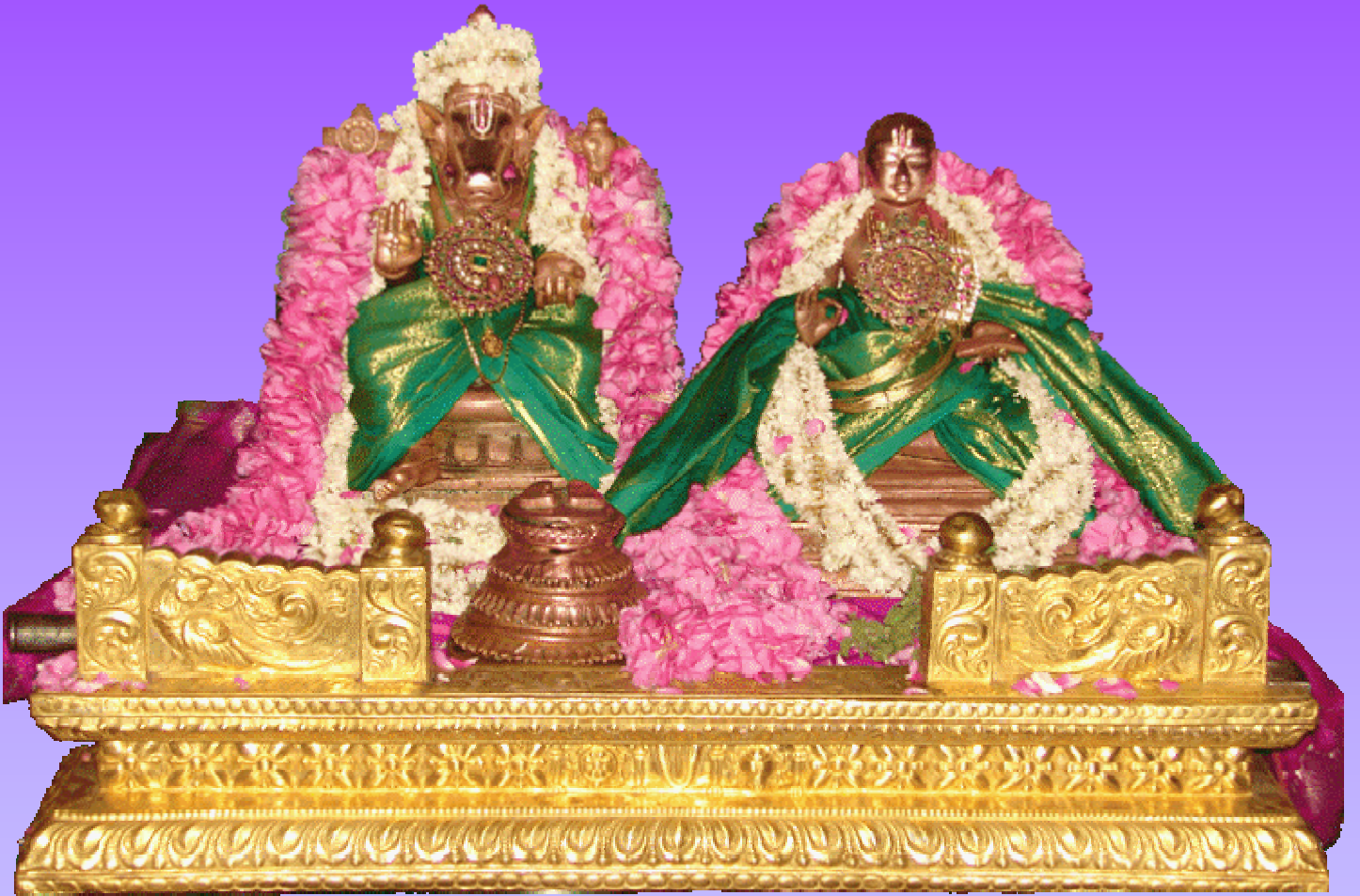
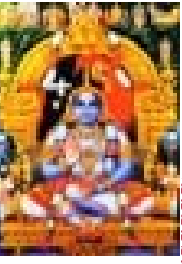


The Peerless Preceptor



Original Essay In English By
Coimbatore Sri. K. Sadagopan Iyengar



The Cover picture is the famous 'EkAsana-sEva' in thiruvahIndrapuram. This is when the mUrthy of hayavadana and swAmy are placed on the same throne. pratamAchAryan with vEdAntAchAryan

Sincere thanks to:

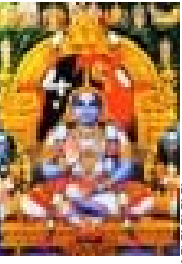
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श्रीः

Srimate Sri LakshmiNrsimha divya paduka sevaka

Sri vanSatakopa Sri Narayana Yatindra Mahadesikaya Nama:



THE PEERLESS PRECEPTOR



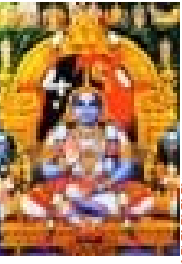
Chapter 1

Most of us remember our primary school teacher vividly. We remember him with gratitude as the person who taught us patiently to read and write, and for a pittance, managed unmanageable hordes of boisterous toddlers while instilling in them the rudiments of learning and norms of social behaviour. We remember him for his role in our academic and moral upliftment, and realise that we owe what we are today to him, in no small measure. The Grand Old lady of Tamil literature, OuvvaiyAr, puts it succinctly thus- "ezhutthu arivithavan irai van aagum" (The teacher is to be venerated as the God Himself)



Acharya dEvo bhava

If the imparter of basic secular knowledge occupies such a high place, one can imagine what an august pedestal a Guru or Acharya, who shows us the path to Liberation, ought to be accorded. Though all systems of philosophy do treat the religious Preceptor with honour, yet the uniqueness of our Sri Visishtadvaita Sampradaayam lies in the supreme distinction it confers upon



the Acharya, based on the Taittiriyaopanishad dictum "Acharya devo bhava" (Honour the teacher as you would the Lord Himself).

Swami Desikan's magnum opus Srimad Rahasyatrasaram begins with an elaborate accolade to the Acharya- the whole first chapter, titled "Guruparmparaa Saaram", sets out in detail all we need to know about the role of the Preceptor and his primacy. And throughout his numerous works, Swami Desikan glorifies the role of the Acharya time and again, and this theme runs through his works constantly, as does the concept of Prapatti.

Why should we revere the Guru?

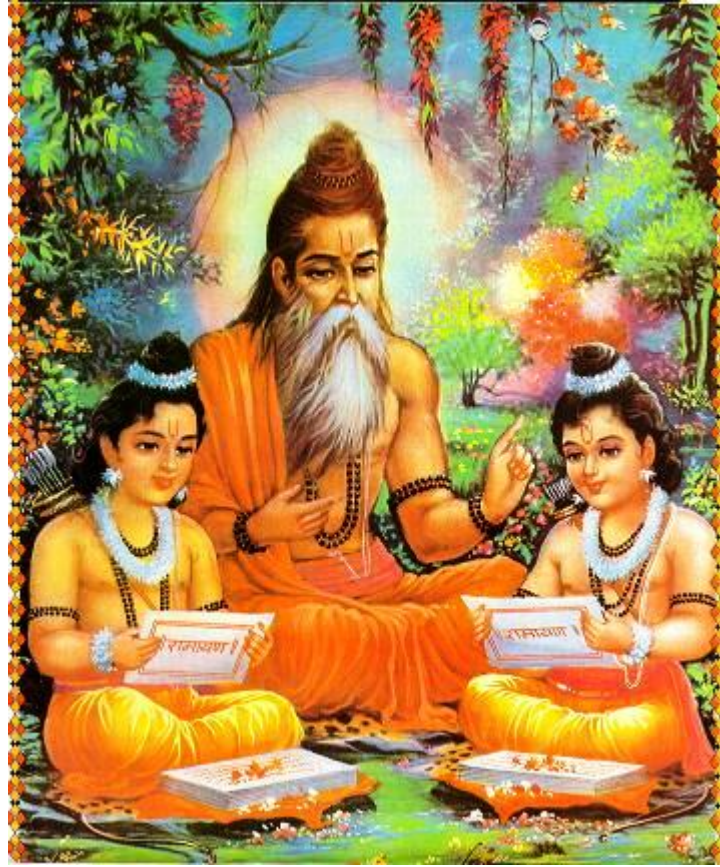
The basic question that comes to our mind is- why should the Guru be venerated? After all, he too is a mortal like the rest of us, equally susceptible to disease, old age and other human frailties. Perhaps he knows more than we do in certain areas, but does it call for placing him on such a high pedestal? The answers to this and other related questions are to be found in the following "Nyaasa Vimsati" sloka (Note: Swamy Desikan's NyAsa Vimasathi can be read at <http://www.ahobilavalli.org> Ebook # 14), where Sri Venkatanatha lists the numerous ways in which the Acharya aids the disciple, and therefore becomes the object of the latter's adoration.

**"Agyaana dhvaanta rodhaat agha pariharant Atmasaamyavahatvaat
janma pradhvamsi janma prada garimatayaa divya drishti prabhavaat
nishpratyuha aanrisamsyaat niyata rasatayaa nityaseshitva yogaat
Acharya: sadbhi: apratyupakarana dhiyaa devavat syaatupaasya:"**

The Acharya is held in high esteem primarily because he dispels the gloom of ignorance that envelops us from birth and kindles in us the light of knowledge. Though we might consider ourselves to be well read and world-wise, our knowledge is often lop-sided and leads to a skewed perception of right and wrong. "Saa vidyaa yaa vimuktaye"- the scripture lays down categorically that the only knowledge is that which leads to liberation. Considered in this light, all



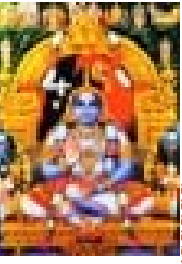
that we have learnt for years together is but a burden ("Sumayaana kalvi") which might help us earn a living, but won't provide an outlet from this vicious and unending cycle of births and deaths. And this material education, in acquiring which we have spent a precious part of our life-span, often pulls us deeper into the mundane morass, full of its ephemeral and ensnaring pleasures. When the quagmire of Samsaara sucks us in inexorably, it is the Acharya who lends us the helping hand of knowledge and pulls us out of what is certain doom, on to the terra firma of Real Knowledge, by knowing which everything else is known.



vAlmIki

Let us look into the significance of each line of the slokam quoted above.

"Janma pradhvamsi janma pradatvaat"- The Acharya blesses us with a birth which destroys the unending cycle of births. What could be this janma ?



Upanayanam is the ritual that is supposed to confer on us a second birth, for it makes one eligible for the study of Vedas. But the janma bestowed on us by the Acharya is much superior- he makes us "Born Again" Vaishnavas, or prapannaas belonging to the "Tondar Kulam", and offers our soul to the Lord, which makes Him release us from the vicious cycle of Samsaara.

"Divya drishti pradaanaat"- The Acharya opens our eyes for us, gives us a new vision. We have been accustomed to seeing the world and people around us with eyes jaundiced with "ahankaaram" and "mamakaaram", the pride and possessiveness born of ages of sin and ignorance. Once we surrender to the Acharya, He instills in us the realisation that we are the Lord's servants and not independent agents, and gives us the vision of "Seshatvam", enabling us to look at all things sentient and non-sentient, as the Lord's bounty.

"Devavat syaat upaasya:"- The Nyaasa Vimsati slokam quoted above sets out in detail the various reasons why the Acharya should be venerated as the Lord Himself.

Swami Desikan says this veneration should be with the full realisation that whatever we do would never repay the Acharya in full measure for his boundless mercy and immeasurable contribution towards our salvation.- "apratyupakarana dhiyaa"-. So great is the Guru's benefaction that it would be difficult even for the all-knowing Lord to find adequate recompense. Reiterating this, Sri Tooppul Pillai says

"Etri manatthu ezhil gnaana vilakkai irul anaitthum

Maatriyavarkku oru kaimmaaru Maayanum kaanagillaan"

This is perhaps based on the Saandilya Smriti vaakya,

"Brahma vidyaa pradaanasya devairapi na sakyate

Prati pradaanam athavaa dadyaat shaki aadaraat "

(Even the Devas know not how to compensate the Guru who imparts knowledge



of Brahman).

Guru—is he equal to God or God Himself?

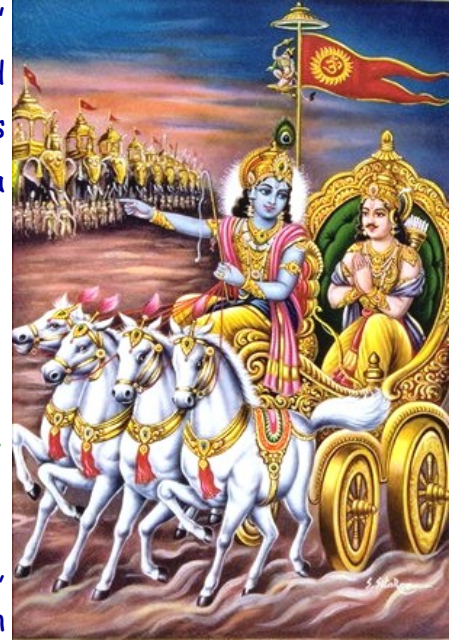
Though we liken the Acharya to God, there are some pramaanaas which lay down that the Guru is indeed the Lord and not just LIKE Him.

