

प्रदोषसमयनिशाकर इव । गुरूपदेशः प्रशमहेतुर्वयः परिणाम इव पलितरूपेण शिरसिजजालममलीकुर्वन्  
गुणरूपेण तदेव परिणमयति । गुरूपदेशश्च नाम पुरुषाण-मखिल-मलप्रक्षालनक्षम-मजलं स्नानम्,  
अनुपजात-पलितादिवैरूप्यमजरं वृद्धत्वम्, अनारोपित-मेदोदोषं गुरुकरणम्, असुवर्णविरचनमग्राम्यं  
कर्णाभरणम्, अतीतज्योतिरालोकः, नोद्वेगकरः प्रजागरः ।

The teachings of the guru dispel even the densest of darkness (ignorance) just as the rising moon. Just like the onset of old age (maturity) converts the darkness of the hair white (whiteness stands for purity), so also the teachings make the turbulent sense organs pure by making them calm. They constitute a bath sans water that washes away all the (internal) impurities; they confer maturity (respectfulness) without the grey hair and other such disfigurements that mark onset of the old age; they make one weighty without the defect of obesity; they are adornments to the ears not made of artificial golden ornaments; they illumine without light; they awaken without disturbing or upsetting one. Now let us study the verses proper.

### गुर्वष्टकम् ।

शरीरं सुरूपं तथा वा कलत्रं यशश्चारु चित्रं धनं मेरुतुल्यं ।

मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ १ ॥

शरीरम् = the body. सुरूपम् = handsome. तथा वा = as also. कलत्रम् = the wife (beautiful). यशः = fame. चारु चित्रं = agreeable and pleasing. धनं = wealth. मेरुतुल्यम् comparable to Meru the golden mountain . गुरोः = guru's. अङ्घ्रिपद्मे = lotus like foot. मनः = the mind. न लग्नम् चेद् = if not attached. ततः किम्? = then what is the use? ततः किम्? = then what is the use? ततः किम्? = then what is the use? ततः किम्? = then what is the use? Meaning of the verse. One may be blessed with a handsome body, beautiful wife, great fame and immense wealth. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru? The implication is that they are of no use. The repetition of the question "what is the use?" four times stresses the point. The second line is the same in all the eight verses.

कलत्रं धनं पुत्रपौत्रादि सर्वं गृहं बान्धवाः सर्वमेतद्धि जातम् ।

मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ २ ॥

कलत्रं = wife. धनं = wealth. पुत्रपौत्रादि सर्वं = son, grandson and all that. गृहं = house. बान्धवाः = relatives. सर्वं एतद्धि जातं all these that are available. Second line is same as in verse No. 1. Meaning of the verse. One may be having wife, wealth, son, grandson, relatives etc. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru? In the above two verses wife (husband included), children and money have been mentioned twice. This is because one is strongly attached to them. Attachment follows desire. Desire is for something one does not have. One desires to have something because one feels that thing will give happiness, comfort or security. Such things include wealth, family, friends, house etc. Having got them one holds on to them. This is called attachment. The utmost attachment is, of course for one's body. Every one wants the body to remain ever young and to last for ever - knowing very well that this wish is unnatural and so can never be had. Scriptures talk of three attachments; one towards the husband/wife, one towards the children and lastly the one towards wealth. The attachment, when it grows strong and becomes intense clouds one's judgement and makes one to act in unpredictable ways. Prahlada had talked about attachment. He said that it is impossible for a person who has not got control over his senses to free himself from the attachment to his home. BH(7-6-9).

को गृहेषु पुमान् सक्तमात्मानमजितेन्द्रियः । स्नेहपाशैर्दृढैर्बद्धमुत्सहेत विमोचितुम् ॥

The attachment to money, for example, can make one to sacrifice even one's life for it. He had given three examples - of a thief, a soldier and a merchant.

को न्वर्थतृष्णां विसृजेत् प्राणेभ्योऽपि य ईप्सितः । यं प्रीणात्यसुभिः प्रेष्ठैस्तस्करः सेवको वणिक् ॥ BH(7-6 10). A thief will not hesitate to commit a murder or risk his own life to get at money. He may try to snatch a

gold chain from the neck of a child and if necessary be ready to strangle the child to take the chain. For him a golden chain is more valuable than the life of a child. Next, a soldier goes to the battle and stakes his life - only to earn some money in return. Lastly, a merchant will take many risks and go to strange and far off places to earn money.

षडङ्गादिवेदो मुखे शास्त्रविद्या कवित्वादि गद्यं सुपद्यं करोति ।

मनश्चेन्न लगनं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ३ ॥

षडङ्गादिवेदः = veda with its six limbs. मुखे = in the mouth. शास्त्रविद्या as also the scriptural learning. कवित्वादि = intelligence and other qualities. गद्यं = prose composition. सुपद्यं well structured. करोति = makes. Second line is same as in verse No. 1. The vedas have six members that help in the correct pronunciation and interpretation of the text. They are: शिक्षा = the science of proper articulation and pronunciation; छन्दस् = the science of prosody; व्याकरणं = grammar; निरुक्तं = etymological explanation of difficult vedic words; ज्योतिषं = astronomy and; कल्पं = ritual or ceremonial.

