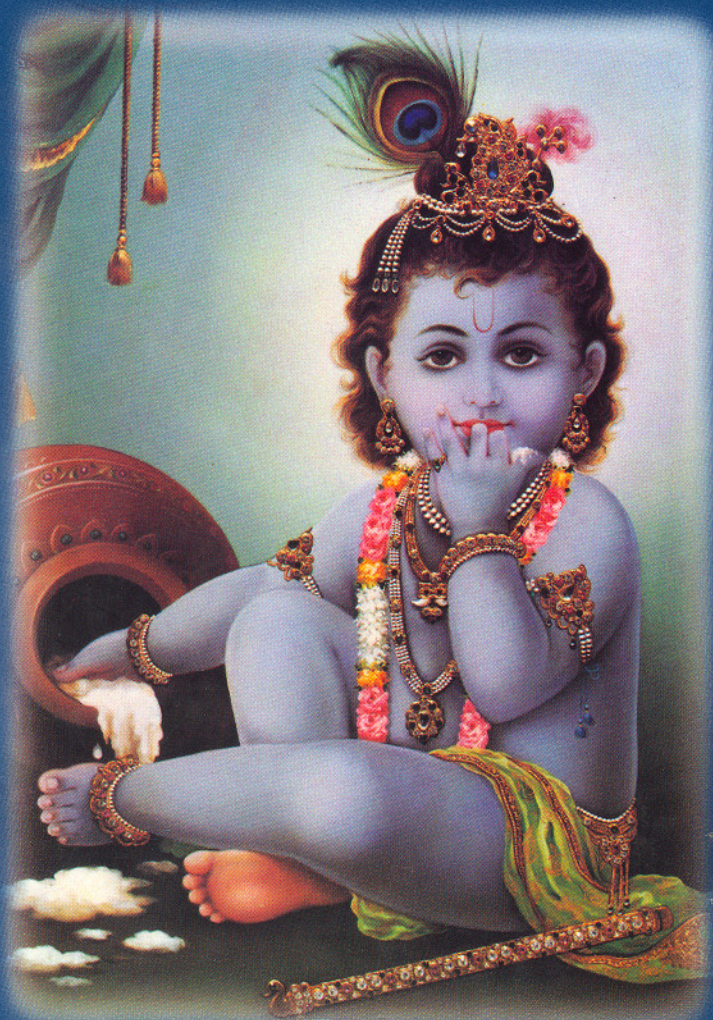


# *Skimad Bhāgavatam:*

**ITS MESSAGE FOR THE MODERN MAN**



**Swami Shantananda Puri**

This book is dedicated with veneration  
to the Lotus Feet of my revered Guru

**Swami Purushottamanandaji**  
of Vasishtha Guha, U.P., Himalayas,

but for whose infinite Compassion  
I would not have been able to formulate  
my thoughts on Srimad Bhāgavatam  
and put them down in this book,

**And Through My Guru**

to the thousands of Spiritual  
Sādhākas all over the world.

## A Perception

The timing of the exposition on Bhagavata Mahāpurānam is ideal too, for mankind all over the world is facing the spectacle of a hoary past fast slipping away, with an uncertain future yet to unfold itself, with materialism weaving its tentacles tightly around him and discoveries and inventions of science bringing but scant cheer to his life of tension, transition, turmoil and terror. When he finds that even the ground he is standing on is virtually slipping away from under his very feet, man desperately needs something to hold on to, something steady to hold himself by, something to which he can hitch himself and it is precisely that “something” which all of us look for at some stage that Swamiji has given us in this book.

The Bhāgavata Mahāpurāna with its 12 skandhas and 18,000 slokas is a perennial fountain head of spiritual knowledge which is as relevant today as it was when it first came into existence. However, living in a jet age with its culture of instant foods, instant information on the Internet and even instant marriages and instant separation, most of us do not have the time, the energy or the aptitude to go through the voluminous religious or scriptural texts. Recognising the mood of the times, Swami Shantananda Puri has given us this “instant recipe”, Parikshit-style, for Sādhana and liberation.

We are indeed much more fortunate than our predecessors because unlike them, we do not have to do strenuous meditation, perform severe penance or yajñās or do arduous service and worship. All we have to do is to remember the Lord and chant His names as and when we can.

Chennai.

**J. Padmanabha Iyer**

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## Two words from the Author

Till about 22 years of my age, my spiritual antenna remained utterly undeveloped. I had no strong religious beliefs and even my faith in any God was nominal. But from my childhood, I was being taken to see the Paramacharya (Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Mutt) very often (till I was 15 years old), whose blessings I had received in plenty. Perhaps, as a result of this Satsanga with a realised Soul, when I was 22 years of age (i.e. by 1950), I took sudden interest in “THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA” - a book which came my way through providence and became my first Guru. Then a longing for God-realisation began to take shape. I began to do meditation and reading of biographies of saints etc. Then my journey on the spiritual path started without a spiritual guide. I decided that my Guru should be only from the lineage of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and should resemble him in all respects, primarily in desirelessness and love for God. I used to pray to God for His grace and to give me faith in Him and strengthen it too.

I began to go often to some well known Mahatmas like Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj of Rishikesh, Krishnaprem (Ronald Nixon) Maharaj of Almora Hills et al., as often as possible. Such satsangas deepened my longing for a Guru and for the Goal. In due course, I was led to my Gurudev in a Himalayan Cave in 1957 by a stranger who was my travelling companion in a bus. My Gurudev, to my delight, was a grand disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and resembled the latter

in many respects. In my very first meeting, I was ordered by my Gurudev to do Bhāgavata Saptāham (reading and discoursing on Bhāgavatam a book unknown to me till then), for seven days at the time of his birthday celebrations in his cave Ashram. Oh ! What a legacy of a priceless treasure my Gurudev gave me for my Sadhana in the form of Srimad Bhāgavatam !

The Grace of the Lord flows perennially. It was that only which started me on the path in 1950 even though I had remained unaware of either God or His grace earlier. I was on my own. The entire Sādhana was an uphill task, or rather it looked so.

There were ups and downs in my Sādhana and even after coming under the refuge of my Guru, for years in between when I was abroad mainly, I forgot prayers, meditation, my Guru and the Lord. But the Lord and my Gurudev never forgot me. Again in surprisingly unexpected ways, they brought me back to active Sādhana. Lord ever remains behind the child who starts walking on this path on its own, but the child is unaware of it. He ever remains alert to catch the stumbling child.

Through all this period, I never parted company with reading Bhāgavatam at home. I look upon Bhāgavatam as Lord Krishna himself and Krishna is the Supreme formless Brahman, my very self.

It is Srimad Bhāgavatam (given to me by my Guru) that made me grow from a crass donkey to an Arab Stallion. It led me smoothly to the state of formal sanyasa (monkhood). It made me desireless, free from attachment and ego and I matured into the mental stage of a Sanyasin long before I donned the ochre robe formally after initiation. The grace of the Lord is always with us, but it is our own efforts (purushārtha) under the watchful, encouraging and benign eye of the Lord, that takes us to an advanced spiritual state. In the ultimate state again, it is the gravitational pull of the Lord's grace that catapults us into the final God realisation and consequent liberation. The Lord rushes to the rescue of an aspirant at the appropriate time and smoothens the way by relieving him of all worldly burdens. I am reminded of an anecdote of Krishna. One Gopi who had once filled up a pitcher with water from a well, requested Krishna who happened to be standing nearby, to lift and place the pitcher on her head. Krishna flatly refused and walked away. After a little while, when the Gopi had managed somehow to carry the pitcher home, Krishna came rushing and voluntarily helped her in placing the pitcher down. On being questioned by the Gopi to explain his perplexing conduct, Krishna answered with a smile : "People have to strive and carry the burden on their own, but I rush to relieve them of their burden at the proper time". Lord's Grace follows Purushartha (own efforts).

My main Sādhana was reading Bhāgavatam as often as possible but certain other Sādhanas (spiritual practices) I was made to do by the invisible hand in the same way as claimed by the flute of Lord Krishna. The Gopis who were highly jealous of the flute which never parted from the proximity of Krishna's lips enquired from the flute as to what Sādhana had been done by it to deserve the constant companionship of Lord's lips. The flute answered thus (according to a Hindi poet):

"My Sādhana was in no way different from that of a full-fledged, sincere and persevering spiritual aspirant. It started with my sacrifice and renunciation of my beautiful abode of bamboo bushes where I had been enjoying with my near and dear ones. My body was subjected to severe austerity (it was cut to size). My mano-nāsa took place as my 'man' - meaning also the maundage (a unit of weight called 'MAN' in Hindi) was all removed from inside and I was made hollow. I had also Granthi - Cheda i.e., my knots were cut (to make me smooth). Last but not the least, I always bowed to and accepted my Lord's desire as paramount. Whatever tune or Raaga my master wanted me to play, I played it and never exercised my own will in choosing the tune. It was only then that my master Krishna accepted me and took me to His lips".

प्रथम त्यजी सुन्दर ॐस झाडी री  
तन कटवाया, मन कटवाया  
ग्रंथी ग्रंथी छेदवाया  
जा सुर स्याम ॐजाना चाही  
सा सुर मैं ॐजाया  
तैं जाकर स्याम माहि अनि अधर लगाया॥

As proved by my own experience and confirmed by the teachings of Srimad Bhāgavatam repeatedly, any one or a combination of any of the following Sādhanas alone can lead us to a high state of spirituality and towards God realisation also, if done with faith, sincerity and fervor.

1. We must determine our goal firmly. God alone is worth striving for. Everyday, we must remember and keep our goal before our eyes just as a Production Manager in a Factory thinks only of the production target set for the month, night and day. God is not a hobby.
2. We must cultivate and develop (by imagining at the outset and getting inspiration from the biographies of saints and sages) an intense, volcanic, exclusive and all - consuming longing to reach the goal. Such an intense yearning alone will guide us and take us to the final stage of self-realisation which will end all miseries, sorrows and bestow absolute and eternal bliss.
3. We must seek frequently satsanga the company of holy men, saints and sages and remain in it imbibing their

vibrations as long as we can (atleast 3 to 4 days every month).

4. We must pray to the Lord (who is the Self) fervently for His grace, love and talk to him confiding our problems and share our daily joys and sorrows. The Lord and Guru are internal and remain as one's very Self. Just as electricity has no form or shape, the ultimate truth called as God or Self has no form or describable attributes but being our very own consciousness is also approachable through any form as Krishna, Siva, Rama and so on, as we find easy to imagine. Finally, the seeker is the sought and all the thought forms have the Self as their source and thus link one in the ignorant state as an individual Jiva with the Higher Self.
5. Constant remembrance of God and chanting His name mentally or loudly at all times including when we are engaged in other work and activities is a "Hot Line" to the Lord.
6. We should not worry or bother about the body's needs, health, money, home, family etc. They will all be taken care of as per Prārabdha or destiny and no amount of our worries or efforts is going to be of any use. We must Learn to accept all circumstances and events, however tragic or calamitous they may look. We must learn not to keep our luggage on our own head but to place it in

the compartment of the train which carries us. We should let go and surrender unconditionally to the will of God which always works for our ultimate good.

7. External harmony is a must for internal harmony, peace and bliss. We must look on all beings as God Himself or as our very Self and learn to forgive the faults and transgressions of others. We should pray for the welfare and good of all those who abuse, insult or harm us and request the Lord to remove all ill will towards them from our heart.
8. We should not be unduly worried about and dwell constantly on the elimination of our defects like passion, desires, anger, greed. By going on filling up our Chitta with constant remembrance of God or Self and taking Lord's name constantly, they will seep and saturate our heart in and around and by the sheer weight strangle all the Vasanas (latent tendencies) by throttling them to natural death.
9. As illustrated in the Bhāgavatam, running away from the world and resorting to ochre robes is not a must for God-realisation. The ultimate stage in spirituality can as well be reached even while remaining active in the world as a householder. One has only to take care that the world does not seep into the mind.

In this small booklet, I have not summarised or recounted the contents/stories of Bhāgavatam but have only pointed

out some of the Sādhanas which can be adopted easily in our present day to day life. In addition, I have tried to hint at the esoteric significance of certain episodes/stories i.e., their inner meaning. If through this book I have been able to incite the interest of a single reader -aspirant into reading the original Bhāgavatam (or its translation) and imbibe its spirit or at least constantly remember the Lord, I would deem myself blessed.