"Peetaga Adai Piraanaar pirama guruvaagi vandu" says Sri Periazhwar, confirming that the Lord Himself assumes the role of the Acharya. This is further corroborated by the following Jayaakya Samhita sloka quoted by Swami Desikan-

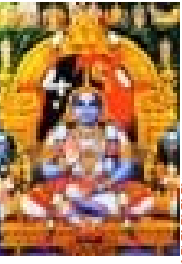
"Saakshaat Narayano deva: kritvaa martyamayeem tanoom

Magnaan uddharate lokaan kaarunyaat Saastra paaninaa "

It is verily the Lord, who, in His infinite mercy, descends to this world in the form of an Acharya, and uplifts the helpless souls immersed in the quagmire of Samsara, with the helping hand holding out the Prapatti Sastram.



Peetaga Adai Piraanaar



Chapter 2

Guru—Greater than God Himself?

To continue with the Acharya's greatness, we have seen two ways of regarding the Acharya- that he is as great as the Lord, and secondly, he is verily the Lord Himself, come to emancipate us.

A third view and the one dearest to Swami Desikan's heart is that the Acharya is superior to Emperuman.

Simply put, we wouldn't know the Lord or of His greatness but for the Acharya, who rescues us from the bottomless pit of Samsara and puts us on the path to liberation.

Tooppul Pillai categorically declares,

"Achaaryaat iha devataam samadhikaam anyaaam na manyaamahe"- (We do not acknowledge a deity equal to or greater than the Acharya).

This may appear to be an exaggeration or "atisayokti"-after all, we see the Acharya too bowing before the Lord, and if so, how could he be greater than the Lord?

The answer is that from our (disciples') viewpoint, the Acharya is indeed superior to the Lord. This is no idle statement, and as all his words are, this assertion of Swami Desikan is also based on good authority- Sri Madhurakavi Azhwar's sreesookti, "devumatru ariyen"

The Path of Madhurakavi

This Azhwar is so taken up with the auspicious attributes of his Acharya, Sri Nammazhwar, that he is unimpressed with the Emperuman Himself.

Sri Nammazhwar's haloed name generates greater sweetness on Sri Madurakavi's palate than that of even the Lord Himself (...*"Perumaayan,en*



appanil- nanni ten Kurugur Nambi ennakkaal- annikkum amudu oorum en naavukke”).

While ordinary poets sing the praise of the Lord, and are mere “kavi”s, here is a great soul who earned the sobriquet “Madhurakavi” by singing the sweet praises of his Acharya, Sri Satakopa Muni.



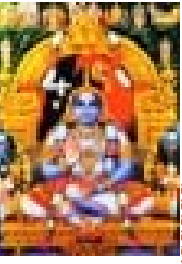
Madhurakavi and nammazhvar

Swami Desikan's Acharya bhakti is so intense and his agreement with Sri Madurakavi's tenet so complete, that he reserves his choicest words of praise for this Azhvar, by characterising him as follows in Sri Guruparampara Saaram—

“**tunbatra Madurakavi tondra kaattum
tol vazhiye nal vazhigal tunivaaargatke**”

Devotion to Lord—A pain?

The words **tunbatra** (tunbam atra) could be interpreted to mean that Sri



Madurakavi rid himself of the tunbam or pain of Bhagavat bhakti , by recourse to Acharya bhakti. One might wonder whether devotion to the Lord could be called "tunbam". Devotion to the Lord is a distraction, to those intent on kinkaryam to His devotees. We might recall that Sri Valmiki calls Sri Shatrughna "anagha:" The "agham" or blemish referred to here is Rama bhakti. Since Sri Shatrughna was devoted to Sri Bharata, Sri Valmiki says that his Bhaagavata bhakti was untainted by Bhagavat bhakti.

Coming back to the paasuram cited above, Swami Desikan calls this (recourse to Acharya bhakti even at the cost of Bhagavat bhakti) "tol vazhi", meaning thereby that this is no new, untested path, but a well-trodden track traversed by our forefathers, and one that has the sanction of the scriptures. And this is the "nal vazhi" too: Kalidasa says that all things old are not good ipso facto, and all things new are not bad by the same token. Here is a path, which has its roots in hoary tradition, and is good too for the soul. "Tunivaarkatke" However, this prescription is not for the weak-hearted, but only for those who are daring and are prepared to forsake all ephemeral pleasures for the ultimate and lasting bliss.

What the Lord could not do, Ramanuja did!

Another testimony to the Acharya's greatness is to be found in the Iraamaanusa Nootrandaadi of Sri Tiruvarangattu Amudanaar, who says that Sri Ramanuja was able to achieve what Emperuman Himself could not.

"Man misai yonigal torum pirandu- engal Maadhavane



Kannura nirkilum kaanagillaa ulagorgal ellaam

Annal Iraamaanusan vandu tondriya appouzhude

nannarum gnaanam talai kondu Naaranarku aayinare"

What the Lord was unable to achieve with His numerous avataaras, could be easily accomplished the moment Sri Ramanuja was born on this earth, says Sri Amudanaar.





People, who remained unmoved and unreformed even when Emperuman preached in person, realized the folly of their ways and became devotees of the Lord, due to Acharya Ramanuja's tireless efforts.

The Puzzling Conduct of Vatuka Nambi

The preference to Acharya Bhakti vis-à-vis Bhagavat Bhakti has also the seal of approval of Poorvacharyas.

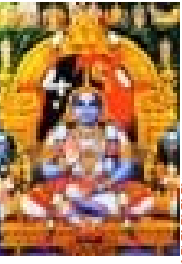
Sri Vatuka Nambi (Andhra Poorna) was one of Sri Bhashyakara's devoted disciples. His attachment to his Acharya was unparalleled. He was in the kitchen of Sri Ramanuja's matham in Srirangam one day, boiling milk for his master, when Sri Ranganatha was passing by on tiruveedi purappaadu. Even while all the other disciples and Sri Ramanuja himself rushed out to see the Lord, Sri Vatuka Nambi remained in the kitchen. When Sri Ramanuja scolded him for not having joined them in worshipping Perumal.



anantAzhwAn

Sri Vatuka Nambi calmly replied that had he done that, the milk, so carefully being boiled to the right temperature for his Acharya, would have been spoilt. Here was a disciple who considered service to the Acharya much above having a darshan of the Lord.

On another occasion, Sri Ramanuja and his disciples were performing mangalaasaasanam of Sri Ranganaraja. While everyone was gazing at the unparalleled beauty of the Lord, Sri Vatuka Nambi's attention was riveted on Sri Ramanuja's countenance. When the Bhashyakara sought an explanation



from Sri Vatuka Nambi for his puzzling conduct at the Sannidhi, the latter replied that just as Sri Ramanuja was all eyes for his master, (Sri Ranganatha), Sri Vatuka Nambi too was concentrating on the beauty of his own master, (Sri Ramanuja). Here was a disciple who found his Acharya more worthy of concentration, than the Lord Himself.

"A Bird in Hand..."

"Eraar muyal vittu kaakkai pin povade" says Sri Tirumangai Mannan, belittling the pleasures of Sri Vaikuntam, vis-à-vis the bliss generated by the Arcchaavataara Emperuman in various temples on earth. Just as readily available rabbit flesh is delicious compared to that of the crow to be hunted down, worship of the Arcchaa is more pleasing than that of the unseen and hard-to attain Paramapadanaatha. The same simile could be applied to worship of the Acharya, which is more easily accomplished and is more delectable than worship of the Lord. The Acharya, who is a "Pratyaksha Devata", is endowed with greater Soulabhyam (accessibility) than Emperuman.





Chapter 3

Story of the Sinner and the Sage

It becomes clear from the aforesaid, that the seeker after the Ultimate has to surrender himself to an Acharya-

"Achaaryavaan Purusha:veda tattvam" -says the Cchaandogya Upanishad.

"Tat vignaanaarttham sa Gurum eva abhigacchet" --- (Mundakopanishad)is another Veda vaakyam, which exhorts us to find an Acharya and surrender ourselves to him, to know the Ultimate.

Here, one may have a legitimate doubt- is it at all necessary to seek out an Acharya? Wouldn't sustained meritorious conduct through Karma Yoga lead us on to Knowledge, Bhakti and Moksham in that order?

Even if one has led an exemplary life, and is a paragon of virtue, goodness by itself cannot make one eligible for emancipation. And even if one has been guilty of the most despicable conduct all through one's life, once he is taken under the wings of an Acharya, he becomes an ideal candidate for liberation.

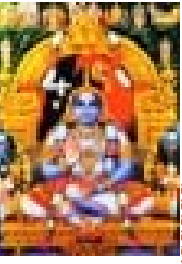
Swami Desikan emphasizes this by quoting the following examples-

"Papishtta: Kshatrabandhu: cha Pundareeka: cha punyakrit

Achaaryavatthayaa muktou tasmaat Acharyavaan bhavet"

To leaven the rather dry subject, Sri Toopul Pillai recounts several stories in Srimad Rahasytraya Saram (this is the style adopted by the Vedas too-they are full of anecdotes). All these stories serve to beautifully illustrate and illuminate the point on hand. The sloka quoted above recounts the tale of one **Kshatrabandhu** and one **Pundareeka**.

Kshatrabandhu, a king banished to the forests due to his unbecoming conduct, used to hurt and harm Rishis, rob them of articles kept ready for yagyas, etc.



Encountering Sri Narada one day, Kshatrabandhu raised his stick to hit the former. Stopping him, Sage Narada said, " You are accumulating a huge baggage of sins, for saving your family. As you know, you will have to reap the fruit of these sins shortly. It would be interesting to know whether your family members, who live off your misdeeds, are prepared to share your sins, so that you are not solely afflicted with the entire burden."




sri nArada muni

Kshatrabandhu found this very logical- his family, who were sharing the spoils of his plundering, must definitely share in its consequences, too. But on inquiry with his wife and sons, he found them surprisingly un-obliging in this regard. The scales of samsara fell from his eyes immediately. He came back to the waiting Sage, who put him on the right path, and in course of time, by adopting Prapatti at the behest of Sri Narada, Kshatrabandhu attained Mokhsam, thus proving that even the worst sinner could be emancipated through Acharya Kataaksham.

Diametrically opposite to Kshatrabandhu in disposition and conduct was Pundareeka, a Brahmin well versed in the scriptures, wealthy, philanthropic, and a symbol of dharma. The sins of his previous births too were greatly washed off through residence at holy places and Teerttha yaatra. Pundareeka, after duly qualifying himself thus, performed Bhakti Yoga, but despite assiduous practice, the fruits were nowhere in sight. The disheartened Pundareeka happened to meet Sage Narada, who explained to him the greatness of the Ashtaakshara Mantra. After concentrating on the Mantra and its purport, which led him to perform Prapatti, Pundareeka could ultimately reach Sri Vaikuntam.





Thus, the innumerable and heinous crimes of Kshatrabandhu were not a stumbling block in the way of liberation, because he had the blessings of an Acharya.

By the same token, even the exemplarily meritorious conduct of Pundareeka could not bestow on him Moksham, till he was emancipated by an Acharya (Sage Narada).

Thus, it is not the presence or absence of Paapam or Punyam that determine Moksham, but the availability or otherwise of an Acharya's blessings. The story concludes with a moral- "tasmaat Achaaryavaan bhavet" Therefore, seek out and attain an Acharya, if you desire liberation.

Bow down to the Guru--Book Your Seat in Paradise

The following sloka emphasizes the role of the Acharya in liberation-

"Siddhi: bhavati vaa na iti samsaya: Achutha sevinaam

na samsaya : atra tad bhakta paricharyaa rataatmanaam"

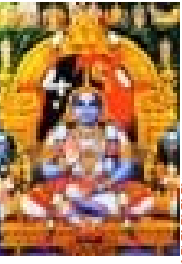
Whether the Lord's devotees attain Moksha or not may be a matter of speculation: but there is no doubt at all that devotees of Bhaagavataas are assured of liberation.

Know Your Preceptor and His lineage

It is thus clear that the Acharya is to be venerated and revered without any reserve.

Is it enough if one knows and meditates on one's Acharya alone?

The shruti (**Rahasyaamnaaya Braahmanam**) lays down that the entire lineage of Acharyas (Our own Acharya, his guru, the guru before him, and so on, upto Emperuman, who is the first Acharya) has to be adored for their infinite mercy.



Here is the relative shruti vaakya-

"sa cha Acharya vamsa: gnyeya:asou asou iti aabhagavatta:"

The big list of tanians we recite daily is in accordance with this dictum of shruti.

