara* seeking His blessings. It is the divine will of *Īśvara* that comes as remedy. My role in such cases is insignificant.”

[Sri Veerakesari Nageswara Sastry]

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A certain devotee of *Acharyal* had two sons and one daughter. His first son had no inclination towards religion. Much as the father tried to influence him and put him on the right path, he could not succeed. He had an occasion to have *Acharyal*'s *darśana* and submitted his plight to *Acharyal*. “As parents, you are responsible only for his *janma*. Each one brings forward his *samskāra*-s from previous lives. You have no hold over them. You should tell him what is good. That will suffice. Do not be unduly perturbed over this.” Advising thus, *Acharyal* gave him *prasāda*. It dawned on the devotee that parents, indeed, have the responsibility to inculcate good values in children. However, if even after their repeated efforts, children do not imbibe the values due to their past tendencies, parents have no choice but to remain calm and unperturbed.

[A devotee]

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A.V. Subramanya Mudaliar was a staunch devotee of *Acharyal* and he used to have *darśana* of *Acharyal* whenever

possible. Once he went to Sringeri and stayed for a few days. He was near the famous *Vidyāśankara* temple when he received a telegram from Madras. It said that he was to leave for Madras immediately as his daughter was going to undergo an operation for appendicitis. Even before he could react to the message, he saw *Acharyal* in front of him asking what the matter was. *Acharyal* was proceeding to Ambal's Temple then and after Sri Mudaliar just said he has received a telegram from Madras, He just nodded and entered the temple. After *Acharyal* left, Mudaliar felt he could have given the full contents of the telegram to Him. As he did not expect *Acharyal* to give *darśana* at that moment, he was short of words. Sri Mudaliar also entered the temple and waited for *Acharyal* to come out. This time *Acharyal* asked him what the message was and Sri Mudaliar briefed Him.

*Acharyal* said, "There is no need for an operation. Come in the evening. I will give you *prasāda*. You can take it to Madras." Sri Mudaliar took the *prasāda* and left the same night to Madras.

At Madras, his son-in-law and his college Principal were stubborn that operation should be performed. Sri Mudaliar, however, having full faith in *Acharyal*'s words put his foot down and said there is no need for an operation. Later, it transpired that with proper medication itself she recovered.

[Courtesy: *Shankara Kripa*]

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*Acharyal* was giving *tīrtha-prasāda* to the assembled devotees in the Sringeri Math Pravachana Mandiram at Chennai. There was a heavy crowd and Sri Sharma, a devotee of *Acharyal*, was regulating the crowd by volunteering himself. His friend Sri Srinivasan approached him with his 3 year old daughter and said, "Please take me to His Holiness and tell Him that my child is dumb and that we are craving for His blessings." Sri Sharma, however, said, "Come later. It cannot be now." When Sri Srinivasan was leaving the place, *Acharyal* Himself called Sri Sharma and asked what the matter was. Sri Sharma explained. *Acharyal* then called

Sri Srinivasan near and gave him a plantain and said, “Everything will be all right. Give the fruit to the child.” The child started talking the same day and went on to recite, in course of time, *Śrī-Lalitā-sahasranāma*, *Śrī-Lakṣmī-aṣṭottara* and *Soundarya-lahari*. Sri Srinivasan felt happy but had one more grievance. His child was not writing at all. When *Acharyal* was camping in 1977 at Navasuja, Chennai, Sri Srinivasan again decided to make use of the opportunity and went for the *darśana*. He found Sri Sharma doing the same job and approached him for help. He recalled to him *Acharyal*’s earlier blessings and the remarkable improvement in the child. He told him that he has come this time to seek blessings from *Acharyal* which would enable his child to write. Sri Sharma asked him to approach His Holiness directly and seek His blessings. Sri Srinivasan went in the evening with the child for *darśana*.

Even before he could seek His blessings, *Acharyal* called him near and said, “Give the child this apple. She would start writing in an year from now.” Sri Srinivasan’s joy could not be contained. The child started writing in Sanskrit one year later.

[Courtesy : *Shankara Kripa*]

★ ★ ★ ★

Once *Acharyal* visited my house. I was then bed-ridden with a problem in the spine. Inside the room, lying on my bed I thought that *Acharyal* might not like to see a patient. But, to my great surprise His Holiness not only entered the room to see me but gently touched my spine saying, “Don’t be worried. It will be alright.” I felt so happy. Later when I was taken to the hospital for the X-ray, the doctor who had insisted on a surgery to be performed, was surprised to find that there was no requirement for the surgery at all! That was the magical effect of His holy touch!

[Sri S.Krishnaswamy]

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## 14. DHARMA

- D: How is one to decide what is *dharma* and what is *adharmā*?
- A: Any action ordained by the *śāstra*-s is *dharma* while that which is prohibited is *adharmā*. In deciding about *dharma*, Manu says:

vedaḥ smṛtiḥ sadācāraḥ svasya ca priyamātmanaḥ ।  
etaccaturvidhaṁ prāhuḥ sāksāddharmasya lakṣaṇam ॥<sup>10</sup>  
(MS, II.12)

(The *Veda*, *Smṛti* (texts written by sages with the *Veda* as basis), the righteous conduct of the *satpuruṣa*-s (great ones) and the satisfaction of one's conscience – these four are the indicators of *dharma*.)

The *Veda* is the foundation of all *dharma*. The *Smṛti* that is in consonance with the *Veda*, is also to be taken as *pramāṇa* (a valid means of knowledge). *Ācāra* (traditional practice) is another *pramāṇa*. Besides all these, there is the satisfaction of our conscience. These help us in deciding what is *dharma* and what is *adharmā*.

- D: Cannot a conduct be *dharma* in one circumstance but *adharmā* in another?
- A: It can. In this regard, we necessarily have to take recourse to the *śāstra*-s. Mere logic will not do. If a person who steals from a house is arrested, he might argue, “I stole only from a wealthy man's house. This paltry loss is negligible by his

standards, whereas it has given me an opportunity to fill my stomach. Therefore, what is wrong in this stealth?” Will a judge ever accept this? He will not, because it is contradictory to what is laid down in the penal code. The judge is bound to punish him. Likewise, what is prescribed as righteous in the *Veda* is indeed *dharma*. What is prohibited by it is *adharmā*. We do not have the competence to decide for ourselves by mere logic.

D: If we commit a mistake unknowingly, are we responsible for it?

A: ‘Responsible,’ in what sense?

D: Will sin accrue on that account?

A: When doing so, if we are unaware that it is wrong, not much sin results. The *sandhyāvandana* that you perform destroys the demerit arising from mistakes that you commit out of ignorance. There is no need for a special *prāyaścitta*. Prayer to *Īśvara* is also effective in effacing the sin of what is done out of ignorance. When there is an opportunity for one to know what is wrong but still one does not make efforts to know, sin will accrue. One should try to know, at least to a certain extent, what the scripture specifies as right and as wrong.

D: Will it not be convenient to have a single *dharma*, common for all? Is it necessary to have it as, “This is *dharma* for one; that is *dharma* for another?”

A: Suppose shirts of the same size are distributed to a motley group of people. Then each one is required to wear the shirt received. Is it feasible for everyone to do so? No. Different physical sizes must be considered. Likewise, different *dharma*-s have been prescribed for people of varied competence. However, *sāmānya-dharma*-s are common to all though there are differences in the *viśeṣa-dharma*-s (special *dharma*-s).

D: What is *sāmanya-dharma*?

A: Manu himself has clarified this by saying:

ahimsā satyamasteyam śaucamindriyanigrahaḥ ।  
 etaṁ sāmāsikaṁ dharmam cāturvarṇye'bravīnmanuḥ ॥<sup>11</sup>  
 (MS, X.63)

(The *dharma*-s common to all, as declared by Manu, are abstinence from injury, truthfulness, abstinence from theft, purity and restraint of the senses.)

One should not even think of causing misery to another. Even if one just entertains such a thought, it is violation of *ahimsā*. It is wrong to assume that only physical pain constitutes *himsā* (injury). Next comes *satya* (truthfulness). That utterance which does not cause misery to others and is also factual is *satya*. If the fact is so disclosed as to harm others, it is improper. Even speech that is pleasant but not factual is not *satya*. Therefore, it is that which is good to others in addition to being factual. Abstaining from pilfering others' belongings is *asteya*. Refraining from stealing implies that another person's property should not even be mentally coveted. "Let whatever belongs to another person, be with him. I shall give something of mine to others" – such a mentality should be ours. *Śauca* is purity. This is of two types. One is bodily purity. Bathing, wearing clean dresses etc., pertain to this category. The other is mental purity. Clothing may be clean but if the mind is not, true *śauca* cannot be realised. *Indriya-nigraha* comes next. When an object is seen or a sound heard, the mind might be attracted towards it. *Indriya-nigraha* is the restraint of the senses from going out to external objects. Regulating the *indriya*-s or the senses is indeed *indriya-nigraha*.

These *dharma*-s are common to all.

D: Is there any benefit in observing the *sāmānya-dharma*-s?

- A: In him, who follows *dharma*, the good effect is certain to be seen. Hence, everyone born as a human being should necessarily adhere to *dharma*.
- D: We see so many people indulging in *adharma* and also that they are only reaping rich benefits. The reason for this may be the *karma* of the previous birth. But the present acts of *adharma* do not seem to yield fruit at all. Why?
- A: It is erroneous to say that an act of *adharma* does not fructify at all. It does yield fruits, but some time later. *Īśvara* has boundless mercy. He gives a sinner an opportunity to rectify himself. If the sinner refuses to change, *Īśvara* punishes him. As regards the result of *adharma*, Manu has said:

nādharmaścarito loke sadyaḥ phalati gauriva ।  
śanairāvartamānastu karturmūlāni kṛntati ॥<sup>12</sup>

(MS, IV.172)

(The *adharma* that is done does not immediately yield fruit unlike a cow (that is ready for milking); but, when repeated it fructifies gradually (like seeds sown in the field) and completely destroys the doer of *adharma*.)

adharmenaidhate tāvattato bhadraṇi paśyati ।  
tataḥ sapatnāñjayati samūlastu vinaśyati ॥<sup>13</sup>

(MS, IV.174)

(One apparently flourishes by *adharma* (such as treachery), then perceives prosperity (by acquiring lot of wealth) and then conquers foes. Finally, however, one is completely destroyed.)

- D: If it is very difficult to adhere to *dharma*, what is to be done?
- A: However great the inconvenience may be, one should not allow one's mind to drift towards *adharma*. With great effort, *dharma* should be followed, as it will give us benefits sooner or later. After one's death, one's relatives go away, discarding one's body. Only *dharma* and *adharma* accompany one. So, only *dharma* can save us in the other

world and also in the next birth in this world. Never will he, who protects *dharma*, be left helpless. That is why it is said:

*dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ* ।<sup>14</sup>

(MB, III.30.8; NN, 34)

(*Dharma* protects one who protects *dharma*.)

This is very much true. Even if the result is not perceived now, the effect will definitely be experienced. Further, it is our duty to act according to *dharma*. “Has *Īśvara* not provided me with all sorts of comforts and benefits? Did He not save me while I was helpless in my mother’s womb? Should I not be grateful to Him?” – considering thus, one should act according to the injunctions of the *Veda*, which is like His breath. One should adhere to *dharma* at least with this perspective.

D: Much wealth is required to perform the *yāga*-s prescribed by the *Veda*-s. How then there is scope for a poor man to follow *dharma*?

A: In the *śāstra*-s it has been said that one should follow *dharma* to the extent of one’s capacity. In following *dharma*, he who is wealthy can construct a temple. If a man does not have wealth, he can go to the temple constructed by the affluent, offer his obeisance and thereby acquire merit. Hence, there is equal scope for both classes of people to adhere to *dharma*. The difference lies only in the particulars of *dharma* to be followed. If he who is poor donates a rupee for a noble cause, he acquires high merit, but if a wealthy person having lakhs of rupees donates a rupee or a half, he will not get the same benefit.

D: We see certain people who stick to their *anuṣṭhāna* but cause suffering to others. Is this permissible?

A: No. The *śāstra*-s themselves say:

*ślokārdhena pravakṣyāmi yaduktam granthakoṭibhiḥ* ।

paropakārah puṇyāya pāpāya parapīḍanam ॥<sup>15</sup>

(SPM, 95)

(I will make known in half a *śloka* what has been said in crores of texts. Helping others is *puṇya*. Troubling others is *pāpa*.)

If one causes misery to others, it is certainly sinful. However, if a man abstains from *dharma* thinking that others would be happy only if he does not follow *dharma*, it is improper. This is because, though the *śāstra*-s prescribe the practice of *dharma* without causing pain to anybody, the word ‘anybody’ here means ‘any good person’. The *īśvara-pūjā* that we do may not be to the liking of an atheist. But on that account, we should not abandon *pūjā*. We can just continue with it but refrain from abusing the atheist. This would be proper indeed.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

*Acharyal’s speeches emphasise the importance of dharma. What follows is an extract from one of His enlightening expositions.*

Maharṣi Gautama has spoken of eight ‘*Ātma-guṇa*-s’ or personal qualities that every individual should cultivate. They help a man to enjoy mental peace and happiness. They also give rise to virtue and so their benefits are not confined to their present life. Further, if people strive to cultivate these, the world will become a happier place.

The first such quality is “Compassion towards all beings.” God has nothing whatsoever to achieve for Himself, but still on account of His compassion and desire to uplift mankind has taken on many incarnations. When we have been given the capacity to help others, it is but proper that we should do so. After all, God Himself has shown us the way. The desire to relieve the sufferings of another is what is termed as compassion.

The second quality is “Forbearance.” Normally, when one hears that which is unpleasant or encounters an unfavourable situation created by another, one feels angry and seeks vengeance. If one is strong enough, one directly retaliates. If not, one seeks to avenge oneself on the sly. Acting thus does not constitute the behaviour of a noble man.

The third quality is “Not cavilling.” Generally, people who are not dexterous or successful, find faults with others who are competent, prosperous or famous. The censure is basically to hide one’s shortcomings; the comments are not constructive. This is a bad practice, for we should appreciate good qualities in others and not assume or search for faults. Bhagavatpāda has said in His *Prabodha-sudhākara* that a person who hears about the condemnation of another incurs sin. What need be said about the sin incurred by a man who actually engages in nitpicking?

The fourth quality is “Purity.” If we were to encounter a person who wears filthy clothes and who has not bathed for many days, his obnoxious smell makes us want to move away. On the other hand, the stinking one is hardly aware of anything abnormal. Likewise, some are in the habit of spitting in public places. Such practices are not only repulsive, but unhygienic too. Hence, one must bathe daily and observe hygiene. Cleanliness is an important ingredient of purity.

The fifth essential quality is “Freedom from laziness.” Many people give reasons for not being in a position to carry out their tasks. No employer would be pleased with an indolent worker. A student, who keeps putting off reading, fares badly in his studies. When a person sincerely engages himself in the prompt performance of his duties, his mind gets far less opportunity to engage itself in harmful or idle thoughts. Thus, it is in everyone’s interest to eschew laziness and cultivate zeal.

The sixth noble quality is “Auspiciousness.” When we meet some, we note that their words as also facial expressions are not pleasing. Such should not be the case. We should speak and

conduct ourselves in a manner that is pleasant. For instance, on seeing an elderly or great person, rather than saying “Sit down” rudely, one should politely offer a seat and invite the person to sit. Proper speech is not just pleasing to hear but is also factual. The Lord taught Arjuna, “Speech that causes no pain, is true, agreeable and beneficial, and the practice of studying the scriptures constitute austerity of speech.” Such austerity of speech purifies a person.

The seventh ordained quality is “Absence of niggardliness.” The tendency to hoard and not part with anything in charity is the result of greed. The Lord has spoken of desire, anger and greed as the triple gates of hell. Hoarding will never benefit us and when we die, we cannot take our wealth with us. Nīlakanṭha Dīkṣita advised, “If you are keen that even after death you should not be parted with your wealth and that you should carry it with you in a bundle on your head then give it to the deserving.”

The last of the eight qualities is, “Absence of attachment.” Most of our problems are due to our worldly desires. It is said in the *Pañcadaśī*, “He who is attached gets tied down in the world. The unattached one experiences joy. Therefore, one who desires to be happy should always discard attachment.” It is perfectly possible to work efficiently and to fulfil all one’s duties without attachment. In fact, attachment impairs efficient functioning. Commonly, surgeons do not perform surgeries on their close relatives. If there was no risk of attachment clouding or impairing performance such would not have been the case.

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## □ Parables of Acharyal

*The following is a parable narrated by Acharyal on the nature of Truthfulness:*

A person stole some goods. He was accosted and made to take an oath that he would answer truthfully. He said, “As long as there is life, I shall speak the truth.” He was then cross-examined. He flatly denied that he had stolen anything. On the basis of his

testimony, he was let off. A friend of his, who had participated in the vile act, asked him, “Why did you utter falsehood so brazenly in spite of the oath that you took?” The man nonchalantly replied, “I did not lie. All that I had said was true. I agreed to spell out the truth as long as there was life. I had an insect in my hand. Before I started answering, I crushed the insect to death. Hence my statement, ‘I shall speak the truth as long as there is life’, continued to hold.”

This is an example of sophistry. When a person has some thing in mind but makes equivocal or confusing statements so as to cause the listener understand something else, he is guilty of having deviated from the truth. To speak the truth, as insisted upon by the scriptures, one’s words should accord with one’s thoughts. The next point to be noted with regard to veracity is that one should speak what is pleasant. But uttering what is pleasant does not imply speaking what is not factual.

A mischievous person decided to fool a friend of his. He went to his friend and said in an excited voice, “Are you not aware that you have won ten lakhs in a lottery? How can you sit here so calmly?” The friend was dumbfounded. When his amazement decreased a little, he began to build castles in the air. In the meantime, the prankster left. Finally, the man took up a newspaper to have the pleasure of seeing his lottery-ticket number there. When he could not find it, his exultation gave way to total dejection. This is an example of pleasant untruth.

One should not verbalize a distressing truth. Following a massive heart-attack, a person was convalescing in a hospital. One day, his son was involved in a road accident and died. A person who had witnessed the accident rushed to the hospital and exclaimed to the heart-patient, “Do you know what has happened? Your son has died!” The patient, who was very fond of his son, could not bear the terrible news. As his heart was already weak, he breathed his last. The conduct of the person who conveyed the bad news was blameworthy.

To sum up, one should speak the truth. Further, one's words should be pleasant and beneficial to others. Distressing truths ought not to be verbalized and words should not be chosen so as to mislead others.

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In a certain village, there lived a couple who had no issues. On account of her motherly instincts, the wife was more eager than the husband that a child be born to them. She kept on consulting various persons as to what expiation or means she could resort to beget progeny. The man almost gave up hope. One day, a person told the wife that if she sacrificed a child and bathed in its blood, a baby would be born to her. She spoke about this to her husband. He chided her for even entertaining such a thought.

A year passed and she became pregnant. In due course, a child was born to her and became the apple of the couple's eye. Her husband told her, "Well, did I not warn you not to resort to any foul means? That would have never pleased the Lord. You followed my advice and now He has blessed us with a bonny baby." The wife blushed. Sensing that something was wrong, he told her, "Speak up. You seem to have something in mind." In a trembling voice, she replied, "Do you remember that nearly a year ago, our neighbour's child died?" The husband felt ill at ease because of the thought that cropped up in his mind. However, he kept a straight face and answered, "Yes, I do." The wife's voice dropped to a whisper as she said, "That child did not die naturally. It was I who killed it and bathed in its blood. That is why this child has been born to us."

The husband was nearly driven mad by his wife's confession. His mind reeled and he railed at *Īśvara*, "O God! There is only darkness in Your realm and no justice." He was so disgusted with God's ways of granting favours and not punishing a faulty deed that he left home and wandered aimlessly for months. Slowly, his mind became a little composed and he returned to his village. He found that he was unable to locate his house and so sought the help

of some villagers. They informed him, “Shortly after you had left, an earthquake struck this village. A few houses were damaged. But, unfortunately, your house collapsed completely and your wife and child were crushed to death.” Instead of being overpowered by shock and misery, the man lifted his eyes upwards and said, “Oh God! I was wrong. In Your kingdom there is not darkness but delay.” He felt convinced that divine punishment had been meted out.

Manu, the sacred law-giver, has stated that he who treads the path of *adharmā* flourishes for a while, beholds prosperity and even goes to the extent of getting the better of those who oppose him. However, in the long run, he is totally destroyed. The wheel of God’s justice grinds slowly but surely. A sinner is given time to make amends for his sins.

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## 15. AHIMSĀ

- D: *Ahimsā* has been ordained in the *śāstra*-s. Should it be followed at all times?
- A: The *śāstra*-s speak of two categories of resolves, viz., *vrata* and *mahāvrata*. *Mahāvrata* is a vow that should be followed always, under all circumstances. Considerations of time and circumstantial limitations can apply to a *vrata*. A *saṁnyāsin* should follow *ahimsā* as a *mahāvrata*. For others, it is a *vrata*. One who lacks mercy is not a human being at all. Everyone should have mercy on the distressed.
- D: We kill some insects unknowingly. Hence how can *ahimsā* be followed to the fullest extent?
- A: The *ahimsā* that I mentioned is only with regard to pain caused to others deliberately. Even the thought of harming others is a violation of *ahimsā*.
- D: Suppose a scorpion or a poisonous snake approaches a man with the intention of harming him. Should he just be a spectator because he upholds *ahimsā*?
- A: No. He can remove the snake or scorpion.
- D: Will this not violate *ahimsā*?
- A: No; because he only saved himself and did not deliberately cause injury.

- D: If one is very docile, will not others take advantage of this and cheat one? Will they not create troubles through various means?
- A: Who said that one should be too docile? It is indeed true that a *samnyāsin* should tolerate pains but if a person involved in worldly life practises forbearance to that extent, he may land himself in trouble.
- D: If one troubles or irritates me without reason, what should I do?
- A: You should be calm mentally but may object or feign anger. You should not give room to anger that makes you lose control over yourself. What I said does not imply that you should always pretend to be angry. Be patient to the extent possible. Present an appearance of anger only after a certain limit is exceeded.

(The questions that follow are from a soldier who had served in the Army.)

- D: Will sin accrue to me since I have been responsible for the death of many people?
- A: No.
- D: Is not killing prohibited?
- A: Did you kill them due to hatred?
- D: No.
- A: You only did your duty and followed the orders given to you. You did that action for the sake of the nation and not for your own sake. Is it not so?
- D: Yes.
- A: That is why I said that you would not incur sin. If you had killed anyone out of animosity or for your selfish end, you would certainly have been a sinner. However, you stuck to

your duty for the sake of the nation. Lord Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna, “For a *kṣatriya*, waging a righteous war is an act of virtue and not a sin.” You soldiers are indeed in the place of the *kṣatriya*-s referred to by the Lord.

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## □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal had imbibed the trait of ahimsā, non injury, even at His young age. Here is just a sample of its manifestation:*

Sri Srinivasa Sastry (as *Acharyal* was known in His *pūrvāśrama*), while personally forbearing, had the inclination and the courage to intervene to terminate the suffering being inflicted on another. He once beheld a boy catching flying insects, tearing out their wings and throwing the hapless creatures to a dog. Walking up to the boy, He quickly grasped his hands and twisted them. The boy screamed. Relaxing His vice-like grip, Sri Srinivasa Sastry said, “The insects also must feel like this. Just as you have hands, the insects have wings. Abstain from torturing them hereafter.”

He once had the following conversation with a friend:

**Sri Srinivasa Sastry:** Hunting of animals is improper.

**Friend:** Carnivorous animals prey on weaker creatures. Such being the case, they deserve to be killed.

**Sri Srinivasa Sastry:** God has created some animals as food for the carnivores. This does not entitle man to poke his nose into the ways of nature and indulge in slaughter.

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*Acharyal* not only practised true *ahimsā* but was also highly compassionate towards all. His compassion extended even to animals.

Some years ago an *Āyurvedic* physician brought *Acharyal* a rare preparation whose composition he kept secret. The doctor said

that the lotion he had prepared would heal any wound. The quantity supplied was very small and so was precious. One day, *Acharyal* saw a badly wounded dog. He noticed that someone had hurt it with a knife and that the wound was very deep. The poor creature whimpered in agony. *Acharyal* was rather moved. Immediately, He ordered that the lotion be applied on the dog. Who indeed would have thought that such a rare medicine, meant for the future use of *Acharyal*, would be given away for the treatment of a dog? The application of the ointment was continued for a couple of days. It was surprising to note that the wound healed well beyond expectations and that too in a remarkably short period of time. The dog became completely normal. *Acharyal's* compassion was universal.

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During His first all India tour, *Acharyal* camped at Delhi in 1967. At that time, the problem of enacting compulsory legislation to prevent cow-slaughter was strongly agitating the country. To Him, violence and compulsion are always abhorrent. He has always maintained that the *dharmic* ideal applies to means as well as to ends. However, in response to the demands of various devotees, He gave a message on the subject although personally He was reluctant to involve Himself in any controversy in which the passions of the moment submerged the faculties of reasoning and the ultimate interests of the country were forgotten. The message issued on His behalf was as follows:

“Adhering correctly to the edicts of the *Veda-s* and *śāstra-s* would be conducive to welfare and prosperity. No injury should be caused to any living being. Leading a life wedded to *ahimsā* brings happiness. Among animals, the cow is most helpful and useful to mankind and is also an object of supreme reverence. Protection of the cow is, therefore, an act of great merit and killing it is a heinous sin. Protection of the cow is thus an absolute necessity. At present, various efforts at a number of places are being made to get cow-slaughter banned. It is the considered opinion of the Jagadguru that the efforts being made to achieve the objective should be absolutely

peaceful and should not cause even the slightest injury or harm to anyone. Injury or harm to others results ultimately in difficulty and loss to the country as a whole. In regard to the enactment of suitable legislation for this purpose, knowledgeable persons should jointly consider, examine and decide in what manner such a legislative measure could be brought about.”

Thus, in His message, He not only expressed His concern with the problem but also advocated the eschewing of any violent methods to achieve enactment of legislation to ban cow-slaughter.

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### ❑ Experiences of Devotees

*The practice of ahimsā has to be carried out in thought, word and deed. Acharyal refrained from wounding even the feelings of a person.*

Once, a group of devotees approached His Holiness to complain about the behaviour of another devotee. They thought that they could influence *Acharyal* to take some punitive action against him. They entered *Acharyal*'s room and *Acharyal* asked them to sit. They obeyed and started, “We have come to request *Acharyal* for something important.....” *Acharyal* closed His eyes and, with folded hands, said, “Before you people start, I would like to make one thing clear. I cannot do anything that would hurt anyone's feelings. So, please do not put Me in that situation!” *Acharyal* then opened His eyes and told them, “Yes, now you can tell Me what you wanted to.” The members of the group had no choice but to drop the idea of influencing *Acharyal* against the person concerned. Having entered into *Acharyal*'s room, each one of them talked about different topics to *Acharyal* and went back! Later, out of compassion and concern, *Acharyal*, on His own, solved their problem in a diplomatic way ensuring that both the sides were satisfied.

[Sri.K. Suresh Chandar]

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On another occasion, a man who had formerly been in the army came to have *Acharyal's darśana*. He suffered from severe mental depression, as he considered himself the cause of the gruesome death of hundreds of people. Belonging to a traditional Hindu family, he had learnt, by rote, the *Lakṣmī-nṛsiṃha-karāvalamba-stotra* and while entering *Acharyal's* room, he was loudly chanting the *stotra!* *Acharyal* spoke to him compassionately. In response he lamented, “Swamiji, I have killed many people in cold blood. I have thus committed an unpardonable sin. I feel that I deserve to die now. Will there be any expiation for my acts?” After he finished his narrative, *Acharyal* did something unexpected. He placed both His hands on the head of this man and declared, “You will be alright. Do not worry” and comforted him with His kind words. With his spirits lifted, the man was overjoyed at this unexpected blessing.

[Sri S.Krishnaswamy]

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Once a man who was walking towards *Acharyal's* abode in Narasimhavanam, Sringeri, for *Acharyal's darśana*, plucked a leaf from one of the plants on the way.

*Acharyal* observed this and was visibly displeased. He called a Math official and said to him, “Why does the man do such a thing? Has the plant hindered his walk in any way? Why does he harm it this way? Please admonish the person.” Such was His concern for all living things.

[Sri Chella Annapoorna Prasad]

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*Maharṣi Patañjali* has said, “In the presence of one who is established in *ahiṃsā* even inimical creatures abandon their hostility.” In the presence of *Acharyal*, who was an embodiment of *ahiṃsā*, instances of violent men turning gentle were innumerable.

A man who was notorious for his arrogance and atheistic outlook once came to the place where *Acharyal* was camping. The sight of him created panic among the people assembled there and the entire staff of the Math became alert as he was carrying a pistol. Someone went inside and reported the matter to *Acharyal*. His Holiness, however, smiled and said, "Let him in." Meanwhile, the atheist started creating scenes shouting "What are these Swamijis for? What is their role in this world? I want to see this Swamiji and ask him these questions...." The staff tried to snatch the pistol away from him but in vain. This heightened the pandemonium and a group of staff went into *Acharyal's* room and stayed put there ready to pounce upon him, should he take out his pistol to hurt His Holiness. *Acharyal* was keeping cool and received him with His characteristic, winning smile. The moment he looked at His Holiness, he folded his hands and fell flat on the floor prostrating. A sudden transformation should have taken place in him. When he got up, *Acharyal* posed kind enquiries to him and blessed him. He walked out of the place a reformed man.

[Sri. K.C.Mahadeva Iyer]

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## 16. DESIRE

- D: Many spiritual aspirants make efforts to conquer desires but desires keep springing up again and again. What is the reason for this?
- A: To conquer desire, first of all, there should be a firm resolve to that effect. A *brahmacārin* may be advised not to sleep in the afternoon. If it does not occur to him that sleeping in the afternoon is wrong, he may not sleep for some days, but may later think, “What is wrong if I sleep for just this one day?” Therefore, we should first resolve suitably. Some people do not practise *viveka* (discrimination). Still, they keep wishing that their desire should vanish. It will not. The reason for this is absence of *vairāgya* (dispassion). *Vairāgya* develops from *viveka* and desires are completely overcome through *vairāgya*. Other spiritual disciplines should also be faithfully carried out. In the initial stages, one may not have an inclination for them but if we abandon them on that account, how will desires subside? One should sincerely practise *karma-yoga*, *mānasika-pūjā*, contemplation of the Lord, etc. If *dhyāna* is also practised, it is highly laudable. Study of the *śāstra*-s is important.
- D: Desires sometimes subside and appear to have been conquered but manifest all of a sudden. Is there any reason for this?

A: I will give you an illustration. Suppose there is a spring, one end of which is fixed to a wall. If we keep stretching the other end, the spring yields and elongates. No sooner do we stop pulling it than it returns to its original size. The mind is like the spring attached to the wall, which is the world. Though the spring (mind) is stretched (held under restraint) forcibly (by spiritual practices), it will go back to its original position if let free. So, the means to destroy desire should be searched for. It is not sufficient if it is controlled only at the time of an impulse. Some do not completely destroy desire. If a desire arises, they suppress it for the time being by thinking, “Oh, we should not give room for desire now.” That particular desire will then remain in the subconscious. It will burst out sometime later. Hence, by understanding the nature of desire and realising that we stand to gain no good from it, the means to destroy it should be sought. If the source is cut, there is no scope for it to arise suddenly. For him who finds this restraint difficult to practise, *satsaṅga* (company of *satpuruṣa*-s) is essential. Desires subside in the presence of great souls. Frequent study of the *śāstra*-s is a very good practice. The *śāstra*-s say, “There is no pleasure in material objects.” Though we have faith in the *śāstra*-s, our faith is not whole-hearted. Hence, a wrong notion such as, “What is wrong if a contrary act is done” may occur. Even to get rid of such ideas, it is beneficial to study the *śāstra*-s again and again.

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### □ Parables of Acharyal

When chasing a deer, a hunter blows a conch. The sound allures the deer and it tarries a while. That opportunity is made use of by the hunter to kill it. Thus, the deer loses its life because of its attachment to sound. To trap an elephant, people first lure it into a pit dug and camouflaged by them. Then, they tie it. The elephant continues to remain untamed. To tame and train it, they send a well-trained female to it. When the female comes into contact with the male, the latter feels delighted and becomes docile. Having

rendered it docile, people train it and make it work for them. An elephant thus loses its freedom because of its yielding to the touch of a female.

When a lamp is lit, moths get attracted to the form of the flame. They rush into the flame and get burnt to death. Moths thus suffer destruction because they are charmed by a form. An angler attaches a worm to the hook of his fishing line and tosses it into the water. A fish, attracted by the imagined taste of the worm, bites the hook and gets stuck. As a consequence, it loses its life.

A bee sat on a lotus and began to suck up nectar. At dusk, the lotus began to close its petals. Captivated by the fragrance of the lotus the bee did not fly out. “The lotus fades at night. But this night is bound to pass and the sun shall rise again. At dawn, the lotus will bloom. I can escape then”, thought the bee. Unfortunately, that night, a herd of elephants came to the lake where the lotus was and began to play in the water. They caught and hurled the lotuses with their trunks. The effect was that the bee met its doom.

Each one of these creatures perished due to its being carried away by a particular sense-object. Man, on the other hand, is attracted by pleasing sounds, pleasant touch, beautiful forms, tasty dishes and fragrant odours. So, he should be very vigilant and should keep his senses under control. Else, he would be inviting trouble.

Bharṭṛhari has said, “Let a moth enter a flame by virtue of its unawareness of the power of fire to burn. Let a fish bite the baited hook because of its ignorance. We, however, refuse to part with objects of sensual enjoyment even though we know them to be the causes of much trouble. Alas! How inscrutable is the impact of delusion!”

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## □ Experiences of Devotees

*Samnyāsa and vairāgya go hand-in-hand. Vairāgya is the essence of spirituality. Acharyal never failed to stress the need to*

*cultivate vairāgya. He Himself led a life of supreme contentment and dispassion. His life is a great lesson on the practice of vairāgya.*

Late one night, *Acharyal* woke up from sleep, ate a small, shrivelled plantain that was kept on a windowsill, drank some water and went back to bed. I, who was watching the scene, felt very bad that He ate the banana, which was fit to be thrown away. When I had the opportunity to talk to Him next morning, I gave vent to my feelings and said, “Why did *Acharyal* choose to eat the fruit that was in such a bad state?” “Why not?”, asked *Acharyal*. “There are boxes full of luscious grapes from Australia that were submitted to *Acharyal*. Why did *Acharyal* have to eat ‘that’ banana?”, I queried. *Acharyal* said, “It is advised that one has to eat something when he feels pain due to peptic ulcers. The banana served the purpose adequately. Just because better quality fruits are available today, do I have to eat that? Do you know what ‘*virakti*’ is? It is not the dispassion that you have towards an object in its absence. Even when the object of desire is in front of you and is also rightfully yours, you should not enjoy it. Even the thought ‘I want it’ should not be there in your mind. That alone is true ‘*virakti*.’” *Acharyal* continued, “Even though I may not attempt to procure the object, if I were to entertain a desire for it, the very longing will remain in My mind as a residual *saṃskāra*. On a different occasion, such a *saṃskāra* may impel Me to act even without My being conscious of it. For instance, let us suppose someone comes and places a delicious fruit in front of Me and I too am in need of it. Let us also suppose that I had earlier entertained a desire for it. In such a situation, I may at once consume the fruit without a second thought. So, ‘true mind control’ is that state of mind, where you do not even entertain the thought that you need something.”