**Swami Shantananda**

**SRIMAD BHĀGAVATAM:**  
**Its Message For The Modern Man**

**AN INSIGHT**

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AUM  
SRI MAATRE NAMAH  
OBEISANCE TO THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER  
SRI GURUBHYO NAMAH  
OBEISANCE TO THE GREAT PRECEPTORS

## SRIMAD BHĀGAVATAM: ITS MESSAGE FOR THE MODERN MAN

### *Introduction*

1. With the steadily growing, almost unhealthy importance of money in all of man's activities on the one hand and the revolutionary growth of science and technology to the point of enslaving man to the creature comforts so very profusely yielded by them on the other, modern man hardly has the time, the energy or the mood to stand back for a moment and calmly reflect on where all this mad, headlong rush is cascading him, whether this materialistic existence has any meaning or purpose, what for he has taken birth and is incessantly toiling in a seemingly futile sense and whether there is something else he can do to relieve himself of this humdrum existence. Deep inside himself, he probably hears the puny stirrings that hark back to those glorious days, way back in antiquity, when life was a blissful relaxation, an experience leading to higher and greater goals. Somewhere he had heard, or read, of something

called the Supreme Reality, of some fortunate few who had experienced it, and of some lesser few who had realised it, but he knows not how to go about such a quest. In his own dumb way, he realises that this profound Reality baffles thought, but that, unless one experiences it even in a remote way, this materialistic world one lives in will only give a false ring. In a kind of daze he begins to grope for those "great works" of ours, the treasure of our culture and cumulative wisdom - the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and the Bhāgavatam. We shall see how the Srimad Bhāgavatam can give solace to these "ailing" millions of this materialistic world. We shall not concern ourselves with a narration of the stories, anecdotes and episodes in which the Bhāgavatam abounds, or even with an intellectual interpretation of its philosophy, but only with seeing what practical, useful message it holds for the modern man, and how he can translate that message into practical action in his own daily life.

2. What is the Srimad Bhāgavatam? The scriptural texts of Sanātana Dharma can be divided into three main categories - the Sruti, the Smriti and the Purāna. Srimad Bhāgavatam, being actually the Bhāgavata Purāna, is a Mahā Purāna and so belongs to the category of Purānas, and its authorship is attributed to Sage Vedavyāsa (Bādarāyana). The word 'Bhāgavatam' primarily means the revelations of the Lord - Bhagavān himself, (भगवतह इदम्) or, "that which relates to the Lord". It also means the glory of the Lord's devotees (Bhāgavatas). The Bhāgavatam is believed to have

been told by Lord Narayana himself to Brahma the creator. This lamp of knowledge is believed to have been passed on by Brahma to his son Sage Nārada; by Nārada to Sage Vedavyāsa; by Vedavyāsa to his son Sukadeva; and by Sukadeva to King Parikshit, Arjuna's grandson and Abhimanyu's son. The main content of the Bhāgavatam is the "Ultimate Reality" (Satya), i.e. the Supreme Self which is also known by other names such as God, Bhagavān, Nārāyana or Brahman. In keeping with the aim of this book, we shall highlight those teachings on various spiritual practices, both simple and advanced, which hold a message for us and which can be adopted by an aspirant in the modern environment while still being engaged in worldly activities with the ultimate objective of achieving unalloyed happiness and permanent bliss and immortality through Self-realisation as propounded in the Bhāgavatam explicitly or impliedly.

3. The Bhāgavatam is divided into twelve sections called Skandhas. Actually, they constitute a step-by-step, progressive guide, starting with the search for a spiritual preceptor (Guru) and culminating in achievement of the goal, viz., God-realisation. The first section, Adhikāri Skandha, deals with how to search for a spiritual guide or Guru, and the qualification and fitness of an aspirant that would draw a competent Guru to him. The second section, Sādhanā Skandha, describes in simple but beautiful words the essential Sādhanās (practices) to be performed by an aspirant, especially by one who is afraid of death or is

facing imminent death. As this section gives an indirect (paroksha) knowledge (Jnāna), it is also called Jnāna Skandha. It contains the recipe for instant liberation - Mukti or Moksha. Bhāgavatam is perhaps the only and unique text in which Sukadeva guaranteed Mukti in just seven days to King Parikshit without the least effort on the latter's part - except to listen with rapt attention - and actually showed the way for attaining it. The message is loud and clear enough for all. The third Skandha may be described as a practical illustration of the principles outlined in the second Skandha in a positive as well as negative sense, with two stories by way of illustration. This is for inducing in aspirants a whole-hearted devotion to the goal; to create confidence in them that it is never too late to start on the path; and that, with a competent Guru, even a person fully steeped in worldly desires and activities can achieve Mukti in this very birth. The fourth section or Purushārtha Skandha deals with the four Purushārthas, the attainment of one or more of which constitutes the objective of every man's life, namely Dharma (virtue); Artha (wealth); Kāma (desire and enjoyment) and Moksha (liberation). It goes without saying that all of man's activities are directed towards seeking and attaining, and holding on to one or more of these. There are four stories in this Skandha to illustrate how, by realising God, man will be able to achieve success in all these spheres. Thus, the path shown in the Bhāgavatam is equally applicable whether what one seeks is worldly enjoyment, wealth beyond measure or ultimate liberation.

4. The fifth section, Sthiti Skandha (Sthiti means being permanently established in the Self or God), contains illustrative stories to show how complete detachment, irrespective of the environment, will lead to remaining permanently established in absolute bliss, and the likely pit-falls on the way. The sixth section, Pushti Skandha (Pushti means Grace, Anugraha, Blessing), deals with the most important factor in man's spiritual journey, namely that no amount of effort on man's part will be of any avail unless it is blessed by God's Grace. Two easy ways of attracting this divine Grace are (1) taking God's name and (2) prayer. The stories in this Skandha illustrate how even the worst sinner or the vilest asura (demon) can easily come within the power of Divine Grace. The seventh section, Vāsanā Skandha defines the two types of Vāsanās (latent tendencies) – the good and the bad – the former leading to God-realisation and the latter to downfall. Vāsanās are tendencies (including likes and dislikes) inherited from previous births and lying deeply embedded in the memory portion of the brain, known as the “Chith”. They are the advisers which impel us to do fresh acts which go to bind us by involving us in future births and consequent miseries. Vāsanās are distinct and different from the Prārabdhās which are only the reactions to the good and the evil acts done in the previous births, fructifying as rewards and punishments, punya and pāpa. The eighth section is the Vāsanā Nirasana Skandha in which the methods for removing the Vāsanās (tendencies, conditionings) are illustrated. The ninth section is the Vamsānucharita Skandha which recounts stories of the

prominent kings of the two races, namely the ‘solar’ or Surya dynasty which originated from the Sun-god and the ‘lunar’ or Moon dynasty which originated from the Moon-god - in which God incarnated himself respectively as Sri Rāma and Sri Krishna. Apart from the fact that some of these stories relate to great devotees of the Lord, like King Ambarisha, hearing or reading these stories purifies the mind.

5. The tenth section, Nirodha Skandha (Nirodha means controlling and stopping), as the very name suggests, deals with controlling and stopping the senses and the mind. Now that Vāsanās have been removed and detachment has been cultivated with the Grace of God, all worldly thoughts cease and the mind becomes concentrated on one-pointed contemplation of the Lord or Self alone. Listening to the stories of the Lord, one's mind is apt to go into Samādhi (super-conscious state). The eleventh section, Mukti Skandha, contains the essence of all spiritual instructions applicable to aspirants with different spiritual constitutions (i.e. aptitudes, temperaments, capacity, etc.). It deals mainly with dispassion (vairāgya), the need for the company of holy persons (satsanga), discrimination (viveka), devotion (bhakti) and knowledge of reality (tattva jñāna). The twelfth and final section is the Āsraya Skandha - God alone is the final āsraya or refuge. Some consider this Skandha also to be Nirodha just like the tenth section. The Lord alone is the final refuge of all Sādhakas and Sāadhanās, the substratum of the entire world, the abode of liberation and

the support of all scriptures. While this is described in detail here, it may be mentioned that all the Skandhās reiterate that God alone is the ultimate and sole sanctuary (āsraya) for all.

6. ँतराधाय प्रेवष्टाडियं श्रीमद्भागवतार्णवम् ।  
तनियिं वाङ्मयी मेरुह प्रत्यक्षा वर्तति हरहि  
सविनाच्छ-वणातीटादर्शनातीनोशनी ॥

(Bhāgavata Māhātmya 361 and 62)

A great and unique feature of the Bhāgavatam which needs to be stressed is that it is not a common Purāna containing mythological stories, events, incidents, hymns of praise and numerous spiritual instructions, but that it inheres the very presence of the Lord and has immense power in the form of words. It is stated in the Bhāgavata Māhātmya that when Lord Sri Krishna was preparing to leave the world, he wished to ensure that his devotees did not experience a sense of bereavement and so he infused his own splendour (tejas) into the Bhāgavatam.

**Note:** *The third Skandha does not have a popularly known esoteric name although it is sometimes referred to as 'Sarga Pratisarga Skandha', 'Visarga Skandha', 'Jnāna Kriyanvayana Skandha', etc.*

We shall now see the message of the Bhāgavatam Skandha by Skandha.

## Chapter I Adhikāri Skandha

7. When King Parikshit becomes aware of the curse that he has to die on the seventh day, bitten by the serpent king Takshaka, an intense, all-pervading desire is kindled in his heart that he should attain moksha in this very birth. He asks all the sages and spiritual savants assembled there as to what man in general, and more especially a man on the verge of death should do, hear, chant or think of, for achieving the ultimate goal of life. His very intense longing and deep yearning drew to that place Sukadeva who was one of the most enlightened Avadhūtās (wandering naked mendicants, completely detached from worldly life) of his time. Sukadeva was highly pleased with the King's question which was repeated to him and began to comply with the request for an answer. Thus the very first telling message of the Bhāgavatam right in the very first Skandha is: the main qualification to get one of the best in the lineage of Gurus is an earnest and intense longing to achieve the goal. It is then a question of the Guru himself knocking at the door of the aspirant uninvited and it is left to the aspirant to open the door. If one were to be an aspirant like King Parikshit with one's mind totally divorced from all attachment with the sole thought of liberation alone, to the exclusion of all else, as the one and only objective; and if the Guru were to be one like Sukadeva, totally

devoid of all attachment including to his own body and always established in the Self, liberation is a *fait accompli*. These are the main messages of the very first Skandha.

8. The next important message is that external harmony is absolutely essential for an aspirant seeking inner harmony and peace. In particular, the aspirant must completely eschew hatred and cultivate forgiveness and love towards even those who do him grievous harm. This point is emphasized in the episode of Draupadi who pleads with her husband Arjuna for sparing the life of Aswatthāma whose hands were still warm and wet with the blood of her own five innocent children who were assassinated while asleep. No wonder that from such a noble lineage sprang up an ideal aspirant (Sādhaka) like King Parikshit.
9. The next important episode is that of Uttarā, Draupadi's daughter-in-law and Parikshit's mother.

**नान्यं त्वदभयं श्चि यत्र मृत्युह रिसीम्। (1-8-9)**

When the foetus in Uttarā's womb is threatened to be burnt out by the terrific weapon, Brahmastra, directed by the vengeful Aswatthāma, she unconditionally surrenders to Lord Krishna, ignoring the presence of her stalwart in-laws, namely the five Pandavas.

**रेक्ष्यतीत ेवश्वासह रक्षणि वरणं तथा।**

Some of the essential ingredients of Saranāgati (Surrender) as prescribed in the scriptures have been demonstrated here, namely, ( I ) absolute faith that the Lord will protect; (2) seeking the Lord's protection at the time of crisis; and (3) absolute helplessness (surrender).

