

|| Emancipation only by Knowledge ||

Shankara Vachanamrita



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Acknowledgement

Jagadguru Shankara Bhagavathpada Stands as a beacon light who illumines the eternal message of “Self Realization” and reestablishes the pre-eminence of “Sanathana Dharma”. He indeed is the great path-finder to the Eternal. He spent his entire life –short though it was - in leading his fellowmen to turn from the impermanent temporal life to the brilliance of the life eternal.

Vedanta Bharati, an academy of Veda-Vedanta Studies and Research, has been functioning to propagate Shankara’s abiding philosophy to everyone, and towards this end, has been for the last six years organizing major programmes like

“Shankara Sandesha –Shankara Saraswathi” and the like. It is with the earnest desire that everyone should imbibe the great philosophy of Shankara and practise it in daily life that Vedanta Bharathi has brought out this small booklet **“Shankara Vachanamrita”**. Its efforts will become fruitful if the readers get enlightened with the message this booklet conveys and get inspired to go deeper into Shankara Bhagavathpada’s other writings.

The chief patron of Vedanta Bharati **H.H. Jagadguru Sri Sri Bharathi Theertha Mahaswamiji-** Dakshinamnaya Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri has blessed this effort. We prostrate at the lotus feet of Jagadguru and seek his blessings.

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Dr. Sridhar Bhat Ainkai
Director, Vedanta Bharati

Shankara Vachanamrita

Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada is the resplendent star that appeared over 1300 years ago on the firmament of Indian Darshana Shastra. That was a time when there was overindulgence in rituals. There were the invasive attacks of those who rejected the existence of Atman. People were confused about the mode of leading a Dharmic life. It was then Acharya Shankara taught the people the Vedic means to Moksha. It was He who established, on firm ground, the core teaching of the Upanishads, with His inimitable and powerful logic. The Acharya did not propound any new sect or system. His teaching is the panacea for any individual thirsting for the Truth and is determined to walk the path lit by that Truth. Whatever system we follow and whatever form of God we choose to worship, if only the Acharya's teachings are accepted as the guiding principles, we can be assured of reaching the goal of realizing the Truth. If one were to secure the direct realization of the truth pertaining to oneself and the perceived universe, one's very perspective of the world gets transformed. His very personality is rendered purified.

Purification at the individual level would result in the cleansing of the nation itself. This results in a unified vision at the macro level. In the light of the teaching of the Upanishads, the entire universe is an illusory appearance in the unitary Consciousness. There is nothing other than this Infinite Consciousness. There is no room for attachment and aversion when in truth everything is One alone. Having blessed the world with such an immaculate and magnificent path, Bhagavatpada Shankara established Mathas in the four directions of our nation thereby adding power and glory to the feeling that we, the descendants of the Holy Bharat, are

one nation. He ensured the uninterrupted flow of the Upanishadic liberating teaching on systematic lines with these Mathas as spiritual power-centers. Completing His life's mission at the age of 32 years, Acharya Shankara Bhagavatpada ascended the Mount Kedaranath (Himalayas) and was no longer seen by anyone. Even to this day the beacon light of the teachings of the Great Acharya, who is truly immortal, continues to guide all of us on the path of Moksha.

Let us never lose sight of these priceless gems of His teachings.

1. अयं तु ऐकत्वदर्शी न बिभेति कुतश्चन । [बु.उ.भा ४-४-१५]

But this man sees unity; hence he is not afraid of anything.

When a person cognizes something that is different from himself, then there is fear from that. That different object is really not there as there is no difference. When this is the case, who is to be afraid of whom? Therefore in the realm of non-difference, there is no room for fear at all.

2. देहादि-आत्मबुद्धिः अविद्वान् रागद्वेषादिप्रयुक्तो धर्माधर्मादि-
अनुष्ठानकृत् । [गी.भा. १३-२]

The ignorant man who considers the body, etc. as the Self, being subject to attachment and aversion, engages himself in action resulting in merit and demerit.

The basis for man's actions (meritorious or otherwise) is the duo of attachment and aversion. This duo has ignorance for its basis. From ignorance springs the identification with the body, etc. When this identification is eradicated, man renounces with equanimity both merit and demerit.