[Sri Rajagopala Sarma]

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The Maharaja of Mysore had submitted a high quality, imported mattress for *Acharyal's* use. At Secunderabad, Raja Limbekar too had offered imported blankets for the use of His Holiness. It was the attendant's duty to make the bed for *Acharyal* every night before *Acharyal* and myself entered the room. Thereafter, the door would be locked. *Acharyal* would then remove His upper cloth and roll it up. This, He would use as His pillow. A deerskin served as His bed and, His lower cloth was the blanket! He would chant "*Śambho Mahādeva*" thrice and go to sleep. In the morning, as soon as He got up, He would slightly rumple the blankets to make it look as if it had been used by Him as His bedding. This was going on for a few days. One day, I asked His Holiness, "Why is *Acharyal* doing like this?" *Acharyal* clarified, "I am a *saṁnyāsin* and I don't require such comforts. However, those who donate such articles to Me, expect Me to use them. If they come to know that I am not utilising them, they may come to the conclusion that the items offered were not of good quality and feel bad about it. As a result, they may trouble themselves further and get Me even more valuable objects. Why give room for all these? That is why I give an impression even to My attendants that I make use of the blankets presented to Me!"

[Sri Rajagopala Sarma]

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About how strict *Acharyal* was with Himself when He was young, He once said, "I knew that true *brahmacarya* consisted in perfect control of the mind and not in mutilation of organs of procreation or in taking drugs to suppress desires. Hence, I ensured, by *Acharyal's* grace, that the mind was always kept in a state which never permitted the rise of lust. Even for a *brahmacārin*, it is positively shameful if a trace of a desire arises either in the waking or dream state. What then need be said as regards the *saṁnyāsin*?"

As regards the pomp with which He had to be associated on account of the *pīṭha*, He firmly held that all pomp related to the Math and not to Him as a person. In fact, He reduced His personal

requirements to a bare minimum and it would be no exaggeration to say that He kept them even below the bare minimum level. In winter, Sringeri is rather cold, necessitating the use of a blanket at night. *Acharyal* wanted that the body should be under His control and not vice-versa. So, He started sleeping on the bare floor wearing a wet loin cloth and to add to the wetness, wrapping a wet towel around His waist. He wore no other clothing at night.

[Excerpted from *Crest Jewel of Yogis*]

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My father once posed this question to His Holiness: “At the Math *Acharyal* could afford to have all the comforts. Why not *Acharyal* enjoy all comforts ? Why should You strain Yourself by getting up early in the morning and working so hard all through the day and go to bed as late as eleven o’ clock? What do you get out of this?” *Acharyal* smiled at him and said, “Suppose you are offered jaggery and *badam halwa* both of which are sweet, which one of these two would you prefer?” My father said, “Where is the doubt here? I will choose the *badam halwa*.” “Well said”, remarked His Holiness. “Those who have tasted the bliss of the Supreme will not pine for these mundane things” added *Acharyal*.

[Sri S.Shivaswamy]

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## 17. CONQUEST OF ANGER

D: How is anger to be conquered?

A: “I am in no way profited by my anger. This person is chiding me. What do I lose by that? Nothing. Then why should I give room to anger?” – if one entertains such thoughts, anger will eventually subside.

D: Is thinking on the above lines sufficient?

A: Further thought may be necessary. “If I now abuse this person due to my anger, it may seem that I have achieved a great feat. However, in reality, have I not become a slave to my anger? In attempting to dominate a foe, I have been conquered by another. Anger not only overpowers me, it spoils my intellect and tempts me to do what I should not do. Why should I become a slave to this anger? I will get much more benefit and satisfaction by the control of anger than by abusing any person” – one should think thus. If one is alert, the advent of anger can be sensed. If its rise is foreseen, effort can be made to control it before it manifests. Half the anger will subside the moment its arousal is recognized. However, many are aware of their anger only after it has erupted. Even such people can develop the habit of sensing it before its eruption.

D: Will anger create obstacles to spiritual progress?

- A: Yes. The Lord has mentioned desire, anger and greed as the triple gates to hell. An angry person does not think of what he is doing and even resorts to dangerous steps. He eventually incurs sin. Anger destroys him through his sins. Therefore, no place should be given to anger.
- D: Does ‘giving no place to anger’ imply that one cannot instruct subordinates in a stern manner?
- A: Commands should be given wherever they should be. Otherwise, an official may not be effective in places like offices. ‘Giving no place to anger’ only means that ideas such as, “I should harm this person or take revenge on him” should not be permitted. At the outset, instructions can be given calmly. If they are not adhered to, one may take recourse to stern language to convey that they should be carried out. However, anger must not be allowed to rise and upset one’s calmness.

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

When a person sets his mind on external objects, he develops an attachment to them. This generates a desire to possess them. If he is unable to get them, he is angry and frustrated. This anger reduces his judgement and discrimination, which, in turn, leads to the forgetting of good things he has learnt. At this stage his sense of right and wrong disappears. Such a person becomes incompetent to do the things that are good for him and avoid the things that are bad for him.

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In keeping with the scriptural teachings, *Acharyal* has taught that one has to strive to conquer anger in order to enjoy peace of mind. In a speech, He took up a verse from Bhagavatpāda’s *Śataślokī*, and highlighted the need to quell anger for getting great benefits both here and hereafter and also ultimate liberation.

*Acharyal* said that anger has to be won over by practising forgiveness, *kṣamā*.

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### ❑ Experiences of Devotees

After my graduation from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta in 1968, I joined a leading textile manufacturing firm. There, I often had to take my subordinates, some of them old enough to be my father, to task. I felt that I was being rude with them and therefore was disgusted with myself. I met *Acharyal* at Sringeri and explained my state of mind. When we were together the same afternoon, *Acharyal* suddenly got up and proceeded with great speed, beckoning me to follow Him. We quickly reached the Śārādāmbā temple where a new *gopura* was being built. Some workers were found to be idling, instead of attending to their tasks. *Acharyal* climbed the scaffolding with great agility and then proceeded to reprimand them in no uncertain terms. *Acharyal* then climbed down rapidly and walked back towards the bridge. His face bore a delightful smile directed at me. I was completely astounded to see how someone who seemed so red faced, choleric and in a sense almost abusive in His haranguing the labourers could suddenly seem to be so peaceful and jolly. It was only several days later that I gradually came to understand the impact of His Holiness' action on that day. What in effect His Holiness was telling me through action, even more eloquently than by word, was that sometimes it is absolutely necessary to be hard on some people when more gentle methods of giving instructions might be somewhat lost. But more important than this was the message that all this must be carried on like an actor playing a part on stage rather than becoming identified with the emotion evinced.

[Sri Nagendra Rao]

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## 18. HINDU RELIGION

- D: What does 'Hindu Religion' refer to?
- A: The word 'Hindu' has come to exist because of usage. *Sanātana-dharma* is its proper name.
- D: Will *Acharyal* kindly clarify who a *vaidika* is?
- A: He who follows the Vedic religion is a *vaidika*. He may follow the Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Naiyāyika, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā or Vedānta school of thought. A person having the *Veda* as *pramāṇa* and intending to follow what is said in it is a *vaidika*.
- D: Many people have not studied the *Veda*. They do not know what is said therein. That being the case, how can we call them *vaidika*-s?
- A: They might not have studied the *Veda* but may still hold Vedic utterances as *pramāṇa*.
- D: Some might not have heard much about the *Veda*. Are they *vaidika*-s?
- A: Do they lead their lives according to the dictates of the *Veda* or not?
- D: What does that mean?
- A: Do they not follow some good tradition? How did that tradition come into being? Their forefathers inculcated it after an analysis of the aspects of *dharma* and *adharmā*.

They may be following certain regulations, such as, “I should not utter a lie. I should not harm others. I should lead my life thus.” The reason for this is that their parents have suitably trained them. Their grandfathers would have taught their fathers. Thus, tradition is responsible for their beliefs and practices. This has the *Veda* for basis. Hence, they know the teaching of the *Veda* in an indirect way. So, they can also be called *vaidika*-s.

- D: If a person has no faith at all in the *Veda*, is he a *vaidika*?
- A: I said that he who has faith in our *Veda* is a *vaidika*. If one does not follow the Vedic path then we call that one a *bhraṣṭa* (one who has fallen).
- D: Some put restrictions on the use of public wells, tanks, prayer halls, etc. As a consequence, many are put to inconvenience. Is this proper?
- A: No one should restrict the use of public wells, prayer halls, etc. There is nothing wrong in the Government punishing those who put such restrictions.
- D: Some people oppress certain others saying that they are lowborn. Does this appear proper to *Acharya*?
- A: As I have already said, it is against *dharma* to harm another. Each person should follow his *dharma*. Be it *sāmānya-dharma* or *viśeṣa-dharma*, harming another is equivalent to abandoning one’s *dharma*. So, none should cause pain to others. If one does that, it only means that one is transgressing *dharma*.
- D: In some places, the Government has taken over the temple lands. What can be done about this?
- A: I am not for violent agitations. If we feel that such an action is improper, we can inform the Government. After all, are not those in the Government human beings? Why will they not realise the problems if properly informed? If the

Government takes over the temple lands, it should also see to it that no inconvenience is felt in carrying out the *pūjā*-s. Other traditional temple practices and the welfare of the *arcaka*-s should be taken care of. If this is done we have no objection to the Government's actions. If it does not cater to the temple's needs in spite of taking over the lands, the Government is guilty of doing injustice to the temple constructed by devotees. The problem should be set right only by making the Government aware of this matter. If one indulges in violent agitations, the public will be put to difficulty and, rather than the Government conceding the demand, the situation may worsen.

- D: Hindus consider the cow to be a sacred animal. Even then, cow-slaughter continues to take place in the country. Is it proper to agitate against this?
- A: We all accept that the cow is a holy animal. Further, we also accept that we derive benefit by practising *ahimsā*. The cow is a docile animal. It provides us with milk. Is not even its excreta useful? So, protecting such an animal is advantageous to us. However, if one indulges in violent agitations to ban cow-slaughter will everything be set right? No. Cow-slaughter can come to an end only if each person decides to safeguard the cow that he owns even if it has grown old. If one drives it away because it has stopped yielding milk, what will be the fate of the cow? Taking a firm decision to safeguard the cow is superior to indulging in agitations. We see many people raise slogans calling for cow protection but most of that has just publicity value. At the same time, we can also see people who protect their cows by erecting sheds, etc. Their action goes without publicity. Of these two categories, the latter is superior to the former. Cow-slaughter should essentially be abolished. But we should also take proper care to know the procedure to be followed in eliminating cow-slaughter.

- D: Hinduism speaks of what one should do for oneself. Is it not a self-centric religion? Nothing seems to have been mentioned about doing something for the sake of others. On the other hand, in Christianity, serving others has been prescribed. What is the opinion of *Acharyal* as regards this?
- A: My opinion is that this view is incorrect. How are we trying to attain *mokṣa*? By first cleansing the mind. Being merciful is essential to purify our minds. Hence if we cultivate mercy, we can purify our mind and as a result, attain good heights in meditation. Does not mercy imply reducing the pains of another person? It is therefore a glaring flaw to say that helping others has not been taught in the Hindu religion. Our *śāstra*-s say that we should get rid of *ahamkāra* (ego). Getting rid of egoism has been specified in all religions. Is it not? Hence, it is erroneous to say that Hinduism preaches egoism. Incarnations of the Lord have been spoken of in the Hindu epics. Why did the Lord incarnate? Was He in need of anything? No. He manifested only for the sake of others. We consider emulating Him as our aim. See the *Bhagavadgītā*:

adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca |  
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī ||<sup>16</sup>  
(BG, XII.13)

In this verse, it is taught that there should be no hatred towards anybody and that we should be friendly and compassionate towards all. Our prayer is:

lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu<sup>17</sup>  
(SPSS, 1)  
(May everyone be happy.)

No differentiation between friend and foe is made. We pray for the well-being of all creatures.

*Jñānin*-s have no bondage whatsoever and to them, the world is an appearance. Still, they are usually rather

compassionate. Even if a *jñānin* does not offer physical help, he is doing good to the world by his mere presence. Bodily help is not the only form of doing good.

★ ★ ★ ★

### □ Discourses of Acharyal

The Hindu religion represents a highly evolved way of life. Its most important principle is that a person will enjoy or suffer the consequences of his own acts. What a person does in previous births conditions his success, failure, pleasure and pain in subsequent births. Unfortunately, however, we do not remember anything about such past acts. This is not surprising considering that when we grow to manhood, we have no recollection of the mother's milk which fed and nourished us in infancy even in this life. It is, however, necessary to hold fast to this principle of each person enjoying the fruits of his own actions, and to do good all the time.

★ ★ ★ ★

### □ Parables of Acharyal

People think that wealth will give them great happiness and the fulfilment of desires. For the sake of wealth, a person goes to the extent of doing what is improper. He does not feel inclined to give the Government what is due to it. So, it becomes necessary for him to prepare a false account. On getting caught, he pays a bribe to save his skin. He feels that somehow, he must amass more and more money. But then there crops up the problem of where he is to keep it. Therefore, he is forced to keep it in a box. That box has to be locked, and further, he has to take care to see that the box remains in a safe place.

When he performs *sandhyāvandana*, the thought of the box comes to his mind. When he sits for the worship of God, again, the thought of the box crops up in his mind. When does he finally become freed from this thought? Only on the day he dies and

departs. His zealously-guarded wealth then completely passes to others without his knowledge.

Such a man would have loved to take his wealth with him to the next world. He might have thought, “I have somehow earned money and so far kept it with me. I do not at all want to part with it even after death. If possible, I would like to place it on my head and carry it with me.” To such a person, Nīlakanṭha Dīkṣita has given a humorous but valuable advice. He has said, “If you desire to take your wealth with you after death then donate it, while you are alive, to a good, deserving person. What will happen if that is done? The wealth will get transformed into *punya*. Regardless of whether or not you have a head after death, it is certain that the wealth will accompany you in the form of *punya*.”

The scriptures prescribe the giving of gifts to the deserving as an antidote for greed. So, charity apart from bringing about happiness in others greatly conduces to the spiritual well-being of the donor. A person who loses some money feels unhappy. But he feels happy, not sad when he voluntarily gives the same amount to a poor student who is not in a position to pay the examination fees. Charity can thus make not only the receiver but also the donor happy.

★ ★ ★ ★

### □ Incidents from *Acharyal's* Life

*Hinduism accords very high importance for showing compassion to others. Acharyal was a living testimony for this great quality. His compassion can only be wondered at but not fully comprehended.*

*Acharyal* had some breathing trouble and He was under the treatment of an *Āyurvedic* physician in Bangalore. He had told me that the medicine was giving Him great relief. Once when I went to have His *darśana*, He said that His trouble had recurred. I queried, “What about the *Āyurvedic* medicine?” *Acharyal* replied, “I stopped the *Āyurvedic* medicine because the physician is very

old and he has to procure the ingredients for preparing the medicine with a great deal of difficulty. Of course, he does say he will prepare the medicine for Me. But I do not want him troubled!" His compassion was such that He was more concerned about His physician's welfare than His own!

[Dr.G.Lakshmipathy]

★ ★ ★ ★

*Acharyal* never stood on prestige and was ready even to lend personal help. One night His attendant, Malnad Venkatesa, was having difficulty in sleeping on account of mosquitoes. However, exhaustion got the better of him and he fell asleep. Being a very early riser, *Acharyal* woke up prior to His attendant. On seeing the sleeping Venkatesa, *Acharyal* noticed a lot of mosquitoes hovering around him. Our *Guru* used His handkerchief as a fan and waved them away. Then He started to move on. The breeze stirred the sleeping one from his slumber. He woke up and was startled to see *Acharyal* passing by. He realised that it was *Acharyal* who had chosen to drive away the mosquitoes that were biting him without feeling such an act was infra dig for a pontiff of a very prestigious Math.

[Excerpted from *Crest Jewel of Yogis*]

★ ★ ★ ★

Handicapped people merited *Acharyal*'s special attention during *darśana* time. On an occasion, when *Acharyal* was giving *tīrtha-prasāda*, He beheld a lame man walking down the road leading from the present Private Secretary's office to Sacchidananda Vilas. The man had come for receiving *tīrtha* but as he was slow he was afraid that the distribution might end before he reached. He need not have entertained any such worries. Realising that the man would have to struggle to climb the steps leading to Sacchidananda Vilas, *Acharyal* called out to him to remain where he was. Asking His attendant to follow Him with the vessel containing *tīrtha*, *Acharyal* rapidly descended the flight of

stairs and approached him. Our *Guru* made tender enquiries and conversed with him for a few minutes. Then He lovingly gave him *tīrtha*. The lame man had tears of joy flowing down his cheeks as the holy water entered his mouth.

[Excerpted from *Crest Jewel of Yogis*]

★ ★ ★ ★

A poor devotee, who was very keen on performing *pāda-pūjā*, invited *Acharyal* to grace his house. He did not have the adequate funds needed for the purpose and so the Math staff informed him that he could not do the *pūjā*. When *Acharyal* had been to a house for *pāda-pūjā*, this man came there and stood at a corner gazing longingly at *Acharyal*. *Acharyal* noticed him and beckoned to him. He then asked, “What is troubling you?” The hapless man poured forth his tale of woe. *Acharyal* cheered him up and told him to go to his house and be prepared. The moment the *pāda-pūjā* was completed and *prasāda* had been distributed, *Acharyal* informed His staff that He proposed to go to the poor man’s house. Since the time was short, the man was not able to make much arrangements but *Acharyal* did not mind, for was He not gracing the man’s house as did Lord Kṛṣṇa Vidura’s ? The *pāda-pūjā* proceeded smoothly. At the end of it, *Acharyal* asked His Private Secretary to hand over Rs. 250 to the poor man. Then, *Acharyal* gave him *prasāda* and left. Thus, not only did *Acharyal* visit the man’s house free of cost, but also helped him monetarily.

[Excerpted from *Crest Jewel of Yogis*]

★ ★ ★ ★

## □ Experiences of Devotees

*Acharyal* once graced our home in Bangalore. We were occupying the first floor of the house, but since *Acharyal* was unwell at that time, I had made arrangements for the *pūjā* downstairs. After the *pāda-pūjā* was over and *Acharyal* was about to leave, I just informed Him that I was actually occupying the first floor of the building. *Acharyal* immediately asked, “Why did you

not tell Me earlier? I would have come upstairs! Anyway, the next time I visit Bangalore, I shall definitely come upstairs to your house!” We could only marvel at His compassion, when, on His next trip to Bangalore, He made it a point to grace my home. As He was too ill to climb up the staircase, He was carried to the first floor in a chair!

[Smt.S.Suryanarayana]

★ ★ ★ ★

A lady who was hardly 30 years old, lost her husband who was the only son of his parents, in an accident. The responsibility of looking after her two young sons fell on her shoulders. One day, she requested *Acharyal* for a private audience with Him. He asked her to come and see Him the next morning and told me also to come. When she met Him the next morning, the lady asked *Acharyal*, “Why is it that I have to undergo so much suffering? I have not committed any sin. Why then should I suffer? Now that my husband is dead, who will look after me?” Despite His busy schedule, *Acharyal* spent His time consoling her. He explained to her that the whole world is impermanent. He then proceeded to say that one suffers due to one’s own *karma*. There is nobody who does not undergo suffering. He advised, “Your children are like your eyes. It is your duty to bring them up well. As for you, you are academically well-qualified. You could take up a teacher’s job somewhere. That would fetch you sufficient money to meet the needs of your family. My blessings are with you. Come for the *pūjā* ...” No sooner had *Acharyal* blessed her with such soothing words than she felt a great peace enveloping her and her miseries vanishing. Her morale increased manifold and she resolved that she would do as per *Acharyal*’s advice. She came to the Math regularly. By *Acharyal*’s grace she and her children are doing fine now.

[Sri K.S.Sankaran]

★ ★ ★ ★

Sri Meenakshisundaram had lost his vision in one eye when he was only 35 years of age. He was managing with the other eye. The damaged eye was however, giving him incessant trouble due to burning sensation and continuous flow of tears. Panic gripped him as he thought, “What if the vision in the other eye is also affected? How will I have *darśana* of *Acharyal*? How can I perform *pūjā* to *Īśvara* (*Acharyal* had blessed him earlier with *pañcāyatana-pūjā*)?” When *Acharyal* was camping at Madras in the year 1971, Sri Meenakshisundaram duly approached Him and expressed the troubles he was forced to endure. *Acharyal* closed His eyes for a moment. Then He said, “Know this for certain that you will not lose your vision in the eye that is normal now. Regarding the eye that is troubling you, chant verses 42 and 43 of the *Soundaryalahari*. Everything will be fine.” *Acharyal*’s instructions were promptly carried out. By *Acharyal*’s compassion, the devotee (who later came to be known as Sri Shankarananda Bharathi) had retained his vision in one eye, while the troubles in the damaged eye left him for good.

[Sri K.Srinivasan]

★ ★ ★ ★

Before sitting down to receive the *mantropadeśa* from *Acharyal*, my husband found it difficult to do *namaskāra* because of a wound near the knee. *Acharyal* immediately noticed this and asked what the matter was. Explaining that he must have hurt himself in the bus to Bangalore, my husband showed *Acharyal* the wound which had by then become septic and highly inflamed. It was rather gory to look at and obviously, quite painful. *Acharyal* suggested that we warm rice flour and tie it with a cloth over the injured area. *Acharyal* then gave him *Pañcākṣarī-upadeśa* and blessed me unexpectedly, with the *Bālā-mantra-upadeśa*, before proceeding for some function. Subsequently, my husband seated himself there away from the crowd, as the wound was hurting him. A little later, a person came up to him with *prasāda* and the message, “*Acharyal* has sent this *pañcāmṛta* for you, since you would find it difficult to come and get it!” This made us wonder if

there is any limit to *Acharyal's* compassion. In the evening, we returned to the place where we were put up. But we could not manage to get any rice flour that night. The next morning, however, we were in for a pleasant surprise as there was no sign of the inflammation - the wound was completely cured! We went to *Acharyal* and told, "We could not carry out the treatment that *Acharyal* had suggested. Nevertheless, the wound has got cured completely by *Acharyal's* grace." *Acharyal* simply smiled.

[Smt. Kantimathi Krishnan]

★ ★ ★ ★

*The following took place on 19.9.1989. Acharyal shed His body on 21.9.1989.*

*Acharyal* was unwell that day. Some orange juice was what was to be His intake that afternoon. The attendant on duty was, however, unfamiliar with the use of the juice extractor. He ended up preparing juice mixed with significant solid residues. Though *Acharyal* noted this, He raised no objections. Sri H.N. Shankar, the then Deputy Administrator of the Math, however, suggested that the juice be filtered out. *Acharyal* guided the attendant and soon pure orange juice was ready, with not a drop spilt or left behind.

Unexpectedly, *Acharyal* told Sri Shankar to taste it and see how he found it. As *Acharyal* never concerned Himself with the tastiness or otherwise of what He consumed, this was unusual. Sri Shankar poured a little juice into his palm, swallowed it and reported, "It is nice." "As it is tasty, have some more," said *Acharyal* and directed His attendant to fetch a clean tumbler. Half the juice readied was poured into the tumbler. Sri Shankar drank it. Not stopping with having given away half of what was to be His meagre intake, *Acharyal* happily instructed Shankar to consume the balance too. With no choice, Sri Shankar obeyed. What served that afternoon as the substitute for *Acharyal's* liquid diet was His joy in fully giving away to a disciple what the disciple found nice.

[Based on the reminiscences of Sri H.N.Shankar]

*Acharyal* was extremely forbearing. Even when in excruciating pain, He never lamented, yelled out or made any of the sounds such as “Ah!” that people normally do. Instead, He just uttered the Lord’s name and that too without any prayer for relief. The following incident took place a few days before *Acharyal* cast off His body. *Acharyal* was unwell and in much discomfort. Sri Giridhara Sastry, the then Administrator of the Math, slept in a room next to that of *Acharyal* to personally attend to Him. Though not summoned by *Acharyal*, he happened to wake up in the middle of the night. He noiselessly entered *Acharyal*’s room to see how *Acharyal* was. *Acharyal*, who had not slept due to pain, promptly noticed him and asked, “Did I disturb your sleep by My utterance of the Lord’s name?” Sri Giridhara Sastry replied in the negative but was struck by the extent of *Acharyal*’s compassionate concern even at the time when He was in agony.

[Based on the reminiscences of Sri H.N.Shankar]

★ ★ ★ ★

During one of my visits to Sringeri in the 70’s, *Acharyal*, who is a personification of compassion, vouchsafed to me a highly cherished blessing. I was to depart from Sringeri for Madras and I was feeling absolutely miserable at having to leave *Acharyal*’s physical presence. I could not hide this sentiment from Him. *Acharyal* asked, “Am I this body alone that I am not with you in Madras?” I said, “I do understand but still am feeling awful. How I wish I never had to go. Yet, *Acharyal* has ordered me to complete my studies properly and so, I must leave. I really long to see and talk to *Acharyal* wherever I am just as I am able to do so now.” *Acharyal* was silent for a while and then said, “Very well. It shall be as you wish. I shall appear before you just as you see Me now. Whatever you wish to ask Me at that time you can do so and I shall reply to you just as I am doing now. So, you can go to Madras without feeling the pangs of separation. I shall be with you.” So unlimited was His mercy!

[A disciple]

*Acharyal had the innate ability to effortlessly render the tenets of Hindu philosophy thoroughly intelligible.*

A devotee took a group of foreigners including a christian priest to Sringeri and had the *darśana* of *Acharyal* . His Holiness started chatting with them in His customary cordial style. The foreigners too, freely voiced their doubts about Hinduism and its various tenets including idol worship. *Acharyal* responded to their queries with convincing answers. The topic then shifted to *Advaita* philosophy. *Acharyal* gave a lucid explanation of the non-dual philosophy. Noticing the priest's inability to grasp the subject, *Acharyal* resorted to catechism to drive home the points that He expounded earlier.

*Acharyal* : Who are you?

Priest : I am so and so.

*Acharyal* : No, I did not ask your name. Who are 'you'?

Priest : I am so and so's son.

*Acharyal* : No, no, not that. Who are 'you'?

Priest : I am the priest of.....church.

*Acharyal* : I did not mean that. Tell me who 'you' are.

Priest : (Confused...) I don't know!

*Acharyal* : (Smiling) See, this is the problem! We do not know who we really are!

Your name, relationship to someone else and your profession – all these pertain to your body and not to you. Now, tell me, what are you called when you are starving?

Priest : A hungry man?

*Acharyal* : Correct. What are you known as when you are overeating?

Priest : A glutton?

*Acharyal* : Yes. That's right. Well, when you are travelling?

Priest : A traveller?

*Acharyal* : Yes, indeed. Now consider this. Descriptions like hungry man, glutton and traveller are based on actions, again, pertaining to your body. Do you get the feeling that you are a different man every time you are called by a different name?

Priest : No, it is "I" that is known by various names and relationships.

*Acharyal* : There you are! 'You' are that unchanging common entity behind all these changing names and forms. That indeed is your true identity.

Then, His Holiness expounded the unreality of the universe according to the tenets of *Advaita* and the underlying supreme reality - the substratum of all names and forms. The delighted christian priest profusely thanked His Holiness and was happy that he had received a valuable teaching that day.

[Sri Venkatarama Sastry]

★ ★ ★ ★

Once when *Acharyal* was camping in Delhi, a delegation of the residents from a colony came for His *darśana* to request Him to visit the colony and bless the foundation-stone-laying ceremony for a temple. When they presented this information to the executive member of the organising committee, he dissuaded them saying that *Acharyal* had a hectic schedule of visiting a large number of houses for accepting *pāda-pūjā* and *bhikṣā-vandana*. He also persuaded the delegation not to reveal the intention of their visit to *Acharyal* while having His *darśana*.

When the delegation went to *Acharyal* for His *darśana*, His Holiness asked who they were and the purpose of their visit. The delegation introduced themselves as residents of a nearby Hindu locality and that they had come to invite His Holiness for the *bhūmi-pūjā* for a temple in their locality. At this moment, the gentleman who had asked the delegation not to mention the purpose of their visit to His Holiness, intervened, reminding *Acharyal* of His busy schedules on the prescribed date. *Acharyal* remarked, “The purpose of establishing this Math by Śaṅkarabhagavatpāda is to uphold *Sanātana-dharma* and inculcate faith in God and not for merely visiting houses for accepting *pāda-pūjā* and *bhikṣā* which generates revenue for the Math. Therefore, visiting this temple site is My top priority.” On the set date, His Holiness promptly blessed the invitees as well as all other residents of the colony with His visit to the site for laying the foundation stone.

[Sri K.C. Mahadeva Iyer]

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## 19. MENTAL WORSHIP

D: Some people desire to perform *pūjā* but find no suitable opportunity. They are also unable to meditate properly. What can such aspirants do to have one-pointed concentration of the mind?

A: They can practise *mānasika-pūjā*.

D: What is *mānasika-pūjā*?

A: *Mānasika-pūjā* is mental worship of *Īśvara*. Flowers, incense, etc., are required for *pūjā*. Here, we imagine all the accessories, conceive that *Īśvara* has come and offer them to Him. That indeed is *mānasika-pūjā*.

D: How should *mānasika-pūjā* be practised?

A: “*Īśvara* has come. I should welcome Him. I should offer Him an *āsana* (seat)” – contemplating thus, we welcome Him and offer Him an *āsana*. After He adorns the *āsana*, we wash His feet and His hands. For His *ācamana*, we give Him pure water. He accepts that. Then we bathe Him. Proceeding thus, we complete the *pūjā* mentally. We do it with the feeling that He accepts all our offerings.

D: What is to be done if *Īśvara*’s form does not remain steady during *mānasika-pūjā*?

A: One can keep before oneself a picture of one’s *iṣṭa-devatā* (chosen Deity). The *pūjā* may be done while looking at the

picture. In due course, the *pūjā* can be continued after closing the eyes and conceiving that *Īśvara* is present there. If the form becomes unsteady, the eyes can be opened for a while.

D: Is there any restriction in doing *mānasika-pūjā*?

A: There is no restriction. It can be done at any time and in any way. Charming effects are seen if *Īśvara* is worshipped mentally. The mind becomes purified and His grace is obtained. To get an idea about *mānasika-pūjā*, *stotra-s* like the *Śiva-mānasapūjā-stotra* and *Mrtyuñjaya-mānasa-pūjā-stotra* may be studied.

D: Is everyone permitted to practise *mānasika-pūjā*?

A: Yes. There are no restrictions.

D: How long should *mānasika-pūjā* be done?

A: It can be done for any length of time. Initially, it may be difficult to practise it for a long time. But, with repeated practice, one will find increasing delight in it.

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## □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

What follows is a first-hand account of Acharyal's *mānasika-pūjā* during His initiation into *Narasimha-mantra*.

During My initiation, when *Acharyal (Paramacharyal)* was about to start voicing the *dhyāna-śloka*, I found Myself spontaneously visualising *Narasimha* in My heart. As I heard and repeated the *dhyāna-śloka*, I realised with surprise and happiness that the form of *Narasimha* described therein and the one I was seeing matched. The words relating to the *pañcopacāra-pūjā* (following the *dhyāna-śloka*) took only some seconds for *Acharyal* to utter and for Me to repeat. Yet, I experienced no shortage of time in elaborately worshipping the Lord mentally in My heart with offerings of sandal paste, flowers, incense, lamp, food and so on. I can attribute only to divine grace the irresistible urge that led Me

to begin the worship. During *naivedya*, I served the Lord a variety of dishes in a jewel-studded golden plate, put a little food into His mouth, waited for Him to masticate and swallow and only thereafter offered another morsel. It was as if the several seconds miraculously became extended to over half an hour from My perspective. Even while performing the worship with concentration and dedication, I was able to see *Acharyal* and repeat His words without delay.

When *Acharyal* started to utter the *Narasimha-mantra* (after the *pañcopacāra-pūjā*), He placed His right palm on My head. He did not do this when He initiated Me into other *mantra*-s such as the *Medhā-Dakṣiṇāmūrti* and the *Śrīvidyā*.

The moment *Acharyal* chanted the *mantra* once and, following Him, I too did so, an amazing event occurred. *Acharyal* abruptly withdrew His hand from My head, joined His palms and gazed at Me silently with deep reverence. My breathing stopped. The form of Lakṣmī-Narasimha that I was seeing within Me vanished. However, I began to experience the Lord as My *Antaryāmin* (Inner Controller), refuge and intimate well-wisher as clearly as one can see a fruit in one's open palm. I ceased to regard the body, *prāṇa*, organs, mind and intellect as Mine; everything was just His. I do not know how long I remained thus, motionless and immersed in bliss. All along, I did see *Acharyal* keeping His palms joined and looking in My direction.

Then, the form of Narasimha reappeared and My breathing resumed. My mental state reverted to what it had been during My chanting of the *mantra* but with the difference that I now felt extremely intimate with Narasimha. At the same time, *Acharyal* lowered His hands. He then recited the *mantra* two more times, giving Me time to repeat His words. After completing the initiation, He said, "After You had said the *mantra* once, I saw just Narasimha in Your place. That is why I jerked back My hand from Your head and offered My salutation to Him. When His form disappeared and You reappeared, I proceeded with the initiation. Dedicate everything to Him."

Throughout that day, offering everything to Narasimha was extremely easy. For instance, when I had My afternoon bath, I automatically felt that I was performing *abhiṣeka* to Narasimha who abided within Me. During *bhikṣā*, I straightaway visualised Him as accepting from within and eating whatever I put into My mouth. When I read a book after *bhikṣā*, He appeared to be listening from inside My heart as if I were reading to Him. As I walked, it spontaneously seemed that I was taking Him, who was within Me, for a stroll.

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### ❑ Experiences of Devotees

*The glory of mental worship is something that has to be personally experienced.*

One day at Sringeri, at the end of my meditation, I turned towards *Acharyal's pādukā-s* and mentally visualized His presence. Immediately, the flowers that were on the *pādukā-s* jumped up one foot into the air and dropped into my hands. On a subsequent date, the Administrator of the Sringeri Math, Sri Giridhara Sastry returned from camp and conveyed to me a news that gave me great joy. On the very day when this *pādukā* incident occurred, *Acharyal* had been at Tarakeshwar. The Mahanth had requested *Acharyal* to perform *pūjā* to the sacred *Jyotir-līṅgam* there and *Acharyal*, as also the Mahanth had sat down for worship. Instead of going through the usual *pūjā* procedure, *Acharyal* closed His eyes and remained thus till the completion of the *pūjā*. Later, on being asked, *Acharyal* said that He had been performing *mānasika-pūjā*. The portion of Giridhara Sastry's narrative that is particularly relevant is as follows:

*Acharyal* had visualized a vessel with a thousand holes using which *abhiṣeka* was being performed by Him to the sacred *līṅga*. That time, according to *Acharyal*, He saw me, asking Him whether I could also be with Him during the *pūjā*. He acceded and said He had noticed my presence throughout the worship. How much should be His concern that even at that time He should have chosen

to grace me. It was at that juncture, that at Sringeri flowers automatically jumped off the *pādukā*-s and came to my hands.

[A disciple]

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Once while I was in Sringeri, I was recollecting the story involving Bhīma engaged in *mānasika-pūjā*. That story sank the glory of *mānasika-pūjā* into my mind. I imagined that lotuses were blossoming and I offered them at the lotus feet of *Acharyal*. I did the mental *arcana* from the time *Acharyal* started from Narasimhavanam till He returned to it after visiting the various temples located on the other side of the river. Near Sacchidananda Vilas, His abode, His Holiness turned towards me, smiled and majestically entered inside. In the evening, when I had gone for *Acharyal's darśana*, He sent for me. When I devoutly sat down, He held a silver coin of Śāradāmbā in His hands and closed His eyes for a few minutes in meditation. His normally bright face appeared all the more lustrous. Beholding the spiritual splendour gave a joy that has to be experienced to be understood. He gave me the coin and also *mantrākṣatā*. What a special blessing it was!

Subsequently, I was fixing the coin on my sacred thread. Sri Krishnaswami Iyer who watched me doing this, asked, “Did you do any *pāda-pūjā*?” and continued, “This pendant is given only to those who perform it.” I was perplexed and confined myself to narrating the mental worship that I had done in the morning. “Yes” he replied, “It is the fruit of that worship which you have got now. Cannot our God-like *Acharyal*, who can fulfil what is in the minds of those who are thousands of miles away, bestow the result of the *mānasika-pūja* that you did to Him in His presence? This is what He has done.”