10. In this Skandha, Vyāsa raises the character of women to the highest pinnacle. He shows how Parikshit's mother Uttarā, how her mother-in-law Draupadi and Draupadi's own mother-in-law Kunti, excelled one another in their devotion to the Lord, manifesting unconditionally forgiving nature and other characteristics of spiritually evolved personalities. The hymns of praise sung by Kuntidevi, Parikshit's great-grandmother, also contain methods of indirect Sādhana.
11. **वेदिह सन्तु नह शश्वत्तत्र तत्र जगदुराणि (1-8-25)**

This is an oft-quoted verse from Kunti's hymn of praise. In her inimitable style, Kunti seeks a strange boon from the Lord, beseeching Him to continue bestowing on her calamity after calamity. The message is that every calamity or tragedy visited on an aspirant is a shock-treatment by the ever-compassionate Lord to awaken him or her from the stupor of ignorance - a sure sign that the Lord's full attention is on the aspirant and that He tries to turn the aspirant's mind more towards the spiritual path for a quicker progress, away from the frustrations and shocks in the worldly life

जन्मैश्वर्यश्रुतश्रीभरधिमानमदह उमान्।  
नैवार्हत्येभघातुं वै त्वामेकहानगाचिरम्॥

(1-8-26)

In another verse extracted above, Kuntidevi tells Krishna - “A person who is full of ego and is intoxicated with his noble birth, learning or riches, is not even fit to take your name, much less to seek you who are easy of access to poor and humble people.” Humility is a *sine qua non* to spiritual progress. The context brings to mind the Biblical saying - “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to pass through the gates of Heaven.”

12. In another verse Kunti tells the Lord - “Lord, many a time you have saved us - when my son Bhima was poisoned; when our house was set on fire; when Bhima was accosted by a demon; when Draupadi was disrobed and insulted in the assembly of villains; while facing the miseries in forest life; when the unerring astras (invoked missiles) of great warriors hit my sons in the Mahābhārata war and lastly when the only scion of the race in the womb was threatened by Aswatthāma’s missile” (1-8-24). This provides us with a beautiful clue for meditation. Many of us can always recollect several occasions in our lives when some calamity or the other had threatened us and led to a situation in which no earthly power could ever have saved us, but at the very last moment, it was staved off through divine intervention. Sitting quietly and offering gratitude to the Lord by recollecting these incidents again and again is an easy way of meditating on the Lord without the mind

getting diverted. This method has been indicated elsewhere too in the Bhāgavatam (X-31-3), e.g. where the gopikās sing, weeping and recollecting the various occasions when Lord Krishna had saved them from dangers.

13. In one of the closing verses of Chapter 8 of this Skandha (I-8-41), Kunti prays to the Lord to sever her mind from her sons and relatives to whom it is firmly attached, and to direct it towards the Lord. Such a detachment which is a “must” for God-realisation is not easy of achievement solely through our own efforts without the Grace of the Lord. So we have to keep on praying to the Lord again and again, seeking his help to release ourselves from our deluded attachment to our kith and kin. The efficacy of prayer to the Lord is indirectly stressed in the Bhāgavatam repeatedly. Whatever be the problems that arise during the course of our spiritual Sādhana - due to lack of proper environment, lack of concentration, disturbance due to sleep or other causes - they can all be solved by resorting to sincere prayer. Prayer is thus a potent, all-purpose tool or weapon in the hands of the aspirant and its benefits can easily be experienced by practice.
14. Vedavyāsa indirectly exhorts aspirants to avoid reading books containing stories of sex, violence, hatred, murder, etc., and to read only those things which extol the glories of the Lord and contain His names. In order to make our minds stay one-pointed on God alone, to the exclusion of all else, the practice of reading useless or base books of fiction, romance, crime, etc. - to which a good proportion of the younger generation seem to be so very unfortunately

addicted - will have to be given up as it can only take the mind away from the goal.

तद्वाग्विसर्गो जनताधेवप्लवा  
यस्मिन् प्रेतःकिमेद्ववत्ये।  
नामान्यनन्तस्य यशोतीन यत्  
शृण्वन्ति गायन्ति गृणन्ति साधवह॥ (1-5-11)

Says Vyāsa in the above sloka: “Wise and holy people read, hear and appreciate only those books which are replete with the names and glories of the Lord which have the capacity to purify all sins even though every para / stanza may be full of grammatical irregularities.”

15. The story of an earlier life of Sage Nārada illustrates the importance of Satsanga, namely, the company of holy persons and rendering personal service to them as well as to the Lord’s devotees. Nārada had then been born as the son of a servant-maid in a charitable guest-house. As a young boy, he used to voluntarily serve an assemblage of holy persons who sought the guest-house during the rainy season and listen to the stories of the Lord narrated by them. One of the holy men initiated the boy into the Lord’s mantra (holy incantation). As a result of severe penance and meditation, the boy in his subsequent birth became the direct son of the creator Brahma and also attained the position of a Divine Sage – Devarshi. The unique importance of Satsanga is emphasized again and again at many places in the Bhāgavatam.

रहूणैतत्तसि न योत  
न चज्यिया नर्वीणाद् गृहाद्वा।  
न च्छन्दसा नैव जलोमसूर्य-  
र्वेना महतीदरजाडिभषकिम् । (V-12-12)

In the fifth Skandha, Jada Bharata in his exhortation to King Rahugana says - “No one can achieve God-realisation by any amount of penance, meditation, Vedic rituals, worship of the Sun-god, the fire-god or other gods, sacrifices or by renouncing the house-holder’s life. God-realisation is possible only by immersing oneself again and again in the dust of the holy feet of saintly persons.” Again, in the eleventh Skandha (XI-12-1 and 2), in his final message to Uddhava, Sri Krishna declares - “No yoga, virtuous deeds, study of scriptures, vows, vedic rituals, pilgrimages, social services to the poor and the needy, or spiritual discipline will ever as easily take us to the Lord as Satsanga can. Satsanga is the easiest way to get rid of one’s attachment to the world.”

16. The first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is known as the “Vishāda Yoga”, i.e., the yogic path of grief. When Arjuna was grief-stricken at the prospect of his having to fight against his own preceptors, close relatives and others, his grief became the starting point for his ascent on the spiritual ladder through the revelation of the teachings embodied in the Gita. Similarly, when Parikshit was suddenly faced with a curse which was to terminate his life in seven days’ time, he grieved over his inconsiderate act of sin culminating in the curse and his grief resulted

in such an immeasurable treasure like the Bhāgavatam narrated to him by Sri Sukadeva. One should be able to put to use every suffering, misery or calamity for the purpose of ascending the spiritual ladder by cultivating detachment from the affairs of the world, which can only lead us from one misery to another.

17. Armed, fortified and consoled by these rare gems of wise counsel, practical tips and sagacious messages of the very first Skandha of the Srimad Bhāgavatam, the modern aspirant can now march forward on his self-chosen spiritual path to see what treasures the Sādhana Skandha holds for him.

## Chapter II Sādhana Skandha

18. तस्मान्द्वारत सर्वात्मा भगवानीश्वराणि ह्यपरह ।  
श्रातिव्यह कीर्तितव्यश्च स्मर्तव्यश्चच्छिताभयम् ॥ (II-I-5)

एतावान् सांख्ययागिभ्यां स्वधर्मपिरेनष्टया ।  
जन्मलाभह रिह सुसामन्ति नारायणस्मृतह ॥ (II-I-6)

The Sādhana Skandha begins with a straight-forward and clear-cut answer to the question posed by King Parikshit in the first Skandha. Sukadeva answers - “The Supreme Being, the Lord who is immanent in all beings as the Self of all, is alone to be constantly remembered. His glories and names should be narrated and chanted in order to attain the supreme state of fearlessness and bliss. Even to remember the Lord at the last moment in one’s death-bed leads to the fulfillment of life’s entire objective.” The crux of all Sādhanas is constant remembrance of the Supreme Being or Self. What is sought to be connoted here by the words Lord or Supreme Being is not what resides only in a temple or in an idol; the stress is on the Lord who is the Self of all and who is very much present in all beings, be they birds, animals, insects or human beings. This Sarvātma Bhāva, i.e. considering the Lord as the Self of all beings including the aspirant, will by itself rid us of all our Vāsanās (latent tendencies) of attachment towards



some and hatred or ill-will towards some others, fear, desire, jealousy, violence, anger, greed, etc., as in the entire world the aspirant will begin to see nothing but the Self.

19. **तुत्रिति तन्मयतया तरवाडिभनदि-  
स्तं सर्वभूतहृदयं मेनमानताडिस्मि ॥ (I-2-2)**

Two instances of this Sarvātma-bhāva are illustrated in the Bhāgavatam.

Firstly, in the invocatory verse of Suta while starting to narrate the Bhāgavatam, there is a beautiful episode about Sukadeva who, as soon as he was born after remaining sixteen years in his mother's womb, renounced his parents and house and ran towards the forest. His father, Sage Vedavyāsa, overcome with love and grief, ran behind Sukadeva calling "Oh son! Oh son!" As Sukadeva was in such an exalted state that he had identified himself with everything around him, all the trees around him began to respond on his behalf, asking Vedavyāsa to go back.

Secondly, in the fourth Skandha (IV-8-80), Vyāsa describes the severe penance (tapas) done by the child Dhruva at the age of five, meditating on the entire universe as his own Self and holding his breath. Because of Dhruva's total identification with the entire universe, the breathing of all the creatures in the worlds also became affected and they had to struggle hard to keep themselves alive.

**तन्मूलत्वादच्युतज्या सर्वजीवात्मतणिम् ॥ (VII-14-36)**

In the 14th chapter of the seventh Skandha, Nārada says - "As the Lord is the root of all, serving and pleasing all the beings is worship of the Lord".

20. Incidentally, while answering Parikshit's question, Sukadeva stresses that taking the names of the Lord and chanting them loudly is an easy path for those who wish to reach the state of fearlessness and desire to cultivate dispassion (Vairāgya). This aspect will be dealt with in greater detail while dealing with the sixth Skandha.
21. Two types of meditation are described in the Sādhana Skandha – (1) Meditation on the cosmic form of the Lord, imagining the nether-most region, namely Pātāla, to be the Lord's feet, the various rivers as the blood vessels of His cosmic form, the mountains as the skeleton (bone structure), etc.; and (2) Meditation on the form of the Lord, limb by limb, organ by organ, e.g. starting with visualisation of His feet, then His nails and toes, His calves and legs, knees, thighs, waist, hands, chest, chin, ears, nose, eyes, hair and so on, giving full freedom to one's imagination. For aspirants who believe in the Lord with a form, the second type of meditation indicated above may be suitable as an easy Sādhana for adoption and practice till they get fully established in the path of devotion, Bhakti Yoga (II-2-8 to 14). While in the case of Jñāna Mārga (the path of knowledge), the aspirant has necessarily to possess certain qualifications as essential prerequisites, such as control of

the mind, control of the senses, Vairāgya (dispassion), Viveka (discrimination), etc., the only thing needed by an aspirant following the path of devotion is the ability to hold on to the feet of the Lord in his mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts, with a real yearning and longing to behold the Lord with one's eyes.

22. न भारती मडि मृषालिक्ष्यति  
न वै वेचन्मि मनसा मृषा गेतह ।  
न मि हृषीकोण तित्त्यसत्थि  
यन्मि हृदौत्कण्ठ्यवता धृता हपरह ॥ (II-6-33)

This idea of holding on steadfast to the Lord's feet in one's mind is brought out beautifully when Brahma the creator tells his son Nārada –

“As I am holding fast to the thought of the Lord in my heart with all my yearning, automatically no lie ever comes out of my mouth, my mind never goes towards unreal objects and my senses never take me to the wrong path”. Thus all the qualities required of an aspirant are effortlessly achieved.

23. Traditionally the most important part of the second (Sādhana) Skandha is the “Chatusloki Bhāgavatam” (the four-verse Bhāgavatam) where, in four small verses, Lord Nārāyana expounds to Brahma, the creator, the entire philosophical essence of the Bhāgavatam (11-9-32 to 35) in four divisions – (1) Brahma Tattva; (2) Māyā Tattva; (3) Jagat Tattva; and (4) Jijnāsyā Tattva, as follows.

(1) Even before the universe came into existence, i.e. even before creation, the Supreme Being alone (Brahman, the Self, the Lord) existed. It continues to exist even after the entire universe disappears in the great deluge – (Brahma Tattva).

