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ŚRĪMATE RĀMĀNUJĀYA NAMAḤ.

A CATECHISM
OF THE
VISIṢṬHĀDVAITA
PHILOSOPHY

OF
ŚRĪ RĀMĀNUJA ĀCHĀRYA



COMPILED
FROM THE ORIGINAL SHASTRAS
By N. BHASHYACHARYA, F.T.S.
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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE Viśiṣṭhādvaita Catechism, now published, is No.3 of the series of Catechisms of the Oriental religions, announced last December as to be issued from the Adyar Library. The aim of the projectors is to give, with the help of the most competent scholars, the essence of each of the great Asiatic philosophies, and in a form so simple and succinct as to make it comprehensible by ordinarily intelligent persons, young and old. The compiler of the present work is a Hindu Pandit, a Vaiṣṇava brahmin, of rare intellectual and scholastic endowments. As an example, I may state that, having accompanied me this month on an official visit to Bangalore, he gave four extemporaneous lectures, upon as many different evenings, upon difficult philosophical subjects, in four languages — Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and Canarese — to the admiration of the public. His Sanskrit discourse was rendered as fluently and eloquently as either of the others in the vernacular tongues, and the leading Pandits of Bangalore present in his audience, complimented him most ardently at the close. I mention the fact with a view to showing the reader what quality of man is the compiler of this truly admirable compendium. The opinion of his abilities entertained by European orientalist and Hindu authorities is reflected in the following documents:-

*I. Extract from a letter from Mr. J. Pickford, M.A., late professor of Sanskrit,
Presidency College, Madras, dated, Copper House Hotel,
1st April 1870*

“I have known N. Bhashaya Charlu: for nearly two years and during ten months of this period he rendered me valuable assistance in the Sanskrit and Telugu languages, and in examining the palm leaf MSS. in the College library. He is very well acquainted with the Sanskrit language, in all its branches especially Vedas, Literature and Rhetoric besides the Vedanta Philosophy. In Vaidik knowledge I have met with no Pundit at all equal to him. He is also better acquainted with European enquiry into Sanskrit than any Hindu I have Seen, and the information he can give about the various districts in the South of India, where rare manuscripts can be obtained, is very useful to a European. In fact, his knowledge of the South of India is so good that some months previously I recommended him to the Government as a fit person to be deputed on the search for rare MSS.”

(Signed) J. PICKFORD, M.A., *Sanskrit Professor.*

II. *Extract from a letter dated 10th March 1871 to Pandit N. Bhashya Charlu*

"I am very glad to find such a learned and good Pundit as you in these parts. Your knowledge of Vedas is really wonderful. Of all the Pundits I have met, I have not found one equal to you in the general knowledge of the Vedas. I think I am really fortunate in finding you here. I am more than glad you have promised me to assist in the undertaking. Without the assistance of such Pundits as you are, I am afraid I shall not be able to make much progress."

(Signed) A. C. BURNELL.

But the Viśiṣṭhādvaita Catechism speaks for itself, and for my esteemed colleague, Pandit Bhashyāchārya, of Cuddapah,

ADYAR, 28th December 1887.

H. S. OLCOTT.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

HAVING been desired by Colonel H. S. OLCOTT, President, Theosophical Society, to prepare a Viśiṣṭhādvaita Catechism, as one of the projected series of Catechisms of the Eastern religions, to be issued from the Adyar Library, I have compiled this book. This is intended to impart to beginners a knowledge of the general outlines of this philosophy and as such it cannot be considered as exhausting the subject. It is so very difficult to find English equivalents for many Sanskrit terms, a difficulty enhanced by the fact that this philosophy has not yet been written in English, although many of the terms used are similar to those in the treatises on Sankhya and other philosophical systems, but with, quite different significations and definitions, that I have thought it best to accompany the Sanskrit terms with their English equivalents so far as they are applicable.

The more important events in the life of the Founder of this Sect are briefly given being entirely taken out of *Divya-sūri-charita*, a Sanskrit poem written by Garuda-vāhana Pandita, soon after the time of Śrī Rāmānuja Ācārya, and other trustworthy records, such as the inscriptions.

Regarding the philosophical portion, I followed only the original Sanskrit works of Śrī Rāmānuja Ācārya and the commentaries thereon. I have not even expressed my own views or those of any of my colleagues in the Society. Nor have I dwelt at great length on dogmatic points which have no connection with philosophy.

Being a Vaiṣṇava Brahmin myself, and a descendant, of one of the 74 Vaiṣṇava priests (Acharya Purushas) appointed by Śrī Rāmānuja Ācārya, I have had opportunities of studying systematically the philosophy under my own learned Guru.

Some of the points that could not conveniently find a place in the Catechism have been added as notes.

CUDDAPAR,

December 1887.

From the Editor

This gem of a publication was written 126 years ago, some of the literary expressions used by the learned pandit are outdated and some of the scientific ideas have also been vastly upgraded. I have taken the liberty of correcting some of the vocabulary to give greater consistency — for example the word IDOL has been changed to ICON, B.C. (Before Christ) to B.C.E. (Before the Common Era.) A.D. (Year of our Lord) to C.E. Common Era. etc. I have also corrected some of the stilted English while retaining the meaning.

A few questions have been rearranged to provide a better flow of ideas. The words in square brackets are mine and have been added for greater clarification.

To most Non-Hindus and even to many Hindus the concepts taught are unintelligible and require greater explanation so again I have taken the liberty of providing exhaustive footnotes and a commentary to the best of my ability.

Śrī Rama Ramanuja Achari Sydney 2013.



Rāmānuja Ācārya (1017 — 1137 CE)

OM

namah parama-ṛṣibhyaḥ

HINDU VIŚIṢṬHĀDVAITA CATECHISM

1. Master, teach me the Viśiṣṭhādvaita Philosophy.

There are two branches of *Viśiṣṭhādvaita*¹ Philosophy; Siva *Viśiṣṭhādvaita*, and Vaiṣṇava *Viśiṣṭhādvaita*; which shall I teach you ?

Note:— The only difference between the two is that the one sect (*Siva-viśiṣṭhādvaita*) acknowledge the supremacy of Siva (*Mahādeva*) over the other deities, and the other (*Vaiṣṇava viśiṣṭhādvaita*) that of Vishnu (Nārāyaṇa). The former are the followers of Śrī Khanta-śivācārya who wrote a commentary on Brahma-Sutras according to that system called Nīlakaṇṭha-bhāṣya. There is a commentary on it called Śivāka Maṇi-dīpika by Appaya-dikshita. There are other treatises on this system written by Haradatta, Appaya-dikshita, and others as Chatur-veda-tatparya-nirṇaya, Śiva-tattva viveka, etc. The latter (*Vaiṣṇava viśiṣṭhādvaitis*) are the followers of Śrī Rāmānuja Ācārya.

2. Please teach me the branch to which my father belongs.

Your father is a follower of Śrī Rāmānujāchārya who taught the Vaiṣṇava Viśiṣṭhādvaita Philosophy.

3. Who was Rāmānujāchārya?

He was [said to be] an incarnation of Śeṣa/Ananta².

4. What is meant when it is said he was an incarnation of Śeṣa?

It means that the spirit of Śeṣa overshadowed his human body, in obedience to the command of [The Supreme Being] Vāsudeva.

5. What was the reason for the incarnation of Śeṣa or Ananta as Śrī Rāmānujāchārya?

To teach the true philosophy of Vedanta³.

6. Where was he born?

He was born at Śrīperumbudur, in the Chingelpet district, twenty-six miles west of Chennai.

7. What was the date of his birth ?

He was born under the constellation Ārdra, in the month Chaitra, of the year 4118 of Kali Yuga, called Pingala (C.E. 1017).

¹ There are three schools of Vedanta — *Advaita* — non-dualism, *Dvaita* — dualism and *Viśiṣṭha-advaita* or “Qualified non-dualism.”

² Mythologically speaking Ananta-śeṣa is the eternal servant of Lord Viṣṇu and acts as his couch. The name *Ananta* means “eternity” and *śeṣa* alludes that that which remains after the entire universe has been dissolved at the end of the cycles of Universal becoming (Time being cyclic from the oriental point of view). From this “remnant” the new universe comes into being. Iconographically it is represented as a coiled thousand-headed serpent upon which Lord Viṣṇu rests.

³ It is also important to note that Rāmānuja himself never claimed to be an incarnation of Śeṣa or any one else. The idea that he was an incarnation was a pious belief of his followers after his death. Apparently his parents were childless and obtained him after performing a *yajña* at the temple of Parata-sarathi in Chennai, hence the belief that he was a god-given child.

8. Tell me about his family.

He was a Yajur-vedi of the Haritasa gotra (clan) and the Āpastamba Sūtra. His father's name was Keśava Somayāji⁴, and his mother's name was Kāntimati Devi.

9. Where Was he educated?

After his thread ceremony⁵ (*upanayana*), he was educated at home by his father until his fifteenth year, when, after the death of his father, he left Śrīperumbudur for Kanchi (Conjeeveram).

10. By whom was he taught?

His father taught him all the Vedas and Vedāngas⁶ till his fifteenth year, and at Conjeeveram he studied the various philosophical systems under Yādava-prakāśa Mīśra, an ascetic of great learning and fame.

11. To what school of philosophy did Yādava-prakāśa belong ?

He was at first a follower of Śrī Sankarāchārya, but afterwards became an [independent] reformed Advaiti [modifying some of the conclusions of Sankarāchārya]. His opinions are not accepted by the followers of Śrī Sankarāchārya.

12. Did he write any books?

He wrote a commentary on Brahma-Sutras⁷, independent of that written by Śrī Sankarāchārya [which was the first such commentary].

13. Did Rāmānuja āchārya agree with the views of his teacher Yādava Prakāśa ?

No.

14. What teachings did he then follow?

He followed the *Viśiṣṭhādvaita* system taught by his predecessors.

15. Who were they?

They were (1) Bhagavad Bodhāyana, (2) Drāmiḍāchārya, (3) Brahmānandī (or Tankāchārya), (4) Guha-devāchārya, (5) Āchārya-bharuchi. (6) Āchārya Kapardi, (8) Śrī Natha-muni and (9) Śrī Yamunāchārya.

1. Bodhāyana a Rishi and disciple of Vyasa, is, like Apastamba, an author of Grihya and Kalpa Sūtras and of a great commentary (*bhāṣya*) on Brahma-sutras, called Bodhāyana-vritti. He is quoted by Śrī Sankarāchārya in his commentaries as well.
2. Dramidāchārya is the author of a commentary on Brahma Sutras called Dramida-bhāṣya. He is also often quoted by Śrī Sankara Āchārya in his Bhāṣya.
3. Brahma Nandi wrote a varttika (gloss) on Brahma Sutras. He is also called Vākya-kāra.
4. Āchārya bhāruchi is author of a Dharma Sastra and is quoted by Vijñānesvara in his

⁴ He was also known as Asuri Kesavacarya

⁵ *Upanayana* is the ceremony of initiation into Vedic studies at which the child is taught the gāyatṛī mantra — it is normally done only for males of the brāhmin, kṣatriya and vaiśya castes. Originally it was also done for girls as well but over the millennia this fell out of fashion. Nowadays it is almost only done by Brahmins.

⁶ Vedāngas are the “limbs” of the Vedas and include — *śikṣa* — phonetics, *kalpa* — ritual, *vyākaraṇa* — grammar, *nirukta* — etymology, *chandasa* — poetry/meters, *jyotiṣa* — astrology.

⁷ The entire edifice of Vedānta philosophy is based upon Scriptural authority called the *Prasthāna-trayam* which comprises of the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma-sūtras.

Mitākṣara.

5. Acharya Kapardi wrote a commentary on Apastamba Kalpa Sutras
6. Nātha-muni, son of Īśvara Muni, wrote Nyaya-tattva — a philosophical treatise on the Viśiṣṭādvaita system, and Yoga-rahasya on the secret doctrine of Yoga system. He lived in Southern India in the 8th century C.E.
7. Yāmunāchārya a *tridaṇḍa sanyāsi*⁸ (monk) wrote Ātma-Siddhi, Īśvara-Siddhi, Samvit-Siddhi, Āgama prāmānya, and other treatises on the above system, and flourished in the 10th century C.E. in Southern India.

16. Why did he not agree with the philosophical conclusions of Yādava-prakāśa although he studied under him?

Because he found that the teachings of Yādava-prakāśa contradicted the sacred scriptures and the writings of the Āchāryas.

17. Having found this out what did he do ?

He argued (debated) with Yādava-prakāśa and condemned his interpretations, and, being unable to reach an agreement, left him.