3. तथा च सर्वप्राणिनां शोकमोहादि दोषाविष्टचेतसां स्वभावत एव
स्वधर्मपरित्यागः प्रतिषिद्ध सेवा च स्यात् । [गी.भा. २ पीठिका]

To all those beings filled with the defects of dejection, delusion, etc., giving up ordained duties and resorting to prohibited actions occur as a matter of natural course.

When subjected to misery and delusion, man forgets what he is supposed to do and resorts to that he ought not to do. As a result of this his life becomes useless. Thus every one must make his life fruitful by remaining free from misery and delusion.

4. प्राणिनां सुखप्राप्तये धर्मो विधीयते । दुःखपरिहाराय च अधर्म
प्रतिषिध्यते । [सू.भा. १-३-३०]

Dharma is enjoined with a view to bringing happiness to beings. Adharma is prohibited so that the beings do not suffer from misery.

Dharma accomplishes happiness here and in the hereafter. It affords a framework congenial for an orderly lifestyle. When we adhere to the scripture-taught truthfulness, etc.,

happiness accrues to us. When we abstain from the scripturally-prohibited acts, misery is avoided. It is with this intention the Veda enjoins: 'adhere to Dharma', 'one ought not to swerve from Dharma', etc.

5. गुणाधिकैर्हि गृहीतः—अनुष्ठीयमानश्च धर्मः प्रचयं गमिष्यति इति ।
[गी.भा. पीठिका]

When accepted and practised by men of high character, Vedic religion (Dharma) will widely spread.

Teachings have to be addressed to only those who are fit to receive them. When the truly qualified people grasp the teachings and put them in practice, other people also will follow them. It is seen that the teachings given out to unqualified persons become futile. Therefore teachings on Dharma have to be given only to those who are endowed with high character.

6. प्रत्यक्षा च विद्वत्संयोगे प्रज्ञावृद्धिः । [बृ.उ.भा. ३-१-१]

It is evident that the intellect is enriched when one lives in the company of the learned.

It is seen in the worldly parlance that even a mediocre student becomes transformed into an intelligent one in the company of accomplished scholars. This is a fact even today. History tells us that a dull-witted student named Bhupadeva, owing to his tutelage under a very learned scholar, turned out to be a highly intelligent scholar in Vyakarana (Grammar).

7. न च विज्ञानात्मा परमात्मनो वस्त्वन्तरम् । [बृ.उ.भा. २-३-६]

The Individual Self is not an object that is different from the Supreme Self.

This can be understood thus: The wave is non-different from the water (of the ocean). The ornament ring is non-different from the substance gold that it is made of. The space delimited by a jar is non-different from the unlimited, all-pervading space. Even so is the Self delimited by the body-mind is non-different from the Infinite Self that pervades the entire creation. Thus is it declared: 'Jivo Brahmaiva, na aparah', *the jiva is none other than the Brahman.*

8. ब्रह्मैव एकं परमार्थसत्यम् इति वेदानुशासनम्। [मुं.उ.भा. २-२-११]

'Brahman alone is the One Ultimate Reality' such is the final ruling of the Veda.

Reality is spoken of as having three facets as it were: parlance reality, seeming reality and Absolute Reality. The 'silver' appearing erroneously in a shell is of the seeming reality. The same is the case with dream as well. All these remain as real only as long as they are perceived; the moment they get sublated, the perceiver realizes these to be false. The case of the parlance reality is different. This world that is perceived by us, though not of the same order of reality as a dream, too will come to be experienced as a mere appearance upon the dawn of the realization of the Ultimate (Absolute) Reality - the Upanishads declare. The Real Substance that is Brahman alone, being immutable (in space, time and by its intrinsic nature), is the Absolute Reality; everything else is unreal: 'Brahma satyam, jagan mithya' (Brahman is Real, the world is unreal).

9. अमेधसो हि श्रीः अनर्थायैव ।[तै.उ.भा. १.४.३]

The riches acquired by a dull-witted person are bound to result in calamity.