[Sri R.Muthusundaram]

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## 20. ROLE OF KARMA

- D: What is the role of *karma* (action) in spiritual life?
- A: If actions are done for the sake of *Īśvara*, without attachment to the fruits of actions, mental purity is attained.
- D: Will not one act inefficiently if there is no attachment to the results?
- A: No.
- D: When one is not interested in success or failure, one cannot put forth one's best. Is this not a logical conclusion?
- A: Only the opposite of this is true. An aspirant who does not have attachment at all will perform actions properly, as he does his duty as an offering to the Lord. Would any devotee like to offer to the Lord that which is improper? He will not. He who practises *karma-yoga* will not indulge in a bad deed. Further, he will offer all actions to the Lord. On account of devotion to *Īśvara*, he will strive to act to the best of his ability. As against this, he who has attachment to the fruits of actions will be bogged down by longings.
- D: Has this been spoken of in the *śāstra*-s also?
- A: Yes. Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

muktasaṅgo'nahaṁvādī dhṛtyutsāhasamanvitaḥ |  
siddhyasiddhyornirvikāraḥ kartā sāttvika ucyate ||<sup>18</sup>

(BG, XVIII.26)

(He who is without attachment, without ego, endowed with firmness and enthusiasm and unaffected by success and failure – such a one is termed as a *sāttvika* (pure) doer.)

- D: Suppose a person acts with an idea that dedication of the results to *Īśvara* will ensure success in endeavours. Is he a practitioner of *karma-yoga*?
- A: No. This is because he has not truly renounced attachment to the fruit of action.
- D: What makes practice of *karma-yoga* difficult?
- A: Attachment to objects and lack of devotion towards *Īśvara*. A man having attachment may say that he has dedicated everything to *Īśvara*, but, actually, will not have been able to do so. In the absence of staunch devotion to the Lord, the ideas, “Everything should be dedicated. It is my duty to do so” will not be there. This again makes whole-hearted practice of *karma-yoga* difficult.
- D: Is it enough if one is unattached to the results or should everything be positively dedicated to the Lord?
- A: If it is to be *karma-yoga*, one must dedicate everything to Him.
- D: Will *Acharyal* kindly give an illustration to show that one who practises *karma-yoga* will perform one’s duty in a befitting manner?
- A: Let us suppose that a student takes an examination and that he is very much desirous of success. What happens if he does not fare well in a particular subject? He becomes worried. He may then not perform well even in the next day’s examination. This is because of the persistent worry that he had not fared well in the previous examination. On the contrary, he who is unattached, prepares whole-heartedly. As he reads without worry, he will act better. Further, he will not be troubled by lack of interest. He will feel, “I do this for the sake of *Īśvara*.”

Therefore, at least considering it as my bounden duty, I should be sincere.”

D: Who is competent to practise *karma-yoga*?

A: Anybody can practise *karma-yoga*. By the practice of *karma-yoga*, the mind becomes very pure. Devotion towards *Īśvara* deepens. Realisation of the Truth dawns only in a pure mind. Hence, everyone should constantly resort to *karma-yoga*. All can derive benefit from it.

D: Is it sufficient to dedicate merely the fruits of actions to *Īśvara* or should one dedicate the actions themselves?

A: It is extremely good to dedicate the actions themselves. If that is not possible, at least the results should be dedicated. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa has spelt out a sequence of increasingly simpler practices. He has said:

mayyeva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṁ niveśaya ।  
nivasīṣyasi mayyeva ata ūrdhvaṁ na saṁśayaḥ ॥<sup>19</sup>  
(BG, XII.8)

(Fix your mind on Me. Concentrate your intellect on Me. You shall dwell in Me alone. There is no doubt about this.)

atha cittam samādhātum na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram ।  
abhyāsayogena tato māmicchāptum dhanañjaya ॥<sup>20</sup>  
(BG, XII.9)

(If you are incapable of fixing your mind firmly on Me, endeavour to reach Me by repeated practice.)

abhyāse'pyasamartho'si matkarmaparamo bhava ।  
madarthamapi karmāṇi kurvansiddhimavāpsyasi ॥<sup>21</sup>  
(BG, XII.10)

(If you are not capable of even repeated practice, perform actions for My sake. Even by performing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection.)

athaitadapyasakto'si kartum madyogamāśritaḥ ।

sarvakarmaphalatyāgaṃ tataḥ kuru yatātmavān ॥<sup>22</sup>

(BG, XII.11)

(If you are unable to do even this, then, seeking refuge in Me alone, dedicate the fruits of all actions to Me, with a disciplined mind.)

- D: If one is engaged in *karma-yoga*, will one perform many actions?
- A: One need not. Actions may be classified into six categories. They are: (1) *nitya-karma*, (2) *naimittika-karma*, (3) *kāmya-karma*, (4) *niṣiddha-karma*, (5) *upāsanā-karma*, and (6) *prāyaścitta-karma*. *Nitya-karma* is that which has to be done regularly at the scheduled time. *Sandhyāvandana* is an example of this. *Naimittika-karma* is not governed by a recurring time restriction. Some of the *karma*-s to be done during eclipses can be cited as instances of this. *Nitya* and *naimittika karma*-s are ordained by the *śāstra*-s. Their non-performance leads to sin. That *karma* which one does with a desire for some achievement is called *kāmya-karma*. The *śāstra*-s do not ordain these *karma*-s as obligatory. One does these only because of one's desire. *Niṣiddha-karma* is that which the *śāstra*-s prohibit. *Karma*-s connected with contemplation constitute *upāsanā-karma*. Finally, that action by which sin is expiated is *prāyaścitta-karma*. These six types can be simplified by considering only four categories, namely *nitya*, *naimittika*, *kāmya* and *niṣiddha karma*-s. One should not indulge in *niṣiddha-karma*. *Kāmya-karma* could be given up. However, one must perform *nitya* and *naimittika karma*-s. He who practises *karma-yoga* will not get involved in all sorts of actions. Whichever act is necessary, he will do without attachment. Basically, he will be concerned with *nitya* and *naimittika karma*-s.
- D: One dedicates one's actions to *Īśvara* to obtain His grace. In such a situation, how can it be said that one does not have attachment to the grace of *Īśvara*? Does one not perform actions with the target of securing it?

A: From one viewpoint, what you say is correct. However, if, instead of being attached to material benefits, one is attached to *Īśvara*, no bondage will be produced. On the other hand, we will thereby become free from bondage. However, in ideal *karma-yoga*, dedication is done without even the desire for the grace of *Īśvara*. There should only be the idea, “It is my duty to offer this to *Īśvara*.” Śāṅkarabhagavatpāda says in the *Gītā-bhāṣya*:

kuru... kevalamĪśvarārtham<sup>23</sup>

(BGB, II.48)

(Act just for the sake of *Īśvara*.)

Also, do not act even with the attachment:

īśvaro me tuṣyatu<sup>24</sup>

(BGB, II.48)

(May *Īśvara* be pleased with me.)

In *karma-s* like *sandhyāvandana*, we say

śrīparamēśvaraprītyartham... upāsiṣye<sup>25</sup>

(I perform ... for the pleasure of *Īśvara*.)

Nonetheless, this is quite appropriate. This is because the wording has come down to us by tradition. Moreover, we can have the notion that we do the *karma* just for the sake of *Īśvara*.

D: In practising *karma-yoga*, how can one ascertain whether one has made progress or not?

A: I said that there should be no attachment to the fruit of action. Is one unattached when one desires to know whether or not one has made progress in the path of *karma-yoga*? However, if one has a doubt about one’s progress in the spiritual path, one can introspect, “Is my mind pure? Am I peaceful? Am I carrying out all actions without any worry and for the sake of *Īśvara*?” This self-analysis will show whether one is following *karma-yoga* properly or not.

## □ Parables of Acharyal

*Devotion and karma-yoga are inseparable twins. The ideal karma-yogin endeavours to bring out his best performance in order to be able to make the best offering to Īśvara. This attitude is evident in all the actions performed by him, be it spiritual or secular.*

*When such a person transforms into a jñānin, the traits that he had developed and mastered earlier will not leave him. It would be extremely beneficial to appreciate this characteristic in our Acharyal. Whatever He did contained great lessons for the observer. Acharyal has taught on many occasions the value and the method of performing karma-yoga. His parables drive home the efficacy of karma-yoga.*

The Lord has explained how a person may perform actions but avoid being bound by them. A person should dedicate all his actions and their fruits to God and discharge his duties without hankering for the results. This means of performing actions but escaping bondage is called *karma-yoga*. The performer of *karma-yoga* protects himself by dedicating his actions and their fruits to God.

A person had the practice of performing *pūjā* to God and offering Him fruits and other eatables. After his worship, he used to partake of an offered fruit as God's *prasāda*. An agnostic friend of his mockingly told him, "Your practice of performing *naivedya* is silly. The fruit that you place before your God remains exactly at the same spot where it was kept. It undergoes no physical change either. Further, it is not the God you worship but you who consumes it."

The devotee responded with a smile, "I submit a fruit to God with the firm conviction that, in keeping with His statement in the *Bhagavadgītā*, He will accept it. Having received it, He is free to do whatever He pleases with it. Since He is omnipotent, He is perfectly capable of making it vanish or leaving it behind in its entirety after having consumed it. I believe that it is He who leaves

behind the fruit for me after partaking of it in a humanly-inconceivable way. As far as I am concerned, what I consume after *naivedya* is the remnant of what God has eaten.”

“Recently, when your political leader came to your town, you and numerous others received him and offered him garlands. He certainly did not and could not wear all of them. He then gave you one of the garlands that he had received and you accepted it joyfully. As he walked through the large crowd of his supporters, he tossed some garlands to them and the crowd cheered. It is possible that a supporter got back the very garland that he had given. Just because your leader does not retain the garlands presented to him, you people do not abstain from the practice of garlanding him; you derive joy in honouring him and do not tell him what he should do with the garlands that you give him. Why then are you uncomfortable with my sincerely offering God fruits and feeling happy? When your leader can return a garland to you, why should God not be free to give me back the submitted fruits with His blessings? A *karma-yogin*, in fact, offers to God not just eatables but all his thoughts, words and deeds.”

A man had two servants. One of them was particular about eulogising his employer but not in executing his master’s instructions. The other sincerely carried out the tasks assigned to him; he also held his master in high esteem. The employer obviously preferred the second servant to the first. A devotee who, like the second servant, sincerely performs the duties ordained for him by God and specified in the scriptures and, further, does so in a spirit of dedication, pleases God greatly and receives His grace in abundance. By the Lord’s grace, his mind becomes very pure. In due course, he realises the Truth and gets liberated.

A woman doted on her young son and took great care of him. One day, she woke up with an intense headache, fever and nausea. Nevertheless, she attended to the child’s morning requirements without any laxity. That day, she found the rice prepared by her to be slightly overcooked. Promptly, she started to cook some more. Her husband noticed this and told her, “You are sick and in pain.

Why do you want to strain yourself? The rice that is ready is quite eatable.” “I want to give my son only the kind of rice that he is used to and likes. As for the overcooked rice, I shall consume it,” replied the wife. Out of deep love for her child, the woman did her very best for him. Likewise, a *karma-yogin*, by virtue of his devotion to God, performs his duties to the very best of his ability and refrains from *adharma*.

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## 21. DEVOTION

D: Performing *bhajan*-s is considered an act of devotion. Some others say that performance of *nitya-karma*-s is devotion. Which of these is true devotion?

A: Śāṅkarabhagavatpāda has said in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*:

mokṣakāraṇasāmagryāṁ bhaktireva garīyasī ।<sup>26</sup>

(VC, 32)

(Amongst the means to obtaining liberation, devotion reigns supreme.)

He has also defined devotion. He has said that devotion is profound meditation on one's own true nature. This is the definition of excellent devotion. However, none but a few can have this kind of devotion. Others need to be prescribed a lower, simpler kind of devotion. Śrī Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, while speaking of devotion, has said that devotion is of three kinds. The first kind is associated with the conception, "I belong to *Īśvara*." The second is having the notion, "*Īśvara* belongs to me." An illustration is Yaśodā's love for the child, Kṛṣṇa. If great affection towards *Īśvara* is cultivated, the idea, "*Īśvara* belongs to me" can develop. Superior to even this is the knowledge, "I am that Supreme Being."

D: How can the realisation "I am that Supreme Being" be termed *bhakti*?

A: An ordinary devotee is prepared to accept that he is different from *Īśvara* but an ideal devotee, being unable to bear even this separation, desires “I must merge with my Lord.” Finally, he does attain that realisation. So, this should be termed as the highest form of devotion. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has said that He regards a *jñānin* as the greatest devotee.

D: What form of devotion should ordinary people have?

A: As long as the feeling, “I am the body” exists, it is best to consider oneself as a servant of the Lord. Then, one will not desire anything from *Īśvara*. One will consider serving the Lord as one’s duty. When the Lord said to Prahlāda, “I shall bestow a boon upon you”, Prahlāda replied:

yasta āśiṣa āśāste na sa bhr̥tyaḥ sa vai vaṇik ḥ.<sup>27</sup>

(BP, VII.10.4)

(He who expects something from *Īśvara* is not a servant; he indeed is a merchant.)

D: If that is so, is it erroneous to consider the performance of *bhajan*-s as devotion?

A: No, it is not. Even that is an act of devotion. Sage Nārada, while speaking of devotion, has said:

sā tvasminparamapremarūpā ḥ.<sup>28</sup>

(NBS, 2)

(Devotion is of the nature of supreme love for *Īśvara*.)

Any form of love of *Īśvara* will be grouped under devotion. Śaṅkarabhagavatpāda has said in the *Śivānandalahari*:

aṅkoraṁ nijab̥jāsantatirayaskāntopalam sūcikā  
sādhvī najjavibhuṁ latā kṣitiruhaṁ sindhuḥ saridvallabham ḥ  
prāpnotīha yathā tathā paśupateḥ pādāravindadvayaṁ  
cetovṛtīrupetya tiṣṭhati sadā sā bhaktirityucyate ḥ.<sup>29</sup>

(SL, 61)

(Just as the seed of an *aṅkola* tree attaches itself to that tree, just as an iron piece goes to a magnet, just as a chaste woman has affection for her husband, just as a creeper clings to a tree and just as a river merges with the ocean – if thoughts are thus ever fixed on the pair of lotus feet of *Īśvara*, it is termed as *bhakti*.)

The first example is that of the seed of the *aṅkola* tree attaching itself to the tree. In the same way, in the initial stages, the devotee turns his mind towards *Īśvara*. The second illustration is that of an iron piece moving towards a magnet. In the first stage, the devotee had to do something. But here, his mind goes towards *Īśvara* naturally. If one keeps thinking of *Īśvara*, one's mind will go to Him by itself. The magnet attracts the iron piece. Likewise, *Īśvara* attracts His devotee to Himself. The third illustration is about a chaste wife. The wife loves her husband and he loves her in return. Likewise, the devotee and *Īśvara* intensely love each other. The fourth example is that of a creeper clinging to a tree. If a tree is entwined by a creeper, the beauty of the tree is enhanced. In the same way, the devotee's extreme devotion enhances the glory of the Lord. The analogy of the river merging with the ocean refers to supreme devotion. Just as a river, on merging with the ocean, cannot be distinctly identified, the devotee with limitless devotion becomes one with the Lord. These are the different gradations in devotion. Therefore performance of *bhajan-s* is also an act of devotion.

D: Some people say that it is sufficient if one does *bhajan-s* and ask as to why *nitya-karma-s* should be performed. Is this view correct?

A: No. Proper performance of *nitya-karma* is itself an act of devotion. Let us suppose that there is a master and that he has a servant. If that servant, without discharging the duties assigned to him by his master, just indulges in eulogy, will the master have a liking towards him? No. *Īśvara* is our master. He has specified through the *Veda-s* and *Smṛiti-s*

how we should lead our lives. If we discard His injunctions and confine ourselves to praising Him, how will He be pleased? So, one should perform *nitya-karma-s*. As a supplement to that, one is welcome to do *bhajan-s*, etc.

D: How are we to cultivate devotion towards the Lord?

A: How does attachment to any object arise in us? If we keep thinking positively of a particular object, attachment towards it develops. If we repeatedly think of some action as important, attachment arises towards it. Likewise, if we incessantly think, “He is Supreme. There is immense happiness in contemplating on Him”, devotion towards *Īśvara* will become firmly established.

D: Why should one be devoted to *Īśvara*?

A: He has bestowed upon us all that we have. So, we ought to be grateful to Him. He grants material and spiritual attainments and so we should be attached to Him. Though normally these can constitute a reason, it is preferable to be devoted to *Īśvara* considering it just as one’s duty. Devotion should be natural. That is true devotion and it does not depend on any logical reason. *Īśvara* is most lovable and the devotee’s mind spontaneously goes to Him. That is all.

D: It is quite natural that if one has great affection for one’s *iṣṭa-devatā*, one will not have the same attachment to other deities. Can one with a liking for Śiva have hatred towards Viṣṇu?

A: Having hatred is neither good nor acceptable to the *śāstra-s*. The formless *Īśvara* assumes a form only to shower His grace on His devotee. *Īśvara*, by Himself, is devoid of form. The Lord manifests Himself in the manner in which His devotee desires to see Him. It is improper to harbour notions of difference such as, “Śiva is different from Viṣṇu.” Though one may be particularly attached to one’s *iṣṭa-devatā*, one should not look down upon other deities.

- D: Is there anything special about the path of devotion?
- A: Anybody can follow the path of devotion. There is no restriction at all. Moreover, it can be followed easily. One naturally has something called *prīti* (love). If it is turned towards *Īśvara*, it becomes devotion. In the path of *jñāna* or *dhyāna*, one may have to face many difficulties during practice. Only after having advanced to a certain extent, one enjoys great joy. Such is not the case with the path of devotion. We can experience great joy even before reaching an advanced stage. Even while contemplating on the Lord, we can enjoy bliss. Hence, in the path of devotion, there is happiness right from the beginning. Devotion is the means and also the end. This is another exceptional feature.
- D: Sometimes, while reciting *stotra*-s, a person may commit some mistakes. He may not be aware of them. Is this a grave fault?
- A: It is always better to understand the meaning of *stotra*-s that we chant. Knowledge of the meanings helps us in focussing our minds. However, if certain mistakes occur without our knowledge, we need not be unduly concerned. *Īśvara* considers only what is in the heart. He is not swayed by external appearances.

mūrkho vadati viṣṇāya vidvān vadati viṣṇave ।  
ubhayoḥ sadṛśaṁ puṇyaṁ bhāvagrāhī janārdanaḥ ॥<sup>30</sup>

An ignoramus may say *viṣṇāya* instead of *viṣṇave*, as would be uttered by a learned man. Both secure the same *puṇya*, as *Īśvara* grasps only the inner feeling. Śrī Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita has explained this by means of an illustration. Devotees offer flowers to *Īśvara* and attain liberation. Manmatha wanted to shoot an arrow made of flowers at Śiva. By doing so, he sought to hinder Śiva's penance. The Lord did not accept the flowers. On the contrary, He reduced Manmatha to ashes. In spite of the commonness in the use of flowers, the devotees

obtain the highest end, while Manmatha perished. The inner attitude is thus of prime importance.

D: Is it improper to pray to *Īśvara* for wealth, to perform meritoriously in an examination or for anything else?

A: I do not say that such prayer is wrong but it is unnecessary. *Īśvara* knows what is good for us and is capable of providing everything. He is compassion personified and omniscient. Such being the case, it is best to pray thus: “You are in my heart and that is sufficient. Do as You think fit.”

If one acquires a *kāmadhenu* (wish-fulfilling cow), is it wise to use it for ploughing? Is not *Īśvara* like a *kāmadhenu*? Of course, if one prays for specific ends, it cannot be considered wrong; *Īśvara* responds to such prayers too.

D: *Īśvara* does not need anything. Still, it has been said that everything should be offered to Him. What is the reason for this?

A: *Īśvara* does not need anything, but is it not our duty to surrender our hearts to Him? It certainly is. Therefore, we must always offer our minds to *Īśvara*. That is to say, we should always keep thinking of *Īśvara*. The Lord says:

māmanusmara yudhya ca<sup>31</sup>

(BG, VIII.7)

(Think of Me and fight.)

By this, He emphasizes the need to think of Him at all times. If we offer anything to *Īśvara*, He will certainly accept our offering. The Lord Himself has said:

patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyaṁ yo me bhaktyā prayacchati |  
tadahaṁ bhaktyupahṛtam-aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ ||<sup>32</sup>

(BG, IX.26)

(Whatever you offer Me with devotion – a leaf, flower, fruit or water – that I do accept.)

yatkarōṣi yadaśnāsi yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat |

yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkuruṣva madarpaṇam ॥<sup>33</sup>

(BG, IX.27)

(Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as a sacrifice, whatever you donate, whatever austerity you perform, - do all these, O son of Kunti, as an offering unto Me.)

- D: Sometimes worries prevent the mind from turning towards *Īśvara* and divert its attention. What is to be done with regard to such hurdles?
- A: Why should a true devotee have any worry? While travelling in a train, should one keep one's luggage on the head or on the floor? We would call a man a fool if he carries his luggage on the head. Whatever goes on in this world happens only as per His will. Should we not be carefree, with the feeling that *Īśvara* does everything only for our good? If we worry, is it not tantamount to lack of the belief, "*Īśvara* protects us. He gives us that which is good for us?"
- D: Though this is so, worries sometimes arise of their own accord.
- A: That is true indeed. It is merely a pointer to the fact that devotion is not mature enough. One should make efforts to develop devotion and to get rid of worries. If one truly surrenders to *Īśvara*, one can live comfortably and be happy too.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

*Acharyal's teachings always emphasise the need for devotion to Īśvara. Himself a great devotee, Acharyal has given many anugrahabhāṣaṇa-s highlighting the role of devotion in a sādḥaka's pursuit of liberation. Acharyal often goes into ecstasy contemplating on the divine form of Īśvara.*

People have a natural capacity to love. Affection requires an object and when that object is God, it gets the appellation *bhakti* or devotion. Nārada defines *bhakti* as extreme love of God. He who attains such devotion no longer longs for anything and is ever fully satiated and happy. While attachment to wife, wealth, etc., causes bondage, attachment to God liberates. A sense object sometimes gives joy and sometimes sorrow. It is not always available and has several faults. On the other hand, God is ever captivating, constantly available and totally free from blemishes. Further, what or who can be as loveable as God who is the repository of all good qualities? So bewitching are His glories that even sages who have realised the Truth and have nothing to achieve go into raptures on thinking of Him.

A devotee wanted to pray, “O Bhavānī, please bestow on me, Your serf, a compassionate glance.” So he began with the words “*Bhavāni-tvam*.” So eager was the Goddess to fulfil Her devotee’s wish that She did not realise that the devotee’s pause after “*tvam*” meaning “You”, was only the interval between successive words. Taking the request as complete, She immediately granted him “*Bhavānitvam*” or the state of being Bhavāni; that is She made him one with Herself. Śaṅkara has stated this in His *Soundaryalahari*.

At first, when a person tries to fix his mind on God, he may not find his mind co-operative and he may not derive much joy in doing so. There is no reason, however, for despair. The budding devotee can change the situation to his advantage by giving God a detailed report of the antics of his mind. What difficulty is there in mentally telling God, “My mind refuses to think of You. See the way it rebels?” Such a conversation with God is itself a way of thinking of Him.

Even when a person is able to briefly fix his mind on God, he experiences peace. This is because, at least for that short duration, he is free from concerns and is like a baby in the arms of its mother. The sense of peace and joy comes rather easily in the presence of great devotees. The nice feeling itself provides an impetus to the budding devotee to think further about God. It is, nonetheless,

necessary for him to recognise that in the initial stages there is the danger of the mind forgetting about God for long. Hence, without giving room to inadvertence, he must diligently strive to think of God often.

### ❑ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal's devotion was exemplary even when He was very young. Sri Srinivasa Sastry (as He was called before *sannyāsa*) worshipped a small crystal idol of Lord Gaṇapati. One day, His mother had no eatable to give Him to offer to the Lord as *naivedya* and felt ill at ease about this. Discerning her predicament, He promptly conveyed to her that she need not bother and that He would manage. Sri Srinivasa Sastry satiated Lord Gaṇapati by offering a spoonful of water with a heart full of love. After all, has not the Lord said: "Whoever offers Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water - that devout offering made by the pure-hearted man, I accept"?*

*Acharyal narrates His first savikalpa-samādhi experience on divine forms and His Śiva-darśana attained when He was hardly eighteen years of age:*

That day, when I was focussing as usual on the full form of Ambā, My mind suddenly locked on to Her feet. The experience was quite extraordinary. I saw Her feet throbbing with life. I beheld Ambā Herself and not merely the form that I was visualising earlier. The sense of reality of the vision was highly profound and left no room for doubts. This was My first experience of *savikalpa-samādhi*. During the *samādhi*, I almost totally forgot Myself and that I was meditating; Ambā's feet alone manifested. After about one and a half hours, I regained awareness of the body and opened My eyes. I could literally see Ambā in front of Me. I reached out and touched Her feet with My hands. A few moments later, She disappeared. Such was the will of God that the forms that spontaneously constituted the objects of the four *savikalpa-samādhi*-s following this one were those of Lakshmi-Narasimha, Kṛṣṇa with a flute, child Mukunda and Viṣṇu with eight arms.

On another day, keeping the eyes fixed, I chanted “*Om Namaḥ Śivāya.*” As usual, I felt a strong tingling sensation between My eyebrows. I soon began to behold an attractive and soothing moon-like disc of light within Me in that region. With the mind having become very calm and attentive, I imagined My heart-lotus in full bloom. In it, I visualised, in accordance with the *dhyāna-ślokā* of the *Pañcākṣarī-mantra*, Śiva in association with Pārvatī and possessed of five heads and ten arms.

As I focussed on the form, My awareness of the surroundings and the body vanished. Soon, My mental chanting of the *mantra* came to a stop and My mind thoroughly locked on to the divine form in the heart. Suddenly, the form became extraordinarily vivid. I could then literally experience the immediate presence of Śiva. The affection and smile that I beheld in the Lord’s *īśāna-mukha* (upward face) in particular still enthral Me. I was overwhelmed with joy.

After about one and a half hours, I became lightly aware of the body. I opened My eyes. I could see the sun close to the horizon. I could, at the same time, clearly apprehend the Lord associated with Ambā in My heart-lotus. The Lord appeared to be emerging from within and expanding. A deep long sound of *Om* was audible. I then definitely beheld Śiva in front of and facing Me. Oh, what a glorious sight that was! Tears of joy flowed from My eyes and My hairs stood on end. The Lord’s lips moved and I heard His very sweet voice. His words were: “*O, child, from tomorrow, fix Your mind on the Formless, Supreme Reality here. You will soon become established in Brahman.*” Then Śiva blessed Me by placing His hand on My head. Having done so, He disappeared. In a state of ecstasy, I began to pay obeisance to and extol Parameśvara through verses that occurred to Me spontaneously.

As the Lord had directly instructed Me as a *Guru*, I thought of meditating on Him as Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the Teacher. Mentally chanting the *Medhā-Dakṣiṇāmūrti-mantra*, I visualised Him. The meditation was deep, with the form quite clear. When I regained consciousness of the body and opened My eyes, I found no trace of

sunlight. It was only a few moments later that I realised that there was something on My neck. A big cobra had loosely coiled itself around My neck. Its upraised hood was near My right shoulder, facing away from Me. I had meditated on *Bhujāṅga-bhūṣana* (an epithet of Śiva meaning, “He who has a snake for an ornament”) and now a snake was on My body as an ornament. Taking this as a sign of the Lord’s grace, I felt very happy. I stroked the cobra gently. It seemed to like this and rested its head against My right cheek. After some time - maybe five minutes - the snake slowly uncoiled itself and went away.

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*Before Paramacharyal intervened and regulated the duration of Acharyal’s nirvikalpa-samādhi sessions and, thereby, prevented Acharyal from lapsing into irreversible samādhi, the nirodha saṁskāra-s in His mind were very intense. Even in such a situation, His unflinching devotion to His Guru and Ambā was evident.*

*Acharyal* recollected the happenings and said, “Thereafter, *samādhi* ceased to have any role as an aid to realise Brahman. However, I had been repeatedly abiding in *nirvikalpa-samādhi* since that *pourṇamī*. *Nirodha-saṁskāra-s* (impressions stemming from the interception of the mind) had, consequently, become intense. Because of this and utter indifference to names and forms, My mind subsided readily and on its own into *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. Such abidance in *samādhi* made the mind even further disposed to reposing in *nirvikalpa-samādhi* and disinclined towards everything else. That night, no sooner did I lie down than I went into *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. By the time I emerged from it, the night had passed. When I completed performing My *āsana-s* and readied Myself to start *prāṇāyāma*, My mind again plunged into *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. Another session of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, which occurred spontaneously during My *āhnikā*, preceded My usual Friday-visit to the temples.” When I asked if *Acharyal* experienced the same indifference towards Śāradāmbā as towards names and forms in general, *Acharyal*’s answer was a categorical “No.” He

added, “As I silently stood before Ambā, tears of joy flowed from My eyes.”

*Acharyal had a natural and spontaneous love for Īśvara and constantly maintained that whatever good accrued was solely due to the God’s will. The feeling, “I am but a mere instrument in God’s hand”, was constantly with Him.*

[Excerpted from *Yoga, Enlightenment and Perfection*]

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## 22. STUDY OF THE ŚĀSTRA-S

- D: Is it necessary for one seeking *mokṣa* to study the *śāstra-s*?
- A: Study of the *śāstra-s* is needed to understand the Truth, clear doubts and secure realisation of the Absolute.
- D: What are the works that *Acharyal* would recommend?
- A: For a spiritually advanced aspirant, the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* alone is sufficient. In studying it, Gauḍapādācārya's *kārikā-s* and Bhagavatpāda's *bhāṣya* thereon may also be studied. The *Muktika Upaniṣad* says about the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*:
- māṇḍūkyam-ekamevā'laṁ mumukṣūṅṅāṁ vimuktaye ।<sup>34</sup>  
(MukU, I.26)  
(The *Māṇḍūkya* alone is sufficient to give liberation to a *mumukṣu*.)
- The *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* is a fine text that anyone can study. The *Bhagavadgītā*, which flowed from the lips of the Lord Himself, is very important. Bhagavatpāda's works, Śrī Vidyāranya's *Pañcadaśī*, etc., can also be studied.
- D: Why has the study of *śāstra-s* been advocated?
- A: To clarify the Truth to an aspirant. Doubts may arise if we do not correctly understand the view of *śāstra-s*. The study of the *śāstra-s* clears such doubts. Firm faith in *Vedānta* is established. Scriptural studies enable one to realise as a fact

what is taught by the *Guru* and is the final purport of the *śāstra*-s.

- D: Is the study of scriptures necessary for one having absolute faith in the teaching of one's *Guru*?
- A: If a disciple has so firm a faith, it is not necessary for him to study the *śāstra*-s formally in order to know the Truth.
- D: How long should one study the *śāstra*-s?
- A: As long as one is not convinced of the Truth. Thereafter, one can stop. It is said

palālamiva dhānyārthī tyajed-grantham-aśeṣataḥ ।<sup>35</sup>

(AU, 18)

(Just as one desirous of grains discards the chaff, so also (after a certain stage) one should totally give up study of the *śāstra*-s.)

- D: What texts could those involved in worldly activities read profitably on a regular basis?
- A: They can recite at least one chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* every day. Doing *Viṣṇusahasranāma-pārāyaṇa* daily is a very good practice. At least a little of Bhagavatpāda's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and Śrī Vidyāraṇya's *Pañcadaśī* could be read regularly to get a clear understanding of *Vedānta*.
- D: Which verses of the *Bhagavadgītā* are particularly delightful to *Acharya*?
- A: adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṁ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca ।  
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ kṣamī ॥  
santuṣṭaḥ satataṁ yogī yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ ।  
mayyarpita-mano-buddhir-yo mad-bhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ ॥<sup>36</sup>

(BG, XII.13-14)

(He who is free from malice towards all beings, who is friendly as well as compassionate, who has no feeling of mine and is free from egoism, to whom pleasure and pain are

alike, who forgives all, who is ever content and of controlled mind, who is endowed with firm conviction and whose mind and intellect are in Me – that devotee of Mine is dear to Me.)

- D: Do not these verses refer to the characteristics of a *jñānin*? This being the case, will the verses be useful to a *mumukṣu* (one who aspires for liberation)?
- A: Bhagavatpāda has clarified that the attributes of a *jñānin* are described for others to strive to attain that state. If all are compassionate and devoid of hatred as taught by the Lord, the whole world will be peaceful.
- D: The *śāstra*-s disallow certain actions in the *kaliyuga* though permitting them in the other *yuga*-s. What is the reason for this?
- A: The *śāstra*-s do so and that is all. Though we are capable of giving the purport of what has been said in the *śāstra*-s, we have neither the authority nor the competence to change or to give reasons for all that has been said therein. As I am in this *pīṭha*, I am, to a certain extent, in the position of a Judge. A Judge can give his judgement only as per the existing laws. He cannot make a law of his own. Similarly, I do not make any new scriptural law. No purpose is served by asking Me why some actions are specifically prescribed in the *kaliyuga*. Only the authors of *Smṛti* texts should be consulted!
- D: Can all read the *Purāṇa*-s, *Rāmāyaṇa* and such other works?
- A: All can read them and benefit.
- D: Those who are not Brahmins do not have the opportunity to attain *mokṣa*. Some raise such an objection. Is the position really so?
- A: Whoever said that only a Brahmin can get *jñāna* and, hence, liberation? Vidura, for instance, was a great, enlightened soul. He was not a *brāhmaṇa*. That formal study of the *Veda* is traditionally done after *upanayana* does not imply that the

path to liberation is not available to all. We can find the essence of the *upaniṣad*-s in texts like the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and *Vicārsāgar* (Hindi). All can study such works and acquire *jñāna*. Everyone is competent to get *jñāna*. Śaṅkarabhagavatpāda has said this conclusively.

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## □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*As a student, in His pūrvāśrama days and as a saṁnyāsin, Acharyal applied Himself with great ardour to the study of the śāstra-s.*

*Acharyal's studies in Tarka were as yet incomplete when a Tarka scholar from North India chanced to come to Sringeri to seek some clarifications from Paramacharyal. Paramacharyal directed the pandit to our Guru but the scholar was diffident and sought help from Paramacharyal Himself. "Let Him give the necessary explanation. If your doubts are still not dispelled, I shall clarify", said the sage. Unconvinced but not in a position to say anything, the scholar settled down to hear what he felt would be the inept mumbling of a novice. He was taken aback beyond measure when he heard a torrential flow of intricate points from the divine lips of our Master which thoroughly dispelled the doubts. He realised his folly in underestimating Acharyal's genius and after due apology returned home satiated and wiser in more ways than one.*

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*Acharyal constantly encouraged the study of the śāstra-s. He was instrumental in starting institutions to propagate the study of śāstra-s. He organised and presided over the annual vidvat-sadas at Sringeri and at various cities during His tours. Invariably He moderated the scriptural discussions and gave final ruling on topics debated upon by the assembled scholars.*

*Acharyal never believed in keeping to Himself what He had learnt. Hence, He trained many in the Tarka-śāstra. He was very keen on expounding Vedānta texts. He would welcome doubts and*

would not hesitate to send for numerous reference texts. He would permit interested people to attend His classes, for He used to say, “Even the mere hearing of *śāstra*-s is beneficial. Thus, I do not think it essential to limit the number of persons coming for the classes. Suppose that twenty persons come for the lessons. Will it not be that at least one or two listen intently and interestedly and thereby derive special benefit from hearing the *śāstra*-s?”