(2) That which appears on the Self (a false superimposition) without any reality behind it – just like the vision of a serpent on a rope lying in the darkness – is called Māya (illusory power of the Lord) – (Māya Tattva)

(3) The Lord, being the material cause of the entire universe, is immanent in all the beings and he transcends them all (Jagat Tattva)

(4) For a real aspirant for real knowledge, this constitutes all that should, or needs to be known by him, by applying the method of agreement and difference (Anvaya and Vyatireka) to find out that reality which exists at all places and at all times. (Jijnāsyā Tattva)

### Chapter III

#### 24. शिवा वार्ता प्रेक्ष्याद्भर्तुह्नि विदावनुस्मरन् ॥ (III-2-3)

From the third Skandha onwards, in various places in the Bhāgavatam, it has been specifically highlighted that, whenever someone puts a question to another, the latter always thinks of the Lord for a few seconds before replying to the former. This is a beautiful technique which all aspirants can easily adopt in their daily life. Thus when someone asks us some question (may be even on a trifling worldly matter), we can make it a practice to think of the Lord and take His name before starting to reply. Perhaps we may even extend this technique by taking the Lord's name once again as soon as we finish answering each question. This will go a long way in helping us practise constant remembrance of the Lord. Thus, before one begins to answer a question, one may mentally think of Lord Rāma and say "Rām" and then answer the question; likewise, one may again say "Rām" mentally after answering the question. This is a really wonderful message of the Bhāgavatam, conveying a very simple, readily workable technique all of us can usefully apply. The long conversations between Vidura and Uddhava and also between Vidura and Maitreya clearly illustrate how all such discussions invariably veered around the Lord and other spiritual topics, and how they never degenerated into gossip and worldly affairs. It is essential for every aspirant in the modern days to avoid

'talking shop' or talking about purely mundane matters whenever they meet friends, make social calls, etc., and, instead, invariably to turn the conversation round to spiritual topics.

25. If we desire to escape from the various fears relating to wealth, house, friends, relationships, etc., as also from the miseries of bereavement, desires, failures, greed, etc. — all mainly resulting from the ideas of "I" and "MINE", we should seek the sanctuary of the Lord (III-9-6).
26. A very common, but significant, feature of the Bhāgavatam is that most of the names of the characters appearing in it are not just arbitrary names: they have a deep symbolic significance elaborated through various illustrative episodes. For example, the names of the two fierce demons, Hiranyāksha and Hiranyakasipu represent respectively the demoniacal qualities of "greed for wealth (Lobha)" and "Desire for enjoyment (Bhoga)". Hiranyāksha means one whose covetous eye (aksha) is always on gold (hiranya), while Hiranyakasipu means one whose sleeping cot (kasipu) is made of gold (hiranya). Naturally lobha tries to overcome the entire world, and it can meet its death only in the hands of the Lord. Similarly in the sixth Skandha we have the anecdote of Ajāmila. Ajāmila means one who is involved (mila) in aja (māyā) and is thus immersed in it.
27. The story of Varāha avatara where the Lord incarnates himself as a boar is to illustrate that He is immanent in

all beings and He can always manifest Himself even in one of the lowliest beings like a boar.

28. Again, in the latter part of the third Skandha, Devahûti completely surrenders herself at the feet of her own son Kapila who was the Lord's own incarnation, and looks at him as her Guru. Kapila gives elaborate instructions to his mother, known as the Sāṅkhya philosophy (different from the Sāṅkhya philosophy of the Sûtras attributed to Kapila). The salient features of Kapila's teachings are:

**चतिह खल्वस्य ेन्धाय मुक्तयि चात्मना मितम्।  
गुणषु सक्तं ेन्धाय रतं वा ुसि मुक्तयि॥**

(III-25-15)

It is the mind which is responsible for both bondage and liberation. It is the steering wheel which, if turned towards worldly things, leads one to bondage, while, if turned towards the Lord, leads to Mukti (liberation). In order to keep the mind trained towards the Lord constantly, it is necessary that the mind should be purified and cleansed of the dirt, namely desire, greed, etc. arising out of the ego which manifests itself in the form of 'I' and 'MINE' (III-25-16). In order to rid the mind of its attachment to worldly objects as "mine", one must resort to the company of holy persons, Sādhûs, which is the direct doorway to liberation. Thus attachment to Satsanga leads finally to detachment (III-25-20 and 24)

29. Now the question arises: how to recognise a Sādhû or a holy person? A holy person has absolute forbearance; is

always calm and collected; is a friend of all beings, has no enemies and is extremely compassionate. Sādhûs have a firm devotion to the Lord and, for the sake of the Lord, they renounce all their relatives and all their activities. They undergo any amount of suffering, always maintaining their unswerving devotion to the Lord, and spend all their time hearing or narrating the glories of the Lord. They are solely dependent on the Lord, having unconditionally surrendered themselves to Him. One should seek the company of such holy persons (III-25-21, 22 and 23).

30. Kapila also mentions practising the immanent presence of the Lord and talking to the Lord as one of the Sādhana's. He says that at a certain stage of Sādhana, the devotees (aspirants) are able to see various beautiful forms of the Lord which are capable of granting boons, and they converse freely and enchantingly with those forms (III-25-35). In this very century of ours – the 20th century – Rāmakrishna Paramahansa, his chronicler Mahendra Nath Gupta and Paramahansa Yogananda were well-known luminaries who were on talking terms with the Divine Mother.

31. A Sādhaka need not concern himself or bother about his body at all as all the activities, sustenance and condition of the body are all pre-programmed and pre-determined by the will of the Lord. It is the attachment to one's own body that is the strongest and almost the last obstacle to be overcome before God-realisation. Kapila describes the state of the fully enlightened soul who is completely

established in his own real nature (the Self) and has thus lost all awareness of the body, in these terms:

“A fully enlightened Siddha is not aware of his body at all while sitting down or getting up. As one gets the body at birth and relinquishes it at death, as per the will of the Lord (as per Prārabdha), the Siddha is not aware of it at all just like a drunken person is not aware whether he is wearing his clothes or is naked”. (III-28-37). This is one of those rare and casual verses translated into Tamil and Malayalam by Sri Rāmana Maharshi of Arunāchala.

## Chapter IV Purushārtha Skandha

32. **ऋतुप्रषिस्त्वत्तह ऋतुफलेवधानव्यसेननाऽ  
ध्रुवं कर्तुह श्रद्धोवधुरमेभचाराय ेह मखाह॥** (Sivamahimna Stotra)

The first anecdote of the fourth Skandha relates to the destruction of Daksha Prajapati as also of the elaborate sacrifice (yajna) performed by him. It illustrates that no amount of Vedic rituals or other virtuous acts, however efficiently performed, will bear any fruit unless accompanied by faith (sraddha) and devotion to the Lord who is the sub-stratum of all rituals, things and activities in the world.

At one stage of Sādhana, we should shun completely the company of worldly persons and all discussions and conversations which will not help us in the progress of our spiritual life. Sati, Lord Siva's consort, preferred self-immolation in yogic fire to the ignominy of having a father who had no love for the Lord (IV-4-22). In almost every episode throughout the Bhāgavatam, Vyāsa stresses again and again that love for the Lord and constant remembrance of the Lord are the only ways for salvation.

33. In the second episode relating to the child Dhruva, the advice given to him by his mother Suniti is applicable to

every Sādhaka. She says “ Never bear the least ill-will towards others howsoever much they may have offended you or wounded your feelings. Anyone who causes any harm or suffering to another has, under Karmic law, to pay for it when his action rebounds on him” So, as a Sādhaka, one should have no ill-will or hatred for the offender. The one and only refuge which the Sādhaka should constantly seek and which, when attained, will automatically put an end to all his miseries and grief of whatever nature, is the Lord and the Lord alone.

**मामलं तात रिषि मंस्था।**

**भुङ्क्ते जना यतिरदुहखदस्तत्॥ (IV-8-17)**

**आराधयाधाक्षिजीदधिं।**

**यदीच्छसिध्यासनमुत्तमा यथा॥ (IV-8-19)**

“Seek him and pray to him fervently. All our desires for wealth, fame, promotion, success in enterprises, etc. will get fulfilled. He will grant to the devotee even the most impossible boon”.

34. So long as all Vāsanās are not completely annihilated, it will not be possible for us to eschew all worldly desires. In the early stages, there is no harm in seeking fulfillment of desires from the Lord who is the father, mother, master, and all-in-all for a devotee. In the Bhagavad Gita, the one who seeks material favours from the Lord (an Arthārthi) is classed as one of the four categories of His devotees (Bhaktas). By constantly taking the Lord’s name and remembering Him, a day will dawn when the mind

will get purified and the Sādhaka will get rid of all the desires including that of liberation.

35. Dhruva as a child of five years was determined to worship the Lord and do penance although he did not have the faintest idea of how to go about it. Just as in the case of Parikshit, dealt with in Chapter 1, Dhruva was also fired by an intense determination to reach the goal, undeterred by the prospects of sufferings in an unknown forest. Dhruva’s sincere and intense longing for a vision of the Lord attracted and brought a competent Guru to him. Sage Nārada met the child on his way to the forest and after testing the child’s firmness in his resolve to attain the Lord, initiated him and gave him all necessary instructions. The term “ Dhruva ” means a person with a firm determination and this name fits the child very well. Here again there was no need for the child to search for a Guru — in fact he never even knew the first thing about the need for a Guru. The Guru is always internal as Ramana Maharshi has averred, and he manifests externally according to the need, aspiration and yearning of the Sādhaka. One has to become like a child and cry and weep in order to attain the Lord.

**36. सहस्रशीर्षो तता गस्तमता।**

**मधार्विनं भृत्येददृक्षया गतह॥ (IV-9-1)**

Dhruva’s unrelenting perseverance and intense Sādhana, ignoring all bodily needs such as hunger and thirst, attracted the Lord so much that He came to Dhruva for the first

time in the history of mankind. And He came, in the form of the Cosmic Purusha with thousands of heads, eyes, feet, etc. Perhaps, He felt that this extraordinary five year old devotee, with his intense and bated breath suffocating all living creatures of the universe must be seen, not just with two eyes but with thousands of them. The Bhāgavatam adds that He did not go to grant a vision to the child devotee, but on the other hand, to have the ‘vision’ (darshan) of such a unique devotee. All glory to such a devotee!

37. महत्तमान्तर्हृदयान्मुखयुताः  
वधस्व कर्णायुतमषि मी वरहः॥ (IV-20-24)

In the anecdote of King Prithu, his conversation with the Lord is illuminating. The easiest Sādhana one can do is to keep the company of holy persons and to go on listening to the glories of the Lord. No amount of such hearing will become surfeit. So Prithu asks for a boon from the Lord, to bestow on him ten thousand ears so that he can taste the nectar of the glories of the Lord’s disportations (leelas) emanating directly from the hearts of great saintly persons and issuing forth as words from their mouths.

38. अहं भवान्न चान्यस्त्वं त्वमविहं वचस्व भाह्नि। (IV-28-62)

Each individual soul is nothing but Brahman, the Supreme Being. Because of desires it got into a body-mind-intellect complex, forgot its original form and nature and began to identify itself with the body, the mind and the intellect.

This wrong identification brought in its wake many miseries and sufferings due to old age, bereavement, death, etc. Even when the individual soul forgets the Lord, the latter does not forget the Jāva even for a moment. Out of compassion, the Lord Himself manifests as the Guru and well-wisher in one birth or the other and teaches him – “I am You; You are none else; and You are myself alone”.

This significant truth has been illustrated in a story form (rūpaka) by the anecdote of Puranjana. Puranjana was a hamsa (swan) living with another swan by name Ajnāta (the unknown Paramātmā). Puranjana goes out and meets a beautiful girl whom he marries (intellect or Buddhi) and begets children. He gets wholly immersed in a worldly life. Finally the demon Kāla (time), the demoness Jarā (old age) and Jvarā (fever) attack his kingdom and he finally dies, thinking of his wife. He gets born as a princess in the next birth and when her husband dies, she weeps and is disconsolate. Then the friend Ajnāta appears before her and reveals the latter’s true form, which is identical with that of Ajnāta himself.

39. It is only because of the Lord’s Māyāsakti (illusory power) that the world has been created. Each individual soul, though identical with the Supreme Self, is not aware of it because of its wrong identification with the body. A zero watt bulb is very miserable because it finds the 100 watt bulbs and 1000 watt bulbs very brilliant and popular. It is also afraid of death. This misery or fear arises because

the zero watt bulb is totally unaware of the fact that it is the very same electric power which illumines the 100 watt and 1000 watt bulbs that illumines it also, and that being the case, there should be no cause for any complaint, grievance or misery. This misery, grief, death, etc. are only for the bulb – the electricity remains absolutely unaffected. How can the bulb wake up to this reality? There is a divine ‘thermostat’ in each individual which automatically awakens the thirst to know “who I am in Reality” or attracts a Guru who takes the soul “in hand” and begins to teach him.