Each Acharya in the lineage, up to Emperuman, has to be known and paid obeisance to individually. This is important, because our Acharya owes his knowledge to his own Acharya, and so on. The treasure of the Rahasya Trayam (the three sacred/secret mantras) is now in our hands thanks due to a distinguished parampara of Acharyas, who have passed it on from one generation to another, with immeasurable mercy and expecting absolutely nothing in return for this great upakAram. Thus it becomes our bounden duty to know and revere each Acharya in our Guru parampara. Apart from this, if we get acquainted with the greatness of each of the inspiring Acharyas, it would help us in appreciating their contribution to the Sampradaya and to emulate, as far as is possible for fickle-minded mortals like me, their exemplary devotion to the Lord and His bhaktas.

Many of us are interested in reconstructing a Family Tree, to trace our genealogical roots-however, it is more important for us to know our Guruparampara or lineage of Acharyas.

After all, our parents and forebears are responsible for our samsaara and attendant problems, while our Acharya and his gurus ensure our liberation from this mundane world and everlasting bliss. (This is not to belittle the importance of our parents and pitru vargam, but only to emphasize the importance of Acharyas).



Chapter 4

The Lord-The Prime Preceptor

The uniqueness of our Sampradaya lies in the fact that we have none other than the Lord at the head of our Guruparampara. Emperuman is our first and foremost Acharya, as is evident from the following tianian all of us recite daily:-

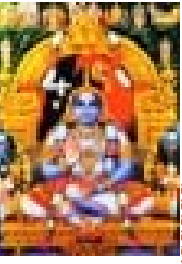
**"Lakshmi Naatha samarambhaam naatha Yaamuna madhyamaam
asmat Acharya paryantaam vande Guruparamparaam"**



kattumannarkoil SrimannAthamuni and YAmunamuni

The distinguished lineage of Gurus begins with Emperuman and His Consort, has Sri Naathamuni and Sri Yamuna Muni (Sri Alavndaar) as its centerpiece and our own Acharya at its end. The aforesaid sloka by Sri Koorattaazhwaan indicates that it is not mere Emperuman, but Sri:Patil who is our first Acharya. We have seen earlier that we should venerate each of the Acharyas in our Guruparampara, beginning with Sriman Naryana and ending with our own Acharya ("Achaarya vamso gneya; asou asou iti aabhagavtta:").

However, how does the present day devotee relate to the Lord as his



Preceptor? All we know is our own Acharya who guides us to the right path. We can definitely accept Emperuman as the Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient power and revere Him as such, but how do we accept Him as our Guru? He has not guided us personally through upadesam, nor shown us the right path to liberation.

How then does the Lord perform His role as our Primary Acharya?

Swami Desikan enumerates no less than eleven ways in which Emperuman justifies His title as Paramaachaarya or Universal Teacher, if not directly, then as the initiator of an instructional tradition.

1. First of all, the Teacher-Taught relationship between the Lord and us is established by the fact that at the beginning of all creation, the Lord teaches the Vedas to Brahma, who personifies all the sentient souls. Vedas are the embodiment of all knowledge and the creative process.

“Yo Brahmaanam vidhadhaati poorvam, Yo va Vedaamscha prahinoti tasmai”

says the shruti, acknowledging the role of the Primordial Teacher.

2. The Lord ensures the dissemination of the holy scripture through Brahma, and his progeny, viz., Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumaara, etc.

3. When the process of propagation of knowledge is hindered by the theft of Vedas by the asuras, Emperuman takes the Matsya avataara, hunts out and destroys the thieves, and restores the Vedas to Brahma.

4. He ensures that the Divine Light spreads unhindered, through great saints and seers like Sri Narada (the author of Bhakti Sutras, and the Preceptor to countless jeevatmas like Kshatrabandhu and Pundareeka), Sri Paraasara (author of Sri Vishnu Purana, which sets out clearly the true nature of the Lord, the sentient and non-sentient souls, etc.), Shuka Maharshi, the creator of Sri Bhaagavata Purana, Sri Shounaka, and countless others.





5. One of the Lord's greatest boons to mankind is Sage Vyasa, who is the author of such incomparable bodies of instruction such as Sri Mahabharatham and the Brahma Sutras. While the former work shows us the right code of conduct for life in this world and others, the Brahma Sutras lay down clearly the nature of the Ultimate and the ways to reach the same. Sage Vyasa's contribution is so great that he is considered to be the Lord Himself personified- "Vyaasaaya Vishnu roopaaya", "Krishna dvaipAyanam Vyaasam viddhi Narayanam prabhum"

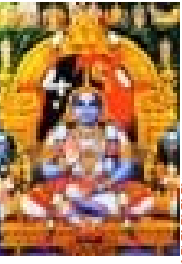
6. The Lord Himself takes on the Acharya's role in several avatars such as Matsya, Hamsa, Sri Hayagreeva Nara, Narayana, and as the Geetaachaarya.

At the end of a Kalpa, an asura by name Hayagreeva stole the Vedas from a sleepy Brahma, who became directionless without the guiding lamp of the Shruti. The Lord took avatara as a small fish and got into the hands of Satyavrata, a Rajarishi who was performing Sandhyavandanam in Vaigai River. He put the fish into his kamandalu, but it grew too big for the same. He then let the fish into a tub, where too it maintained its phenomenal growth, whereupon the King put it into a tank. When the fish outgrew the pond too, the king could not think of a larger body of water for accommodating the fish other than the ocean, and accordingly let the fish into the ocean. By now the King had realised that this was no ordinary aquatic creature, and prayed to it for enlightenment. The Lord then revealed Himself and taught Satyavrata all about Atma Tattvam. He also destroyed Hayagriva asura and restored the Vedas to Brahma.

Another avatara where the Lord resorted to direct teaching is the Hamsaavataara. When Brahma's sons Sanaka, Sanandana, SanAtana, et al queried him about the nuances of Yoga, the clueless Brahma meditated upon the Lord for guidance. Emperuman appeared before them as a Divine Swan and elucidated the secrets of Yoga.

It would appear that Brahma has a penchant for losing Vedas, which serve him





as a guiding lamp to carry on Creation, for he lost them again to a fresh set of asuras named Madhu and Kaitabha, who secreted the Vedas at the bottom of the ocean. The Lord had to rush to Brahma's rescue again in the form of Sri Hayagriva, with the face and features of a Divine Horse, destroyed the asuras and restored the Vedas to Brahma.

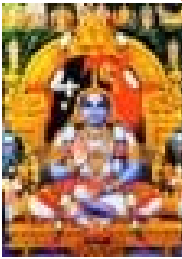
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madhusUdhaba hayagrIvar - thiruvahIndrapuram

The Lord took a twin avatara yet again, as Nara and Narayana, born of Dharma Prajapati, and took abode at Badarikashrama, where He taught Karma Yoga and Divine Realisation to Nara, Sri Narada and others.

The last-mentioned avatara, the Geetaachaarya, is especially significant, for the Bhagavat Gita excels as a manual of instruction for lost souls. Extolling Sri Krishna's role as a teacher, Sri Nammazhwar says, "Neri ellaam edutthu uraittha nirai gnaanatthu orumoortthi"





In His infinite mercy, the Universal Teacher has given us a wonderful body of knowledge, which will stand us in good stead all through our sojourn in this world, and which, when we shed our mortal coils, helps us escape from the vicious and unending cycle of births and deaths. This is why we hail Sri Krishna as "Jagat Guru" or the Universal Preceptor "**Krishnam vandE Jagatgurum**"

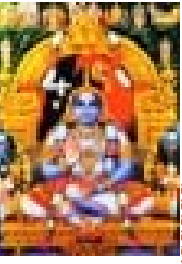
7. For those whose faith in Him is slender, the Lord also arranges for His words to be attested by the life and conduct of great people like Sri Bhishma, who command considerable respect and following, through their phenomenal knowledge and impeccable behaviour.

8. The Lord also teaches the Paancharaatra shastra to the devout at the beginning of every yuga. The Paancharatra consists of hundreds of books or Samhitas, as they are called, of which the Saatvata, Poushkara, Jayaakhya and Paadma Samhitas are the principal ones.

Dealing with the nature of the Brahman and ways of attaining the same, these Samhitas lay down in great detail the manner of establishing temples for the Lord and conducting worship therein. Thus the unapproachable Emperuman not only makes Himself easily accessible in various temples in the form of Arcchaa moorthy, but also guides ignorant mortals as to the correct ways of worship.

9. All of Emperuman's instructional efforts pale into insignificance compared to what He has achieved by resorting to another set of Dasaavataras in the form of various Azhwars. Though Azhwars are twelve, the count taken here excludes Sri Madhurakavi, whose devotion was exclusively to Sri Nammazhwar, and Sri Kodai Naachiar, who is included in the group of Divine Consorts).





Chapter 5

Azhwars as Acharyas

The greatest efforts of Emperuman at emancipating mankind is through the Azhwars, who, through their Divya Prabandam, made ordinary mortals realize what a great treasure awaited them during and after this life of trials and tribulations, if only they cared to learn about and develop devotion for the Lord. Perhaps the Lord realized that His incarnations as Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, etc. had but a limited effect on samsaris, and while they listened to Him in awe while He was with them, they quickly forgot Him and returned to their errant ways, once the avatara was concluded. Realizing the inefficacy of being born as a Supreme Being for the purpose of uplifting people, the Lord devised the ploy of taking birth as one of the proletariat, so to say, in the hope that people would listen to their peers.



And thus were born the Azhwars, some of them in superior castes, some in inferior ones, and belonging to diverse occupations, having but two things in common- intense love for Sriman Narayana and the immensely generous intellects that made them share their experiences in divinity with anybody who would listen. Occasionally, when we are subject to an uplifting experience, we feel like sharing it with our near and dear, to make them too experience our thrills, at least secondhand. This was the state of Azhwars too- they were not content to keep their enlightening experiences to themselves, but invited everybody from the rooftop, to partake of the nectar they had discovered.

"Tondeer elleerum vaareer, tozhudu tozhudu nindru aartthum" --- invites SriNammazhwar

"engal kuzhaam pugundu koodu manam udaitondar ulleer vandu ollai koodumino" exhorts Sri PeriAzhwar

"Sonnaal virodham idu, aagilum solluvankelmino"- Sri Nammazhwar compels all to listen to words of wisdom, though unpalatable.





The more one goes through the Divya Prabandas, the more one is convinced about their being Upadesa Granthas (manuals of instruction) rather than Anubhava Granthas (Records of Experience). And as the Azhwars themselves attest, they spoke and sang but as a voice of the Lord, and it was He who entered them and made them sing His praise. Sri Nammazhwar says so at several places in Tiruvaimozhi- "pannaar paadal inkavigal yaanaai tannai taan paadi", "en naavinulaane" etc.

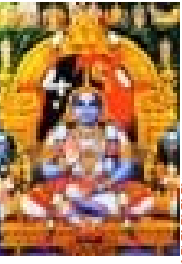
The Clouds of Mercy

It is thus clear that Emperuman's greatest instructional effort was to be born again as Azhwars. The immeasurable contribution of the Azhwars is graphically described by Swai Desikan thus- "MeghangaI samudra jalatthai vaangi sarva upajeevyamaanatanneeraaga umizhumaa pole"



vEdam thamizh seida mARan

Seawater is salty and unfit for consumption. However, clouds absorb the essence from the sea and bring it to the thirsty mankind and crops in the form of rain, which represents the purest form of water. Similarly, Vedas and other scriptures are in Sanskrit, which is difficult of comprehension to the average man. Azhwars, in their infinite mercy, translated the essence of Vedas into



Tamil, the common man's language, making it easy for him to benefit there from. This is why Sri Nammazhwar is hailed as "Vedam Tamizh seida Maran Satakopan"

Further, only people fortunate enough to be born in the upper castes were eligible to learn the scriptures, putting them beyond the reach of others. But "Maaran marai" or the Draavida Vedam enabled even the lowliest to partake of the treasure in its accessible form.

Selective Learning



A thorough study of the Vedas would involve several lifetimes, and even then would perhaps never be complete, for the Vedas are indeed endless- "anantaa vaivedaa:" confirms the Shruti itself.

The Kaataka Prasnam recounts the story of Sri Bharadvaja Maharshi, who devoted three lifetimes to Vedic studies. At the end of his third lifespan, Indra, appearing before the Rishi, inquired what the latter would do if he were to be given another life. Sri Bharadvaja replied that he would devote the fourth lifetime too to Veda adhyayanam. Indra then showed the Maharshi the quantum of scriptures the latter had imbibed- a mere three handfuls- and the quantum yet to be learnt-three towering mountains. Indra told Bharadvaja that however many life spans he might be provided with, he would never be able to master the Scripture fully, for knowledge is simply endless. The moral of the story is to learn, within the short lifetime available to us, the quintessence of knowledge, by knowing which everything else is known.