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

I was in my teens when I chanced to attend a *vidvat-sadas* at Sringeri. Realising that I could not make out anything from the scholarly debates of the assembled pandits, I abruptly got up from the *sadas* and proceeded to perform my evening *sandhyāvandana*. After the night *pūjā*, *Acharyal* sent for me and enquired why I did not sit through the *sadas*. I replied that it did not make sense to me to sit in the *sadas*, pretending as if I was able to grasp the import of the scholarly discussions, when, in reality, I did not comprehend anything whatsoever.

“No, that’s not the attitude”, *Acharyal* corrected me. “It is not necessary that you should be able to grasp everything that is discussed in the *sadas*. Even mere hearing of *śāstra*-s will fetch you *punya*. So, it is sufficient if you sit in a *sadas* and listen to the scriptural discussions. From now on, make it a point to attend *vidvat-sadas* whenever you get an opportunity. Sometime or the other you will start comprehending the import of these scriptural discussions.” I followed *Acharyal*’s advice, and, needless to mention, I immensely benefited from it.

[Sri A.Ramaswamy]

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*Acharyal*’s razor-sharp intellect, His keen zest for learning and His unmatched humility - all enabled Him evolve as an erudite scholar in almost every branch of *śāstra* - be it *Veda*-s, *Vedānta*, or *Tarka*. Once, the Maharaja of Cochin, himself an accomplished

scholar in the *Nyāya-śāstra*, had prayed to *Acharyal* to resolve one of his doubts in the *Nyāya-śāstra*. He wrote a letter to *Acharyal* detailing his query and sent it through some pandits in Kerala. It was during that time that a *vidvat-sadas* was going on in the august presence of our *Acharyal*. When the letter was submitted, *Acharyal* directed one of the pandits to read it out before the scholars assembled at the *vidvat-sadas*, initiating a discussion among the scholars. One by one, the pandits expressed their solution but one or the other scholar promptly rebutted the replies. Erudite *vidvān-s* such as Mathur Sri Venkateswara Sastrigal, who had learnt under none other than Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal and later became a professor in the Mysore University, and Sri Madhusudana Bhattacharya, a renowned *Tārkika* from Calcutta, too offered their explanations only to be subsequently countered by the other scholars. The debate continued and it seemed as though it would be eternity before a conclusion could be reached. *Acharyal* suggested to the scholars that all of them reflect on the issue further and come out with a tenable conclusion before the concluding session of the *sabhā*.

The doubt pertained to a *siddhānta* of *Nyāya-śāstra*, for which no explicit answer was available in any other *Nyāya* Text. As it turned out, even on the concluding day, none of the pandits was able to resolve the doubt to the satisfaction of the *sabhā*. At this juncture, *Acharyal* Himself intervened and presented an appropriate answer in His inimitably lucid style. The pandits were awestruck at the splendid reply given by *Acharyal*. *Prouḍha-vidvān* Mathur Venkateswara Sastrigal openly remarked, “Only our *Acharyal*, the Pontiff of Sri Sharada Peetam, can put any doubt to rest. After all, is He not the Goddess Śāradāmbā in human form?” It became a memorable *sadas* for the *vidvān-s*. The Maharaja’s joy knew no bounds when he received the clarification offered by *Acharyal*. He promptly wrote a letter to *Acharyal* conveying his reverential salutations and gratitude for the guidance received.

[Sri K.S.Venkatarama Sastrigal]

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## 23. VEDA-S

- D: It is said that the *Veda-s* are beginningless. Are they?
- A: Yes. They are like the breath of the Supreme Being.
- D: Some say that the *Veda-s* were authored thousands of years ago by the Aryans and that the *Upaniṣad-s* were written later. Is there any flaw in accepting this view?
- A: This view is not acceptable to us. If the *Upaniṣad-s* were written after the *Veda-s*, why should the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* now be considered as constituting the seventh, eighth and ninth *praśna-s* of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* at all places? If it is accepted that *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* was written at a particular place and after *Veda-s* were written, why should all people consider it as part and parcel of the *Veda*? Further, why should they accept it as belonging to that very position to which it is assigned?

Let us suppose that the *Veda-s* were written many years ago. Were the 'authors' of the *Veda-s* sincere, or were they intent on cheating others? The *Veda-s* speak about sacrifices that should be performed to attain heaven. We can get this knowledge only from the *Veda-s*. So, if Vedic authors were sincere, they could not have written on their own about the sacrifices to attain heaven. On the other hand, suppose that they were frauds. Why should they themselves have performed these sacrifices?

Those who teach the *Veda-s* are very particular that during recitation no error should occur either in the words or in the *svara-s* (intonations). Why are they so particular? Merely because those who had taught them the *Veda-s* had instructed them that the exact words and their *svara-s* are vital and that any error would not bring benefit. Proceeding likewise from a student of the *Veda* to his *Guru* and, further, to his *Guru's Guru* and so on up to the so-called authors of the *Veda-s*, it will be seen that they too should have held the belief that the *svara-s* are very important. Why did the so-called authors of the *Veda-s* insist on the proper *svara-s* in spite of the fact that it would be much easier to learn the *Veda-s* without *svara-s*? Is it not because of their having known that *Veda-s* are holy and that no changes whatsoever should creep into them? They could not have considered books written by themselves as very holy. Therefore, no human being could have written the *Veda-s*.

Even scholars accept that *Rāmāyana* was composed thousands of years ago. We find that Rāma of Ayodhya knew the *Veda-s*. We also come to know that Rāvaṇa, who ruled over Lanka, knew the *Veda-s*. How could the *Veda-s* have spread so widely even at that ancient age? It takes many years to learn even a portion of the *Veda-s*. In the days of yore, the *Veda-s* were studied without the aid of books. They could have spread over vast regions and the recitation technique could have been carefully preserved only if studied by all in the same fashion, with the conviction that they are holy.

If the *Veda-s* were written by primitive men, how is it that they are so potent? Apparently incurable ailments have been cured by Vedic means. People have come across such incidents. If the *Veda-s* were merely ordinary books written in olden times, they could not have had such potency.

In the light of points such as these, we confidently consider *Veda-s* to be the direct teachings of the Supreme Being.

- D: If the *Veda-s* came from the Supreme, how are different *ṛṣi-s* associated with various *mantra-s*? *Ṛṣi-s* are the authors of the *mantra-s*, are they not?
- A: *Ṛṣi-s* are not the authors of the *mantra-s* with which their names are associated. Sages acquired the realisation of the essence of the *mantra-s* from God and made them known in the world. They did not produce the *mantra-s* on their own. Brahmā taught the entire *Veda-s* simultaneous with His creation of man. Being a manifestation of the Lord, Veda-Vyāsa subsequently took the diminished capacity of the people of the *kaliyuga* into consideration and codified the *Veda-s*.
- D: We find many stories in the *Veda-s*. Are they accounts of historical events?
- A: No. The stories do not relate to actual worldly incidents. The *Veda-s*, which are like the breath of the Supreme Being, have no beginning. As such, they are not the records of the historical events of any age. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, for instance, contains a discussion between sage Yajñavalkya and king Janaka. This is not the retelling of a dialogue between two individuals who lived in some specific period. An event similar to that narrated could have occurred at some time but it cannot be said that this is what has been cited in the *Upaniṣad*. The stories in the *Veda-s* are meant only as illustrations.
- D: Long ago, through the process of evolution, man gradually came into being. In the early stages, his brain was much less developed than the human brain is now. He led a primitive existence. In due course, his brain improved to the present level. Thereafter, the Lord could have taught him the *Veda*. Is there any flaw in conceiving thus? If we have it this way, the findings of palaeontologists are not contradicted and, at the same time, it is admitted that the *Veda* was revealed by *Īśvara*. What does *Acharyal* have to say about this?

- A: This is faulty. Simultaneous with His creation of man, the Lord should have taught him the *Veda*. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ ।<sup>37</sup>

(BG, III.10)

(At the outset, having created mankind along with *yajña*-s, the Creator said...)

*Yajña*-s (scriptural sacrifices) have the *Veda*-s for their basis. For a *yajña* to be performed, the *Veda* is needed. Thus, the Lord's words imply that *Īśvara* taught the *Veda* when He created the world. If we do not accept this view, we cannot give logical replies to many queries. If a primitive man predated the *Veda*, he could not have known what is *dharma* and what is *adharmā*. Since, the norms of righteousness and unrighteousness were not revealed to him by God, did God simply treat his actions as virtuous and reward him or just treat them as sinful and punish him? If his actions fetched him the rewards of righteousness, we are forced to conclude, "Before the *Veda* came into being, good fruits were obtained for whatever one did but after *Veda* came to light, one also reaps unpleasant fruits for one's actions." Is this fair? Further, can one accept the conclusion that before the *Veda* came to light, one did not have to go to hell at all as one always secured good results, whereas after the revelation of *Veda*, the possibility of going to hell arose? If the view that all actions led to bad consequences were accepted, then also the implication is queer.

Therefore, when the Lord created the world, He should have revealed the *Veda*. That is to say, He should have, at the outset itself, made known what is *dharma* and what is *adharmā*. Thus, it is improper to hold that the *Veda* came to light only much after the appearance of man.

- D: Is there any injunction that one must study the *Veda*? Can tape recorders be used to learn it?

A: He who is competent to do so is required to duly learn his *Veda*. The *Veda* itself ordains:

svādhyāyo'dhyetavyaḥ<sup>38</sup>

(TA, II.15.19)

(One's *śākhā* (branch) of the *Veda* should be studied.)

It should be learnt only from a *Guru*. If one attempts to learn from a recorded tape, it can never be true *vedādhyayana* (study of the *Veda*). If a parrot says, "Come here", a person generally does not assign value to the words and go to the parrot. On the other hand, if another person calls him with the same words, he goes to the caller. The difference lies not in the words but only in the speakers. *Vedādhyayana* is characterised by a *śiṣya* listening to his *Guru* reciting the *Veda* and then repeating the same. It is not learning with the aid of recorded sound.

D: Is *vedādhyayana* beneficial in any way?

A: Yes. As *vedādhyayana* is the duty of those competent for it, they can discharge their duty by doing it. Further, the means of attaining good in this world and the next has been taught in the *Veda*. It is the *Veda* that reveals the precise means to attain *mokṣa*. Thus, regardless of whether we seek material prosperity, heaven or *mokṣa*, we should turn our attention to the *Veda*. Even by merely reciting the *vedamantra*-s, we do profit. The *vedamantra*-s are powerful. They are capable of curing diseases, bringing rains, etc.

D: Nowadays, many people have not learnt the *Veda* as they do not get the proper opportunity. Further, as they have to attend offices, schools, etc., they do not even find adequate time. Those conversant with the *Veda*-s are not sincere and enthusiastic when it comes to teaching laymen. In these circumstances, what should one competent to study the *Veda* do?

A: *Adhyayana* should be done to the extent possible. At least the *Rudram*, *Camakam*, *Sūktā*-s and other *mantra*-s essential for *pūjā* should be learnt. It is not difficult to spare some time in the morning or evening for learning the *Veda*. It is best if everyone learns one's *śākhā* (branch) completely. If that is not possible, *adhyayana* should be carried out to the extent possible. It is improper to blame those conversant with the *Veda*. They also have needs to cater to. This is an age when everyone thinks that secular education alone is the means to earn huge sums of money. The teachers too wish to lead a secure, comfortable life. However, any greediness on their part is wrong. One should provide support to them. If people do not assist them financially and encourage them, how can they comfortably live a life dedicated to chanting and teaching the *Veda*? People should therefore duly respect them, provide them support and sincerely learn from them. For their part, they should teach properly, without giving room to greed.

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### □ Parables of Acharyal

*What follows is a humorous parable narrated by Acharyal depicting the need to recite the Veda-s in the prescribed manner:*

A poor pandit had unmarried daughters. He was at a loss as to how he could find the money to get them married. A friend told him, "Musicians get handsome rewards." Consequently, the desire to learn singing sprouted in his mind. He found out that to train his voice, he would have to practise singing for long. Hence, he sat under a tree at the outskirts of his village and practised singing. But what emerged from him was mere cacophony.

A ghost that had earlier been a musician inhabited that tree. It was not able to bear the pandit's murder of music. So, it told him, "I am a music-knowing ghost. This tree is my home. Your cacophony is making it impossible for me to stay here. Go elsewhere." The pandit replied, "Why should I go? I want to earn

money and for that I want to become a songster by ardent practice. This is my chosen place for practice.”

The ghost said, “Since it is money that you want, I will tell you how you can get it. I shall possess the princess. The king will have his physicians attend to her. However, they will be unable to cure her. You seek the king’s audience. Tell him that the princess is possessed by a ghost and that you can exorcise it and cure her. With the king’s permission, go to the princess and sing there as you are doing now. I, who cannot bear your atrocious singing, will immediately leave the princess. She will get cured. The king will handsomely reward you. Thereafter, there will be no need for you to come here and kill music.”

The man agreed and the ghost’s plan was successfully executed by them. As a consequence, the man was able to get more than enough money to get his daughters married, while the ghost was able to live in peace on its tree. Just as the music-knowing ghost of the story was put off by the poor man’s cacophony, *Vedic* scholars feel ill at ease when someone chants the holy *Vedic mantra*-s incorrectly in their presence.

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Once, most of India’s inhabitants were committing many sinful acts and going to hell. *Īśvara*, out of compassion, taught them the sacred *Śrī-rudra-mantra* to enable all to escape the tortures of hell. Everyone began bathing in holy rivers and worshipping Lord Śiva through it.

Meanwhile, Yama, the god of death, began to worry. “Nowadays nobody comes to hell. What is the use of my being the king of hell without any person to rule over?” he lamented. He went to Lord Brahmā and complained, “I have no subjects. So, I would like to retire.” Lord Brahmā replied, “It is true that people perform *Śrī-rudra-japa* and thereby escape from your clutches. However, I will give you two messengers, *aśraddhā* (absence of faith) and *durmedhā* (perverted thinking). On account of these, people will feel that *Śrī-rudra-japa* is not as efficacious as it is said to be. So,

they will not do it properly. Obviously, they will not be liberated from sin.” The story reveals that it is not enough to merely chant a *mantra*. Faith and proper attitude are also necessary. If these are there, the full fruit of the chant will accrue to the chanter.

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

Once, my eldest son, accidentally cut one of his fingers. The doctors were not able to arrive at a decision as to whether to amputate it or to do something else as he was a diabetic. I wrote a letter to *Acharyal* seeking His blessings. *Acharyal* advised me to perform *Rudrābhiṣeka* to Lord Śiva in a temple, daily, for a period of 40 days. There was no Śiva temple nearby. Moreover, I found it difficult to follow His instructions due to other unavoidable personal reasons. So, I wrote another letter to *Acharyal* seeking His advice if it would be possible for the Math to arrange for the *abhiṣeka* in a Śiva temple at Sringeri itself if I sent the required sum of money towards the cost of this forty-day *abhiṣeka*. Out of compassion, *Acharyal* had it arranged in Sringeri itself. In addition to this, as per *Acharyal*'s instruction, the *prasāda* was also posted to me everyday without fail. Needless to mention, his finger came back to normalcy without the need for any surgery.

[A devotee]

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Once during a *sadas* at a place called Kollur in Andhra, I was present with my second son who was just 12 years old but had by then completed his *Vedādhyayana*. Learning that the boy had completed the *adhyayana*, *Acharyal* tested his knowledge by asking him to chant passages from different sections of the *Veda*. The boy could recite the portions concerned with utmost ease. Visibly pleased, His Holiness immediately got up from His *āsana*, came near the boy, placed His hands around his hips and lifted him up. Showing the boy around to all those who were present, *Acharyal* said, “Look at this lad. He has acquired mastery over the

subject. I am extremely pleased.” Placing the boy on the ground, His Holiness showered His blessings on him. Honours were given to the boy on behalf of the Math. I was moved to tears at this great blessing conferred upon my son.

[Sri Venkatappa Yajnanarayana]

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## 24. JAPA

- D: Should one performing a *mantra-japa* know the *ṛṣi* (seer), *chandas* (metre) and *devatā* (propitiated deity), of the *mantra*?
- A: Yes.
- D: Should one do the *nyāsa-s* before and after the *japa*? (*Nyāsa-s* involve the sanctification of parts of the body.)
- A: Yes, one should.
- D: Is it good, when doing *japa*, to meditate on the form described in the *dhyāna-sloka*?
- A: Yes; that is the normal procedure. However, if the *Guru* granting initiation instructs that contemplation be performed in some other way, that instruction should be carried out.
- D: Is there any restriction in doing *japa* mentally?
- A: No.
- D: How many times should the *japa* be done?
- A: *Japa* brings good to us to the extent that we do it. If we get accustomed to it by practice, it effortlessly continues even without our being aware of it. In course of time, it continues into the dream state also.
- D: When performing *gāyatrī-japa* mentally, is it necessary to pay attention to the *svara-s* (intonations) of that *mantra*?

- A: *Svara-s* must be correct if *japa* is performed with the lips moving; but if the *gāyatrī-mantra* is chanted mentally with one-pointed concentration, importance need not be given to the *svara-s*. It is sufficient to do just the *japa*.
- D: Will performance of the *japa* without concentration yield fruits?
- A: *Japa* always yields results. It produces better effects if done with the mind one-pointed. Otherwise, the effect will be less.
- D: Should the *Veda* be necessarily chanted with proper *svara-s*? Will sin accrue from mispronunciations?
- A: Yes. We should chant with the exact *svara-s*.
- D: Can one learn *vedamantra-s* by oneself?
- A: No. *Vedamantra-s* must be learnt from a *Guru*. It is therefore that Śrī Kumārila Bhatta said:
- vedasyādhyayanam sarvam gurvadhyayana-pūrvakam 1.<sup>39</sup>  
(SV, I.1.7.366)
- (All study of *Veda* is preceded by learning from a *Guru*.)
- D: What purpose is served by the exact chanting of *vedamantra-s*?
- A: Our mind becomes pure and sins get washed away.
- D: Many *Upaniṣad-s*, such as the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* of the *Yajur Veda*, are without *svara-s*. Why?
- A: *Svara-s* should have been there for these *Upaniṣad-s*, as they are parts of the *Veda*. However, with the passage of time, knowledge of the *svara-s* has been lost.
- D: Then, how should one chant such *Upaniṣad-s*?
- A: There is no necessity to observe *svara*-restrictions in chanting those *Upaniṣad-s* for which *svara-s* are unknown. No sin will accrue on that account.

- D: What, according to *Acharyal*, are the *vedamantra*-s to be learnt by all competent persons?
- A: All eligible persons should definitely learn the *Rudram*, *Camakam* and the *Sūkta*-s that are chanted during *pūjā*.
- D: In some portions of the *Rudram*, there are prayers for material benefits. Similar is the case of the *Camakam* too.
- A: So what?
- D: Can a person who desires *mokṣa* alone chant these *mantra*-s? After all he is not interested in the material benefits prayed for.
- A: The *śāstra*-s say that even *saṁnyāsin*-s can chant the *Rudram*. It is well known that *saṁnyāsin*-s should not desire material objects.
- D: How are they allowed to chant the *Rudram*?
- A: Whenever one chants *vedamantra*-s, it does not mean that one has to desire the objects mentioned there. *Mantra*-s, such as the *Rudram*, are very sacred. If the mind does not long for what is prayed for, purity of the mind and the grace of *Īśvara* are obtained. Further, the objects concerned are not thrust upon one by virtue of the chant. So *saṁnyāsin*-s also can definitely chant the *Rudram* and be benefited.
- D: Have some portions of the *Veda* been lost in the process of passing on from *Guru* to *śiṣya*?
- A: Yes. We know that there were a century of *śākhā*-s (branches) of the *Yajur Veda*, but only a few are available now. Similar is the case of the other *Veda*-s.
- D: It is said that the *śāstra*-s should not be studied during *anadhyayana*. Is this the opinion of *Acharyal* also? (*Anadhyayana* days are there every fortnight.)
- A: Yes. Traditional classes should not be conducted during *anadhyayana*.

D: Does it then mean that on such days one should neither chant portions of the *Veda*-s already learnt nor read the scriptural texts by oneself?

A: No, it does not. I only said that no traditional classes should be held.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

In His *pūrvaśrama*, *Acharyal* used to perform His *nityakarma* (scripture-ordained religious observances to be practised regularly) with meticulous care. *Acharyal* has said, “I felt a great fondness for the *gāyatrī-mantra* and started chanting it mentally whenever I could, right from the day of My *upanayana*. In about a month’s time, I was able to do so even while engaged in My regular activities. I was happy to find that I soon mentally repeated the *Gāyatrī* during My dreams too. I did not disclose My practice to anyone.”

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

My ailing grandmother was in her nineties when *Acharyal* graced my house in Tirunelveli. Compassionately addressing her, He said, “Chant the name of *Rāma* continuously.” My grandmother replied that she would do so. *Acharyal* did not leave the matter at that. “Saying that you will do it is insufficient. You must actually do it. Now repeat after Me.” He then chanted the sacred *mantra* and she chanted after Him. How fortunate was she to have received initiation at that age and that too unasked and further, with the *Guru* Himself coming to her! She proceeded to chant the *Rāma-nāma* continuously. Some months passed and her condition became serious. Under these conditions there was every chance that her mental chanting would get interrupted. Strange are the ways in which the grace of our *Guru* acts. Unexpectedly, a group arranged for *akhaṇḍa* (unbroken) chanting of *Rāma-nāma*. The place of chant being nearby, the divine name reverberated in my home day

and night. Shortly thereafter, my grandmother breathed her last. Thus till her last days, an opportunity had been provided for her to be sanctified by the holy name of Śrī Rāma.

[Sri Ramasubramania Iyer]

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*On many an occasion Acharyal has spoken about the potency of the Viṣṇu-sahasranāma. Here is an instance.*

I was blessed to drive *Acharyal's* car on many occasions. Every time, I would receive one or the other valuable piece of information from His Holiness. During one journey, I was following a conversation going on between His Holiness and a devotee who also accompanied us in the car. Efficacy of *mantra-s* was the topic of discussion and the devotee was listing a number of *mantra-s* and the diseases that each such *mantra* was meant to cure. As there was a slight pause in their conversation I stepped in and asked His Holiness, “Is it possible to know all of them?” His Holiness said, “First of all there is no need to know all of them. *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma* alone is enough. It is a remedy for all diseases. There is no problem that cannot be solved by it!” I learnt a new lesson that day!

Subsequently too, when I sought His Holiness' blessings for my friend ailing from cardiac problems, His Holiness was quick to say, “Ask your friend to chant *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*.”

[Sri K.Niranjan Kumar]

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During a *navarātri* festival at Mumbai, *Acharyal* was using a book while performing the *Lalitā-sahasranāma-arcana* to Goddess Śāradāmbā. A devotee who noticed this wondered why *Acharyal* would require a book in order to chant the *Lalitā-sahasranāma*. He later asked *Acharyal* about this.

*Acharyal* clarified, “*Pūjā-vidhāna* (set of rules for worship) requires that not even a small deviation should occur in the course of the chanting. That is why I made sure that I followed the book.”

*Acharyal* used to be extremely particular, as seen here, about correct adherence to the *śāstra*-s and used to follow the dictates of the scripture and tradition meticulously.

[Dr.H.C.Visvesvaraya]

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Once, *Acharyal* was scheduled to visit a town and stay in a devotee’s house. The devotee’s friend, who did not belong to the Brahmin community, was occupying one of the rooms in his house. Now that His Holiness was to visit his house, the devotee had a doubt if it would be in order if his friend continued to stay there. With great hesitation, the devotee conveyed his predicament to his friend who readily appreciated the situation and vacated the place. The devotee kept that room locked. *Acharyal*’s accommodation had been arranged in the ground floor.

His Holiness visited the house and instead of entering the room meant for His stay, went around the house. When He saw the locked room, He came near it and said, “I shall stay in this room!” The devotee was surprised. Nonetheless, he saw to it that the room was prepared for *Acharyal*’s stay.

When the devotee had *Acharyal*’s *darśana* later in the day, His Holiness asked him, “Was anyone staying in this room before?” The devotee became concerned that he had committed a mistake in not informing *Acharyal* apriori about his friend who was the occupant of that room. The disciple hesitantly replied that his friend, who belonged to a different community, was staying there. He need not have worried at all for *Acharyal* compassionately said, “I want to see your friend. Where is he now?”

When the disciple’s friend had the *darśana* of *Acharyal*, He asked him if he was practising any spiritual *sādhana* in that room. That gentleman politely replied, “No Swamiji, I merely chant

*Bhagavān's nāma-japa* repeatedly and, as such, don't know any spiritual *sādhanā*. Nor do I feel I am competent to practise any *sādhanā*."

*Acharyal* was pleased with his humility and said, "Performing *nāma-japa* with sincerity is itself a great *sādhanā*. While I was staying in your room, I could feel that the entire place was charged with a divine power and that is why I queried if you were doing any spiritual *sādhanā*." *Acharyal* then blessed him.

[Sri K.Suresh Chandar]

When I had the privilege of beholding *Acharyal* for the first time, He directed me to sit by His side and compassionately asked me what I wished. "Will *Acharyal* give me *mantropadeśa*?" was my spontaneous reply, much to my own surprise; I had not expected myself to make the request I did. *Acharyal* graciously asked me to come the next day morning for initiation.

The next morning, I was asked to go to the room where *Acharyal* had just then finished His *anuṣṭhāna*. *Acharyal* asked me to sit close to Him. I was in a daze throughout the initiation and felt His grace possessing me. Even after I reached home, I found myself continuously repeating the *Śiva-mantra*, which He had initiated me into. The mental chanting was spontaneous and linked with the outgoing breath. As the day wore on, an intense desire to meditate gripped me. When I closed my eyelids, the *mantra* rumbled on but slowly faded away. The mind became increasingly calm and in a few minutes, I lost all awareness of the body and surroundings. An hour had lapsed in this state. This experience used to repeat every time I sat for meditation. I knew beyond doubt that *Acharyal* had graced me in abundance and that my excursions to ecstasy were exclusively due to Him. Months later, of His own accord, *Acharyal* spoke to me about my initiation and informed me that by the will of *Īśvara* a transfer of spiritual power had occurred during the *mantropadeśa*.

[A disciple]



## 25. BRAHMACARYA

- D: Is it necessary for a man desirous only of *mokṣa* to observe *brahmacarya* throughout life?
- A: It is necessary for one who has *vairāgya* and longs for *mokṣa* alone. In fact, married life is a big bondage. He who wishes to lead the life of a *brahmacārin* can devote himself fully to realise the Supreme Being. The path is more difficult for the *grhastha-s* (householders) as they have many responsibilities. Further, married life itself does harm by not allowing one to perform spiritual practices all the time.
- D: If such is the case, why do the *śāstra-s* permit married life?
- A: Not all people desire *mokṣa*. Further, only a handful of persons are competent to observe *brahmacarya* throughout their life. Therefore, to enable others to attain the Supreme by leading a good life, the *śāstra-s* permit marriage. Many regulations are set by the *śāstra-s* for householders. So, we should remember that the *śāstra-s* have permitted only a regulated married life.
- D: It has been mentioned in many places in the *śāstra-s* that progeny is necessary for a person. Will *Acharyal* kindly give reason for this?
- A: One studying the *śāstra-s* can realise that such statements are meant only for people who do not have intense desire for *mokṣa* and whose minds are not free from lust.

We learn from *śāstra*-s that a person with intense *vairāgya* need not lead a married life. The *Upaniṣad*-s say:

yadahareva virajet tadahareva pravrajat<sup>40</sup>

(JU, 4)

(On the very day one gets intense *vairāgya*, one should renounce.)

brahmacaryādeva pravrajat grhādvā vanādvā<sup>41</sup>

(JU, 4)

(Let him take to *samnyāsa* from the stage of a *brahmacārin* or householder or *vānaprastha* (he who has retired to a forest).)

kiṃ prajayā kariṣyāmaḥ ।<sup>42</sup>

(BU, IV. 4.22)

(What shall we do with progeny?)

- D: Some people raise objections by asking how society can function if all observe *brahmacarya*. What is *Acharyal's* view in this regard?
- A: From among a thousand, one person intensely desires *mokṣa*. Even among those striving for it, only a few feel that *brahmacarya* should be practised. Hence, the issue does not arise.
- D: Can even a non-Brahmin decide to be a lifelong celibate?
- A: Certainly.
- D: Does *Acharyal* consider it wrong if women remain as spinsters on account of their urge to practise spiritual disciplines?
- A: Women can also remain unmarried, provided they have intense *vairāgya*. Mind control and taking care to see that the circumstances are all right are essential.
- D: Does *Acharyal* opine that householders cannot get *jñāna* and attain *mokṣa*?

- A: No. They can definitely attain *mokṣa*. However, their path is more arduous. One desiring *mokṣa* alone can take *saṁnyāsa* and lead a life just for that purpose. But for householders, freedom from distracting influences is difficult. Nevertheless, it is improper to say that they cannot secure *jñāna*. Janaka and such others were *jñānin-s* though they were householders. It is, however, wrong to quote this and say that the life of *brahmacarya* is not necessary for any one.
- D: We read about *ṛṣi-s* in the *Itihāsa-s* and the *Purāṇa-s* and also learn that they were householders. Does it not mean that even among the householders, there were many *jñānin-s*?
- A: It cannot be said that the word *ṛṣi* means a *jñānin*. We cannot also assert that all the *ṛṣi-s* were *jñānin-s*. Moreover, could not the married *ṛṣi-s* have realised the Supreme even prior to their marriage, while they were *brahmacārin-s*? This apart, it is highly erroneous to say that all *ṛṣi-s* were householders. We all accept that Śuka, Sanaka, etc., were great *ṛṣi-s*. There is no doubt at all that they were all *jñānin-s* and were also celibates.
- D: If one wants to live as a *naiṣṭhika-brahmacārin* (lifelong celibate), is it good to take a suitable *vrata* (vow)?
- A: An aspirant can take such a vow if he is firm in his decision, has *vairāgya* and is devoid of lust. The *vrata* taken will give him strength. However, he should be careful before taking such vows, since great sin will accrue if there is any break of *naiṣṭhika-brahmacarya*.
- D: Does *Acharyal* feel that evil thoughts occurring in the mind of a *brahmacārin* will harm his *brahmacarya*?
- A: Certainly. Even if any evil thought occurs without one's deliberate will, it is not a good sign. However, if one gives place to evil thoughts deliberately, it has to be considered as a violation of *brahmacarya*. Next, it cannot be said that bad

dreams will harm directly, but if one gives room to evil thoughts consciously, the situation is entirely different.

D: Some people desire *yoga* very much but they are not devoid of desires. Can such people also choose to live as lifelong celibates?

A: hey can, if they have firm conviction and confidence. They can get initiation and guidance from a *Guru* and, further, practise austerities. However, if there is a break in the vow of lifelong celibacy, it is a great sin.

D: What prevents one from being an *ūrdhvaretas*?

(He is called an *ūrdhvaretas* whose *vīrya* or semen does not leave his body and whose sexual energy is sublimated into spiritual splendour.)

A: Evil thought, evil speech, evil company, cinema, bad books etc., may prevent one from becoming an *ūrdhvaretas*. So, these should definitely be avoided. Excess heat in the body may indirectly act as an impediment. If there is a problem due to this, one could take boiled barley water to reduce the heat. Physical exercise is beneficial. If a bad thought appears in a dream, it indicates the bad state of one's mind. If evil thoughts arise even in the waking state, it has to be considered as foul. One should impress on the mind that *brahmacarya* is very important and that one cannot get happiness from the objects of the world. The food that we take has the capacity to change our mental state. Those interested in *brahmacarya* should avoid the food prohibited for them. It is not proper to take onion, garlic, salty and spicy food, meat, wine, coffee, tea, etc. *Āsana*-s such as *sarvāṅgāsana* and *śīrṣāsana* are helpful to a *brahmacārin* who desires to be an *ūrdhvaretas*.

D: Is there any use in being an *ūrdhvaretas*?

A: When one becomes an *ūrdhvaretas*, one can attain good meditation and also rapidly advance in spiritual path.

D: Do those with *vairāgya*, who are without lust and who wish to live as *naiṣṭika brahmacārin-s*, have the blessings of *Acharyal*?

A: My blessings are always there for such persons. It is My opinion that it would be highly laudable if many people were like that.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

In the months prior to initiating *Acharyal* into *saṁnyāsa*, *Paramacharyal* spoke to Him, in private, about the importance of dispassion and *brahmacarya*. A brief account of the advices given in a couple of such private sessions is given here.

There is great benefit in observing perfect *brahmacarya*. For this, complete control over the mind is important. To achieve such mastery, one should avoid thinking of sense-objects. The reason is that as one thinks of sense-objects, one gradually develops a degree of attachment to them. When attachment is allowed to grow, it becomes an intense desire. When a powerful longing is permitted to manifest, it becomes difficult to check and uproot. When a man strongly desires some object or honour and a person or situation thwarts the consummation of his longing, he becomes irritated.

When a man gives way to anger, he loses his power of proper discrimination between right and wrong. It is well known that an irritated man may be disrespectful even to his *Guru*. From delusion, the recollection of what one has been taught regarding righteous conduct is lost. This disruption of memory disrupts the functioning of the *buddhi* and the man in this state is as good as destroyed. The seed of all this evil is thus thinking about sensory objects. So, if You wish to control Your mind, You must not allow Your mind to cogitate upon the objects of the senses.

Married life is a big source of bondage. A householder has to cater not only to his own requirements but also to those of his family. Hence, he cannot devote himself entirely to meditation and

such spiritual practices. Many are the people who get married and think that that course of life is good for them. Actually, for a discriminating person, family life is so full of misery that it is better to stand on burning coal rather than to get married.

The body is made up of skin, blood, flesh, bones and so on. It contains within it urine and faeces. The body of even the female whom the indiscriminating consider to be extremely beautiful is only of this kind. Recourse to such discrimination enables one to combat lust and be established in *brahmacarya*.

While recapitulating such advices decades later, *Acharyal* said, “My *Guru* was so kind that even when I was too young to be afflicted by passion, He emphasised the worthlessness of sensory pleasures and stressed the importance of dispassion and thereby precluded any scope for even the seed of passion finding a place in My mind. He rendered Me fit for *samnyāsa*.”

[Excerpted from *Yoga, Enlightenment and Perfection*]

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Till *Acharyal* was in His fifties, He did not allow females to sit directly in front of or close to Him, never looked them in the eye and restricted conversing with them to the minimum needed. Nonetheless, being the occupant of a pontifical seat, He did give ladies *darśana*, guide them as a *Guru*, never denied them His grace and ensured that none of them felt unwanted. When *Acharyal* was in His sixties, He said, “One may be free from desires, but if one is the head of a *pīṭha*, one must conduct oneself in such a way that even an iota of doubt does not arise regarding one’s character. I am now old and so, even with others in mind, it is not necessary for Me to impose on Myself all the restrictions that I once did. Indeed, it would cause a lot of inconvenience to others if I now conduct Myself exactly as I did then.”

[Based on *Crest Jewel of Yogis, Volume I*]

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When *Acharyal* was touring in North India for the first time, a highly influential and scholarly monk decided to test His sense-control. So, he arranged for a belle to try to tempt *Acharyal*. She entered the room where *Acharyal* was giving *darśana* just as the last of the devotees was leaving and remained till she alone was left. However, when she observed *Acharyal*, she was so overwhelmed by His patent purity that she became disconcerted. *Acharyal* compassionately asked her, “Mother, what is it?” At this, the girl simply broke down. She was about to confess and seek *Acharyal*’s pardon when the monk who had sent her himself entered. He told *Acharyal*, “I knew that You are a scholar *par excellence*. However, I wanted to ascertain whether You are also a master of the organ of taste and are free from fondness for valuables. So, some time back, I sent you tasty dishes and jewels through people. However, You turned down the offers. I finally wished to examine Your *brahmacarya* and, hence, sent this beauty to try to tempt You. I now realise that You are so pure and self-controlled that You are beyond temptation. I truly acknowledge Your greatness and pay obeisance to You.”

[Sri A.Ramaswamy]

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*Acharyal told me the following in 1987:*

When I was about twenty years of age, two *Bairāgī*-s, who lived on the banks of the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh, came to Sringeri. They wanted to have Sannidhanam’s [*Paramacharyal*’s] *darśana* and seek some clarifications from Him. As He was in seclusion at that time, they were unable to approach Him. They met Me. One of them looked weak and somewhat effeminate, while the other had powerful muscles and resembled a wrestler.