18. Where, and to whom did he go?

He went to Śrīrangam (Trichinopoly District), having heard that Yāmunāchārya, a great Vaiṣṇava ascetic, was teaching there.

19. What was the nature of Yāmunāchārya's teaching?

He taught the Viśiṣṭādvaita system according to Bodhāyana and Drāmiḍācharya.

20. What happened when Śrī Rāmānujāchārya arrived at Śrīrangam ?

[When he reached there] he found that Yāmunāchārya had left this world for the abode of supreme bliss. He therefore selected as his Guru the best of Yāmunāchārya's disciples, whose name was Mahāpūrṇa āchārya (in Tamil – *Periya-nambi*), by whom he was initiated into the Vaiṣṇava faith at Madhurantakam village in the Chingelpet District.

21. What did they do after this?

They both proceeded to Kanchi, where the Guru (Mahāpūrṇa) instructed the disciple (Rāmānuja) in the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy, including the writings of Bhagavad Bodhāyana and others.

22. Was Śrī Rāmānujāchārya married?

He was married, but in his eighteenth year he ceased to lead a married life, and became a monk — Sanyasi (*tridaṇḍi*) at Kanchi.⁹

23. How long did he live?

He lived 120 years, dying in the year 4238 of the Kali Yuga. (C.E. 1137).

24. Where did he depart this life?

He attained Liberation at Śrīrangam, where his holy body was interred in a shrine in the temple of Śrī Ranganatha, where his [preserved] image is now worshipped.

⁸ *Tridaṇḍi* refers to the fact that he carried three bamboo sticks tied together an insignia of Vaiṣṇava monks. Advaiti Monks or the Brahmin caste carry only a single staff. Monks of non-brahmin castes do not carry any staves at all.

⁹ He abandoned his wife because of her failure to support his cause and for the discriminatory feelings and practices towards his guru Mahāpūrṇa as well as his śūdra mentor Kāñcīpūrṇa.

25. What did he do after he became a Sanyāsi (monk)?

He remained for some time at Kanchi, [gathering and] teaching many disciples. From there he went to Tirupati.

26. What did he do at Tirupati?

He delivered many discourses on the Vedānta in the temple of Śrī Venkatesa in Upper Tirupati. He there re-organised the temple-worship of Śrī Venkatesa.

27. Where did he go from Tirupati?

He visited the sacred places of Southern India, and the Vishnu temples in those places, preaching to multitudes, and initiating many persons.

28. What did he do after making these pilgrimages?

He settled down for some time at Śrīrangam.

29. What happened at Śrīrangam?

He had a philosophical dispute¹⁰ with a Chola King named Krimikanta¹¹, who opposed [Vaishnavism and] his attempts to spread his religion.

30. What was the consequences of this dispute?

He was obliged, with his disciples, to leave Śrīrangam for Mysore territory.

31. Who was the ruler of this country ?

A King named Ballala¹², who reigned at Dhorasamudra independently of Krimikanta Chola.

32.Q. What was the religion of Ballala?

He was a Jain.

33. What steps did Rāmānujāchārya take in this place for the spread of his own religion ?

He debated with many Jain scholars whom he defeated in argument.

34. What effect had this on the King?

He became convinced of the truth of the system taught by Śrī Rāmānujāchārya who converted him into a Śrī Vaiṣṇava and named him Vishnu-varadhana.

35. What did he (Śrī Rāmānujāchārya) do after that?

He constructed on a hill, a town called Tiru-nārāyana-pura (Melukote), and built a temple there¹³. In

¹⁰ He himself did not actually have the dispute, getting intelligence of the evil intentions of the king his disciples encouraged him to flee and his place was taken by Kureśa who defeated the court pandits in debate but was blinded and sent back to Srirangam.

¹¹ *Krimikanta* means “worm-throat” and is a pejorative name given to the king by Vaiṣṇavas because he seems to have developed throat cancer later in life (assumed to be a result of his persecutions of the Vaiṣṇavas.) His real name was Koluthunga Chola I who lived 1070 – 1120)

¹² Vishnu-varadhana (1108–1152 CE) was an emperor of the Hoysala Empire in present day state of Karṇāṭaka. His original name was Bittideva and his brother’s name was Veera Ballala. After conversion he received the name Vishnu-varadhana and took the first steps in creating an independent Hoysala Empire in South India through a series of battles against his overlord, the Western Chalukya King Vikramaditya VI. He also recovered Gangavadi province from the hegemony of the Chola empire. The Hoysalas gained the dignity of a kingdom starting from his rule. He died sometime in 1141 and was succeeded by his son Narasimha I.

the temple, he set up the icon of Śrī Nārāyaṇa. With the assistance of the king he effected settlements for many Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.

36. How long did he remain in Tirunārāyana-puram ?

He lived there for 12 years. When he heard of the death of Krimikanta Chola, he returned to Śrīrangam and re-organised the worship in the great temple there.

37. Did he preach only in Southern India?

No. He went with his disciples to Northern India by way of Tirupati, Ahobilam and the Maharashtra country preaching everywhere as he travelled.

38. What places did he visit in Northern India?

He visited Girnar (Dattatreya Kshetra) in Gujerat, and Dwarka. Thence he went to Prayag (Allahabad), Benares, Mathura and Haridwar.

39. Where did he go from Haridvar ?

He went to Badarikasrama (Badrinath), in the Himalayas; thence to Śrīnagar in Kashmir.

40. What did he do in Śrīnagar?

He visited Śāradapīṭha, a great seat of learning, containing a large library¹⁴. Upon the latter he bestowed copies of his own works. These were accepted, after great discussion, by the pandits there. It was then usual at Śrīnagar to take into the library only those works as were approved of by the Pandits and such of them as were considered best.

41. What works did he present to the library at Śrīnagar?

He is said to have authored altogether seven works:-

- (1). "Śrībhāṣya," (His magnum opus) a large commentary on the Brahma Sutras of Badarayana, according to the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. In this work he criticizes the other philosophical systems, especially that of Śrī Sankarāchārya.
- (2). "Vedanta dīpa", a smaller commentary on Brahms. Sutras.
- (3). "Vedanta Sāra", a gloss on Brahma Sutras.
- (4). "Vedārtha Sangraha", a discourse on the Upanishads.
- (5). "Gita-bhāṣya", a commentary on Bhagavadgita.
- (6). "Gadya-traya", (in prose) a treatise in praise of Nārāyaṇa, written for the use of his disciples.
- (7). "Nitya-grantha", or ordinances relating to the daily worship of Nārāyaṇa.

Of these he presented Śrībhāṣya, Vedārtha Sangraha and Gita-bhāṣya to the library.

42. What important event happened to him at Śāradapīṭha

¹³ Actually the town and temple and the icon were existing long before Rāmānuja's arrival — but under the patronage of the King he had 8 settlements for his Śrīvaiṣṇava followers built there. Melukote was plundered and sacked by the Muslims in the 14th but was rebuilt by the Thimmanna Dannayaka in 1460.

¹⁴ His intention of visiting the library was to obtain a copy of the Bodhāyana Vṛtti which he wanted to use in formulating his own commentary on the Brahma-sūtras. Access to the text was denied him and legend has it that Sarasvati herself handed him the manuscript and sent him on his way. When the disappearance of the manuscript was discovered he was pursued and the mss returned to the library, but during the nights Kuresha had been studying the text and had memorized it in its entirety and thus Rāmānuja was able to complete his magnum opus. It is therefore doubtful that he would have presented a copy of the yet to be written book!

The goddess Sarasvati (goddess of divine wisdom) appeared to him and questioned him on many difficult points in Vedanta philosophy. On being satisfied with his answers; she gave him the title of Śrī Bhashyakara, and an icon of Hayagriva. From that time he was called Śrī-bhāṣyakāra¹⁵.

43. Where did he go from Saradapitha?

He went through Kurukshetra to Ayodhya and Gaya. Thence he went into Bengal to visit Kapilasrama (Sunderbunds, south of Calcutta)

44. Where did he go from Kapilasrama?

He went to Jagannatha puri and other sacred places on the Coromandel Coast; ending his journey at Śrīrangam.

45. Were these his only travels?

No, he twice travelled throughout the whole of India, preaching his philosophy everywhere and initiating many disciples. After his second visit to Northern India, he settled at Śrīrangam, where he remained-till he attained Mokṣa.

46. Did Śrī Rāmānujāchārya have many disciples?

His disciples were very numerous. Once, at Śrīrangam, the disciples present at his lectures numbered seven hundred Sanyāsis (monks), twelve hundred Grihastis (householders called Paramēkantis), five hundred nuns (in Tamil, *Kothis*) and many non-brahmin Vaiṣṇavas, generally called *Bairagis* and *Satanis*.

47. Besides preaching himself, what measures did he take to spread his doctrine?

He appointed, for purposes of initiation and instruction, seventy-four of the most learned of his disciples as [hereditary] Āchārya-puruṣas or Pīṭhādhipatis (lineage-holders).

48. How was the succession of teachers carried on after the death of Śrī Rāmānujāchārya ?

As all the seventy-four Āchārya puruṣas were married men (Grihastis), their descendants, or in the absence of direct descendants, other successors hold the priesthood¹⁶ among Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.

49. How does the succession of teachers of the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy differ from that of the followers of Śrī Sankarāchārya, and Śrī Madhvāchārya?

These two teachers left behind them *Maṭhams* (Monasteries), the heads of which were to bear the names of Śrī Sankarāchārya or Śrī Madhvāchārya, but Śrī Rāmānujāchārya founded no such Maṭhams.

50. Will you tell me the names of some of the [chief] followers of Rāmānujāchārya

Among the chief were Śrīvatsanka Misra and his son Bhattapara-sara, author of several works; Varadavishnu Misra, Śrīrama Misra, Senesvarāchārya, Śrī Vishnu Chittāchārya, who wrote many treatises on the Vedanta, as well as many commentaries on the works of Śrī Rāmānujāchārya.

51. Were there any famous followers of Śrī Rāmānujāchārya who lived after his death?

Yes, Vyasāchārya, author of a commentary on Śrī Bhashya; Vedantāchārya, author of many philosophical treatises, and a great poet of Southern India. Mahāchārya, a renowned author of

¹⁵ “Sri-bhashyakāra” means author of Bhāṣya or Commentary. The name his father gave was Lakṣmanārya which is the same as Sri Rāmānujāchārya, both meaning, the younger brother of Rama.

¹⁶ This can be confusing — priests (*purohits*) are those professionals who undergo specific training in order to administer the sacraments according to the Grihya sūtras — directive texts. *Āchāryas* are those who are authorised to specifically administer the Sri Vaiṣṇava sacrament of initiation (*samāśrayanam*) and not necessarily the others.

works on Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy.

52. When did these great men live?

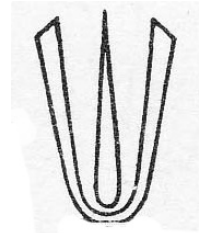
Vyasāchārya and Vedantāchārya flourished in the 13th century and Mahāchārya in the 15th century C.E.

53. Are there any divisions among the followers of Śrī Rāmānujāchārya ?

Yes, there are two, the Vaḍa-kalai and Teṅ-kalai.

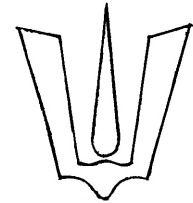
54. What are the characteristics of the Vada-kalai division?

They attach greater value to the [Sanskrit texts]; Vedas, Sastras, Śrībhāshya, etc. The white mark (*ūrdhva-puṇḍra*) they wear on their foreheads is like the English letter U. Vaḍa-kalais (from *vaḍa-kalai* which means in Tamil, 'Northerners' i.e. based at Kanchi) are so called because they have great regard for Sanskrit philosophical literature and they follow the principles laid down in the *Rahasyas* (Tamil Secret literature) written by Vedantāchārya (Vedanta Desikan) who lived in Kāñcipūram.



55. What are the characteristics of the Teṅ-kalai division?

The Teṅ-kalais (which means in Tamil; the 'Southerners') are so called because they have greater regard for the Tamil Divya-prabandha and they follow the principles in the rahasyas of Lokācārya Piḷḷai (who lived in the 13th century at Śrīrangam), and their Tamil commentaries by Manavāla Mahāmuni who flourished in the 14th century in Tinnevely District. [The white mark (*ūrdhva-puṇḍra*) they wear on their foreheads is like the English letter Y].