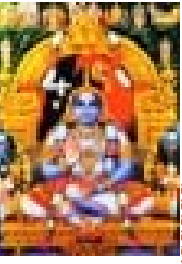
Exhorts a seer- As the time available is short and hurdles to learning are so many, do learn only that which is of the essence, taking a leaf out of the book of the Swan, which, when faced with a container of watery milk, separates the milk from the water and imbibes only the milk.

"alpascha kaalo bahavascha vignaa; yat saarabhootam tat
upaadhadheeta, Hamsa yathaa ksheeram iva ambu mishram"





The quintessence of the Vedas and other scriptures has been summarized by Azhwars in the form of Divya Prabandas, for ready absorption by our frail faculties, in a capsule form, so to say. Just as a sugarcane tastes sweet all over, these prabandas too can enlighten and emancipate .



Chapter 6


Acharya Avataaram

We saw how the Lord tried His best to emancipate lost souls, through the medium of the Azhwars. However, even this valiant effort left untouched a large section of humanity, which had become hard nuts to crack, due to the increasing influence of the Kali Purusha. This undesirable influence also led to the proliferation of several pseudo religions and philosophies, which, while professing to show people the path to liberation, made them, sink even deeper into the mundane morass. The saintly Azhwars had laid down a well-trodden track to Sri Vaikuntam, which, however, in course of time, became overgrown with thorny bushes of conflicting religious and philosophical thought, not only obscuring the original path, but also misleading people into meandering lanes, which led nowhere.

There was thus the imperative need to clear away the weeds and thorns and to restore the traditional path to its pristine glory of being the sole viaduct to Vaikuntam. This was no easy job; for the obstructing overgrowth had taken deep and strong root, and so many by-lanes had sprung up as to almost obliterate the original trail. The Advaitins, Jains, Buddhists, Kaapaalikas, Shaaktas, Meemaamsakas, Naiyaayikas (Logicians) et al. had established control over large sections of the populace even during the Azhwars' times (as is shown by the Tiruvaimozhi paasuram- "ilingatthu ittapuraanattheerum, Samanarum, Saakkiarum Valindu vaadu seiveergalum matrum" and "Veruppodu Samanar, Mundar, vidhiyil Saakkiyargal" from TirumAlai)

Some of these schools of thought were outright bad, while others professed to be good but led people astray, much like the proverbial mirage. It is as important to create a beautiful garden, as it is to maintain and protect it against pestilential attacks by weeds, worms, poachers etc. Hence Emperuman had to take another series of avataaras as Acharyas, to redeem the Sampradaya, to protect it against the onslaught of obscurantist schools and





propagate the same for the upliftment of the masses. And, unlike the original dasaavataaraas , most of which happened in the north, for His avatAra as Acharyas, the Lord chose the south of India, sanctified by residence of great Maharshis like Sri Agastya ("Agastya sevitamaana desatthile ...avataritthu arulinaan"-Swami Desikan).

The Achaaryaavatara of the Lord has been foretold in Sri Bhaagavata Puraana, in the following sloka:-

"Kalou khalu bhavishyanti Narayana paraayanaa:

Kvachit kvachit mahaa bhaagaa:dramideshu cha bhoorisa:

Tamraparnee nadee yatra Kritamaala Payasvinee

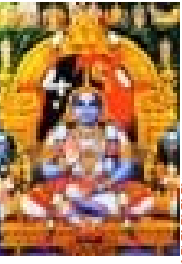
Kaveree cha Mahaabhaagaa Prateechee cha Mahaanadee"

This sloka predicts the avataara of the Lord as Acharyas, on the banks of holy rivers like the Kaveri, the Taamraparni, the Paalaar, the Periyaar, the Vaigai, etc.

The Marine Motif

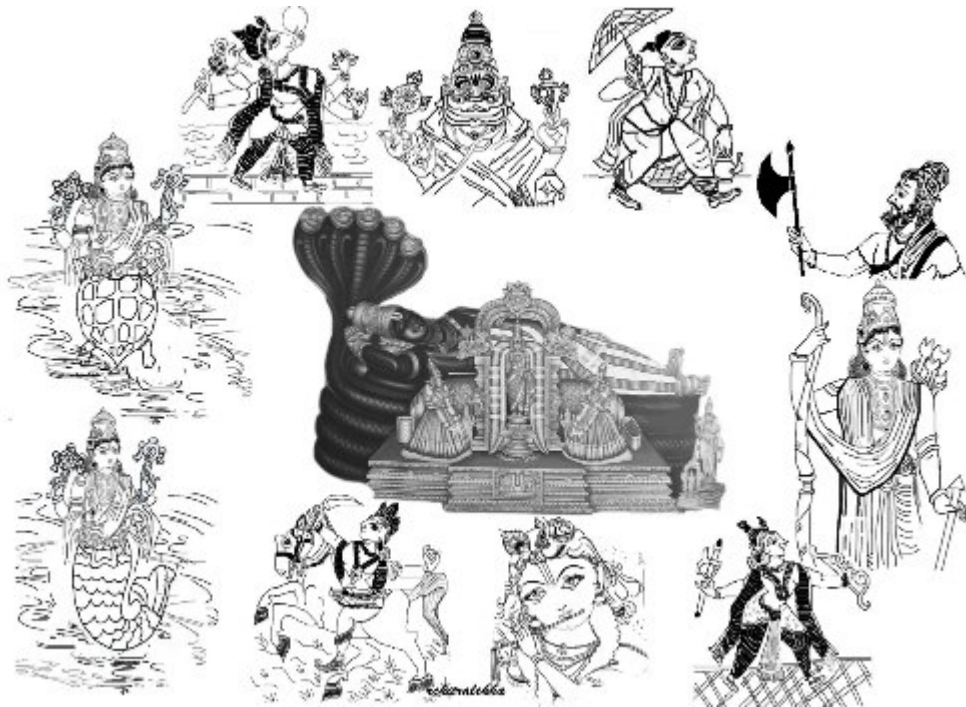
Sri Rama was born on the banks of the Sarayu, Sri Krishna's birth and childhood were around the Yamuna, and when we come to think of it, almost all of the Lord's avataras are associated with water, in some form or the other.

1. The **Matsya avatara**, needless to say, had to be in water, as the Lord chose to assume the form of a fish.
2. In **Sri Koorma avatara**, He took the form of a Great Turtle, (which is an amphibian), and stationed Himself at the bottom of the ocean, supporting the Manthara Parvatam on His back, to enable the Devas and Asuras to churn the sea for Amritam.
3. In **Sri Varaaha avatara** again, He rescued Bhoomi from the depths of the ocean, where she had been secreted away by Hiranyaaksha.
4. As **Sri Rama**, He built a bridge to Lanka across the Ocean, an





unimaginable feat.

5. In **Sri Krishnavatara**, all of Sri Krishna's youth was spent in the sands of the Yamuna ("**Yamuna saakshika youvanam yuvaanam**"--_Sri Gopala Vimsati). On the very night of His birth, He crosses the Yamuna in the safe hands of Sri Vasudeva amidst a raging storm with an obliging Yamuna parting for His passage. The city He built for His permanent residence, Dwaraka, is situated by the sea.
6. In His **Vyooha avataara** too, as **Sri Vaasudeva**, He lies on the Milky Ocean, on Sri Adishesha.
7. And before all creation, He lies on a banyan leaf in the primordial waters as a baby, housing all the worlds in His small tummy ("**Aala maa maratthin ilai mel oru baalakanaai- gyaalam ezhum undaan**"-Sri Tiruppaanazhwar).
8. And in **Arcchaavatara** too, most of His temples are situated on river banks- Srirangam, Tirukkudandai, Kapistalam, and Anbil; --the list is too long to bear enumeration.



dasAvatAram





Such is the Lord's inseparable association with water in some form or the other, that Sri Bhagavata Purana says that He is born as Acharyas, yet again on the banks of holy rivers like the Kaveri, Tamraparni, Vaigai, Palar and Periyar.

True to the aforesaid sloka, we find that most of the Acharyas' avatara stthalas (birth places) are situated on riverbanks or nearby places.

The first Acharya in the Guruparampara,

1. Sri Nammazhwar, was born on the banks of the Taamraparni.
2. Sri Nathamunigal was born in Kaattu Mannaar koil (Veera Narayanapuram),
3. Sri Uyyakkondar at Tiruvellarai,
4. Sri Manakkaal Nambi at Manakkaal,
5. Sri Alavandaar again at Kaattu Mannaar Koil, all on the banks of or in proximity to the Kaveri
6. Sri Ramanuja was born at Sriperumbudur, which is not far from the Paalaar.

Adhering to the "Water" theme, Sri Embar describes the Guruparampara thus-

"Lakshmee Naathaakya sindhou Sataripu

jaladha:praapya kaarunya neeram

Naathaadrou abhyashinchat tadanu

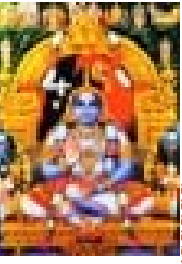
aghuvara ambhoja chakshu:jharaabhyaam

Gatvaa taam Yaamunaakyaam saritam ata

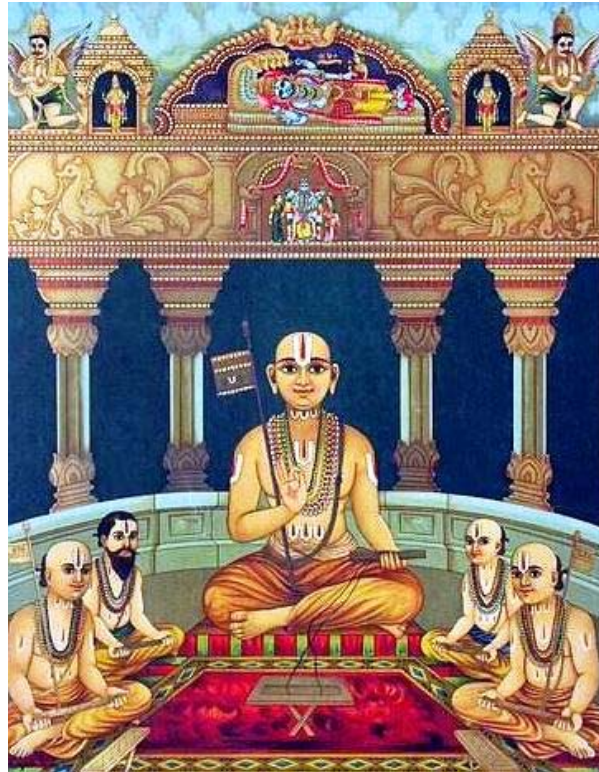
Yateendraakhya Padma karendram

Sampoorya praani sasye pravahati

Bahudhaa Desikendra pramoughai:"





The Lord (**Lakshmeenaatha**) is a veritable ocean of mercy. Sri Nammazhwar, as a cloud, absorbed the essence of this ocean and showered it on the peak of a towering mountain, which is Sri Nathamuni. This rain water flows down the Nathamuni mountain in two great streams (Sri Uyyakkondaar and Sri Manakkaal Nambi), to become a broad river (Sri Alavandar). This immense river splits into five canals, viz., Sri Peria Nambi, Sri Tirukkoshtiyur Nambi, Sri Tirumaalai Andaan,, Sri Tiruvaranga Perumal Arayar and Sri Tirukkacchi Nambi, all of which drain into the vast lake that is Sri Ramanuja. This grand lake has 74 sluices (The Simhaasana Adhipatis or Mutt heads established by Sri Ramanuja), through which the water flows to sustain crops. In this simile, samsaaris like us are referred to as the crops, deriving their sustenance from the Acharyas (Swami Desikan too refers to such crops in Sri Dayaa Satakam --"**SaranAgata sasya maalineeyam**") (Note: Sri Daya Satakam of Swamy Desikan with annotated English Commentaries can be read at <http://www.sundarasimham.org> Ebook # 16)

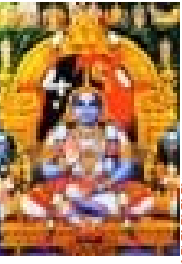


Acharya rAmAnuja with pratama sishyAs





Coming back to the point, all Acharyas, right from Sri Nammazhwar, and followed by Sri Nathamuni, Sri Uyyakkondaar, Sri ManakkaaAl Nambi, Sri Alavandar, Sri Peria Nambi (and four other Acharyas of Sri Ramanuja), Sri Bhashyakara and the descendants of the 74 Mutt heads appointed by him, right down to the venerated Acharyas manning the peethaas today--all these Acharya Purushas are verily the Lord Himself, come to lift us up from the benumbing ocean of Samsara to a world of everlasting bliss of service to the Lord.



Chapter 7

THE GREAT NAATHAMUNI



We have seen so far the indispensable role the Acharya plays in dispelling one's ignorance and paving the way for emancipation. We have seen too how the Lord, in his anxiety to ensure the upliftment of individual souls, tries various ploys, taking birth in this world as Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, etc, as various Azhwars, and finally as numerous Acharyas, whose lineage starts with the Lord Himself, and is followed by Sri Piraatti, Sri Vishvaksena, Sri Nammazhwar, Sri Nathamuni, Sri Uyyakkondaar, Sri Manakkaal Nambi, Sri Alavandar, Sri Peria Nambi, Sri Ramanuja and the 74 Mutt heads established by him, and their illustrious descendants up to the present-day Acharyas showering their mercy on us.