In the course of his conversation with Me, the first one hesitatingly said, “I have been leading a life of renunciation but am not free from sexual desire. While I never misbehaved with any woman, bad thoughts troubled me off and on. This was the situation till a few months ago, when I met a *Bābā* and posed my

problem to him. He gave me a large packet of medicinal powder and said that if I consumed a little of it every day, I would obtain relief. I have been sincerely following his advice. My desires have largely vanished. I think that I have gained a great spiritual benefit. However, my muscular strength has come down and my chest has become a little like that of a female. My companion is in need of help to deal with lust. He is hesitant to take the *Bābā*'s medicine because he fears that his muscles will become weak. He wanted to ask *Guruji* whether in the interest of spiritual growth, he should overcome his hesitation and resort to the medicine. I wanted to ask *Guruji* if I should continue with this medicine or whether *Guruji* would give me some other medicine without the side effects. We have, however, not had the good fortune of being able to talk to Him. Would You like to keep and use some of the medicine that I have? I can replenish my stock from the *Bābā* who gave it to me." I declined his offer.

The second person asked Me, "You are young. Are You not troubled by sexual thoughts?" I answered that I was not. At this, both of them asked, almost in unison, "Will You please help us and tell us what we should do?" I answered, "Do not use the medicine. You cannot gain any spiritual benefit by checking the sexual instinct through it. Kings employed eunuchs in their harems because they were confident that the eunuchs would not be tempted and misbehave with the women. However, none regards those eunuchs as great celibates. None deems that they became spiritually great on account of castration. On the other hand, all of us regard sage Śuka as established in continence and as spiritually great. His body was intact but he was so free from desire that even damsels in the nude did not care to cover themselves when he passed them. A dumb person does not lie but he is not looked up to as one who never lies. A person who is unconscious is not revered as a *yogin* just because he is free from all thoughts of the world. Incapacity does not confer spiritual benefit. The medicine with you temporarily and partially reduces you to the state of a eunuch. It is, as far as gaining spiritual benefit is concerned, no better than

castration. I shall provide you a medicine that will enable you to be rid of lust and to gain spiritual benefit.”

Then, I asked them to go to Śārādāmbā’s temple, spend half an hour gazing at Her with devotion and to pray to Her with faith to rid them of lust. They returned after half an hour. I told them, “In the *Durgā-saptaśatī* it is said that all women are the Divine Mother’s forms. Whenever you are tempted by the sight of a woman or think of a female with desire, immediately think of the gracious Divine Mother. Feel that it is She who is in the form of all women. Also implore Her now and then from the bottom of your heart to free you from lust.” “Need not contempt for women to be cultivated to combat lust?” asked the muscular *Bairāgī*. I replied: “No. Just as desire is bad for your mind, so is hatred. Both likes and dislikes are impurities that agitate the mind. The scriptures speak of seeing the defects in an object just to neutralise a pre-existing attachment born of the notion that the object is pleasurable. The aim is definitely not to generate hatred. Śuka certainly did not hate or look down upon any woman. He looked upon everything as the Supreme Brahman.” The *Bairāgī*-s left Sringeri shortly thereafter.

They returned after about a year. This time, both of them looked healthy and muscular. On seeing Me, they joyfully said, “Swamiji, Your medicine is very effective and has no side effects.” I clarified that it was not My medicine and that what were working were Śārādāmbā’s grace and their dedicated efforts. During this trip, they had the great good fortune of getting Sannidhanam’s (*Paramacharyal*’s) *darśana* and blessings.

[A disciple]

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## 26. SAMNYĀSIN

- D: Should actions be renounced?
- A: Unnecessary actions should not be done. In spiritual life, one should not try to discard all actions right at the beginning, but should dedicate them to *Īśvara*. It may be noted that actions themselves will leave one as one's mind gets purer and purer. Just as cleaning-nut powder settles down at the bottom along with the impurities in water, all actions dissociate themselves from an advanced person on their own. That is the period best suited for one to take up *saṁnyāsa*.
- D: Should *saṁnyāsa* be taken up before or after the attainment of *jñāna*?
- A: The *saṁnyāsa* taken up after the attainment of *jñāna* is called *vidvat-saṁnyāsa* while that taken before knowledge is termed *vividiṣā-saṁnyāsa*. The former is superior to the latter.
- D: What state of mind qualifies one for *saṁnyāsa*?
- A: After properly analysing the world, one concludes that one will not get any lasting happiness from it, and leads a spiritual life. Subsequently, when one becomes unconcerned about actions and their renunciation, then indeed one is truly fit for *saṁnyāsa*. One should have attained equipoise prior to taking up *saṁnyāsa*.
- D: Can one take up *saṁnyāsa* even at a young age?

- A: Yes, provided one has intense *vairāgya*.  
yadahareva virajet tadahareva pravrajat<sup>43</sup> (JU, 4)  
(Let him take to *saṁnyāsa* on the very day that he attains intense *vairāgya*.)
- D: Are there any regulations for a *saṁnyāsin*?
- A: There are regulations for those who have taken *saṁnyāsa* but have not attained *jñāna*. However, there are no obligatory norms for *saṁnyāsin*-s who have attained the Supreme.
- D: If a *saṁnyāsin* does not get food for some days, should he make efforts to get food or should he keep quiet thinking, “I will not try to get it even if my spiritual life is affected.”
- A: The *saṁnyāsin* who has realised the Truth need not worry about food or death. However, if an unenlightened *saṁnyāsin* feels that his spiritual practices will be compromised, he may, if he wishes, make some more effort for *bhikṣā*.
- D: Does not the word *cāturmāsya* mean four months? But nowadays, *saṁnyāsin*-s remain in a place only for two months. Has this been permitted in the *śāstra*-s?
- A: Yes.
- D: Do *saṁnyāsin*-s need to observe *ahiṁsā* as a *mahāvratā*?
- A: Yes. *Saṁnyāsin*-s must practise *ahiṁsā* at all times. For them, it is a *mahāvratā*.
- D: Is it the duty of *saṁnyāsin*-s to induce others to get *jñāna*?
- A: There is no rule that a *saṁnyāsin* must guide others towards realisation. There is nothing wrong if he lives on his own. However, by training disciples, he becomes a *Guru*.
- D: Is there any rule to the effect that all those who have attained *jñāna* should, without exception, take up formal *saṁnyāsa*?

- A: No. If *Īśvara* feels that it would be better if they remain in the midst of the world, He will keep them in an *āśrama* other than *saṁnyāsa*. However, I do not mean by this that a householder's life is better.
- D: Will a man who has attained *jñāna* care for *saṁnyāsa*? Why should one lead a *saṁnyāsin*'s life after *jñāna* dawns?
- A: It is not that he puts in great effort and takes up *saṁnyāsa*. Actions wither away from him of their own accord. Thus, he becomes a *vidvat-saṁnyāsin* to remain as an undisturbed *jīvanmukta*.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Forbearance and ahimsā are vital characteristics of a saṁnyāsin. The following incident shows that Acharyal had imbibed these virtues even as a young boy.*

Even in His childhood, Sri Srinivasa Sastry (*Acharyal*'s name before His *saṁnyāsa*) was ever uncomplaining. One day, His friends decided to test the limits of His forbearance. Fetching a stick, they began to beat Him with it. He bore their unprovoked onslaught without a murmur. When the boys stopped, aghast at how far they had gone in testing Him, He won their hearts with kind words. He also told them the following story:

A Buddhist monk was unjustly tortured by a monarch. The king finally softened and, feeling ashamed, begged the monk's pardon. As an act of atonement, he catered to the subsequent needs of the monk. Thus, merely by forbearance, the monk was able to humble the emperor. Sri Srinivasa Sastry's friends hung their heads in shame on hearing the tale.

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On many an occasion *Paramacharyal* (Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal) had spoken to Sri

Srinivasa Sastry about the futility of leading a worldly life. This had kindled some queries in the mind of Sri Srinivasa Sastry, who posed them to Vaidyanatha Sastry. These were:

1. I have heard that the eldest son in the family must compulsorily get married. Is it so?
2. Our *Guru* embraced monasticism after becoming highly erudite. Is it obligatory that one acquire deep knowledge of the scriptures prior to renouncing the world?
3. I have heard that when one is born, immediately a set of debts accrues to one. Some of these are repaid by serving one's parents, some by worshipping the *deva-s* and yet others by begetting progeny. Is this indeed the state of affairs?
4. Is one permitted to enter another *āśrama*, only after dwelling for long as a *brahmacārin* in the hermitage of the *Guru*?
5. Can a young boy like Me take up *samnyāsa* if he desires to? Parents may not grant permission. Can *samnyāsa* be taken up without their approval?

During the course of one of His talks with the students, *Paramacharyal*, of His own accord, proceeded to give a detailed exposition. He said that marriage is compulsory only for a person who wants to enjoy sensual pleasures. It is not obligatory on one who has strong dispassion to lead a householder's life. Further, there is no injunction in the *Veda-s* that a dispassionate one should get married. The *Veda-s* indicate remedies for the removal of desires and never exhort the gratification of longings or procreation. Just as fond parents would only try to save their child from falling into fire and would not induce it to tumble into it, so too do the *Veda-s* indicate the means for people to abstain from bad ways and to proceed in the holy path. In fact, the moment one becomes extremely dispassionate, one can renounce and become an ascetic. Thus, a man can become an ascetic regardless of whether he is a celibate or a householder or a forest-dweller.

*Paramacharyal* went on to explain the futility of begetting a child. He strengthened His explanations by various citations and firmly drove home His points. For instance, He said that only rarely one happens to get a son who is endowed with all good qualities. Even on such a son being born, if the lad were to be shortlived or diseased or were to later have no children, the parents would have to put up with mental suffering. If a young child were to suffer on account of diseases or planetary influences, the grief of the parents would know no end. If the child were to grow up a little but were to be stupid, then too the parents would be far from happy. Further, if after *upanayana*, the boy were not to become learned or, if learned, he were to refuse to get married, then also the parents would suffer agony.

*Paramacharyal* explained that *śrāddha* (a rite performed for the deceased parents) is an obligatory duty that purifies the performer. He emphasised that the manes do not sustain themselves exclusively on the *piṇḍa* (ball of cooked rice) that is offered during the *śrāddha* ceremony. He went on to add that the stories found in texts like the *Mahābhārata* about the necessity of offspring are not meant for advanced spiritual aspirants who have strong dispassion. All the queries raised earlier by Sri Srinivasa Sastry were thus categorically answered by *Paramacharyal*; neither He nor Vaidyanatha Sastry had mentioned them to *Paramacharyal*.

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*Acharyal once narrated the following information to a disciple:*

Two days before taking *saṁnyāsa*, I had thought, “Dreams are not under My control. Mistakes committed in them do not result in sin. Nevertheless, My renunciation should be so sincere and firm that after being initiated into *saṁnyāsa*, I should not see Myself in any dream as clad in white as I am now. I love chanting the *Gāyatrī-mantra*. Yet, as *Gāyatrī-japa* is disallowed for *paramahaṁsa-saṁnyāsin-s*, I should not engage in it even in My

dreams from the day after tomorrow.” By God’s grace, till today, this has come to pass.

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### □ Experiences of Devotees

Once during one of *Acharyal*’s visits to Delhi, I was desirous of making a special wooden cot for Him to sleep on, as the weather was extremely chill. Later, I found that His Holiness did not lie on it but on the floor. Anxious, I submitted, “I have arranged for the cot exclusively for Your Holiness’ use. It is brand new and no one has used it so far. I will be very happy if Your Holiness uses it.” *Acharyal* smiled and said, “Yes, I will.” Later, I was surprised to find that He used it only to keep His articles on that and to occasionally sit on that, but not for sleeping. He continued to sleep on the floor unmindful of the testing weather condition.

[Dr. H.C.Visvesvaraya]

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### □ Parables of Acharyal

*Acharyal* once narrated a humorous tale concerning pseudo-samnyāsin-s.

A *samnyāsin* was not observing any regulations with regard to food and spiritual practices. A householder approached him and asked, “You do not seem to be observing any regulations whatsoever. You eat as you wish, spend your time loitering and do acts that are unbecoming of a *samnyāsin*. Is it proper for you to be like this?” The *samnyāsin* replied, “Everything is Brahman. The body and the mind perform actions whereas I am the pure, conscious *Ātman* which is unstained. As such, it matters little to me what the body and the mind do. Indeed everything is Brahman.”

The householder queried, “Will you come to my house for *bhikṣā*?” “Yes”, replied the *samnyāsin*, “I have no objections. To me, who revels in the *Ātman*, nothing matters. I shall come.” That afternoon, the *samnyāsin* went to the householder’s place and sat

down to have a meal. However, his host did not offer him even a drop of water. As minutes passed, he became restless. His host deliberately ignored his uneasiness. Finally, unable to withstand the delay any longer, he shouted, “What do you mean by keeping me waiting? I am quite hungry. Serve me fast.”

The householder came up to him and said, “I fail to realise how hunger and thirst could arise in you who are totally immersed in the bliss of the *Ātman*. You are all-pervasive, for, such is the nature of the *Ātman*. I am unable to offer you water, for, being omnipresent, you already pervade it from within and without.” The *saṁnyāsin* got up saying, “Do not speak like that. I am unable to bear my hunger.” He then left in search of food.

This *saṁnyāsin* lacked self-control and dispassion. Hence, he did not adhere to the rules meant for unenlightened mendicants. He misused *Advaita* philosophy merely to explain away his misconduct. His unrestrained behaviour fetched him much sin; his *Advaitic* declarations offered him no protection from demerits.

Nowadays many take up *saṁnyāsa* but without anyone to initiate them into it. For their *saṁnyāsa*, about ten rupees are sufficient. They just go to a shop and say, “Give me a cloth which is ochre-coloured.” Unlike normal *saṁnyāsin*-s whose clothing is drab, they want theirs to be resplendent. So, they specify, “Give me a cloth which is ochre-coloured and resplendent.” They wear it and wander about as *saṁnyāsin*-s!

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## 27. CONTROLLING THE MIND

- D: Many people find it difficult to do *dhyāna* as their mind wanders in many directions. What advice would *Acharyal* give to enable such people to practise *dhyāna* well?
- A: Actually, *dhyāna* is a secret. The *Guru* instructs only after keeping in mind the competence of the disciple. As for mind-control, though it is difficult it is quite possible.
- D: Some people say that it is just impossible for them to control the mind. What about them?
- A: Give a bundle of hundred rupee notes to the person who says that it is just impossible to control his mind. Ask him to count the notes without making mistakes. After he finishes this task, ask him if his mind wandered while he was counting. You will indeed get the reply, “It did not.” The mind does not wander while a person is counting his salary. What is the reason for this? It is only the feeling that there should not be any error. Why will the mind wander if such a feeling is had while practising *dhyāna* also?

Arjuna says:

cañcalaṁ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavad-dṛḍham ।  
tasyāhaṁ nigrahaṁ manye vāyoriva suduṣkaram ॥<sup>44</sup>

(BG, VI. 34)

(O Kṛṣṇa! The mind is restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate. I think controlling it is more difficult than restraining the wind.)

Lord Kṛṣṇa responds:

asamśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calam ।  
abhyāseṇa tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate ॥<sup>45</sup>

(BG, VI. 35)

(O son of Kuntī! No doubt it is difficult to control the mind. Yet, by practice and dispassion, it can be controlled.)

- D: What is *abhyāsa* (practice)?
- A: Effort to keep the mind focussed is termed practice.
- D: In what sense is the word dispassion used here?
- A: When one has no attachment to any material or heavenly enjoyments, one is said to be dispassionate. Dispassion is the foundation for spiritual life.
- D: How should dispassion be cultivated?
- A: *Vairāgya* can appear in many ways. When one's close relative dies, one may not want anything in this world. Such dispassion is temporary and is not spiritually significant. Steady dispassion is born of *viveka* (discrimination). For instance, we discriminate between *sat* (that which is ever existent, the reality) and what is other than *sat*. The *vairāgya* that is produced by such analysis will remain steady. An easier analysis is, "There is no happiness at all for me from any object." This is a lower grade of *viveka*. One can develop *vairāgya* even through this *viveka*.
- D: How can it be said that happiness is not at all derived from objects? When something desired is eaten or when some other enjoyment is had, happiness does arise.
- A: No. If carefully analysed, it will be perceived that happiness is not obtained from objects. If a certain thing is to be the

cause of another, the rules of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* (concordance and discordance) should be satisfied. The existence of the effect when the cause is present is *anvaya* (concordance). The absence of the effect in the absence of the cause is *vyatireka* (discordance). Consider an example. Mud is the cause of a pot. Only if mud exists can the pot exist. This is *anvaya*. When there is no mud, there is no pot. This is *vyatireka*. For a cause-effect relationship to exist, *anvaya* and *vyatireka* should be satisfied. If an object is to be the cause and happiness the effect, the said rule must be satisfied between the two. However, it is not. Hence, objects cannot be the cause of happiness.

- D: Will *Acharyal* kindly explain this with an illustration?
- A: Suppose that a boy is eating a sweet. Let us now analyse whether that dish is the cause of happiness. If the boy is given the sweet when he is ill, it does not make him happy. So, no happiness is derived though the eatable is present. Further, even in the absence of the sweet, the boy can be happy, in the company of friends. Therefore, the sweet dish cannot be the cause of happiness.
- D: When one object is absent, we get happiness through another object. Hence, even if an isolated object cannot be the cause, why cannot objects collectively become the cause of happiness?
- A: Even this assumption does not hold good. Everyone experiences happiness during deep sleep. On waking up we say, "I slept happily. I was aware of nothing." During deep sleep, no object whatsoever is present. Nevertheless, we do enjoy sleep. So, it cannot also be said that a collection of objects is the cause of happiness. It cannot also be asserted that even if one object is absent, some other object is always present to give happiness.
- D: If objects do not cause happiness, how does a man get happiness when a desired object is obtained?

- A: It is only because of mental peace. When a person desires an object, his mind is restless because of longing. Hence, during that period, there is no happiness. When the object is secured, the desire for it subsides. Hence, the mind becomes peaceful, and one enjoys happiness. Subsequently, a desire for something else arises and mental peace is lost. So, happiness disappears. When that desire is consummated, there is peace again and, so, happiness. Normally, man does not perceive that there is a gap separating two thoughts and does not realise that the happiness is due to mental peace. Further, one also falls prey to the wrong notion that an object is what is responsible for happiness.
- D: If one recognises that mental peace gives happiness and not objects, can one thereby get *vairāgya*?
- A: Yes. If one repeatedly notes that happiness does not stem from objects and that they are worthless, one becomes dispassionate. For example, one wanting to neutralise the desire for wealth could think, “I have to work hard to earn money. Even preserving the earned money is difficult. There is pain when it is lost or becomes spent. Wealth thus causes not happiness but unhappiness.” To tackle desire for women, a person can reflect, “Her body is full of blood and flesh.” By repeatedly thinking in this fashion, desires can be neutralised. Dispassion makes the mind steady and peaceful. Only a dispassionate mind is fit for practising *dhyāna*. A dispassionate person can attain even the Supreme state.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal* has said that due to the grace of Iswara and owing to the practices done in the past lives, He was endowed with a mind that was never given to wandering. A *yogin* par excellence, *Acharyal* kept His mind under complete control.

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Every day *Acharyal* attended to a huge pile of letters from His various devotees, not only from India but also from abroad. Once when I was reading mails for *Acharyal* and was noting down His replies, I read a letter from a devotee who had mentioned about his problems with minding his senses and about his mind getting distracted during meditation. *Acharyal* answered, “As long as an object is thought of to be good, it is natural that a want develops in respect of that object. By discrimination, when one sees the worthlessness inherent in it, the craving, and the resultant distraction cease by themselves. “*Doṣa dhṛṣṭyā muhurmuḥuḥ*” (by repeatedly perceiving faults in sense objects). No matter what the object is, it is sought after only if one sees plus points in it.” So He replied looking at Sri Giridhara Sastry. Turning to me He said, “What else? That is all. An object perceived as faulty does not generate a desire.” He nodded in question at me as if to ensure what He had said had been grasped by me. “Yes”, I said meaning that I had paid attention to what I thought were *Acharyal*’s instructions to me. It was the last day (16th September, 1989), mails from devotees were taken to *Acharyal*.

[Sri H.N.Shankar]

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## □ Experiences of Devotees

*Acharyal* has advised many methods to keep one’s mind under control. On an occasion, He advised me one such method. “Steadfastness to the effect, ‘now my mind must remain focussed on *Bhagavān*’ has to be engendered. Else, the mind will continue to roam hither and thither.” I felt great joy on this spontaneous advice from *Acharyal*.

[Sri K.Srinivasan]

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*Acharyal* was ever in a state of equipoise and total peace. Once, in Coimbatore, *Acharyal* visited the *Śārādā* temple and I

went to have His *darśana*. A function was in progress. All kinds of people were around and the sound level was pretty high. Nadaswaram was being played loudly. Apart from noise there was smoke from the *homa-kunḍa*, and odour from flowers and fruits. I was finding it very difficult to sit amidst the din and bustle, crowd, smoke and sweat. But, *Acharyal* was sitting on the dais, completely at peace, with a beautiful smile on His face, eyes half closed. I thought that this was the greatest sight I had ever seen because I could not take my eyes off Him.

When I went to see Him some time later in Sringeri, I was thinking that it would be nice if I saw Him again in that state. At that time, He was very busy and was also ill. So I told Him, “*Gurunātha*, I think You are exerting too much and I think You really should take rest. If You were not *Acharyal*, I would not have allowed You to take up all these responsibilities.” He said, “What do you want Me to do? I personally would like to sit like this and meditate.” Saying so, He went into a trance! I did not know what to say. Once again, I had the opportunity to behold Him seated on the dais, glowing with *tejas*.

[Dr.G.Lakshmipathy]

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## 28. DHYĀNA

- D: What is meant by *dhyāna*?
- A: *Dhyāna* is the state wherein the mind concentrates on just one object.
- D: What is the main advantage of practising *dhyāna*?
- A: If mental concentration is achieved by practice, the mind can then be turned towards *Īśvara*, and being thus purified, it can be directed towards the *Ātman*, which is formless and devoid of attributes. By doing this, one attains the state of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the culmination of *dhyāna*, wherein one realises the Truth.
- D: Though meditation can do so much good, why is it very difficult to practise?
- A: The difficulty in controlling the mind is indeed the reason.
- D: How can the mind be controlled?
- A: The Lord has said that practice and dispassion are the means.
- D: What are the obstacles to get *dhyāna*?
- A: Do you ask about obstacles during meditation or those arising at other times?
- D: I am asking about the obstacles that prevent one from attaining *samādhi* during meditation.

- A: The first among the obstacles is *vikṣepa*; that is, the mind wanders in all directions. This is the foremost obstacle. The second is the mind attaining a dull state. Of course, *vikṣepa* is absent. Even this is bad. If one attains an inert condition similar to sleep, one will not reach the Supreme state. *Sakaṣāya* is the third obstacle. This is a state wherein there is neither *vikṣepa* nor mental inertness. It gives a sort of happiness, but in it the seed of desire is not destroyed. This is unlike *samādhi*. One should carefully go beyond even this. Gauḍapādācārya has said:

laye saṁbodhayeccittaṁ vikṣiptaṁ śamayetpunaḥ |  
sakaṣāyaṁ vijānīyāt samaprāptaṁ na cālayet ||<sup>46</sup>

(GK, III. 44)

(If the mind is in a state of torpor, it should be woken up. If it is dispersed amongst objects, it should be calmed down. If it is latent with the seed of desire, that condition should be recognised. One should not disturb the mind established in equipoise.)

- D: How can we calm down the distracted mind?
- A: We should turn the mind repeatedly to the object of meditation. With growth of dispassion, *vikṣepa* subsides. During meditation, the conviction that meditation alone is important should exist. The feeling that the form or sound being meditated upon is actually present is useful in focussing the mind.
- D: What is to be done if the mind becomes dull or sleepy?
- A: If a person is alert, he can discern that his mind is becoming passive and dull. By sensing the onset of torpor and awakening and focussing the mind, he can deal with dullness. The *japa* that is being done may be intensified. If this is done, the mind will become alert. But if, in spite of effort, the mind continues to drift into the state of torpor, it is advisable to take a small break, have a walk and then recommence *dhyāna*. On certain occasions, the mind should

not be forced to meditate. If there is tiredness, it is advisable to commence *dhyāna* after a break. But, if indolence is the reason for the dullness, one should force the mind to continue with meditation.

D: Is it necessary to do *japa* during *dhyāna*?

A: While doing *saguṇa-upāsanā*, *japa* is very useful in the beginning. It helps the mind to be calm. As the mind locks on to the object of *dhyāna*, *japa* ceases of its own accord. Thus, there is often no need to stop *japa* wilfully.

D: How should meditation on a form be practised?

A: Techniques vary and different aspirants have to be instructed differently. A common code of instructions cannot be prescribed. I shall spell out one method. One can proceed with the notion that one's *iṣṭa-devatā* (favourite deity) is seated in the lotus of one's heart. If one finds it difficult to visualise and focus on the pertinent form of the Lord, one can take the aid of a picture of the deity. *Japa* should be done while looking at the picture. Then, after partially closing the eyes, one should try to meditate on the deity, with the idea that one is actually seeing the deity. The mind may focus for a while, without wandering. But once the mind starts wandering, one can open one's eyes and look at the picture again. This can be followed by meditation, with the eyes partially closed. If the attempt is repeated in this manner, the form of the *iṣṭa-devatā* will remain in one's mind, without the need for looking at the picture. This is one of the methods of practising meditation. Meditating on sound is another method. Mahārṣi Patañjali prescribes the general rule:

yathā'bhimata-dhyānādvā ।<sup>47</sup>

(YS, I. 39)

(Or, by meditating on any desired, permitted object.)

The *Guru* determines the method that is best suited to his disciple.

- D: Is it advisable to do meditation when one is not keeping good health?
- A: That depends on the extent of ill health. Those who have considerably advanced in meditation will be able to meditate whenever they wish to. But those who are still in the beginning stages may be able to meditate only when they are keeping good health. Increasing the practice of meditation yields correspondingly better fruits. This does not, however, imply that one should sit so long as to strain the mind. Experts in meditation can concentrate for hours together. But if one who is not versed in meditation tries to sit for hours in *dhyāna*, only unpleasant memories will be generated. Besides, headache or some other pain may make its appearance.
- D: How should *nirguṇa-dhyāna* (meditation on the Self devoid of attributes) be practised?
- A: While doing *nirguṇa-dhyāna*, one need not take the aid of any divine form or *japa*. It is suited to those who have attained high levels in the practice of *dhyāna*. Meditation on that which is bereft of form and attributes is *nirguṇa-dhyāna*. It leads to *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the highest state of meditation. No unique method exists for practising it. One of the methods for this is as follows. First, the rise and fall of thoughts should be just watched, with the conviction that there is no connection between oneself and the thoughts. Gradually, the thoughts automatically subside. Another method consists in directly putting a stop to all mental wandering and then firmly thinking, "I am pure consciousness and bliss." During *nirguṇa-dhyāna*, awareness of the body is absent.
- D: Why do some experience bodily jerks at times during meditation?

A: It normally means that the body is weak. It can also be due to the influence of the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*. Meditation can be continued without worrying about minor jerks.

D: Where should meditation be performed?

A: In a calm and pure place.

D: Is it advisable to sit on some special seat?

A: Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

caillājīnakuśottaram<sup>48</sup>

(BG, VI. 11)

The seat recommended comprises a mat of *kuśa* grass, on which deerskin is spread, with a cloth being spread on the deerskin.

D: Many desire meditation sincerely but still are not able to do it properly. Why is it so?

A: It may seem that they greatly long for meditation, but is it actually so? No. Even a little analysis of the life of most people shows that they do not attach adequate importance to meditation. Sleep, food, office, examination, etc., get higher priority than meditation. If it is time for the office, that is the end of meditation. Further, even when they sit for meditation, they do not sit with the idea, “Let anything happen in this world. I need only meditation now.” This apart, meditation is difficult in this birth for those who have not practised it much in their previous births. By the same rule, those who had practised much meditation will now find *dhyāna* easy. Swimming is initially difficult. It becomes easy with practice. That is the case here also.

D: When one is seated for meditation, will the resolve, “I am not going to give room to any worry or worldly thought” be helpful?

A: Yes.

D: It stands to reason that he who has intense *vairāgya* should be easily able to forget the world when he sits for meditation. However, we see some persons with intense dispassion who are unable to meditate well. Will *Acharyal* clarify the reason for this?

A: Normally, *dhyāna* is easy for those who have intense dispassion. However, because of their not having duly practised mediation in their previous births, some deeply dispassionate ones may experience difficulty in achieving intense focus during meditation.

D: If one is defeated again and again when trying to meditate, will not one become disheartened and irritated?

A: Giving place to disheartenment or irritation is equivalent to one standing as an obstacle in one's own way. Even to get a degree, one has to go to college and study for years. What then need be said about the effort required to achieve success in *dhyāna*, which is very subtle and far superior? Not only do people not put in the same effort as they do for obtaining a degree but they dare to say that they feel irritated and frustrated. You can see for yourself how fair this is. Maharṣi Patañjali has said in his *Yogasūtra*-s:

sa tu dīrgha-kāla-nairantarya-satkārāsevito dṛḍha-bhūmiḥ ।<sup>49</sup>

(YS, I. 14)

(It becomes firmly rooted when practised for a long time, without any break and with sincerity.)

If people could successfully accomplish *dhyāna* in days or a few months, the sage's aphorism would be meaningless.

D: Even those who are able to get good meditation may experience fluctuations in their level of meditation. On certain days, their meditation is very good but on certain other occasions, it is unsatisfactory. What should be done to get good meditation always?

- A: Ill health, unrestricted food, laziness, worries, desires, etc., remain as impediments to *dhyāna*. Therefore, if we strive and remove these obstacles, *dhyāna* will become steady. If the problem persists, then, without giving any room for worry, further efforts should be made. If meditation gets spoilt because of a particular powerful obstacle, one should, with the guidance of a *Guru*, remove it by a specifically directed effort. All this apart, advantage can be taken of the fact that the mind is naturally peaceful at certain times of the day, such as dawn and dusk.
- D: Is *dhyāna* alone sufficient to control desires?
- A: Those who attain the highest state of meditation, namely *samādhi*, can destroy desire through it. For others, meditation alone can be insufficient. Mental impressions are generated or strengthened when one thinks of or resorts to objects of desire while one is not in meditation. These tendencies tend to overpower those produced during meditation. Therefore, when one is not doing meditation, one should assiduously cultivate dispassion by the perception of faults in objects. Studying scriptural texts daily and contemplating on the ideas expressed therein help one to conquer desires. The company of sages is very helpful in curbing longings.

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

*Acharyal was endowed with a great felicity for meditation. He has said that He had practised a number of techniques, not out of necessity, but with a view to be of guidance to a wide variety of seekers. What follows is His teaching about meditation:*

*Dhyāna* is the one-pointed fixation of the mind on the object of concentration. Bhagavatpāda, in His *Gītā-bhaṣya*, speaks of *dhyāna*, as the proximate means to Self realisation. Basically, *dhyāna* is of two types (1) *saguṇa* and (2) *nirguṇa*.

In *saguṇa-dhyāna*, one meditates on a form or sound while these are absent in *nirguṇa-dhyāna*. The final aim of *dhyāna* is to bring the spiritual aspirant face to face with the Truth. *Saguṇa-dhyāna* must be practised till one is competent to perform *nirguṇa-dhyāna*. This does not, however, preclude the possibility of one who is an adept in *nirguṇa-dhyāna* performing *saguṇa-dhyāna*. The actual method of spiritual discipline to be practised is to be decided only by the *Guru* and the procedure is likely to vary from person to person on account of differences in temperament, state of spiritual development, conditions and the like. This being the case it is not possible to describe a unique way of practising meditation.

One method of performing *saguṇa-dhyāna*, which is suitable to many, is concentration on one's *iṣṭa-devatā* as seated in a red lotus in one's heart. One should imagine the red-petalled lotus in full bloom with the *iṣṭa-devatā* seated in it in the manner described in the appropriate *dhyāna-śloka*. Concentrating one's mind on the form of the *iṣṭa-devatā* one should perform *japa*.

Another method of performing *saguṇa-dhyāna* is to imagine the *iṣṭa-devatā* as seated in front of the *sādhaka*. To some this may be easier than concentrating on the *iṣṭa-devatā* in the heart. Another method is to meditate upon a *jyotis* (effulgence) in the space between the eyebrows, while performing *nāma-japa*. Meditation on *Guru* can also be practised.

These methods of meditation may be very difficult for some who are unable to mentally, clearly visualise their *iṣṭa-devatā*. For them, a simple method would be to sit in front of a picture of the *iṣṭa-devatā*, look at the picture and perform *japa*. Because of the presence of the picture, the difficulty in visualising the *iṣṭa-devatā*'s form is reduced. *Japa* may be done either audibly or with the lips moving but without sound coming out or mentally, the last one being the best. As one gains in concentration, one can begin to close his eyes for brief periods of time and visualise the *iṣṭa-devatā* as seen in the picture. With due practice, meditation can be performed without the aid of the picture. *Saguṇa-dhyāna* can also

be done by concentrating one's mind on the *mantra* alone, without taking recourse to the form of the *iṣṭa-devatā*.

Two types of difficulties are generally encountered when people practise *saguna-dhyāna*. These difficulties are (1) extraneous thoughts keep disturbing the meditation process and, (2) the aspirant feels sleepy. The inability to keep one's mind fixed on the object of meditation is a difficulty which almost all *sādhaka*-s face. It is only an exceptionally few people who, on account of the great spiritual discipline practised in the previous births, that do not encounter this problem.

The method of tackling this problem consists in being vigilant at the time of meditation. If the mind wanders, it should be brought back to the object of meditation. In most cases, it is futile to attempt to simply force the mind to remain on the object of meditation. Therefore, as and when the mind goes out, one has no other choice but to watch its movement and bring it back. A slight aid is to hold one's breath for a moment or two when one finds the mind going out. This will block the outward-going trend of the mind for that period or at least reduce the intensity of its outward-going tendency.

Another aid is to visualise the presence of the *iṣṭa-devatā* in whatever object the mind chooses to think about. By doing this, the mind is made to think of the *iṣṭa-devatā*. Uttering the *japa* with somewhat greater vigour also helps one in gaining control. If one notices the commencement of distraction, more than half the problem is solved as one can fixate the mind again on the object of meditation. In most cases people become aware that the mind has deviated from the object of concentration only after some time has elapsed. Vigilance, stressing on the mind about the transitory nature of external objects, and their inability to produce any happiness should be practised in order to hold the wandering mind. Perception of faults in the objects, towards which the mind runs, acts as a brake on the wandering mind. These are some aids to which one may take recourse to curb the wandering of the mind,

but it must be borne in mind that these are, as it were, emergency measures adopted during the course of the meditation period.

In *nirguṇa-dhyāna*, one does not resort to any form or sound. Here, the mind is focussed on the Supreme *Ātman* which is beyond all name and form and which defies any positive conception. *Nirguṇa-dhyāna* leads to *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the highest state of meditation, where one directly ‘experiences’ the Supreme reality.

*Brahmacarya*, complete faith in the *Guru*, *bhakti*, *vairāgya* and practice are all very necessary to achieve success in meditation.

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*In some rare public discourses, Acharyal has dwelt on the procedures for saṅgūṇa and nirguṇa dhyāna. Here is an excerpt from a speech delivered by Him at Chennai, in the year 1982, on nirguṇa-dhyāna:*

Can *nirguṇa-dhyāna* be done? Yes, it can be performed. How should it be done? Initially, one should look at a light for a few moments. When one does so, worldly concerns are forgotten. Even the thought, “I am forgetting”, will be absent. At that juncture, the eyes should be closed. Next, one should feel, “The eyes are seeing within.” Spontaneously, an effulgence will manifest. Unlike common illumination, it is generally blue-hued. At times it resembles moonlight. Feeling that the gaze is in-drawn, we should hold on to the thought, “I am pure consciousness” and realise consciousness as all pervasive. If we do so, the process will culminate in *asamprajñata-samādhi*. We can, by this method, attain *asamprajñata-samādhi* and thereby get realisation of the Self.

