

Sādhana-pañcakam
Pujya Swamiji's transcribed talk

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of small texts, consisting of five, eight or a hundred verses which are attributed to Śrī Ādiśaṅkarācārya. A text with five verses is called a *pañcakam*, eight verses is called an *aṣṭaka*, ten verses is a *daśaka*, and a hundred verses is a *śataka*. There is a *sahasra* also, a text with a thousand verses, called the *Upadeśa-sāhasrī*.

One of the more popular books by Śaṅkara is the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-aṣṭakam*. This book actually has ten verses, although the main verses are eight in number. Then there is *Daśaślokī*, a book with ten verses discussing the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*, the self. The verses look simple, but it is a very important work according to *Vedānta śāstra* and *sampradāya*, the tradition. Śrī Madhusūdana Saraswatī, the author of *Advaita-siddhi*, wrote a commentary on *Daśaślokī*, for which there is a huge sub-commentary called *Gauḍabrahmānandīyam*, written by Śrī Gauḍabrahmānanda. It is a highly logical and analytical work.

The text being presented here is known as *Sādhana-pañcakam* because it consists of five verses that talk about the *sādhana*, the means for *mokṣa*, self knowledge. It is also called *Sopāna-pañcakam* because it introduces the subject matter gradually. *Sopāna* means a flight of steps. Like a flight of steps, the text progresses step by step and is a very popular *pañcaka*. In the tradition, this text is attributed to Śaṅkara. Regardless of whether it was written by Śaṅkara or somebody else, it has some very beautiful instructions on what one has to avoid and what one has to do as a seeker. Certain do's and don'ts are mentioned for *mumukṣus*, seekers. The verses are of great value, thus we never omit to talk about them during any course. These five verses are like the verses from the *Bhagavad Gītā* on values, *amānitvamadamahitvam-ahimsā kṣāntirārjavam*.¹ Whether we read the entire *Gītā* or not, these verses are always discussed. In fact, even though they come in the thirteenth chapter of the *Gītā*, I will not wait until that chapter. I introduce them at the very beginning of the course because they are to be cultivated over a period of time.

¹ *Bhagavad Gītā*, 13.7–13.11

The Sādhana-pañcakam is also part of the teaching, being one of the important *pañcakas*. This is why we are looking into these five verses.

VERSE 1

वेदो नित्यमधीयतां तदुदितं कर्म स्वनुष्ठीयतां
तेनेशस्य विधीयतामपचितिः काम्ये मतिस्त्यज्यताम् ।
पापौघः परिधूयतां भवसुखे दोषोऽनुसन्धीयतां
आत्मेच्छा व्यवसीयतां निजगृहात्तूर्णं विनिर्गम्यताम् ॥ १ ॥

*vedo nityamadhīyatām taduditam karma svanuṣṭhīyatām
teneśasya vidhīyatāmapacitiḥ kāmye matistyajyatām ।
pāpaughah paridhūyatām bhavasukhe doṣo’ nusandhīyatām
ātmecchā vyavasīyatām nijagr̥hāttūrṇam vinirgamyatām ॥ 1 ॥*

वेदः *vedaḥ* - Veda; नित्यम् *nityam* - always, i.e. daily; अधीयताम् *adhīyatām* - may it be studied (by you); तत् *tat* - that; उदितम् *uditam* - mentioned, enjoined; कर्म *karma* - action; स्वनुष्ठीयताम् *svanuṣṭhīyatām* - may it be performed well; तेने *tena* - by this means; ईशस्य *īśasya* - to Īśvara; विधीयताम् *vidhīyatām* - may it be done; अपचितिः *apacitiḥ* - worship, atonement; काम्ये-मतिः *kāmye-matiḥ* - desire for a particular result; त्यज्यताम् *Tyajyatām* - may they be given up; पापौघः *pāpaughah* - sum of all *pāpas* (demerits in this birth and past births); परिधूयताम् *paridhūyatām* - may it be destroyed; भवसुखे *bhavasukhe* - experiential pleasure; दोषः *doṣah* - limitation; अनुसन्धीयताम् *anusandhīyatām* - may it be seen, remembered continuously; आत्मेच्छा *ātmecchā* - desire for *ātmā*; व्यवसीयताम् *vyavasīyatām* - may it be entertained (and pursued); निजगृहात् *Nijagr̥hāt* - from one’s home; तूर्णम् *tūrṇam* - quickly; विनिर्गम्यताम् *vinirgamyatām* - may one go out, leave

‘May you study the Veda daily. May you perform well, the *karmas* enjoined by the Veda. By performing your duties in accordance with the Veda, may you worship Īśvara. By doing what is to be done, may you give up the desire for things intended to enhance your security or happiness. Through the resulting purity of mind, may you destroy all the *pāpas* accumulated in this life and past lives. May you see and remember the limitation inherent in experiential pleasures. May you entertain and pursue a desire to know the *ātmā*. May you quickly leave ‘your home’ behind, i.e. discard the notion of ownership as exemplified by the house.’