56. How long have these divisions existed?

For the last four hundred years. [There are 18 major points of difference called the *aṣṭa-daśa-bhedas*]

57. What is the Divya-prabandha ?

It is a collection of 4000 Tamil devotional and philosophical poems composed by Vaiṣṇava devotee/poet/saints (Āḷvārs) — both brahmin and non-brahmin — who lived before the time of Śrī Rāmānujāchārya. Their images are worshipped in the Vaiṣṇava temples of Southern India. Śrī Sathakopan [a sūdra] was the foremost of these devotees. [Among them was a woman named Āṇḍāl]

58. What does the "Divya-prabandha" contain?

It contains many of the essential principles of the Vedanta [in the form of poems], with many prayers to [the various aspects and incarnations of] Nārāyaṇa.

59. What did Śrī Sathakopa do?

Śrī Sathakopa, otherwise called Nammāḷvār was a great Yogi or Mahatma, much revered. He lived in Alwar-tiru-nagiri on the banks of the Tamraparni river (Tinnevely District). His most important work is "Tiru-vāyimoli." containing 1,000 verses included in the "Divya-prabandha." This work [which is considered to be equal to the Rig Veda in authority] is held in great reverence by all Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.



60. What is the meaning of the term "Śrī Vaiṣṇava" ?

Vaiṣṇavas are those who give Vishnu the supremacy over all other deities. The term includes nearly

twenty branches, including the Madhvas (followers of Śrī Madhvāchārya), the followers of Śrī Vallabhāchārya, and those of [Nimbarka and] Chaitanya. The term Śrī Vaiṣṇava is applied only to the followers of Rāmānujāchārya. It is the general name by which both factions — Vadagalai and Tengalai are known.

The initiation (*samāsrayanam*) of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas is based on five, principles called Pancha-saṁskāra. They are as follows :-

- (1). *Tāpa* — branding on two shoulders with the marks of *śaṅkha* (the conch) and *chakra* (the disc) emblems of Vishnu.
- (2). *Puṇḍra* — the drawing of white lines (of a sort of white y) on the forehead with a red line (of powdered saffron, &c.) in the middle. They should be marked in 11 other places in the body. These twelve marks should be worn every day.
- (3). *Nāma* — naming the postulant with one of the names of Vishnu, and one should be called by those names only.
- (4). *Mantra-upadeśa* — Mantras which are taught by the Guru along with their meanings at the time of initiation. The Mantras of Vishnu are various, the most important of them are:— one of six syllables called *Vishnu ṣaḍākṣarī*, one of eight called *Nārāyaṇa aṣṭākṣarī*, one of twelve called *Vasudeva dvādaśākṣarī*, a *dvaya* or mantra for taking refuge (*śaraṇāgati mantra*), and *carama-śloka* (verse 66, chapter 18 of Bhagavadgita). Of these, *Nārāyaṇa aṣṭākṣarī* and the last two are called *rahasya-traya*, or *mantra-traya* (the three Secrets, the three Mantras), and are taught to every one at the time of initiation. This initiation can be obtained by one of any gender, caste or creed — even a mlechcha or chandala, can become a Vaiṣṇava. Every day the Vaiṣṇava should recite these Mantras a certain number of times.
- (5). *Yāga* — worship of icons of Vishnu, [the method of] which should be taught at the time of initiation by the Guru's presenting an icon to the disciple. Thence the disciple should worship it and no other deity¹⁷.

61. What are Śrī Vaiṣṇavas called in Northern India?

They are there called Śrī Sampradāyis¹⁸.

62. Upon what authorities are the writings of Śrī Rāmānujāchārya based?

- (1) The Vedas (Mantras, Brahmanas and Upanishads),
- (2). The Smritis, especially that of Manu.
- (3). The Pancharatra Agamas, so far as they relate to the Vedanta.
- (4). Mahabharata, Bhagavad-Gita and Vishnu Purana.
- (5). The commentaries on Brahma Sutras, by Dramidāchārya and Bodhāyana, as already mentioned.

63. What is the central point of the Viśiṣṭhādvaita Philosophy?

That Para¹⁹-Brahman (the Supreme Being) is the only One Truth (*tattva*) in reality.

¹⁷ Nowadays the practice is simply to offer worship to the ācārya's icon at the time. Later if the initiate is willing an interested then an icon can be obtained and the method of worshipping it is taught.

¹⁸ There is another branch of the Sri Sampradaya called the Rāmānandis – followers of Rāmananda a migrant guru from South India.

¹⁹ *Para* means “Supreme” and *Brahman* means “the Immensity.” The Term Brahman can be applied both to the Absolute as well as the material universe, so *Para* is used to affirm that the Supreme Absolute Reality is meant.

64. What is said about Para-Brahman?

It is said to be Eternal (*nitya*), Unconditioned Reality (*satya*), Eternal and Infinite Consciousness (*jñāna*), Infinite in point of time and space (*ananta*), Omnipresent (*vibhu*), Omniscient (*sarvajña*), and Omnipotent (*sarva-śakti*). It is the material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*), the instrumental cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*), as well as the auxiliary cause (*sahakari-kāraṇa*) of the universe.²⁰

65. What other names is IT²¹ known by?

In the Vedas It is called *Sat* (self-existent or Truth), *ātma* (Self), *Brahman* (the Immensity), *Īśa* or *Īśvara* (Lord). *Viṣṇu*, (the All-pervader –within) *Nārāyaṇa* (the Ground of Being). In other sacred texts It is called *puruṣottama* (the Supreme Being) and *Vāsudeva* (the all-pervader – without)

66. How does IT exist?

It exists in inseparable union with *chit* (*ātma*) and *achit* (*anātma*) — two other realities. It is knowable only in that condition, but It is not material. It is different from *chit* [which are all conscious or sentient entities] and *achit* [all insentient entities] and is of a intellectual [conceptual] nature (*jñānātmaka*)

67. At first you said there was only ONE reality, now you say *chit* [sentient beings] and *achit* [insentient matter] are two other realities; how are these statements to be reconciled?

The only independent reality is Para-brahman. The other two are dependent on it. These three, *chit*, *achit* and Para-brahman, do not exist separately but, like substance and attribute, in inseparable union with one another. Brahman is compared to substance, and *chit* and *achit* to quality of the substance such as colour, dimension, etc., are qualities of paper, for instance.

Commentary

According to Viśiṣṭhādvaita philosophy there are three realities — God (Brahman/Īśvara), individual conscious monads (*jīvas/cit*) and insentient matter (*jagat/acit*). Whereas God is a substantive reality the other two are dependant realities — but at the same time one organic whole.

According to modern scientific notions, matter = quantum energy = consciousness. How do we square these two view points?

68. What is said in the scriptures about the relation subsisting between these three ?

In the scriptures, *chit* and *achit* are declared to be the **body** (*śarīra*) of Para-brahman, which is [the occupant of the body] — *śarīri*. The *śarīra* does not exist without *śarīri*, nor *śarīri* without *śarīra*.²²

69. Q. Is this the meaning of the term *śarīra*, in the Upanishad ?

In the Upanishad, the term *śarīra*, is not used to denote 'bodies', such as human bodies, but to denote attributes, the substance being *śarīri*. *Śarīra* refers to that which is *Aprthak-siddha* (i.e. in inseparable union, or connection with that which has for ever existed, and which is not brought about at any intermediate period, and which can never cease. Thus there is an indissoluble union between *chit*, *achit* and *Īśvara*.

²⁰ According to this system every effect is produced by three causes, viz., *upādāna kāraṇa* (material cause), *Nimitta-kāraṇa* (instrumental cause), and *sahakāri-kāraṇa* (auxiliary cause) for example clay is the material cause, the potter is the instrumental cause, and time is the auxiliary cause of a pot.

²¹ Seeing that the ABSOLUTE is beyond all notions of gender the pronoun best used is IT.

²² Just as we are comprised of a physical body, a mind and a Self – they are academically definable as separate things but all three exist and operate as a single whole. The physical body can be seen as *achit*, the mind as *chit* and the Self as *Īśvara*.

70. There is then, a *real* difference between these three?

Yes, but that *real* difference is neither conditioned (*aupādhika*) nor illusionary (*māyākṛta*). *Chit*, *achit* and *Īśvara* exist in union with one another, and are knowable only in that united condition. In other words, *Īśvara* is the locus of the attributes *achit* and *chit*, which three, as explained in the scriptures or ascertained by inference, are ONE thing²³ (*tattva*).

71. Why is this philosophy called the Viśiṣṭhādvaita?

The word *Viśiṣṭhādvaita* is composed of the two words *Viśiṣṭha* and *Advaita*. *Advaita* means non-duality, or *one* reality; *Viśiṣṭha* means containing the attributes (*viśeṣana*) i.e., containing *chit* and *achit* as [inseparable] *śarīra*, The term *Viśiṣṭhādvaita*, therefore, means non-duality, or one reality-Parabrahman — which is united with *chit* and *achit* as its attributes.

72. How do you reconcile this system of Philosophy with certain passages in the Upanishads which set forth the doctrine of absolute non-duality? (vide appendix for details)

These passages cannot be looked upon as teaching absolute non-duality, for there are other passages which teach the reality of *chit*, *achit* and *Īśvara*, and others again teaching that *achit* and *chit* are the *śarīra* of Para-brahman.

Hence there are seemingly conflicting passages in the Upanishads and the only way to reconcile them is to look upon *achit* and *chit* as the ‘attributes’ of Para-brahman, and Para-brahman, the substantive reality, as the locus of these attributes. Hence there is an indissoluble union of the three and this is what is meant when non-duality is asserted in the Vedānta.

73. But is not Brahman said in the scriptures to be *nirguṇa* (devoid of attributes and qualities) ?

Yes, but by this it is not meant that Brahman has no attributes whatever, for every reality must have attributes (and Brahman is a reality) but what is meant is, that Brahman is devoid of those qualities of Prakṛti (Material Nature) to which humankind is subject, such as negative qualities (*heya-guṇas*), material limitations and imperfections [such as ignorance and suffering].

74. What is meant by the *guṇas*?

According to Sanskrit lexicography the term *guṇas* signifies the three qualities of Prakṛti — *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Brahman is not subject to the qualities of Prakṛti and is therefore said to be *nirguṇa*. (devoid of *guṇas*).

Commentary

Prakṛti consists of three constituent forces called *Guṇas*. These are postulated to account for the diversified energies and objects of experience. The three constituents each has its characteristic function. *Guna* means a cord. They are the actual substances or ingredients, of which Prakṛti is constituted. They make up the whole world evolved out of Prakṛti.

Sattva Guṇa is derived from *sat*, "that which is real or existent." It is applied to the force that illuminates and reveals all manifestations. It is responsible for the lightness of things, the upward movement of fire, and the currents of wind. It manifests itself as light, balance harmony.

Rajas Guṇa is derived from *rañj*, "to be clouded, affected or moved," and it is used to connote that force which affects and moves the other two constituents. It is the activating and exciting potency without which the other constituents could not manifest their inherent qualities. Its function is to move things, overcome resistance, do work. It is responsible for all motion and change that goes on throughout nature.

²³ An examples would be the molecular structure of water which consists of 2 atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen — separate atoms but one molecule.

Tamas Guṇa means "darkness": Here it is used to connote the force that restrains, obstructs, and envelops the other two constituents by counter-acting the tendency of Rajas to do work and Sattva to reveal. It is the restraining and binding potency of nature. Its function is to resist motion. It is responsible for the attraction and downward pull of the earth and the tendency of water to descend. It is the cause of mass, weight and inertia.

75. Is not Para-Brahman said to be nameless ?

Yes because it has no *particular* name. It is signified by all names either directly or indirectly. Agni, Indra and other names signify it sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. Nārāyaṇa, Vishnu, and Vasudeva signify it directly. [Nārāyaṇa = the ground of Being, Vishnu = that pervades the external universe and Vasudeva = that which pervades in the inner-universe.]

76. Is not Para-Brahman said to be formless (*nirākāra*) and colourless (*arūpa*).

Yes. It is shapeless, formless and colourless, because it is omnipresent, all-pervading and infinite, but it can take upon itself, by it's own will, any form or body (which is finite) — “of the colour of the sun.”

77. Is such a body produced by Karma?

No.

78. Is such a body material?

It is not composed of ordinary matter. It is composed of *śuddha-sattva*, a peculiar intellectual substance.²⁴

79. Of what use is such a body ?

The contemplation of an Impersonal Deity being impossible, this form is taken by *Īśvara* to facilitate the contemplation of Yogis (spiritual practitioners).