There is a story related in the Srimad Bhagavatam: The king of Angadesha had a son by name Vena. This boy was an idiot by nature. When he came of age, he became the monarch of Angadesha. Due to the collective effect of his youth, access to riches, authority and his innate idiocy, he concluded that there was none equal to him. He demanded that everyone worship him as God. He tormented all those noble subjects who refused to comply with this unreasonable demand. This resulted in a chaotic situation all over the kingdom. There was anarchy and riotous situation. Mother Earth could not tolerate this and at last the subjects of Vena rebelled against him and killed him. Such indeed is the disaster that results when power rests in wrong hands.

10. तस्मात् केवलादेव ज्ञानात् मोक्षः इत्येषः अर्थो निश्चितः गीतासु सर्वोपनिषत्सु च । [गी.भा. ३ पीठिका]

It has been established in the Geeta and in all the Upanishads that liberation results from Knowledge alone.

Ordained action (karma) and devotion (bhakti) will result in the cleansing of the mind. While these are indirect causes for liberation, Knowledge of the Atman alone is the immediate cause for Moksha.

11. न च अज्ञानव्यतिरेकेण मोक्षस्य व्यवधानान्तरं कल्पयितुं शक्यम् ।
[बृ.उ.भा. ३-३-१]

It is impossible to specify any impediment to liberation other than ignorance.

Every person entertains the desire to attain liberation. Liberation is nothing but the realization of one's true nature. What obstructs us from gaining this knowledge is the ignorance that has remained with us over past several lives.

Even as a small cloud covers, as it were, the Sun that illumines the earth, ignorance covers, as it were, our true nature. The means to eradicate this ignorance are: listening to the teachings of the Guru, uninterrupted study of the Vedantic texts and engaging in spiritual discipline.

12. सर्वत्र हि शास्त्रप्रापिता एव धर्माः उपास्याः न विद्यमाना अपि अशास्त्रीयाः । [छां.उ.भा. २.२.१]

Indeed, in all cases, only duties enjoined by the scriptures are to be undertaken; not those which, even though in vogue, are contrary to the scriptures.

The scriptures are the only means of knowing in the field of super-sensory matters. This is because, there are many subtle matters that are not available for our estimation but have been fathomed by the Rishis endowed with the inner power that enabled them to divine the Vedic Mantras. Therefore, in matters concerning God, meditation, etc., the scriptures are the sole authority.

13. दुर्लभं त्रयमेवैतत् दैवानुग्रहेतुकम्।

मनुष्यत्वं मुमुक्षुत्वं महापुरुषसंश्रयः ॥ [वि.चू. ३]

These three things are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God – namely, birth as a human, longing for Liberation, and the protecting care of a perfected sage.

Human birth, a strong desire for liberation and the guiding company of exalted persons are three extremely rare accomplishments. They are attained not without the Grace of Ishwara. To be born as a human is itself very rare: 'jantunam nara-janma durlabham' (for those that are born, birth as a human is very hard to obtain, says the Vivekachudamani verse 2). Even if this is had, the desire to attain liberation from the cycle of births and deaths is an

even more difficult trait. If, owing to great merit (Punya) this desire is born in a person, obtaining the grace of an appropriate Guru who can guide one in this path to liberation is an extremely rare occurrence. These three become possible only when Divine Grace is present in full measure.

14. इतः कोन्वस्ति मूढात्मा यस्तु स्वार्थे प्रमाद्यति। दुर्लभं मानुषं देहं प्राप्य तत्रापि पौरुषम् । [वि.चू. ५]

Even after having acquired a human birth, if one does not endeavor to accomplish what is ultimately beneficial to oneself, what else could be more foolish than that?

Compared with the body of birds and animals, the human body has all the conditions conducive to work for the highest good. Unlike the other living beings, man has the faculty to discriminate between what is dharma and what is not. These other beings have no consciousness of the morrow. They do not have the urge to secure knowledge. Man has enough facility to secure knowledge as also to internalize the saattvic attributes. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us humans to make the best use of this birth.

15. ऋणमोचनकर्तारः पितुः सन्ति सुतादयः । बन्धमोचनकर्ता तु स्वस्मादन्यो न कश्चन ॥ [वि.चू. ५३]

A father has got his sons and others to free him from his debts, but he has got none but himself to remove his bondage (samsara).

He alone who is bound has to determine to get himself released. He alone who is diseased has to take the medicines and cure himself; one cannot take the medicines to bring relief to someone else.

