

# *Glimpses of Divine Messages*

*(from the Upanishads, Bhagavat Geetha and Divya Prabandham)*



*Excerpts from 'Mystery of Man and the Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender'*

*A book by Neduntheru U.Ve Sri S. Kannan Swami*

Sincere Thanks To:

Sri Nrsimha seva rasikan Oppiliappan Koil Sri Varadachari Sadagopan svami for hosting this  
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by Neduntheru U.Ve. Sri S. Kannan swami

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Sri Malolan and Sri Dolai Kannan inside Golden Mandapam at Sri Ahobila Matam, India  
Thanks: [www.anudinam.org](http://www.anudinam.org)

## THE DIVINE COLLECTION

### (UPANISHADS, BHAGAVAT GEETHA AND DIVYA PRABHANDAM)

(Excerpts from the book "Mystery of the Man and Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender" by Neduntheru U.Ve. Sri S. Kannan Swami)

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#### INTRODUCTION

Dear Sri Vaishnavas:

Back in October 2010, a fellow alumni of Vivekananda college of Madras holding a post-graduate degree in Mathematics published a most scholarly book entitled "**Mystery of Man and the Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender.**" The central message of this extraordinary book in the author's own words is: "The deep *mystery of man* caught up from beginningless time in this mysterious *universe* is resolved only through *His eternal grace* and with *our one unconditional surrender*, which is again triggered only at His instance at a moment of *His choice*, it is *His grace* alone that ensures our freedom."

The author of this "mini-encyclopedia", U.Ve. Sri Kannan Swamy, hails from the Vaidika agraharam of Neduntheru nestling on the bank of Cauvery river near Lord Aravamudan's divya desam of Thirukkudanthai. He is a deep student of Veda-Vedantam and has participated in the sampradayic Grantha Kalakshepams under the sacred feet of stalwarts of Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Sampradayam like Goshtipuram Sri Ramanujacharyar Swamy, Sri PerukkaraNai Swamy, Purisai Sri KrishnamAchar Swamy, Paiyambadi Chetlur Sri Srivatsankacharyar Swamy and Mannargudi Sri Rajagopalachar Swamy after his retirement from the Central Government service as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. He is taking part in number of Vidvat Sadas and has received the blessings of the Pontiffs of Sri Ahobila Matam, Poundarikapuram Andavan Asramam, Srirangam Srimad Andavan Asramam and Mysore Parakala Matam. The following excerpts from the Mangalasarana Srimukhams of many Acharyas will provide a fitting prologue to "the intellectual feast" served through Sri Kannan Swamy's matchless monograph.

**HH The 45<sup>th</sup> Jeeyar of Sri Ahobila Matam, Sri Narayana Yatindra Maha Desikan:** "Neduntheru Sri S.Kannan Swamy has explained with appropriate Pramanams the doctrines of Surrender (Prapatti), as expounded by Vedanta Desika to drive home the point that surrender alone is the means to salvation, in other words, liberation from the shackles of karma and reaching the feet of the Lord. This Prapatti, it is emphasized, is only a vyajya and it is only the Lord who

grants the liberation ... We appreciate the marathon effort of the author to elucidate our philosophy in a fashion that will appeal to the modern generation exposed to contrary pulls and attractions and enable them to realise the pristine glory of a great heritage deriving strength from the timeless Vedas ”.

**HH The 46<sup>th</sup> Jeeyar of Sri Ahobila Matam, Sri Ranganatha Yatindra Maha Desikan:** “This is an incisive and critical survey of the findings of Science, with the limits and contradictions admitted by the Scientists themselves. They are examined objectively with copious references to the deep utterances of Vedic seers on these issues, projected in an entirely different and original light .... We have no doubt that this monumental exercise will motivate students of both Science and spirituality, to delve into Vedic lore, bring out the gems of truth embedded in them and enable more people to reap the full benefit of the treasures ”.

**HH Prakrutam Brahma Tantra Svatantra Parakala Matam Jeeyar:** “This treatise on the Mystery of Man and the Universe is a remarkable work that sums up the essentials of Sri Visishtadvaita, the glory of Prapatti and the account of how the thinkers have pushed forward the frontiers of Science but have signally failed to grasp the mysteries of the Universe”.

**Sri U. Ve. Vaikuntavasi Anantha Narasimhacharya of Sri Poundarikapuram Asramam:** “This is an intellectual feast to the readers and is a cogent integration of modern scientific ideas with philosophical thoughts and Upanishadic musings.”

**Sokatthur Sri. U.Ve. Dr. P.Ramanujacharya Swamy, Asthana Vidwan, Sri Ahobila Matam, Director of CDAC-Bangalore:** This is to express my indebtedness to Neduntheru Sri.S.Kannan for having opened my eyes through “Mystery of Man and the Universe -Divine Grace and Our Surrender”, a book which is veritably a touchstone for sincere seekers and scholars alike. The approach taken in the book on such deep concepts like Universe and Man, which are on the two extremities of infinitely large and infinitely small respectively, to arrive at the proper stand to be taken by seekers is strikingly original and hence praiseworthy. Freedom from fear of possible lack of answers to ticklish questions and controversial stands taken by earlier thinkers comes out boldly in Sri Kannan's writing. It has set me thinking on many issues, be they in modern science topics or ancient writings and books, even so for those who have the temerity to think of being experts in either lore. Divine grace and its inevitability in our emancipation and that too through our wilful surrender “ in action” have been convincingly argued for.

**Professor K.E. Devanathachar Swamy, Dean Faculty of Darsanas, Rashtriya Samskrit Vidyapeetha, Tirupati:** This book is an endeavour, of which every scholar can feel proud. This could possibly be authored only by one who has deep faith and knowledge in both Vedic system and modern science... The most thorough and awakening part of the book is perhaps the chapter on 'Bhakti and Prapatti revisited'. This section would prove handy for fresh entrants into Vedantic studies, particularly SriVaishnavites... This work can be called the magnum opus of Kannan Swamy

and a glossary of Visishtadvaita for reasons such as (1) the book explains the greatness of all Acharyas and Alvars (2) clarifies the means of liberation, namely Prapatti and Bhakti along with Jnana yoga and Karma Yoga, with all supportive scriptures like Upanishads and Gita (3) highlights the relevance of traditional values in the present world with the support from modern thinkers and philosophers and (4) profuse references to Vedas in juxtaposition with the western thought.

**Dr. A.V.Srinivasan, Former Head, Institute of Neurology, Madras Medical College:** Going through Sri S. Kannan's book is an exhilarating experience-- like a flowing river with consciousness as its content and thought as its unity ... The Chapters on Bhakti and Prapatti along with Alvars and Acharyas are a veritable gold find, which would compel in-depth reading and absorption.

**Dr. K. Rangarajacharya, Head of the Mathematics Department, Bharat Engineering College:** The author, Sri Kannan has evidently done extensive studies with the guidance of eminent preceptors in a variety of fields germane to the ultimate objective of clarifying the eternal validity of the truths enshrined in the upanishads and the utterances of the Alvars. Two areas among many highlighted and elucidated in this monograph are: {1} The elucidation of the mystique of Bhakti and Prapatti and {2} Prapatti as a sovereign prescription, a credible means to be eligible for the certain tryst with His grace and to qualify for liberation at a moment of aspirant's choice.

Above excerpts from the anugraha Mangalasanams of Vedantic Scholars and eminent Acharyas are indicative of their highest regards for the scholarship and versatility of Sri Neduntheru Kannan Swamy. There is nothing more to be added on adiyen's part to persuade the would-be-readers to immerse themselves in the blissful flood of the anubhavam of this ubhaya Vedantic scholar/author.

Sriman Kannan Swamy's command of English language is matchless. He is equally proficient in the handling of Sanskrit during the elucidation of subtle points relating to our darsanam during his debates at the vidvat sadas. His constant and rigorous studies of Vedanta through the traditional Kalakshepam route under the sacred feet of many sadacharyas have borne fruit for the benefit of all of us; his unique skills to distil the essence of such studies spanning many years are admirable.

Sri Neduntheru Kannan Swamy's path breaking monograph is a treasure with 18 chapters; it should be read avidly by the Vedantins and the Scientists alike, who seek the answers to "the deep mystery of man caught up from beginningless time in this mysterious universe". This monograph has 573 pages and is indeed an intellectual banquet. It will however be a daunting task to keep up with the Garuda gati of the gifted author every step of the way at first. Every reader would have to develop his own approach to enjoy the rich banquet (aru suvai uNdi) assembled in this monograph. The sequence that adiyEn followed is to study first the chapters 5 (Upanishads), 6 (Lord's word on the battle field), 10 (Alvars and Acharyans), 7 (Refrain of Self-Surrender everywhere), 9 (Bhakti and Prapatti revisited) and concluded with chapter 18 (the Epilogue).

During the second stage, adiyen covered chapters 4 (about this book and beyond), 5 (Prologue) and followed it up later with the study of all the other chapters.

Adiyen earlier had the bhagyam of releasing chapters 7 and 9 along with the Epilogue as a separate eBook (Ebook # GD010, under the title Bhakti and Prapatti, in [www.sadagopan.org](http://www.sadagopan.org)). In the following pages adiyen is releasing chapters 5,6 and 10. Please enjoy the present offering as you have all done the earlier release. One should however complete the reading of this monograph in its entirety to enjoy the views from the dazzling/dizzying heights that Sriman Kannan Swamy takes us to. Refrain of Self-surrender is heard from everywhere.

Srimat Azhagiya singar Thiruvadigale SaraNam

Dasan, Oppiliappan Koil Varadachari Sadagopan

The following pages contain Chapter Excerpts from the singular monograph

**"MYSTERY OF MAN AND THE UNIVERSE : DIVINE GRACE AND OUR SURRENDER"**

by

**Neduntheru U.Ve. Sri S Kannan Swami.**

For those desirous of procuring a copy of this monograph for themselves and savor the depth of content presented therein, the contact details for the author is given below:

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[http://www.amazon.com/Mystery-Man-Universe-Divine-surrender/dp/1453857478/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1345567085&sr=8-3&keywords=Mystery+of+Man+and+the+Universe](http://www.amazon.com/Mystery-Man-Universe-Divine-surrender/dp/1453857478/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1345567085&sr=8-3&keywords=Mystery+of+Man+and+the+Universe)



*Chapters 5,6 and 10*

*Excerpts from 'Mystery of Man and the Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender'*

*A book by Neduntheru U.Ve. Sri S. Kannan Swami*



"He is your Self, the inner Controller, the immortal!"  
Sri Lakshmihayagrivan ([www.parakalamatham.org](http://www.parakalamatham.org))

## CHAPTER 5

### Upanishads - A Divine constitution

**"There was not then what is, nor what is not. There was no sky and no heaven beyond the sky. What power was there? Where? Who was that power? Was there an abyss of fathomless waters?**

**There was neither death nor immortality then. No signs were there of night or day. The one was breathing by its own power in infinite peace. Only the one was: there was nothing beyond. Darkness was hidden in darkness. The all was fluid and formless. Therein, in the void, by the fire of fervour arose the one.**

**And in the one arose love: love the first seed of the soul. The truth of this the sages found in their hearts: seeking in their hearts with wisdom, the sages found that bond of union between Being and non-Being.**

**Who knows the truth? Who can tell whence and how came into being this universe? The gods are later than its beginning: Who knows therefore whence comes this creation?**

**Only that god who sees the highest heaven: he only knows whence this universe came and whether it was made or uncreated. He only knows or perhaps he knows not.**

**-Rig Veda.**

Reflections and questions of this kind on the eternal cosmic mystery have been engaging thinkers and philosophers down the centuries but pre-dating all of them are these very questions found posed In the revelations in Rig Veda thousands of years ago. The answers were provided much later in the deep thoughts voiced by the seers from time to time in the different Upanishads, which are very appropriately described as the Himalayas of the soul.

Sayanacharya, to whom we owe principally our understanding of the Vedas, defines Vedas as that literature which throws light on the transcendent means of securing what is desired and avoiding what is not desirable. Vedas, revealed scriptures as they are called, are beyond the ken of perception and inference because they elucidate "all the divinities, moral and spiritual duties of man as well as absolute truth." Man, however great or evolved, cannot claim perfection as could render his findings or reasoning infallible. So, as declared by Sayana, on questions regarding transcendental facts, the self-manifest, inherently valid, eternally existing, divinely inspired Vedas alone can be considered as inerrant and conclusive. Vedas are handed down from beginningless antiquity through a continuous stream of preceptors and pupils but they cannot be traced to any human source. It is argued by those who hold to the theory of eternality that as Dharma and Brahman are eternal and also as the relation between word and its meaning is also

eternal, the language and content of the Vedas are eternal. There are others who accept the spiritual principles enshrined in the Vedas but believe that the compositions are the work of the rishis or aptapurushas who have realized the truths for themselves.

Veda, as a vidya, has two phases, a higher one called para vidya and the lower one called apara vidya - corresponding to jnana-kanda and karma kanda. The former deals with God, soul and nature; the latter deals with religious rites and duties. Veda, considered as a sastra - this is from root "s'as" which means, to wish, command, or teach - is either ajnata-jnapaka or apravrtta-pravartaka, that is, revelational or mandatory.

According to the famous Purusha-sukta, Rig, Yajus and Saman were generated at the beginning of creation from a mental sacrifice of adoration performed by the divine Prajapatis and sages. The Svetasvataropanishad declares that the Supreme Being creates Brahma and transmits the Vedas to him. The Brhadaranyaka says: "as from a fire kindled----smoke issues, even so, the Rigveda etc ----are all the breath of this Infinite Reality---." The Brahma Sutra [1-1-3] declares Vedas as the [only] source of right knowledge in regard to Brahman; and affirms the eternity of the Vedas in sutra 1-3-29. The Mimamsa sutra 1-1-18 affirms the eternity of the word. Srimad Bhagavatha declares in the opening verse that God, the Supreme truth, caused the Vedas to appear in the mind of Brahma, the first poet. In his introduction of the Gita-bhashya, Sankara speaks of Lord Narayana transmitting the Religion of work [pravritti dharma] to Prajapatis like Marichi and the Religion of renunciation [nivritti dharma] to sages like Sanaka immediately after the creation and thereafter of the dissemination of the Vedic lore.

Upanishads - sum and substance of all true wisdom - constitute the last phase of the Vedic revelation. The Mantras form the first phase, the Brahmanas the second, the Aranyakas the third and the Upanishads the fourth and the last. Since Vedic times, there have been two principal currents of philosophical thought - one insisting on the importance of Karma [rituals] and the attainment of heavenly felicity through them, while the other emphasized the intuition of Brahman through knowledge and ascetic practices as the goal of human life; the first preferring an active life in society and the second a life of retreat and mystic absorption.

Upanishads represent the heights to which the contemplative spirit of man rose to receive the revelations vouchsafed not to any single seer but independently to several sages separated from one another both in space and time. The strength of conviction with which these thinkers share the experiences with others - of God, His creation, man and his liberation - carries a stamp of not only originality but deep vision and foresight which should serve to guide the destiny of mankind for all time to come.

*A few examples:*

**"The Infinite is below; He is above; He is behind; He is in front; He is to the south; He is**

to the north; He is all this."

"Through fear of Him fire burns; through fear of Him the sun blazes; through fear of Him Indra, Vayu, and also Yama as the fifth speed on their way."