The beauty of Srimad Rahastrayasaram lies in its sound logical base. Another distinguishing feature is Swami Desikan's capacity to foresee possible doubts in the minds of readers and to clarify them simultaneously, while making a point.

In tune with the Shruti dictum that one ought to know and pay obeisance individually to each Acharya in his Guruparampara, we recite daily the tanians relating to various Acharyas. The Acharya is normally one's contemporary, as instruction or upadesa could be obtained only in person from the Acharya. Here, a reasonable doubt would rise in our minds—how Sri Nammazhwar, separated by hundreds of years from Sri Nathamuni, could be the Acharya for the latter.

It is common knowledge how Sri Nathamunigal, hearing the ten pasurams beginning with "AraavamudheE", was inspired to search for the rest of the thousand and odd Tiruvaimozhi pasurams, by obtaining upadesa of "Kanninun Sirutthaambu" from the descendants of Sri Madurakavi Azhwar. And by reciting this prabandam 12000 times with devotion, he was rewarded by Sri





Nammazhwar, who appeared in person and taught the entire Divya Prabandas, to enable their re-propagation. Thus, by obtaining upadesa from Sri Madurakavi's descendant, Sri Nathamuni joined the sishya parampara of Sri Nammazhwar. Further, Sri Nammazhwar's personal instruction in his Yoga dasaa made him Sri Nathamuni's Acharya.

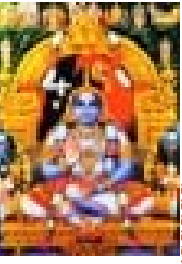
The contribution of Sri Nathamuni to the protection and propagation of the Sampradaya is invaluable, and he is counted as the first Acharya for all practical purposes. Acknowledging Sri Nathamuni to be the first Pontiff of SriVaishnavism, Swami Desikan says "Nathopagyam pravrittam". Our Acharyas have not only instructed those eligible sishyas who came into contact with them, but also authored Manuals on various aspects of the Sampradaya, for the enlightenment of subsequent generations. In this fashion, Sri Nathamuni's works were "Sri Nyaaya Tattvam" (the source of inspiration for Sri Alavandar's Siddhitrayam) and "Sri Yoga Rahasyam". Sri Nathamuni was a great Yogi and had 8 sishyas of repute, primary among whom were Sri Uyyakkondar and Sri



thirukkachchi nambi

Kurugaikaaval Appan. (It was to the latter that Sri Nathamuni entrusted the propagation of Yoga Shastra, but due to the Lord's will, Sri Alavandar reached Sri Appan too late to be instructed in the secrets of Yoga, which was then lost to us forever).

We have to remember Sri Nathamunigal with gratitude not only for having rediscovered the lost treasure/heirloom of the Divya Prabandas, but also for



having set them to divine music ("Taalām vazhangī Tamizh marai innisai tанда vallā"). Perhaps in recognition of this fact, his vīgraha is seen in many temples with cymbals in his hands. The present manner of recitation of Prabandas in temples is no doubt good, ("Paaatyē geyē cha madhuram") but imagine how absolutely uplifting it would be to hear these poignant pasurams sung in soul-stirring ragas appropriate to the Azhwars' moods! Even a cursory look at the paasurams would reveal that they are meant to be sung with devotion, and not merely recited, however resonantly. Sri Namazhwar says, "Pannaar paadal inkavigal yaanaai tannai taan paadi", attesting to the fact that even the Lord intended this divine poetry to be sung.

A further proof is that one of the Azhwars, Sri Paan Perumaal, was an expert musician, a wandering minstrel, whose occupation itself was singing the Lord's praise. Such is Swami Desikan's regard for Sri Nathamunigal that he exhorts us to pay obeisance to the Acharya daily, and proudly proclaims that Sri Nathamuni's devotees are indeed peerless in all worlds ("Nathamuni kazhale naalum tozhudu ezhuvom, namakku aarnigar naanilatthe").



nAthamuni - Srirangam - thanks Sri Murali Bhattar

The greatness of this Acharya can be gauged by the fact that Sri Alavandar,





in his "Stotra ratnam" (Note: SwAmy Alavandar's Stotra Ratnam can be read at <http://www.sundarasimham.org> Ebook # 49), devotes no less than three slokas to the praise of Sri Nathamuni, and concludes by saying that Sri Ranganatha Muni's (as he was christened) tiruvadis are the sole refuge, not only in this world but also in Sri Vaikuntam ("atra paratra chaapi nityam yadeeya charanou sharanam madeeyam").

A cardinal principle enunciated here is that the Acharya is not only a facilitator ("Praapakam"), but also the goal to be attained ("Praapyam"). The Saatvata Tantra of Paancharatra says,

"Gurureva param Brahma, Gurureva paraa gati:

upaaya upeya bhaavena tameva sharanam vrajet"

It is relevant to note here that obituary notices of Sri Vaishnavas always refer to the individual having attained the lotus feet of his Acharya ("Achaaryan tiruvadi adaindaar") and not that of the Lord. In fact, the Scriptures denounce those whose devotion is addressed to the inaccessible Lord, in preference to the easily-accessed Acharya- Says the Saatvata Tantra,

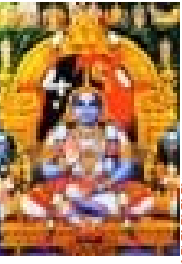
"Chakshu: gamyam Gurum tyaktvaa Shaastra gamyam tu ya:smaret

karasttham udakam tyaktvaa ghanasttham abhi vaancchati"

(One who forsakes the Guru, visible to the eyes in flesh and blood, and sets his heart upon the Lord, who is to be known only through the Shastras, is indeed a fool-as much a fool as one who forsakes the potable water on hand and hankers after water from clouds or some such unobtainable source).

It is noteworthy that both Sri Alavandar ("nityam sharanam madeeyam") and Swami Desikan ("naalum tozhudu ezhuvom") agree that devotion to Sri Nathamuni should constantly occupy our thoughts, day in and day out. This is akin to the dictum of the vedas, "Tasmaat Braahmanebhyo Veda vidbhyo dive dive namaskuryaat". Just as the Vedas exhort us to be devout towards Vedic scholars and pay obeisance to them daily, Sri Nathamuni, who is well versed not





only in the Vedas, but also in the Vedanta, should be the object of our constant veneration.

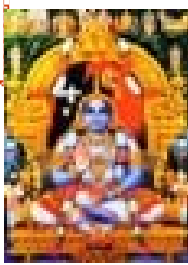
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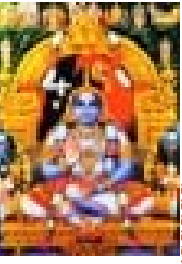




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Deshika_disciples





Chapter 8

Disciple's Duty

The Guruparampara Saram, which we are currently studying in detail, is indeed a fitting prelude to Srimad Rahasyatraya Saram, for it lays down the essence of what one has to do to attain mokhsham-which is to seek out and obtain refuge in an Acharya. In a sense, one might say that the rest of Srimad Rahasyatraya Saram is but an elaboration of Sri Guruparampara Saram, for the presence or absence of Guru Bhakti determines whether a person attains liberation and becomes eligible for eternal service to the Lord, or remains interminably bound by mortal shackles ("Pirandum setthum nindru idarum pedamai", as Sri Nammazhwar calls it).

Having sought refuge in an Acharya and been shown the way to emancipation, what is the duty of the disciple? He should not only remember the Guru with undying gratitude, but also publicize the Acharya's greatness at every possible opportunity ("Potri ugappadum, pundiyil kolvadum, Pongu pugazh saatri valarppadum").

This not only helps the disciple in keeping alive his grateful memories, but also encourages uninitiated others to approach the Acharya and benefit therefrom.

A beautiful sloka from the Sesha Samhita impresses Swami Desikan so much, that he not only quotes it in his magnum opus, but also provides considerable elaboration for the same.

"Gurum prakaasayet dheemaan, Mantram yatnena gopayet

Aprakaasa prakaasaabhyaam ksheeyate sampat aayushi"

Whether a person remembers and extols the praises of his Acharya depends upon the depth of his Guru bhakti. When our love or respect for someone is intense, we cannot refrain from speaking about that someone to anybody who might listen. We thus find parents speaking with pride of the exploits of their





infants, lovers talking about each other to their respective friends, politicians paying constant tribute to their mentors, cinema buffs talking non-stop about their favourite matinee idol, and so on. Though not on the same plane, intense Acharya bhakti also prompts a person to constantly remember, venerate and adore his Guru. The first quarter of the aforesaid sloka lays down that the wise person publicizes his Guru's greatness. It follows therefore that those who do not do so are unwise. This is indeed true, for the Acharya's assistance in the pilgrim's progress is so immense that anyone who doesn't remember or publicly acknowledge his Acharya's greatness is definitely unworthy of his salt.

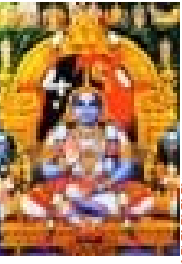
Are there precedents for such public acknowledgement and profuse praise of an Acharya by the beneficiary disciple? There are instances galore of this. All the Acharyas of our Guruparampara have had intense devotion and love for their preceptors, which have found expression in several slokas and whole stotras.

We thus find

1. Sri Madurakavigal singing the praise of Sri Nammazhwar, to the specific exclusion of even the Lord ("Devu matru ariyen"),
2. Sri Alavandar acknowledging Sri Nathamuni's greatness in the Stotra Ratna and other works ("namo achintya adbhuta aklisha gnaana vairaagya raasaye|| Naathaaaaya munaye agaadha bhagavat bhakti sindhave")
3. Sri Ramanuja showering liberal praise on Sri Alavandar ("Yaamunaarya sudhaambhodhim avagaahya yathaamati|| Aadaaya bhakti yogaakhyam ratnam sandarsayaami aham") and other Acharyas too
4. Swami Desikan devoting an entire stotra of 70 slokas (Sri Yatiraja Saptati) to the praise of Sri Ramanuja, in which other Acharyas too come in for due adulation.

These are but a few instances of "Guru PrakaaAsanam" or public adoration of the Guru. Such intense devotion for the Acharya also enables better





comprehension in the sishya- the dedicated disciple is on a perfect wavelength with the Acharya, so as to be able to read his Acharya's thoughts, without even a specific expression thereof.

We often find that some sishyAs are able to grasp the Acharya's upadesa much better than others: Swami Desikan, quoting the **Kata Shruti** and the **Jaabaala shruti**, attributes this uneven comprehension in peer disciples to the level of devotion each has towards the Acharya- the deeper the devotion, the better the comprehension, and vice versa.

1. Sri Sanjaya, with his intense bhakti towards his Acharya Sri Vyasa, was able to watch and listen to the proceedings of the Kurukshetra war - "live", so to say- sitting in the comfort of Dritharaashtra's palace.
2. Upakosala, disciple of Satyakaama Jaabaala, was able to absorb the Brahma VidyA, even without his Acharya's upadesa.

For those without such deep devotion to the Acharya, spiritual knowledge is difficult to attain and sustain. Thus, spiritual accomplishments are directly proportionate to the intensity of one's Acharya bhakti.





Chapter 9

The Secret Formula

We saw how it is the bounden duty of each disciple to publicly acknowledge and propagate the glory of his Acharya, as is laid down in the sloka

"Gurum prakaasayet dheemaan, mantram yatnena gopayet

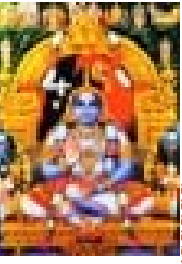
Aprakaasa prakaasaabhyaam ksheeyate sampat aayushi"

Just as there are things to be publicized, there are matters to be preserved painstakingly as a secret too- for instance, the mantra which the Acharya entrusts to the sishya is to be kept to himself, and not to be handed out to all and sundry.

This sloka contains a caution to the Guru too, not to entrust the mantra indiscriminately to anybody and everybody, without verifying their credentials and capacity to absorb, retain and benefit from the mantra and its purport. The Acharya is supposed to preserve the mantra much like a nuclear secret, to be handed over only to the deserving and discreet. Swami Desikan exhorts the Acharya to protect and preserve the mantra, and not to entrust it to the fickle-minded, who do not qualify to be disciples.

Some sishyAs are wealthy, and would submit at their Guru's feet handsome tributes. There are other disciples who are extremely influential politically, socially or otherwise: if these persons become an Acharya's disciples, then the Acharya automatically gains reflected glory.

Swami Desikan says that the Acharya, while selecting a disciple for upadesam, should not be guided by considerations of wealth or fame accruing to him, through the disciple. The only consideration for the preaching should be the disciple's spiritual attainment and his eagerness to receive the mantra. **"Kripayaa nisspruho vadet"**- the prime consideration for mantropadesam should be the Acharya's overwhelming concern for the disciple's emancipation, which



in turn is caused by the disciple's devotion and endearing qualities.