Īśvara is [essentially] impersonal but It may be considered 'personal' when It takes a body upon itself and of Its own free will, and does some good for the world. Such a body is made of *śuddha-sattva* (Pure Light) and is of five kinds:—

(1). *para-vigraha* with which *Īśvara* always remains in *Vaikuṇṭha*²⁵ with many instruments as śaṅkha (conch), cakṛa (discus), gadā (mace), etc. and ornaments as kirīṭa (crown) kuṇḍala (ear-rings), hāra (necklaces), kaustubha (chest-gem) etc.

(2.) *vyūha-vigraha* — [emanations of] Saṅkarṣana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha. With these three bodies Vishnu remains in *Amoda*, *Bhuvana*, and *Pramoda* respectively. These latter are called Vishnu-lokas situated in Sātya loka within the material universe, and in them they are worshipped by *upāsakās* (Devas) who attain Mokṣa at the end of *prākṛta pralaya* when these lokas are destroyed.

Commentary

Description of the Vyūhas

I am unaware of the learned pandit's description of the Vyūhas or hypostatic emanations of Lord Viṣṇu —he seems to be presenting the view of the Vaikhānasas.

²⁴ The existence of such a *stuff* is postulated but since it is not conditioned by time, space or causation it is therefore inconceivable.

²⁵ *Vaikuṇṭha* is commonly understood to be the 'heaven' of Viṣṇu and is often conceived of in a purely material way as a spiritual world with palaces, lakes and groves etc. etc. much like the heaven of the Christians, but the term actually means the absolutely 'unhindered' state. A state in which there is no conceivable obstruction, limitation or hindrance of any sort. A transcendental state of pure bliss (*ānanda*) beyond comprehension and thus inexpressible.

The following is a description according to the Pancharatra Agama of their function in the projection, maintenance and dissolution of the Universe.

1. **Sañkarṣaṇa** — with this *vyūha* the non-pure creation becomes dimly manifest like an embryo without internal distinctions. The *guṇa* concerned is *bala*, (omnipotence).

2. **Pradyumna** — with this *vyūha* the duality of Spirit (*Puruṣa*) and Matter (*Prakṛti*) makes its appearance, by means of the *aiśvarya* (absolute independence) *guṇa*. Pradyumna causes the projection of the group soul (*mānava sarga*) and of primordial matter (*pradhāna*) and subtle Time (*kāla*).

3. **Aniruddha** — this *vyūha* by means of the *śakti* (ability to become the material universe) *guṇa*, causes the evolution of the atoms of Manifest matter and of gross Time out of the earlier Primordial matter and Subtle Time. This allows the evolution of the Matter and Spirit resulting in the mixed creation (*miśra sṛṣṭi*) of the Souls.

(3). *Vibhava-vigraha* — incarnation of God in a human form such as those of Rama, Krishna etc.

(4). *Arca-vigraha* — an invisible energy (of Pure Illumination) which enters into icons, by the force of concentration and chanting of mantras [by the priests at the time of consecration], the icon is then called an *arca*. This energy will leave the icon if it is not properly worshipped, or becomes [tainted by something] impure.

(5). *Antaryāmi-vigraha* is a manifestation of the Lord which appears to a person when he meditates on the real self.²⁶

While Īśvara takes up any of these bodies, Lakṣmi²⁷ follows her lord with a similar body, and remains with him. Although Īśvara is infinite, a finite body may be said to contain him, and to move in him as a pot containing Akasa in it, moves in akasa.

80. What is *achit* [the insentient component of the Universe]?

Achit is threefold. It is Time (*Kāla*), Primordial Nature (*mūla-prakṛti*) and *śuddha-sattva* (pure illumination).

81. What is time ?

Time is said to be [twofold — (a) Absolute Time which is] the cause of all changes, which is eternal, universal and unconditioned. (b) Conditioned time (*khaṇḍa-kāla*) is not eternal, and is reckoned by the rotation and revolution of planets, as hours, days, yugas, kalpas, etc.

82. What is Nature?

Nature is the material basis (*upadāna kāraṇa*) of the universe, just as clay is the *upadāna kāraṇa* of the pot, and as such forms the body of the individual Self (*Jivātma*), and of everything else in the cosmos. It is different from either *chit* (*Jivātma*) or *Īśvara*. It has no origin, it is self-existing,

²⁶ *Antaryāmi* is also a term used for the aspect of the Lord's energy which inhabits every living being, often called the "Over-soul" or "Higher-self."

²⁷ In Srivaishnava theology, the One Divine Nature expresses Its will to redeem by assuming a dual Spiritual Form - Nārāyaṇa & Sri/Lakṣmī - these two aspects are philosophically inseparable but functionally distinct. Nārāyaṇa with perfect justice rules the universe as Father, but Sri His Eternal Consort resides within His heart as the embodiment of Saving Grace - the Universal Mother. She ensures that the reign of righteousness is tempered by redemptive mercy. The Lord dispenses justice in accordance with the merit and demerit of the jiva and Lakshmi is entirely dependent upon the Lord, but through her Beauty and Grace she captivates the Lord and transforms his desire for justice (*nigraha-shakti*) into redemptive Grace (*anugraha-shakti*), she acts as the Mediatrix between the Lord and the jivas.

eternal, universal and single, but it is in every respect subordinate to Brahman.

83. By what names is Nature called in the Scriptures?

It is called *prakṛti*, *pradhāna*, *mūla-prakṛti*, *avyakta* and *māyā*. It is also sometimes signified by the words *Tamas*, *akṣara* and *Brahman*. It is the centre of the three guṇas:— *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*; with these attributes it produces all its manifestations.

84. What does it first evolve?

Mahat (intellect).²⁸

85. What is evolved from *Mahat* ?

Ahaṅkāra (egotism) which is threefold, viz., Sāttvik-ahaṅkāra /*vaikārika*, Rajas-ahaṅkāra /*Taijasa*, and Tamas-ahaṅkāra /*Bhūtādi*.

86. Explain the nature of *Mahat* and *Ahaṅkāra*.

I must explain these by a simile. They correspond to the various conditions of matter. Just as clay dug out of the earth undergoes many changes before it is made into a pot, so matter undergoes many changes before the material universe comes into existence.

Prakṛiti means matter in a certain state in which neither of the qualities *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* predominate over the others. *Mahat* does not here mean intellect (*buddhi*) as in Sāṅkhya, but rather refers to the immediate manifestation of matter in which the three qualities are not in the same proportion. It is threefold, *sāttvika-mahat*, *rajasa-mahat*, and *tamasa-mahat*; these produce respectively the three kinds of Ahaṅkāras (*sāttvika*, *rajasa*, and *tamasa ahaṅkāras*). Again *mahat* is not *adhyavaśāya* or *buddhi* as in Sāṅkhya, where it is a manifestation of *jñāna* (knowledge), but in this (Viśiṣṭadvaita) system — *Mahat* is a manifestation of matter, and consciousness is an attribute of Jivātma. *Ahaṅkāra* is not here used to signify egoism as in the Sāṅkhya system, but is used here for want of a better word. It is not *Antaḥkarana* or *Abhimāna* as in other philosophy, but is a manifestation of *Mahat*, and is the cause of the subtle elements senses. *Manas* in this philosophy is not the same as in the Sāṅkhya system, but it is the sixth sense (*antarindriya*) by means of which every kind of knowledge is produced in the *ātma*. Moreover it is considered as atomic (*aṇu*) situated in the centre of the heart where also the five senses are situated and their functions (*vṛttis*) are carried from the heart to the organs of sense through their nerves.

87. What is produced from *Sāttvik-ahaṅkāra* ?

From Sāttvik-ahaṅkāra are produced.

- (1) the mind (*manas* or *antaḥ-karaṇa*).
- (2) the five organs of sense (*jñānendriyas*) viz. the skin as organ of touch (*tvak*), the eye (*chakṣus*), the tongue (*jihvā*), the nose (*ghrāṇa*), the ear (*śrotram*).
- (3) the five organs of action (*Karmendriyas*) viz., throat (*vāk*), hands (*pāni*), feet (*pāda*), anus (*pāyu*) and reproductive organs (*upastha*). The second class faculties of perception corresponding respectively with the five senses.

88. What is produced from *Tamas-ahaṅkāra* ?

²⁸ This principle which is called *Mahat-tattva*, the "Great Principle," or simply *Mahat*, is used to connote *Cosmic Intelligence* — the Universal *Buddhi*. In this context, *intelligence* is understood as the **Universal Expansive Principle** — the capacity to expand, reveal, and ascertain; there is no association with individual ideation, relationship, or identity.

From Tamas-ahaṅkāra are produced the *Pañca-tanmātras* (the five subtle elements) which may be taken as the essences containing the attributes of the five gross elements (*Pañca Mahā-bhūtas*). The *Pañca-tanmātras* are: sound (*śabda*), tangibility (*sparṣa*), visibility (*rūpa*), taste or sapidity (*rasa*), odour (*gandha*). These *tanmātras* produce the five elements.

89. What are the five elements?

- (1) Ether (*ākāśa*), produced by the subtle element of sound (*śabda-tanmātra*). It is that subtle substance, which pervades all space and exists every where and in everything.
- (2) Air (*vāyu*), or wind, is produced by the subtle element of tangibility (*sparṣa tanmātra*) which is its peculiar attribute.
- (3) Light, heat or fire (*agni*) which is produced by the subtle element of visibility (*rūpa-tanmātra*).
- (4) Water (*ap*), produced, by the subtle element of sapidity (*rasa tanmātra*).
- (5) Earth (*prithivi*) produced by the subtle element of odour (*gandha tanmātra*)

90. What is produced from Rajas-ahaṅkāra ?

Rajas-ahaṅkāra aids and both Sāttvik-ahaṅkāra and Tamas-ahaṅkāra – Matter (*prakṛti*) and mahat, by the will of Īśvara, to produce everything.

91. In what form did Nature (*prakṛti*) exist before the evolution of the Universe.

Before evolution began, Nature, (*prakṛiti*) was without form and unknowable. It may however be said to have been atomic. Its attributes were in a latent condition (*sukṣmāvasthā*).

92. What is *śuddha-sattva*?

It is a substance not subject to qualities of matter from which it is different. The names given to it are *svaccha-dravya* and *nitya-vibhuti* (Pure Light). Out of this *śuddha-sattva* are formed the Vaikunta-loka (the heaven of Vishnu) and the bodies of Īśvara and of mukta, when of their own free-will, they take bodies upon themselves. It is intellectual in its nature but yet not being ego, it is included in *achit*.

This *śuddha-sattva* being ethereal like *ākāśa*, cannot be seen by the eye.

93. What is *chit*?

It is Jīvātma and is not material. It is eternal, not produced by anything else, and different from *achit* and Īśvara. The Jīvātma in each individual is different from that in another.

It is pure, blissful (*ānandamaya*) atomic (*anu*), intellectual, immutable, the centre of consciousness, the ego (subject to Karma till it attains Mokṣa), subordinate (*sesha*) to Para-brahman, Until it attains Mokṣa it cannot exist without Prakṛiti. Every particle of Prakṛiti contains Jīva and is the *śarīra* (body) of that Jīva which it contains every Jīva has the Supreme spirit as *śarīri*. (*antaryāmin*) Para-brahman pervades every jīva as well as every particle of matter. Jīva is of three classes.

The Jīvātma (ego) is of an intellectual nature, and is at the same time the centre of intellect or consciousness. Its seat is in the heart, *Jīvātma* being finite in atomic form, but its attribute (consciousness) is infinite and of various kinds such as perception, inference, etc. it proceeds to various objects, near or distant without any limitation as to time or space as does the light from the sun. This consciousness is eternal and real but its manifestations (perception, inference, &c.) require some other aid. Therefore all its manifestations (or *avastha*) are impermanent but consciousness itself is eternal. All mental functions such as judgment, doubt, desire, fear, etc., are manifestations (*avasthas*) of it.

Cit (or *pratyak*) means that which possesses consciousness. It signifies both Īśvara and Jīvātma; but Īśvara's consciousness being eternal and infinite, and not requiring any aid for development,

and Jīva's consciousness being limited [and contracted] owing to *bandha* (bondage) the term *chit*, is used generally to signify only *Jīvātma*. Although the form of Jīvātmā atomic (anu), in mokṣa its consciousness becomes infinite.

94. Please explain the three classes of Jīva.

They are:—

- (1) The *nityas* who permanently enjoy Supreme Bliss (*Nityānanda*, *Brahmānanda*) and are never subject to matter or karma. They are omniscient and dwell in Vaikuṅṭha-loka. They are Ananta, Garuda, Vishvaksena, etc.
- (2) *Muktas* who have attained *Mokṣa* (Liberation) and who are thus freed from all miseries and from the bondage of matter and have become omniscient.
- (3) *Baddhas* (bound) are those who are subjected to all Karma and to the miseries arising from connection with matter. They are the devas, human beings, animals, etc.

