

THE

BHAJA GOVINDAM

of Adi Shankaracharya



Dr M.N. Nandakumara looks at the beauty and meaning of Adi Sankaracharya's 8th century poetic hymn *Bhaja Govindam*



**SRI ADI SHANKAR-
ACHARYA**

**the great exponent
of Advaita Vedanta
non-dualistic
philosophy**

Adi Shankaracharya is considered to be one of the greatest intellectuals India has ever produced. He is known for his clarity of expression, his vision, his experience and his understanding of the realities of the world.

The credit of establishing Advaita Vedanta, the non-dualistic philosophy, at a time (7th-8th Century AD) when the very essence of Vedic teachings was under threat, should go to Adi Shankara. He was direct in his approach, clear in his expression and exposition and had a unique understanding of head and heart.

"When intelligence matures and lodges securely in the heart, it becomes wisdom. When that wisdom is integrated with life and issues out in action, it becomes devotion. Knowledge, which has become mature, is spoken of as devotion. If it does not get transformed into devotion, such knowledge is useless tinsel" *Bhaja Govindam* by Sri C Rajagopalachari.

Popularly known as *Bhaja Govinda Stotra* this poem also is known as the *Moham Mudhgarah* – a hammer to crush delusion. On first reading we feel that the *Bhaja Govindam* is a devotional song. Indeed it is, but it also contains within the simplest of Sanskrit verses, the very essence of Indian philosophy. As a poetic work, it is a devotional song par excellence, perhaps the most popular in India by any composer, and as a philosophical treatise, there are few that can compare.

Shankara begins by saying "*Oh fool stop wasting your time in unnecessary things. Meditate upon God and try to understand what His real nature is.*" Shankara's intention here perhaps is that we should not be imitators but should strive to understand and experience the realities of the world. Desire for wealth will not bring peace, but enjoying life with what one has earned by sincere hard work will. "*Children are involved with games, youngsters are involved with love, older people are engulfed in worries but in HIM no one is interested, how sad.*" says Shankara. As long

as one is capable of supporting one's family then one is respected. The day one becomes old and weak and helpless, then no one will be interested says Shankara.

Shankara clearly states that attachment is the root cause for all miseries in this world. He says "*where is the room for lust, when one is past one's youth? Where is the so-called lake when all the water has dried up? Where are one's friends and relatives when wealth is gone? Oh man think, think. Where is the bondage when true knowledge is experienced?*" He pushes aside all dogmas in his effort to establish the true realities of this world by following the path of jnana supported by the paths of bhakti and karma. One must bring God into every action one performs. One's entire life should be enveloped in such

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thoughts. Then even the Lord of Death will have no argument with such a person.

Finally Shankara says that, when a person dedicates himself totally at the feet of his Guru, then will he be released from all bondage instantaneously. When one performs one's duty with uniformity of action, speech and thought, then one will see the Supreme Lord in one's own heart ■