"Radiant and near is that Great Being"

Sri Jvala Narasimhar - Sri Ahobilam (Thanks: [www.navanarasimha.org](http://www.navanarasimha.org))

"From Him come all the seas and the mountains; from Him flow the rivers of every kind, from Him come all the herbs and their juices."

"Verily it is by the command of that Imperishable, O! Gargi! that the sun and the moon stand apart. It is by the command of that Imperishable O Gargi that heaven and earth stand apart. It is by the command of that Imperishable that what are called moments, hours, days and nights, half-months, months, seasons, years all stand apart."

"Radiant and near, indeed stirring in the heart itself is that great being. In it is centred everything - everything that moves and breathes and winks."

In the Upanishads, the gods fade away and their place is taken by the one Infinite Brahman - as Brhadarany Upanishad puts it - "when they say, 'sacrifice to this god or sacrifice to that god' -

each god is His manifestation for He is all the gods." This Brahman is considered both transcendent and immanent in as much as He has not only created the world but also entered into it and lives in the hearts of all creatures as their antaryamin. Yagnavalkya proclaims—" He who dwells in the earth and is within the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls all beings from within, He is your Self, the inner Controller, the immortal. He who dwells in all beings and is within all beings, which the beings do not know, whose body all beings are, who controls all beings from within - He is your Self, the inner Controller, the Immortal."

The distinctive feature of **Taittiriya Upanishad** is the description of the ethical teachings of the times as brought out in the form of a dialogue between the teacher and his pupils - sometimes called a convocation address. This Upanishad is famous for the doctrine of the five sheaths of the self - food, breath, mind, intellect and bliss. The story of the enlightenment of Bhrigu, son of Varuna, narrated in the Upanishad shows a deep insight into the spiritual evolution on earth. Bhrigu approaches his father Varuna and requests him to teach him Brahman - the ultimate Reality. The father asks the son to go and discover Brahman for himself - the Brahman from which those things are born, that by which when born they live and into which they enter on passing away. Bhrigu goes away, meditates and concludes - that food or matter is Brahman, for it is from matter that all beings are born, it is by food, which is the matter that they live and it is into matter that they pass when they die. He goes back to his father and reports his conclusion. The father asks him to meditate again; so the son does and finds that prana or life which is a higher reality is Brahman. Directed to meditate again, the son discovers that manas or consciousness as a reality higher than life. This way Bhrigu progresses step by step - from matter to life, from life to consciousness, from consciousness to intellect and from intellect to bliss [ananda]. Visualising the human being as multi-layered, the outermost layer is the gross physical body [Annamaya Kosa] that envelops other subtle layers such as breath [Pranamaya], mind [Manomaya], wisdom/intellect [Vijnanamaya] and bliss [Anandamaya]. Thus he discovers that Brahman is perfect bliss and ends his enquiry. To describe the bliss that the self is entitled to, one has to leap from the gross and the physical to the metaphysical and the spiritual level. The analogy used to describe this bliss is that state of dreamless sleep that is beyond words and senses.

Bhrigu's findings bring out that at one end of the spectrum there are lifeless objects consisting wholly of matter and at the other end, there is God, the perfect spirit and in between lie the plants, animals and man in an ascending scale. The world is thus a vast theatre in which constant struggle goes on between spirit and matter. **The struggle appears to be involuntary before the level of human beings is reached, but at the point of human life, man emerges as a free agent, free to make or mar himself. Man's destiny is cast in this law of spiritual progression but if man were to ignore it consciously and opt for supine indifference - which has no sanction whatsoever - it would tantamount to suicidal folly, in any case, indefinite**

**degradation, with receding prospects of recovery and redemption.**

Man, with the duality of body and soul, is partly matter and partly spirit, rather partly animal and partly god-like. The more he cultivates goodness, compassion and love, the nearer he is to the Kingdom of God, whereas lust, cruelty and wicked greed would take him away from the Kingdom. The law of spiritual progression indicated in this Upanishad is illustrated in the Hindu theories of four varnas [castes], four stages of life [asramas], four ends of life [purusharthas], four phases of individual soul, namely, Vaisvanara, Taijasa, Prajna and Atman and the four phases of the supreme spirit, namely, Virat, Hiranyagarbha, Isvara and Brahman.

The third chapter Bhriguvali of this Upanishad contains a description of Brahman as that from which all this is born, in which all these are residing and that into which all these merge in the end. Sutrakara adopts this definition in the second Sutra [1-1-2]. This Upanishad proclaims that the ultimate reality is one Supreme Paramatman, characterized by infinite auspicious qualities and that it is the internal self of all entities sentient and non-sentient. The world is real. The entities are real. The differences among the entities are real. The jivatman gains the bliss when he attains the blissful Brahman.

**Brhadaranyaka Upanishad** is the longest, the most famous and one of the oldest Upanishads. The great philosopher Yagnavalkya in the dialogue with his wife Maitreyi in this Upanishad puts it very bluntly - "It is not for the love of wife that the wife is dear, but for the love of the Self is the wife dear. It is not for the love of husband that the husband is dear but for the love of the Self is the husband dear."

Thus the lesson is that the external objects and experiences serve to expand the inner powers of the soul - in other words, turning the searchlight inwards is a must; that would mean control of our bodies, regulation of desires and acquisition of a mental poise so as to enable us to view and understand the external world better. The goal of Supreme bliss would move nearer the seeker, even as the seeker exerts himself towards that end. Itihasas and Puranas have stories galore of the devotees struggling and toiling to achieve the unique state of bliss, not easily vouchsafed, definitely not granted gratis. The Dharma sastras mandate duties for the house-holder, citizen and the king even for the purpose of limited goals. **No wonder Upanishads urge everywhere that man should consciously take concrete steps for his spiritual evolution. Nowhere is it promised to the non-seeker.**

The ultimate destiny of man - Realization of God with experience of supreme bliss - is obviously not possible of achievement for everybody in the span of a single life-time and hence passage through several lives is predicated on the law of karma, which is indeed an exceptionally unique formulation in the Upanishads. To put it differently, we are all voyagers on an infinite river - definitely not trapped in a time warp and squeezed into a volume of a body. A mortal ripens like corn and like corn he is born again. Yagnavalkya declares in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad "As a

caterpillar, having reached the end of a blade of a grass and having made an approach to another, draws itself together towards it; even so does the self, having thrown off this body and dispelled all ignorance and having made an approach towards another, draws itself towards it. And as a goldsmith taking a piece of gold turns it into another shape, a newer and more beautiful one, even so does this self, having thrown off this body and dispelled all ignorance, makes for itself a better body, a newer and more beautiful one, whether it be like that of the Pitrs or the Gandharvas or of Prajapati or Brahma or of other beings."

The law of karma operating in samsara emerges with clarity in Upanishads with man becoming the architect of his own fortunes, not subject to chance or the caprice of an indifferent or unfeeling Almighty. Good deeds and misdeeds determine his destiny, making him go up and down in the scale of creation. Freedom from the vicious circle of births and deaths is the ultimate goal that beckons ceaselessly to those so inclined. True, the laws of determinism are relentless and they make the roads for us to traverse but the blessings of free will provide the wheels of transportation to turn with time. Dharma provides the power of free will to confront the karma born of deterministic laws. When the power of dharma is released, it pulls down the scale, lifting above the pan of karma into the air. People keep making choices all the time, in fact every moment, influenced by habit, heredity, environment and other factors, all of which make a difference to the quality and efficaciousness of the decisions. Choices exercised correctly in time and in consonance with dharma do counterbalance the weight of karma and facilitate correct and proper decisions towards betterment.

**The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad** declares "As a man acts, as a man conducts himself, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good; the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action and sinful by sinful action. Some say that a man is made of desires only and not of acts. But as is his desire, so is his will; as his will is, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does - the results he will reap.

So much for the man who desires. But as to the man who does not desire, who is without desire, who is freed from desire, whose desire is satisfied, whose desire is the Self only - his vital spirits do not depart elsewhere. Being Brahman he goes to Brahman "

The law of karma encompassing all creation is thus a significant contribution made by the Upanishads to the religious thought of mankind. It appears that the law of karma enunciated in the Upanishads anticipates the formulation of its own solvent, namely the doctrine of karma yoga elaborated in the Bhagavad Gita. All works must be done in a spirit of self-less renunciation and sacrifice with no desire for the fruit and they lead eventually not to re-birth but to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Lord declares to Arjuna: Gita [9-27, 28] " Whatever thou doest, whatsoever thou eatest, whatsoever thou givest away and whatsoever of austerities thou doest practise - do that as an offering to Me. Thou shall be free from the bonds of works which bear good or evil fruits. With thy mind set on the path of renunciation, thou shall become free



and come to Me." The injunction here is a mandate for action with assurance of a positive outcome. Nowhere is there any hint of result flowing or forthcoming without positive prior action on the part of the individual caught up in the world.



**"Do everything as an offering unto Me!"**

Prakrutham HH Srimat Azhagiya Singar performing aradhanam to Sri Malolan mulavar and utsavar at Sri Ahobilam  
Thanks : Sri V Sadagopan Swami

What are the steps to be taken for reaching the goal? Upanishads do not elaborate on specific steps so much as on the bliss of the destination. Seekers who approach the seers in the forests are presumed to have completed the duties in life and qualified themselves with knowledge, cultivation of virtues and character so as to be fit enough to receive the higher instruction from the sages who have attained the highest grade of spiritual evolution.

**Kenopanishad**, as the name indicates - by whom? - addresses the question of the real power behind the functions of the universe, external in nature and internal in man. It gives an account of a single reality, the Atman, as the inspirer of the functions of both man and the universe, of sense-functions in man and the functions of the elements in the world. It declares that penance, self-control and works form the support of the secret instruction relating to Brahman. Brahman is not

to be thought of as a non-entity, when it is said that it is distinct from the known and the unknown. The term Pratibodha signifies knowledge which is characterized by Satyatva, Jnanatva, Anantatva and others. The aspect of Upasana is stressed in this Upanishad and we have its elaboration in the Gita as Bhakti Yoga.

**Chandogya Upanishad** is a very ancient Upanishad belonging to Sama Veda. The earlier chapters deal with ritualistic matter and sacred chants and discussions concerning them. The first chapter deals with the Udgeethopasana, significance of pranava and the mystic nature of the saman chant. In the second, the entire universe is taught to be viewed in saman. The third teaches madhu vidya and shandilya vidya with a description of purusha vidya in the 16th and 17th khandas. The fourth chapter teaches samsarga vidya through story of Janasruti and Raikva. Satyakama Jabala's episode is introduced to expound shodasakala Brahma vidya and the akshi purusha Brahma vidya through the episode of Upakosala. The fifth chapter teaches panchagni vidya and vysvanara vidya.

Chapters 6 to 8 contain lofty and deep questions and thoughts of philosophy. The sixth chapter is devoted to the teaching of Sadvidya which constitutes the crowning message of the Upanishad. Svetaketu returns to his father after completing his study, when the father asks the son - have you enquired about that adesha by knowing which the unheard becomes heard, the unthought becomes thought and the un-understood becomes understood? Adesha means the supreme Paramatman by whose command all the worlds are ruled. Svetaketu did not know and the father Uddalaka teaches him that supreme knowledge. The Supreme Brahman called as Sat was the one entity that existed prior to creation; therefrom evolved the three elements fire, water and matter; differentiation of names and forms followed by entry of Brahman into them through the Jivatman as the inner self. The crowning teaching of the section is Tat-tvam-asi. Here is established the oneness of tat, the omniscient omnipotent sat, and tvam, the antaryamin in the self of Svetaketu. The one Supreme is itself the internal ruler or antaryamin in all entities, sentient and insentient. This is the essence of all Upanishads. The seventh chapter is devoted to the exposition of Bhuma vidya while the eighth chapter expounds the Dahara vidya - it is in the latter vidya it is brought out that Brahman is necessarily qualified by all auspicious qualities without any defilement whatsoever.

The Brahma Sutrakara closely follows this Upanishad and after referring profusely to the mantras of this Upanishad in his sutras concludes with the sutra 4-4-22 [No return; as there is authority], which in fact is the conclusion of this Upanishad. Many enlivening and thought-provoking episodes that are narrated in the body of the Upanishad make a very interesting study.

**Mundaka Upanishad** is considered the most poetical of the Upanishads. The theory of knowledge of two kinds is explained here - a higher [para] and a lower [apara]. While apara, which is foundational knowledge, is gained from the scriptures through instruction properly imparted, para is Upasana. Sastraic knowledge and intellectual attainments, although necessary, might trigger

vanity and arrogance and thus become counter-productive. The Highest knowledge cannot be secured through performance of rites. One has to approach a competent preceptor for gaining that knowledge.

Brahman is the cause of the universe and it is the supreme celestial Purusha, immortal and transcending everything else. It is through Pranava, Brahman is to be meditated upon. Even as the archer shoots the target with his arrow, the process of meditation is through Pranava, which is the bow, the atman is the arrow and the Brahman is the target.

The two birds [jivatman and Paramatman] have similar qualities, move together and cling to the same tree. But the individual self [jivatman] is in sorrow, deluded by matter; when he sees the Lord, who is pleased, he is freed from sorrow. He attains then perfect similarity with the Supreme.

**Kathopanishad** is perhaps the most philosophical of the Upanishads. We have the story of Yama tempting Nachiketas with the gift of the pleasures of the world but the young lad rejects the offer of transient experiences which wear out the vigour of the senses. Nachiketas is not impressed with the prospect of heaven of a superior kind to be secured through a sacrifice. He chooses knowledge above all worldly blessings. Here is adumbrated by Yama the theory of the good [sreyas] over the pleasant [preyas]; the view that Atman cannot be known by the senses either by reason or by much learning but only by intuitive insight or direct realization; and the doctrine of the body as the chariot of the self. Jivatman and Prammatman reside in the same cave of the heart and conquest of the senses is a necessary pre-requisite for the attainment of the Paramatman. The samsara is compared to a tree having roots above and the branches downward. The teaching concludes with the statement - 'when all the raga and dvesha in the form of the knots of the heart are destroyed, then a mortal becomes immortal and enjoys Brahman here alone.'

**It is not mere knowledge of the scriptures but the realization of the self that paves the way for liberation. Kathopanishad cautions and declares: "The Self cannot be gained by the study of the Vedas nor by intellectual power or by much learning. He is to be gained only by the one He chooses. To such a one the Self reveals His own nature." He is to be gained by the one whom He chooses - but whom does He choose? Arbitrarily? No. He chooses the one who becomes dearest to Him. Ramanuja's elucidation of the position outlined in the Vedartha Sangraha runs as follows: In the text "This atman is attained by one whom He chooses", the clause "whom He chooses" conveys the idea of the seeker becoming an object of choice to the Bhagavan. He becomes the object of greatest love to the Lord because in him has arisen supreme love for the Lord. Therefore, in reality, only knowledge that is of the nature of supreme bhakti is the means for attaining Bhagavan.**

'Men of good deeds who worship me are of four types - they are [a] the distressed, who having

lost the position and wealth wish to regain them [b] he who aspires for wealth which is yet to be attained [c] the seekers of knowledge who wish to realize the real nature of the self as distinct from Prakriti and [d] the man of knowledge who knows that it is the essential nature of the self to find happiness only in the Lord.' [Gita 7-16].