16. गेयं गीतानामसहस्रं ध्येयं श्रीपतिरूपमजस्रम् । नेयं सज्जनसङ्गे
चित्तं देयं दीनजनाय च वित्तम् ॥ [मोहमुद्गर. २७]

Wealth has to be donated to the needy.

Only such a donation to the deserving serves the purpose of giving. The Keralite king, Rajashekhara offered immense wealth to the young Shankara in appreciation of the latter's splendid accomplishments. The Great Shankara politely refused to accept it and got that huge wealth distributed among the needy people of the kingdom.

17. न हि लोके वित्तलाभः कस्यचित् तृप्तिकरो दृष्टः । [क.उ.भा. १-
२७]

It is not seen anywhere in the world that acquisition of wealth results in contentment to anyone.

While wealth does give some joy, it is invariably accompanied by sorrow as well. Once the wealth is acquired, the person engages in the task of multiplying it somehow or the other. As declared 'man is not sated by wealth', the satisfaction derived from wealth is not everlasting. We are to ever remember the saying: 'to the wealthy, even the son is a source of fear.'

18. न हि रात्रौ कूपे कण्टके वा पतितः उदितेऽपि सवितरि पतति
तस्मिन्नेव । [छां.उ.भा. २.२३.१]

A man who had fallen into a well or on thorns at night, surely does not do so even after the sun has risen.

While walking, owing to poor visibility or inadvertence, a man trips and falls. But he would avoid falling once he has clear visibility and is alert. Even so, one would not, unlike before, err even after gaining knowledge; indeed, one ought not to.

19. सर्ववेदान्तेषु च प्रत्यगात्मा वेद्यतयैव प्रदर्श्यतेऽहमिति, न बहिर्वेद्यतया शब्दादिवत् प्रदर्श्यतेऽसौ ब्रह्मेति । [बृ.उ.भा. २-१-२०]

All the Upanishads present Brahman as to be realized as 'I am this (innermost Self)'. They do not present the Atman as an object external to oneself such as sound, etc.

There are two categories of things in the world: the Drik (seer) and Drishya (the seen). All that can be objectified comes under the Drishya category. The Drik, seer, the Atman, is never an object knowable by any other entity. The Upanishads present the Atman as self-knowing or self-illuminating.

20. तस्मात्तत्काले स्वातन्त्र्यार्थं योगधर्मानुसेवनं परिसंख्यान-अभ्यासश्च विशिष्टपुण्योपचयश्च श्रद्धानैः परलोकादिभिः अप्रमत्तैः कर्तव्य इति सर्वशास्त्राणां यत्नतः विधेयोऽर्थः, दुश्चरितात् च उपरमणम् । न हि तत्काले शक्यते किञ्चित् सम्पादयितुम् । कर्मणा नीयमानस्य स्वातन्त्र्याभावात् । [बृ.उ.भा. ४.४.२]

Those desirous of other superior worlds have to engage in yogic practices, meditation, extraordinary meritorious acts etc., (when they are physically able to engage in these). The scriptures emphasize this point sparing no effort. Giving up of evil conduct is enjoined. At the time of death, one will not be in a position to earn merit by engaging in any good acts, as all the faculties remain subdued then. By

force he is led by his earlier karma and as such his exercising any freewill is out of question at that time.

21. यदा ईशानं देवम् अञ्जसा आत्मत्वेन पश्यति न तदा निन्दति वा कञ्चित् । सर्वम् आत्मानं हि पाश्यति । स एवं पश्यन् कम् असौ निन्द्यात् । [बृ.उ.भा. ४.४.१५]

When he directly realizes the effulgent Lord as identical with his own Self, he no longer blames anybody, for he sees all as his Self, and for that reason whom should he blame?

Hatred, envy, anger and so on are all directed only towards someone who is different from oneself and not towards oneself. The real situation is such that there does not exist anything other than the Atman. Any other entity that might be experienced is none other than oneself. A Jnani endowed with such a realization will not censure anyone. Nor will he direct his wrath on anyone.

