

# Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's Kāśī Pañcakam

With the commentary Tatva Prakāśikā

by

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Verse 5

कशिक्षेत्रं शरीरं त्रभुवनजननी व्यापिनी ज्ञानगङ्गा  
भक्तिः श्रद्धा गयेयं निजगुरुचरणध्यानयोगः प्रयागः ।  
विश्वेशोऽयं तुरीयस्सकलाजनमनस्साक्षिभूतोऽन्तरात्मा  
देहे सर्वं मदीये यदि वसति पुनस्तीर्थमन्यत्किमस्ति ॥

kaśikṣetrṁ śarīraṁ trbhuvanajanānī vyāpinī jñānagaṅgā  
bhaktiḥ śraddhā gayeyam nijagurucaranaḍhyānayoḡaḥ prayāgaḥ ।  
viśveśo'yam turiyassaskalājanamanassākṣibhūto'ntarātmā  
dehe sarvaṁ madiye yadi vasati punastīrthamanyatkimasti ॥

शरीरं śarīraṁ – body, कशिक्षेत्रं kaśikṣetrṁ – the pilgrimage centre of Kāśī, त्रभुवनजननी trbhuvanajanānī - - the mother of the three worlds, व्यापिनी vyāpinī – all-pervading, ज्ञानगङ्गा jñānagaṅgā – the Ganges of knowledge, भक्तिः bhaktiḥ – devotion, श्रद्धा śraddhā – faith, इयम् Iyam – this, गया gayā – Gaya, निजगुरुचरणध्यानयोगः nijagurucaranaḍhyānayoḡaḥ – the communion of meditation on the feet of one's preceptor, प्रयागः prayāgaḥ – Prayāga, अयम् ayam – this, विश्वेशः viśveśaḥ – Lord of the Universe, तुरीयः turiyaḥ – the fourth, तुरीयस्सकलाजनमनस्साक्षिभूतः - saskalājanamanassākṣibhūtaḥ, - obtaining as the witness of the mind in all living beings, अन्तरात्मा antarātmā – the inner ruler, यदि yadi – if, मदीये madiye – belonging to me, देहे dehe – in the body, सर्वं sarvaṁ – everything, वसति vasati – abides, पुनः punaḥ – so, अन्यत् Anyat – other, तीर्थम् Tīrtham – pilgrimage center, किम् kim – which one, अस्ति asti – is?

Body is the pilgrimage center of Kāśī . The all-pervading flos of knosledge is the Ganges, the mother of the three worlds. Devotion and faith are this city of Gaya. The communion of meditation on the feet of one's preceptor is the city of Prayaga.

Atman, the fourth, is this Lord of the universe. It obtains in all living beings as the witness to the mind and the inner ruler. As everything exists in my body, where is the need for any other pilgrimage centre?

This verse is in the metre called sragdhara. In Vedanta, there is a nyāya called nyāya nahi ninda nyāya, the logic of non-censure: nahi nindā nindyam ninditum api tu stutyam stotum; the intent of the censure is not to censure one, but to glorify the other. Superficially, the poet seems to censure something, but his intent is to highlight the glory of the thing under consideration. The intent is to glorify the higher, not to censure the lower. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was once asked if he would go on pilgrimage to Kāśī. He replied that he was not interested because he sees Śiva in his own heart. He urged his disciples to have motiveless devotion in the heart, rather than visiting places. He was highlighting what is important rather than putting down pilgrimage.

Pilgrims usually visit Prayāga and Gayā in addition to visiting Kāśī. Śrī Śaṅkarā included all the three places in the symbolism. The sacred city of Kāśī is body. Just as the Ganges flows in Kāśī, so also the manifest consciousness flows in this body. According to mythology, Ganges is called triloka sarit, the river of three worlds, as it flows in heaven as well as the nether world also. It is called Mandākinī as it flows in heaven. Atman, the Awareness Absolute, manifests in the body-mind as the witness of the three states of waking, dream and sleep.

Śraddhā, the love for knowledge is Gayā. In Gayā, people perform śraddhā, the ritual propitiating the manes. Śraddhayāa kṛtam śrārdham, the ritual is called śrārdha because it is performed with love and devotion. Generally people perform this ritual without fail, but there is a misconception that it is inauspicious, unlike temple worship. The origin of this misconception could be the general fear that people have for death. Anything connected with death is abhorred. But death is as real as life. Once a bereaving woman prayed to Lord Buddha to revive her son. He told her that he would indeed bring the dead body to life if she could get a fistful of rice from a home that had no experience of death. Śrārdha is as auspicious as any prayer. In it, we worship God in the form of manes.

Meditation is Prayāga. Prayāga is the confluence of the three sacred rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarasvatī the unseen. Similarly, in meditation, as one contemplates upon Īśvara's feet, the body, mind and ego resolve in Śiva, the Awareness of Being. Īśvara alone appears in the form of preceptor and then as Atman, the sadguru, the preceptor in the form of the inner Being. Ultimately, Īśvara and guru resolve in Atman. Meditation on the feet is symbolic of śiva śaraṇāgati, self-surrender.

The seeker surrenders to the awareness of being and abides in the inner silence. It is dhyāna yoga. It is yoga because it is the communion of the body-identified persona with the Reality that reflects in the body-mind. This communion is Prayāga.

Atman is turiya, the fourth. It lights up the entire content of the waking, dream and sleep, and yet transcends them. The content of the waking consciousness does not affect Atman. Atman is never ever attached to the content. These states happen; they do not happen to Atman. Nothing ever happens to Atman just as the day and night do not happen to the sun. That turiyā is Śiva. The moment you watch the mind, you become the witnessing awareness. Already, you are not the persona any more; you are the impersonal intelligence which is Śiva.

Śiva is Viśveśvara, the overlord of Viśva, the universe. Viśva is also the one who identifies with the content of the waking consciousness. Vividha pratyayagamya viśvam. What we taste, touch, smell, see and hear is the Viśva. Who is the master of this Viśva? The Awareness Absolute is the master. That Kāśī, Śiva, is you. Śiva is obtaining in our hearts as antarātmā, the innermost reality.

How does one realize the antarātmā, the inner Reality? By realizing, "I am not the body, I am not the organs of action, I am not the sense organs, I am not the mind (emotions), I am not the intellect, I am not the ego". Abide as pure 'I am'. That is the gateway to the truth. As we abide in the pure 'I am', we would resolve into the pure awareness of the being, which is the antarātmā. That antarātmā is the sākṣi of the entire movement of the mind, not only in one's heart but also in the hearts of every living being. It is the same Atman that reflects in the body-minds of all the living beings, like one sun reflecting in a billion dewdrops or one electrical energy shining in a million bulbs. Śiva, Bhavāni, Gaṅgā, Kāśī, Prayāga, Gayā – all are here in this body. What else is needed to purify it? Tirtham is that which sanctifies. There is no other place that is supposed to purify us. Atma tīrtham param tīrtham, says the Sūta saṁhita. People roam all around in search of a shrine or river that could purify them. But, they do not realize that the greatest shrine of all is Kāśī shining in the heart as Atman. Taking a tourist bus and visiting various pilgrimage centers with a group of people is not an end in itself. It is good for national integration, but not enough for Self-realization. The striver should discover silence, peace and happiness, in oneself by yoga or by assimilating the truths enunciated in this encomium. That is the real pilgrimage.

**hari om tat sat śrikr̥ṣṇārpanamastu**