And why should the Guru preserve the mantra as a closely guarded secret and not propagate it to as many as possible? Surely, the more the mantra is known to, the more those are benefited! Is it not a narrow attitude not to share one's treasure with the multitude?

All this might be true of worldly wealth, but when it comes to Spiritual knowledge, sharing it with the uninitiated and ill-qualified would result in the knowledge losing its greatness. If pearls are cast before swine, they would hardly appreciate their value: on the other hand, if a connoisseur of jewels comes across these pearls, he would be extremely impressed by their value and magnificence, and ensure that they are immediately set into a necklace and adorn the neck of a commensurately beautiful lady.

Similarly, dissemination of mantra and its purport to the spiritually unlettered would result in the mantra losing its greatness, as it would be perceived to be easily available, and therefore, cheap. The true magnificence of the mantra would be appreciated only by a disciple who has toiled hard, through service to the guru, attaining preliminary qualifications like aatma gunaas, devotion to the Acharya, an unquenchable thirst for the right type of knowledge, etc.

Equally, considering the difficulty with which he attained the mantra, he would painstakingly preserve it as a secret, and would pass it on only to the eminently qualified.

Here, Swami Desikan cites the example of Brahma, who came to grief by imparting knowledge of Paancharaatra to Indra, without checking the latter's qualifications to receive the same. Brahma was carried away by the fact that Indra, the undisputed leader of all the devas, had come to him on bent knees, seeking knowledge. Guided by considerations of the glory that he (Brahma) would derive as the Acharya of the all-powerful Indra, Brahma taught Indra the nuances of Sri Paancharaatra. As a result of this ill-advised propagation, Brahma's own knowledge of the Shastra was erased totally from his mind, and





he had to seek out Sri Narada for refreshing his memory.

Cautioning Acharyas about unquestioningly accepting all and sundry as disciples, Swami Desikan quotes from the Manudharma shastra:-

“Raagyo raashtra kritam paapam, Raaja paapam purodhasa:

Bhartu: sva stree kritam paapam, sishya paapam gurorapi”.

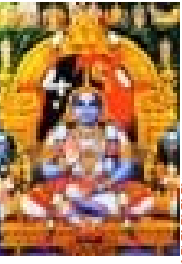
Elaborating on the concept of moral responsibility, Manu declares that the King is responsible for the wrongdoings of his subjects, as it is his duty to guide them in the right path. The King's sins are laid at the doorstep of his Purohita, whose duty it is to tender correct and timely advice, and ensure its adherence. The husband, under whose protective umbrella the wife lives, is responsible for the latter's acts of commission and omission. Similarly, the Acharya has to bear the cross for the sins of his disciple, for it is the former's sacred duty to provide guidance and instruction to ensure that the disciple treads the path of virtue and righteousness.

Thus, by accepting unquestioningly all and sundry as disciples, the Acharya lays himself open to the dangers of reaping the frightening fruits of the sinful seeds sown by his errant sishyas.

It is the Acharya's responsibility to impart the mantra only to the eminently qualified disciple, just as a valuable heirloom should be bequeathed only to the most responsible of the sons, who would protect and preserve it. Hence the Acharya is entitled to severely test the sishya's patience, to ensure that he is indeed worthy of the treasure he aspires to acquire. Swami Desikan cites the example of **Raigya Maharshi**, to demonstrate the point that even to the



thirukkoshtiyur nambi



qualified disciple, Acharyas should not part with the mantra that easily:-

Jaanashruti was a model king, good to his subjects, philanthropically inclined, and known for his charity and benevolence. One night, two swans, flying over Jaanashruti's palace, conversed between them to extol the praises of Raigva, declaring him to be the repository of all that is to be known. The good king, ever thirsty for knowledge, went in search of Raigva, whom he found living beneath the shelter of a dilapidated cart, scratching his itching sores. Jaanashruti knelt at the feet of the unprepossessing Raigva, offered him a tribute of 600 cows, a chariot, and innumerable jewels, and requested him humbly to impart scriptural secrets. However, Raigva, unimpressed by the substantial wealth lying at his feet, rejected it outright, saying that he didn't need all that, and also refused to teach the king even a word. The king, unfazed by the rejection, persevered, and through prolonged, devoted service to Raigva, managed to win the latter's heart and confidence. Raigva, impressed by the king's absolute lack of ego and his thirst for knowledge, initiated him into the esoteric path of Brahmavidya.

And more recently, to demonstrate this point, we have the example of Sri Ramanuja, whose efforts to acquire **mantram** and **mantraarttham**, are legendary. Sri Peria Nambi instructed Sri Ramanuja to learn from Sri TirukkOshtiyur Nambi, the Sampradaayic secrets which were bequeathed by Sri Alavandar. When approached, Sri Tirukkoshtiyur Nambi, intent on measuring the depth of Sri Ramanuja's eagerness and eligibility for the mantra, kept putting off the latter, with one excuse after the other. Sri Ramanuja, undaunted by the Acharya's repeated refusal, walked between Srirangam, (where he himself resided) to Tirukkoshtiyur (a distance of around 200 km) 17 times, tirelessly beseeching the Acharya to part with knowledge. At last, moved by Sri Bhashyakara's tenacity and thirst for sampradayic knowledge, Sri Tirukkoshtiyur Nambi relented, took the former as a disciple, and imparted in full whatever he had learned from Sri Alavandar.



Chapter 10

The Eligibility Criteria

We have seen in detail the purport of the slokam

**"Gurum prakaasayet dheemaan mantram yatnena gopayet
aprakAsa prakAsAbhyAm kshEeyatE sampat Ayushi"**

Here, the instruction to publicise the greatness of the Guru is applicable to the entire Guruparampara, for, after all, one's Acharya derived his wealth from his own Acharya and so on. Hence it becomes the duty of the sishya to extol the praise of not only his own Guru, but of the entire lineage of Acharyas.

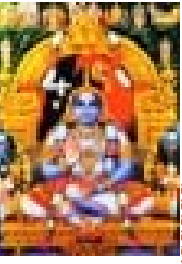
Further, the term **"Mantram"** includes the **"Mantraarttham"** or the mantra's sacred purport. Thus the dictum not to reveal the mantra to the unqualified applies to the mantra's purport too. This is borne out by the following Bhagavat Gita sloka :-

**"idam te na atapaskaaya na abhaktaaya kadaachana
na cha asushrooshave vaachyam na cha maam ya: abhyasooyati"**

Having imparted to Arjuna the divine secrets of Karma, Gnaana, Bhakti and Prapatti YogAs, the Lord cautions him not to disseminate this hard-earned knowledge to certain classes of people-

"naatapaskaaya"- Mantra and its purport are not to be told to one without absolute control over the body, mind and tongue, and lacking penance. Such a person would neither benefit fully from the knowledge, nor realize its greatness.

"naabhaktaaya"- Even if a sishya has the preliminary requisite of **"tapas"** as detailed above, if he lacks devotion to the Acharya and to the Lord, he is not qualified to receive upadesa of the mantra or its purport. For, as shown above,



the efficacy of the mantra is directly proportionate to the degree of the beneficiary's devotion to the Guru from whom he receives it, as also to the Lord who is enshrined in the mantra.

"**asushrooshave**"- Mere tapas, and bhakti in the Guru and the Lord, do not entitle a sishya to the scriptural secrets- he must also be imbued with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and the eagerness to perform kankaryam to the Acharya, as an outward manifestation of his Gurubhakti.

"**Yobhyasooyati**"- Even if endowed with all the aforesaid sterling qualities, if a sishya is eaten up with envy or intolerance at the Lord's svaroopam, His boundless auspicious attributes, His unlimited Ishwaryam ,etc., he is instantly disqualified to receive the treasure of knowledge.

The Mantra herself beseeches her possessor not to give her away to the non-believer, the devotionless, the envious, etc., as the following sloka indicates-

**"Naastikaaya sataayaapi mad bhakti rahitaaya vaa
asooyakaaya maam maa daa: sevadhi: tesmi rakshamaam"**

The Mantra, putting herself in the position of the daughter of the Acharya, pleads with him not to give her away in marriage to the unqualified, thereby putting her and the Acharya in misery. When a good girl marries a bad person who lacks appreciation of his bride's sterling qualities, it causes untold misery to the girl herself, her father who performed the kanyaadaanam, and to everybody who was witness to the marriage.

All this elaborate prohibition is intended to ensure that only the qualified disciple receives the mantra and its purport, so that he would appreciate its greatness, afford it the due devotion it calls for and reap the bountiful fruits it is capable of conferring on the upaasaka.

Whenever one recites the mantra mentally or verbally, or meditates on its enlightening purport, one should simultaneously remember with overwhelming





gratitude the Acharya and the illustrious lineage of preceptors before him, who made it possible for one to attain the great treasure of knowledge. Similarly, whenever the Acharya performs mantropadesam, he should do so only after meditating upon the Acharya vamsam-"Achaaryam manasaa dhyaatvaa mantram adhyaapayet Guru:"- lays down the Scripture

Meditating on the lineage of Gurus is not only our bounden duty, but is immensely pleasurable, when one's devotion and gratitude are true. Further, it also redeems one of certain sins like conversation with the wicked. Just as association with the pious adds merit, alliance or even mere conversation with the wicked is capable of pulling us down into an abyss-

" Na mleccha asuchi adhaarmikai: saha sambhaasheta

Sambhaashya punya krito manasaa dhyaayet"

Thinking of the purifying lineage of Acharyas washes away the sin accruing from speech with the impure, unrighteous and the outcasts, says the Goutama Dharma Sootra.

Remembering with gratitude his own Acharyas, and to enable our meditation on the lineage, Swami Desikan enumerates the Guruparampara in the following sloka-

"En uyir tandu alittavarai sharanam pukki

yaan adaive avar gurukkaL nirai vanangi

pin arulaal Perumboodoor vanda vallal

Peria Nambi, Alavandar, Manakkaal Nambi

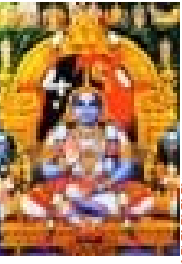
Nan neriyai avarkku uraittha Uyyakkondaar

Nathamuni, Satakopan, Senainaathan

Innamuda Tirumagal endru ivarai munnittu

Emperuman tiruvadigal adaigindrene"





The reference to "en uyir tandu alittavar" says a lot. It indicates that this life was indeed worthless before the Guru, through his infinite mercy, induced the realisation that we are the Lord's own creatures, and exist solely for His service ("Seshatva Gnaanam"). Anyone who lacks this realisation doesn't live, but merely exists, like other inanimate beings.

That such a life is no life at all is borne out by Sri Tirumazhisai Piraan's words, "andru naan pirandilen, pirandapin marandilen".

Azhwar considers himself to have been born only after he acquired Seshatva Gnaanam described above. Every Brahmin is supposed to be born twice- once when he takes birth, and then again when he undergoes upanayanam and Brahmopadesam, which entitle him to study the Vedas and Vedanta. Azhwar and Swami Desikan are of the opinion that apart from the two births described above, there is a third and most important birth-that induced by Seshatva Gnaanam. Unless one takes this third birth, the other two births would remain incomplete and useless, as they would only lead him deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of Samsaara, whereas the third birth would show him the way out of the morass and uplift him to worlds above.

The words "en uyir" could also be taken to refer to the Lord, for He is verily the giver of life and its sustainer. He is indeed life itself. Without Him, we are as good as non-existent. The Acharya, by enlightening us as to the true nature and auspicious attributes of the Paramatma, gives us life in its true sense. And in so doing, the Acharya protects us from the fate that befalls those who know not the Ultimate-hence the sobriquet "alittavar", meaning protector. It is to this Acharya that we pay obeisance, says Swami Desikan.



Chapter 11

Surrender to the Acharya!

Swami Desikan's paasuram, "en uyir tandu alittavarai sharanam pukki" conveys a wealth of information, as we saw last.

The words "sharanam pukki" reiterate the hoary tradition of Acharya Prapatti. We are told that just as Saranaagaati or Prapatti is to be performed to the Lord and to the Piratti ("Purushakaara Prapatti"), an essential prerequisite therefor is performance of Prapatti to the Acharya. This is not the first mention of Acharya Prapatti in Sampradaayic literature-several Poorvaachaaryas have indicated it in their works.

Seeking refuge at the holy feet of his praachaaryaa Sri Nathamuni, Sri Alavandar says in his Stotra Ratnam, "atra paratra chaapi nityam yadeeya charanou sharanam madeeyam"

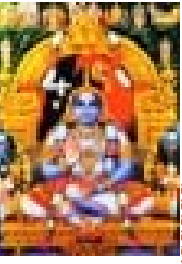
"Sa gurum eva abhi gacchet" says the Upanishad, clearly laying down that Acharya Prapatti is the sole route for attaining knowledge ("tat vigyaanaarttham").