95. I understood you to say at first that Para-Brahman was the great first cause of all things, but you afterwards said that matter or Nature was the material basis of the universe please explain how this so?

Though matter is the material basis (*upadāna kāraṇa*²⁹) of the universe it cannot exist without Para-Brahman, being its attribute or *śarīra*. Thus Para-Brahman may itself be said to be the material basis of matter which is its *śarīra* itself evolving many forms. In other words, matter is not the material basis of the Universe independently of Para-Brahman but, as an attribute of Para-Brahman it is a dependent or secondary material basis. By material basis I here mean that, through which an effect is produced on its form being changed, as gold is the material basis on an ornament and clay of a pot.³⁰

Matter exists in two conditions, the *sūkṣmā* the subtle or latent and the undifferentiated condition; and the *sthūla* or differentiated condition it produces a congeries of forms called *Jagat* (universe). In Hindu philosophy matter, in its latent condition, is said to be the cause, and in its manifested condition the effect. In this sense gold and clay are said to be the material causes of the ornaments and the pot. But, whether manifested or unmanifested, the same matter is always held to be the *śarīra* of Para-Brahman, Para-Brahman being its *śarīrī* or Centre.

96. The material basis and the instrumental cause are different from one another, as the gold is different from the goldsmith and the pot from the potter. How then can Para-Brahman be both material cause and instrumental cause?

Para-Brahman is said to be the instrumental cause, because, by its will, matter, its attribute, evolves the universe out of itself.

Time (*kāla*) is said to be the *sahakāri-kāraṇa* (auxiliary cause) of the cosmos, and Para-Brahman being the *śarīrī* (locus) of *kāla*, is also said to be the *sahakāri-kāraṇa* of the cosmos.

97. But if the universe is said to be brought into existence by the evolution of matter, how can Para-Brahman be said to be the cause of creation?

²⁹ In Hindu philosophy *upadāna kāraṇa* is technically said to be the material cause.

³⁰ These are two common metaphors used in Vedānta to illustrate the concept that all phenomena are modifications only but Reality remains the same. Ornaments are varied and different but when reduced to its real substance they are all nothing but gold. Clay is a substance which can be moulded into thousands of forms and utensils but they are all nothing but clay. The Upanishads declare that the entire Universe is nothing but Brahman, but what we see are its multifarious modifications.

The word 'creation' is a misnomer. Para-Brahman *evolves* the universe out of already existing matter, and matter, in obedience to the will of Para-Brahman, evolves the universe out of itself. This evolution³¹ is called *creation*. It is impossible to believe that anything can be created out of nothing. Creation is said to be of two kinds and also of three kinds.

98. What are the two kinds?

They are (1) General creation (*samaṣṭi sṛṣṭi*) and (2) specific creation (*vyaṣṭhi sṛṣṭi*)

99. What *samaṣṭi sṛṣṭi* ?

Samaṣṭi sṛṣṭi is the evolution of Mahat, Ahankara, etc., in obedience to the will of Para-Brahman.

100. What is *vyaṣṭhi sṛṣṭi*?

Vyaṣṭhi sṛṣṭi is the evolution that results from the combination in regular proportion (Pañci-karaṇa) of the five elements after the above come into existence. Without such combination no individual evolution can take place, and by this evolution, aided by Karma, are produced the various bodies in the Universe which bodies are of four kinds.

101. What are the four kinds of bodies in the Universe ?

They are :-

- (1) *Sura* [including the various other celestial beings such as Daityas, Gandharvas, etc.]
- (2) *Nara* (human beings).³²
- (3) *Tiryak* (animals).
- (4) *Sthāvara* (vegetables and minerals).

102. What are the three kinds of 'Creation' ?

They are:-

- (1) *Prākṛta-sṛṣṭi* — or the evolution of Mahat, Ahankāra, etc., corresponding to the *samaṣṭi sṛṣṭi* above explained. It takes place once, in the beginning, in each Mahā-kalpa (the lifetime of Brahmā/Hiranyagarbha³³)
- (2) *dainamdina-sṛṣṭi* — evolution that takes place once in the beginning, in each Brahmā kalpa (day of Brahmā). It corresponds to *vyaṣṭhi sṛṣṭi*.
- (3) *Nitya-sṛṣṭi* — the evolution that takes place daily, according to the effects of Karma such as the birth and growth of all gross bodies.

³¹ The term used in Sanskrit is *sṛṣṭi* which means 'projection' — when a movie is about to begin all that is seen is the blank screen. The projector then starts up and throws light onto the screen in various combinations which constitute the movie, along with sound. In the same way the entire phenomenal universe is not a creation from nothing (which would make it an illusion) but a projection of the very substance of Brahman. The metaphor used is that of the spider that projects and spins the web from its own abdomen.

³² Human jīvas also exist in 2 other forms as well as *pretas* — "hungry ghosts" when they have left the human body and before they take on another rebirth either on earth or in an astral plane, and as *nārakis* (hell-beings) when they obtain a special body — *yātana-śarīra* to experience the torments of purgatory.

³³ There is likely to be some confusion here. Our author uses the terms Brahmā and Hiranyagarbha interchangeably but according to the Upanishads they are technically different. Reality is said to exist in states (*catuṣ-pāt*) (1) *Brahman* — the totality of Being, absolute and inconceivable, (2) *Īśvara* — the Personal Lord of the Universe who creates through the agency of Brahmā. (3) *Hiranya-garbha* — lit. 'golden womb' which refers to the total aggregate of individual jīvas or Selves (souls) and (4) *Virāt* — the manifested universe of quantum matter.

103. What is a Kalpa?

A Kalpa is a period of vast time, there are two Kalpas, *Brahmā-kalpa* and *Mahā-kalpa*. A Kalpa is made up of shorter periods of time called *Manvantaras* and these again are made up of periods [of time] called Yugas of which there are four.

104. What are the four Yugas?

- (1) Kali Yuga of 432,000 years. (2) Dvāpara Yuga of 864,000, years.
 (3) Treta Yuga of 1,296,000 years (4) Krita Yuga of 1,728,000 years.

The sum total of these four Yugas, 4,320,000 years constitutes one Mahā-Yuga.

The Four Ages — Catur-yuga = 1 Mahā Yuga

| Yuga | deva years | human years |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| satya yuga | 4800 years | 1,728,000 |
| treta yuga | 3600 years | 1,296,000 |
| dvapara yuga | 2400 years | 864,000 |
| kali yuga | 1200 years | 432,000 |
| | 12,000 | 4,320,000 |

1000 Maha-yugas = 1 Kalpa = 4,320,000,000 yrs = day of Brahma

360 Kalpas = 1 Brahma year. Brahma's life span is 100 years which is 36,000 Kalpas!

105. What is a Manvantara ?

Manvantara is the period of one Manu's³⁴ rulership and is equal to seventy-one Maha Yugas. There are fourteen such Manvantaras.

106. What is a Brahmā Kalpa?

Brahma Kalpa, or one day of Brahma is equal to fourteen Manvantaras together with the Sandhis, *i.e.*, the intervals between each Manu. This whole period is equal to 1000 Mahā Yugas.

107. What is a Maha Kalpa

A Mahā Kalpa is 360 days of Brahmā or Brahmā Kalpas, together with nights or quiescent periods of equal duration, make up one year of Brahmā. A hundred of such years constitute the lifetime of Brahmā which, is called a Mahā-kalpa this is equal to 311,040,000,000,000, human years.

108. What part of the present Mahā Kalpa have we now reached?

One half of this period has elapsed since the evolution of the universe in its present form. That half is called *para* and the second half or *apara* has just begun. That is to say the 51st year of Brahmā's life has commenced. So far the reigns of six Manus have passed, and the one at present reigning is the seventh called Vaivasvata Manu. Twenty-seven out of the seventy-one Mahāyugas have elapsed since he began to reign and we are now in the 28th Mahāyuga. Of this Mahāyuga three minor Yugas have gone and we are now in the 4,988th year (1887) of the present fourth /Kali Yuga³⁵.

109. What is Pralaya ?

When the universe changes, from its present objective or manifested, into a latent (*sūkṣma*) condition, it is said to be in *Pralaya*. Pralaya is of four kinds, viz., (1) Prākṛita Pralaya (2) Naimittika Pralaya, (3) Nitya Pralaya, (4) Atyantika Pralaya.

³⁴ A Manu is a cosmic administrator and legislator.

³⁵ The present *Kali Yuga* is computed to have begun on Friday, February 18, 3102 BCE., and will last for another 426,891 years.

110. What is Prākṛita Pralaya ?

Prākṛita Pralaya is that in which the whole universe changes from its present manifest state into a latent state and becomes dissolved into unmanifested Nature in which state there is no tension between the 3 guṇas — *rajas*, *sattva* and *tamas*, and hence no evolution can take place. This Prākṛita Pralaya takes place once, at the end in each lifetime of Brahmā /Mahā-kalpa.

111. What is Naimitika Pralaya?

This Pralaya takes place once, at the end, in each Brahmā-kalpa. In it the three lokas (solar system³⁶) change from their present condition into an elementary one — all things in them being reduced to their primitive elements.

112. What is a Nitya Pralaya?

Nitya Pralaya takes place every moment, it is that change which bodies undergo when they pass into a perishable condition such as degeneration and death, etc.

113. What is Atyantika Pralaya?

Atyantika Pralaya is that condition in which the connection between Jīva and matter is severed. This takes place when a Jīva attains Mokṣa [Liberation].

114. I understand you to say that the universe is *real* and does not perish completely. But we see that pots are broken in pieces, streams dry up, and other material things become dissolved or otherwise destroyed. 'How then is the universe real ?

I do not say that the universe is *real* in any particular form any more than a pot, a stream or any particular object. Every thing that has form is subject to decay and destruction. In other words forms are all destructible but not the real substance which is their material basis³⁷. All gross bodies perish, the only real things are the *sūkṣma* particles which are uncreated and indestructible and, in that condition unknowable. That is to say in Pralaya, the 3 guṇas are inactive, and when they become active and reactive with each other then evolution takes place. A pot may be broken and the pieces reduced to dust, but the atoms forming the dust cannot be destroyed. In this sense the universe is real.

115. What are birth and death?

The act of Jivātma in entering a body is called *birth*. It's abandonment of a body is called *death*. The Jīva dwells in one body for some time and then abandons it, entering after a longer or shorter interval into another body. Its change to another body is called Rebirth. Birth, death, and rebirth are necessities of the body only, which is changeable, but not of the Jīva which is in itself changeless.

116. But if Jivātma is immaterial, eternal and pure, how can it come into connection with matter (i.e. by taking a body) and thus become subject to please and pain ?

Karma is the cause of the connection of Jivātma with matter in the shape of the *kārāṇa śarīra* (the human monad), as well as of misery and happiness. Karma is the producing cause of birth, death, rebirth and every kind of body mentioned above.

³⁶ A *loka* is a “realm” or even more accurately a “dimension” or a “parallel universe.” The lokas (all 14 of them) co-exist – they are not separate and individual solar systems.

³⁷ Today, if one wants to talk about the world in the context of our modern viewpoint, one can speak first and foremost of the “fields and their particles.” It is the fields that are the basic ingredients of the Universe, in today's widely dominant scientific paradigm.

117. What is Karma?

Karma is the result of the conscious (intentional) actions of the Jivātma whether good or bad. Good Karma is that which results in pleasing and bad Karma is that which results in displeasing Īśvara.

Commentary

Karma is more an objective moral law of the universe than a capricious “pleasing or displeasing” of Īśvara. In the monotheistic religions as well there is the concept of “sin” as being that which displeases God – but God of the Bible and the Quran commands murder and pillage as well as slavery and treats women and children as “booty.” The doctrine of Karma in Hinduism is based on a universal moral principle — *paropakāra puṇyāya, pāpāya para-pīdanam* — virtue is defined as that which is beneficial to other beings and sin as that which causes suffering to others. So in this context any act which brings joy and happiness to another sentient being ‘pleases’ Īśvara and any act which intentionally causes suffering to another being ‘displeases’ Īśvara. Acts have their own consequences and God is merely the dispenser of the fruit of actions.

118. How does the action of the Jīva produce Karma?

Through Ignorance (*ajñāna/avidyā*) which is twofold (1) *anyathā-jñāna* (2) *viparīta-jñāna*.