'Of these, the man of knowledge ever with me devoted to the One only is foremost. I am very dear to the man of knowledge - he too is dear to me.' [Gita 7-17]

**'The man of knowledge cultivates single-minded devotion to me only - I am very dear to him, in fact so dear that my dearness to him is comparatively not so much perhaps!' The seeker of knowledge, in other words, cannot wait for grace to descend on him without a genuine dedicated effort on his part to do everything to deserve His grace.**

Ramanuja quotes Bhagavan Dvaipayana who has enunciated this truth in the Mokshadharmam and has thus furnished a commentary on the whole of the Upanishad. "His form does not fall within the range of perception. No one sees Him with his eyes. He whose mind has been brought to the state of samadhi by determined effort, sees Him who is of the nature of knowledge through bhakti" and then proceeds - the meaning is that one who, by determined effort, fixes his whole mind on the supreme Purusha sees Him *through bhakti*. Here seeing means direct perception; direct perception means attainment. It is thus the passage would be one in harmony with the Lord's declaration, "I am attainable only through undivided bhakti." [Gita 11-54], Bhakti is only a special form of knowledge and thus the explanation becomes complete.

The core teaching of Bhagavad Gita beginning with karma yoga is anticipated in **Isavasyopanishad**, in the two significant opening verses:

"All this, whatsoever moves in this moving world, is pervaded by God. Through such renunciation you may enjoy. Do not covet anybody's wealth.

Always performing works here, one should wish to live hundred years. If you live thus as a man, works will not cling to you - there is no other way."

If it is rendered as, "Do not covet the wealth of anyone", it would imply that 'anyone' means 'oneself' as well. An alternative rendering from Sankara conveys the idea differently: "Do not covet; whose wealth is it?"

It is thus very clearly brought out that one has to continue to perform the prescribed works, as long as one desires to or has to live in this world - such work would include incidental and necessary obligations that will have to be undertaken to sustain the performance of scripture-prescribed duties. It would be inappropriate to ignore or reject the duties and thus merrily carry on the day-to-day work of earning a living, acquiring material goods and supporting the family and relatives with no other concern at all.



'The Lord is both Upayam and Upayam!'  
Sri Pavana Narasimhar - Sri Ahobilam ([www.navanarasimha.org](http://www.navanarasimha.org))

The last verse of this Upanishad signifies that the Paramatman is both the Upaya and the Upeya, that is, the means and the end:

"O Agni, the Supreme who has Agni as His body, lead us through an auspicious path to wealth. O God, Thou who art the knower of all knowledge, relieve us from the crooked sin. We offer Thee many words of salutation with the word 'namah' "

**Mandukya Upanishad** outlines the famous theory of the four states of consciousness, namely, waking, dreaming, profound sleep and the fourth state [turia] which alone is real. Ramanuja explains that the Paramatman who is the inner self of the jivatman is never tainted with the defects in the waking, dreaming and dreamless states.

**Svetasvataropanishad** of Krishna Yajurveda is not one of the ten principal Upanishads but it is considered important, having been recognized by Brahma Sutrakara and as it is referred to by both Sankara and Ramanuja in their commentaries. The Upanishad distinguishes the jivatman from the Paramatman very clearly and expounds the realities of the bhoktha, bhogya and preritha. The Supreme Principle dwells in the jivatman and is known as antaryamin or inner self; this may be called the central principle of this Upanishad. The jivatman and the Paramatman are described as two birds of similar qualities, perched on the same tree. The jivatman tastes the sweet fruit of karma whereas the other bird is only witnessing without eating. The will of the Paramatman is always glorious and is the cause of the universe. Ramanuja quotes extensively from this Upanishad, as the duality texts therein bring out the difference between the jivatman and the Paramatman.

Renunciation is not abandonment of action but leavening such action with contemplation, detachment and self-less devotion to the work without fear or love of results. The seeker of knowledge is not exempt at any stage from the ordained performance of duties on any specious plea or pretext or sanction of fancied authorities. **The essence of Upanishadic wisdom is embodied in the Bhagavad Gita which proclaims the imperative of self-less action, with no attachment whatsoever, in accordance with the prescribed mandates and, most importantly, unconditional surrender unto the Supreme.**

## Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Interpretations

There is no greater attainment than the attainment of the Self, there is no greater joy than the joy of the Self and there is no knowledge greater than the knowledge of the Self—declare the Acharyas even as they describe and define the Supreme Self, the Paramatman. The most reliable and the highest authority for the knowledge of the Self is direct experience, which is Svanubhava. The verbal authority for that knowledge is the vast repertoire of the revelations from the rishis, recorded as Upanishads as well as the later works which are in agreement with them and seek to expound the truths enshrined therein. Despite the apparent simplicity of the language of the Upanishads, interpretations have differed, giving occasion to Dvaita [dualist],

Advaita [non-dualist] and the Visistadvaita [non-dualist qualified] schools. All are, however, generally agreed that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is the cause of the world; that knowledge of It leads to liberation, which is the summum bonum of life; that Brahman is known only through scriptures and not through mere reasoning or other means of knowledge. The scriptures are the sole authority but they differ as to the nature of Brahman, Its causality with reference to the world, the nature of the individual soul and its relation to Brahman and also as to what happens to the soul after release.

**Sankara** interprets the ultimate reality as One non-dual Brahman, which is Existence, Knowledge and Infinity. It is homogeneous, without qualities. Existence, Knowledge and Infinity are not its qualities; they are the very essence of Brahman. Brahman is eternal and immutable. It is that one immutable Brahman that appears as this diverse universe through what is described as Maya, which is indefinable [*anirvachaniya*]. Although Brahman is without forms, the various forms that are observed are but its reflections, similar to the reflections of the sun we notice in a pool of water. We all know that the sun's reflections in the water are not real. The idea of an Isvara is basically a concept of a conditioned Brahman, which the individualised soul finds convenient for the purpose of devotion and worship.

According to the Advaitic standpoint, only Brahman is real and all else is unreal. This unreality of the world does not signify total negation. The world exists as an empirical necessity but not as a transcendental reality. Even as an illusory experience is sublated by the empirical knowledge, the empirical knowledge is also sublated by the higher transcendental knowledge. In an experience, two things are involved - I and You, the subject and the object. As regards content and quality they are completely different, but somehow get mixed up and identified in the course of experience. We cannot explain why it is so; logically, we cannot explain how the absolute Brahman came to be manifested as the relative world.

The theory of Panchikaranam seeks to explain the origination of the world from the one Reality that exists, Brahman, which transforms itself into the five rudimentary elements, which, in different proportions, bring about the phenomenal world as we see. Brahman is both the efficient and the material cause of the world. But this is true only apparently. Really, there is neither transformation nor the world. This is the well-known Vivartavada. The world is an apparent modification of Brahman through Maya, an imaginary attribution only. There is the analogy of a rope being mistaken for a snake through ignorance - in the same way the non-real world is seen in Brahman through Maya. The soul is in reality eternal, uncreated and identical with Brahman. Individualised by its Upadhi, the inner organ - *antahkarana*, it is an atomic effect. The soul on release attains identity with Brahman and exists, as always, as pure consciousness. Qualities like omniscience are only attributed to it, when understood as Isvara. Brahman, in other words, is *nirguna*. One who realizes the *nirguna* Brahman attains it at death, without having to traverse the path of gods. The one who realizes the *saguna* Brahman goes by the path of gods and attains

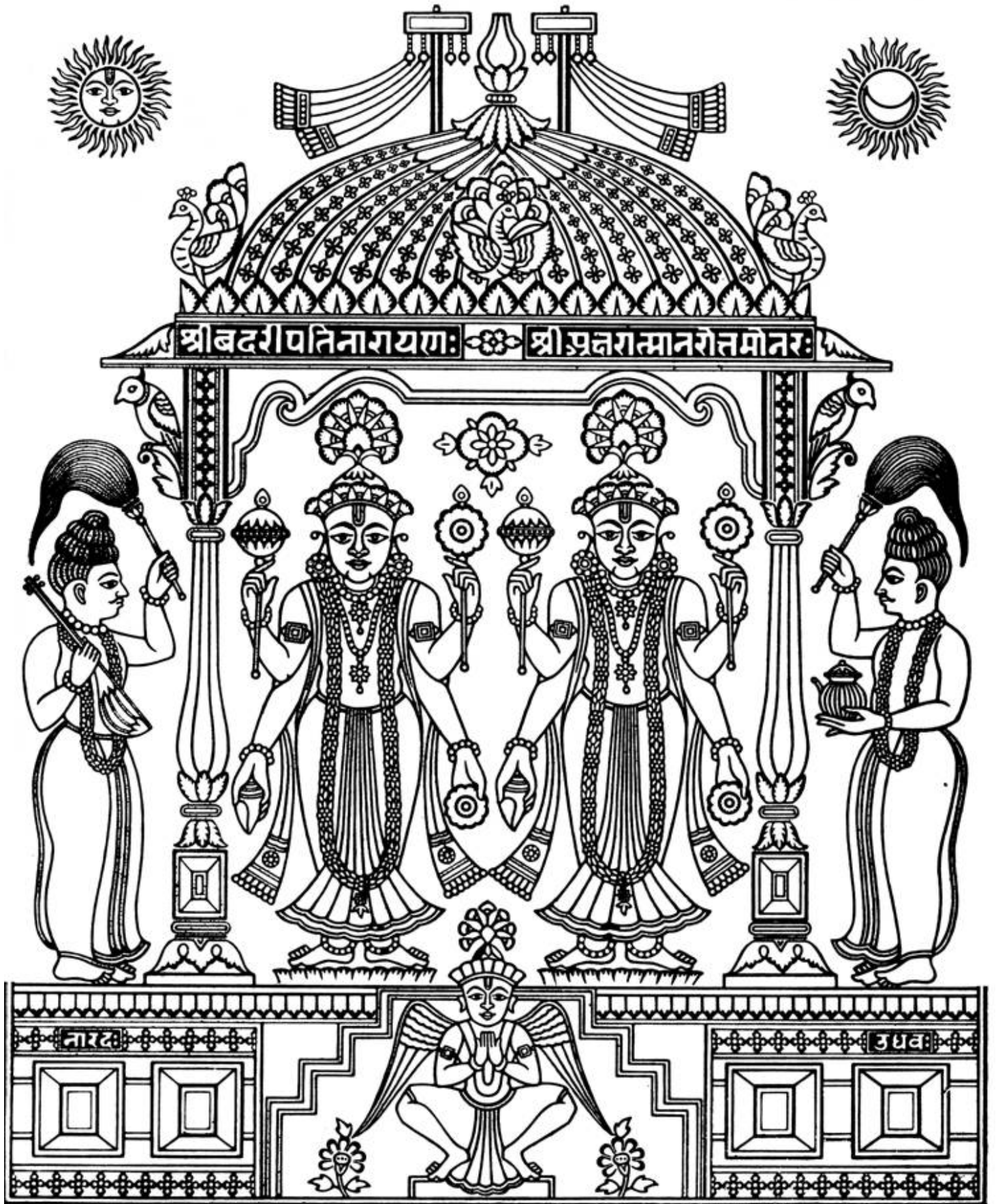
Brahmaloka, from where he does not return but attains the Supreme Brahman at the end of the cycle, along with Brahma the ruler of Brahmaloka.

In this light, we have to appreciate that this world exists as a fact of experience, which flows in three streams of consciousness - the waking, the dream and the deep-sleep - the gross, the subtle and the causal states. The fourth state which is Brahman is no state at all, as it is beyond all perception. The deep-rooted faith in the reality of the phenomenal world is not easily given up. Sankara says that Upasana - which is the process of seizing some stay or 'alambana' - is one of the methods established in the sastras, to get rid of the attachment and attain the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. Sastras have prescribed many 'alambanas' but the most sacred and the ancient is Pranava [Kathopanishad 1.2.17]. The place of meditation in the spiritual discipline formulated in Advaita Vedanta has to be clarified - knowledge alone is the liberating factor here. When knowledge is mediate and is still of the nature of understanding of Maha-Vakyas with the help of reasoning, some portion of the basic ignorance contributory to bondage is eliminated. This mediate understanding gets transformed into direct understanding and immediate realization and at that point, the remaining part of ignorance is destroyed. Even at that stage, the embodied self continues as long as the Prarabdha Karma remains without getting exhausted. This is described as the state of Jivan-mukti. Liberation in the complete sense is achieved, with the liquidation of Prarabdha.

The Sutras are not themselves explicit about the theme of discussion and would therefore require an interpretative tradition. Sankara refers to a vrittikara while Ramanuja refers to an extensive vritti by Bodhayana. Sankara asserts the sole reality of the Absolute Spirit, which is Brahman of the Upanishads and he regards the external world as only phenomenally real and identifies the essential Self in man with Brahman.

**Madhvacharya** is a dualist. He declares that there are three eternally distinct and entirely distinguishable entities, namely, Brahman, Prakriti [matter] and jivas [souls]. The last two, dependent on Brahman, are ruled by Brahman. Brahman is the only absolute independent existence. Everything else is finite, being conditioned by Brahman. Essentially it is Knowledge and Bliss. It cannot be known fully and completely. We cannot conceive of its Infinite personality; but It takes on limited forms for the sake of the devotee but It is neither material nor finite. Matter [Prakriti], which is eternal but dependent on Brahman, goes through modification. At the will of God, Prakriti goes through changes in accordance with the Karma of the individual soul. The Lord is only the efficient cause, as Madhva does not agree that out of the sentient Brahman, the insentient world is produced. It is only Brahman who guides the dependent souls, limited in knowledge and intelligence, to the goal. On liberation, the souls enjoy positive and unalloyed bliss, which is not mere release from suffering and bondage. The souls do not attain identity or equality with Brahman and in fact in that state, the souls are not equal among themselves.





"Brahman is the self of the soul and the soul is the body of Brahman"  
Nara Narayana Murthi - Badrinath (Thanks:en.wikipedia.org)

**Ramanuja** affirms that Brahman has always auspicious qualities and is free at all times from imperfections of any kind. He postulates a Brahman which is qualified by the world of sentient and insentient beings as its Body, in both the causal and effected states. The changes and imperfections are limited to Its Body alone. The Body remains unchanged in its true essence. At the time of creation, the Body takes on a condition as the world manifest. The world is essentially non-different from its cause. Souls are not created. They are the effects of Brahman and form its Body. Every soul is a knower, atomic, an agent and a part of Brahman in the sense that a body is a part of an embodied being or like a quality, which is a part of a substance qualified. Souls are not different from Brahman, even as qualities are not different from the substance. On liberation, the soul attains its true nature, which is freedom from sin and Karma-bound life. The soul then attains all the auspicious qualities of Brahman but does not attain identity with Brahman. It has a separate identity in the released state, experiences itself as non-different from Brahman, being a mode of Brahman. Brahman is the self of the soul and the soul is the body of Brahman.