22. नरत्वं देवत्वं नगवनमृगत्वं मशकता
पशुत्वं कीटत्वं भवतु विहगत्वादिजननम् ।

सदा त्वत्पादाब्जस्मरणपरमानन्दलहरी-

विहारासक्तं चेद्दृढयमिह किं तेन वपुषा ॥ [शिवानन्दलहरी १०]

Let me (if need be) be born as a man or a celestial, as a wild beast or a mosquito, as an animal or a worm, as a bird or any other creature. What harm can accrue from these embodiments, if in every such birth my heart always feels inclined to disport in the waves of supreme bliss consisting in the constant remembrance of Thy lotus feet?

To engage in the remembrance (reminiscence) of the Lord, any kind of body is good enough. Even when endowed with a superior body, if a person does not engage in divine recollection, of what use is such a body? What kind of a body one has is not of significance. To be engaged

in the reminiscence of God is what is crucial. The case of Gajendra (elephant), Vidura (of Dasiputra), Krikalasa (a giant lizard) are examples we find in the scriptures.

23. मार्गवर्तितपादुका पशुपतेरङ्गस्य कूर्चायते

गण्डूषाम्बुनिषेचनं पुररिपोर्दिव्याभिषेकायते ।

किञ्चिद्भक्षितमांसशेषकबलं नव्योपहारायते

भक्तिः किं न करोत्यहो वनचरो भक्तावतंसायते ॥ [शिवानन्दलहरी
६३] ।

What is there that the love of God cannot accomplish? Even a hunter becomes a great devotee. The allusion is to the story of saint Kannappa, the wild hunter. He knew none of the scriptural forms of worship, and so he made offerings to Shiva's image in his own wild fashion. Overcome by his devotion to Shiva, he cleared the Linga with his footwear. He spat on the Linga, in holy abhishekam, the water carried in his mouth. As naivedya, he offered the remnants of the meat he had eaten. Yet, by the Lord's grace, he became the prince of the devotees in a moment. Submitting with a heart full of devotion is what the Lord appreciates; not the kind of object that is offered.

24. देवे च वेदे च गुरौ च मन्त्रे

तीर्थे महात्मन्यपि भेषजे च ।

श्रद्धाभवत्यस्य यथा यथान्त-

स्तथा तथा सिद्धिरुदेति पुंसाम् ॥ [सर्ववेदान्त सिद्धान्त
सारसङ्ग्रहः २१३]

The intensity of faith a person bears in respect of God, Veda, Guru, mantra, a holy place, venerable personages and medicine determines the kind of fruit he receives in return to his resorting to each of these.

The fruit has for its origin faith and effort. 'Faith is the mother of desire (aspiration)' says the Shruti. If we are to expect proper returns from sacred objects, our faith, shraddhaa, too has to be unshakeable. Firm conviction denotes true faith. This translates into working with undoubting confidence with regard to the fruit of action.

25. प्रदीपज्वालाभिर्दिवसकरनीराजनविधिः

सुधासूतेश्चन्द्रोपलजललवैरर्घ्यरचना ।

स्वकीयैरम्भोभिः सलिलनिधिसौहित्यकरणं

त्वदीयाभिर्वाग्भिस्तव जननि वाचां स्तुतिरियम् । [सौन्दर्यलहरी १००]

Oh Goddess, who is the source of all words, offering of this poem, which is made of words that have sprung from You alone, is like showing the camphor lamp to the Sun, like offering the water got from the moon-stone as oblation to the moon, and like offering to the ocean the water from the very ocean as water of worship (arghya/tarpana).

O Mother, the source of the world of words! With the medium of Your own words Your glories have thus been sung. Since You are the source of words, we have no other way than singing Your praises with the words that are Thine. O Universal Mother! You have descended in a torrential flow of words and sung Your own glories by choosing me as the medium. What else is this other than showering Your grace on me?

26. सर्वो हि आत्मास्तित्वं प्रत्येति, न नाहमस्मि इति । यदि हि न आत्मास्तित्वप्रसिद्धिः स्यात्, सर्वो लोकः नाहमस्मीति प्रतीयात् । आत्मा च ब्रह्म । [सू.भा. १.१.२]

For every one is conscious of the existence of (his) Self, and never thinks 'I am not.' If the existence of the Self were

not known, every one would think 'I am not.' And this Self (of whose existence all are conscious) is Brahman.

Even though we might surmise that we are not conscious of its existence, the Atman is always known as existent. The objects which are visible to us in a lit area might go out of the ken of our perception when all of a sudden there is a power failure. Nevertheless, even in that darkness we remain unfailingly aware of our own existence as 'I am'. Thus, we can never deny the existence of Atman.