Sri KooratthAzhwan performs prapatti to the lotus feet of Sri Ramanuja-
"Ramanujasya charanou sharanam prapadye".

The devoted Madhurakavi seeks refuge in Sri Nammazhwar's tiruvadi -
"Mevinen avan ponnadi meymmaye"

The Lord too lays down in the Gita that knowledge is to be gained from the Acharya by performing prapatti at his feet and through Acharya kainkaryam -
"tat viddhi pranipaatena, pariprasnena sevaya"

Quoting the Jayaakhya Samhita, Sri Nadaadur Ammal says in his "Prapanna Parijaatam", that the Acharya is both the means and the goal to be attained, and Prapatti is to be performed to him, as to the Lord -"Upaaya upeya



bhaavena tameva sharanam vrajet"



thiruvellarai engalAzhvan and ammAL

Further, the Acharya is to be venerated always, and meditated upon with unflinching devotion. The present practice in various Mathams, Ashramams and households, of celebrating the tirunakshatrams of present and past Acharyas has the sanction of the scripture, which says

"archaneeyascha vandyascha keertaneeyascha sarvadaa

dhyaayet japet namet bhaktyaa bhajet abhyarchayet mudaa"

Just as the Ashtaakshara and Dvaya mantras are recited repeatedly, the Acharya's holy name is also to be on one's lips always, prompted by overflowing devotion and love for the Preceptor. We should perform archana to his holy feet, meditate on them with absolute concentration, sing his praises always, and prostrate before him or his image, prompted by bhakti. The "Iraamaanusa Nootrandaadi" of Sri Tiruvaragattu Amudanar, (Note: IrAmAnusa





NUtrandAdhi of AmudanAr can be read at <http://www.ahobilavalli.org> Ebook # 28) the "Yatiraja Saptati" of Swami Desikan (Note: SwAmy Desikan's YatirAja Saptati can be read at <http://www.ahobilavalli.org> Ebook # 6) and the "Yatiraja Vimsati" of Sri Manavala Mamunigal are but demonstrations of the aforesaid tenet. In fact, the first mentioned work is also known as "Prapanna Savitri"-just as the Gayatri mantra is to be recited a minimum of 108 times during each Sandhyavandanam, the nootrandadi enables us to recite the haloed name of Sri Ramanuja, every time the andadi is recited. It follows that therefore, that it is the bounden duty of every Sri Vaishnava to perform japam of his Acharya's holy names, as he would of Ashtaksharam etc.

Sri Nadadur Ammal says that the aforesaid has the sanction of all scriptures worth the name-"iti sarveshu vedeshu sarva shaastreshu sammatam"

The code of conduct prescribed above is not limited to one's own Acharya-such devotion and love is to be extended equally to the entire Acharya parampara, as well as to the Acharya's wife, son, etc. ("Guru daara sutou tu guruvat vrittim aacharet")

One who thinks of the Lord's images in temples as being made of metal, wood, etc., and does not see in them the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent Lord, is destined to rot in hell: similar is the fate of sishyas, who consider their Acharya to be a mere mortal, with human failings, says the Prapanna Parijatam-

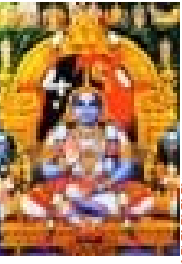
"Yo Vishno: pratimaakaare loha bhaavam karoti cha

Yo Gurou maanusham bhaavam ubhou naraka paatinou"

Sri Paada Tirttham

The Acharya's Sri Paada tirttham or water obtained by washing his lotus feet, is prescribed as an antidote for the deadliest of sins, and is capable of absolving us of the debilitating effects of the grossest of misdeeds. Such tirttham is to be sipped with faith and devotion, to be sprinkled over one's





head, eyes and all over the body, as a purifying agent. Here, Sri Ammal cites as pramaanam the conduct of Sri Krishna Himself-it is said that when Sri Narada went to Dwaraka, Sri Krishna washed the Rishi's feet and sipped the resultant water, along with His wives. The scriptures prescribe that whenever one eats or drinks something, an Achamana is to be performed after the act: however, drinking of Soma rasa at the end of Soma Yaga, and partaking of Sripaada Tirtham of the Acharya are exempt from this rule of Achamanam, signifying their greatness. It is well known that the Ganga emanated from the Lord's tiruvadi, and owes its holiness to its origins. Similarly, the water from the Acharya's tiruvadi is eminently purificatory and holy.



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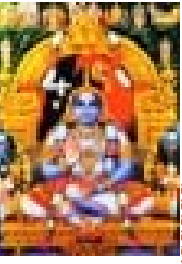
**SrI Ramanuja's SripAda theertham in Saligrama, karnataka
(thanks SrI Sridhar)**

To sum up, the Acharya is himself the goal as well as the means for its attainment. Hence, Prapatti is to be performed to the Acharya, just as we do it to the Lord. Not only the Acharya, but those connected with him are also to





be venerated and loved deeply. Acharyas' tiruvadis are as purifying as the Lord's own, and water emanating therefrom is a panacea for all ills of the body and the spirit.



Chapter 12

Ramanuja Vaibhavam

Continuing with Swami Desikan's pasuram, "ennuyir tandu aLittavarai", we are impressed with the distinguished author's apparently boundless bhakti and admiration for Sri Ramanuja.

"pin arulaal Perumboodoor vanda valal" says Tooppul Pillai, referring with devotion to Sri Emperumaanaar. Each word of this line is worth its weight in gold, as it illuminates one aspect of the multi-faceted personality that was Sri Bhashyakara.

Swami Desikan would appear to divide the Guruparampara into two broad categories- the Acharyas before Sri Ramanuja and those after him. Immediately after paying obeisance to one's own Acharya and the ones before him, Swami Desikan says one should remember with reverence and gratitude the Great Acharya who re-established Visishtadvaita siddhaantam on unshakeable foundations, through such monumental works as the Sri Bhashya. Swami Desikan is of the firm opinion that if the Guruparampara were to be likened to a magnificent necklace, then Sri Bhashyakara would be its splendid centrepiece, adding glamour to both sides of the necklace ("mahatee gurupankti haara yashti Yatirajena nibaddha naayaka shree:")

Just as the Acharyas after Sri Ramanuja attained glory due to association with his tiruvadi, the pre-eminence of the Acharyas before him was also multiplied manifold due to their association with his tirumudi (head).

"arulaal" vanda vallal- Sri Ramanuja came to this world with the sole aim of emancipating jeevas like us, who wouldn't listen to words of wisdom even if the Lord Himself were to appear before us and preach- ("engal Madhavane kannura nirkilum kaanagillaa ulagorgal" - Sri Ramanuja NootrandAdi)

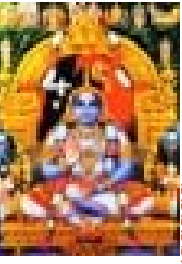
Thus the only motive behind this avatAra was kripa or "arul". Whereas the



Acharyas before Emperumaanar limited their teachings to those near and dear to them, and in any case only to the chosen few, it was Sri Bhashyakara who opened the floodgates of the Sampradaya to one and all, irrespective of caste, creed or community, by propagating the Prapatti maargam, which does not prescribe any eligibility criteria. Hence the title "Kripa maatra prasanna Acharya" fits Sri Ramanuja to a T. And in so doing, he was motivated not by considerations of the popular acclaim he would gain or the resultant power or riches, but solely by unfathomable mercy for the countless millions securely bound by the coils of samsaara and knowing not the means for redemption there from. Swami Desikan is so impressed by Sri Ramanuja's kripa, that he compares it to the Ganga in its breadth, depth and purifying qualities-"Yatipati dayaa divya thatinee".



perumpudur vanda vaLLal



"arulaal vanda vallal"

The word "vanda" is extremely significant. Even though the words "Perumboodoor piranda vallal" could have been used, the usage of "vanda" denotes that the birth of Sri Ramanuja was no accidental, uncontrolled happening, but one planned and decided well in advance. While jeevas like us have little control over when, how, where and in what form we would be born next, Emperuman and nitya sooris, who enjoy absolute independence, decide the place, time and other aspects of their avataaram. Thus we have Sri Rama choosing Sri Dasaratha as His father- "Pitaram rochayaamaasa vridham Dasaratham nripam"

Similarly, Sri Ramanuja, who was but an avatara of Sri Adishesha, too chose SriPerumboodur as his avataara stthalam. The choice of Sriman Mahaabhootapuri as birthplace, Sri Kesava Somayaji as father and Sri Kaantimati as mother, were all decided in advance to give Sri Ramanuja the advantages of location and background. Further, Swami Desikan calls Sri Ramanuja's avatAra the result of the combined merit and prayer of the three worlds, ("trijagat punya phalam") for, had this avatara not happened, the world would still be clouded by ignorance and groping for a way out of the debilitating samsaara.

"Perumboodur vanda vallal - Vallal is a philanthropist with boundless munificence. Tamil literature lists seven great vallals- Kaari, Paari, Began, et al. Karna too qualified as a vaLLal. However, all these philanthropists satisfied only one aspect of the requirements of the needy- they gave away money and riches, which could buy food, clothing, shelter, and other objects of material pleasure. The one thing they could not give was happiness, that is, lasting happiness. Ephemeral happiness could be acquired by spending money, but not everlasting bliss. Sri Ramanuja was the rare philanthropist who gave away bliss, not merely happiness, and that too, perennial, everlasting, uninterrupted bliss, in the company of the best of the Lord's devotees, at that abode of all happiness, Sri Vaikuntam. That all mortals who came into contact with the





Prince of Saints were emancipated through hard-to-earn knowledge and were assured of heavenly bliss, is pointed out by Sri Amudanar thus- "annal Iraamaanusan vandu tondriya appouzhude naNNarum gnaanam talai kondu Naranarku aayinare".

Sri Ramanuja's munificence does not stop with mere mortals: it extends to the Lord Himself. When there was a dispute as to the identity of the Lord of the Seven Hills, it was Sri Ramanuja who bestowed Him with the Shankha and Chakra, thus conclusively establishing Him to be Sri:pati.

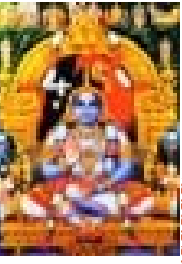
Just as Sri Nammazhwar calls Emperuman "vallal" ("vallale, Madhusoodana, en maradaga malaye" "vallal Manivannan tannai kavi solla vammo" etc.), Swami Desikan applies the sobriquet to Sri Bhashyakara, overwhelmed by the latter's generosity in parting with the esoteric secrets of the Sampradaya, so that even the common man could start thinking of attaining liberation, hitherto beyond the reach of all but the chosen few, by adopting Prapatti.

Sri Amudanar addresses Sri Ramanuja in a similar vein- "Kozhundu vittu ongia un vallal tanattinaal valvinayen manam nee pugundaai"

Amudanar also lists the multifarious benefits that Sri Ramanuja's munificence bestows on those who come to him-

"porundiya tesum porayum tiralum pugazhum-nalla
tirundiya gnaanamum selvamum serum- seru kaliyaal
varundiya gyaalatthai vanmayinaal vandu edutthu alittha
arunthavan- engal Iraamaanusanai adaindavarikke"





Chapter 13

The Voice of Ramanuja

Homage to the Guruparampara is made easy by Swami Desikan's pasuram, "ennuyir tandu alitthavarai sharanam pukki". We can observe in this pasuram, that the choicest adjectives are reserved for Sri Ramanuja ("Pin arulaal Perumbhoodoor vanda vallal"). This indicates Swami Desikan's boundless bhakti for the BhashyakAra. And what might be the prime reason for such lavish praise?

Apart from any other reason, Swami Desikan is a parama vaidika, whose every word and action is based on the Vedas. His admiration for Emperumanar is easily understood, when we realise that it was Sri Ramanuja who rescued the Vedas from the morass of advaitic misinterpretation they had fallen into. By adorning the Vedamaata with garlands of correct and consistent interpretation, Sri Ramanuja did Her yeomen service. So much so that the Vedas became impregnable to further assaults by the ill-informed. This generated much relief and delight to the Vedas, and as Sri Tiruvarangattu Amudanar says, "Naarananai kaattiya Vedamkalipputtradu". Swami Desikan confirms this in his Yatiraja Saptati, by likening Emperumanar to a physician who cured the Vedas of chronic fever caused by mistreatment by quacks- "Shruteenaam.....antarjvaram aseesamat".

Swami Desikan is unreserved in his praise for the Bhashyakara for his protection of the Vedas, and this theme occurs repeatedly in his Yatiraja Saptati. Just as the Empress's private attendants minister to her various needs, Sri Ramanuja's sree sooktis render multifarious services to the Vedamata, and make her glow with beauty.