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BHAJA GOVINDAM

Adi Shankaracharya

- 1 Seek Govind, Seek Govind, Seek Govind, O Fool! When the appointed times comes (death), grammar rules surely will not save you.
- 2 O Fool! Give up the thirst to possess wealth. Create in your mind, devoid of passions, thoughts of the Reality. With whatever you get, entertain your mind, be content.
3. Seeing the full bosom of young maidens and their navel, do not fall a prey to maddening delusion. This is but a modification of flesh and fat. Think well thus in your mind again and again.
- 4 The water drop playing on a lotus petal has an extremely uncertain existence; so also is life ever unstable. Understand, the very world is consumed by disease and conceit, and is riddled with pang.
- 5 As long as there is the ability to earn and save, so long are all your dependants attached to you. Later on, when you come to live with an old, infirm body, no one at home cares to speak even a word with you!
- 6 As long as there dwells breath in the body, so long they enquire of your welfare at home. Once the breath leaves, the body decays, even the wife fears that very same body.
- 7 So long as one is in one's boyhood, one is attached to play, so long as one is in youth, one is attached to one's own young woman; so long as one is in old age, one is attached to anxiety, yet no one, alas to the Supreme Brahman, is ever seen attached.
- 8 Who is your wife? Who is your son? Supremely wonderful indeed is this samsara. Of whom are you? From where have you come? O brother, think of that Truth here.
- 9 Through the company of the good, there arises non-attachment; through non-attachment there arises freedom from delusion; when there is freedom from delusion, there is the Immutable Reality; on experiencing the Immutable Reality, there comes the state of 'liberated-in-life'.
- 10 When youthfulness has passed, where is lust and its play? When water is evaporated, where is the lake? When the wealth is reduced, where is the retinue? When the Truth is realised, where is samsara?
- 11 Take no pride in your possession, in the people at your command, in the youthfulness that you have. Time loots away all these in a moment. Leaving aside all these, after knowing their illusory nature, realise the state of Brahman and enter into it.
- 12 Day and night, dawn and dusk, winter and spring, again and again come and depart. Time sports and life ebbs away. And yet, one leaves not the gusts of desires.
- 13 O Distracted One! Why worry about wife, wealth? Is there not for you the One who ordains? In the three worlds it is the association-with-good-people alone that can serve as a boat to cross the sea of change, birth and death.
- 14 One ascetic with matted locks, one with shaven head, one with hairs pulled out one by one, another parading in his ochre robes – these are fools who, though seeing, do not see. Indeed, these different disguises or apparels are only for their belly's sake.
- 15 The body has become worn out. The head has turned grey. The mouth has become toothless. The old man moves about leaning on his staff. Even then he leaves not the bundle of his desires.
- 16 In front the fire, at the back the sun, late at night he sits with his knees held to his chin; he receives alms in his own scooped palm and lives under the shelter of some tree, and yet the noose of desires spares him not!
- 17 One may, in pilgrimage, go to where the Ganges meets the ocean, called the Gangaasaagar, or observe vows, or distribute gifts away in charity. If he is devoid of first-hand-experience-of-the-Truth, according to all schools of thought, he gains no release, even in a hundred lives.
- 18 Sheltering in temples, under some trees, sleeping on the naked ground, wearing a deerskin, and thus renouncing all idea-of-possession and thirst-to-enjoy, to whom will not dispassion bring happiness?
- 19 Let one revel in Yoga or let him revel in Bhoga. Let one seek enjoyment in company or let him revel in solitude away from the crowd. He whose mind revels in Brahman, he enjoys, verily, he alone enjoys.
- 20 To one who has studied the Bhagavad Gita even a little, who has sipped at least a drop of Ganges-water, who has worshipped at least one Lord Muraari, to him there is no quarrel with Yama, the Lord of Death.
- 21 Again birth, again death, and again lying in mother's womb – this samsara process is very hard to cross over. Save me O destroyer of Mura, (Lord Krishna) through Thy infinite kindness.
- 22 The Yogin who wears but a godadi (shawl made of rags), who walks the path that is beyond merit and demerit, whose mind is joined in perfect Yoga with its goal, he revels (in God-consciousness) – and lives thereafter – as a child or as a madman.
- 23 Who are you? Who am I? From where did I come? Who is my mother? Who is my father? Thus enquire, leaving aside the entire world-of-experience, essenceless and a mere dreamland, born of imagination.
- 24 In you, in me and in all other places too there is but one All-Pervading Reality. Being impatient, you are unnecessarily getting angry with me. If you want to attain soon the Vishnu-status, be equal-minded in all circumstances.
- 25 Strive not, waste not your energy to fight against or to make friends with your enemy, friend, son or relative. Seeking the Self everywhere, lift the sense-of-difference born out of 'ignorance'.
- 26 Leaving desire, anger, greed and delusion, the seeker sees in the Self 'He Am I'. They are fools those who have not Self-knowledge, and they consequently, as a captive in hell, are tortured.
- 27 The Bhagavad Gita and Sahasranama are to be chanted; always the form of the Lord of Lakshmi is to be meditated upon; the mind is to be led towards the company of the good; wealth is to be shared with the needy.
28. Very readily one indulges in carnal pleasures; later on, alas, come diseases of the body. Even though in the world the ultimate end is death, even then man leaves not his sinful behaviour.
- 29 'Wealth is calamitous', thus reflect constantly: the truth is that there is no happiness at all to be got from it. To the rich, there is fear even from his own son. This is the way with wealth everywhere.
- 30 The control of all activities, the sense-withdrawal, the reflection, along with japa and the practice of reaching the total-inner-silence – these, perform with care, with great care.
- 31 O Devotee of the lotus-feet of the teacher! May you become liberated soon from the samsara through the discipline of the sense-organs and the mind. You will come to experience the Lord that dwells in your own heart.