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## 29. NIRVIKALPA-SAMĀDHI

- D: Will one's breathing completely stop when one attains *nirvikalpa-samādhī*?
- A: No, breathing persists to a small extent.
- D: What is the characteristic of *nirvikalpa-samādhī*?
- A: The absence of awareness of the distinction of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing is indeed its special characteristic. The *Ātman* is clearly perceived. Further, supreme bliss is experienced.
- D: Will there actually be a positive experience of supreme bliss in *nirvikalpa-samādhī* or is there merely the absence of sorrow?
- A: There is not only the absence of sorrow but also the attainment of supreme bliss. Even in *jaḍa-samādhī* the bliss of the *Ātman* is experienced but to a much lower degree.
- D: I heard that *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* is present in *nirvikalpa-samādhī*. *Acharyal* said that there is no awareness of the distinctness of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing in *nirvikalpa-samādhī*. If so, will the knowledge of *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* be there in *samādhī*?
- (*Akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* is a plenary mental activity having the *Ātman* for the object.)

- A: No. When one is in the state of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, one will not be aware of the presence of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*.
- D: If so, how can it be said that the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* existed during *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: One can know that by means of inference and scriptural statements. If recollection is to arise, there should have been a preceding experience. When the mind comes down from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, there is a memory to the effect that supreme bliss was experienced earlier. For the memory to be present, there should have been an experience. If there is to be an experience connected with the mind, there should have been a thought. That mental *vṛtti* is called *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*.
- D: An object is required for a thought to arise in the mind. What is the object of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*?
- A: The *Ātman*.
- D: When an object is perceived, the mind assumes its form. Only then does knowledge of the object arise. In dreams too, the mind assumes the form of what is seen, with the difference that the senses do not play a role. So, in both waking and dream states the *vṛtti* assumes the form of an object. *Acharyal* said that *Ātman* alone is grasped by *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*. How can *Ātman* become an object of the *vṛtti* as It does not have a form at all?
- A: When it is said that the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*'s object is the *Ātman*, what is implied is that the mind is so extremely pure at that time that it just cannot be discerned distinctly from Brahman. The mind is then like a pure crystal. The effulgent *Ātman* manifests in it clearly. Just as a crystal, when placed in the vicinity of a red flower appears red, so also is the nature of the *Ātman* assumed by the mind. This *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* is the one that destroys ignorance.
- D: Will a single experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* be sufficient to attain *brahma-jñāna*?

- A: Normally, it is not sufficient. During *nirvikalpa-samādhi* the *Ātman* is experienced. After emergence from that state, the experience gradually begins to fade. However, just after coming down from it, everything is perceived as *Ātman*. Nothing distinct from the *Ātman* is discerned. To cite an example, one feels, “I am a big ocean. It is in me that the bubbles constituted by the world are produced.” The experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* must be had to be understood. Verbal descriptions are woefully inadequate. If one gets the experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* repeatedly, one’s *jñāna* becomes stable. After the realisation becomes stable, the mind is destroyed and one becomes a *jīvanmukta*.
- D: Why should one descend from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: If *prārabdha* is not exhausted one is obliged to emerge even from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. We can find different illustrations for this in the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*.
- D: Can one attain *jñāna* without experiencing *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: *Jñāna* is nothing but the knowledge of one’s True nature. Technically, it can be obtained even through just *vicāra* (enquiry). *Nirvikalpa-samādhi* is a wonderful means but it is improper to say that it is the only means.
- D: During *nirvikalpa-samādhi* will there be an awareness of oneself and the surroundings?
- A: No.
- D: Can one be awakened from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: In most cases, it can be done with some difficulty. Sometimes, it becomes almost impossible to wake one up. All this depends on the depth of the *samādhi*.
- D: Can one predetermine the duration of one’s stay in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?

- A: Yes, if there is sufficient practice. If a suitable resolve is made, before going into *samādhi*, one can descend from the exalted condition at the predetermined time. For example, if one thinks, “I will do *pūjā* in an hour”, and goes into *samādhi*, then one can come down from *samādhi* after being in that state for exactly one hour.
- D: Will *Acharya* kindly explain the experiences that precede the onset of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: It is impossible to give a precise description and the steps preceding *nirvikalpa-samādhi* are not unique. However, I will give a rough account of what can happen. First, awareness of the body and the surroundings gradually vanishes. Then, only the thoughts of the mind are perceived. As meditation proceeds further, mental activity subsides. One feels, “I have become infinite like the sky.” Then comes a great blissful experience. After this, there is a sudden change and awareness of the differentiation of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing ceases. That experience is completely beyond words.
- D: What is the procedure to be adopted to attain *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: Usually, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* can be attained if one repeatedly gets *savikalpa-samādhi*.
- D: Will the awareness of the distinction of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing cease in *savikalpa-samādhi* also?
- A: No. It ceases only in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. The term *savikalpa-samādhi* itself shows that this is a *samādhi* with the distinction of the seer, seen and seeing present.
- D: Will the joy got in *savikalpa-samādhi* be the same as that in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: No. The joy of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is unparalleled. But it can be said that the happiness obtained in *savikalpa-samādhi* is

very great when compared to the joy derived from sense-objects.

- D: Can it be said that liberation will definitely be had by one who arranges for his death in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: It cannot be said so. *Mokṣa* can be attained when *jñāna* becomes thoroughly unobstructed and fructifies. If *prārabdha* remains and one arranges to have oneself killed in *samādhi*, rebirth can occur.
- D: Can it be said that if one dies while in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, one can attain *jñāna* easily in one's next birth?
- A: Yes. It may be said thus.
- D: Is there a possibility for one to fall from spiritual life even after attaining *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: Yes, there is the possibility of a fall, until complete, firm realisation of the Truth arises. I have come across persons who have slipped after *nirvikalpa-samādhi*.
- D: Can *nirvikalpa-samādhi* be obtained by means of drugs, self-hypnosis, etc.?
- A: No.
- D: Is it possible to feel thirst, hunger etc., immediately after the mind comes down from prolonged *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- A: These are normally not felt. Rarely, a little body ache may be felt because of the body having remained erect and motionless for long.
- D: Will *Acharyal* say something about *nirvikalpa-samādhi* from personal experience?
- A: (Smiling) Do you think that all the while I was merely repeating like a parrot what is contained in the *śāstra-s*?

## □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal describes the event that marked His attainment of nirvikalpa-samādhi for the first time:*

Before going for meditation, I decided, “I should, during My meditation this evening, prevent Myself from being overwhelmed by the bliss of *savikalpa-samādhi*. Then, by impressing upon Myself that I am bliss itself and not one who enjoys it, I should focus My mind more thoroughly on the *Ātman*. Once My mind were to become fully established on the *Ātman* and devoid of every transformation of a form other than that of the *Ātman*, how can any distinction between bliss and the one experiencing bliss or, for that matter, any other subject-object distinction and the sense of individuality show up at all? By establishing the mind on the *Ātman* and remaining without any thought, I would be acting in accordance with the instruction, “One should gradually withdraw with the intellect endued with firmness; making the mind established in the *Ātman*, one should not think of anything.”

I reached My place of meditation on the hill around one and a half hours before sunset. Sitting in the *siddhāsana*, I performed two cycles of *prāṇāyāma* together with the *jālandhara*, *udḍiyāna* and *mūla bandha*-s to promote mental tranquillity. Then, as usual, I directed My gaze towards the centre of My brows and chanted the *prāṇava*. That day, I beheld an unbounded expanse of blue, resembling the sky.

The notion, “I am the non-dual Brahman apart from which nothing whatsoever exists” that was prominent and naturally persistent since the previous evening, had been intensified by My *savikalpa-samādhi*-s of the morning and by My reading and reflection of the afternoon. So, I did not have to cultivate it. I had barely seen the soothing expanse of blue when it vanished. I felt Myself expanding and becoming like space. The sense of ‘I’ nearly vanished and My mind entered *savikalpa-samādhi*.

The bliss was very great. However, with effort, I restrained Myself from being overwhelmed by it and thought, “I am not the

one experiencing bliss but am bliss itself.” In a trice, a sharp change occurred. Awareness of the distinction of the concentrator, concentration and the object of concentration completely disappeared. No more was there any sense of individuality or of space, time and objects. Only Brahman, of the nature of absolute existence, pure consciousness and ultimate bliss, shone bereft of the superimposition of even a trace of duality.

After about two hours, the mind descended to the level of *savikalpa-samādhi*, and mild awareness of the distinction of the concentrator, concentration and the object of concentration reappeared. Though the bliss of *savikalpa-samādhi* was by far greater than the joy of any worldly enjoyment, it was nothing compared to the absolute, non-dual bliss of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. Gradually, I became lightly aware of the body and of the build up of breathing that must have almost totally stopped earlier.

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## □ Experiences of Devotees

*Acharyal* could fathom the innermost recesses of His disciples’ hearts and fulfil whatever aspirations the devotees had. For example, years ago, I had a strong desire to behold *Acharyal* in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. I did not express my feelings to Him but what can be hidden from the omniscient One? One day, He asked me to accompany Him to the Kālabhairava temple and there, He sat down for meditation. He asked me to sit close to Him and then remarked, “We will meditate.” I saw His eyes close partially. Slowly, the heaving of His chest became slower and slower and soon, no trace of breathing was discoverable by me, though I was very close to Him. He seemed to radiate peace. Suddenly, I felt a force dragging me into meditation. I too closed my eyes and my mind soared to the heights of concentration. I thought that a moment had elapsed before I was able to regain awareness of the body. I opened my eyes and observed *Acharyal*. Slowly, His breathing commenced and in a few moments He opened His eyes. Turning to the Kālabhairava idol, He called out the Lord’s name and after

prostrating, came out of the temple. Actually, over half-an hour had elapsed. On coming out of the temple, He said, “*Nirvikalpa-samādhi* is very nice. Is it not?” Thus, He had fulfilled my wish to behold Him in that sublime state even prior to my expressing the desire. Of course, since then, I have been privileged to see Him on numerous occasions in that acme of meditation, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* and to even photograph Him in *samādhi*.

[A disciple]

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## 30. NĀDĀNUSANDHĀNA

- D: What is meant by *nādānusandhāna*?
- A: Generally speaking, it is also a kind of meditation.
- D: How can it be practised?
- A: There are a few ways. I shall mention one of them. The ear, nose and mouth should be closed with the fingers and the sound that is heard inside one's ears should be carefully listened to.
- D: How is one to breathe if the nose and the mouth are closed completely?
- A: I did not mean that the nose should be shut completely.
- D: Is there any benefit in paying attention to the sound produced inside?
- A: Yes. It is essential to make the mind one-pointed. This can either be done by fixing the mind on a form or by paying attention to a sound. External sounds are attenuated when the ears are closed. However, the internal sound is clearly apprehensible. By directing attention to that sound, the mind becomes one-pointed.
- D: How is one to concentrate on the sound heard internally?
- A: One can focus the mind on it just as one would concentrate on an external sound. This is because the internal sound can be heard when the ears are closed.

- D: While meditating in this manner, is it necessary to concentrate on a form?
- A: No. Fixation of the mind on the sound within is sufficient.
- D: What will result if the mind is fixed on the sound?
- A: Gradually, the mind becomes more and more peaceful. External sounds and other disturbances cease to distract the concentration. The sound heard from inside becomes very clear. With the passage of time, different internal sounds are heard. Finally, all sounds cease and the mind plunges into *samādhi*.
- D: Can we see the manifestation of any special power when meditating on the internal sound?
- A: Sometimes, one can hear the sounds or conversations that originate far away. However, one should be indifferent to clairaudience and just continue with one's meditation. One's spiritual progress will suffer if one turns to clairaudience and the like that may manifest.
- D: Is *nādānusandhāna* better than meditation on a form?
- A: I have not said so. All depends on the competence of the disciple. The *Guru* may advise *nādānusandhāna* for some disciples and meditation on a form for some others.
- D: Is there any speciality in *nādānusandhāna* as compared to other methods?
- A: (Smiling) Even a person who is not proficient in *nādānusandhāna* ought not to be disturbed by external sounds and external forms since his ears and the eyes are closed. You can consider this itself as a speciality!
- D: Is there any difficulty in practising this type of meditation?
- A: (With a smile) Will there not be pain when the hands are used to close the ears for a long duration?

D: Is there an alternative method of practicing *nādānusandhāna*?

A: I have watched Buddhists practising meditation with an aid of a bell that rings for a long duration. Two persons sit facing each other. They alternately ring a bell and concentrate on the sound. There are other such methods in vogue.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal recounts His experiencing nirvikalpa-samādhi through nādānusandhāna:*

In the last of the seven dreams in the course of which I received instructions about *yoga* from Śiva, the Lord had taught Me *nādānusandhāna*. After that, I began to practise it for some minutes, once a week. One morning, as usual, I closed My ears, nose and mouth with My hands to commence My contemplation on the sound heard in the right ear. The ocean-like sound that I heard abruptly grew in intensity. Then, in quick succession, I heard a variety of sounds. These included those of a drum, a flute and a *vīṇā*. Each sound lasted for only a few moments before being replaced by the next. I had heard the same sounds, in the same sequence, when the Lord had demonstrated *nādānusandhāna* in the dream. When the last of the sounds ended, there was just silence. My mind became extremely tranquil and suffused with bliss. The sense of “I” rapidly faded away completely, and *nirvikalpa-samādhi* ensued. Only non-dual, objectless consciousness remained. About an hour passed before the mind descended from *samādhi*.

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## 31. LAMBIKĀ-YOGA

- D: I have read that Śrī Vidyātīrtha spent his last days in *lambikā-Yoga*. Will *Acharyal* kindly explain what is meant by *lambikā-Yoga*?
- A: During *lambikā-yoga*, nectar flows down from the *sahasrāra-cakra* situated in the head. That nectar causes hunger and thirst to disappear. Good health is had.
- D: How should one practise *lambikā-yoga*?
- A: According to *haṭha-yoga* texts, the tendon at the lower part of the tongue should be cut a little. Then, certain medicines should be applied to heal the wounded portion. The lower portion of the tongue should then be cut to a further extent. Simultaneously, the tongue should be stretched, little by little. Soon, the tongue becomes thin and elongated. When this elongated tongue is stretched, it should reach the region between the eyebrows. The tongue should now be folded back and thrust upwards. When meditation is practised after this, nectar flows down.
- D: Does meditation of this nature cause physical pain and dumbness?
- A: It cannot be guaranteed that there will be no pain but it is wrong to say that one will become dumb. The voice will be clear.

- D: How will the nectar taste? Will one know by experience that it is flowing down?
- A: There is no need to say that the nectar is tasty. It can surely be experienced as it flows down to the throat.
- D: Will hunger and thirst disappear completely once the nectar is tasted?
- A: It cannot be assumed that they disappear forever. They are normally not felt for some time, but reappear later. So long as the effect of the nectar lasts, the body is not in need of food and water and does not grow weak.
- D: Has *Acharyal* seen anybody who has cut his tongue in the prescribed manner?
- A: Yes. I have seen one person. He had a clear voice. He demonstrated *lambikā-yoga* by folding his tongue and pushing it upwards. He was making a peculiar sound. Finally, he succeeded in obtaining nectar.
- D: Would any external sound or disturbance have caused harm?
- A: Yes. Excessive disturbances could have been fatal.
- D: Is there any other easier way of obtaining nectar than cutting the tongue?
- A: Certainly, there is. What I told you now is just the *haṭha-yoga* method of obtaining the nectar. For some people, it descends during meditation due to the pertinent penance done by them in the previous birth. My *Acharyal* has told Me about the flow of nectar.
- D: In which kind of meditation does nectar flow?
- A: Usually during *saguna-dhyāna*.
- D: Since the nectar is said to flow down from the head, can one come to the conclusion that nectar is stored there? Is it not surprising?

- A: Whether it is surprising or not, is irrelevant. The existence and descent of nectar are directly experienced. Besides being tasty, the nectar also frees one from hunger and thirst. Hence, there is no room for doubt. However, neither the nectar present in the *sahasrāra* in the head, nor what flows down to the throat is detectable by others. It is not something gross.
- D: If *lambikā-yoga* is taught to all, then countless people suffering from hunger can be benefited. Is it not?
- A: Only extremely few will successfully obtain nectar and so the practice cannot be made universal. The effort required to succeed is tremendous and would act as a deterrent even to those assiduous strivers who may be very keen on tasting the nectar.
- D: Has *Acharyal* noted any characteristic in persons who have experienced this flow of nectar?
- A: Yes. For some people, a little quantity of water oozes from the crown of the head. But this is unrelated causally to the flow of nectar.
- D: When would the water ooze from the head?
- A: It may come any time. Even while taking food.
- D: How much?
- A: More or less one *uddharaṇī* full.  
(An *uddharaṇī* is spoon-like and is used during *anuṣṭhāna*.)
- D: Is what emerges water or any other fluid resembling water?
- A: (Smiling) Water.
- D: Will there be any inconvenience on account of the flow of water?
- A: There is no inconvenience at all. The water that emerges needs to be removed with a cloth. Otherwise, it will flow down the face.

- D: What is the reason for such flow of water?
- A: It can flow. That is all.
- D: Has *Acharyal* made effort to make nectar descend?
- A: I neither pay attention to such *siddhi*-s nor do I make effort to obtain it. It just comes as it pleases. I do not make any effort to get it or to prevent it.
- D: *Acharyal* pointed out that nectar could descend in some people even if the lower part of the tongue is not cut. What can such people do to initiate or facilitate the flow?
- A: While practising *saguṇa-dhyāna*, they could keep the tongue folded back, with the tip at the rear of the upper palate. If the practice of their past births is suitable, this would be of some help.
- D: Would it not be beneficial to spiritual aspirants to get over the need for food and water by recourse to *lambikā-yoga*?
- A: No. The aim of those aspiring for liberation should only be the securing of the realisation of the Supreme and, thus, liberation. Turning attention to dealing in an extraordinary way with hunger and thirst is also a kind of distraction from the goal. *Lambikā-yoga* came naturally to sages like Śrī Vidyāīrtha and so they allowed it. However, if a beginner spends his time on this, he will be wasting his precious time. We should take care that the mind does not deviate from the goal.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

*In a benedictory address to a mammoth gathering on December 21, 1982 at Paramahamsi-Ganga-Ashram in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Acharyal spoke of how people can achieve their various cherished ends by suitably concentrating on the Divine Mother.*

Concerning the desire of people to have a long life, He cited an authoritative verse, meaning, “*The life-span on earth of those who contemplate every day on You (Mother) as present within the lotus of the head and raining cool nectar becomes great.*”

*Acharyal* then said, “The scripture and even our experience reveal that there is a lotus in the head; just as there is nectar in a common lotus, there is nectar in this (*sahasrāra*) lotus too. Its nectar is savoured in *lambikā-yoga*. This *yoga* involves making one’s tongue very thin and long, inserting it into the passage at the back of the mouth and taking it upwards to the head. When one remains with the tongue thrust up to the head, one tastes the nectar that flows there. Long life is acquired by those given to drinking nectar thus. This is a means taught in the *yoga-sāstra*.”

*Acharyal* went on to explain, in the light of the cited verse, a course that can be adopted by a devotee of the Mother who is unfamiliar with *lambikā-yoga*, but who seeks to transcend ephemeral existence or to have a long life. He said, “The Mother is meditated upon in the six *cakra*-s (*mūlādhāra*, *svādhiṣṭhāna*, *maṇipūra*, *anāhata*, *viśuddha* and *ājñā*) and in the *sahasrāra*. The *sahasrāra* is the topmost of these centres. ‘Mother, You are seated there. With both Your hands, You are pouring down nectar that is descending to and filling my stomach. The nectar is cool. You are indeed raining the ambrosia of the gods. I contemplate on You in this fashion.’”

Having presented the meditation specified in the first half of the verse from a practitioner’s perspective, *Acharyal* did so in the form of a teaching. He said, “Close the eyes. Think of the *sahasrāra* lotus. Then, conceive of the Mother as seated there and pouring down nectar. Feel that the nectar is descending and filling the stomach. What is the fruit of contemplating thus? The life-span of those who meditate thus every day becomes great.”

Shortly after delivering the half-an-hour-long benedictory discourse, *Acharyal* told a disciple in private, “When I cited the verse concerned, I was reminded of the related experience that I

had as a boy. That was one reason for My mentioning that the scripture as also experience reveal the presence of the *sahasrāra* lotus and the nectar there.”

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## 32. KUṆḌALINĪ

(*Kuṇḍalinī* is the Supreme Power in the form of a snake. The *suṣumnā-nāḍī* is a subtle tube passing through the central canal of the spine. Seats of manifestation of *śakti* (power) are present in the *suṣumnā-nāḍī* and within the head. They are called *cakra*-s and resemble lotuses. If the *kuṇḍalinī* comes to these locations, *śakti* manifests in a special way. Generally, the *kuṇḍalinī* lies asleep in the *mūlādhāra-cakra*, at the base of the *suṣumnā-nāḍī*. One attains *samādhi* when the dormant *kuṇḍalinī* awakens, rises from the *mūlādhāra-cakra* and ascends, via the *suṣumnā-nāḍī*, to the *sahasrāra-cakra*, which is in the head.)

D: Do the *kuṇḍalinī* and the *cakra*-s really exist?

A: *Kuṇḍalinī* is the embodiment of the Divine and is a source of power. There is no gross serpent actually coiled up at the base of the spinal cord. Nor again are there gross lotuses in the spinal cord. The *kuṇḍalinī*'s arousal and ascent up the back can be felt. Likewise, stages in the manifestation of *śakti* are apprehended. These correspond to the ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī* to the various *cakra*-s.

D: Then, why are the *cakra*-s spoken of?

A: Contemplation of the *kuṇḍalinī* and the *cakra*-s, as described in the *Tāntrika* texts, does cause manifestation of power and expansion of awareness. Physical effects can also be seen. Normally, one will die if one does not breathe for a long time. But, during the practice of *kuṇḍalinī-yoga*, one can

remain for long, with suspended breathing. I have seen some who obtained powers by contemplating on the *cakra*-s. Some people can lift a heavy weight merely by moving their eyelids. I have heard of this. Such powers can and do occur.

- D: It is said that one attains special powers and *samādhi* by waking up the *kuṇḍalinī* and making it ascend through the *suṣumnā-nāḍī*. How is one to awaken the *kuṇḍalinī*?
- A: It may be awakened through suitable meditation and through *prāṇāyāma*. Other methods are also there.
- D: How is one to practise *prāṇāyāma*?
- A: There are different kinds of *prāṇāyāma*. One should personally learn from a qualified *Guru* before practising.
- D: Will *Acharyal* explain a simple form of *prāṇāyāma* that can be practised during *anuṣṭhāna*?
- A: One should sit in a firm position and keep the back straight. *Prāṇāyāma* is practised by breathing in through one nostril, retaining breath for some time and then exhaling through the other nostril. Next, air should be drawn in through the nostril used earlier for exhalation. Ordinary *prāṇāyāma* has got three parts. They are *pūraka*, *kumbhaka* and *recaka*. Breathing in is *pūraka*, retaining the breath is *kumbhaka* and breathing out is *recaka*. One will not find it difficult if these are done in the ratio of 1:2:2. What I mentioned now is a variant of the standard ratio of 1:4:2. To obtain special benefits, the *jālandhara-bandha*, *udḍiyāna-bandha* and *mūla-bandha* too should be performed in the course of *prāṇāyāma*. These should be learnt from a teacher. Improper practice of the *bandha*-s is harmful.
- D: Should one retain air long enough to cause discomfort?
- A: No. Care should be taken while doing *prāṇāyāma* to see that discomfort never sets in. If it does, the duration of retention

can be reduced. This implies appropriate reduction in the durations of inhalation and exhalation.

D: What is the use of *prāṇāyāma*?

A: It helps to purify the *nāḍī*-s and make the mind calm. It is a form of expiation. It also helps to arouse the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī*.

D: Will one who has attained *samādhi* be aware that his *kuṇḍalinī* has ascended to his head?

A: Not necessarily. The awareness may not be present in those who have attained *samādhi* through the path of *Vedānta*. However, they can, if they want, become aware of the ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī*.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*The following is an extract from Acharyal's conversation concerning Kuṇḍalinī-yoga with a disciple:*

I have told you about all My experiences related to the *kuṇḍalinī* that took place earlier. You would have discerned that they were unpremeditated and occurred with almost no effort of Mine. This one too was like them. I believe that Ambā, who had Herself taught Me about the *kuṇḍalinī* a few months after My *saṁnyāsa*, straightaway vouchsafed those experiences and, that afternoon, their culmination.

I had just apprehended a hue between My brows when, involuntarily, I adopted the *jālandhara*, *uḍḍiyāṇa* and *mūla-bandha*-s and My attention turned to the *anāhata-cakra*. I apprehended the *kuṇḍalinī* there. It seemed that the elements earth, water and fire had become absorbed in the *kuṇḍalinī*. As the divine *śakti* headed rapidly to the *sahasrāra*, leaping, as it were, from one *cakra* to the next higher one, air, space and the organs too duly merged into Her.

When the *kuṇḍalinī* reached the *sahasrāra*, all duality, inclusive of the sense of “I” and awareness of the distinction of the agent of meditation, meditator and the object of meditation, thoroughly vanished. Just objectless consciousness of the very nature of bliss shone. This *nirvikalpa-samādhi* lasted for about an hour. As the mind lightly came out of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the descent of the *kuṇḍalinī* from the *sahasrāra*, through the *ājñā-cakra*, to the *viśuddha-cakra* was discernible. I regained mild awareness of the body without sensing any further descent of the *śakti* and opened My eyes.

[Excerpted from *Yoga, Enlightenment and Perfection*]

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Some hold that the arousal of the *kuṇḍalinī* and its ascent to the *svādhiṣṭhāna-cakra* are likely to be accompanied by a temporary manifestation of intense sexual desire. It is also contended that the piercing of the *brahma*, *viṣṇu* and *rudra-granthi*-s by the *kuṇḍalinī* on its way from the *mūlādhāra* to the *sahasrāra* is accompanied by much pain and even sickness. The laudable course is for one to first cultivate intense dispassion and to purify the *nāḍī*-s. Only *sāttvik* food should be consumed. Further, *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* should be practised under the guidance of an adept and not by just referring to books. For one who ensures all this, the arousal and ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī* are definitely not accompanied by lust, pain and sickness.

[Excerpted from *Yoga, Enlightenment and Perfection*]

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### 33. AMANASKA-YOGA

- D: One feels happy when one remains motionless and calm. Therefore, may one sit quietly for some time, even with the eyes open, to obtain mental peace?
- A: Surely, it can be done provided it is not indolence. Sages like Yājñavalkya have spoken of a practice of this form called *amanaska-yoga*.
- D: What is *amanaska-yoga*?
- A: It is a state of mind wherein no thoughts appear. True *amanaska* is attained only when the mind is destroyed in *samādhi* and one becomes a *jīvanmukta*. Normally, we dwell on different objects. It appears that thoughts occur continuously. Careful observation, however, reveals that there are gaps between successive thoughts. The *Ātman* clearly shines in the gaps. People do not note this, as the interval between thoughts is very short. Bhagavatpāda writes in the *Laghu-vākya-vṛtti*:

muktābhirāvṛtaṁ sūtraṁ muktayor-madhyā īkṣyate ।  
tathā vṛtti-vikalpaiścīt-spaṣṭā madhye vikalpayoḥ ॥<sup>50</sup>

(LV,10)

In a garland made of pearls, the thread is hidden in the places where the pearls are present but in-between two pearls, the thread is seen. In the same way, the *Ātman* of the form of pure consciousness is not apparent when a thought is present

but it is patent in the interval between the end of one thought and the rise of another. We can obtain great happiness if we calmly enlarge the gap between one thought and another.

D: Can this be practised even with the eyes open?

A: As I pointed out, the aim is to see that no thought arises in the mind. So, there is no harm in keeping the eyes open. It is sufficient if the mind does not wander towards external objects. While practising, one should remain calm and quite free from worries. No effort should be made to do or dwell on anything. If any thought arises in the mind, its continuance should be discouraged.

D: What indication is there to show that one is progressing in the path of *amanaska-yoga*?

A: The mental peace and happiness that one derives is an indication of progress.

D: Is it not difficult to see to it that no thought arises in the mind?

A: It is difficult to attain the zenith of thoughtlessness. But the mind can be kept peaceful to a considerable extent.

D: Do mundane people also have the power to still the mind?

A: Do not all people sleep?

D: Yes.

A: How?

D: I am at a loss to know the import of *Acharyal's* question.

A: People lie down. After that, how do they go to sleep? They close their eyes and remain quiet. Soon, sleep envelops them. Is it not?

D: Yes.

- A: We note that during deep sleep, people are thoroughly at peace. They have rendered their minds thoughtless. Of course, this is achieved involuntarily. Is it not so?
- D: Yes.
- A: Therefore, it can be said that all can still the mind. Mundane people still it during deep sleep without any effort and without being conscious of it. In the path of *amanaska-yoga*, one thoroughly silences the mind in the state of wakefulness.
- D: Can *amanaska-yoga* be done in any place?
- A: It may be practised anywhere but there should be facilities to sit comfortably. How can one practise it while running a race?
- D: Are there any ill effects?
- A: No.
- D: What should one be careful about, when practicing *amanaska-yoga*?
- A: (With a laugh) One should not go to sleep! Sleep should be averted by being alert.
- D: How can one practise this *yoga*?
- A: One sits quiet, without any worry and ignores the thoughts of the mind. Gradually, thoughts subside but one remains alert. Even if the eyes are open, one is undisturbed by thoughts. By this means, one can remain peaceful and happy and also advance in the spiritual path. Primary *amanaska* is, however, not just quietness of the mind. That is found only in a *jīvanmukta* seated in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*.

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## D Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal* has said, “People say that thoughts keep coming to their minds. They can hardly conceive of a situation where the

mind is quiet. However, this surprises Me. As I see it, the mind should be quiet unless and until it is required to have a thought. Normally, the mind should be quiet and just rest on the Self, unless a thought is needed for any task. When the necessity ends, the mind should revert to the state of tranquillity. Even when a task is at hand, active thinking is generally not needed all the time. For instance, when reading a book, the mind ought to become quiet when a page is being turned.”

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*Paramacharyal* had engaged the scholar Sri V.S. Ramachandra Sastrigal to expound *Tarka* to our *Guru*. The studies were completed even before *Paramacharyal* cast off His mortal coil. After ascension of the sacred *vyākhyāna-simhāsana*, *Acharyal* did not treat Sri Ramachandra Sastrigal as just an *āsthāna-vidvān*. He communicated with Sri Sastrigal very frequently by means of letters written in His own hand. A perusal of the collection of letters written by *Acharyal* to Sri Ramachandra Sastrigal revealed that in some of His epistles, *Acharyal* had explicitly addressed Sri Sastrigal as His *upādhyāya* or teacher and had written to him with due regards acknowledging his great scholarliness. From a letter written by Sri Ramachandra Sastrigal to *Acharyal* during the course of *Acharyal*'s first South India tour, one learns how appreciative Sri Sastrigal was of *Acharyal*'s great endeavours for the upliftment of *Sanātana-dharma*. In fact, Sri Sastrigal had written that the events of *Acharyal*'s tour deserved to be engraved in gold. Sastrigal in his letters had often sought *Acharyal*'s advice on many matters, looking upon Him as his *Guru*. For His part, *Acharyal* had readily obliged by giving His suggestions. *Acharyal* had recommended the efficacy of *amanaska-yoga* to Sri Sastrigal.

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## 34. MĀYĀ

- D: In dim light, a rope may falsely appear as a snake. Similarly, the Supreme Being appears as the world. This, I have learnt from the *śāstra*-s. If a rope is to falsely appear as a snake, someone different from both the snake and the rope is necessary. Similarly, if Brahman appears as the world, an observer, distinct from Brahman and the world, is necessary. Such an entity is not there. Therefore, is the illustration proper?
- A: An analogue can never match the original perfectly. If it does, then it will be non-different from what is sought to be illustrated. The rope-snake example is advanced only to show that one thing can falsely appear as another. Only this aspect of the illustration should be considered and not the existence of a perceiver different from the rope and snake.
- D: For a man to mistake a rope for a snake, he must have seen a real snake earlier. Else, the wrong notion of a snake cannot arise in him. Thus, the mistake presupposes the existence of a real snake. In the same way, if the Supreme Being is to be mistakenly seen as the world, there should be a real world. Is it wrong to argue in this manner?
- A: Yes. It is wrong. To mistake a rope for a snake, knowledge of a snake is necessary. It is incorrect to say that only a real snake can produce such knowledge. I will give an example. A person mistakes a tree to be a ghost. He saw a ghost in a

dream had by him earlier. When he sees the tree now, he misapprehends it to be the ghost dreamt of by him. Did that ghost really exist? No, because it was seen only in a dream. Everyone knows that whatever is seen in the dream is unreal. So, it is only the knowledge of the snake that is necessary and not a real snake. Similarly, for the Supreme Brahman to appear as the world, there is no need for a real world to exist.

- D: Is *māyā* real? If it is, then it will be wrong to say that Brahman is *advitīya* (non-dual). Nor can we assert that *māyā* does not exist, since we are able to see the effects of *māyā*. Will *Acharyal* please explain the perplexing nature of *māyā*?
- A: *Māyā* cannot be said to be ‘*sat* (absolutely real)’ because it is destroyed the moment true *jñāna* dawns, just as a dream disappears when we wake up. Hence, there is no second entity called *māyā*, different from Brahman, just as there is no dream-object apart from the dreamer. *Māyā* cannot also be termed ‘*asat* (non-existent)’ because we can see its effects in the form of the world. That is why it has been said, with logic as the basis, that *māyā* is neither *sat* nor *asat*.
- D: It is said that everything except Brahman is false. Then, are not the *Veda*-s also untrue? If the *Veda*-s are false, will not Advaita philosophy, which is based on the *Veda*-s, be untrue?
- A: Advaitin-s say that the world is untrue from the standpoint of the Absolute. They do not, however, deny the empirical validity of the world. From the *vyāvahārika* (empirical) standpoint, to the extent that the world is admitted to be true, so are the *Veda*-s. The empirical *Veda* gives rise to knowledge that is potent enough to sublimate the empirical world. What shines thereafter, is just the non-dual Brahman. Thus, Advaita *Vedānta* is quite in order.

Further, no damage will be done even if it is postulated that the *Veda*-s are not real. This is because even an unreal thing can give us a real effect. For example, assume that a tiger

chases us in our dream. We may wake up due to the fear produced. Here, the unreal tiger brings about the real effect of waking up. Hence, even if we say that the *Veda*-s are unreal like the world, undoubtedly liberating knowledge can arise from its teachings. In this way too, it can be seen that Advaita Vedānta is quite in order.

D: Scientists gather information about and analyse the world. If the world itself is unreal, is the research carried on by scientists meaningless?

A: No. We do not say that studying the world and analysing its laws are pointless. The empirical utility of science is unquestionable. This much, however, is certain that none can ever rightly come to the conclusion, “The world is definitely like this.” A bat recognises the presence of an object by means of ultrasonic waves. What it perceives is different from what we see. Similarly, if we had the X-ray vision, our perception of an object would be different from what it is now. Which of these perceptions is the right one? The answer has to be that the different conceptions are all valid or invalid. When we see an object, our act of perception should not modify the object. But we cannot see without altering what we observe. If we see a room through a dark glass, will not everything appear dark? We see things only as the mind “shows” them to us. Hence, it can only be said, “These are the laws of the universe as we see it” and not, “The cosmos is only like this. These alone are its laws.”