DAILY STUDY OF ONE'S SCRIPTURE

Vedonityam adhīyatām; may the Veda be studied by all of you daily. *Nityam* means always or daily. There is a rule in the Veda: *svādhyāyo adhyetavyaḥ*, one should study one's own Veda. Based upon this technical issue, there are a lot of arguments. The rule is meant for the three *varṇas*,² the people who are supposed to study the Veda. That is why the *upaniṣad* says *svādhyāya-pravacanābhyām na pramaditavyam*;³ let there not be any indifference in *svādhyāya*, the study of Veda and *pravacana*, the teaching of Veda, because it is a scripture.

This body of knowledge known as Veda is handed down from one generation to another. Thus, it has to be studied. How many people study that? Even though not many people study it, somehow the Veda gets to you. In fact, we find that the Vedic knowledge has entered into all the scriptures, the world over. Either the Vedic knowledge has entered into them, or that knowledge is common and therefore all the scriptures talk about it. We do not know which is the case. But one thing we do know is that the Veda is the most ancient body of knowledge, and whatever is talked about in the Veda is talked about elsewhere also.

HEAVEN IS NOT THE ULTIMATE END

All of the ancient texts talk about this knowledge, whether it is the Old Testament or New Testament, or even the Koran to some extent. All reach only up to the level of heaven. The Veda talks about heaven, and these other texts also talk about going to heaven and so on. The only problem is these other texts do not talk about anything beyond heaven. Heaven is within the world of experience alone. Heaven is not the ultimate solution. It is a holiday home. That is not understood. Therefore the solution offered by the other texts is only partial. If it is to be complete, the *mahāvākya*⁴ has to be included. From a spiritual perspective, heaven-going is within *saṁsāra*, the life of becoming. Getting out of *saṁsāra* does not mean going to heaven. Heaven itself is within *saṁsāra*. To get out of it, one has to know the reality of oneself, the self being everything.

²Specifically *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, and *vaiśya* .

³Taittirīyopaniṣad 1.11.1

⁴Statement pointing out the oneness of the *jīva* and *Īśvara*, i.e. the individual and God.

KARMA IS COMMON TO ALL

Thus we find that whether or not one studies the Veda, one does the *karmas* that are supposed to be done. Everyone knows what is to be done and what is not to be done, regardless of whether they do it or not. In the form of *karma*, it is there in every home that follows the Veda. Wherever Vedic *dharma* is followed, certain do's and don'ts are common in all cultures. These are all *veda-uditam karma*, actions enjoined by the Veda. What is to be done and what is not to be done are all said by the *śāstra*, scripture.

The concept of sin etc., also comes from *śāstra*. When you do a wrong *karma*, you attract both *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* and *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, seen and unseen results. Stealing attracts a *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*. *Dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, a seen result, is punishment and so on. But stealing attracts *adr̥ṣṭaphala* also. You may escape imprisonment, but you cannot escape *pāpa*.⁵ You have to pay in terms of pain, in this life or later. This concept is found in all the scriptures, and thus *pāpa* is accepted by all of them. Even the Buddha accepted the idea of *karma*. In fact, Buddhism is much more committed to reincarnation than we are.

In Vedānta, we do not care about reincarnation at all because we do not believe in it. We do not think of incarnation, let alone reincarnation. We say that the self is never born nor does it die,⁶ therefore we are not concerned. For them, it is a progression. So you require a number of births, as many lives as the leaves on a tree, in order to gain *nirvāṇa*. Even to reach the level of *bodhisattva*, some kind of *adhikāritvam*, half the leaves on the tree should fall. The tree is no ordinary tree with a few miserable leaves. This is a tree full of leaves, small leaves also. An example like this is given in Buddhist literature. Therefore, they believe in reincarnation and progression. Even the Dalai Lama is selected solely because of the the reincarnation. So, the concepts of *puṇya* and *papa* have gone from this *śāstra* to all these literatures. These are the do's and don'ts, the right and wrong actions. This is common.

To be continued...

⁵ The unseen result of a wrong action, which causes an unpleasant experience at some later time, is called *pāpa*. The unseen result of a right action, which causes a pleasant experience later, is called *puṇya*. These terms have no exact equivalents in English.

⁶ (आत्मा) न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचित् (Bhagavad Gītā, 2.20)