"Prasaadhayati yat sookti: svaadheena patikaam shrutim"

Sri KoorattAzhwan too says that Sri Ramanuja's yagyopaveetam acts as the mangala sootram for the Vedas "trayya maangalya sootram" (Sri Dhaatee





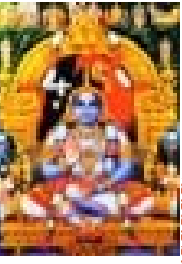
Panchakam). The Voice of Ramanuja is filled with the heady perfume of the Shrutis, says Swami Desikan-"**Shruti surabhaya:**". That the Bhashyakara's works are but paraphrases of the Vedas and enhance their enchantment, is brought out by the Yatiraja Saptati sloka—

**"Pratishttaa Tarkaanaam pratipadam Richaam dhaama Yajushaam
parishkaara: Saamnaam paripanam atharva Angirasaam"**

The divine outpourings of Sri Ramanuja add beauty to the SamaVeda vakyas, form a supporting base for the Yajusha mantras, and a legacy for the Atharva Veda. The purport here is that Sri Bhashyam, Sri Vedaarttha Sangraham, Sri Vedanta Deepam, Sri Vedanta Saram, and other works of Sri Ramanuja decisively clarify the unfathomable depths of Veda Vedanta vaakyas, and resolve the apparent contradictions between some of them, demonstrating conclusively that all the mantras in all the Vedas declare in unison that Sriman Narayana is the Parabrahmam, Prapatti is the strategy to reach Him and eternal service to the Lord is the ultimate goal.

Vedas are akin to a high-powered focus lamp illuminating the beautiful form and the boundless auspicious qualities of the Paramapurusha. It is this lamp, which enables us to have a clear view of the Ultimate. However, at one time, due to poor up-keep by electricians (who learnt their trade through "Do It Yourself" books), the lamp started to flicker, conjuring up illusory images of the Lord, burned low and ultimately burnt itself out, totally blacking out the common man's view of the Lord. Then came Sri Ramanuja, the master electrician, a perfect practitioner of the craft learnt at the traditional school. Through expert attention, he restored the lamp to its pristine glory and fine-tuned its focus to show up the Lord in all His splendour. Swami Desikan lavishly lauds the Bhashyakara's contribution for its unmatched originality though rooted deeply in tradition, its successful rejuvenation of the Vaidika sampradayam and its unfailing adherence to tenets of the Shruti. Just as the Mudal Azhwars lit a lamp each on a stormy night to have a glimpse of the Lord, Sri Ramanuja too, through his Sri Bhashyam and other works, lit up an eternal





flame, by the light of which the Lord shines out magnificently, even to our rheumy eyes clouded with ahankaram and mamakaram.

Sri Koorattazhwan, renowned for his unparalleled Acharya bhakti, describes Sri Ramanuja as the exalted gem adorning the forehead of the Vedamata, illuminating her boundless beauty for all to see-"**tra**i **vidya choodaamani**:". He goes on to say that the mighty Vedas lean on the Bhashyakara's sacred Tridandam for support ("**Traiyyanta aalamba dandam**"). If the Perumbodoor Vallal could captivate and mesmerise even hard nuts like adiyen and make adiyen unable to proceed with the other Preceptors, it indeed speaks volumes of the Acharya's glory, which grows with each recounting.

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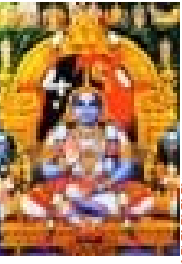
Chapter 14

Dissent and Democracy in Sri Vaishnavism

Sri Ramanuja's greatness as the Protector of the Vaidika Sampradaya is immeasurable. For, were it not for him, then not only would the Vedas and Brahma sutras have suffered due to misinterpretation, but our perception of the Lord, with all His auspicious attributes, would have been skewed and improper. Plain, transparent glass affords a clear view of objects, while a prism distorts images. Thus it is not only we mortals but Veda Purusha himself and Emperuman too, who should be eternally grateful to the Bhashyakara for putting things in the proper perspective, and further, for throwing open to all and sundry the Prapatti Marga, assuring them of Liberation, which had been the preserve of the chosen few before. Keeping all this in mind, Swami Desikan calls him "Pin arulaal Perumbodoor vandaVallal".

To digress a little, though the Acharya is to be regarded and venerated as the Lord Himself, yet, when he commits a factual error, he is to be corrected by the disciple, but in privacy, says the Scripture. There are several recorded examples of such conduct in the Sampradaya.

Apart from being an Acharya par excellence, Sri Ramanuja was also a model disciple. His devotion to his Gurus was legendary. Notwithstanding all this, Sri Ramanuja exhibited another facet of a model disciple's conduct- that of unhesitatingly correcting the Acharya when he was wrong. On the rare occasion, when the Acharya himself errs, due to oversight or other reasons, and the Sishya can definitely recognise the error, it is the duty of the disciple to apprise the Acharya of the mistake in the politest possible terms, in privacy. ("Gurum rahasi bodhayet") The Sishya should not take this as an opportunity to belittle the Guru in public, but realise that even the mighty are prone to mistake ("na kaschit na aparaadhyati", as Sri Mythily told Siriya Tiruvadi) and act accordingly.



In the case of Sri Ramanuja, when his Acharya Yadavaprakasa interpreted the Shruti Vakya "tasya yatakapyasam pundareekam eva akshinee" to mean that the Lord's eyes resembled the backside of a monkey, the disciple, though moved to tears of anguish over this grossly unbecoming and inappropriate comparison, reacted with circumspection, and his disagreement could be discerned by his Guru only from the hot tear drops that fell on his (Yadavaprakasa's) thigh (Sri Ramanuja was applying oil to his guru's head at the time this interpretation was voiced). And upon the Guru's inquiry, Sri Ramanuja submitted his humble opinion that the correct meaning of the quote would be that Emperuman's beautiful eyes resembled a lotus. While this later led to an estrangement between the Acharya and the disciple, Emperumanar did not hesitate to put on record his dissent on vital matters.

And later too, when Sri Ramanuja was learning the purport of Tiruvaimozhi from Sri Tirumalai Nambi, he did not flinch from putting forth versions which he believed to be more appropriate and dear to the heart of his Praachaarya Sri Alavandar.



periya thirumalai nambi - thanks SrI Sridhar





Guruparampara records that even Sri Koorattazhwan, (that model disciple of Sri Ramanuja, who considered his Acharya's words holier than the Scripture), registered his disagreement with certain sentences in Sri Bhashya which was being dictated to him by Emperumanar. And Sri Ramanuja, who was well aware of his disciple's erudition, respected the latter's sentiments and made suitable amends.

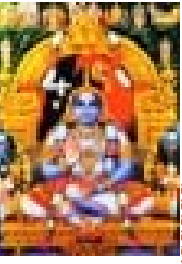
The very fact that the commentaries on Tiruvaimozhi contain several references to "Alavandar nirvaaham", "Emperumanar nirvaaham" "Pillan nirvaaham" "Bhattar nirvaaham" etc., indicate that sishyas did occasionally differ from their Acharyas, but this did not detract in any way from the undying devotion and immeasurable respect they had for their Acharyas.

Indeed, our Sri Vaishnava Sampradayam has democracy at its roots, with the spirit of inquiry and dissent being tolerated and even encouraged, all, of course, in the context of differing aspects of Bhagavat anubhavam. The Lord is multi-faceted and every one is free to enjoy Him as their emotions and intellect prompt them to, within the framework of the Scriptures.

We must remember, however, that the conduct of the giants referred to above may apply to us only in a very limited fashion, and as (speaking for myself) spiritually impoverished mortals endowed with limited faculties, we would do well to tow the Acharya's line in toto, unquestioningly. This is required of Sishyas especially today, when on one pretext or the other, their Acharyas are subjected to criticism from all and sundry ill-informed sources. We must remember that it is not for us to sit in judgment over the conduct of these saints for their imaginary infringements. It would it be the grossest form of Bhaagavata apachaaram to even listen passively to such criticism, leave alone to actively participate in such blasphemous conversation.

When one's Acharya is being criticized, rightly or wrongly, it would be one's bounden duty to defend one's Preceptor with all of one's might, and if this is not possible for some reason, at least to depart the place with alacrity, as





would a person pursued by a snake. Sri Tondaradippodi Azhwar's pasuram should be our guide in this regard-

"ninpaal porupparianagal

pesil povade noyadaagi kurippu enakkadayum aagil

koodumel talayai aange aruppade karumam kandaai"

Though the second alternative proposed by Azhwar may not be practicable these days, it is certainly indicative of how vile and unbearable criticism of the Acharya is, to devoted disciples.



Chapter 15

Gurudakshina

In the previous chapters, we have seen the greatness of the Acharya and the Guruparampara, and our own duties towards them.

It is now time for Gurudakshina, which is to be submitted to the Acharya, at the end of the period of study, for it is only fair that we show our gratitude to the Guru, who has given us the most valuable of treasures, viz., knowledge, that too knowledge of the Self and the Paramatma. And how do we show such gratitude?

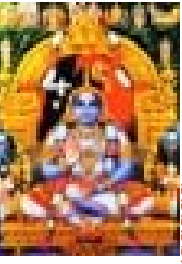
The Shruti says, "Acharyaaya priyam dhanam aahritya". We should propitiate the Acharya with the offering that is dear to him. And what is the measure of such offering? Shastras lay down that the disciple should offer at the Acharya's feet his (sishya's) entire wealth, or half of it, or a quarter, or at least the maximum he can afford.

**"Sarvasvam vaa tad ardham vaa tad ardha ardhameva vaa
Gurave dakshinaam dadyaat yatha shakti api vaa puna:"**

Considering the priceless gift he has received, it would only be fitting even if the disciple were to offer his life, wealth and his all to the Acharya, says the Vihagendra Samhita, adding that only such a disciple, who offers his everything and himself as Gurudakshina, is entitled to the name "Sishya"-

**"Shareeram arttham praanam cha sad gurubhyo nivedayet
Evam lakshana sampanna: sishya ityabhidheeyate"**

It is impossible to fix a price or fees that the Acharya should be offered as DakshiNA, in view of the invaluable knowledge he has imparted, leading to liberation. Whoever can fix a price for Moksha? Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Sishya to offer the Acharya the most he can, ungrudgingly, says the Shandilya Smrti-



"Brahma vidyaa pradaanasya devairapi na sakyate

Prati pradaanamapi vaa dadyaat yatha shakti Adaraat".

Swami Desikan, the model sishya that he was, goes a step further and says that even the Lord is unaware of the exact measure of recompense to be offered to the Acharya, who has lit up the lamp of knowledge in our hearts, driving away the darkness of ignorance-

"Etri ezhil gnaana vilakkai irulanaiitum

Maatrinavarkku oru Kaimmaaru Maayanum kaanakillaan"

It therefore goes without saying that the disciple should remember his Acharya with undying appreciation, and never speak ill of the latter. What happens to the Sishya who does the unthinkable, who harms his Guru by thought, word or deed? Such an ingrate is to be "shot at sight", says the Shruti-

"Vidyaa choro Gurudrohee vedesvara vidooshaka:

ta ete bahu paapmaana: sadyo dandyaa iti Shruti:"

Further, such an infidel would be the subject of everlasting contempt everywhere he goes, and the object of undying scorn of the Lord and all Bhagavatas. He is to be compared to Hiranyakasipu and Ravana, who, even after listening to words of good advice from Sri Prahlada and Sri Vibheeshana respectively, tried to harm the latter. Sri Sandilya Mahrshi exhorts Sishyas never to harm the Acharya by word, deed or thought, and to revere Him as he would the Lord-

"Na pramaadyet Gurou sishya: vaang mana: kaaya karmabhi:

avibhajya aatmanaa Acharyam varteta asmin yatha Achyute"

The Acharya's contribution is so magnificent and the disciple's gain so immeasurable, that the Acharya is to be venerated not only here in this world, but even at Sri Vaikuntam, after Liberation. Is this not paradoxical, for,



everyone, upon reaching the Lord's abode, becomes equal and share equally in the services they perform to the Lord?



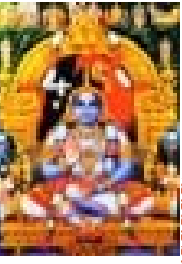
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The Jeevatma, after attaining Moksham, becomes totally equal to the Lord Himself in bliss. In such an egalitarian society, where is the question of persisting relationship of Acharya and Sishya?

Not so, says Sri Alavandar, declaring categorically that Sri Nathamuni's tiruvadi is his sole refuge here and in the higher worlds- "atra paratrachaapi nityam yadeeya charanou sharanam madeeyam".

To conclude, the Acharya's magnificence can only be summed up in Swami Desikans own sreesookti, which bears repetition ad nauseam- "Acharyat iha devataam samadhikaam anyam na manyaamahe"

There is no deity greater than or even equal to the Acharya he is verily a



"oppaar mikkaarai ilai aaya Maamaayan".

Considering the theme, there are many who feel that Sri Guruparamparasaram, besides providing the gateway to the exalted School of the Rahasyatrasaram, is a University by itself.

Srimate Sri LakshmiNrsimha divya paduka sevaka

SrivanSatakopa Sri Narayana Yatindra Mahadesikaya Nama:

dasan, sadagopan.