D: It is said that *māyā* is the cause of all bondage. Why does *māyā* exist?

A: As far as a *jñānin* is concerned, there is nothing called *māyā*. The Supreme Being alone exists. So, with regard to him, there is no scope for this question at all. Questions and answers are possible only in the realm of duality, in the realm of *māyā*. If such a question is to be answered logically, one should have understood the nature of *māyā*. However, the

moment one grasps the true nature of *māyā*, it vanishes totally and Brahman alone shines. Thus, it is not fair to expect a proper answer to this question, as the question itself is faulty.

*Māyā* itself is like a big question mark. The Supreme Being is non-dual but *māyā* creates this appearance of duality. This indeed is the power of *māyā*.

In the absence of adequate light, a rope may seem to be a snake. Seeing this, one may ask, “Why should the rope appear as a snake when they are two different entities?” The answer is, “It does so on account of one’s ignorance.” Suppose one asks, “Why does this ignorance exist?” This question cannot be answered. A man who has no misconception ever sees the rope only as a rope. The question is ridiculous as far as he is concerned, for, to him, the rope never appeared as a snake.

Next, take the case of a man who has the wrong notion that he is seeing a snake. He too cannot answer the question because, as far as he is concerned, what is in front of him is indeed a snake, not a rope. Let us consider a third man’s view. He initially mistakes the rope to be a snake. Later, he realises that it is a rope. Suppose, he is asked, “Why did the rope appear to you as a snake?” His reply will be, “It was due to my misconception.” He is then asked, “Why does this misconception exist?” The man will not be able to answer. This is because he now sees only the rope and the misconception being asked about is totally absent.

Some questions have no answer because of the fallacy inherent in the question. What answer can be given to the question, “Where is the beginning of a circle?” The questioner asks this question with the misconception, “A circle has a beginning.” It is the question that is not proper. Likewise, the question, “Why does *māyā* exist?” is improper.

D: Would *Acharyal* show how one could conclude that the world is illusory; something conjured by *māyā*?

A: The seed of a banyan tree is small. If it is broken, only smaller pieces are seen. But a big banyan tree grows from it. Does this not, at first sight, seem to be a magical feat? From the semen of one person, a babe is born and gradually becomes a big man. Does this also not seem like magic? So, one can consider the world to be an illusory projection.

What we see in our dream greatly matches what we see in the waking state. Hence, we cannot say with certainty that the two are different.

If we keep on posing the question, “why” with regard to anything of the world, we finally end up with the answer, “I do not know.” Such should be the case if the universe is illusory. Let us suppose that we see in a dream a huge elephant within a small room. The doors of a room are very small. If one starts enquiring in the dream as to how the elephant came into the room, the conclusion will be, “I see the elephant but I cannot understand how it came in.” Similar is the case with what is shown by one who practises *indrajāla*. It is in such cases that something is seen but no explanation is possible. The world too is inexplicable and so should be illusory.

After waking up from the dream just considered, we would say, “There was no elephant; nor did it enter the room.” On realising the Truth, the world is negated in the same way. The words of the *Veda* are:

māyāṁ tu prakṛtiṁ vidyāt ।<sup>51</sup>

(SU, IV.10)

(Know *prakṛti* (primordial nature) to be *māyā*.)

D: If the world is just an appearance, why has its creation been described in the *śāstra*-s?

A: If a child asks about the sun, what do we say? We reply that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. We do know that the earth rotates and that there is no actual rising and setting of the sun. Still, we say that the sun itself rises, just to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the child. Similarly, when one seeing the world gets a doubt as to its origin, the *śāstra*, being like a mother, speaks a little about the world. Then, it leads the enquirer stage by stage and finally explains the Truth. The final description of the Truth is:

neti neti ।<sup>52</sup>

(BU, II. 3.6)

(Not this, not this.)

★ ★ ★ ★

## □ Parables of Acharyal

*Māyā, the fascinating phenomenon, is the source of human bondage. But an understanding of its nature can pave the way to liberation. It is with this in view that the scriptures have spoken extensively about māyā; the Advaitic scriptural lore abounds in information and tales on māyā. Acharyal narrated the following parable based on the yoga-vāsiṣṭha.*

A young lad said to his mother, “Please entertain me with a story.” His mother agreed to do so and narrated the following thoroughly fanciful tale.

Three handsome princes lived in a city that was totally non-existent. They were courageous and righteous. Two of them had not been born, while the third had not even reached the womb of his mother. With good thoughts, they set out to acquire the best. On the way, they came across fruit-bearing trees suspended in space. They plucked and ate a variety of tasty fruits.

Moving on, they beheld three rivers prettified by ripples. Two of the rivers never had a drop of water, while the third was fully dry. The princes bathed and sported in the dried-up river. Having

drunk its sweet water to their heart's content, they reached a city that was yet to come into existence and where people were conversing and enjoying themselves.

In that city, the princes saw three lovely mansions, two of which had not at all been built, while the third had neither walls nor pillars. They entered the third mansion and, there, obtained three golden vessels. Two of the vessels had been shattered, while the third was completely pulverised. They took the pulverised vessel and put into it a quantity of rice that was hundred handfuls less than a hundred handfuls. They cooked the rice in that vessel and, with it, fed numerous Brahmins who had no mouths, but were voracious eaters. Thereafter, they ate the food that remained.

Delighting themselves with hunting and other pursuits, they dwelt happily in that city that was yet to come into being.

The boy listened to his mother with rapt attention. He enjoyed the story and found nothing incongruous in it. As far as he was concerned, his mother had given him a completely factual account of what had once transpired.

Just as the indiscriminating child regarded the story as factual, unenlightened people mistake the world they see and think of it to be real. They do not realise that the universe is illusory; it appears and disappears with the onset and cessation of mental activity and has no existence apart from the non-dual Supreme that is of the nature of pure consciousness.

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## 35. WAKING STATE AND DREAM STATE

- D: Is the waking state different from the dream state?
- A: It is not when considered from the standpoint of the Truth.
- D: Then, does it mean that everything is a concoction of the mind?
- A: Yes.
- D: Will *Acharyal* please explain?
- A: In the dream state, we see a world that appears to be real when we are witnessing the dream. We see a world in the waking state. This also seems to be real. We experience joy and sorrow in the waking state. Likewise, we experience them in the dream too. Therefore, both the states are similar and hence, unreal.
- D: In the waking state, if a book is placed on a table, it remains at the same place the next day also. However, a book placed on a table in the dream is not to be found there when one wakes up the next morning. Considering this difference, can it not be said that the waking state is real while the dream state is unreal?
- A: Suppose, for example, that you keep a book on the table in a dream. Then you go to do some other work in that dream

itself. On returning, will not the book be found in the same place?

D: Yes, it will be there.

A: This example should have cleared your doubt. In this waking state, if a book is kept at a spot, it remains in the same place. Similarly, during a dream, a book remains where it is placed. No doubt, a book of the dream state vanishes when one wakes up but, then, similar is the case of a book of the waking state vanishing when one goes to sleep.

D: There seems to be another difference also.

A: What is it?

D: Some others see us sleeping. They can assert that we were definitely asleep. So, dreams are unreal.

A: Let us assume in the course of a dream you see yourself sitting and daydreaming. In your dream, some people see you sitting. As far as they are concerned, your sitting at that place is real but what you are imagining is unreal. Is it not?

D: Yes.

A: Were you really sitting near those people?

D: No.

A: The reason is that both your sitting at that place and your being observed by other people belong to the dream. Similar is the case with people watching another sleep.

D: The waking state continues for years, while a dream persists only for minutes or an hour. What about this difference?

A: If this reasoning is adopted, you will have to answer the following question. If one dream lasts thirty minutes and another ten minutes, will you say that the dream that lasted thirty minutes is more real than the dream that lasted ten minutes?

D: No.

A: Therefore, just by giving the reason that the waking state lasts longer than a dream, it cannot be concluded that the waking state is more real than the dream state. Further, the passage of time too is something imagined. In a dream, one may think that a long time has lapsed but, with regard to the waking state, only ten minutes might have passed.

D: I accept that the world in the waking state is very similar to the world experienced in the dream. However, a doubt has arisen.

A: You can express any doubt without hesitation.

D: We are not aware that whatever we experience in the waking state is unreal. Why?

A: In the course of a dream, are you usually aware that it is unreal?

D: No.

A: When is it known by you that the perception had in the dream is false?

D: Only when I come to the waking state.

A: Likewise, we will realise unmistakably that the world of the waking state is false only when we awaken from this dream of the waking state.

D: When will one wake up from this dream?

A: When one attains the realisation that one is the *Ātman*, which is devoid of all bondage and is of the nature of Supreme bliss.

D: When will such a realisation occur?

A: When one completely purifies one's mind and fixes it on the *Ātman*.

D: What role do the *Guru* and the *śāstra*-s play in this matter?

- A: The teachings of the *Guru*, which are in accordance with the *śāstra*-s, produce the knowledge of the Truth.
- D: Do not the *śāstra*-s and the teachings of the *Guru* belong to this unreal world? If so, how can they generate the knowledge of the Truth?
- A: These teachings also belong to the world. Still, right knowledge can dawn because of them. Let us assume that in a dream, a tiger is chasing us. We may wake up on account of fear. In the same way, the dictates of the *śāstra*-s and the teachings of the *Guru* wake us up from this big dream.
- D: Then, what is creation?
- A: Perception alone is creation. There is no creation other than perception. Perception of a thing is its origination.
- D: What about *Īśvara*?
- A: He too is a part of your dream. In reality, there is neither cause nor effect. One has bondage as long as one considers that one has bondage. He who feels that he is free is indeed free. That is why it has been said:

muktābhimānī mukto hi baddho baddhābhimānyapi ।<sup>53</sup>

(AG, I. 11)

(He who considers himself liberated is a liberated one. He who feels that he has bondage is bound.)

Therefore, one should remove the wrong impression that one has bondage.

- D: Is the removal of the wrong idea that one has bondage the means to attain *mokṣa*?
- A: Yes. So far, I was speaking with the *drṣṭi-srṣṭi-vāda* (perception-is-creation view) in mind. This, however, is not suitable for many people because their minds are not pure enough to imbibe it. People accept that the dream state is unreal. However, if told that the waking state is equally

unreal, they would feel disturbed. On hearing, “The waking state is on par with the dream state” some may decide that dreams too are real! That is why the *śāstra*-s do not speak much of the *dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi-vāda*.

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### □ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal describes the method of reflection on the unreality of the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep and of discerning the reality of the Ātman:*

“The states of waking, dream and deep sleep are neither natural to Me nor absolutely real. This is because while I persist unchanged in all these three states, the state of waking is absent during the states of dream and deep sleep; the dream state is absent during the states of waking and deep sleep; and deep sleep is absent during waking and dream. What appears and disappears like a mirage cannot be absolutely real. Being subject to annulment, the states of waking, dream and deep sleep are false. I am unstained by them like the desert by mirages.”

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## 36. ŚĀSTRĀ AND SCIENCE

- D: The *purāṇa*-s speak of the sun's chariot being drawn by seven white horses. How are we to reconcile such statements with the discoveries of science?
- A: Such statements are not to be taken literally. In fact, the large size of the sun is mentioned in *jyotiṣa-śāstra*. Hence, it is clear that such statements are to be interpreted figuratively.
- D: The *purāṇa*-s speak of an inhabited *candraloka* (world of the moon) to which departed souls go. Man has landed on the moon. His visit has falsified the claims of the *purāṇa*-s. How are we to accommodate the view of the *purāṇa*-s?
- A: Even in the *purāṇa*-s, different descriptions of some heavenly region, such as *Vaikuṇṭa*, are found. Thus, we can infer that symbolism has been resorted to. It would matter little even if the description of *candraloka* were falsified. The reason is that the aim of such descriptions is to indicate that there is life after death and that rebirth need not take place in this world alone.
- D: Apparently contradictory stories regarding the same person or incidents are encountered in the ancient scriptural texts. For instance, Kapila is regarded as the promulgator of the Sāṅkhya philosophy, which does not admit the existence of *Īśvara*. On the other hand, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describes Kapila as admitting the existence of *Īśvara*. In the *Mahābhārata*, no mention is made of Uddhava leaving for

Badrinath in his last days, he having been given permission by Śrī Kṛṣṇa to cast off his body in *yoga*. As opposed to this, in the *Uddhava-gītā* of the *Bhāgavata*, it is specified that Śrī Kṛṣṇa directed Uddhava to proceed to Badrinath. What is one to conclude upon seeing such discrepancies?

- A: The Kapila referred to in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is different from Kapila, the promulgator of the atheistic Sāṅkhya philosophy. In this particular case, a direct explanation can be given. But there are many cases where this cannot be done. Some people advance the explanation that the dichotomous incidents occurred in different, previous *kalpa*-s (cycles of creation) but this explanation does not appeal to Me. A more rational explanation is that something took place and the narrator penned an interesting account of it, with additions, subtractions and changes. The touching up was done to make the stories interesting so as to induce people to follow the stories and imbibe the morals therein; the morals are obviously important. It is, for instance, mentioned that Rāma was born to Daśaratha after thousands of years. This could be the poet's way of saying that Rāma was born after a long time.
- D: We learn from science that man evolved from animals. Thousands of years ago, man was living in caves. Cooking too was unknown to him. How could the *Veda*-s have been there at that time? Further, how could the people then have lived as per the dictates of the *Veda*-s?
- A: Let us suppose that you have a dream in which you see yourself as a ten-year-old boy. Should you not logically conclude that you must have been a child earlier?
- D: Yes.
- A: Did the dream start from the time you were a babe?
- D: No. The dream begins suddenly revealing me as a ten-year-old boy.

- A: That is, even though it suits logic to say that in the dream you should have been a small boy initially, in reality it was not so. Do you agree?
- D: Yes.
- A: It is not proper to extrapolate backwards in time since the dream started suddenly. The contention of the scientists is also not proper. Some of them may contend, "We see a person in a particular position now. Many years ago, he should have lived in a cave because he would not have had this much knowledge." However, just as a dream begins suddenly, this world has arisen suddenly. So, here also, it is improper to extrapolate the time element backwards.
- D: Scientists say that life has evolved from matter. They also say that consciousness is produced when the elements of matter evolve into a particular form, such as that of a cell or a brain. Is such an opinion wrong?
- A: This indeed is the philosophy of the Cārvāka-s. It is not a proper school of thought at all. Why does a scientist say that consciousness arises from inert entities and that there is no distinct entity called consciousness?
- D: Since consciousness is seen only where the body or cell or brain exists. Where the body is absent, we do not find consciousness.
- A: Such logic is not proper. Let us take an example. Wherever light is present, objects are seen. Further, everybody is aware that an object will not be seen in the absence of light. Therefore, is it correct to say that perception is a quality of light?
- D: How can perception be a quality of light? It cannot be.
- A: That is, the object is seen only when there is light. The object is not observed when there is no light. Still, sight is not a quality of light. Similar is the case here. Consciousness is

seen where the body is present. It is not perceived where the body is absent. Just because of this, will it be correct to say that consciousness is an attribute of the body? It will not be correct at all. The body may be required to reveal that consciousness exists but it is improper to assert that consciousness is a quality of the body.

Further, some have experienced exorcism. A ghost does not have a body like us, but it has consciousness. Many wonderful incidents are taking place through divine grace. Even scientists cannot say that they have not taken place unless they have preconceived notions or wish to deliberately conjecture an alternative explanation. From these, we can know that what is not material does exist.

The *śāstra*-s are the highest *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge). There is no finality in our logic. One reason may appear to us to be right and unassailable but if a highly intelligent person were to argue against it, we may be forced to admit that what we thought right is really wrong. Yet another logician may falsify the arguments that led to our changing our views. Mere logic is thus quite insufficient. We require the foundation of the *śāstra* for finality in our reasoning. The *Veda*-s were taught by the Lord. They are very sacred. In the *Veda*-s, it has been mentioned that the body is different from consciousness. Therefore, we should accept that. The realisation of the *jñānin*-s of the *Ātman* as pure consciousness is in complete accord with what the *śāstra*-s say. In fact, the *Ātman* is beyond the ken of scientific investigation. So, there is no question of Its existence being disproved by any such investigation.

Can a scientist conclusively prove that consciousness was produced from just matter? It is impossible. So far he has not done it. If asked whether he will do it in the future, the answer is in the negative. Let us suppose that a scientist says that he has created life in his laboratory. How can it be proved beyond doubt that consciousness was not present in

a latent form in the material used by him? That cannot be proved at all. Consciousness could have been latent initially and, then, could have manifested. As it cannot be conclusively proved that consciousness is born of matter, there is no need to subscribe to the materialistic views of such scientists.

Of course, there are many advantages that we get from science. There is no doubt at all about it. But it is not necessary to accept what some scientists conclude through imagination and faulty logic. At any rate, there is absolutely no rule that just because one is a scientist, one should be an atheist. Many great scientists were theists and even now there are many scientists who believe in God. Thus, dedication to science does not necessitate the denial of consciousness other than matter.

Our *śāstra*-s state and also give numerous reasons to show that the *Ātman* is different from the body. Therefore, we should never entertain any doubt in this regard.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

*The Truth Beyond Space and Time - A benedictory discourse delivered by Acharyal.*

Every object in this Universe has a delimitation of the form, “It is found here, but it is not found there.” However, Brahman, which is *bhūmā* (big), is devoid of any spatial delimitation. Whatever place you conceive of, It is there.

Therefore, there is no area where It is not. It is beyond *dik* or spatial direction. Strictly speaking, spatial direction cannot be specified in an absolute sense. For a man in Madurai, Madras lies in the northern direction. However, for a man dwelling in Visakhapatnam, Madras lies to the south. If it be asked, “Per se, does Madras lie in the northern direction or in the southern direction?”, the answer would be, “It is neither. It exists. That is

all.” If we proceed to Visakhapatnam, relative to us, Madras is in the south. On the other hand, if we were to go to Madurai or Tirunelveli, the direction of Madras, relative to us, would become north. Therefore, *dik* or spatial direction is something that is relative. Even in a relative, rather than an absolute sense, Brahman cannot be specified as existing in the northern or southern direction.

The case of time is similar to that of spatial direction. With respect to some specific delimiting factor, we speak of a day. What exactly is a day? It is something we determine with reference to the movement of the sun. We now see the sun rising. The time interval between our current and next sighting of the rising sun constitutes a day. When the rising sun is next seen, the next day begins. If this be the case, what is the position if we do not sight the sun? In other words, what is time, measured in terms of a day, independent of the observed movement of the sun? Time exists but the question, “What time is it?”, cannot be answered without reference to something like the movement of the sun. Hence, a measure of time, such as a day, loses its significance without reference to some delimiting factor. A day is thus something relative and not absolute. Thirty days constitute a month and 365 days, a year. As other measures of time, such as a month and a year, are based on a day, they are also not on a firmer footing than a day; they too have meaning only with reference to some delimiting factor.

Time, space and objects are all conjectured by the mind. After all, but for our defining temporal terms, such as day with reference to the apparent movement of the sun in the sky, time would not be discernible as it is now. Similarly, but for our defining directions, as for instance, north with respect to the pole star, spatial direction would lose its value. As far as the objects of the universe are concerned, the answer to the question, “Are they limited by time?”, is, “Yes”; everything is limited by time. For instance, we make statements, such as, “We were born on this day. One day or the other, we will die. At present, we exist.”

If we consider the case of the body or some other object, it is clear that it did not exist prior to its origination at a certain point in time and that on some day, it will perish; thereafter it will cease to be. It is only between its origination and destruction that it appears, to an observer, to exist. That is to say, all objects are delimited by time.

What is consciousness or Brahman like? Before the birth of Rāma, there was the *kṛta-yuga*. Now the *kali-yuga* is in progress. Brahman is not limited by any such periods of time. It exists and that is all. The question, “When does It exist?” is inapplicable to Brahman, which is beyond time. Whatever point of time you conjecture, Brahman does exist at that time. Did It exist before the *Kṛta-yuga*? It did. It was there at the time of Rāma, It is there now and It shall be there even tomorrow.

Brahman is beyond the limiting influence of spatial direction, time and objects. However, though beyond space and time, it is not a void or an inert entity. It shines in the form of consciousness. If one were to get the direct realisation of this entity, one will attain the summum bonum of life. This is what the scriptures say.

Experience too is like that. The more absorbed we become in Brahman, the more does it seem, “So many things take place in the universe. All this is a mere illusory sport.” If the world be a mere illusory sport then what object is good and what is bad? For a person who has desire for the objects of the world, any object will seem to be good or bad depending on whether he sees it as a source of his joy or sorrow. On the other hand, for one who is devoid of attachment and aversion and whose mind is focussed on the Self, the position is, “I am the witness. That is all.” If such a person were asked, “Do you get happiness or unhappiness on account of the world?”, he would answer, “I see no reason to either laugh or weep over anything. I merely witness what comes before my eyes and do not even make an effort to experience anything.”

Bacteria cause infection. It is so written in medical books. Bacteria cannot be seen with the naked eyes but can be seen with the aid of a powerful microscope. What is there inside curds? One can see nothing. However, if one were to use a microscope, one would see very odd things and would say, “Oh, how can I use this curd which has bacteria in it?” A ripe mango is palatable but if it were seen through a microscope, one would exclaim, “I will never eat this fruit,” because one sees strange creatures moving inside it. Thus there is difference between what we can see and what is actually there.

Why did not God give us the power to see bacteria? Because we have to manage our lives; what He has given us is sufficient for that. If one wishes to see more minutely then one may resort to a microscope. However, if one were to use the science of medicine and instruments such as a microscope to prepare good food, one will only fail. In other words, there is a time and place for everything. For instance, one must cook in the traditional fashion; thereafter one may use medical science to analyse the food.

To sum up, there is a proper way to do things. Merely because one does not readily recognise their significance, it does not follow that they do not have any.

[Excerpted from *Divine Discourses*]

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## □ Parables of Acharyal

A person had a harmonium. When he played it, melodious music flowed out of it. Hearing the enchanting tunes, another man thought, “How does such sweet music come out of this? Probably, these sounds are present inside this instrument.” Getting very curious, he dismantled the harmonium and searched for the sounds in every nook and corner. However, much as he toyed with the internal parts, he could not get the original music out of them. “Ah, what a wonder! This instrument produces music out of nowhere”, he concluded.

While there are certain occasions when one should dismantle and analyse, there are numerous other situations where this technique will not be of any help. Analysis of the *Ātman* falls under the latter category.

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## 37. NATURE OF BONDAGE

- D: Does bondage really exist?
- A: No. If bondage is real, how can it be destroyed by knowledge?
- D: Who has got the bondage?
- A: He who thinks he has bondage.
- D: Who thinks that he has bondage? That is, in whom is the idea present that bondage exists?
- A: You should answer that.
- D: For the *Ātman*.
- A: The *Ātman* is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. It does not have any kind of bondage. This is the conclusion of the *śāstra*-s.
- D: If the bondage is not for *Ātman*, it should be for the mind.
- A: The mind is an inanimate object. How can it have bondage? It is not at all possible for an inanimate object to have bondage.
- D: If the bondage is neither for the *Ātman* nor for the mind, how can bondage be present at all?
- A: Did you think of all the possibilities?

- D: I have thought of everything. I have not considered a combination of the *Ātman* and the mind because that is meaningless.
- A: Why?
- D: Since the nature of the *Ātman* is quite different from that of the mind, how can they unite?
- A: Are heat and light the attributes of iron?
- D: No.
- A: Are they the attributes of fire?
- D: Yes.
- A: What happens when a piece of iron is heated for a long time?
- D: It becomes white-hot and glows.
- A: That is so. If you were not already aware that heat and light are the qualities of fire, would you not consider them to be the attributes of heated iron as they are seen in it?
- D: Yes.
- A: The mind is inert and the *Ātman* is of the nature of consciousness. Bondage is only for the *jīva*, who, like the heated iron, is a combination of the mind and the *Ātman*. It is not as though bondage is for the *Ātman* alone or the mind alone. In reality, the *jīva* is the *Ātman*. The *jīva* experiences bondage as long as he is unaware of his true nature. When the *jīva* realises his true nature, he gets freed from rebirth.
- D: In that case, even *mokṣa* cannot be permanent.
- A: Why?
- D: Because that which has a beginning should also have an end. *Mokṣa* is produced when *jñāna* dawns and so, has a beginning.

A: The objection is not valid as there is no real bondage. Bondage is unreal and is because of ignorance. When ignorance is destroyed through knowledge, all bondage ceases. *Mokṣa* is nothing but abidance in one's true nature as Brahman. We do not call as *mokṣa* something actually attained by the *Ātman*.

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

One who steals the property of others starts a series of crimes and suffers the consequences thereof. In the same way, one who steals the soul suffers. What is meant by stealing the soul? It means that if, out of ignorance, one does not understand the real nature of the soul or thinks what is not the soul to be the soul, one becomes subject to suffering. *Avidyā* or ignorance has no beginning. When we see a pot, the knowledge of that pot arises in us and ignorance about the pot disappears. But we cannot say when the ignorance about the pot originated. Therefore, while *ajñāna* or *avidyā* or ignorance is without a beginning, with the dawn of knowledge it disappears.

Votaries of *Tarka* or logic do not accept that ignorance is the cause of bondage. They say that the mistaken joining of the body and the soul as a single unit is the cause of bondage. But it should be evident that this mistaken identity is itself caused by a previous ignorance. This can be removed only by correct knowledge.

Many indeed are the evil consequences of *ajñāna*. The most important amongst them is the sprouting of the ego. There are three kinds of bodies - the gross, the subtle and causal. As soon as a tree sprouts from a seed, it has to be watered to keep it alive and to enable it to grow. The tree of bondage is nourished by the water of *karma*. In the absence of this water of *karma*, the tree of bondage will wither away. Otherwise, by continuing to perform more and more *karma*-s, this tree becomes bigger and bigger.

Continuing the analogy of the tree of *samsāra* or bondage, our gross body is its bark. Since the life of the senses which surround us is the cause of the body's growth, it may be compared to the inner part of the tree. The numerous veins and arteries that course through the body and pulsate within us are the branches of the tree. The five organs of knowledge may be considered to be the tips of those branches because that is where the flowers bloom and these flowers may be likened to the sensory organs. The fruits of the tree constitute our sorrows and joys.

When the mind is anxious to obtain something, it is agitated till it attains that object. If the mind is not propelled by desire, it is capable of resting on a high plane. Such a mind becomes the receptacle for 'ātmānanda.' Instead of knowing that such bliss can originate only in the *Ātman* or soul, we mistakenly consider that it results from the functioning of our numerous organs of apprehension and action. On the contrary, the only happiness that is everlasting and unchanging is that which is reflected in the mind which is free of all desires.

The objects in this world are numberless. The attainment of a particular object can satisfy only the desire for that object. The desire for all other objects continues as ever before and the mind is wandering all over the place in search of them. That is why *śāstra*s teach us that real happiness can be obtained only by turning the mind away from desire for all external objects and search for the bliss of the soul within. Ultimately, therefore, the search for the attainment of external objects is not only unsatisfying but also acts as an impediment in the way of attaining *ātmānanda*.

A mango tree can yield only mangoes; so also other trees can yield only a particular fruit. But the tree of bondage is the exception to the rule. It produces many fruits which are the cause of *samsāra*. The *jīva* or the embodied soul is the bird that lives off the fruits of this tree. The entire series of acts mentioned above arise from ignorance. Ignorance is the root of the tree of bondage. It should be uprooted.

Ignorance can be conquered only by its opposite, namely, knowledge.

[Excerpted from *Saint of Sringeri in Sacred India*]

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## 38. THE MEANS TO ATTAIN MOKṢA

D: What is the means to *mokṣa*?

A: *Brahma-jñāna* alone is the direct means to *mokṣa*. The *śāstra*-s say:

jñānādeva tu kaivalyam ।<sup>54</sup>

(*Mokṣa* is attained only on account of *jñāna*.)

tamevaṁ vidvān-amṛta iha bhavati ।

nānyaḥ panthā vidyate'yanāya ।<sup>55</sup>

(PS)

(Only on knowing Him, one becomes deathless. There is no other way to immortality.)

D: Does it follow that action is not the direct cause of liberation?

A: Yes. The *śāstra*-s are conclusive in this regard. For example, the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* teaches:

na karmaṇā...<sup>56</sup>

(MNU, XII.14)

(*Mokṣa* is not attained by action.)

D: When does *jñāna* dawn?

A: *Jñāna* arises when the mind becomes pure and devoid of desires.

- D: Will not the mind attain purity if actions are performed in a spirit of dedication to *Īśvara*?
- A: Yes. It will.
- D: Then, should not *karma* also be said to be the cause of *mokṣa*? This is because the mind becomes pure when *karma* is performed in a spirit of dedication to *Īśvara*. *Jñāna* dawns in a pure mind and *mokṣa* is, thereby, attained.
- A: Your reasoning itself shows that *karma* is not the direct means to *mokṣa*. Everybody knows that clay is the cause of a pot. Similarly, the one who makes the pot is also its cause. Now, is the father of the potter also a cause of the pot? After all, but for his father, the potter would not have been born and but for the potter, the pot would not have been produced.
- D: The father of the potter cannot be considered as a cause, for if he is, we will be forced to regard the potter's grandfather, great-grandfather, etc., also as causes.
- A: If the same reasoning is applied, it can be seen that *karma* is never the direct cause of *mokṣa*. Further, that which stems from *karma* has a beginning and so, has an end. Hence, if *mokṣa* results from *karma*, it cannot be permanent. However, the *śāstra*-s say that *mokṣa* is permanent. Hence, it should be understood that *jñāna* alone is the direct cause for *mokṣa* and nothing else.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

In the *Bhāgavata*, it is said that *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna* constitute the means for a person to attain the highest and that there are no other paths besides these three. Meditation on Śiva, Viṣṇu, etc., is included in the path of *bhakti*. When it is said that *karma* and *jñāna* are both necessary, does it mean that they have to be conjoined? In other words, do they have to be practised at the same

time? That is impossible. Can water and fire be kept together in the same place at the same time? No. Similar is the case here.

Bhagavatpāda advises, “You should keep doing *karma* with sincerity. By virtue of its performance, your mind will become pure in due course. Then take to contemplation on God. With the practice of contemplation, you will gradually get to the stage where you will see the entire universe as having no existence apart from the Supreme. Then you would have become a *jñānin* or a knower of the Truth.”

When a person has had numerous experiences of being censured, he gradually gets the realisation, “In this world, neither censure nor praise has any value.” If we remain unruffled even in the face of provocation, then we become noble persons. When does this understanding dawn? Usually, on our becoming old. Just as with the passage of years, people progress from immaturity and irritability to maturity and calmness, one gradually progresses from activity to renunciation. One should start by regularly engaging in one’s religious duties.

No matter what is seen in this world, there is not much to it. The sun rose. We got up. Then, we bathed. Next, we ate breakfast and went to office. There, we did work, came home, ate our night meal and then went to sleep. The next day, the same sequence was repeated; nothing else. Bhartṛhari says, “We keep doing the same things again and again. However, because of our delusion, we do not even feel ashamed of ourselves.” One should sit, reflect deeply and realise that this is the way of the world. If something needs to be done then let it be carried out; else, let it not be done. When does an understanding of this form arise? Only after prolonged analysis of the ways of the world.

Even if one were to go from here to heaven, on the exhaustion of *punya*, one returns to the world of mortals. On coming back, the man who went to heaven engages in further *karma*. Again, he goes to heaven and then returns. Thus, either in this world or in going to

heaven and coming back, there is nothing of consequence. Does it not seem, “enough?”

The river flows and keeps on doing so. Till when? Till it reaches the ocean. Then it just becomes the ocean. It is the water of the ocean that becomes mist, then a cloud and descends to the ground as rain. The rain water forms a brook, then becomes a river and goes back to the ocean. He who has not analysed the situation would say, “The ocean and the source of the river are far apart and yet some say that the river and the ocean are one. They are stupid.” However, he who has analysed would say, “The river could not have come into existence but for the ocean. The source of the river is the ocean itself and it is to the ocean that the river goes back. As such, they are essentially one.”

When does transmigration cease for the individual soul who goes from birth to birth like the flowing water of a river? *Bhagavān* says, “On attaining Me, there is no rebirth.” Many are the *jīva*-s or individual souls that are encountered in the world. Who are they? The Lord avers, “It is verily a part of Mine that has become the eternal individual soul in the world.”

There is a big fire from which a spark emerges. Is this spark different from the fire? No, they are essentially one. On separation from its source, a fiery particle becomes a spark. On its rejoining its source, it becomes indistinguishable from the big fire. “Likewise”, says the Lord, “If you, who are a spark that has emerged from the big fire that is Myself, want to escape from this cycle of birth, old age and death, then merge with Me.” How are we to merge with God?

A river has a name and form till it reaches the ocean but not thereafter. After it merges with the ocean, it is just called ‘ocean’. For us, who have been moving, like a flowing river, from birth to birth in the cycle of transmigratory existence, the goal is merger with the ocean that is the Supreme. What demarcates our case from the merger of a river with the ocean or a spark into its source is that we were never actually separated from our source, the Supreme.

Our separation is only apparent. While we continue to be the Supreme alone, owing to our ignorance of our true nature, we suffer.

Merger with the Supreme, characterised by our realising our true nature, is the goal that we must attain. For this, the paths are those of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*; *karma* leads to *bhakti* and *bhakti* to *jñāna*. After *jñāna* or firm realisation of the Truth is got, what does a person have to do? Nothing. He has no identification with the body and abides in bliss.

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## 39. DIFFERING VIEWS IN ADVAITA TEXTS

- D: We find differing views in the Advaita texts themselves. For example, I have learnt from the *Pañcadaśī* that the *jīva* is a reflection of consciousness in *avidyā*. In some other texts, Brahman delimited by *avidyā* is termed as *jīva*. Some works speak of the presence of multiple *jīva*-s. Some others say that there is only one *jīva*. What is the reason for such differing views?
- A: Advaita philosophy, which stems from *śāstra*-s and is elucidated by Śaṅkarabhagavatpāda, has some variety just as the Ganges branches severally before merging with the ocean. However, all Advaitin-s agree that:

brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ ।<sup>57</sup>

(B, 20)

(Brahman is real, the world is unreal and the *jīva* is verily Brahman, and not different from It.)

Further, the followers of Bhagavatpāda are unanimous that *jñāna* alone is the cause of *mokṣa*.

The variations seen are in the description of the world, God and the individual self. The different views serve to cater to the requirements of aspirants of differing competence and temperament. To a highly competent and advanced aspirant, the *eka-jīva-vāda* (the view that there is only one *jīva*) is

appealing. Difficulty may arise if others are also taught in the same fashion. So, for them, *nānā-jīva-vāda* (the view that there are many *jīva*-s) is presented. Sureśvarācārya has clarified, “By whatever method one gets the knowledge of the inner Self, that means should be considered proper. Such methods are several.”

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## 40. JÑĀNIN

- D: Is a *jñānin* beyond virtue and sin?
- A: Yes.
- D: Then, since no merit or sin is acquired by a *jñānin*, will he conduct himself in any manner whatsoever?
- A: A *jñānin* will not do so normally. His mind should have been extremely pure prior to his attaining *jñāna*. This purity remains even after the dawn of knowledge. A *jñānin* is an ideal for others. Sureśvarācārya has observed, “If a *jñānin* were to act in an unregulated fashion, then what is the difference between him and a dog, which consumes even what is unclean?”
- D: Should the *śrāddha* of a *jñānin* be performed after he dies?
- A: Yes.
- D: A *jñānin* will not be reborn. How then is *śrāddha* useful?
- A: To whom?
- D: To the *jñānin*.
- A: As far as the *jñānin* is concerned, it serves no purpose.
- D: Then why should the *śrāddha* be performed?
- A: Because the relatives do have a duty to fulfil. From the *jñānin*'s point of view, performance of *śrāddha* is of no use. However, the relatives continue to have their duty to perform

*śrāddha*. Just because one becomes a *jñānin*, one's relatives are not absolved of their duty. They are bound to perform those actions that the *śāstra*-s have prescribed for them.