शिक्षाकल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दसां चयः । ज्योतिषामयनं चैव वेदाङ्गानि षडेव तु ॥

One may have thoroughly studied the vedas and its six branches; be able to reel off words of learned length and thundering sound from them and quote from the scriptures extensively. This may greatly impress an innocent audience and earn him accolades besides money. Similarly one may be able to compose great literary pieces - prose or poetry. But these achievements will not help in gaining knowledge about the Self. The upanishads very emphatic about this.

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन । MU (3-2-3). The knowledge about the Self can be had only at the feet of the guru. Till it is got all the learning one carries in his head can only be termed a burden. Sri Sankaracharya says this clearly.

वाग्वैखरी शब्दभरी शास्त्रव्याख्यानकौशलम् । वैदुष्यं विदुषां तद्वद्भुक्तये न तु मुक्तये ॥

Loud speech consisting of a shower of words, the skill in expounding the scriptures, and likewise erudition - these may bring in some money or fame and as a result some joy to the scholar; but they are of no use in gaining liberation. VC(69). Bhartruhari also says this in his Vairagaya Satakam. He asks what is the use of studying vedas, smritis, puranas, extensive shastras or the maze of ceremonials? They may take us to heaven. One may stay there for a long time ; but the stay is not permanent . As soon as one's stock of merit that has taken him to the place is exhausted he is flung back to earth to take birth again. Moksha or liberation is the only thing that will guarantee escape from rebirth.

किं वेदैः स्मृतिभिः पुराणपठनैः शास्त्रैर्दर्महाविस्तरैः

स्वर्गग्रामकुटीनिवासफलदैः कर्मक्रियाविभ्रमैः ।

मुक्त्यैकं भवदुःकभाररचनाविध्वंसकालानलं

स्वात्मानन्दपदप्रवेशकलनं शेषैर्वणिग्वृत्तिभिः ॥

Meaning of the verse. One might have thoroughly studied the vedas with its six limbs, mastered the scriptures and be able to compose wonderful poetry and prose pieces. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

विदेशेषु मान्यः स्वदेशेषु धन्यः सदाचारवृत्तेषु मत्तो न चान्यः ।

मनश्चेन्न लगनं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ४ ॥

विदेशेषु = in the foreign countries. मान्यः = respected. स्वदेशेषु = in his own country. धन्यः = wealthy, fortunate. सदाचारवृत्तेषु = in the virtual or moral conducts or in observing traditional observances. मत्तः = proud or arrogant. न च अन्यः = none like him. Second line is same as in verse No. 1. One may be honoured in other countries and also be respected in his own country. He may be virtuous and follow the prescribed duties as per custom. But they cannot help in gaining the knowledge of the Self. Works prescribed by the scriptures when properly done lead to the purification of the mind.

Knowledge can be had only by enquiry under the guidance of the guru. Sri Sankaracharya says: VC(11) चित्तस्य शुद्धये कर्म न वस्तूपलब्धये । वस्तुसिद्धिर्विचारेण न किञ्चित्कर्मकोटिभिः ॥  
 Meaning of the verse. One may be respected in his own country as well as in other countries. He may also be known to be a follower of duties as prescribed by tradition. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

क्षमामण्डले भूपभूपालवृन्दैः सदा सेवितं यस्य पादारविन्दम् ।  
 मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ५ ॥

क्षमामण्डले = in this great globe/earth. भूपभूपालवृन्दैः = by many kings and rulers. सदा सेवितं = always served, attended. यस्य पादारविन्दम् = whose lotus like foot. Second line same as in verse No.1. One may be very great and exalted. Kings may wait at his feet. But wise men do not attach any importance to such a person if he carries only a crown and not knowledge of Self on his head. Sri Vedanta Desika refers to kings who are puffed up with pride with contempt in his Vairagya panchakam. He says a king never rules over the entire world but only a small portion of it. But even this is enough to make him proud. Sri Desika says he does not care for them but is determined to worship the Lord who, in return for a handful of pounded rice, made Kuchela rich as Kubera himself.

क्षोणीकोणशतांश-पालन-कलादुर्वारगर्वानल-  
 क्षुभ्यत्क्षुद्रनरेन्द्र चाटुरचना धन्यान् न मन्यामहे ।  
 देवं सेवितुमेव निश्चिनुमहे योऽसौ दयालुः पुरा  
 दानामुष्टिमुचे कुचेलमुनये दत्ते स्म वित्तेशताम् ॥

Bhartruhari says the same thing in his Vairagya Satakam. This verse is addressed by a yati or sanyasi (one who has renounced the world) to a king. The yati speaks of the vanity of the king's possessions, and declares that a yati is greater than a king. The reason is that a king may be rich in wealth but the yati is rich in wisdom aquired at the feet of his preceptor.