40. Having seen four of the twelve Skandhās, we have so far traversed about a third of our spiritual journey. Many are the priceless gems of practical advice and meaningful messages that this ocean of knowledge has so far placed at our disposal to initiate us into our spiritual adventure. Before we proceed further, let us sit back for a moment, collect our thoughts and set down here, all in one place, the salient messages we have picked up so far.

(1) However uninitiated or inexperienced an aspirant may be, even if he were to be totally unaware of the need for a Guru, a competent Guru will come knocking at his door, uninvited, provided the aspirant has a keen, deep and intense longing and yearning to achieve the goal. Two striking illustrations are: Parikshit – Sukadeva and child Dhruva – Sage Nārada. The Guru is always internal and he manifests himself externally according to the need, aspiration and yearning of the Sādhaka.

(2) External harmony is essential for an aspirant seeking inner harmony and peace. Forgiveness and love must replace hatred and ill-will. Humility is a *sine qua non* to spiritual progress.

(3) Sitting quietly and offering gratitude to the Lord by recollecting again and again those incidents in which He saved us from the verge of utter ruin and disaster is an easy way of meditating on the Lord without the mind getting diverted, Kuntidevi and the Gopikas being the best examples.

(4) True dispassion and total detachment (Vairāgya) – that is, cutting asunder the deluded attachment to our kith and kin and our possessions – is a “must” for God-realisation; but this can only come to us with the Lord’s Grace. So, repeated prayers to the Lord to help us tide over all our obstacles through His Grace are the only answer. Prayer is thus a potent weapon in the hands of the aspirant.

(5) It is not advisable to read books which cater to the baser instincts of man. Aspirants must read only those books which extol the glories and names of the Lord and listen only to such names and glories.

(6) No yagas, virtuous deeds, study of scriptures, vedic rituals, etc. will ever take us as easily to the Lord as does Satsanga, the company of holy persons and service to them and to the Lord’s devotees.



(7) The crux of all Sāadhanās is constant remembrance of the Supreme Being or Lord, who is immanent in all beings as the Self. Narrating the glories and chanting the names of the Lord enable us to attain the supreme state of fearlessness and bliss. This Sarvātma-bhāva, namely, seeing the Lord in every creature and in everything will by itself help us rid ourselves of our Vāsanās (latent tendencies). Sukadeva and Dhruva represent the pinnacle of this Sarvātma-bhāva.

(8) While the path of Knowledge, i.e. Jnāna Mārga, requires the aspirant to possess certain essential pre-requisites such as control of the mind, control of the senses, Vairāgya (dispassion), Viveka (discrimination), etc., the only thing needed by an aspirant following the path of devotion is the ability to hold on to the feet of the Lord in his mind, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, with a yearning and longing in his mind to have a vision of the Lord.

(9) It is a good practice to remember the Lord briefly and take his name before we answer any question put to us, even on trivial matters, and also on completion of the answer. When all reading, hearing and talking is only about the Lord and his names and glories, there will be nothing that will distract the mind away from its goal.

(10) It is the mind which is responsible for both bondage and liberation. The mind is the steering wheel which, if turned towards worldly things, leads one to bondage and, if turned towards the Lord, leads to liberation.

(11) Satsanga, the company of and service to holy persons is the direct gateway to liberation. Thus attachment to Satsanga leads finally to detachment.

(12) When we come across a person with absolute forbearance; who is calm and collected; is a friend of all beings; is extremely compassionate; is firmly devoted to the Lord; has renounced his all - family, kith and kin, possessions – exclusively for the sake of the Lord, is willing to undergo any amount of suffering, and spends all his time chanting or listening to the names of the Lord, we can be sure that he is a holy person, a Sādhu, whose company we should cultivate.

(13) The sustenance, activities, growth, decay, death, etc. of the body are all pre-programmed and pre-determined by the will of the Lord and so a Sādhaka should not concern himself with his body at all.

## Chapter V

# Sthiti Skandha

41. This Skandha contains two main stories, one of Rishabha Deva who became an ideal Avadhûta of the highest order, a state where one lives as Brahman, the Supreme Being. The other story is that of Bharata, Rishabha Deva's son, who went to the forest to do spiritual Sādhana but slid down the spiritual ladder owing to the overwhelming attachment he developed towards a deer. He had to have two more births before he could remove his worldly Vāsanās and reach the highest state. Both these stories are to illustrate how advanced souls remain established in the Turiya (ultimate) state of Pure Consciousness. In the very prelude to these stories it is stressed that it is not necessary that one should renounce one's household and proceed to a jungle in order to progress spiritually. It is said – “So long as one continues to live with the six enemies, Kāma, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada, Matsarya (i.e., desire, anger, greed, delusion, arrogance, jealousy), even if one retires to a forest, one will continue to be fear-ridden and cannot hope to have any peace of mind.”

जतान्द्रियस्यात्मरतुधस्य ।

गृहाश्रमह किं नु करात्पिवद्यम् ॥ (V-I-17)

Even an enlightened person has to maintain his body, experiencing the results – good or bad – of the activities of his previous births (Prārabdha) without the least ego. For the wise person engaged in the contemplation of the Self, having controlled his senses, even remaining as a householder will not cause any harm to his spiritual interests.

वनडिं दाषिह प्रभवन्ति रोगणाम् ।

गृहडिं ह्वान्द्रियेनग्रहस्तहि ॥ (Yoga Vāsishtha)

The same idea occurs in the Yoga Vāsishtha thus – “For a person who has not got over his attachment to the world, defects leading to impediments will crop up even in a forest. For one who has controlled all his five senses, remaining within the household itself is a penance”.

42. King Bharata, even after retiring to the forest, brought a helpless fawn (deer child) to his hermitage in the name of compassion and developed such an attachment for the animal that he totally forgot his spiritual Sādhana and worship of the Lord. Because of this deep attachment, he was born in the next birth as a deer (what a fall!) himself. In contrast, in the seventh Skandha, in the story of Prahlada, the son of the demon-king Hiranyakasipu, Prahlada had the worst imaginable domestic environment in which even taking the Lord's name constituted the most unforgivable offence. But, heedless of the sufferings heaped on him such as being poisoned, being pierced by the sharp weapons of his father's attendants, being pushed down

from a mountain-top, being roasted in a fire, etc. Prahlada openly continued chanting the Lord's name and defied his father, the demon-king. Eventually the Lord had to take the form of Narasimha (half-lion, half-man) and appear before him. Environment being determined by Prārabdhā (past actions), irrespective of whether the environment is conducive or not, one should persistently continue with one's Sādhana. Spiritual success is dependent on oneself and not on the environment. As one progresses with one's Sādhana, automatically a day will come when the environment will also become favourable. “**सर्वाह सुखमया दशह।**” (All the directions – i.e. the entire atmosphere – are peaceful and joyous).

43. In his lectures to his sons, Rishabha Deva advocates the following practices and procedures as part of the Sādhana for eschewing the ego and attaining the Self (V-5-10 to 13)

(1) Following the instructions of the Guru and devotion to the Guru and to the Lord.

(2) Identity of approach to all pairs of opposites in life, such as happiness and misery, heat and cold, riches and poverty, etc.

(3) The realisation that misery alone can result from all worldly things.

(4) Enquiring incessantly into “Who am I?” and contemplating on it.

(5) Eschewing greed and cultivating dispassion.

(6) Eliminating all desires from the mind.

(7) Worshipping the Lord, listening to the names, glories and stories of the Lord; Satsanga, i.e. company of holy persons and rendering service to them and to the Lord's devotees.

(8) Eschewing enmity and hatred; cultivating the practice of seeing everything with the same bhāva or vision; withdrawing all sense of identification with the body, one's kith and kin, household, possessions, etc.

(9) Practising Yoga Sādhana in solitude; maintaining control of the Prānas (vital breath or bio-energy), the senses and the mind.

(10) Cultivating complete faith in the Sat (Being, the Reality, Existence); celibacy (Brahmacharya); always remaining vigilant and alert; controlling one's speech.

(11) Performing all spiritual Sāadhanās with patience, perseverance and enthusiasm.

(12) Seeing the Lord in all things in the world; acquiring scriptural knowledge and confirming it by actual experience.

It is not necessary that one should follow all the above injunctions at the same time. Even if one is able to practise just one of the relatively more important instructions, the others are sure to follow automatically. So one should not

be alarmed or discouraged on seeing such a seemingly formidable list.

44. Rishabha became an Avadhûta (wandering naked) and was considered to be the first of the Jaina Tirthankaras. The description of his state is simply superb. When he renounced his kingdom and took to wandering through various forests and kingdoms, he carried just one item of baggage – his body. Even when spoken to, he never replied and he used to act differently at different times, as though he was a nincompoop, deaf, dumb, or blind, possessed or mad. He was absolutely unperturbed when people threatened him, beat him, threw stones at him, spat at him, threw all kinds of unmentionable filth at him or made him otherwise dirty. He was absolutely established in the Self without any adjuncts (upādhis). As, in the Ultimate Reality, the Self alone exists, he was able to experience himself in the roles of both the tormentor and the tormented. He had renounced all ego and the ideas of "I" and "Mine". He was established in his own glory in the Self. This is the description of a fully enlightened Avadhûta or Atyāsrami. When once one has reached this stage, one may know that one has realised.
45. A worthy son of a worthy father was Bharata, the eldest son of King Rishabha. We have already seen a part of Bharata's story – what started off as an act of compassion towards a helpless fawn ended up in attachment and delusion. Even renouncing the household and going to the forest for solitude did not help as he had not been able

to renounce attachment to worldly things, no matter what the excuse or the pretext was. However, by the Grace of the Lord, the full memory of his previous birth was retained by Bharata in his subsequent birth as a deer. As a consequence, he put himself on the alert, left his deer-mother, sought a lonely hermitage and, avoiding all company, and repenting his past lapses, spent his life feeding on dry leaves and grass. Even in his next birth, as the son of a Brāhmana, he again retained full memory of his previous births and began to act like a spastic child. He behaved as though he was mad, blind or deaf, without any interest in learning. Even when he was taken before an idol of Kāli by a gang of dacoits for being offered in a sacrifice to the Goddess, he remained unperturbed. Even when the irate Divine Mother manifested Herself, killed the dacoits and saved him, he remained unmoved. This is the state of total fearlessness of fully enlightened Paramahansas devoted solely to the Lord. Being free from all attachments to their own bodies, they have no enmity towards anyone and all creatures are their friends as they see the Self (the Lord) in each one of them (V-9-20). Bharata at last opened his mouth while instructing King Rahûgana (already mentioned in para 15 above). Bharata beautifully summarises Sādhana thus:

“One should overcome Māya by the rise of knowledge, with the weapons of worship of the feet of the Guru and the Lord. Being freed of all attachments and having conquered the six enemies (Kāma, Krodha, Lobha, etc.) one should realise the reality of the Self” (V-11-15 and 17).

## Chapter VI

### Pushti Skandha

46. This chapter deals with the unknown – but most essential – factor in one’s spiritual life, known as the Grace (Anugraha) of the Lord. Paul Brunton calls it an X-factor as it is both unknown and unpredictable. This Skandha also prescribes “Nama Smaranam”, remembering or chanting any of the names of the Lord – whether from the bottom of one’s heart with deep faith and devotion, or even unintentionally – as also prayers from the heart, as the sure means to attain the Grace of the Lord.
47. Ajāmila was a fallen Brāhmana, a confirmed sinner who had abandoned his parents and family and was living in sin with a prostitute and begetting children, the youngest of whom was named Nārāyana. By a quirk of fate, he was able to see two messengers of the God of Death (Yama-dootās) suddenly descending on him, ostensibly to take away his life; and, in a burst of attachment caused by sudden panic and fear of death, he called his youngest son, playing a short distance away, by his name Nārāyana. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, four messengers of Lord Nārāyana appeared before him. After arguing with the Yama-dootās, they convinced them that it was improper on their part to take away the life of a person who had appealed to Lord Nārāyana. They thus not only saved

Ajāmila from death, but also instructed him on the glory of chanting the Lord’s name. Wonderful indeed is the glory of uttering the Lord’s name even most unintentionally, just once.