- D: Whom should we consider a *jñānin*?
- A: A *jñānin* is one who has realised his true nature as Brahman. It is possible that misery, happiness, etc., exist in his mind just as in the minds of others but since his mind is totally pure, they do not affect him. To cite an example, a seed that is roasted and then sown in the soil cannot sprout and grow into a tree but can still be eaten. The mind of a *jñānin* is burnt by the fire of *jñāna*. A semblance of the mind remains, like a burnt seed, but it cannot perform any action that can lead to rebirth.
- D: We see even *jñānin*-s experiencing joys and sorrows. How can they?
- A: Let us suppose a man is spinning a wheel. If he takes his hands off the wheel, it will come to a stop only after a few more rotations. *Prārabdha* is the cause of the *jñānin*'s body. Once *jñāna* is attained, identification with the body and mind ceases. Nonetheless, as long as *prārabdha* remains, like the momentum of the wheel, the *jñānin*'s body and mind continue to act. From an observer's perspective, only the *āgāmi* and *sañcita karma*-s (the actions that would yield fruits only later) are destroyed, but not *prārabdha*. *Prārabdha* is expended only by experiencing it. However, from a *jñānin*'s standpoint, he has neither *prārabdha* nor the body and mind.
- D: Is a *jñānin*'s abidance in the Supreme constant in the states of waking, dream and deep sleep?
- A: Yes.
- D: What will be his experience when he looks at the world?

A: “Nothing is different from me; there is no universe apart from the *Ātman*” – he knows thus as a matter of experience.

D: Why are *jñānin*-s compassionate?

A: Prior to the dawn of knowledge, a *jñānin*'s mind should have been very pure, for *jñāna* dawns only after the mind is thoroughly purified. Hence, compassion should have been cultivated earlier. That manifests itself more prominently after realisation of the Truth. *Jñānin*-s have nothing to attain through any action. They are ever content, having attained what is to be attained. Therefore, it may be said that they live only for the welfare of others.

D: Can even *jñānin*-s have devotion to *Īśvara*?

A: When a *jñānin* can and does feel, why should he be incapable of devotion to *Īśvara*? The glory of the Lord is supreme and infinite. So, even a *jñānin*'s mind inclines towards *Īśvara*. This does not mean that he has not realised his own True nature. Though he has realised the non-dual Truth, his body and the mind engage in acts of devotion to *Īśvara*. We read in the *Bhāgavata*:

ātmā-rāmāśca munayo nirgranthā apyurukrame |  
kurvantyahaitukīṃ bhaktim-ittham-bhūtaguṇo hariḥ ||<sup>58</sup>

(BP, I.7.10)

(Even sages who revel only in the *Ātman* and are without any bond (or have given up even the study of texts) are devoted, without any expectation whatsoever, to the Lord. Such is the excellence of the Lord.)

D: To which world will a *jñānin* or a *jivanmukta* go after death?

A: He will not go to any world. He just remains as Brahman. After his death, we refer to him as a *videha-mukta*. The *śāstra*-s say that he who has attained *jñāna* attains immortality. He realises Brahman here itself. After death, he is not differentiated from Brahman.

- D: Will a *jñānin* desire *samādhi*? Is there any need for him to remain in that state?
- A: A *jñānin* has neither craving for nor the need to remain in *samādhi*. Be it *samādhi* or distraction, they are mental states. He is beyond all these. Considering the depth of a *jñānin*'s experience of *samādhi*, it is said that one *jñānin* is superior to another. This is with regard to an observer. That is, as far as an observer is concerned, gradations, such as, "He is a greater *jñānin*", are there. But as far as the *jñānin*-s are concerned, there is no such differentiation at all. A *jñānin* involved in worldly activities is referred to as a *brahmavid*. If a *jñānin* has the practice of going into *nirvikalpa-samādhi* and coming out of it on his own, he is a *brahmavidvara*. If he can be awakened from *nirvikalpa-samādhi* only by the efforts of others, he is a *brahmavidvarīyān*. A *brahmavidvariṣṭha* is one who never emerges from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. His body perishes while he is in *samādhi*. As a *brahmavidvariṣṭha* has the best *prārabdha*, he is deemed the greatest *jñānin*.
- D: If engaged in actions, will *jñānin*-s also have the experiences of happiness and misery?
- A: Yes, they too experience pain, etc. However, as their minds are very pure, they are not unsettled by the experiences. They are like a soldier who does not cease firing even though he is wounded. A *jñānin* does not give room to ill will even if another person causes him misery. Similarly, happiness does not elate him.
- D: Can *jñānin*-s get dreams?
- A: Why not? They can certainly get dreams. Just as the *jñānin* sees the world of the waking state as having no existence apart from the *Ātman*, he apprehends the world of a dream as having no existence apart from the *Ātman*. I just told you the actual state of affairs.

- D: What purpose is served by becoming a *jñānin*?
- A: If one attains *jñāna* one can become a *jīvanmukta*. One then becomes freed from all bondage. Supreme bliss is experienced. A *jñānin* is never reborn. He is one who has attained that which is to be attained. What more need be said?

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* says:

bhidyate hṛdaya-granthiśchidyante sarva-saṁśayāḥ ।  
kṣīyante cāśya karmaṇi tasmin dr̥ṣṭe parāvare ॥<sup>59</sup>

(MuU, II. 2.8)

(When the Supreme *Ātman*, which is both superior as the cause and inferior as the effect, is realised, the knot of the heart is destroyed, all doubts come to an end and one's actions become dissipated.)

*Jīvanmukti* is indeed the highest attainment.

- D: What is the reason for two *jīvanmukta*-s giving differing advices to their disciples?
- A: *Jīvanmukta*-s are those who have realised the Truth and are devoid of *vāsanā*-s (tendencies of the mind). They may have practised different spiritual disciplines and so may advise others differently. Instructions are given keeping in mind the competence of the disciple. This is another reason for the differences in their advices.

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## □ Discourses of Acharyal

*Acharyal was a perfect jīvanmukta. What follows is an extract from one of His divine discourses about a Guru, who is a realised soul:*

One who makes us literate, one who does good unto us may be ordinarily described as a *Guru*. But the great preceptor is one who himself knows the essence of the *Upaniṣad*-s, releases us from

bondage, and being free from ignorance, is steadfast in the enjoyment of the Self and is able to impart this path unto others. People desire freedom from pain (like Gajendra), they desire prosperity or they desire knowledge; all these three approach God for the fulfilment of what they hope for. But the preceptor who has realised himself is godly. That is why Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gīta*, “There is no difference between Me and the *jñānin* or the realised soul.” Such a preceptor or *ācārya* is free from ignorance and desire. If he is under their influence then he is no *ācārya*. The true seer does not see the world as such but only as the undifferentiated Brahman.

The question may be asked whether such a realised soul can or will give advice to others. This is possible. As God incarnates Himself for redeeming mankind, so also He incarnates as preceptor to help in the salvation of His disciples. Lord Śiva Himself came down to earth as Ādi Śaṅkara. A proper awareness of the external world and of such activity as instruction to disciples is consistent with the state of *jīvanmukti*, or release from bondage while the body still exists. The complete disappearance of the external world occurs along with the disappearance of the conditioned body. There is no inconsistency here.

One’s real Self is veiled by ignorance. Therefore, we flounder in the sea of *samsāra* or cycle of births and deaths. Sometimes, passion and ego rule our actions. How can a similar human being help us to emancipate ourselves from this state? Hence the need for approaching a true *ācārya*. The logicians, who argue with conviction that the world is as real as Brahman, cannot be real preceptors. He alone can be a preceptor who can help us to ward off accumulated wrong impressions and instil the right ones.

[Excerpted from *Saint of Sringeri in Sacred India*]

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My *Guru* was a knower of Brahman and was not dependent on any effect or cause. His introversion did not stem subsequent to His taking *saṁnyāsa*, studying the *śāstra*-s and practising spiritual

disciplines. It manifested right from His birth. Detachment is said to be extreme, middling and mild. What is mild detachment? When some problem crops up, one feels, “What is the need for this world?” Extreme detachment is that in which, owing to the company of a sage, one feels, “The world must be renounced this very instant.” If a person has fire on his head, he would rush to put it out. My *Guru*’s detachment was of this kind. His detachment was so intense that though He dwelt as a pontiff in such a big Math, He did not even have the idea that He lived there. “*He receives food as alms in his palms and lives at the bases of trees*” - It was with this mental attitude that He abided in the Math. However, when it came to religious activities and activities relating to the welfare of the devotees, He acted in accordance with the following words of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* - “*O Pārtha, there is nothing in the three worlds that I must do; nor is there anything to be attained that has not been attained. Yet, I engage in actions.*” “*O Pārtha, if I do not, without laziness, ever engage in action, men would, in all matters, follow My path. These worlds would be ruined if I did not perform action.*”

Keeping others in mind, He opined, “You have all labelled Me a big pontiff. Regardless of whether or not I should perform worship and obtain the fruit thereof, what would you say if I were to abstain from worship? ‘Even *Swamigal* does not perform any worship. Why should we engage in what He Himself is not interested in carrying out?’ Therefore, I must perform worship. You people will then act likewise, thinking, ‘The great one Himself engages in worship. It may or may not be necessary for Him but we need it. So, we must carry it out.’ That My *Guru* was a *mahātman* (great soul) has been known by experience by those who were His contemporaries and beheld Him.

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*The following is an excerpt from a speech delivered by Acharyal at Bangalore in the year 1989. This is among His last five benedictory addresses. It was uncommon for Acharyal to speak about or comment on His gracious speeches. However, without any*

*discernible occasion to do so, of His own accord, He recalled and commented on this holy address, at Sringeri, in August 1989. He had remarked, “I remember that, while at Bangalore, I went one day to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. That morning, I had sat for long in nirvikalpa-samādhi. Though I engaged in My normal activities, My mind was particularly indrawn that day. Perhaps, that is why I spoke about the viewpoint of a knower of the Truth and about samādhi. I now get a feeling that I shall not be discoursing on those lines again.”*

*Acharyal was a nonpareil yogin and had been frequently abiding in nirvikalpa-samādhi, the pinnacle of yoga, since His teens. He had the capacity to confer samādhi on others. As stated by Him, He had sat for long in nirvikalpa-samādhi on the day He delivered this divine discourse. Yet, in connection with samādhi, He chose to cite, in this sacrosanct address, the experiences of a disciple rather than His own; further, He took no credit whatsoever for those experiences. Such was His matchless freedom from egoism.*

Merger with the Supreme, characterised by realising our True nature, is the goal that we must attain. After *jñāna* or firm realisation of the Truth is got, what does a person have to do? Nothing. He has no identification with the body and abides in bliss.

There is a disciple of Mine. Owing to the special merit acquired by him in his earlier birth, on his sitting in *samādhi*, the acme of *yoga*, he does not get up even when three days have passed. One may ask, “Has *sandhyāvandana* not got omitted?” He is doing something that is far superior to *sandhyāvandana*. He is absorbed in the Supreme Brahman.

I : What was it like when you remained for three days in *samādhi*? Were you aware of day and night?

Disciple : No, I was aware of nothing external. I just abided in that state.

- I : How did you know that three days had passed?
- Disciple : I had kept a watch with me. When I got up, I learnt from it that three days had lapsed.

When he has attained a high state, is it necessary for him to perform *sandhyāvandana* or to perform *abhiṣeka* to a *Śiva-linga*? No.

On the other hand, suppose there is a person who desires to eat tiffin, drink coffee and go out and wander in the streets, and also does all this but remains without performing worship of God. What can we say to him except “You are a thorough *nāstika*.” On the other hand, it must be said about this disciple of Mine that he is the ultimate *āstika*. Because, in *samādhi*, he does nothing. If he were to engage in activities then it might be suggested to him to do *sandhyāvandana* too. But he does nothing whatsoever; even food is not needed by him. There do exist such persons.

What I am saying is what I have seen in My disciple. His achievement is because of the special merit acquired by him in his previous birth. He told Me, “I wish to go to a forest and sit in penance.”

- I : For how many days?
- Disciple : One month.
- I : What will you eat?
- Disciple : I shall keep with me a little *aval* (flattened rice).
- I : What will you do if a tiger comes?
- Disciple : Oh, am I not there as a food for that tiger? If it feels like eating, let it do so.

That is the extent of his firmness of mind. One day, when he was seated, a tiger actually came there. He saw it and felt, “God

has come to me in the form of this tiger. He is revealing Himself like this.” He just remained seated. The tiger observed him and saw whether he was moving his hands, or legs or head. He did not move at all. What did the tiger think? Perhaps, it concluded that this person must actually be some stone. It went away. If we get that kind of capacity, need we do worship of God? No, for we would experience God right where we are. After all, has it not been said, “Nārāyaṇa pervades the interior and exterior of everything perceived or heard in this world”?

[Excerpted from *Divine Discourses*]

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### ❑ Incidents from Acharyal's Life

*Acharyal's* recognition of realised souls merits special mention. An *avadhūta* named Brahma arrived at Sringeri. He seemed to observe no regulations and did not even hesitate to urinate or defecate in public. He partook of food from a Muslim's house and seemed to be an eccentric, partly bordering on lunacy. *Acharyal* immediately recognised that He was no mentally deranged person. In fact, on an earlier trip of his, *Acharyal* had blessed him. *Acharyal* spoke to him freely and made arrangements for his comfortable stay even when He was setting out on His tour. He explicitly confirmed that Brahma was a *jñānin*.

Speaking of him on another occasion, *Acharyal* remarked, “He was a *jñānin* no doubt. But few understood his ways and so, he spent time inside a lunatic asylum rather than outside it.”

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### ❑ Experiences of Devotees

*Acharyal was a perfect jīvanmukta. Being a sage versed in the scriptures and established in Brahman, He had the authority and competence to decide upon the sādhanā to be practised by an aspirant and uplift the disciple to the level of Self-realisation.*

I once prayed to *Acharyal* for blessing me with true devotion. *Acharyal* blessed me and said, “Abidance in the Self is indeed considered the highest devotion. May you have that true devotion.”

On another occasion, *Acharyal* asked me to come near Him. When I did so, I was astounded by what I saw in His eyes. It seemed as if everything was within them and that He was the embodiment of indescribable power. In a few moments, He appeared His normal self. Unexpectedly, He got up and started walking towards the bridge leading to the northern banks of the river Tunga. He beckoned to me to follow and soon, we reached the *aśvattha* tree near the Private Secretary’s office in Narasimhavanam. There, with a tone of finality, He remarked, “This shall be your last birth.”

[A disciple]

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On an occasion, I requested *Acharyal* on behalf of my brother-in-law to bless him with a *liṅga* for his *pūjā*. His Holiness went upstairs and brought two *liṅga*-s. One was a *sphaṭika* (crystal) *bāṇa-Liṅga*, while the other was a *Narmadā-liṅga*. He gave me the first and said, “Worship it. You will get *jñāna*.” The second one was to be given to my brother-in-law. What induced *Acharyal* to act as He did is unknown to me. I commenced daily worship of the *liṅga*. Subsequently, I came into contact with an *avadhūta* called Brahma. He had an unkempt appearance, had long nails and a beard. On seeing me he said, “Bring *prasāda*.” I went and brought some idlis, gave them to him and said, “*Namaste*.” “Happy man”, he replied, “How about realisation?”, I queried. “You will get it”, he remarked. “How?”, I persisted. “The mind will tell you”, was the poignant reply. The conversation ended there. I met *Acharyal* and reported what had transpired. He was silent for a while and gazed fixedly. “He is a *Raja-yogin* with *Vedantic* experience”, said *Acharyal* finally with a tone of absolute certainty. A clearance had been given. Had not *Acharyal* told me earlier that by worshipping the *liṅga* that He gave me I would get *jñāna*? The means were now beginning to operate in full force.

[Sri P.S.Venkatasubba Rao]

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During the year 1982, *Acharyal* suffered an anginal attack. He was given an injection of morphine, for relief. *Acharyal* soon slipped into semi-torpor, with His mind reeling. Sri Giridhara Sastry and I were seated by His side. There was no one else in the room. *Acharyal*, who was hardly conscious of His surroundings, began lisping a verse meaning, “Virtuous and faulty deeds of the mind do not touch Me, the Supreme Brahman, who am all pervasive.” Who else but a great *jīvanmukta* could have asserted thus even when He was barely conscious of what He was saying?

[A disciple]

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## 41. SIDDHI-S

- D: Will *jñānin*-s have all sorts of *siddhi*-s (supernatural powers) always?
- A: No. If the *prārabdha* of a *jñānin* is such that he should have *siddhi*-s, we can see them in him. If the *jñānin* so desires, he can get *siddhi*-s but it is unlikely that he will get such a desire.
- D: Do *siddhi*-s indicate the attainment of an exalted spiritual state.
- A: No, for some *siddhi*-s can be attained even by the use of herbs, *mantra*-s, austerity or the worship of evil spirits.
- D: Is a *jñānin* affected by *siddhi*-s in any way?
- A: No. He does not care in the least for *siddhi*-s. He may or may not get them but he does not bother about that at all.
- D: Can it be said that nothing in a magic show is the consequence of a *siddhi* of the magician?
- A: Normally, magic shows are mere tricks. The magician's possession of some power cannot be ruled out in very rare cases.
- D: Some people cure diseases, like jaundice, with great ease. For example, water is kept in a vessel. It becomes yellowish and the patient's eyes become normal. The disease is also cured. How do such actual cures occur?

- A: Normally, they take place through the power of a *mantra*. A few other factors hold the key in some cases. Generally, those who cure diseases in this manner do not accept money for their treatment. They cure as an act of service. As far as I have seen, if they teach their method to other people, the potency of the *mantra* is lost.
- D: Then how do they teach other people?
- A: Normally, they retire after teaching it to their sons or disciples.
- D: Sometimes we find *vibhūti* (holy ash) falling from a photograph. Will *Acharyal* kindly clarify how such incidents can occur?
- A: Often fraud is involved. Sometimes, such things happen owing to the power of an evil spirit. At other times, they occur because of a sage's *sankalpa* (resolve). At times, *Īśvara* wills such events to show His presence.

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### □ Discourses of Acharyal

*The following is an extract from a discourse delivered by Acharyal in the year 1988:*

After Bhagavatpāda obtained permission for *saṁnyāsa* from His mother, Āryāmbā, she told Him, “I gave You permission to become a *saṁnyāsin* since it was my wish that you should live. However, You are my only son. If I die, You should come and perform my obsequies. Otherwise, what is the use of having begotten You as my son?”

Unwilling to disappoint His mother, Bhagavatpāda declared, “I shall fulfil your desire. Wherever I may be and in whatever condition, I shall come to you in the hour of need and personally perform your last rites.”

One might ask “Was it right on the part of Bhagavatpāda to have given such a promise?” Yes, in that circumstance, Bhagavatpāda’s assurance was perfectly in order. He procured her consent on the basis of such an assurance. However, the promise that Bhagavatpāda gave cannot be given by any other, for another would not be able to visualise the time of his mother’s death and arrive at his mother’s side immediately. Can a person not assuage his mother with promises, take *saṁnyāsa*, and then forget the commitments? No, once one makes a promise, it becomes one’s bounden duty to see that one fulfils one’s commitment at the appropriate time. No promise should be allowed to turn out to be an empty one. Bhagavatpāda certainly valued His promise. When Bhagavatpāda was at Sringeri, by the special powers that He had, He envisioned the approaching end of His mother.

The *mantra-śāstra* speaks of several *siddhi*-s or supernatural powers. One such is the ‘*pādukā-siddhi*’ by which a person can reach the place of his choice in an extremely short time by his mere wish. Bhagavatpāda reached Kalady from Sringeri by the use of *pādukā-siddhi*. Is this possible? Yes, we should accept the words of those who have experienced it. My *Guru* has confirmed the existence of *pādukā-siddhi*. An instance of the use of *pādukā-siddhi* comes to My mind. There was a person who lived in Sringeri. My *śāstra* teacher and that person started out together from Sringeri by walk to go to Kigga for offering prayers at the temple there. The person concerned was old and My *śāstra* teacher moved a little ahead of him. There was only one road to Kigga and so, if at any point of time that person had overtaken My *śāstra* teacher, the latter would have certainly known. However, when My teacher reached Kigga, he found that the elder person was already there.

Bhagavatpāda had *yoga-siddhi* and *mantra-siddhi*. However, supernatural powers should not be used. Yet, if one abstains from invoking them even in the exceptional circumstances in which they should be, one would be behaving foolishly. Bhagavatpāda used

the *pādukā-siddhi* rightly for the sake of His mother. Reaching Kalady in this manner, He performed her last rites.

Bhagavatpāda's action was guided solely by the consideration that the assurance given by Him to His mother prior to His departure had to be carried out at any cost. Āryāmbā attained the exalted status that she rightly deserved. Bhagavatpāda did not act out of attachment; nor was He motivated by the desire to fulfil some personal ends. It is true that *saṁnyāsin*-s are prohibited from performing funeral rites, but Bhagavatpāda was a *brahmavit*, a knower of the Truth and such knowers are beyond restrictions.

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### ❑ Experiences of Devotees

*A jñānin with immense tapas is a veritable Kāmadhenu. His words unfaillingly come to pass.*

Once when *Acharyal* was travelling to Tirupati, Sri Subba Rao and Sri Nanjunda Rao were with Him. At a certain spot, the car entered a pool of slush and got stuck. The attempts made by the devotees to get the car out were all in vain. Finally, Sri Subba Rao came to *Acharyal* who was sitting inside the car and said, "We have tried all we could to take the car out but we failed. Only *Acharyal* can do something about it now." They resumed the work and to their great surprise, the car was released smoothly! Later, out of curiosity, Sri Subba Rao approached His Holiness and asked what exactly He did to cause the car come out of the slush easily. *Acharyal* said, "I chanted *Śrī-Hanumat-pañcaratna* and prayed to Lord Āñjaneya to offer help. It came. I do not normally resort to such prayers. In this case, you people tried your level best and then came to Me and said that only I could do something. That is why I decided to pray to Hanumān!"

[Mrs.Ramnath]

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Once while touring in the state of Tamilnadu, a group of villagers stopped His Holiness' car. They submitted to His Holiness, "We have heard that You are called 'Mazhai Swamigal' (Swamiji who brings rains). Please get us the rains as we have been suffering from drought for the past several years."

As it was getting late for us and as a part of our convoy had already gone ahead, we were trying to convince the villagers to allow us to proceed. *Acharyal* called me and said, "Look, I find that they have a strong faith in God and some in Me too. If I am to ignore them and proceed further, not only will their faith get ruined but also will their attitudes change towards atheism. So, I have decided to stay here for the night. Send a car and bring the trucks back to this place." His words were final and all His instructions were carried out. Some house was identified as the venue for the *pūjā* to be performed by His Holiness. Before the commencement of the *pūjā*, His Holiness called some of us and instructed, "Make an announcement to the villagers that there will be heavy rains tonight and therefore, they have to take necessary precautions to protect their kith and kin and property." The announcement was made but the villagers were a bit sceptical about the prediction. However, they attended the *pūjā*. After the *pūjā*, *Acharyal* called us and told, "I will spend the whole night inside the car itself and you all may find comfortable places to sleep in the night. *Acharyal* then got into the rear seat of the car and sat in *padmāsana*. After an hour or so, a heavy downpour started with thunder and lightning. All through the night, it rained cats and dogs. The next day morning, the villagers surrounded *Acharyal*'s car and the village headman prayed that the rains be stopped as all the tanks and reservoirs were already full and that if the rains continued, it would cause havoc." The rains stopped and the *yātrā* resumed.

[Sri A.Ramaswamy]

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*Acharyal* once planned to visit the Narasimha Parvata where Sri Nrisimha Bharati Mahaswamigal had performed protracted

penance. We wanted to accompany Him. He initially dissuaded us as it was raining heavily and the path was arduous. Finally, however, He gave us permission. On the way, *Acharyal* performed *pūjā* at the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga temple in Kigga and gave my husband *prasāda*. All of us reached the summit and stayed there for the night. At 3.00 p.m. the next day, everybody was ready to descend. Ominous dark clouds began to gather and a downpour was expected at any moment. “Let us start immediately. It will not rain till we go down”, remarked *Acharyal* with a tone of finality. As we descended, we could see that it was raining heavily on the hills on our right and left. However, we were not caught in the rain. The most intriguing part of the phenomenon was that the rain could be seen following us but it never overtook us as we climbed down. As soon as we had reached the vehicles, *Acharyal* said, “All of you board the vehicles immediately. Nature has been tested enough.” No sooner had we taken our seats than it began to rain cats and dogs. What better illustration is needed to prove *Acharyal*’s total mastery over Nature?

[Smt.Vaikuntham Anantharamaseshan]

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Irrespective of when *Acharyal* went to sleep, He would get up at 4 o’ clock in the morning. I observed this when I had the golden opportunity of staying in the divine presence of *Acharyal* during His Hyderabad camp. Sometimes, He would call out to me to check if I was awake. On one morning, I just wanted to see what His Holiness was doing as there was no sound heard after He called out to me once or twice. I slightly moved the blanket covering my face. I was surprised to see that *Acharyal* was seated in *padmāsana*, literally floating at about nine inches in air. His body was motionless and there was no trace of breathing in Him. After being in this state for about ten minutes, His body started to descend slowly and soon after this, the breathing was visible. I heard Him chant ‘*Om*’ after performing *prāṇāyāma*. Then, He got up and went out of the room.

Later, I posed a casual question to His Holiness: “Is it possible for one to float?” *Acharyal* replied, “Yes, it is quite possible to do so through the means taught in the *yoga-sāstra*.”

[Sri Rajagopala Sharma]

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Once I went to His abode to check His blood pressure. I checked it in His left arm and was shocked to find it very high. Then, without showing any reaction, His Holiness stretched His right hand and asked me to check the BP in that arm also. I obeyed. To my surprise, the pressure was extremely low. Looking at my panic-stricken face, He laughed loudly. Only then did I realise that He was teasing me with His superhuman powers. On another occasion, He asked me to check His body temperature. I was shocked to observe that it was extremely high. After some time, He commanded me to check the temperature again. When I carried out His instruction, I was surprised to find His body to be extremely chill. Noticing my confusion, He had a hearty laugh.

[Dr. Subhalakshmi]

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Once, when I was travelling in Madras on a two wheeler, I met with an accident resulting in a multiple fracture of bones in my arm. I was admitted in a hospital and the doctor who attended to me decided that I had to undergo a surgery without any delay. In due course, the matter was conveyed to *Acharyal* by my parents residing at Sringeri. *Acharyal* had blessed my parents with the sacred *prasāda* for my early recovery. I was informed that the *prasāda* was being sent from Sringeri. I requested the doctor to delay the surgery as I wished to receive the *prasāda* first. The doctor retorted saying that I was behaving like a fool in spite of being a doctor myself. I ignored his words and went to the extent of transferring myself to a different Unit where a leading orthopaedic surgeon and an ardent devotee of our Math was the Head. The surgeon understood my sentiments and agreed to wait

till the *prasāda* came and said that the surgery could be performed after three weeks. The *prasāda* from *Acharyal* arrived and I applied it on the affected region. When after three weeks, an X-Ray was taken, the surgeon was pleasantly surprised to find that all the dislocated bones had got reset! What else is this but *Acharyal's* grace? Bewildered by the miracle, the doctor declared that he would preserve the X-Ray for his students to see!

[Dr. Subhalakshmi]

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*Acharyal could cause siddhi-s to manifest and stop them too:*

When I went to Sringeri in 1973, I spoke of the numerous *siddhi-s* like clairaudience that had manifested in me and beseeched Him to get rid of them, as I did not wish to be tempted to use them.

*Acharyal* : It is *Īśvara's* will that He use your body for some of His purposes. That is why these powers are manifesting.

I : But I fear them.

*Acharyal* : Very well. They shall stop making their appearance. However, when there is suitable occasion, they shall spontaneously crop up.

Accordingly, the supernormal abilities vanished. I was glad that *Acharyal*, in His compassion, readily eliminated the *siddhi-s*.

[A disciple]

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My father was once travelling by plane. A man whom others called 'Swamiji' was sitting next to my father. He placed his hand on my father's head and materialised a silver coin! When he gave it to my father, the latter said, "I do not go in for anything less than gold." That person did something and the silver coin got

transformed into gold! Later, when my father had the *darśana* of *Acharyal*, he showed the coin to His Holiness and narrated the incident. He then asked His Holiness, “Why does not Your Holiness too perform such miracles?” *Acharyal* replied, “What you are mentioning is an external miracle. I can easily do it and I can even teach you too to perform it. However, it will not be of any use to anyone as it is done only to impress others. Transforming an individual and leading him to higher good, is the biggest miracle performed by a *Guru*.”

[Sri S. Shivaswamy]

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## 42. APPENDIX – List of Sanskrit references

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- <sup>1</sup> ईश्वरो गुरुरात्मेति मूर्तिभेदविभागिने... नमः (M, I.30)
- <sup>2</sup> न नरेणावरेण प्रोक्त एष सुविज्ञेयो बहुधा चिन्त्यमानः ।  
अनन्यप्रोक्ते गतिरत्र नास्ति (KU, I.2.8)
- <sup>3</sup> ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥ (BG, XVI.24)
- <sup>4</sup> यथा ते तत्र वर्तेरन् । तथा तत्र वर्तेथाः । (TU, I.11.3)
- <sup>5</sup> स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् । (BG, II.40)
- <sup>6</sup> शुभाशुभाभ्यां मार्गाभ्यां वहन्ती वासना सरित् ।  
पौरुषेण प्रयत्नेन योजनीया शुभे पथि ॥ (YV, II.9.30)
- <sup>7</sup> यदभावि न तद्भावि भावि चेन्न तदन्यथा । (P, VII.168)
- <sup>8</sup> सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।  
प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥ (BG, III.33)
- <sup>9</sup> इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।  
तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत्तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥ (BG, III.34)
- <sup>10</sup> वेदः स्मृतिः सदाचारः स्वस्य च प्रियमात्मनः ।  
एतच्चतुर्विधं प्राहुः साक्षाद्धर्मस्य लक्षणम् ॥ (MS, II.12)
- <sup>11</sup> अहिंसा सत्यमस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।  
एतं सामासिकं धर्मं चातुर्वर्ण्येऽब्रवीन्मनुः ॥ (MS, X.63)
- <sup>12</sup> नाधर्मश्चरितो लोके सद्यः फलति गौरिव ।

- शनैरावर्तमानस्तु कर्तुर्मूलानि कृन्तति ॥ (MS, IV.172)
- 13 अधर्मेणैघते तावत्ततो भद्राणि पश्यति ।  
ततः सपत्नाञ्जयति समूलस्तु विनश्यति ॥ (MS, IV.174)
- 14 धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः (MB, III.30.8; NN, 34)
- 15 श्लोकार्धेन प्रवक्ष्यामि यदुक्तं ग्रन्थकोटिभिः ।  
परोपकारः पुण्याय पापाय परपीडनम् ॥ (SPM, 95)
- 16 अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।  
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥ (BG, XII.13)
- 17 लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु (SPSS, 1)
- 18 मुक्तसङ्गोऽनहंवादी धृत्युत्साहसमन्वितः ।  
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योर्निर्विकारः कर्ता सात्त्विक उच्यते ॥ (BG, XVIII.26)
- 19 मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय ।  
निवसिष्यसि मय्येव अत ऊर्ध्वं न संशयः ॥ (BG, XII.8)
- 20 अथ चित्तं समाधातुं न शक्नोषि मयि स्थिरम् ।  
अभ्यासयोगेन ततो मामिच्छातुं धनञ्जय ॥ (BG, XII.9)
- 21 अभ्यासेऽप्यसमर्थोऽसि मत्कर्मपरमो भव ।  
मदर्थमपि कर्माणि कुर्वन्सिद्धिमवाप्स्यसि ॥ (BG, XII.10)
- 22 अथैतदप्यशक्तोऽसि कर्तुं मद्योगमाश्रितः ।  
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं ततः कुरु यतात्मवान् ॥ (BG, XII.11)

- 23 कुरु... केवलमीश्वरार्थम् (BGB, II.48)
- 24 ईश्वरो मे तुष्यतु (BGB, II.48)
- 25 श्रीपरमेश्वरप्रीत्यर्थं... उपासिष्ये
- 26 मोक्षकारणसामग्र्यां भक्तिरेव गरीयसी । (VC, 32)
- 27 यस्त आशिष आशास्ते न स भृत्यः स वै वणिक् । (BP, VII.10.4)
- 28 सा त्वस्मिन्परमप्रेमरूपा ॥ (NBS, 2)
- 29 अङ्गोलं निजबीजसन्ततिरयस्कान्तोपलं सूचिका  
साध्वी नैजविभुं लता क्षितिरुहं सिन्धुः सरिद्वल्लभम् ।  
प्राप्नोतीह यथा तथा पशुपतेः पादारविन्दद्वयं  
चेतोवृत्तिरुपेत्य तिष्ठति सदा सा भक्तिरित्युच्यते ॥ (SL, 61)
- 30 मूर्खो वदति विष्णाय विद्वान्वदति विष्णवे ।  
उभयोः सदृशं पुण्यं भावग्राही जनार्दनः ॥
- 31 मामनुस्मर युध्य च (BG, VIII.7)
- 32 पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।  
तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्रामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥ (BG, IX.26)
- 33 यत्करोषि यदश्रासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् ।  
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥ (BG, IX.27)
- 34 माण्डूक्यमेकमेवाऽलं मुमुक्षूणां विमुक्तये । (MukU, I.26)
- 35 पलालमिव धान्यार्थी त्यजेद्ब्रन्थमशेषतः । (AU, 18)

- 36 अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।  
 निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥  
 सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।  
 मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ (BG, XII.13-14)
- 37 सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः । (BG, III.10)
- 38 स्वाध्यायोऽध्येतव्यः (TA, II.15.19)
- 39 वेदस्याध्ययनं सर्वं गुर्वध्ययनपूर्वकम् । (SV, I.1.7.366)
- 40 यदहरेव विरजेत् तदहरेव प्रव्रजेत् (JU, 4)
- 41 ब्रह्मचर्यादेव प्रव्रजेत् गृहाद्वा वनाद्वा (JU, 4)
- 42 किं प्रजया करिष्यामः । (BU, IV.4.22)
- 43 यदहरेव विरजेत् तदहरेव प्रव्रजेत् (JU, 4)
- 44 चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम् ।  
 तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥ (BG, VI. 34)
- 45 असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।  
 अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥ (BG, VI. 35)
- 46 लये सम्बोधयेच्चित्तं विक्षिप्तं शमयेत्पुनः ।  
 सकषायं विजानीयात् समप्राप्तं न चालयेत् ॥ (GK, III. 44)
- 47 यथाऽभिमतध्यानाद्वा । (YS, I.39)
- 48 चैलाजिनकुशोत्तरम् (BG, VI. 11)

- 49 स तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारासेवितो दृढभूमिः । (YS,I.14)
- 50 मुक्ताभिरावृतं सूत्रं मुक्तयोर्मध्य ईक्ष्यते ।  
तथा वृत्तिविकल्पैश्चित्स्पष्टा मध्ये विकल्पयोः ॥ (LV,10)
- 51 मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यात् । (SU,IV.10)
- 52 नेति नेति । (BU,II.3.6)
- 53 मुक्ताभिमानी मुक्तो हि बद्धो बद्धाभिमान्यपि । (AG,I.11)
- 54 ज्ञानादेव तु कैवल्यम् ।
- 55 तमेवं विद्वानमृत इह भवति ।  
नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय । (PS)
- 56 न कर्मणा... (MNU, XII.14)
- 57 ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः । (B, 20)
- 58 आत्मारामाश्च मुनयो निर्ग्रन्था अप्युरुक्रमे ।  
कुर्वन्त्यहैतुकीं भक्तिमित्थंभूतगुणो हरिः ॥ (BP,I.7.10)
- 59 भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिशिछद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः ।  
क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन्दृष्टे परावरे ॥ (MuU, II. 2.8)

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