119. What is the meaning of *anyathā-jñāna* ?

It signifies the confounding of the attributes of one thing with those of another.

120. What is the meaning of *viparīta-jñāna*?

Viparīta-jñāna signifies the confounding one thing with another.

121. How does *avidyā* bring about Karma ?

The Jivātma first confounds the body (matter) with itself, (*viparīta-jñāna*) and then confounds the transitional processes of the body (such as birth, growth, old age, death, etc.), with those belonging to itself (*anyathā-jñāna*). This ignorance produces desire (*rāga*), hatred, anger (*dveṣa*), etc., and under their influence Jīva performs certain actions which cause a karmic reaction — good or bad. These karmas create other karmas through habit (*vāsana*) and ignorance. Again through taste or desire (*ruci*) the Jīva becomes connected with other situations of various kinds. The result of this material connection is [further] ignorance and this ignorance produces Karma [and Karma produces suffering]. Thus Karma works without any definite beginning, just as a wheel does, in these five essentials, viz., *avidyā* (ignorance), *karma* (action), *vāsana* (habit,) *ruchi* (desire) *prakṛiti Sambandha* (connection with matter.) In this sense Karma, and the connection of the Jīva with matter (the *kāraṇa-śarīra*) are said to be *pravāhānadi* — without beginning like the current of a river, and these do not come at any intermediate period, but exist in a latent condition even in Pralaya with Jivātma. When the next cycle of evolution sets in, they again become active and produce results as before.

122. Why cannot Īśvara prevent the Jivātma from producing bad Karma?

Īśvara is not the individual cause, but the *general cause* of everything and is therefore, from the individual stand point, perfectly neutral. Every Jīva is, on the other hand, individualised and hence subject to the result of its own [intentional] actions.

123. What is the effect of bad Karma?

Suffering and misery in this world and in Naraka.

124. What is Naraka?

A state in a certain locality in which the Jivātma experiences pain as punishment for or effect of

bad Karma (*pāpa*³⁸). It is governed by Yama (god of death),

Naraka is sevenfold according to Vedanta; but in Smṛtis it is twenty one fold, according to the threefold subdivision of *uttama* (hard), *madhyama* (middle natures) and *adhama* (light) for each of the seven Narakas. In Yajurveda Aranyaka 1st Prapāṭhaka, it is said to be fourfold, and situated on the four corners of the world. In Bhāgavata and other Puranas it is given as twenty-eight; and situated near the earth. It may be considered as situated within the limits of space and time³⁹.

125. Has Jīvatma a body when it suffers in Naraka?

Yes; it has its peculiar kind of body (*Naraka śarīra* or *yatana deha*) evolved from the *sukṣma śarīra* after separation from the gross body.

126. What is the result of good Karma?

Happiness in this world and enjoyment in *Svarga*

127. What is Svarga ?

A happy state in a certain locality⁴⁰ (*urdhva-lokas*) where the Jīvatma enjoys happiness without any sorrow, clothed in a kind of body evolved out *sukṣma śarīra* after separation from the gross body.

128. What are the Urdhva-lokas⁴¹?

They are (1) Bhuvanloka which extends from the earth to the sun, (2) Svarloka which extends from the sun to the pole-star, (3) Maharloka, (4) Janaloka, (5) Tapoloka and (6) Satyaloka. The last four extend from the pole-star to the limits of this Brahmāṇḍa. (*Macrocosm*); generally these lokas are called Svarga-lokas and Puṇya-lokas.

129. How long does the Jīvatma remain in Naraka or Svarga, as the case may be?

As long as the Karma which brought about these conditions continues.

130. Where are Pitri-loka, Vishnu-loka and Śiva-loka?

They are certain parts of the Urdhva-lokas.

131. Are there any other Brahmāṇḍas besides this one?

Yes, many. Each contains the fourteen lokas-Svarga, Naraka, Sun, Moon, etc., as in this Brahmāṇḍa. Brahmāṇḍa mean Macrocosm. They can be viewed as Galaxies according to Modern Science.

132. Is there a Brahmā/Hiraṇyagarbha for each Brahmāṇḍa?

Yes. Each is ordered in a similar manner to this Brahmāṇḍa.

³⁸ Pāpa or “sin” is defined as any act which intentionally cause suffering to other living beings, virtue (puṇya) is the opposite.

³⁹ Although mythological language *Naraka* is spoken of as being a “place” somewhere in the universe it is in reality more a ‘state’ of being. It is here and now on earth itself that one can experience “hellish” states and there is no necessity to be transported to another world! Most people are a mixture of good and bad – it is only the most evil that would experience Naraka in reality.

⁴⁰ *Svarga* lit. means a ‘good-state’ (*su-varga*) this too can be experienced here and now and is not necessarily a distant paradise in another galaxy. In all religions these two concepts have been used to keep people in control through incentives (heaven) and sanctions (hell).

⁴¹ This spatial concept of *urdhva-lokas* as being “above” is meaningless in a modern cosmological environment of the Big Bang and an expanding universe. The different lokas are best seen in the context of parallel universes rather than ‘above’ and ‘below’.

133. Are these *Brahmāṇḍas* eternal?

Each will be resolved into its final elements at the end of the lifetime of its Brahma. Many Brahmās (Hiraṇyagarbhas) have lived and many more are to come.

134. Does Karma operate in the other *Brahmāṇḍas* as in this one?

Yes, it works in a similar manner.

135. Are all the *Brahmāṇḍas* subject to Pralaya at one and the same time?

No. Each has its own Pralaya at a different time from that of the others. For instance, at this moment, one *Brahmāṇḍa* may be in Pralaya, another just commencing its evolution, and so on.

136. Is each *Brahmāṇḍa* distinct from another ?

Each is encompassed by seven environments consisting of the five elements in their uncombined condition together with Mahat and Ahankara. Hence each *Brahmāṇḍa* is distinguished from every other as just as one egg is distinct from another.

137. Have all the *Brahmāṇḍas* different *Īśvaras*?

No, there is one *Īśvara* (Para-Brahman) that pervades and controls all these *Brahmāṇḍas*.

138. Have all these *Brahmāṇḍas* been produced from one Nature (*mula-prakṛti*) ?

Yes, Nature is infinite, evolution takes place in many parts of it and many *Brahmāṇḍas* come into existence in their due order of evolution. In those parts of Nature where there is no evolution, nothing takes place and there is only blank space.

139. What happens to *jīvātma* after *Svarga* or *Naraka* has been experienced?

It leaves the body in which it experienced *Svarga* or *Naraka* and takes on a material body corresponding with the preponderance of its karmic attraction. This process is repeated until it finally attains *Mokṣa* and thus escapes from rebirth.⁴²

140. Does good karma result in the enjoyment of all the *ūrdhva-lokas* indefinitely?

No. The enjoyments experienced in one particular loka is according to the nature and degree of the good Karma.

141. Who dwell in the *ūrdhva-lokas* and what do they do there?

The deities such as Brahma, Rudra, Indra, Agni, etc. each of whom has his own specific functions e.g. Brahma attends to the duties of creation through the Prajāpatis, [Agni presides over fire, Vayu over the wind etc.]

142. Do all these deities live in one and the same loka?

Each of the principal deities lives in a special loka of his own where he has minor deities under him.

143. Do they perform their duties independently of Parabrahman?

No. They are all subordinate to Parabrahman.

⁴² Christianity and Islam hold with the doctrine of permanent enjoyment in a heaven for believers and for the sin of unbelief an eternity in the fires of hell. This doctrine is completely repugnant to Hinduism, since (a) every state of attainment is conditioned and therefore limited and (b) in the "just" system punishment should fit the crime. Belief and unbelief are hardly criminal offences that should merit such extremely exaggerated outcomes. (c) If God is the creator and ruler and controller of the vast and fathomless Universe why does he demand that us tiny and insignificant mortals pay him attention and validate him?

144. Do these deities live forever?

No. At the end of Mahakalpa (the lifetime of Brahma) all the deities abandon their bodies and attain *Mokṣa* with Brahma.

145. Who then take their places in the following Maha-kalpa ?

[Elevated] Jīvas who possess such a degree of good Karma as to enable them to attain the position of Indra and the other deities⁴³.

146. What is Mokṣa?

There are two kinds: (1) Kaivalya and (2) Brahmānanda. *Kaivalya* is the enjoyment by Jīva, in its real condition of supreme bliss⁴⁴. *Brahmānanda* is enjoyment of supreme bliss by Jīva as Para-brahman i.e., enjoyment of supreme bliss as Para-brahman enjoys it. It is also called *Sāyujya*⁴⁵.

147. Is not Sāyujya the laya or absolute unity of the Jīva in Para-brahman?

No, I have already said that Jīva does not become absolutely united with Para-brahman. *Sāyujya* means enjoyment of Brahmānanda equally along with Para-brahman as described in the Scriptures. This includes *Sālokya* and *Sārūpya*.

148. What is Sālokya?

Sālokya means living in one and the same place.

149. What is Sārūpya ?

Sārūpya means having body (or shape) similar to that of Īśvara which is formed out of śuddha-sattva.

150. Does a Jīva ever become Baddha (bound) after attaining Mokṣa,?

No. I have already said that *Mokṣa* is everlasting. *Muktas* (Jivātmas that have attained *Mokṣa*) are never again subject to the qualities of matter or to Karma. But if they choose, for the sake of doing good to the world, they may incarnate on earth. After such an incarnation they return to *Mokṣa*, and even during these incarnations they are not subject to matter or Karma

151. Is Mokṣa a state that is enjoyed in a particular place, such as Svarga?

It is enjoyed in a place called *parama-pada* (supreme state or Vaikuṅṭha loka⁴⁶), which is not material, being comprised of *śuddha-sattva*. It is above all material worlds. Both kinds of *mokṣa* 'Kaivalya' and 'Brahmānanda' are enjoyed in Vaikuṅṭha loka, but in different parts of it⁴⁷.

⁴³ All the gods or deities in Hinduism are considered to be another form of being in Samsāra and are not eternal — see Q 101.

⁴⁴ *Kaivalya* is an isolated form of enjoyment whereas *Brahmānanda* is enjoyment in a relationship with Parabrahman.

⁴⁵ According to the Upaniṣads there are four types of Mokṣa — *sāyujya* (union with), *sārūpya* (conforming to), *samīpya* (proximity) and *sālokya* (cohabitation with). Some Advaiti ācāryas interpret these as four stages in the realization of the fourfold Brahman. I.e. *sālokya* relates to the realization of the *Virāt* (Universe as being Brahma). *Sārūpya* relates to the realization of the *Hiraṇyagarbha* (world Self) — all jīvas are aspects of the one Brahman. *Samīpya* relates to the realization of the Īśvara the personal Lord of the Universe and *sāyujya* relates to the final merging into the Absolute Brahman.

⁴⁶ Vaikuṅṭha is an inconceivable idea and all descriptions are only proximate and not to be taken as literal.

“That which is the Supreme State (Paramam Padam) of Vishnu is pure, conscious, eternal, unborn, undecayable, inexhaustible, unmanifest, immutable, It is neither gross nor subtle, nor capable of being defined, to that ever immaculate Supreme State of Vishnu I bow”. (*Vishnu Purana* 1:9:50 – 51)

⁴⁷ The Vadakalai theory of Kaivalya is that it is not in paramapada but within this material world and not eternal.

This *śuddha-sattva* is the substance of Vaikuṅṭha-loka and of the bodies of Muktas and Isvara. Nature or matter and *śuddha-sattva* being considered as one substance (namely matter), it is said that it is universal and infinite. Some of the Viśiṣṭhādvaitis are of opinion that *śuddha-sattva* being substance, it is a kind of matter having only Satva quality unmixed with Rajas and Tamas.

152. What are the essentials of Mokṣa?

Entire separation of Jīva from all connection with matter, and complete destruction of Karma whether good or bad. The word *Mokṣa* literally means release from bondage (*bandha*).

153. Where are these essentials obtainable ?

Before the entrance of Jīva into *Paramapada* (the supreme place), beyond the limits of the material universe [and beyond all Time and Space]

154. Is there any difference among the Muktas themselves in their enjoyment of *Brahmānanda* ?

No; there is no difference even between the enjoyment of Para-brahman and that of the Muktas.

155. Is this Mokṣa attainable by every Jīva without exception?

All Jīvas can obtain *Mokṣa* if qualified to do so⁴⁸.

156. Is there any way from this world to parama-pada/Vaikuṅṭha-loka?

Yes. It is called *Archaradigati* or *Devayana* in the Scriptures⁴⁹.