- 48 अयं ह कृतेनर्वेशाणि जन्मकाटिचिंहसामोऽपि । (VI-2-7)  
यदा नारायणायति जगद चतुरक्षरम् । (VI-2-8)  
स्त्रीराजेतिगाहिन्ता यि च तितेकनाडिरीणि (VI-2-9)  
सर्वेषामप्यघवतोमदमवि सुनष्कृतम् ॥ (VI-2-10)

“Even the worst sinners who have killed women and cows or committed regicide or patricide or are given to drinking, stealing, etc., get purified of all their sins by just uttering the name of the Lord once” The Lord’s names have such a strong vibration that even the sins committed in crores of births get washed away by merely uttering His name once. Even if one takes that name unintentionally while slipping or falling down, or on being bitten by a scorpion, serpent, etc. or even in a joke while making fun of others, all the sins get washed away.

49. तदिदमिदमपि रगीतो वदन् गथा  
यि साधवह समदशाणि भगवत्प्रणिहा ।  
तान् नाप्सिदत हरगिदयो भगुप्तान्  
नेषां वयं न च वयह प्रभवाम दण्डि ॥ (VI-3-27)

जहा न वे०त भगवद्गुणनामधयिं  
 चतिश्च न स्मरेत तच्चरणारेवन्दम्।  
 कृष्णाय नाि नमेत यच्छिर एकदोि  
 तानानयध्वमसताडिकृतेवष्णुकृत्यान् ॥ (VI-3-29)

Yama, the god of death, sums up the glory of the Lord's devotees when he exhorts his messengers thus:

“Those devotees who have surrendered themselves to the Lord, possessing equal vision, have their glories sung by the gods and the demigods. They are always under the protection of the mace-wielding Lord. For heaven's sake never dare approach them as I have no control or jurisdiction over such devotees (VI-3-27). On the contrary, bring those wicked persons before me whose tongues have never even once uttered the name or glory of the Lord or whose hearts have never even once remembered the Lord's feet or those who have never even once bent their heads in reverence before the Lord” (VI-3-29)

50. हा गोविन्देति चुक्राशि कृष्णा मां दूरवोसनम्।  
 ऋणमतित्प्रवृद्धं मणि हृदयान्नाकिर्षेत् ॥

It is said that Lord Krishna became a debtor, unable to discharge his debt to Draupadi who called His name and wept while being disgraced in public by Duryodhana and with Dussasana trying to disrobe her. Krishna used to soliloquise: “Draupadi had to call me as Govinda loudly

as I was then living a good distance away at Dvaraka. She has thus put me in a heavy debt which is growing day by day and I am unable to forget it.”

51. The second main episode in the sixth Skandha is that of Vritrāsura. Vritra, a demon of unconquerable strength, while fighting against Indra, the King of the gods, takes time to openly pray to the Lord in the battle-field. The last six verses of his prayer have been extolled by Vallabhācharya (a renowned devotee of the Lord and the Founder of the Pushti Mārga) as “the essence of the Bhāgavatam”.

Vritra prays: “ O Lord! When a person faces obstacles in his material progress and gets frustrated in his objectives, it is indeed a clear sign that your Grace has begun to work to turn him towards the spiritual path. For, Lord, you are unattainable by anybody except the poor who possess nothing and who deem themselves to be nothing.

“O Lord! Please grant me that in my future births I should be born as the servant of a servant of the Lord's feet, and that, with my mind, body and speech, I should worship You only.

“O Lord, I do not want to rule over the heaven, the earth or the nether regions (reputed for their untold riches) as a monarch. Nor do I want any mystic power or even liberation. I want nothing but You.

“Lord, how shall I describe my intense longing for You? My mind is yearning to see You just like the hungry fledglings waiting expectantly for the return of the mother bird; like the hungry calves waiting for the mother cows; and like the wife waiting for the arrival of her husband from tour.

“Lord, in case You do not find me worthy enough to be born even as the servant of a servant of Yours, then please deign to give me at least the company of holy persons. If You find me unworthy of this boon too, then condescend to give me at least a negative boon kindly let me not be born among those persons whose minds are steeped in the Māya of their bodies, their sons, wives, households and other possessions. Let me not have the company of such wicked persons who never think of the Lord but are completely materialistic in their outlook”. (VI-11-23 to 27). In the early stages of Sādhana, the company of purely worldly people is very harmful and it is to be avoided at all costs.

52. **भवानतार्षिन्मायां वै वैष्णवीं जनमोहिनीम्  
यद् देहायासुरं भावं महर्षितां गतह॥** (VI-12-20)

Even Indra could not believe his own eyes when he saw Vritra praying loudly as above. He praises him openly “What a wonder that you could shake off the choking coils of Māya which deludes all people! You have annihilated your demoniacal nature and have risen to the status of a Mahāpurusha (a great person).”

53. There is no one in the world who is outside the ambience of the Lord’s Grace. Whether a person be a sinner of the worst order (Ajāmila) or a demon (Vritra), the divine thermostat of the Lord’s Grace begins to work on him one day or the other and they are all taken to the Lord in due course by one or the other of the spiritual paths. The Lord is Infinite and the paths to Him are also Infinite, though some holy persons who have reached the goal swear (but for a few notable exceptions like Rāmakrishna Paramahansa) that theirs is the only path, the direct and the easiest path to reach the Lord. This is only for the purpose of creating an unswerving faith in the minds of their own followers and devotees. A doctor prescribes different medicines for different patients suffering from identical ailments, depending on their individual constitutions. It is so in the spiritual path too – that one is compelled by the Divine Will to choose that particular path that suits one’s “spiritual constitution” best, i.e. one’s aptitude, state of preparedness, ability, longing, yearning to reach the goal, etc., – in other words inherent capacities and Vāsanās which vary from person to person.

## Chapter VII

### Vāsanā Skandha

54. In this chapter, right in the beginning, in reply to a question asked by King Parikshit, Sukadeva says that the Lord is never motivated by partiality in bestowing His Grace. The Lord's Grace is ultimately the Grace of the Self. It is not that the Lord is always on the side of the gods and helps in defeating or slaying the asurās (demons). His Grace shines equally on all just as the moon shines equally on all waters, dirty or pure, in different pitchers or ponds, but the manifestation of that Grace on different individuals varies because of the good and bad Karmas and Vāsanās (latent tendencies inherited from the past) of different bodies. In an esoteric sense, all the gods and demons reside in us. Some cultivate divine tendencies (दैवी समत्) whereas others cultivate demoniacal tendencies (आसुरी वृत्त) in varying proportions. There is thus a conflict always going on between these two sets of tendencies in the same individual, which is figuratively termed as the 'Deva-asura' battle. The Lord's Grace works depending on the proportion of the tendencies and hence its manifestation and result differ from person to person. "तस्मात् क्निाप्युीयनि मनह् कृष्णानवशियत्ति।" From our side, we should always try to keep our mind solely on the Lord by any means whatsoever – through love, friendship, devotion, hatred or enmity.

One should strain one's best to establish a constant relationship with the Lord. (VII-1-30 and 31 )

55. The main story in the seventh Skandha is that of Prahlada and his father Hiranyakasipu, the former being a paradigm of an ideal devotee with all the good (सद्) Vāsanās, and the latter an example of ego at its worst, full of evil (असद्) Vāsanās. Many Sādhakās do various Sādhanās for twenty or thirty years (often in a half-hearted manner) and bemoan their lack of spiritual progress. This is just like the case of a young married woman who had been advised to do pradakshina of (to circumambulate) the peepal tree a hundred and one times a day for a full one year in order to beget a son; and her trying to test whether there is any heaviness in her womb or abdomen soon after completing one or two rounds of pradakshina. For countless births, we have revelled in worldly life, forgetting the Lord completely and we expect spectacular results after a Sādhana of just twenty or thirty years in a single life. Let us see how we stand in comparison with a child like Prahlada whose spiritual consciousness has been described so very superbly by Vedavyāsa.
56. Says Vyāsa: "Prahlada, though a child of five years or so, was not at all interested in playthings or toys or in games and sports normally played by children. He had no reaction to any worldly thing, howsoever attractive and remained as if he was insentient; but inwardly, all the time, his mind



was immersed in the Lord. While sitting, walking, talking, eating, drinking or lying down, he was not aware of either these activities or of his body, his mind being full of the Lord alone. When he became desperate for the vision of the Lord, he would sometimes weep. At other times, thinking of the Lord's proximity and love, he would laugh and dance, singing the Lord's name loudly, without feeling any sense of shame. Sometimes he would himself 'become' the Lord and imitate him. Sometimes he would sit absolutely still, with horripilation all over his body and with tears of joy streaming down from his closed eyes as he imagined the Lord embracing him. In his relation with the outside world, his behaviour was impeccable. He always spoke the truth; had complete control over his senses; used to treat everyone like his own Self; was the most favourite friend of all people alike; would serve the elders with his knees bent in humility; was kind towards the young and the poor like a father; treated his equals like brothers; venerated his Preceptors as though they were the Lord Himself, and was without the least ego or pride although endowed with learning, riches and a charismatic personality and self-dedication (surrender) to the Lord".

57. When Hiranyakasipu coaxes him to tell what he has learnt from the teacher, Prahlada recounts the following nine methods of devotion to the Lord: " Telling the glories and stories of the Lord, singing or discoursing them, remembrance of the Lord, serving the Lord's feet,

worshipping Him, prostrating before Him, serving the lord as a servant, friendship and self dedication (surrender - saranagati) to the Lord".

58. **तस्मात् सर्वेषु भूतषु दयां कुरुत सौहृदम्।  
आसुरं भावमुन्मुच्य यया तुष्यत्यधाक्षिजह॥** (VII-6-24)

Not to think of violence to any creature – whether man, animal, bird or insect – i.e. Ahimsa – is a prime prerequisite for any person on the spiritual path. Prahlada exhorts his classmates and companions – "Cultivate friendship and compassion towards all beings by renouncing the demoniacal quality of violence as this alone will please the Lord".

**एतावानवि लाकिऽस्मिनुसह स्वार्थह रिह स्मृतह।  
एकान्तभेक्तगोवन्दि यत् सर्वत्र तदीक्षणम्॥** (VII-7-55)

The highest goal for one's Self is to be considered as achieved by exclusive devotion to the Lord, manifested in the practice of seeing the Lord everywhere and in everything. Desirelessness alone can take one to the ultimate spiritual goal. कामानां हृद्यसंराहिं भवतस्तु वृणवि वरम्। (VII-10-7) Prahlada desires only one boon from the Lord – "Let no desire at all arise in my mind. This is the only boon I wish to ask of you." Only when a person can renounce all desires from his mind does he become worthy of seeking divinity.

## Chapter VIII

### Vāsanā-Nirasana Skandha

59. The first and the penultimate episodes in the eighth Skandha relate to the liberation of the king of elephants (Gajendra Moksha) and Mahābali's self-sacrifice (the Lord's incarnation as Vāmana) respectively. The first episode shows that the sad-Vāsanās (good tendencies) come to be of immense help in a subsequent birth and can be life-saving in a crisis. It is the sad-Vāsanās that activate the inbuilt divine thermostat. However much we may be involved in worldly life, a moment comes when a tragedy or a calamity strikes us, and at that moment, we are forced to think of the Lord as the only saviour in such an emergency. Did we not see Kunti Devi in the first chapter, praying to Lord Krishna to let calamities befall her continuously? Moments of utter misery and suffering are indeed the stepping stones to a higher life leading to absolute bliss and they are to be eagerly welcomed.
60. The story of Gajendra also has a deep esoteric significance. The king of elephants, unaware and regardless of the passage of time, was enjoying the three-peaked Trikuta mountain along with its herd of she-elephants and calves. One day, while playing in a river, a crocodile caught hold of its leg and a tug of war ensued between the two for quite some years. However, despite the help given by the

other elephants, it was unable to extricate itself from the clutches of the crocodile. In due course, all the other elephants deserted it and went away and it too became utterly exhausted, being sapped of all its energy and it was really at the end of its tether. Suddenly by the Grace of the Lord, it remembered Him and also a prayer which it used to offer to the Lord in an earlier birth as a King. It called on the Lord in a burst of spiritual fervour and chanted a prayer full of devotion and philosophical principles. And lo! The Lord appeared before it in response to that prayer and rescued it.

61. The episode of Gajendra moksha is really the story, put in an allegorical form, of every jivatma (the individual soul) in this world. Every Jiva is engrossed in worldly affairs, replete with the three modes (the trikutas), namely Satva, Rajas and Tamas in the company of wife and children, totally unaware of what is in store for him. Suddenly by the will of the Lord, a serious calamity overtakes him in old age – say a crippling attack of rheumatoid arthritis which prevents him from moving about. It is only a question of time before all his kith and kin desert him and abandon him to his miserable fate, and even the medicines he takes seem to be of no avail. And lo, when everything about him is pitch dark, he suddenly remembers the Lord who is really the only friend in need and, invariably, the Lord takes him in hand.
62. This story cannot and should not be dismissed as a simple myth. A similar true incident which occurred in the recent

past has been recorded in the “ Akhanda Jyoti” magazine of Shanti Kunj, Hardwar, in its issue of December 1991.