"Know that the individual soul is quite different from its controller, the Paramatma" and "One of the two, namely, the individual soul, eats the fruit of karma and the other, the Supreme soul, shines forth without eating it" are texts in Svestasvetara Upanishad[1-6, 4-6], which teach that Paramatma is the creator, controller, omniscient, independent, pure, possessed of countless auspicious qualities and is the Lord, having everything subservient to Him and that the jiva is the created, controlled, ignorant, dependent, impure, possessed of imperfections and is the servant and is subservient to God. Thus is established the total difference between the jiva and God. The text "Thou, [the individual soul] art That [Brahman]" seems to indicate identity between jiva and God. But there are also texts which declare that individual souls are part of Brahman. Lord Krishna says in the Gita [15-7] "The jivas are part of myself." Badarayana has also clarified the position in Brahma Sutra [2-3-42] that the jiva is a part ,amsa, of God. The text "Thou are That" actually implies a coordination between Thou and That; in other words, 'That' denotes the omniscient Brahman and 'Thou' used in coordination with 'That' also denotes Brahman qualified by the embodied soul. The coordinate expression or identical proposition denotes one and the same object having two different aspects. The body-soul relationship between the jiva and God is also the part-whole relationship between them as spelt out by Badarayana. Parasara also makes the point of inseparable part-whole relationship between the universe and Brahman in terms of illustrations such as [i] light and luminous object [ii] power and powerful object [iii] body and soul in Vishnu Purana [1-22].

This is the Visistadvaita School, also called Ubhaya Vedanta, generally understood to denote the philosophy which has for its source works in the two languages namely Tamil and Samskrit. Another view is that it is a philosophy which declares that the dvaita and advaita texts in the Upanishads, if properly and logically understood and interpreted, do not contradict each other and both are equally important for the correct interpretation. It is relevant to mention here that in

this philosophy justice is done to all the pramanas, namely, perception, inference and verbal testimony.

**Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhava** have all drawn only on the Upanishads for propounding their respective schools. In Upanishads is enshrined the fundamental doctrine of the five-fold truth [I] the Supreme Brahman, [ii] the individual self, [iii] the ultimate goal of life, [iv] the means of attaining that ultimate object of life and [v] the impediments in the way of that attainment. The statements in different Upanishads, appearing mutually contradictory, do not however point to this doctrine directly unless they are properly understood and correlated. There are assertions that Brahman is Nirguna, pure consciousness, existence and bliss. It is stated to be the only one, non-second Reality. Elsewhere various auspicious qualities are described to denote the Brahman, which cannot be conceived of otherwise. Some texts declare that there is no duality whatsoever; others describe duality and refer to the process of creation, dissolution etc. While mere knowledge of the oneness of the Atman is declared as the means of liberation according to one standpoint, there is another that stresses the imperative of meditation on Brahman as the means. There are thus both duality texts and non-duality texts which seem to point to different directions. How are they to be reconciled? The Advaita School relies on the unity texts, while the Dvaita School emphasizes the importance of the duality texts. There is the bheda-abheda school which tries to explain both the view-points as relevant to the one, non-second Brahman that really becomes the universe of the individual self and insentient matter. The Advaita philosophy seeks to explain the phenomenal world as a false appearance on account of what is called a superimposition due to avidya. On the other hand the Dvaita protagonists admit the reality of the universe of individual selves, insentient matter and also Brahman. Sankara maintains that there is only one single Reality or Real, namely Brahman. The multitudinous objects and beings which we see around, above and below us in the universe are, according to him, unreal and illusory appearances like the mirage and like the silver which sometimes appears as an illusion on the shell. In other words they are illusory projections on the only reality which is Brahman. Sankara further holds that this Brahman is devoid of attributes or qualities by which Brahman can be described. He speaks of it as mere consciousness, which is not conscious of anything within it or outside of it - in fact there is nothing in it either inside or outside. However Ramanuja seized on the crucial declaration embedded in the Antaryami Brahmana of Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, which proclaims the body-soul relationship between Brahman on the one hand and on the other, the universe of the individual selves and the entire insentient matter and thus developed his Visistadvaita philosophy.

**Ramanuja's reconciling methodology** is to seek the nexus of harmony among the Srutis which posit both difference and non-difference. The Upanishads are esteemed as Sruti Vakyas par excellence. On a cursory view, they seem to be inconsistent with themselves and call for a kind of harmonization through proper interpretation. The classification of such Vakyas as Bheda Srutis and Abheda Srutis implies an admission of internal incompatibility. Visistadvaita facilitates

reconciliation between the two sets of Srutis with the aid of the third category known as Ghataka Srutis. We have to accept both Bheda Vakyas and Abheda Vakyas and interpret them in the light of the several other statements which proclaim the quality-rich Brahman and qualified monism [Visistadvaita] as well. Enlisting the several scriptural statements of different kinds, Ramanuja avers that they should be explained in a manner that every statement is accorded the primary import so as not to contradict the others. The principle of Sarira-Sariri bhava, that is, body-soul relationship is a spiritual analogy and not a physiological principle. The atman with the body is one only but there is difference between the body and the atman. In the same fashion, Paramatman is only one but He is characterized adjectivally by the universe of the sentient and the insentient.

To sum up:

1. The statements which proclaim the inalienable and changeless character of Brahman only declare that there is no change in the essential nature of Brahman.
2. The statements that posit an attributeless Brahman are only intended to repudiate all inauspicious qualities.
3. We can accept the total denial of plurality because what actually is implied is that all other distinct entities are in the nature of qualities, inseparably adjectival to the one Adviteeya Brahman [not having a second Brahman like Him], constituting the body of Brahman as such.
4. In accordance with the definition of body as formulated by Ramanuja, Brahman is one Self characterized by every other entity distinct from it, but is the Over-lord of every other thing and possessing all the auspicious qualities.
5. All statements signifying the body relate to the atman; Paramatman is the one internal Atman in all entities. Thus Brahman is the one reality existing, being qualified by innumerable bodies that are supported and ruled over and enjoyed for its own purposes. To put it differently, Brahman is one and non-second in the composite form.
6. There is clear distinction in regard to *svarupa* and *svabhava* with respect to each of the three - namely Brahman, the sentient and the insentient; thus difference is affirmed without detracting from the Oneness of Brahman.

In the course of his Sri Bhashya and Vedarthasangraha, Ramanuja has explained all the crucial passages of Upanishads and established the Visistadvaitic philosophy on a firm foundation, invulnerable to conflicting and fractional interpretations which do not recognize the harmony inherent in the Srutis. [Ramanuja himself does not use the term Visistadvaita but his commentators Sudarsana Suri and Vedanta Desika have employed it in Tatparya dipika and Pancharatraraksha respectively]. He accomplishes the task of explaining the Brahma Sutras in a theistic style; in the process he asserts the metaphysical eminence of Brahman without denying the reality of the world and the eternal reality of the individual selves. He firms up the route of

attaining Brahman through Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga maturing into Bhakti Yoga. Sri Bhashya is a grand work of vision and thorough execution, the language of exposition being lucid and illuminating in the splendour of his unimpeachable findings based on his harmonizing interpretation of the Upanishadic texts.

The first four Sutras of the first chapter of Sri Bhashya establish the necessity of enquiry into Brahman, its definition, the relevant sources of knowledge and the supreme value of the pursuit of that knowledge. The function of Vedanta is the discernment of the nature of Brahman which is the supreme Tattva or Reality. The Upanishads affirm the transcendent Brahman which is of the nature of an absolute Being, Consciousness and Bliss and declare that nature and the finite selves are vehicles of its self-manifestation. The external world of sentient and insentient is very much real, however much they seem subject to mutation. Reality is one, the one central principle, Brahman; the totality of finites is its inseparable qualification.

Sri Bhashya expounds the nature of the Jiva in the course of the second chapter. The Jiva is a conscious principle, uncreated, with powers of volition conferred by God. Jivas are many; their plurality is real and eternal. They are neither distinct from God nor wholly identical with Him. They are *amsas* or parts in the manner of forming an adjectival mode.

The third chapter is concerned with the fate of the Jiva caught up in the worldly life of suffering and seeming happiness, brought about by ignorance and sins spread over several past lives. Redemption is to be sought through renunciation and seeking Him through devotion to be practised with increasing intensity in order to win His grace ultimately.

The fourth and the final chapter concerns Moksha - the true liberation from all the binding karma of the past - and release into a state of eternally blissful experience of Brahman. It is the supreme ecstasy of an experience of life with God. Visistadvaita as expounded by Ramanuja is thus a philosophy of religion to reconcile the extremes of reason and faith by the sublime truth that Brahman is the ultimate repository of the sentient and the insentient and the sole and supreme end of spirituality.

### Visistadvaita in Brahma Sutras

The Brahma Sutras are indeed a body of terse and abstruse declarations of the truths enshrined in Upanishads in a form that mighty intellects have in the past probed and come to conclusions about their import according to their best understanding. Among the numerous interpretations, the commentary of Ramanuja stands apart, as it has evolved a very rational and logical approach to the analysis of the Sutras in the light of the unimpeachable pronouncements in the Upanishads, which present apparent contradictions among themselves. Ramanuja has thus been able to propound the unique reconciling philosophy of religion, known as Visistadvaita, entirely on the basis of the Sutras of Badarayana. The metaphysical conception of body-soul relationship between the

universe and the Brahman appears in its personal aspect as the intimate, inseparable union of man and God. Man is part of the Sarira of God, who is the Saririn. The essence of man is his soul; the essence of his soul is the Inner Soul, the Antaryamin. As the physical body is controlled and directed by the soul within, so the individual soul is ruled from within by the Inner Soul, which is the Soul of souls. Man is not a wholly material entity; he is not mere body, which is subject to decay and death. The body only subserves the interests of the soul. The soul is essentially immortal, blissful and of infinite knowledge, consciousness and intelligence, though in the state of samsara, it is in a condition of obscurity. The discipline of religion and the training in philosophy enable man to understand the essence of his svarupa and urge him to seek its fulfilment in the glory of eternal service at the feet of God.

The three truths or reals which the man desirous of liberation must learn and understand are: [i] chit or individual soul called jiva, pratyagatma, jivatma, kshetrajna, chetana and so on, [ii] achit or matter, called pradhana, avyakta, prakriti, avidya, maya, achetana and so on and [iii] Isvara or the universal soul, called Parabrahma, Paramapurusha, Narayana and so on. Chit is the object which is the abode of consciousness, jnana or chaitanya. Achit means the object in which jnana or consciousness cannot inhere. Isvara is the Supreme Being, God, who controls these two. Bhakti or Prapatti is the means by which the aspirant is enabled to remove the hindrances, namely, his Punya and Papa, and reach the goal of eternal bliss in the service of the Supreme.

Chit is derived from the verb, which means: to notice, to understand, to perceive and therefore it denotes an entity, which has consciousness/knowledge. A jivatma is essentially jnana and has jnana as an attribute as well. The characteristics are - [i] it is distinct from the body, mind, sense-organs, breath and intellect [ii] it is blissful in essence [iii] it is eternal [iv] it is atomic in size [v] it is invisible [vii] it is inconceivable [viii] it is without parts [ix] it is changeless [x] it is the abode of consciousness and [xi] it is in the relation of body to God, [i.e.] it is controlled, sustained and supported by God and is ever subservient to God. A quick survey of the relevant Sutras is attempted here in vindication of the conclusion that Visistadvaita is both explicit and implicit in the Sutras of Badarayana.

The Sutra [2-3-19] - 'By the very reason of scriptural statements, the individual soul is a knower' brings out that the soul is not only the abode of knowledge but also the knower. The Sutras in further support are [2-3-29] and [2-3-30], which also show that the attributive knowledge [dharmabhutajnana] of the soul is eternal.

Sutra [2-3-18] - "The individual soul is not produced, as mentioned in the scriptures and also as being eternal as revealed by the Srutis" shows the eternality of the soul.

That the attributive knowledge of the soul is subject to obscurity and manifestation is brought out in the Sutra [4-4-1] - "After attaining Brahman, the individual soul becomes manifest in his own true nature, because of the term - 'in one's own.'" The Sutra [2-3-31] "On account of the

manifestation of knowledge in the waking state being possible only on its existing potentially in deep-sleep state, like virility etc" is also relevant here.

That the soul is atomic in size is evident from the Sutra [2-3-20] - "As the Sruti texts declare the soul's passing out, going to other spheres and returning hence, the soul is atomic in size." The Sutras [2-3-22]: "If it is said that the soul is not atomic, as the scriptures state it to be all-pervading, we say, it is not so, for, the One other than the individual soul, namely Brahman is the subject-matter in those texts" and [2-3-23]: "And on account of the very word atomic used by the Sruti texts to denote its size and infinitesimal measure - the soul is atomic" are also relevant.

The souls are many and this is deduced from the Sutra [2-1-34] - "Partiality and cruelty cannot be attributed to Brahman on account of its taking into consideration other reasons in that regard, because the scripture declares it to be so." Some are born as men while others are born as gods. On account of God taking into account the past karma of the various beings before creating them as gods, man or lower animals, partiality cannot be attributed to him; it is obvious that this exercise of difference in treatment arises because of the multiplicity of souls.

The fourth chapter describes the status and course of liberation for those who have practised Bhakti/Prapatti and hence the division of jivatmas into baddhas and muktas is easily appreciated. The nityas are also recognized as they are described in the Srutis as eternally enjoying the bliss in the abode of Paramatma.

From Sutra [2-3-33] "The soul is an agent, on account of the scriptural injunctions having a purport," it is clear that the soul alone is the doer, not the insentient Prakriti. It is the soul that enjoys the fruit of Karma and none else.

Sutra [1-4-3] reads: "Matter in the subtle state subserves an end, on account of its dependence on the Supreme". It is brought out that the achit - insentient Prakriti and its twenty-three modifications and the worlds that come out of them - is very much real and entirely dependent on Brahman. Further, Sutra [2-2-27] - "Non-existence of things external is not true, on account of their being actually experienced" clarifies that the reality of the universe cannot be doubted or repudiated. Sutra [1-4-9] "Prakriti has light for its origin, so read some recensions" is also relevant.

As regards Isvara, the Antaryami Adhikaranam [1-2-4] makes it abundantly clear that the Lord alone is the Supreme Controller of the entire world of chit and achit, which constitute His body.

That the Supreme Lord alone is the one, who bestows the fruits of actions is brought out in Sutra [3-2-38]: "From Him, the Lord, are the fruits of actions for that alone is possible" and Sutra [3-2-41]: "But the former, Badarayana thinks, on account of the designation of deities as the cause of the fruits of actions."

In the Ubhayalingadhikaranam [3-2-5], the Paramatma is shown as full of auspicious qualities and absolutely free from imperfections. In the Sutra [1-2-2] "Moreover the qualities desired to be expressed are befitting only in the case of Brahman and so the passage refers to Brahman" makes it clear that the auspicious qualities of Brahman are intended to be conveyed by the Srutis. The Sutra [3-3-39] "On account of ardour, there cannot be omission of the auspicious attributes of Brahman" emphasizes that the scriptures declare repeatedly the auspicious qualities of Brahman, which cannot be known otherwise.

Further the Sutras [1-1-21], [1-1-23], [1-2-21] and [1-3-8] declare the nature of qualities not present in the entire chit and achit, as the ground for deducing the infinite nature of the auspicious qualities that characterize Brahman.

The Divine body of Paramatma, worthy of worship, is declared in Antaradhikaranam [1-1-7], thus establishing that Brahman has also a beautiful golden figure, accessible to the meditating yogis - the Chandogya Upanishad refers to the golden [radiant] person who is seen in the sun and the eye.