Adi Shankaracharya

Born in Kaladi, South India between 700 and 800 AD, Shankaracharya met his Guru, Sri Govindapada at an early age and led the life of a renunciate and ascetic. He founded four ashrams (Mathas) and started the Swami order, the same lineage to which belong Swami Sivananda and Swami Vishnu-devananda.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA MEENAKSHI ASHRAM Madurai, South India

BIRTH OF A NEW ASHRAM

A new Ashram for the organisation is taking shape close to the birthplace of Sri Swami Sivananda. We have acquired a beautiful piece of land of five and a half acres, in the Government Reserve forest only twenty kilometres from the ancient holy city of Madurai. Also close by are many of the famous holy temples of the southern state of Tamil Nadu—the famous thousand-year old Siva temples Chidambaram and Rameswaram are only two hours away. The Meenakshi temple at Madurai, with the two famous Subrahmanya temples Pazhamuthirchalai and Tripramkundra, among others, are less than twenty kilometres away. Our Ashram will become the resting place for many pilgrims who visit these holy temples.

The land was purchased a few months ago and we are currently constructing a building of two small rooms and a kitchen. We hope to acquire a further few acres of neighbouring land in the very near future.

At present the site has only a few trees and no building other than the one being constructed. The forest abounds in wild animals. Peacocks, monkeys and deer have already been spotted close by.

Electricity has not yet reached the area, so efforts are being made to ensure a supply. A near-by spring and a pool ensure water is available throughout the year.

The local people are very enthusiastic about the project. A plan for construction is being made and with the help of well wishers and the Masters' blessings we hope to start operating by September 2004. In addition, we are looking into the possibility of starting a centre in the city of Madurai. Once the Ashram opens, it will offer the regular Ashram programmes including yoga vacations, Teachers' Training Courses, study in Vedanta philosophy, and programmes on ayurveda.

The address of the Ashram is:

Kallutthu Saranhangi Village
Vadippatti Taluk, Madurai Dt,
Tamil Nadu, India
Email : Madurai@sivananda.org



Swami Mahadevananda



Above: The famous Meenakshi Temple at Madurai, only 20 km from the ashram

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA DHANWANTARI ASHRAM Neyyar Dam, South India

FASTING AND DETOXIFICATION PROGRAMME

Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwanthari Ashram at Neyyar Dam is offering a two-week Fasting and Detoxification programme under the direction and supervision of Parameshwara, director of the Retreat Centre, Moinhos Velhos in Portugal, where the programme has been offered successfully for many years.

The two-week programme will consist of fruit juice and vegetable broth fasting, massage treatments, Quantum and Bicom sessions, herbal treatments and gravity colonics. There will be Quantum testing before the start of the programme with a health print-out, and again on completion. At the same time the participants will be able to partake in the usual Yoga Vacation programme of yoga asana / pranayama classes, meditation and chanting, and lectures.

Fasting and herbs have always been Nature's way of helping the body to heal itself. Fasting gives the body a chance to put energy into eliminating stored up toxins which are often the cause of many chronic health problems whilst the herbs assist in this process and support the body's own ability to renew tissues. The practice of yoga asanas speeds up the release of toxins which is also assisted by the traditional ayurveda oil massage. Flower essences,



meditation and chanting, and the overall peaceful ashram atmosphere, help with the release of worries and emotions, enabling detoxification at the mental and spiritual levels as well.

The first Fasting and Detoxification Programme will be from February 8th, 2004. For further details please contact YogaIndia@sivananda.org.