Alfred Johnson Budfair was a pearl diver in a small village on the seashore. He was a drunkard, with no reverence for church or god, given completely to hedonistic principles of ‘eat, drink and be merry’. One day, while diving under water, he was accosted by an octopus which wound round his body with its frightening tentacles. His mask was torn and the short sword kept by him as a weapon slipped into the water. While looking at the baleful eyes of the malevolent animal, the cry “O Lord!” involuntarily escaped from his lips and he lost consciousness. When he regained consciousness, he found himself lying on the seashore, with the octopus lying lifeless beside him, cut into pieces. His diving companion told him that, when he dived in search of him, he found him with the tentacles of the octopus wound round his body, but the octopus itself had been cut in various places and was lying lifeless. Johnson’s eyes filled with grateful tears as he realised for certain that it was none other than the Lord who had saved him. In order to propagate Johnson’s message, the Unity School of Christianity was established by one Charles Philmore who was an eye-witness to the incident.

63. An elephant with a huge body but with a disproportionately small brain, symbolises an average human being. To remember the Lord while facing a calamity is one way of wiping out the bad Vāsanās which rule us in our present life. Similarly in the next episode (relating to Mahābali)

it will be proved that an easy way of removing our Vāsanās when we are in prosperity is to give away all our possessions in charity (Dāna). Both the episodes bring out that apparent calamities can be converted into ladders for spiritual prosperity. We should, therefore, welcome such calamities instead of bemoaning them and lapsing into depression.

64. The next episode is the churning of the milky ocean for attaining immortality. Here, in order to make the gods immortal, the churning of the ocean is undertaken jointly by both the gods and the demons (asurās) on the advice of the Lord. As the Mandara mountain, used as the churning rod, would not remain steady in one place, the Lord Himself manifests as a tortoise (Kūrma avatāra) and places Himself under the mountain in order to make it steady. At the outset a terrific poison gas (Hālāhala) emanates from the mouth of the serpent king which acted as the churning rope, and threatens to immobilise the entire universe. But Lord Siva saves the situation by gobbling down the poison himself
65. Various attractive and invaluable items like the Ucchaisravas, a meritorious horse, Airāvata, a white elephant of unparalleled strength, Koustubha, a rare and invaluable gem; attractive and beautiful divine nymphs; and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth - came out of the ocean and they were all appropriated by the leaders. Lastly, the Ambrosia (Amrut or divine nectar) came out.

66. The story of the churning of the ocean is broadly an allegory of the process of meditation which is a principal gateway to immortality and absolute bliss. The process of meditation is in effect a churning of the mind, weeding out the poison gas of Vāsanās and worldly thoughts (वषयान् वषवत् त्यज “shun the worldly things as though they are poison” - Ashtāvakra Gita) and finally drinking the nectar of Bliss. The very thought of doing meditation comes to the Sādhaka only by the Grace of his Guru or the Lord. Various impediments arise during its implementation. The mind refuses to become steady and always moves from thought to thought. One easy way of steadying it is to pray to the Lord himself, who is always with us right from the start.

**यदा संहरति चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गीव सर्वशह।** (Bhagavad Gita II-58)  
(As the tortoise draws in its limbs into its shell).

The significance of the tortoise form of the Lord as the steadying base for churning is that one should try to withdraw oneself from all contact with the world just as the tortoise withdraws itself into its shell whenever threatened. The restlessness of the mind is because of its being constantly engaged in worldly affairs. At one stage of meditation, one is apt to find that the dirty and poisonous thoughts of sex, hatred etc. appear more strongly and in plenitude. This is indeed the Hālāhala poison. When a gutter is being cleaned out, the bad odour or stench becomes much stronger or even unbearable. The only way to tackle the situation is to become Lord Siva who is the

symbol of dispassion and detachment (Vairāgya). We should not then try to enjoy and relive those thoughts of sex or hatred but, with utter indifference, watch them trooping out helplessly, without cooperating with them or even recognising their existence or departure. The impure thoughts lying embedded in the sub-conscious have simply to go out, and all we have to do is to sit back and watch them escape. A worldly thought by itself is not bad, but when we begin to extend and consolidate it by repeatedly ruminating on it, it becomes toxic.

67. The next stage while getting established in meditation is the acquiring of ‘Siddhis’ or mystic powers, e.g. reading the minds of others, visualising incidents happening elsewhere, foretelling incidents yet to take place, etc. These have been symbolised in the attractive gems, nymphs, and other items that came out of the ocean. These mystic powers are very tempting as name and fame come easily to those dabbling in these ‘miracles’. In truth, however, these Siddhis are nothing but impediments meant to distract the Sādhaka from reaching the real goal; and many Sādhakas simply get lost in these Siddhis, being unable to make any further progress in their spiritual journey. Being indifferent to such Siddhis and patiently continuing with the meditation would reward the aspirant with the nectar of God-realisation ultimately.

68. The next main episode is the self-sacrifice of King Bali. The Lord Himself comes in the form of the young, short-statured Vāmana brahmachari to King Bali who was performing a large sacrifice and begs that the King kindly

grant him land admeasuring his (Vāmana's) three small footsteps. Proud of his own unlimited riches and surprised at the extremely trifling nature of the gift sought, the King tries to persuade Vāmana to ask for a sufficiently large gift which would be adequate to take care of his requirements for the rest of his life; but Vāmana sticks to his humble request. The moment Bali accepted the request and formalised the gift by relevant rituals, the Lord assumed His cosmos-pervading huge form extending from the netherlands right upto the topmost world. With one step Vāmana covered Bali's world, with a second step the heaven (and all other intermediate worlds) and his body occupied the entire space and there was no space to measure the third step. When the Lord asked him where he should place his third step as all of Bali's possessions had been occupied already by the two steps, Bali did not hesitate or waver, but bent down and indicated his own head.

69. Esoterically, the story is significant in many ways. If only we allot a little space in our heart for the Lord and also earmark a few moments out of the 24 hours in a day for remembering Him, worshipping Him, chanting His names, then very soon a day will come when the Lord will occupy the entire heart and also take up all of our 24 hours. When we take a single step towards the Lord in all sincerity, He takes several steps towards us – that is the secret of all Sādhana.

70. Secondly, ego and pride are the main impediments to spiritual progress. When a Sādhaka is striving to tread the spiritual path, but finds that, despite his best efforts, ego and pride are dogging his footsteps, then the Lord Himself will step in to remedy the short-comings and put the aspirant on the right track – for the Lord does not want any sincere aspirant to lose out. As stated in the Bible and oft-repeated in the entire Bhāgavatam, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to pass through the gates of heaven.

71. ॐ ह्यन् यमनुगृह्णोम तेद्वशाँवधुनाम्यिहम् ।  
यन्मदहं रुषिहं स्तब्धाँ लार्किं माँ चावमन्यती॥ (VIII-22-24)

The Lord tells Bali, in the presence of Prahlada, Brahma and the other gods, that even when He is stripping a person of his riches and power and humbles him, it is only out of His Grace and that it is a blessing. Once a person becomes proud of his riches and status, he goes to the extent of disregarding and insulting the Lord and the entire world. In prosperity, the easiest way to purify one's heart to attain God-realisation is by giving away one's possessions in charity; if need be, to the extent of reducing oneself to utter penury.

72. Another important aspect is Bali's uncompromising adherence to the truth even in the face of his Guru's curse, and even after he hears that adherence to the truth would cost him all his possessions and his status. Such an absolute adherence to the truth is an indispensable *sine qua non* to spiritual progress.

73. We shall now have a quick bird's-eye-view of the important landmarks we have crossed in Skandhās V to VIII before we proceed further on our spiritual Sādhana:

(1) It is not necessary to renounce one's household and proceed to a jungle to progress spiritually. For a person who has not got over his attachment to the world, impediments will crop up even in a forest. For one who has controlled all his five senses, remaining within one's household itself is a penance.

(2) Rishabha Deva's multi-pointed Sādhana programme in his advice to his sons:

- Following the Guru's instructions and devotion to the Guru and to the Lord.
- Identity of approach to all pairs of opposites, e.g. riches and poverty, happiness and misery, etc.
- The realisation that misery alone can result from all worldly things.
- Constant enquiry into "Who am I?" and meditating on it.
- Eschewing from the mind all desires, greed, enmity and hatred; cultivating dispassion and Samatva-Bhāva.
- Worshipping the Lord; listening to His names, glories and stories; satsanga and service to holy persons and to the Lord's devotees.
- Withdrawing all sense of identification with the body, one's kith and kin, house-hold, possessions, etc.

- Practising Yoga Sādhana in solitude, maintaining control over the vital Pranas (bio-energy), senses and mind.
- Practising complete faith in the Sat (True Existence, Reality), celibacy, always remaining alert and vigilant; maintaining control over speech.
- Performing all spiritual Sāadhanās with patience, perseverance and enthusiasm.
- Seeing the Lord in everything; acquiring scriptural knowledge and confirming it by experience.

Even if one of the above injunctions can be sincerely practised, the others too will follow suit.

(3) Taking the Lord's name even once washes off the sins committed by even the worst of sinners in crores of births. Even if unintentionally chanted once, the vibrations of the Lord's names are so potent that they wash away all sins and calamities. Even Yama the Lord of Death is helpless in dealing with a person who has taken the Lord's name and is therefore under the Lord's protection.

(4) The company of purely worldly persons should be avoided as it is harmful.

(5) Whatever be the Prārabdha of a person, whatever his worldly attachment, the Lord's Grace will dawn on him one day as none is outside His purview and the Lord will enable all persons to reach him through one or other of the various spiritual paths.

(6) The Lord is never partial in bestowing His Grace-there are no likes and dislikes in regard to the dispensation of His Grace. Our duty is to cooperate with Him by constantly thinking of Him.

(7) We should not get discouraged if we do not make adequate progress in Sādhana even after several years. This may be because of our accumulated Prārabdha which may take a long time to be washed out; or our sincerity and dedication may not be adequate. Without getting discouraged, we should go ahead with renewed faith and concentration.

(8) The child Prahlāda's formula for God-realisation as told by him to his father "Hearing the glories and stories of the Lord; singing or discussing them; remembrance of the Lord; serving the Lord's feet; worshipping Him; prostrating before Him; serving the Lord as a servant; friendship; and self-dedication to the Lord. (surrender – Saranagati)".

(9) Ahimsa, nonviolence to all creatures, compassion, total desirelessness these invariably take us to the Lord.

(10) Calamities which befall us during our Sādhana should not discourage us. They are the ladders given to us by the Lord for our spiritual ascent.

(11) If we give the Lord a little space in our hearts and in our daily routine, soon He will occupy our whole heart

and our whole life. If we take one step towards Him, He will take several steps towards us.

(12) All dirty thoughts should be purged from the mind and cleansing done as though it is a choked drain, using the "cleanser" of deep faith in the Lord.

(13) Siddhis or the capacity to perform "miracles" should not distract our Sādhana or our attaining the ultimate goal. We should frown upon the Siddhis as of no consequence.

(14) The Lord will not allow any Sādhaka who has abiding faith in Him to fail in his mission. He will always come to his rescue at the appropriate time by showering His Grace. We should believe in this as an absolute truth.

## Chapter IX

# Vamsānucharita Skandha

74. This Skandha contains a number of miscellaneous stories of certain prominent kings of the two main dynasties and of some devotees of the Lord.

The story of King Ambarisha shows how a real devotee does not retaliate even when others openly try to destroy him, but how the Lord Himself is ever alert in protecting such a devotee even though the devotee may not appeal to Him for help. It also establishes another very important point, namely, that if a person causes harm or grief to a devotee who has fully surrendered himself to the Lord as a result of which the Lord's avenging wrath is directed against the offender, then no other god or power can intervene or save him unless the devotee who is the victim, himself relents and requests the Lord to spare the offender. At the same time, a true devotee never bears the slightest ill-will, hatred or rancour against any such offender and is only too willing and ready to forgive. These characteristics are signs by which any spiritual Sādhaka may assess his own progress *vis-a-vis* an ideal devotee.