When the death of a person attaining *Mokṣa* takes place, the Jīva goes with sukshma-śarīra from the heart to the *Brahmarandra* in the crown of the head, traversing the *Sushumna*, a [subtle] nerve channel connecting the heart with the *Brahmarandra*. The Jīva breaks through the *Brahmarandra* and goes to the region of the sun (*Surya-maṇḍala*) through the solar rays. Then it goes, through a dark spot in the sun, to Parama-pada.

The gates or ways are twofold, viz., *Devayana* (*Archirādi Marga*) and *Pitriyana* (or *Dhūmadi Marga*). These two ways are described in the Upanishads, Bhagavad-gita and Brahma-sutras. *Pitriyāna* is the way by which those persons that attained *svarga* go. They return again to this world as soon as the Karma (which resulted in the enjoyment of *svarga*) ceases.

157. Please tell some more about the journey of jīvātma to Paramapada?

The Jīva is directed on its way to Paramapada by the Supreme Wisdom acquired by Yoga. The Jīva thus proceeds to Paramapada by the aid of *Ativāhikas* (bearers in transit) known by the names of Archi Ahu, Pūrvapakṣa, Uttarāyana, Samvatsaram, Aditya, Chandra, Vaidyuta, Varuna, Indra, Prajāpati, and lastly, chiefly with the aid of Amanava (an incarnation of Vishnu). The archis etc., here mentioned are certain celestial beings and not the ordinary night, day, month, year, air etc.

158. What are the means (*upāya*) of attaining Mokṣa?

There are four means: – viz., Karma-yoga, Jñāna-yoga, Bhakti-yoga and Prapatti.

159. What is *Karma-yoga*?

Karma-yoga means the performance of duties (moral and religious) without any self-interest in the result, after obtaining *tattva-jñāna* (true knowledge of the three realities, *cit*, *acit* and *Īśvara*) through the Scriptures, and always keeping in view the Supreme Being, that is to say contemplating

⁴⁸ Qualification for Mokṣa is achieved through moral and ethical purification from leading a spiritual life and through the realization of one's essential nature (Self-realization.)

⁴⁹ This is not to be taken literally as a journey into outer-space! It is a highly mystical expression of a process which is to be the subject of contemplation not academic analysis.

it through the various kinds of [spiritual] practice (i.e. *japa*, *homa*, *yajña*, *dāna*, *tapas*,⁵⁰ etc.)

160. What is *jñāna-yoga*?

The practice described in the Yoga-sāstras consisting of eight āngas (*yama*, *niyama*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyahāra*, *dhāraṇa*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*). True perception of Jīvatma results from these two, Karma-yoga, and Jñāna-yoga, or it may result from either separately, and these two become the causes of Mokṣa (both *Kaivalya* and *Brahmānanda*.)

Commentary

Here jñāna yoga is declared to be the same as that of the Yoga Sūtras taught by the sage Patañjali (who is also, like Ramanuja Acharya said to be an incarnation of Ananta Seṣa.)

Also known as Raja Yoga or Aṣṭhāṅga Yoga it is the methodology presented by Patañjali for the cultivation of the mind and for its purification. This methodology is divided into two phases:

Phase 1 bahiraṅga-sādhana — extrovert practice

1. *yama* — Self-restraint
 - *Ahiṃsa* — abstention from injury to sentient beings.
 - *satyam* — speaking the truth.
 - *asteya* — refraining from taking that which is not given.
 - *brahma-carya* — moving in the divine.
 - *aparigraha* — non-covetousness.
2. *niyama* — Self-development.
 - *śauca* — purity
 - *santoṣa* — contentment
 - *tapas* — austerity or forbearance
 - *svādhyāya* — study and self-reflection and assessment.
 - *īśvara-praṇidhāna* — Surrender to the Divine
3. *āsana* – Postures — the various forms of physical postures for the cultivation of a strong and healthy body.
4. *prāṇāyāma* - Breath Control
5. *pratyahāra* - Withdrawal of Senses from engagement with external stimuli.

Phase 2 antaraṅga-sādhana — introvert practice.

6. *dhāraṇa* - Focusing the mind upon the object of meditation (i.e. the ātman)
7. *dhyāna* - Meditation — a state of unbroken concentration
8. *samādhi* – Absorption in the object of contemplation, becoming one with the ātman.

161. What is *Bhakti-yoga*?

It is also called *upāsana*. It is the contemplation of Para-brahman (Śrīman Nārāyaṇa) with his various attributes and qualities, without any interruption whatever, throughout one's whole life, at the same time discharging one's duties to the best of one's ability This Bhakti-yoga may be practiced by the aid of Jñāna-yoga with all its principles. Bhakti-yoga also results in Mokṣa (both *Kaivalya* and *Brahmananda*).

Bhagavad-gīta (chapter 7 to 12), as well as the 3rd chapter of Brahma Sutras and Sandilya Sutras describe Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti Yoga requires Karma Yoga⁵¹ for the destruction of bad Karma and

⁵⁰ *Japa* is the recitation of mantras, *homa* is the making of oblations into a consecrated fire, *yajña* is the discharging of one's debts to (1) parents (2) the gods (3) the sages (4) society (5) environment. (see appendix for details). *Dāna* – is charity and generosity, *tapas* is self-discipline (see appendix for details).

⁵¹ Karma Yoga is the performance of one's duty as service the God alone having abandoned the desire and attachment to the fruits thereof. It includes all one's activities – both religious and secular and those done for the welfare of others.

purification of mind.

It requires seven *Sādhanas* (spiritual practices) called *Sādhana-saptaka*. They are:–

- (1). *Viveka* — purification of mind for concentration by taking only pure and wholesome food, as described in Bhagavad-gita and other Yoga Sastras.
- (2). *Vimoka* — relinquishing all [self-referrent] desires⁵².
- (3). *Abhyāsa* — steady and continuous practice of contemplation of one object.
- (4). *Kriya* — doing one's duties; religious and secular as ordained in Vedas, as far as possible.
- (5). *Kalyāna* — the cultivation of the good qualities like mercy, compassion, charity, etc.
- (6). *Anavasāda* — not caring for miseries under any condition [being indifferent to hardship.]
- (7). *Anuddharṣa* — contentment and satisfaction with what one has.⁵³

162. How are we to contemplate Para-brahman in Bhakti-yoga⁵⁴?

As “*Aham-brahmasmi*” This means, literally: “I am Para-brahman,” *i.e.*, I the jīvātma am of the same essence as Para-brahman, or, I (the Jīva) am an attribute or śarīra of Para-brahman which contains many other, attributes and qualities.

163. Is there more than one kind of Bhakti-yoga?

There are many kinds described in the Vedānta such as Dahara-vidya, Antarāditya-vidya, prāṇa-vidya, Puruṣa-vidya, Madhu-vidya etc. (thirty-two in all.)

Upāsanas are of two kinds; *Pratikopāsana* and *Apratikopāsana*. The former is contemplation, as described in the Upaniṣad, of Praṇava and certain other things different from Para-brahman, and includes madhu-vidyā, udgitha-vidyā etc. This produces good results other than *mokṣa*, but afterwards produces *mokṣa* through these results.

The latter (*Apratikopāsana*) is the direct contemplation of Para-brahman, and produces *mokṣa* or other good results, according to the wishes of the person that practices. This includes Dahara-vidya, Sad-vidya, Nyāsa-vidya, &c.

The term Bhakti has also another significance, such as to pick flowers, and offer them to icons, to singing bhajans/hymns to Īśvara, reciting prayers, addressed to Vishnu etc.. These are only the outward expressions of one's devotion (*Bhakti*) to Īśvara and although they are called Bhakti, still they do not properly come under the head of Bhakti Yoga [as taught by Rāmānuja].

164. What difference is there between these vidyas?

So far as the contemplation of Para-brahman is concerned there is no difference. Differences arise only concerning the contemplation of the attributes and qualities of Para-brahman.

⁵² It is impossible to give up all desires, the ones that must be given up are those that are self-referrent – selfish or self-cherishing, the opposite should be cultivated – the welfare of all sentient beings (*loka-sangraha*).

⁵³ These two are also defined as *anavasāda* — avoiding grieving over suffering and loss or the obtaining of the disagreeable, and *anuddharṣa* — avoiding exaltation over achievement and obtaining of the agreeable.

⁵⁴ According to Rāmānuja, Bhakti Yoga is deep and sustained meditation upon the Lord leading to God-realization, whereas Jñāna Yoga is intense contemplation upon the Self leading to Self-realization. Both practices are based on meditation only – the difference being the object of contemplation.

165. What is *Prapatti*?

Learning of all the other means of Mokṣa above mentioned and contemplating only; (1) one's own inability to [adequately] practice any of the three other means, and, (2) Īśvara with all its attributes and qualities as the sole redeemer without doing anything contrary to Its will and keeping faith in It, as the Saviour, till death.

*Prapatti*⁵⁵ is not specifically mentioned in Śrī Bhāṣya and other works of Śrī Rāmānuja but his followers generally approve of this. It is described in great detail in the Pancharātra Āgama and other sacred writings (*rahasyas*) of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava [ācaryas]. As all the modern Śrī Vaiṣṇavas entirely depend upon this, it is mentioned here.

166. What are the qualities to be contemplated in this?

Jñāna (knowledge), *śakti* (power), *bala* (strength), *aiśvarya* (sovereignty), *vīrya* (creative potency), *tejas* (refulgence), *ānanda* (bliss/love), *dayā* (compassion), *vātsalya* (empathy), *saulabhya* (easy accessibility), *sauśīlyā* (affability) and others described in the Scriptures, with Achit, Chit and the Universe as the śarīra. Also the divine body which it takes upon itself by its own will, with Lakṣmī (goddess of wealth) who always remains with Īśvara.

167. Are these four means of Mokṣa all equally applicable?

Only persons of great mental development and who possess *Jñāna* (spiritual knowledge) are fit to practice the first three, viz., Karma-yoga, *Jñāna-yoga* and *Bhakti-yoga*. Those who have attained neither mental development nor spiritual knowledge, and who are incapable of practicing the other means of mokṣa may have recourse to *Prapatti*. This may be practiced by any one, without distinction of caste or creed, even if he be a *chandala* or a *mleccha*⁵⁶, either by himself or by a qualified ācarya for him.

Those that are not qualified to perform the Karmas prescribed by the Vedas, may do those that are ordained by the Smritis, and practice at the same time any of these three means (*upāya*.) *Karma-yoga*, *Jñāna-yoga* or *Bhakti-yoga*. For instance, the twice-born do their own duties (Karmas) according to the Vedas, and other classes may do their own duties as prescribed by the Shastras specially intended for them, and practice these means.

168. What are the qualifications demanded in one who would take up these means of obtaining mokṣa?

- (1) True Knowledge of *Achit*, *Chit* and *Īśvara* obtained from a qualified Acharya.
- (2) Love towards this Acharya.
- (3) Faith in the Scriptures.
- (4) Desire for Mokṣa.
- (5) *Vairāgya*, or the destruction of all worldly desires and affections.
- (6) Attention to duty.
- (7) Study of Scriptures or spiritual literature in any language,
- (8) Renunciation of evil associations and self-interest of any kind.

169. Are these means capable of completely destroying Karma?

⁵⁵ *Prapatti* is better explained as surrendering oneself completely to the Lord. Realizing one's inability to adequately practice the other forms of Yoga one should seek refuge in Krishna alone. (See appendix for more details.)

⁵⁶ A *chaṇḍāla* is an outcaste and a *mleccha* is a non-Indian foreigner — the term is usually applied to Christians and Muslims.

Yes, they destroy the three kinds of Karma, good and bad.

170. What are the three kinds of Karma?

- (1) *Sañcita* — the [cumulative] Karma [of all previous births] which has not begun to produce any effect owing to the operation of other Karma.
- (2) *Prārabdha* — the [small portion of] Karma which has already begun to produce results [in this present birth].
- (3) *Āgāmi* — the Karma which will operate in [the near] future, through future actions, after practice of these means has commenced.

Sañcita Karma will be destroyed by these means, *Prārabdha* Karma will continue to operate till it is exhausted and *Āgāmi* Karma will be prevented by these means from producing any effect at all.

171. Does a person who practices these means in a certain incarnation obtain Mokṣa at the end of the same incarnation (*śarīra*)?