That Brahman is both the material and instrumental cause of the universe is made evident in the Sutras of the Prakriyadhikaranam beginning with Sutra [1-4-23] "Brahman is the material cause also, on account of this view alone not being contradictory to the proposition and illustration cited in the Sruti."



"Brahman has a beautiful golden figure!"  
Swarna Narasimhar - Sri Matam  
Thanks: [www.ahobilamutt.org](http://www.ahobilamutt.org)

That the expression 'Paramatma' in Upanishads points only to Narayana is shown in the Sutra [3-3-43]: "On account of the abundance of indicatory marks [the Narayana-anuvaka deals with the object of worship in all the meditations]; for, the indicatory mark is stronger than the context. That has also been stated by Jaimini."

Ramanuja has demonstrated how the Bheda Srutis and Abheda Srutis can be harmonized to prove that the jivatma is inseparably part of and adjectival to Paramatma and further that the entire universe of chit and achit is also inseparably adjectival similarly to Paramatma. The Sutras [2-3-17], [2-3-42] and [3-2-28] are relevant. He defines the destination of liberation [Moksha] in Atradhikaranam [1-2-2] and delineates elaborately the process of realization for the jivatma through the means of Bhakti yoga repeatedly practised [Sutra: 4-1-1] or through Prapatti [Sutra:



3-3-58] towards the One and Only End, which is Moksha, as elucidated in the fourth pada of the fourth chapter. The eternal experiencing of the qualities of Brahman is really Moksha for the jivatma and this experience, the liberated jivatma shares on par with Brahman. Thus Badarayana's Brahma Sutras enshrine the Tattva, Hita and Purusharta in the manner outlined by Ramanuja in his Visistadvaita entirely on the basis of the declarations in Upanishads.

### Isvara's omnipotence and omnipresence

Isvara's omnipresence or ubiquity everywhere and in every object raises the hackles of some puritans, who fail to grasp the subtlety of the enunciation. Vedanta Desika has, in *Sara Sara*, referred to His supreme power, which enables Him to pervade, control and direct the whole of every object in which He inheres. In his *Nyaya Siddhanjanam*, Desika deals extensively with the question of His omnipresence or ubiquity and demonstrates the *Purnatva* of Isvara, opening with the affirmation that Brahma and Siva being jivas, they constitute His body, while in regard to Vishnu, He enters direct into his form and becomes His body directly. Several are the objections voiced: Will not his omnipresence in an object - in other words, having completed the omnipresence in the object and thus having exhausted it - rule out his omnipresence elsewhere? Is not the omnipotence limited to within the object in question? Or is it a case of all the qualities being confined to the limited place chosen? And so on. Desika refers to the Vedanta Sutra [2-1-26] which raises these very points to suggest that Brahman, declared as indivisible, cannot enter the dispersed effected state of intelligent and non-intelligent parts and therefore Brahman cannot be the cause of the world. It is contended that the whole of indivisible Brahman, if it is to be the cause of the world, would have to be extended and modified so as to evolve with this multiform universe; thus there will be no Brahman left at the end. On the other hand, if only a part of Brahman undergoes modification, we are left with the position that Brahman is divisible, thus running counter to the scriptural statements declaring the indivisibility of Brahman; therefore the Brahman cannot be the cause of the world. These objections are squarely met in the Sutras [2-1-27/28/29/30/31]. Scriptures declare that Brahman is indivisible - *niravayava* - and yet is the material cause of the multiform world. Scriptures alone are the authority and our ordinary standards of reasoning, appraisal and evaluation do not hold at all here. Brahman is unique and beyond all comprehension. The facts of Vedas are authentic and have to be accepted as such; Vedas declare only what is real or possible or plausible. Vedas will certainly not give a direction like - "If fire is to be put out, do it with fire!" We have to accept that Brahman without parts can become many. Brahman can exist as a whole in the causal and effected states as declared by Srutis. It is somewhat like *jati* which exists in the species or like the *gotva* in all cows of different types. This reality of His eternal presence everywhere with all His qualities is proclaimed categorically by Nammalvar with telling effect in the opening verses of Tiruvoimozhi.

### Ubhaya Vedanta

Madhurakavi and Nathamuni have proclaimed in unmistakable terms the parity between Vedas and

Tiruvoimozhi of Nammalvar, as they both declare the same truth and so it is rightly held that Sariraka Brahma Sutra and Tiruvoimozhi represent the unique Vedanta doctrine of Visistadvaita. Vedanta Desika states in Dramidopanishad Tatparyaratnavali that the first twenty one verses of Tiruvoimozhi elucidate fully the entire import of Vedanta. Ubhaya Vedanta scholars have done extensive comparative studies and produced treatises on this deeply absorbing subject.

### Points of view with a difference

The Indian mind is famously split between inherited loyalties and cultivated or acquired [dis] loyalties. Rational perception recedes when emotions displace convictions and begin to rule. Neither theology nor science is an exception. In this context, it is interesting to consider how Western intellect, which is somewhat free from local bias, has looked at Eastern thought critically. The Vedanta Sutras, along with the commentaries of both Sankara and Ramanuja, were rendered into English by George Thibaut and brought out in early twentieth century. The volume containing Sankara's commentary carries a very long and illuminating introduction and analyses the relative merits of both the works with reference to the basic criterion *as to how far the two commentators have faithfully rendered the intended meaning of the author of the Sutras*. While agreeing that the doctrine advocated by Sankara is from a purely philosophical point of view the most important and interesting one which has arisen on the Indian soil, it is remarked that the commentary composed by Ramanuja strikes one throughout as a very solid performance due to the writer of extensive learning and great power of argumentation with its polemical parts directed chiefly against the school of Sankara and deserves to be called even brilliant. The added merit is that Ramanuja's philosophy is not merely the outcome of his individual views but resting on an old and weighty tradition. Sankara does not on the whole impress one as an author particularly anxious to strengthen his own case by appeals to ancient authorities. Further, the Vedanta of Sankara marks a strictly orthodox reaction against non-Vedic elements of belief and doctrine; it is however too little in sympathy with the wants of the human heart; comparatively few are those who rejoice in the idea of a universal non-personal essence in which their own individuality is to be merged and lost for ever - who think it to be sweet 'to be wrecked on the ocean of the Infinite.' The only forms of Vedantic philosophy which are really popular are those in which the Brahman of the Upanishads has somehow transformed itself into a being, between which and the devotee there can exist a personal relation, love and faith on the part of man, justice tempered by mercy on the part of the divinity. Evidently Ramanuja's doctrine is the appropriate candidate for the majority of people.

Thibaut's views on these lines evidently provoked in India serious objections and criticisms to suggest that Thibaut had 'philosophical incompetence', 'hopeless theistic bias due to early training', and the like. Responding very mildly in a surprisingly brief introduction in the volume of translation of Ramanuja's commentary, Thibaut affirms that he was not expressing any opinion on the comparative philosophical value of the systems of Sankara and Ramanuja; not that he had had

no definite opinions on this point; the remarks of the critics had little of solid value; the validity of Sankara's understanding of the Sutras was his main point but his critics had not touched on this point at all; he had never claimed to have understood the works completely as they are yet to be studied more critically.

With only these brief comments, it might be tempting to go judgmental and pronounce a verdict on the Western approach; it would only be proper to study the works closely in entirety with utmost objectivity and then proceed to draw conclusions.

### Fascination with the Upanishads

Dara Shukoh, son of the emperor Shah Jahan was in Kashmir in 1640 when he came to know of the greatness of the Upanishads. He had them translated into Persian and the translation work was completed in 1657. Much later they were translated into Latin by Anquetil Duperron. Schopenhauer [1788-1860] a German philosopher, after reading the translations, stated: " Their reading has been the consolation of my life and will be of my death." Nobel Laureate Erwin Schrodinger's [1887-1961] *What is life* is one of the great science classics of the twentieth century. A distinguished physicist's exploration of the question which lies at the heart of biology, it was written for the layman, but proved one of the spurs to the growth of molecular biology and the subsequent discovery of the structure of DNA. **The book testifies to the influence of Upanishads on the physicist, who declares that the recognition of Atman represents the quintessence of deepest insight into the happenings of the world.**





"The Lord's words on the battlefield of Kurukshetra"  
Hitopadesam - Artwork courtesy Sou R Chitralekha

## CHAPTER 6

### Lord's word on the battle-field - A divine mandate

**I, an aspirant after liberation, seek refuge in the effulgent God, who creates Brahma and endows him with the Vedas also and on account of whom the intellect of mine shines out.**

**- Svetasvetara Upanishad**

**To understand that God exists, that itself is the blessing of birth**

**Thinking about Him constantly is one's fortune**

**To follow without fail the Sri Vaishnava Dharma is true glory**

**Not differentiating between the deities is real virtue!**

**To abstain from Kama and Krodha is an auspicious experience**

**Not committing sins knowingly is itself a gain**

**Living righteously and becoming dispassionate is itself pure joy**

**Regularly engaging in the service of Acharya is accrued wealth!**

**Not falling into the passions of nature is but being supremely Sattvik**

**Shirking off all attachments is itself the kingly post**

**Worshipping Alamelumanga and Her consort Sri Venkata Vibhu**

**As a pure hearted one, is itself eternal and highest glory!**

**- Tallapaka Annamacharya**

Upanishads are many. Enshrined in them are loftiest conceptions as well as supreme heights of wisdom. Couched often in enigmatical and paradoxical language, they exhibit diverse moods and ideas and seem to defy attempts at coordination. As flashes of philosophical intuition, they are matchless in simplicity and grandeur. The Vedanta Sutras step in to provide the frame-work for a logical and consistent interpretation to provide the basis for the formulation of a philosophy and render meaningful the religion of Vedanta. The interconnections among the Upanishads are established to vindicate the continuity of the conclusion of each of the four chapters of the Vedanta Sutras ultimately settling for the supreme result of realization in the final chapter. However the prospect of developing a plan of conduct and spiritual self-culture from the Upanishads and Vedanta Sutras is realized only in the Bhagavad Gita, which clearly propounds the philosophy of life for realizing the ultimate goal. In other words, while the Upanishads make the proclamations and Vedanta Sutras provide the vindication, it is only the Gita that enunciates the path and the destination in unmistakable terms, offering directions for moral development and

spiritual realization.

Sage Vyasa, the greatest among the visionary historians of antiquity, records the growth of unrighteousness in the families of those who ruled the people about five thousand years ago. It was then the Lord Krishna *descended* to protect men of good merit, destroy the wicked and to impress on man the true values of life and living. He brought to light absolute Being as the basic Reality and established it as the foundation of thought, knowledge, experience, action and contemplation. He laid out before the genuine aspirant the promise of an integrated life, with a true plan of action, based on devotion and detachment. Success right now and surely so in the yet unknown future, with eventual liberation, is categorically assured for one who perseveres and practises diligently. Such is the message of eternal Truth declared by Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the battle-field.

### Goals and the means:

The goals of life have been traditionally classified as Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. In *Gita* we have an analogous classification of Aiswarya, Kaivalya and Moksha, which would denote prosperity here as well as heavenly pleasures following death, realization of the essential greatness of the self with the joy of absorption in that self and ultimately realization of the Supreme, offering oneself with love to His eternal service from which there is no return. What are the modes of effort towards the ultimate happiness of service to God? It is through knowledge, but not the intellectual understanding of the wisdom of the scriptures and the like. It is knowledge of the nature of intense meditation. But even that would fail to lead to realization unless there is the descent of God's grace on the seeker pining for liberation. Should it not descend on all of us without discrimination? If God's grace were to come about like a shower erratically and unpredictably, how do we then understand and explain the phenomenon of enduring bondage everywhere vis-à-vis the rationale of the needed discipline as a must for realization? God's grace cannot obviously be arbitrary, vulnerable to the charge of caprice and partiality, which should be the last to be expected of an impartial Ruler. So grace can come about, if at all, only in response to the aspirant's longing for Him; in the absence of that pure self-less love, the seeker lacks the primary qualification to be eligible for His grace.

This is only to say that God as the Supreme Redeemer, determined to liberate every one of us, is awaiting the movement of an initiative from the individual, whom He has blessed with knowledge and freedom to do so. That movement is constant meditation with love and adoration of God for His sake and unceasing worshipful service of that unfailing Supreme Redeemer. It is what is called bhakti, which alone can secure the redemptive grace of God and lead to realization. Bhakti Yoga is not a mechanical discipline but presupposes an awareness of the self in its innate pristine nature transcending the physical body and the refinement of the self with knowledge, aspiration and meditative discipline of a high order. This preparatory self-culture called Jnana Yoga leads to

the knowledge of the self and progressively to Bhakti Yoga.

Jnana Yoga is not easy of practice because of several obstacles, distractions and temptations of the temporal life rendering difficult the pursuit of a contemplative life of devotion and dedication to a goal. These hindrances can be attributed to karma, in other words, past pursuit of an unethical life of earthly longings and acts of misdemeanour. The effects of the unsavoury karma have to be wiped away and this can be achieved only by a determined bid to come out clean through constant endeavour to cultivate a life of virtue, charity, compassion and conformity to injunctions. This is Karma yoga, which is a preparatory exercise for the Jnana Yoga to operate and then going through Bhakti Yoga to bring about the realization ultimately.

Apart from the triad of Yogas briefly described in the foregoing paragraphs, there is an alternative route to realization known as Nyasa, also called Prapatti, which is total surrender of one's responsibility and burden to God for achieving the same goal of realization. The potency of Prapatti is unique in that as through it, one can cultivate bhakti and can also steer clear of the hindrances that would prevent the cultivation of bhakti. What is more, Prapatti can bring about independently the ultimate realization or Moksha without going through the onerous and arduous path of bhakti preceded by Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga.

### Arjuna in a moral dilemma surrendering for guidance:

In the battle-field when the armies face each other in array and are about to fight, Arjuna develops cold feet, overcome by feelings of misplaced affection and compassion and is confused as to the right course of action. He surrenders to the Lord for guidance for a way out of the moral dilemma. Lord takes the opportunity to unfold an entire philosophy of the triad of yogas as well as the supreme route of Prapatti or surrender, which can take the seeker to the goal of realization. In the first place the super-physical and immortal nature of the self is elucidated. In the context of counselling Arjuna as to the appropriate course of action, it is brought out that man must preserve equanimity amidst the dualities of pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, success and failure. Karma yoga here is different from the normal performance of rituals and customary practices executed without awareness of the nature of the self. A man of discrimination has to choose only such of the scriptural commandments which would minister to and promote sattvic aspirations and depress the influence of the other gunas such as rajas and tamas. More importantly, the seeker of spiritual freedom should act without thought of the self or the fruits of actions. Interest in the fruits or concern for the results clamps shackles on the agent as well as the act and this has therefore to be guarded against to ensure dedication of the work and the fruit to God in a spirit of worship. While performing the action, the agent as the doer should be aware that he is not the cause of the action or the fruit. At the same time he should not withdraw from action, when action is a must. In other words, in the name of or under pretext of detachment, he should not falsely develop an indifference to action.