27. न चान्यत्र परमात्मज्ञानात् शोकविनिवृत्तिरस्ति । [सू.भा. १.३.८]

There is no freedom from misery in the absence of the realization of the Supreme Atman.

The root of misery lies in attachment and aversion. Misery continues until attachment and aversion subside. As long as the mind involves in worldly deliberations, likes and dislikes are bound to be there. When the mind takes to the contemplation of the Paramatman and abides in its source, the Atman, then even an iota of misery will not remain.

28. इन्द्रियाणां हि विषयसेवातृष्णातः निवृत्तिः या तत्सुखं, न विषयविषया तृष्णादुःखमेव हि सा । [गी.भा. २.६६]

Verily, happiness consists in the freedom of the senses from thirst of sensual enjoyment, not in the thirst for objects. This last is mere misery indeed.

The source of satisfaction is the feeling 'this is enough'. Discontentment is denoted by the feeling 'I want'. So long as man continues to oblige the senses by providing them whatever they crave, fresh demands crop up one after another and assail him. The joy derived when one obtains a craved object is just momentary. When one renounces the very objects that the senses desire there, engenders

happiness that is intrinsic to oneself. A saying puts this forcefully: When one is given to enjoyment of objects, one's desire for these objects never subsides.

29. न हि अनुत्साहवताम् अननुतिष्ठताम् अलसानां भोगप्राप्तिः लोके दृष्टा [छां.उ.भा. ३.६.२]

It is not seen in the world that enjoyment is available for those who lack enthusiasm, who do not undertake action and are lazy.

Those who march on with enthusiasm doing their task even in the face of problems, obstacles and opposition, surely meet with success. Therefore we should not waste away our lives by lacking in enthusiasm and being sluggish. There is a wise saying that warns us: 'only through intelligent undertaking intended results come; not by mere reverie.

30. वाग्वैखरी शब्दझरी शास्त्रव्याख्यानकौशलम् ।

वैदुष्यं विदुषां तद्वत् भुक्तये न तु मुक्तये ॥ [वि.चू. ६०]

Oratory, shower of words, the skill in expounding the Scriptures, and likewise erudition - these merely bring on a little personal enjoyment to the scholar, but are no good for Liberation.

Explaining tough passages in simple words, speaking in a torrential flow of words, expounding the scriptures with great skill – all these gimmicks serve only worldly ends and take one away from the goal of liberation. Freedom from samsara is essentially the result of direct realization of the Self. Mere scholarship earns for one the epithet of a great Pundit; he would not be revered as a liberated soul.

31. जलं पङ्कवदस्पष्टं पङ्कापाये जलं स्फुटम् ।

यथा भाति तथात्मापि दोषाभावे स्फुटप्रभः ॥ [वि.चू. २०६]

Just as the water which is very muddy again appears as transparent water when the mud is removed, so the Atman also manifests Its undimmed luster when the taint is removed.

Water tainted with dirt is not clear; it becomes clear when rendered free of dirt. In the same way, attachment, ego and the like are the dirt that taint the Atman. When these are cleansed, the Self is clearly realized in its pristine form.

32. तस्मात् कुतार्किकभेददृष्टिं नास्तिककुदृष्टिं च उज्झित्वा
मातापितृसहस्रेभ्योऽपि हितैषिणा वेदेन उपदिष्टम् आत्मैकत्वदर्शनं
शान्तदर्पैः आदरणीयमित्यर्थः। [क.उ.भा. २.१५]

Therefore, giving up the perception of duality that bad logicians have and the erroneous notions that the non-believers entertain, the people whose pride has been quelled should eagerly seek after the realization of the unity of the Self, which is inculcated by the Vedas that are more beneficent than even thousands of fathers and mothers. This is the idea.

Even those truly well wishing parents, being human, give in to likes and dislikes and often fail in determining our supreme welfare. Being human, their well meaning decisions too could, in future, result in disaster. But, the Veda, not being of human origin, is totally free from the defects of likes and dislikes. Consequently, the Veda is ever intent upon our ultimate good alone. Therefore, we ought to heed the exhortations of the Veda.