That depends on the nature of the *Prārabdha* Karma which leads one from incarnation to incarnation. A person obtains Mokṣa when *Prārabdha* has ceased to operate, whether this takes place at the end of one or many incarnations. But one who has recourse to *Prapatti* and completes all Karma by the end of that incarnation, thence alone obtains Mokṣa. When one is qualified to attain Mokṣa, *Sañcita* ceases entirely, *Āgāmi* becomes inoperative and *Prarabdha*, with its results, comes to an end. Thus Karma, the cause of the connection (*bandha*) with matter is destroyed by these four means.⁵⁷

172. Can these means be applied to the contemplation of Brahma, Maha-deva, and other gods and goddesses such as Sakti, etc. for the purpose of obtaining Mokṣa?

No. Because these deities are not the Supreme Being — *Paramātma* or *Īśvara* (Lord). They are only *Jīvas* possessed of certain powers acquired by good Karma, and subordinate to Brahman in every respect. They have not got those attributes and qualities which are essential in what is to be contemplated for the sake of Mokṣa. They are subject to Karma and matter, hence they are unable to bring about the complete destruction, of a person's Karma, or to effect the complete separation of *Jīva* from matter and thus give supreme bliss to *Jīvatmas* who are in the same bondage as themselves.

Therefore the only Supreme Deity the One Reality, the Cause of the Universe the Centre of all attributes and qualities, always remaining with *Lakṣmī*, all-pervading, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, called by many names such as *Vishnu*, *Vasudeva*, *Nārāyaṇa*, is the only Deity through whom Mokṣa can be attained, and He is the One Redeemer of all *jīvas*.

OM TAT SAT.

⁵⁷ Our author is speaking from a *Vaḍagalai* point of view in calling *Prapatti* an *upāya* (or means). According to the *Tengalais*, *Prapatti* is not a 'means' per se but is the way *par excellence*!

APPENDIX.

Question 72.

1. The passages that indicate *achit* and *chit* are the *śarīra* (aprathak-siddha — inseparably united) of Īśvara are :- Brhad-aranyakopaniṣad 5th chapter, 7th Brāhmana and Subālopanishad.

2. Those that indicate the Separate Reality of acit, cit and Īśvara are:-

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| Taittiriya Upaniṣad | Ānandavalli | 1 st Anuvāka | 1 st verse |
| “ | “ | 5 th Anuvāka | 1 st & 2 nd verses |
| “ | “ | 6 th Anuvāka | 2 nd verse |
| “ | Bhṛguvalli | 1 st to 6 th Anuvāka | |
| “ | Nārāyanam | 1 st Anuvāka | 1 st to 4 th |
| Muṇḍakopaniṣad | 8 th Muṇḍaka | 1 st Khāṇḍa | 1 st to 2 nd verses |
| “ | “ | 2 nd Khāṇḍa | 6 th verse |
| Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad | | 1 st chapter | 6 th 9 th 10 th verses |
| “ | | 4 th chapter | 5 th 6 th 7 th 9 th verses |
| “ | | 6 th chapter | 13 th and 16 th verses |
| Bhagavad Gīta | | 7 th chapter | 4 th & 5 th verses |
| “ | | 9 th chapter | 8 th verse |
| “ | | 13 th chapter | 19 to 22 verses |

3. The passages that favor non-duality are :—

| | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| Kāthopanishad | 4 th valli | | 10 th & 11 th verses |
| Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad | 3 rd Prapāṭhaka | 4 th khāṇḍa | <i>sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma</i> |
| | 6 th Prapāṭhaka | 2 nd khāṇḍa | <i>ekam advitīyam</i> |
| | “ | 9 th – 16 th khāṇḍa | <i>tat-tvam-asi</i> |
| | 7 th Prapāṭhaka | 25 th khāṇḍa | <i>ātmaivedam sarvam</i> |
| Brhad-aranyakopaniṣad | 6 th adhyāya | 9 th verse | <i>neha nānāsti kiñcana</i> |

These quotations are only a few of the many and are given here in the way of illustration.

Question 159 — The Threefold Practice

This is a basic framework of spiritual practice as taught by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. He also declares that whatever one’s personal circumstances may be these three should be unfailingly practiced by every one until death and should never be abandoned. All those who call themselves practicing “Hindus” should adhere to this spiritual regime. This program is universal in its application without reference to one’s social standing.

1. Yajña - Sacrifice.

Yajna in its narrow primary sense refers to the ancient Vedic Sacrifices that are now redundant. In its secondary and applied sense it refers to the Five Great Sacrifices which are:-

pitru- yajña - the sacrifice to the parents and ancestors.

deva- yajña - the sacrifice to the gods.

brahma- yajña - the sacrifice to the sages.

bhuta- yajña - the sacrifice to the animals.

manushya-yajña - the sacrifice to human beings.

Every person is born with a debt to these five categories of beings and throughout one’s life these debts must be discharged.

The two dynamic factors of Yajna are:- 1. A sincere feeling of gratitude and 2. the demonstration of that heartfelt gratitude.

- The gratitude to our parents is expressed through honouring them, caring for them while they live and making offerings for their well being (*sraddha*) once they die.
- The gratitude to the gods is expressed through the periodic making of offerings.
- The gratitude to the sages and preceptors who, renouncing personal interest, dedicated their lives for guiding humankind is expressed through the study of the sacred teachings and passing them on to others or at the very least being cultural informed.
- The gratitude to the animals and eco-systems is expressed through feeding birds and other animals and also through active support of environmental issues and ensuring the preservation of the natural habitat.
- The gratitude to society without which we could not exist is expressed through ensuring that other members of the society are cared for. In our own lives we can express this through offering hospitality to guests and to strangers. There are three minimal requirements which must be offered to a guest; a seat, water to drink, and kind words.

2. Tapas - self-discipline

Gita 17;15 - 17 expounds the threefold discipline of body speech and mind as follows:-

Kayika Tapas - physical self-discipline

- The adoration of the gods, the initiated ones, spiritual teachers and enlightened beings;
- Personal hygiene and cleanliness of environment.
- Integrity - harmony of thought and action;
- Sexual-restraint - avoidance of sexual misconduct and exploitation of others through considering them to be objects of self-gratification.
- Non-injury - avoidance of causing pain to any being.

Vachika Tapas - Discipline (Tapas) of speech consists in -

- using words that do not disturb others,
- which are true,
- agreeable and are
- directed at the benefit of the other,
- the practice of the recitation and study of Scriptural texts.

Manasika Tapas - Discipline of mind consists of -

- Peace of mind - the absence of anger, desire, delusion, pride, greed;
- benevolence - being devoted to the good of others;
- silence - control of expression;
- self-restraint - focusing one's thought flow on the object of contemplation;
- perfect mindfulness - being constantly aware of the Spiritual dimension of life, the underlying Cosmic Force.

Ramanuja says that this threefold self-discipline (*Tapas*) should be practised with the utmost faith through deed, speech and thought, having no consideration of any reward and with the conviction that it is to be done simply as adoration of the Supreme Person.

3. Dana - generosity

Generosity is compassion in action; the practice of philanthropy arises from the perception of the same Divine Principle in all beings. When one realises "sameness" with others, one develops not

only empathy with their needs and suffering but also a desire to alleviate that suffering to the extent possible. *Dana* is service – the giving of one’s resources and self to help others whenever and wherever possible.

The person who renders service to the world even at the risk of his life, and is devoid of rivalry and jealousy, is said to be an excellent person both here and hereafter. Narada Purana 1:4:74

Question 165 — Prapatti/Shadanga yoga/Saranagati)

The Way of Surrender

The Gita is considered to be the Yoga Shastra par excellence. Lord Krishna gives clear and explicit instructions regarding the three paths of Yoga. After expounding upon them in great detail, and acknowledging their difficulties, in the 18th Chapter Verse 66 the Lord makes the Ultimate Statement (*carama sloka*);

*Abandoning all other means (dharmas) take refuge in me alone;
I will liberate thee from the effect of all sins, grieve not.*

It is not merit (*punya*) which is the operative cause of Grace (*daya*) but the sense of one's unworthiness (*akincina*), the sinfulness of sin and the inability to follow the three conventional Yogas. The Lord Himself is the way, the means (*upaya*) as well as the goal (*upeya*) and Prapatti is the act of self-surrender to His grace. There is an intimate relationship between the act of self-surrender to the Saviour and the flow of divine grace.

The Three Components of Śaranāgati

- *Phala-samarpana* — Abandonment of the hedonistic motive that self-satisfaction in some heavenly realm is the supreme end of religious practice, and the rejection of the concept that self-surrender to God is a means to achieve this end. One should renounce the ideas of agency (*kartrtva*), proprietorship (*mamata*) and self-interest (*svārtha*).
- *Bhāra-samarpana* — Renunciation of the sense of personal responsibility in the act of salvation. Salvation comes from the Saviour Himself who is the Way and the Goal. It does not come by the will or desire of the individual. Prapatti obviates the burden of guilt, self-effort and the consequences of error.
- *Svarūpa-samarpanam* — The surrender of oneself to God who is the real owner of the soul. This act of surrender brings about a radical change in one's life from an egocentric view point to the Theocentric view that everything belongs to God, exists for His pleasure alone and is to be offered back to Him.

The act of taking refuge — samāśrayanam

1. ānukūlya-saṅkalpaḥ — The resolve to act according to the will of God and to do that which pleases Him. It includes the abandonment of ego (*ahamkara*) and entails being benevolently disposed towards all beings (*sarva-bhuta-anukulya*) based on the firm conviction that the Lord dwells within all beings. The qualities of a Prapanna that please the Lord are enumerated in detail in the 12th Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita:—

13. Not hating any living being, friendly and compassionate to all, free from the notions of 'I' and 'mine', and regarding all pain and pleasure with equanimity, and forbearing;

14. contented, constantly contemplating, self-restrained and firm in one's convictions, dedicating the mind and intellect to Me — such a devotee is dear to Me.

15. He by whom the world is not disturbed, and who is not disturbed by the world, who is free from joy and jealousy, fear and repulsion — he is dear to me.
16. One who is free from expectations, who is uncontaminated, skilled, impartial and free from anxiety, who has renounced every undertaking — is dear to Me.
17. One who is full of devotion to Me, who rejoices not, nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, and who renounces both merit and demerit — such a devotee is dear to me.
18. He who is impartial to both foe and friend, honour and dishonour, who is indifferent to both cold and heat, pleasure and pain and who is free from all attachments;
19. to whom both censure and praise are equal, who is silent (when praised or abused) and content with any condition, who has no home, who is steady of mind, and who is devoted to Me — dear to Me is such a person.
20. But those devotees who adopt this ambrosial virtuous conduct (dharma) as taught above, who are full of faith and who regard Me as the Supreme — they are exceedingly dear to Me.

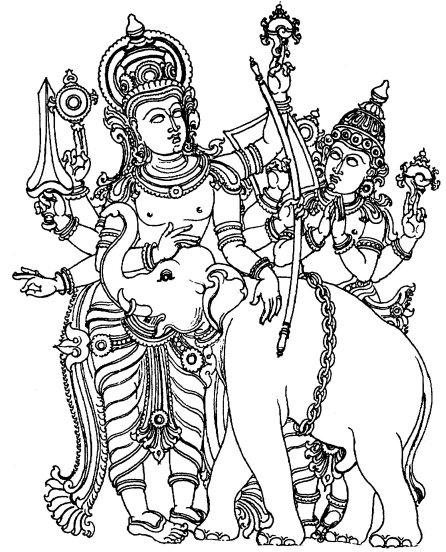
2. *pratikūlya-varjanam* — is the resolve to abstain from acts which are contrary to the will of God or which would displease Him.

3. *kārpanya* — a feeling of unworthiness and helplessness.

4. *mahā-viśvāsa* — complete faith in the saving Grace of the Lord. It is the faith that He *alone* has the ability to grant salvation and that He *will* fulfil His promise to liberate those who take refuge in Him.

5. *goprtva-varanam* — the sincere request for the Grace and protection of the Lord, abandoning all other *self-initiated* means.

6. *atma-nikṣepa* — the predominant factor is the offering of oneself to the Lord with the conviction that the opportunity for such self-dedication is in itself the result of the Grace of God.



The forgiveness of the Redeemer presupposes the quality of *being forgiven* in the jiva, and a *change of heart* as well. The bestowal of grace may be *unreserved*, but it cannot be accepted *undeserved*. The theory of 'pretext' (*vyāja*) for granting Grace reconciles the 'justification by works' with the 'justification by faith', on the principle that a trivial cause can precipitate a mighty effect. A sincere display of remorse, no matter how small, is enough to open the flood gates of Grace and Divine Mercy. The seed can only sprout in suitable soil and so too, Grace needs an pretext or an *excuse* to manifest itself.