**"To work alone you have the right and not to the fruits. Do not be impelled by the fruits of work. Nor have attachment to inaction." [Sri Bhagavad Gita 2-47]**

What is emphasized here is action for its own sake, uncontaminated by desires that bind and fetter, in other words, action in a spirit of worship. That lifts up the soul towards spiritual freedom. Positive action imbued with the spirit of renunciation is far superior to work governed by desire for earthly perishable fruits. With this understanding as the basis of karma, all acts performed in absolute equanimity of mind, progressively leads to the weakening of the effects of former deeds done with worldly desires. In stages understanding gets illumined; delusions vanish and an attitude of complete detachment from earthly values is entrenched making way for intuitive apprehension of the self.

As karma yoga is practised to fullness, Jnana yoga is initiated, when the aspirant reaches the state of a steady-minded person maintaining absolute equipoise. The path is now set for the perception of the self and that leads to bhakti, the final means for liberation or moksha. Conquest of desires is not a process of suppression which renders renunciation insecure and incompatible. The senses are very wild, powerful and unpredictable. To restrain them completely requires a gradual preparation through desireless action, backed by an understanding of the nature of the self. Contemplation of the Supreme as the sole means of purification of the mind, perception of the self and yearning for realization are broadly the stages of Jnana yoga and Bhakti yoga, starting from Karma yoga in the first place.

Karma yoga envisages a life of action, exertion and exercise of sense organs while Jnana yoga points to the control of senses, concentration and contemplation. Are they not apparently a contradiction in terms? Do they not appear to be mutually exclusive directions of discipline? Yes, seemingly so. Only one who pursues a life of action and reaches fullness can hope to secure a passage to a life of contemplation - which is certainly not attained by refraining or abstaining from action. In fact, in life, every one is always and all the time attached or attracted to one activity or another under the compulsive influences of nature - sattva, rajas, and tamas. It would therefore be logical to accept the position and proceed from a plane of regulated and refined action and then aspire for progress, without struggling to break the natural laws. Karma yoga is not mere involvement in some action or the other. Understood in the full sense of the term, Karma yoga implies knowledge of the nature of the self and thus includes a substantial element of Jnana yoga as well. Even a Jnani or a mystic has to subsist and to maintain himself in this world, of course, through correct and righteous living and therefore there is no question of cessation of karma even for one advanced in inward life of contemplation, with all senses subdued and mastered. In this view, Karma yoga is superior to Jnana yoga and would be a safe and preferred course even for one qualified to practise Jnana yoga directly.

Where is the bondage in the performance of karma? Actions do mean involvement and commitment but they have to be done without attachment; actions undertaken for the sake of



obligatory sacrifice of oblation do not bind at all. Lord puts it in a nutshell in his instruction-

"Therefore, Arjuna, be unattached and always perform obligatory actions. He who does so reaches the supreme goal of life."



**"Therefore Arjuna, be unattached and perform your duties!"**

Even one of moral and spiritual distinction has to perform Karma yoga necessarily, even if one could dispense with it. One has to set an example for others to act, as otherwise those not qualified would like to emulate and opt for Jnana yoga, dispensing with performance of prescribed works. King Janaka was qualified to adopt Jnana yoga directly but rightly he decided to follow the Karma yoga and thus reached the goal.

What needs to be borne in mind is the Lord's emphasis on Karma yoga performed without attachment and even without a vestige of consciousness of being the author of action. Total self-effacement in action is the clue to freedom from anxiety, arising from unconditional subordination to the Supreme Being. While the individual has free responsibility in relation to actions, this freedom is governed, maintained and ensured by Him alone, in as much as the individual, even with the exercise of free will, is only one of the many contributory causes of action. It is well understood that the individual with all his boasted freedom is tossed about under the influence of senses prompted by the gunas of prakriti. All the same he fancies that he is functioning with absolute moral autonomy! The essential basis of Karma yoga is therefore conscious subordination to the Divine source of all action.

## Play of the senses:

Senses craving for gratification seek to chase the objects of desire and when that effort is thwarted, hatred ensues and fuels the desire further. In other words, when we demand the acquisition of objects on which we have set our hearts, until we get them or if we do not get them, there is mental agitation which gets expressed in differing forms of behaviour, attitude and outlook. The mental agitation and unrest are there because of the deep-print mental impressions of the objects, with which we identify our happiness. It is common knowledge that when unfulfilled desire breeds hatred, self-control recedes imperceptibly, allowing full scope for negative emotions to form and multiply. Even a Jnana yogi, under extreme provocation, is apt to lose his bearings and burst out although the difference is that he reverts to normalcy without any trace of the momentary aberration.

The safest course for the seeker is to adopt the Karma yoga, which comes naturally with ease, rather than be lured away directly to the risky and difficult track of Jnana yoga. To repeat: the senses, the mind, the intellect and the desire are all hindrances that confront and challenge the seeker who wishes to subdue them. Among them, the foremost foe, namely, desire has to be kept at bay by the unfailing, although slow, weapon of Karma yoga - in the process, the accomplices of desire, namely senses, the mind and the intellect can be gradually reined and held in check. In fact the aspirant's first priority is the regulation of the mind, which is a two-faced-friend and foe. The subdued mind is a friend at our service, while the unsubdued mind becomes the master who calls the shots. How does one go about it? The primary requirement is that the seeker should realize that the agency of actions vested in him has come about because of his relation to the senses and prana, brought about by karma. Keeping constantly in mind that he is not the author of the functions of the senses, he should learn to give up attachment to the fruit of actions and maintain a total detachment while engaged in action.

Karma yoga, the preferred discipline, has in it a distinct share of Jnana yoga, which, without the preceding Karma yoga is fraught with hazards. Those qualified for Jnana yoga should maintain themselves on the basis of Karma yoga - which is svadharma - and set an example for the general run of seekers, lest the latter be drawn away to the para dharma, which is Jnana yoga.

## Jnana yoga

The yoga of Karma leads to the yoga of Jnana, which in turn leads to self-knowledge or self-discovery. This self-knowledge is necessary for the beginning and development of Bhakti of the highest order. Bhakti is what is otherwise described as Upasana filled with love, in other words, loving contemplation of God, based on an understanding of His supreme majesty, His infinite, exalted and auspicious qualities free from every shadow of imperfection. This loving contemplation compulsively engages the devotee in the service of God and makes him surrender

unto Him totally. The devotee reaches a stage that he finds it impossible to live without Him and thus qualifies himself to receive the gracious gift of the direct experience of God and attain Him ultimately.

In the second pada of the third chapter of Brahma Sutras, Ramanuja avers that the recognition of the fact that God is free from imperfections and abounds in infinite auspicious qualities brings about Bhakti. In his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, he elaborates how the paths of Karma and Jnana lead to the path of Bhakti and this synthesis of the yogas is fundamental to the account of the spiritual evolution enshrined in the Gita.



**"The Lord abides in the heart of every being!"**  
Swami Nammazhvar - Kanchipuram  
Thanks: Sri Shreekrishna Akilesh

"The Lord abides in the heart of every being, spinning them round and round, mounted on a wheel, as it were, by His power." Gita [18-61].

In other words He abides in the hearts of all beings as the central reality within them and causes all beings to revolve as if mounted on a machine. The selves in the embodied condition are actuated in several modes of life through the powers of Prakriti under His control. How and doing what does He exist? He exists by enabling, by His Maya [power], all beings that are mounted on the machine Prakriti in the form of body and senses created by Him, to act in accordance with their gunas of Sattva and others. It is already declared [Gita 10-8] that "I am the origin of all; from me proceeds everything; thinking thus the wise worship me with all devotion." And in [Gita 15-15] "And I am seated in the hearts of all. From me proceed memory, knowledge and their removal as well. Indeed I alone am to be known from all the Vedas. I bring about the fruition of the rituals of the Vedas; I alone am the knower of the Vedas."

**Lord now expounds the strategy to get rid of this Maya:**

**"Seek refuge in Him alone, O Arjuna, with the whole of your being. By His grace, you shall find supreme peace and eternal abode." Gita [18-62]**

**Man must therefore seek his release by surrendering to Him with the whole of his being. With His grace alone, he can realize his freedom and joy in His service for ever. Eternal bliss is God's gift only to those who worship Him through surrender.**

In the concluding chapter [eighteenth] of the Gita, the three-fold theme of philosophy -tattva, hita, and purushartha - is emphasized. The five-fold truth - artha panchaka - namely the self, the ultimate, hindrance to realization, the nature of realization and the means therefore is also declared in definite terms. More importantly, Ramanuja enunciates the fundamentals of his philosophy, namely, the concepts of [1] God as the Antaryamin - Inner controller [2] Temporal world - Lila Vibhuti [3] Surrender - Prapatti [4] Release into the realm of God's Nitya Vibhuti - Moksha.

The Lord, having imparted to Arjuna the true knowledge and the mystery of mysteries, asks him to reflect and decide what to do; and proceeds to transmit the most secret of all, for the good of Arjuna, who is dearest to Him. **The secret is Bhakti.** A vibrant description of Bhakti earlier indicated in the ninth chapter is reiterated in the eighteenth chapter.

**"Focus your mind on me, be my devotee, be my worshipper. Bow down to me. Engaging your mind in this manner and regarding me as the supreme goal, you will come to me" Gita [9-34].**

**"Focus your mind on me. Be my devotee. Be my worshipper. Prostrate before me. You shall come to me alone. I promise you, truly; for you are dear to me" [18-65].**

It is here Lord makes it abundantly clear that He holds as surpassingly dear to Him that devotee, in whom there is surpassing love for Him - idea that had been made earlier "in [7-17]-'For I am inexpressibly dear to the man of knowledge and dear is he to also me.'

Lord assures Arjuna of the greatest good that would accrue to him through surrender, loving contemplation and service. Here is a categorical statement that Bhakti, if practised as advised, would lead him definitely to the goal of union with God. But the devotee would certainly confront obstacles in his Sadhana; how does he have to overcome them? Obstacles are twofold - those that stand in the way of attainment and those that stand in the way of adopting the means for attainment.

**The famous [18- 66] verse is -**

**"Renounce [having renounced] all dharmas, take refuge in me alone. I will deliver thee from all sins. Do not grieve."**

Lord's assurance couched in this verse admits of more than one interpretation, different only in particulars but pointing to the single consummation devoutly wished for.

Renunciation of Dharmas, in other words, the ways of Karma, Jnana and Bhakti - implies practice of these yogas without the thought of being the doer, without attachment to the ego and without

desire for any fruits. What is advocated and recommended is contemplation of the Supreme and absolute acceptance that He is the cause of all deeds, the sole object of devotion, the only aim of all endeavours and the only one who can bring about the devotee's realization of Himself. There is no question of abandoning the Dharmas but what is enjoined is the due performance, untainted by feelings or consciousness of doership, egoism and craving for rewards. Obstacles in the path to union with God are in the form of sins accumulated in the past and there is the Lord's assurance that these sins will be obliterated. While surrender to Him makes a clean sweep of the obstacles and paves the way, Bhakti yoga ensures the attainment of the goal of realization.

Another interpretation revolves round the rigorous and exacting discipline of Bhakti yoga, practice of which is fraught with several hindrances. Lord assures that he would liberate the devotee from the sins in the form of hindrances that stand in the way of practising the difficult Bhakti yoga and also ensure the consummation of God-realisation. Here the devotee's surrender is limited to the desire for removal of obstacles in the way of Bhakti, while Bhakti yoga thus rid of hindrances leads to realization. In the former case surrender secures the destruction of obstacles to realization and Bhakti completes the realization. In both the cases, surrender is imperative although the objects of surrender differ.

### Lord shows the way:

Yet another route which indeed is most potent and efficacious is Prapatti - the surrender direct to the Lord. Here the seeker, for lack of knowledge, of capacity and of patience and in view of the difficulty of fulfilling the conditions, gives up Bhakti yoga altogether and surrenders himself wholly in His hands for granting his release. God in His infinite compassion showers His grace on the aspirant. The Lord, while revealing His majestic grandeur to Arjuna, declares:

Gita [11-53, 54, 55]

**Neither by Vedas nor by austerity nor by gift nor by sacrifice, can I be seen in this form as you have seen me.**

**But by single-minded devotion can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.**

**He who does all actions for me, who looks upon me as the Supreme, who is devoted to me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creation, he comes to me. O Arjuna.**

The sins are now completely destroyed and the devotee is enabled to realize his union with the Supreme. Here Prapatti is a self-sufficient discipline and also the principal means to realization. It is now not an auxiliary to another means like Bhakti and it is not also a means for cultivating and practising on the arduous path of Bhakti.

The efficacy of Prapatti as an independent sadhana for realization is unique. It is a sovereign route for the feeble, who are unequal to the demands of Bhakti yoga. It is unfailing because it hinges directly on the infinite potency of His grace which descends directly on to those who surrender totally without reservations.

Vedanta Desika sums up the essence of Prapatti in God's own words:

'When a man falls into despair or grief because he is not able to adopt certain upayas as productive of the desired results - to that man I stand as those upayas'. This is the gist of the Charama [last] sloka - 66th of the 18th chapter of the Gita.

God thus places Himself as the means for any of the following -

1. Removing the obstacles/sins in the way of cultivating Bhakti
2. Removing the obstacles to realization sought through Bhakti
3. Direct realization, independently of Bhakti yoga, through direct prayer and surrender.

Bhakti yoga is a long-term exercise over probably several lives like Ayurvedic treatment of a life-time for a chronic ailment. Self-surrender is spiritual surgery which does not fail to yield the effect at the desired point of time but the success depends as much on the surgeon as



"I stand as the Upaya!" - Kanchi Sri Varadar Mulavar

on the co-operation and faith of the patient who gives himself up wholly without the least reservation.

It is necessary to understand here the grief of Arjuna, who expresses it in more than one place, even as he listens to the Lord. In the beginning of the Gita, the cause of his grief is essentially that he has to fight against his own gurus, kith and kin whom he will have to kill. When the Lord explains that the Atma is eternal and it is only the perishable body that perishes and so on, this grief is thus removed. In the sixteenth chapter, the Lord speaks about people of divine and demoniac qualities, with their merits and demerits respectively, Arjuna is depressed; he grieves, being uncertain as to which of the two classes he belongs. The Lord assures him that he belongs to the class with divine propensity and thus removes his grief [Gita 16-5].

The third occasion is the one when the Lord declares-'I shall relieve you from all sins; do not grieve' [Gita 18-66]. Here what has been worrying the dumbfounded Arjuna is that he is not at all qualified, after listening to the Lord describing the travails of practising Bhakti yoga, which He teaches elaborately. Lord's grand and final assurance changes the concluding scene dramatically when Arjuna proclaims that he has understood everything now and gets ready to fight and do his duty.

### How free is our free will under His control?

In the context of the Lord's message in the Gita -" The Supreme dwells in the heart of all beings, revolving them all by His mysterious power, Maya"- question is often raised - are not our actions under our control? Does an Unseen power think for us, decide and tell us that we must act in a particular fashion? The control which the Supreme wields is not the control of the kind which a puppeteer exercises over the puppets. The control is actually exercised through a subtle mechanism that works under material nature [prakriti]. It is declared in the Gita that "Everywhere in all the material universes, the dispositions of nature - the gunas of prakriti - perform all works. But deluded by egoism, man thinks-'I am the doer'."