त्वं राजा वयमप्युपासितगुरुप्रज्ञाभिमानोन्नताः  
 ख्यातस्त्वं विभवैर्यशांसि कवयो दिक्षु प्रतन्वन्ति नः ।  
 इत्थं मानधनातिदूरमुभयोरप्यावयोरन्तरं  
 यद्यस्मासु पराङ्मुखोऽसि वयमप्येकान्ततो निःस्पृहाः ॥

The yati says that if the king chooses to be cold towards him, he too is perfectly indifferent towards the king! Meaning of the verse. One may be very powerful and kings may wait at his feet. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

यशो मे गतं दिक्षु दानप्रतापाज्जगद्वस्तु सर्वं करे यत्प्रसादात् ।  
 मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ६ ॥

मे यशः = my fame. दानप्रतापात् = by the glory of the gifts. दिक्षु = in all directions. गतं = gone or is spread. यत् प्रसादात् = by whose favour or condescension. सर्वं जगद्वस्तु = all the things in this world. करे = in hand. Second line as in verse No. 1. The same idea as in the previous couple of verses is restated for emphasis. Meaning of the verse. One may claim that by his charities and gifts his fame has spread in all directions and nothing in this world is not obtainable by him. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru? So far the poet has been talking of a person who has attachment to wealth, home, family, fame etc. In the next two verses he says that what is said is equally applicable to one who claims to have shed such attachments.

न भोगे न योगे न वा वाजिराजौ न कान्तामुखे नैव वित्तेषु चित्तम् ।  
 मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ७ ॥

चित्तं = (my) mind (is) न भोगे = is not in enjoying sensuory pleasures. न वा वाजिराजौ =not in either

horses or in being a king. न कान्तामुखे = not in (looking at) my wife's face; (ie)., not having attachment to wife, child, and other members of the family. नैव वित्तेषु = never in wealth. Even if one makes such a claim; which implies that he has got detachment, what is the use of this if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

Meaning of the verse. Even if one has developed intense aversion to worldly possessions and relations, such a detachment is of no use if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

अरण्ये न वा स्वस्य गेहे न कार्ये न देहे मनो वर्तते मे त्वनर्घ्ये ।

मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ८ ॥

मे मनः = my mind. न वर्तते = does not dwell on. अरण्ये = (living in the) forest or वा स्वस्य गेहे = (living in) my own house. न कार्ये = not in indulging in prescribed activities. न देहे = or my body. तु अनर्घ्ये = not to invaluable or priceless things. Second line as in verse No.1. Meaning of the verse. Even if one claims that his mind is not attached to forests, or house, or his own body or even wealth such a detachment is of no use if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru? Now the poet concludes after mentioning the फलश्रुतिः or benefit of reciting the poem. They are stated so that one will develop deep interest in studying the poem, mull over the contents and in due course accept and act on them (ie.) develop devotion to his guru. This devotion will, in due course bear fruit.

गुरोरष्टकं यः पठेत्पुण्यदेही यतिभूपतिर्ब्रह्मचारी च गेही ।

लभेद्वाञ्छितार्थं पदं ब्रह्मसंज्ञं गुरोरुक्तवाक्ये मनो यस्य लग्नम् ॥ ९ ॥

गुरोः अष्टकं = the composition consisting of eight verses on the guru. पुण्यदेही = one who has done meritorious deeds. यः पठेत् = if he reads. यतिः = be he a sanyasi (ascetic). भूपतिः = a king. ब्रह्मचारी = a student studying under a teacher. च गेही = or a householder. He will लभेत् = get. वाञ्छितार्थं = desired goal. ब्रह्मसंज्ञं पदं = the status known as brahman. गुरोरुक्तवाक्ये = in the teachings of the guru. यस्य = whose. मनः = mind. लग्नं = is attached. Meaning of the verse. Any one whose mind dwells on the teaching's of his guru, be he a king or an ascetic or a bachelor who is studying or a householder reads these verses regularly he will, by the grace of his guru, get his wishes fulfilled in this world and also attain the highest goal known as moksha.

CONCLUSION. The human birth is rare. One gets it after many inferior births as birds, animals, insects etc. Such inferior births are meant solely for reaping the consequence of their past deeds. One who has got such a birth cannot make any conscious effort to gain spiritual progress. Only the one who has been blessed with a human birth has the discrimination to distinguish between what is good for him and what is not; what is temporary and what is permanent. Having found this, he alone (not the animals, insects or birds) can set his goal and make efforts to get at it. In this the Lord has been very kind to give us scriptures that discuss about the goals. He has also sent us many acharyas who, out of immense mercy, talked at great length on this subject and answered every possible question one may have. It is upto us to study them and make the best of the precious human life. If we were to miss the chance we cannot say with certainty what our next birth will be. The Kenopanishad (2-5) says that if one fails to make a sincere attempt to attain the goal of life he makes a grave error. The loss is inestimable.

इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टिः ।

Thus the only way to make our life meaningful (that is to avoid sorrow and miseries) is to pursue the spiritual path in this life itself with the guidance of a guru. One has to hold on to his teachings with absolute faith and serve him sincerely knowing he is the very personification of the Lord.

॥ ॐ तत्सत् ॥

Written and encoded by N. Balasubramanian bbalu at satyam.net.in