Man is born with certain tendencies - samskaras - that he acquires commensurate with his activities - karma - in previous lives. These tendencies are made up of the three gunas: sattva, rajas, and tamas. The relative proportions of these qualities determine broadly his character. Generally, his thoughts and actions are dictated by the samskaras, because nature compels him to act according to his character. "Not even for a moment one can remain without performing some action or the other. Everyone is forced to act according to the qualities he has acquired from the modes of material or gunas." says Gita. The Padma Purana declares that the fate of five things in one's life is already decided at the time of one's conception in the womb - the aggregate wealth one will acquire, one's occupation, education, lifespan and when, where and how one will die. Happenings associated with these five are pre-ordained and will come to pass, no matter what, and can be described as destiny. One's character, moulded by one's samskaras will then enable one to

act in such a fashion that events will play out as destined.

Are we then cogs on a machine operated by the Supreme or do we have free will at all to act independently? Lord tells Arjuna, "Thus I have imparted to you wisdom that is more secret [profound] than all that is secret. Reflecting over the whole teaching, do as you think fit." It is evidently implied that man does have free will to think and act independently - this free will is an ability that has been endowed by the Lord to enable man to make his destiny - thus free will is a prerequisite to be able to shape one's destiny. Without free will, the law of karma becomes inoperative; we could use the limited free will to pursue purely material prosperity and pleasure that will have a degrading effect on the samskaras we keep building for the future; or we could generate sattvic samskaras, which will help us, evolve spiritually and ultimately take us to the goal of liberation. The deep mystery of destiny cannot be grasped unless we see the link of free will that determines actions, which, being largely resultant of past samskaras, become also the makers of samskaras that will dictate future action.

### The charm and power of the Bhagavad Gita

The Gita is only a continuation of the essential teachings of Vedanta of the Upanishads. Presented in a direct fashion it has become a scripture accessible to one and all without exception. The ethical guidance which people need is provided in the Gita. A metaphysics, which is concerned with the highest Reality, may not find the acceptance which a practical ethical philosophy like Gita will deserve. Apart from ethics, another element of the scripture is Bhakti which is primarily devotion to God. It is about loving of God out of the fullness of one's heart and not out of its emptiness.



The Gita was first translated into English by Sir Charles Wilkins and published by the East India Company with an introduction by Warren Hastings [1732-1818], the first British Governor-General, in which we find the following prophetic comment:

"The writers of the Indian philosophies will survive when the British Dominion in India shall long have ceased to exist and when the sources which it yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance." A century later, another beautiful rendering of the Gita in English appeared, namely, the Song Celestial by Sir Edwin Arnold [1832-1904]. In his introduction to the translation in 1885, Arnold refers to earlier translations, into French by Burnouf, into Latin by Lassen, into Italian by Stanislav Gatti, into Greek by Galonos and into English by Thomson and Davies. The tremendous appeal of the Gita lies in its treatment of human problems in a human way. It has



inspired the human mind in India for centuries and today it is inspiring millions of people in different parts of the world.

Thinkers and writers like Emerson, Walt Whitman and Thoreau in USA and Carlyle in England have reported broadening and deepening of their outlook after studying the Gita and their writings also began to convey a new and fresh message. In his book *Walden*, the transcendentalist Thoreau refers to Gita in these words:

"In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmological philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial."

"The Bhagavad Gita has profound influence on the spirit of mankind by its devotion to God which is manifested by actions." - Dr Albert Schweitzer [1875-1965]

"The Gita is the most beautiful philosophical song existing in any known tongue" - Robert Oppenheimer [1904-1967]

"The Gita is one of the clearest and the most comprehensive summaries of the Perennial Philosophy ever to have been done. Hence its enduring value, not only for Indians, but for all mankind. . . The Gita is perhaps the most systematic statement of the Perennial Philosophy." - Aldus Huxley [1894-1963]

"The Gita is known as the Lord's Song - or the Song Celestial - and it represents one of the highest flights of the conditioned spirit to its unconditioned source ever achieved." - L.Adams Beck [? - 1931]

"When I read the Gita and reflect how God created this universe everything else seems superfluous." - Albert Einstein.

The emotion produced by Indian thought must have been very strong for Emerson to write in 1856 such a deeply Vedantic poem as his beautiful Brahma:

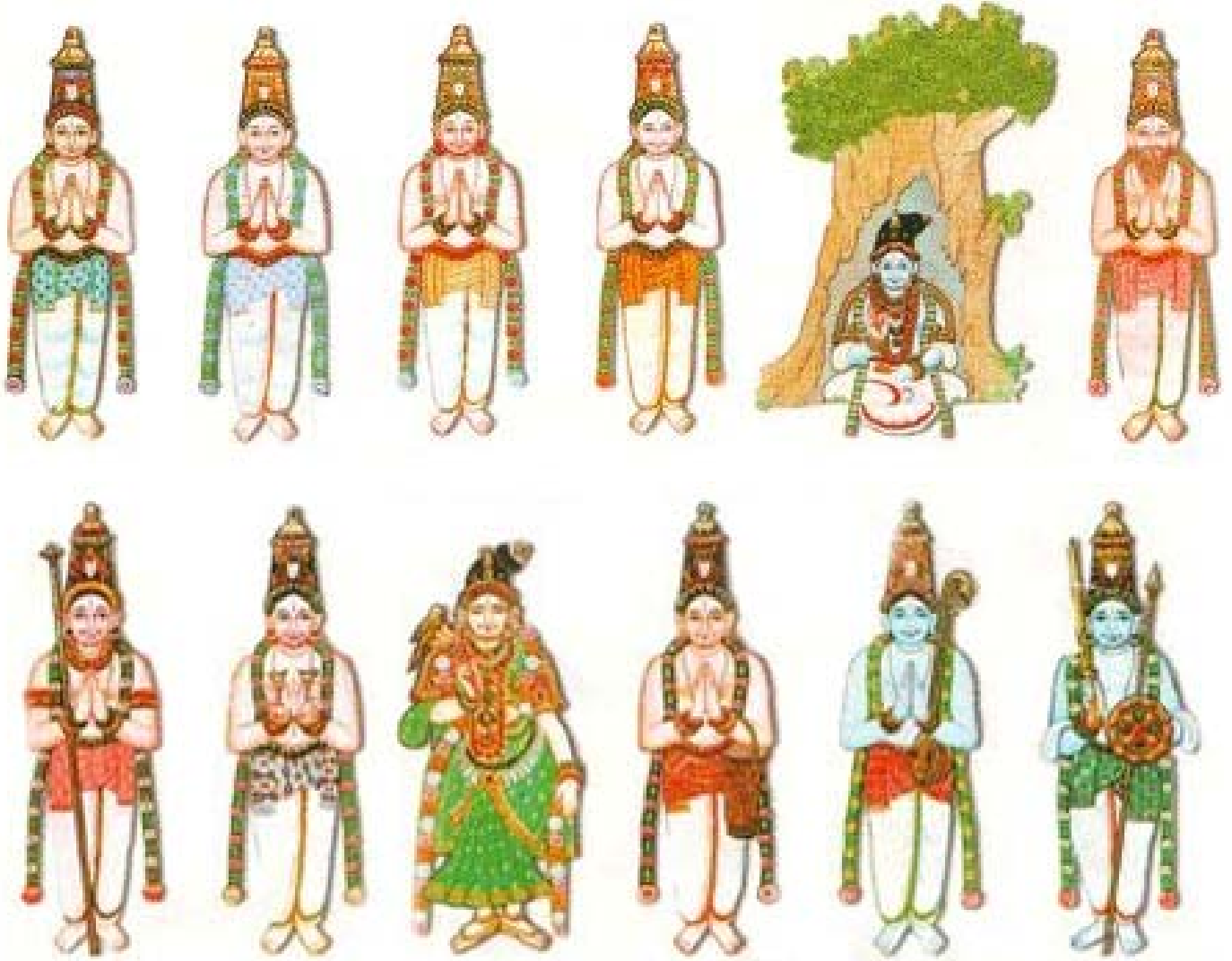
*If the red slayer thinks he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again.  
Far or forgot to me is near,  
Shadow and sunlight are the same,  
The vanished gods to me appear,*

*And one to me are shame and fame.  
They reckon ill who leave me out;  
When me they fly, I am the wings;  
I am the doubter and doubt,  
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.  
The strong gods pine for my abode,  
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;  
But thou, meek lover of the good!  
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.*



## CHAPTER 10

### Alvars and Acharyas



The 12 Alvars (Thanks: Sri Shreekrishna Akilesh)

Alvars have a unique position and status in the history of Visistadvaitic thought and philosophy directly related to Sri Vaishnavism. They realized the reality of Brahman through direct experience. They took a direct intuitive dive into divinity and brought forth the hymns, four thousand in number, which according to tradition were collected and arranged by Nathamuni in the manner of the four Vedas codified by Vyasa. These hymns breathe the gospel of Prapatti, which is a sure means to reach the Godhood - the Brahman that creates, sustains and destroys the universe - that is of the form of Sriman Narayana, the *saririn* of all beings, the sentient and the insentient. The recitation of the Prabandhas, on par with the Vedas, is now an integral part of worship in Sri Vaishnava temples. Nathamuni is hailed as the first pontiff of Sri Vaishnavism and also as the founder of the Ubhaya Vedanta school, inasmuch as he could succeed in discovering the Tiruvoimozhi and recovering the whole Prabandha, which was revealed to him by the Alvar himself at Tirunagari. While Sri Bhashya is a logical and systematic enquiry into Brahman revealed

through the Vedanta Sutras, Bhagavad Vishayam is the exposition of the spiritual experience of Nammalvar. The former stresses the deductive while the latter the inductive side. It is said that Nathamuni knew of a yoga, which could secure mukti with ease and minimum exertion and he was keen on transmitting it to his grandson Alavandar. Unfortunately the meeting of the two was not destined to take place and the precious yoga is lost for ever. Nathamuni is said to have composed two path-breaking works, Nyayatattvam to establish the Visistadvaitic philosophy and the other Yogarahasyam in order to secure the sampradaya [tradition] - but to our misfortune both are lost. It is said that in Yogarahasyam, the part relating to Prapatti was couched in manipravala [pearl-coral, that is, with both Tamil and Samskrit] style, with a view to relying on the authority of Alvars for the acclaimed unfailing validity and efficacy of the doctrine championed and practised by the Alvars.

**Nammalvar** delineates in his four works - Tiruviruttam, Tiruvasiriam, Peria-Tiruvandadi and Tiruvoimozhi - how he renounced this-worldliness under the captivating spell of His beauty and love. Tiruvoimozhi unfolds the majesty of divine life and love, with the descent of God into the self of Alvar and his upward journey into the divine home. It is the grace of God that transforms Alvar into a liberated soul and through him a beacon is set for the whole of humanity. The first hundred hymns sing of kinkarya to the supreme Lord as the principal goal of life. The second hundred expounds that kinkarya is rendered only for His satisfaction without any trace of egoism. The third stresses that this kinkarya is fulfilled through extension of service to all those devoted to Him. In the fourth we are enlightened how the hindrances to a divine life in the form of temptations of aisvarya and kaivalya are tided over. The fifth reveals the justification by faith that it is He who clears away the hindrances. In the sixth is enshrined the crucial stage of the spiritual journey - devotion consummated in surrender - Prapatti. Alvar's dejection is depicted in the seventh, while in the next eighth, dejection triggers further reflection and strengthens the passionate devotion to the Supreme. Ninth is the picture of intense longing, while in the last tenth we have the magnificent ascent of Alvar into his divine home for the bliss of kinkarya.

**Vedanta Desika** in his reflective lyric Daya satakam embracing all the facets of Divine mercy describes the galaxy of teachers who stand as protective ghats of knowledge for the divers to dip into the ocean of His compassion. He begins his magnum opus Srimad Rahasyatrayasara with an inspiring account of the succession of Acharyas who have carried and handed down the great heritage of ours and predicts the arrival of more preceptors very soon. Alvars, it is said, could with their insight foresee the emerging teachers of the future. Manavala Mamuni in his commentary of Acharya Hridayam [second prakaranam-91] refers to Tiruvoimozhi [5-2-1] as indicative of the descent into the world of Tirumangai alvar and also Ramanuja. Swami Nammalvar is excited that the days of Kali would be numbered, with the certain advent of Sri Vaishnava Samriddhi very soon.

**Yamunacharya**, known also as Alavandar, was one of the few preceptors who had travelled far high

in the ladder of mysticism. The whole composition of sixty-five verses - the Jewel of hymns - Stotraratnam - is a lyrical masterpiece of devotion and has few parallels in the melody of diction or the depth of devotion. In each of the stanzas, we can glimpse the passionate and determined outpouring of a heart pining for union with the Supreme. Even while chanting the hymn, one feels the impact of the faith and conviction with which the saint reveals his spiritual moods.

**"O Thou worthy of being sought as refuge! I am not one established in dharma, nor am I a knower of the self! I have no fervent devotion for Thy lotus-feet; utterly destitute and having none else for resort, I take refuge under Thy feet." [22]**

It is here Alavandar declares his Prapatti with the full complement of the accessories - the will to do whatever is pleasing to the Lord, not to do what is not agreeable, helplessness, supreme faith and supplication for protection. He admits to his inability to perform Karma yoga, Jnana yoga and Bhakti yoga and in that situation sees no alternative to complete surrender at His feet with unshakable faith.

**"A drop from the nectar-ocean of love to Thy lovely lotus-feet extinguishes the blazing forest-conflagration of trans-migratory existence in an instant and bestows supreme bliss." [29].**

**Whatever I might be physically, whatever might be the type of character I am endowed with, from this very day I offer myself at Thy lotus feet [52].**

**Whatever is mine, whatever I am, all are verily yours. When I am awakened to this knowledge, what can I offer to you? [53].**

**"As Thou Thyself hast awakened in me this consciousness of being eternally Thine, so too, O Lord, grant me out of compassion that devotion which is of the nature of enjoying none but Thee." [54].**

Surrendering of the self to the Lord for protection means the realization of the self as existing wholly for the purpose of the protector to such an extent that the self feels no further responsibility for its own protection; further, the self-surrender is in the full knowledge that the fruit of the surrender is not one's own. It might appear that the surrender suggested in sloka 52 is being modified through sloka 53; it is not so. Sloka 60 brings out the essence of surrender:

**"Thou alone art my father, Thou alone art my mother, Thou alone art my beloved son, Thou alone art my dear friend, Thou alone art my confidant, and Thou alone art the preceptor and the refuge of the worlds. I am Thine, Thy servant, Thy attendant; Thou art my goal; and I take refuge in Thee. In such circumstances, I am verily a burden on Thee."**

It is reiterated again in a different form in the following sloka:

**"Remember please that promise of yours that the refugee who will but once pray to you saying, 'I am yours', will deserve your grace. Tell me if this promise holds good for all others but me alone." [64].**

These utterances are indicative of the unquenchable longing of the saint for realization. The doctrine of self-surrender - the supreme mystical idea - is transparent in every stanza; the outcome of true self-surrender is the complete annihilation of will and ego. The seeker who gives up everything for His sake lives unto Him alone. Only to such a devotee, the Lord reveals Himself. This great idea of self-oblation to the Divine is best expressed in the closing lines- " O Lord, he who begs for shelter in Thee praying but once saying-' I am Thine ' becomes worthy of Thy compassion." The saint must have taken this keynote of surrender from the oft-quoted Valmiki's verse expressing Rama's assurance of protection to Vibhishana:

**"To him who has sought my protection even once and begged of me saying 'I am Thine' - to him I offer protection from all beings. This is my vow."**

**-Srimad Ramayana -Yuddha Kanda 18-33**

Alavandar has summed up the essence of Bhagavad Gita in a short metrical work of 32 verses known as *Gitartha Sangraha*, which divides the 18 chapters of the Gita into three hexads - the first hexad dealing with Karma yoga and Jnana yoga, the second with devotion or Bhakti yoga towards realising the Paramatman and the last hexad with the details and statements dealt with in the first two and concluding with the Lord's supreme message. Having explained the tenets of Karma yoga and Jnana yoga, Alavandar postulates, towards the end of this work, the doctrine of surrender in clear and unmistakable words:

**"Looking upon all disciplines from performance of duties to the practice of Bhakti as meant only for pleasing the Lord and not with any other motive, one should abandon all dependence on any other means than Him [the Supreme Person] and remain without any fear of inadequacy or the efficacy of the act of resignation, in regard the goal of salvation." [Gitartha Sangraha-31]**

There can be no better enunciation of the power of absolute surrender to the Lord in preference to every other path indicated. Such a person, he concludes, finds his sole joy in exclusive and continual service of God in His realm which he is bound to attain.

It was given to Ramanuja to formulate the philosophy of Visistadvaita, although he was not the founder. He was wholly dedicated to the task of systematizing the traditional teachings of the *rishis* and the *Alvars* as expounded by Nathamuni and Alavandar. He based his detailed commentary [*Gita Bhashya*] on the guide lines thus spelt out succinctly by Alavandar. What is more, he has avoided futile controversies and confined himself to a faithful interpretation of the verses in the light of the tradition, of which he has come to be regarded as a representative - namely the doctrine of Visistadvaita.



**Bhagavad Ramanuja - Kanchipuram (Thanks: Sri V C Govindarajan)**

The path of bhakti described elaborately in his Gita-bhashya is open only to those who are eligible for undertaking Upasana, preceded by the performance of ritualistic works prescribed for the twice-born, along with Jnana yoga which is meditation on the Atman distinct from the body-mind. With the practice of Jnana yoga, Karma yoga becomes really complete. Jnana yoga needs the enduring support of Karma yoga, without which it becomes unsteady. These disciplines require the

study of Vedas and Upanishads, not open to those not twice-born. It is only with the practice of these disciplines, Bhakti yoga can follow; the sins get effaced in due course, the mind turns towards God and pure bhakti prevails. This course is not available to the majority, who, because of lack of competence or eligibility, is prone to be excluded from the goal; it is here Prapatti comes to the rescue. No Vedic studies or Upasana; absolute faith and trust in God is sufficient as the Lord becomes both the means and the end in their cases. There are many passages which support and recommend this route.

**"O Partha, Taking refuge in Me, women, vaisyas, sudras and even men of inferior faith attain to the highest goal" [Gita:9-32].** This is an unambiguous declaration of the Lord favouring the course of absolute surrender. A more emphatic assertion is made in one of the concluding verses:

**"Completely abandoning all dharma, seek Me alone as refuge. I will free you from all sins. Do not grieve." [Gita18-66]**

Ramanuja's comment on [9-32] is terse and brief. On the above he suggests two interpretations regarding the renunciation of dharma. The first one is the performance of all ordained duties including the permitted kama karmas without any regard to or expectation of the fruits of action and also without any consciousness of doership in the practising of Karma, Jnana and Bhakti Yogas in the way instructed. This would mean that He is the only means and He is the end as well. The second interpretation means abandoning all expiatory disciplines prescribed in Sastras for the removal of sins which obstruct Bhakti Yoga and relying wholly on His grace for redemption from such evil and thus being enabled to commence and consummate Bhakti Yoga. It is pertinent to consider why in these interpretations, the doctrine of Prapatti is not clearly asserted. Even in Sri Bhashya, this doctrine is not discussed elaborately, quite unlike the treatment of Upasanas. On the other hand, in his Gadyas, particularly in the Saranagati gadya, Prapatti as a sure upaya is not only gloriously extolled but advocated as the only unfailing means for redemption. This is not surprising as he had not only inherited the legacy of the Alvars immersed in God-love but also received the blessings of Yamunacharya imbued with the tradition handed down from Swami Nammalvar and Nathamuni. A possible explanation is that his commentaries on Vedanta sutras and Gita were guided by his firm determination to establish the Visistadvaitic philosophy and demonstrate its supremacy and superiority to the rival schools which either misunderstood or misinterpreted or repudiated the Vedas. His eloquent delineation of the glory of Sriman Narayana in both Sri Bhashya and Gita bhashya could go well with an audience of Vedic scholars familiar with Karma yoga, Jnana yoga and Bhakti yoga and also the question of competence and authority for the performance of Vedic rituals and also Upasanas. As regards Prapatti, the unique inheritance through Alavandar deserved a separate, elaborate and distinctive treatment, which stands embedded in Saranagati gadya. In the Gadyas and the Nityagrantha, Ramanuja expounds the doctrine of Prapatti, without any ambiguity, as an independent means to salvation while in his



other works he teaches the difficult path of devotional meditation, called bhakti or upasana.

His two alternative interpretations of Gita [18-66] do not state explicitly that 'surrender' is an alternative path to salvation as against the path of 'devotion'. But in these interpretations there is a clear hint of his concept of surrender, which is elaborated in the Gadyas. In the first interpretation of the Charama sloka [18-66], he takes all dharmas to mean the paths of karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga - these disciplines are not to be given up but to be performed as a worship pleasing to God; what is to be given up is the karmic fruit of such actions, the notion that the actions are one's own, the idea that one is the author of these actions. This would mean that God is the sole performer, the sole refuge; He is both the means and the goal; worshipping Him in this spirit, would ensure the deliverance of the devotee from all the accumulated sins which upto now barred him from realization, as assured in the second part of the sloka. In the second interpretation, the dharmas to be given up are the expiatory ceremonies to remove the sins that obstruct bhakti yoga; the sins are infinite, the ceremonies are countless, life is short - and so Arjuna is advised to surrender unto Him, who will wipe away the sins that prevent him from practising bhakti yoga.



Swami Vedanta Desikan and Sri Manavala Mamunikal - Kanchipuram  
Thanks: Sri V C Govindarajan

Vedanta Desika points to the message of Prapatti contained in the second interpretation, namely, that even as the seeker may abandon the expiatory ceremonies and surrender unto Him in order to be able to commence bhakti yoga for realization without glitches, he may also give up altogether the bhakti yoga which, he realizes, he cannot perform and surrender unto Him directly and secure moksha. On the other hand, Meghanadari Suri holds that Prapatti as an independent means is what Ramanuja propounds in all his works; the first interpretation of the charama sloka points to the doctrine of Prapatti, while the second one is concerned with bhakti, with surrender as a means to steer clear of the obstacles to bhakti yoga. It would be relevant to recall the summary of the last Chapter [18] of the Gita in the 22nd verse of Alavandar's Gitaartha Sangraha:

**"The last chapter presents the mental state required for ascribing the agency to the Lord, the necessity of cultivating the Sattvic quality, the spiritual culmination of discharging one's duties and practising Bhakti Yoga which form the essence of the Gita Sastra."**

Evidently Ramanuja follows this approach in his first interpretation of the charama sloka; it is this that sets the tenor of his elucidations in the Gita Bhashya throughout. The idea is that all forms of worship should continue and that will include all human effort and initiative to attain salvation. But these are all only secondary; because God Himself is the true means as well as the goal; He alone gets the worship done and He is the One worshipped. Ramanuja has thus followed Alavandar in such a fashion that all human effort is relegated, God being the sole accomplisher of the salvation. It may be pertinent and interesting to recall that Ramanuja insists on Satvika Tyaga, a format that we all follow in all Vedic rituals including Sandhya worship, Aradhana etc. The Lord advises Arjuna to surrender all his actions to Him and then fight without concern or tension [Gita 3-30]; commenting on this verse Ramanuja observes, " .....**Contemplate that the Supreme Person, the Lord of all, Principal of all, gets done His own works only for the purpose of getting Himself worshipped with His own instruments, namely, the individual selves which belong to Him and are His agents. Become free from selfish attachment to action. Also be free from feverish concern originating from such thoughts as 'What will become of me with an ancient and endless accumulation of evil arising from beginningless time?' Perform Karma Yoga with ease, for the Supreme Person Himself, worshipped by acts, will free you from bondage....."**

Sudarsana Suri, Peria acchan Pillai and Vedanta Desika, who appeared more than a century later than Ramanuja, have all commented on the Gadyatraya. Sudarsana Suri considers Prapatti, which is distinct from bhakti, as an independent means to salvation. Peria Acchan Pillai holds that Prapatti is the only way to attain Him, in place of devotion in which one has to rely on one's own effort. According to Vedanta Desika, Ramanuja proclaims bhakti as the means to attain God in all his works; in Gadyatraya, however, Prapatti is taught as the easy means open to all without exception. The joy of intense devotion and service here is no doubt considered the means but God's grace alone secures the salvation, after which is assured the eternal joy of devotion and service in the Divine estate. Alavandar's influence on Ramanuja is evident in the extended understanding of the

teaching of the Gita so as to relegate the role of the human effort. In his comment on the Gita [18-65, which precedes the Lord's final word] Ramanuja describes the Lord's assurance in these words - "Renouncing all ego-centeredness, you shall come to Me. You are dear to Me. He, in whom there is surpassing love for Me, I hold him also as surpassingly dear to Me. Not being able to bear his separation, I myself will enable him to attain Me. This is what is meant in the assurance 'you shall come to Me alone.' "

The terms parabhakti [higher devotion], parajnana [higher knowledge] and paramabhakti [highest devotion] used more than once in the Gadyas are nowhere defined therein. They correspond, however, to stages of Alvars' devotional experiences both in anguish of separation and in the joy of communion alternating tantalizingly. These experiences are all gone through only here before the body's final fall, while the everlasting communion follows only thereafter. It would appear at first sight from Saranagati gadya that the act of surrender is in order to get freed from the sins that stand in the way of bhakti and thus secure His grace to follow the path of devotion. This understanding would mean that the 'surrender' taught here is not different from what Ramanuja has advocated in Gitabhashya, namely, surrendering in order to be enabled to pursue the means of bhakti [upaya] which will lead to the goal [upeya]. That would result in denying Prapatti the character of independent means - which is obviously not what Ramanuja had in view. Commentators who came later have set at rest the confusion. Sudarsana Suri identifies parabhakti as Prapatti, the direct means to salvation. Others have held that parabhakti, parajnana and paramabhakti are not upayas but only stages in attainment obtainable before the final release from the body. Vedanta Desika clarifies that bhakti with gradations in the Gadyas is not upaya for attaining release but an end in itself [svayam prayojana]. Commentators have pointed out that parabhakti is the devotee's longing to have an ever-lasting vision of God; parajnana is the achievement for a brief period of such a vision; and paramabhakti is the unquenchable aspiration and thirst to have the experience of the vision without interruption like the flow of oil. These are only experiences cultivated here as ends in themselves and are not to be equated with the bhakti yoga taught as the means for moksha.

Alavandar renders in the first three verses of Stotraratna his homage to the great Nathamuni and says in the third verse -

**"Obeisance again to Nathamuni, the best among those who have subdued the senses, by whose holy precepts - which are the overflow of the boundless nectar-ocean of love and true knowledge of Achyuta - the true bhakti yoga in its entirety, has descended on the earth."**

In the dedicatory verse of Sri Vaikunta Gadya, Ramanuja pays his tribute to Alavandar thus:

**"Having dived into Alavandar's ocean of ambrosia to the best of my understanding, I have brought forth the gem called bhakti yoga and am holding it up to view."**

While annotating the *Vaikunta Gadya*, Vedanta Desika has clarified that this reference to Bhakti Yoga is not to be understood in the same sense as it is expounded in *Gita* and the *Gitabhashya*. A few lines further down in this *Gadya*, Ramanuja declares that there is no means for salvation for him except Prapatti at His lotus feet. Vedanta Desika points out here that bhakti is only contemplation of the Lord as an end in itself. In verse 22 of *Stotraratna*, Alvarandar himself declares that there is no means for him except to surrender at His Lotus feet [Prapatti]. It is therefore clear that the postulation of Prapatti as independent means in the *Gadyas* is different, while in *Gitabhashya*, Prapatti is a condition for getting rid of the sins/obstacles that hinder bhakti. It will be seen that Ramanuja refers quite often to the devotion which is the means of attaining Brahman and states that this devotion is itself very very dear to the devotee - *anavadhikatisayapriya*. In other words, while the devotion is a means to attaining Brahman, it is, from another point of view, an end in itself and corresponds to the description of man's eternal destiny, that is, to be His servant in all situations; this is brought out in Alavandar's *Stotraratna* [46] thus:

**"Constantly waiting on Thee alone, with all other desires absolutely quenched, when shall I, an eternal servant of Thine alone, delight Thee, having Thee as the Lord of my life?"**



**"Oh Lord of my life, I am an eternal servant of Thee!" - Sri Ahobilesar, Upper Ahobilam**  
Thanks: [www.navanarasimha.org](http://www.navanarasimha.org)

Service [kainkarya] is an ever-recurring theme in Ramanuja's Gadya; this service is pictured more as man's supreme goal, rather than a means to reach that goal. Alavandar's Stotraratna [60] is graphic: "I am Thine, Thy servant, Thy attendant; Thou art my goal; and I take refuge in Thee. In such circumstances, I am verily a burden on Thee." Service of this kind actually leads to self-surrender. What Ramanuja, therefore, preaches in the Saranagati Gadya is Prapatti or complete self-surrender, which ultimately leads to the goal of eternal service in His kingdom. Wherever devoted service is stressed as the goal of the religious life, the means to the goal is the Lord Himself. All that man has to do is to surrender himself, recognizing his utter helplessness and complete subservience to the Lord.

Divine grace on the one hand and man's acknowledgement of his subservience to the Lord is what sends Ramanuja into raptures, contemplating the picturesque infinitude of His qualities. In the state of moksha, the individual self is ushered into perfect bliss and love in divine communion and engagement in uninterrupted adoration of His glory. To the criticism that subservience even in moksha is degrading, Ramanuja enunciates a principle that 'what an individual pursues as a desirable end depends upon what he considers himself to be'. People with different dispositions follow different goals. The conception of value is determined by the conception of the self. The individual selves, looking upon themselves, as men, rakshasas, demons, gods, males and females have corresponding and mutually separate conceptions of what is to be desired and what is to be avoided. These are mutually contradictory. In reality the nature of the self is that it is different from the body, that it is of the nature of consciousness and that in its essence it is subsidiary to the Supreme. Any other notion of oneself arises from karma, even as the conception of oneself as being self-dependent is. When the individual forms a true conception of himself, he pursues ends that accord with that conception. The imagined value of everything, other than the Supreme Person, is all due to the effect of karma. Hence they are trivial and transitory. Only the Supreme Person is intrinsically of the nature of joy. Only the joy in Him is infinite and abiding, declare the Srutis. "Brahman is bliss, Brahman is akasa" [Cha 4-10-5]. "Brahman is bliss" [Tai 3-6] and "Brahman is real, knowledge and infinite" [Tai 2-1]. {VedantaSangraha-paras 245,246,247}