75. The story of Soubhari is to illustrate the deleterious effect which the company of worldly persons even for a short while has on a Sādhaka. For years Soubhari was doing intense penance inside the waters of the Yamuna river. One day, when he opened his eyes, he saw the king of

the fishes enjoying with his family and this aroused in him an ardent desire to get married. He used his yogic powers to convert himself into a very handsome young person, married fifty princesses and lived with them for several years in palaces created by his yogic powers, still without getting any final satisfaction.

सं. त्यजति मथुनव्रेतनां मुमुक्षुह  
सर्वात्मना न वसृजद्दि वेहपरन्दियोण।  
एकश्चरन् रहेस चत्तमनन्त ईशानि  
युञ्जीत तद् व्रेतषु साधुषु चत्ति प्रसह॥ (IX-6-51)

Suddenly wisdom dawns on Soubhari and he exclaims - “Alas, just by looking at the fish, I slipped from the highest state in which I had been meditating on the Supreme Being for a long time. A Sādhaka should always avoid the company of worldly persons and should never allow his senses to go to outside objects. He should either remain in absolute solitude, constantly remembering the Lord; or be in the company of holy men (if company becomes unavoidable)”

76. The story of the Rāmāyana is summarised in this Skandha.

स्त्रीसेनां गेतेमेत प्रथयंश्चचार। (IX-10-11)

While narrating the episode of Rāma wandering in the forest, searching and weeping for Sita, Vyāsa says “The Lord demonstrated to the world the pitiful state to which



a person fond of the company of women is reduced” This very idea is further elaborated in the story of Purûrava. In the story of King Yayāti too, he exchanges his old age with the youth of his son Puru and enjoys conjugal bliss for thousands of years.

**न जातु कामह कामानामुभागिनि शाम्येत।  
हेवषा कृष्णवर्त्मव भूय एवोभवर्धत।।**

**मात्रा स्वस्त्रा देहत्रा वा नोवेवक्तासना भवति।  
लवोनन्द्रियग्रामा विद्वान्समे कर्षत ॥ (IX-19-14 &17)**

When Yayāti found that even then his senses had not reached satiety, he exclaimed in repentance “Sexual desires can never be fulfilled or exhausted by their enjoyment. The more one tries to satisfy or fulfill them, the more do they blaze forth and grow like the fire which is nourished by the pouring of ghee. One should not remain in the company of a woman alone, even if she were to be one’s own mother, sister or daughter, as the senses are too strong and they may force even a wise man into the wrong path”.

77. The last main episode in this Skandha is that of King Rantideva. At the time of acute famine in the country, having exhausted all the stocks of grain in his granary and all the water in the reservoirs by distributing them to starving subjects, he starved for 48 days without even having water to drink, along with the members of his

family. By chance, when he got some food and water, several hungry people came to him in utter distress one after the other, seeking food and water and he distributed all the available stock, seeing the Lord in each one of them. Just as he was at the point of death and was about to sip a drop of water, a downtrodden person rushed to him and begged for the water to wet his parched mouth and lips, and the King obliged him without the least hesitation.

**न कामयडिहं गेतमीश्वरात् रि-  
मष्टेर्द्युक्तामृनिर्भवं वा।  
ओर्तं प्रघिडिखलदहिभाजा-  
मन्तह स्थिता यनि भवन्त्यदुहखाह ॥ (IX-21-12)**

Rantideva prays to the Lord: “O Lord! I do not want liberation or any high position or immense riches. Kindly grant me that I could remain in the hearts of all beings and take unto myself all their unhappiness and misery, thus ridding them of all sorrows.”

**Chapter X**  
**Nirodha Skandha**

78. The tenth Skandha is the longest in the Bhāgavatam with as many as 90 chapters; the next longest, the third Skandha, having only 33 chapters. This Skandha mainly recounts the sporting leelas of Lord Krishna. Even if we disregard the esoteric significance of the incidents in Krishna's life; and even if we consider all these incidents to be purely mythical, still, when one reads the story as it progressively unfolds itself, thinks of the childish pranks of the Lord and His glories, remembering that, howsoever much of a myth it might be, it still is a story of the Lord who incarnated himself in human form. Even by listening to it, the mind of any aspirant who has been able to get rid of his Vāsanās, easily achieves concentration which can very easily take him to the super-conscious state of Samādhi as it is said that “यत्र यत्र मना योत तत्र तत्र समाधयह्” Wherever the mind gets firmly fixed, there is Samādhi experienced. This is the reason why this Chapter is called the Nirodha Skandha (controlled thoughts). This is a technique to reach the goal; and all techniques which are available for use have necessarily to be within the realm of unreality and Māya. But so long as this technique leads us to God-realisation, why should its reality or otherwise matter?

**नैषोतदुहसहा क्षुन्मां त्यक्तादिमे रोधति  
रोन्तं त्वन्मुखाम्भाजिच्युतं हपरकथामृतम्॥**

(X-1-13)

Even at the beginning of this Skandha, after having listened to nine Skandhās, King Parikshit has already reached the stage of one-pointed interest and concentration, as will be evident from his above-quoted words “Sir, now that I am drinking the nectar of the Lord's glories flowing from your mouth, it is so fulfilling that neither hunger nor thirst is affecting me (even though, for the last four days, I have taken neither food nor water).”

79. When Krishna was accused of having eaten mud, as witnessed by his elder brother Balarāma and also by a group of cowherd boys, Krishna blandly denies it to his mother, saying, in plain words, that he did not eat the mud. Many feel outraged that the Lord himself should utter a lie when his incarnation as Krishna is purported to be for upholding and establishing virtue. Herein lies a great spiritual secret. Krishna never uttered a lie. Being the Lord, he had no sense of “doership” . While the body and the senses were attending to various activities as per Prārabdha or Karma or destiny, a spiritually evolved soul will remain as pure witness – consciousness, and there will be no ego which will attribute the “ doership “ to itself. This is the state of inaction in action which every Sādhaka should aspire to reach.
80. In the Damodara leela of the Lord, Yashoda tries to tie up child Krishna to an old wooden mortar as a punishment,

but finds that the rope she is using is falling short by 2 inches. She ties other pieces of rope to that cord, but she still finds the length to be the same 2 inches short. Although she repeated this process several times, exhausting all the ropes in the house, she finds the combined length still short. This is to show that no Sādhaka should think that he can attain God-realisation solely through his efforts. It is the Lord's Grace which clinches the issue finally, and one has to pray for it.

81. वाणी गुणानुकथनं श्रवणौ कथायां  
हस्तौ च कर्मसु मनस्तव वीदयानिह ।  
स्मृत्यां शरस्तव नवासजगत्प्रणामां  
दृष्ट्वा सतां दर्शनस्तु भवत्तनूनाम् ॥ (X-10-38)

When child Krishna releases the twin sons of Kubera from the curse of being two Arjuna trees by uprooting them and restoring the young men to their original form, the twins ask for a boon from the Lord –

“O Lord, please grant us that our tongues may always be engaged in singing Your praises and glories, our ears in hearing them, our hands in doing Your service, our minds in the contemplation of Your holy feet, our heads in prostrating to the entire world which is Your dwelling, and our eyes in the vision of the holy persons who are Your embodiments.”

82. There is a strange yoga mentioned in Bhāgavatam, called ‘Steya Yoga’ (the path of stealing for union with the Lord

- X-8-29 and 31). All the yogic texts and scriptures prescribe the cultivation of non-stealing (asteya) as one of the requisites for an aspirant, while here, Lord Krishna's stealing of milk, curd, butter, etc. has been mentioned as a yoga (path to the Lord). In the Mahāvākya TAT-TVAM-ASI, meditation on which is believed to lead one to realisation, Asteya is prescribed from the aspirant's point of view (i.e. ‘Tvam’-based Sādhana). The Steya yoga is ‘Tat’ (the Lord/God) based, as, simply by listening to these exploits of stealing by the Lord, the mind gets a single-pointed concentration which leads one to Samādhi.

83. तत्तद्विनुकर्मा सुसमीक्षमाणानि  
भुञ्जान एवात्मकृतं वीकम् ।  
हृद्वाग्वुर्ध्वदधन्नमस्तति  
जीवति यानि मुक्तयि स दायभाक् ॥ (X-14-8)

In another episode Brahma the creator gets deluded and wishes to test whether such an ordinary-looking boy like Krishna, playing with the dust-laden cow-herd boys of Brindavana could in fact be the Lord himself. When the Lord teaches him an unforgettable lesson, Brahma expresses regret and sings some hymns in His praise. One of them contains the three valuable Sādhanās which in themselves could take one to God-realisation. Brahma sings (as in the above verse) - “Lord, one who spends his life praying and looking forward to Your Grace, quietly experiencing the joys and sorrows which are visited on him as a result of past actions (Prārabdha), and prostrating to you with heart,

speech and body, becomes ultimately entitled to liberation (Mukti)”. So, this is actually a three-in-one Sādhana (1) incessant prayer for the Lord’s Grace; (2) quietly experiencing Prārabdha-caused joys and sorrows; and (3) prostrating to the Lord with heart, speech and body. One should always weep and pray for the Lord’s Grace. Why not take the succour of the Lord Himself for attaining Him? One should not rebel against the sorrows and miseries of life, which are only a result of one’s own earlier actions. These are meant to purify our mind. Full acceptance of the Lord’s will and bearing all calamities cheerfully is itself a Sādhana. Remembering the Lord continuously; surrendering the mind, speech and body to him; performing only selfless acts beneficial to mankind; contemplating on the Lord continuously; and either resorting to silence or surrendering one’s speech to the Lord, or, if need be, using speech only to chant the names and glories of the Lord, are sure means for realising the spiritual goal.

84. There is an interesting episode of Venu Gita (The Song of the Flute) in the 21 “ chapter of this Skandha. The Gopis (cowherdess women) are all so intensely devoted to Lord Krishna that, wherever they turn, they imagine all nature as worshipping and lying ensnared by the bewitching charm of the Lord. They feel envious of the flocks of does (female deer) accompanied by their black bucks, which have come to hear the sweet melodies of Krishna’s flute, as if enchanted. They could also see the cows and calves gathered around the Lord, the calves forgetting to drink

the milk oozing from their mothers’ udders, all with their ears cocked to listen to the strains of Krishna’s flute. They imagine the rivers and the streams hastening with their hand-like waves carrying gifts of lotus flowers to be offered at the Lord’s lotus feet in a fervent embrace. The birds sitting quietly on the boughs of trees with their eyes closed are sages who have assumed that form in order to enjoy the divine music emanating from the Lord’s flute. When the mellifluous notes of the Lord’s flute blaze forth in the beautiful night, the Gopis whose hearts are full of love for the Lord run to him immediately, abandoning whatever worldly activities had engaged them at that moment. Gopis who were feeding their husbands and children, those who were milking cows, those who were in the process of dressing themselves — all of them dropped those activities midway and ran to the Lord, their hair dishevelled, their robes in disarray, totally unaware of their bodies. How many of us will be prepared to drop our activities and turn to the Lord? His call is always sounding in our hearts, but few of us heed it at all!

85. **दुहसहप्रष्टिवरहतीव्रताधिताशुभाह ।**  
**ध्यानप्राप्ताच्युताश्लषि ेनर्वृत्या क्षीणमलाह ॥** (X-29-10)  
**जहुगुणमयं दहिं सद्यह प्रक्षीर्णेन्धनाह ॥** (X-29-11)

Another beautiful aspect of this episode is that, on the one hand, only those Gopis who could run to Krishna on the Yamuna bank that night were able to enjoy His company;

on the other hand, there were a few Gopis who were restrained from going by their husbands or other relatives and were locked up in dark windowless rooms. They also got instant liberation. Such liberation can only come when their stock of punya (merit) and pāpa (sin) gets completely exhausted so that the soul does not have to get embodied any more as there is no stock of either punya or pāpa to be experienced. In the case of the latter category of Gopis who were locked up in dark rooms with no exit, they were utterly miserable and their entire bodies were burning in the 'fire' of separation from their beloved Lord. Experiencing of such untold and extreme misery exhausted their stock of sin (pāpa). Likewise, while meditating on the Lord, they found themselves, in their imagination, embracing the Lord and experiencing the utmost Bliss. This extreme joy exhausted their stock of punya (merit). Having thus exhausted all their Prārabdha of merit and sin, they were immediately relieved from the bondage of 'samsara' (cycle of births and deaths), left their bodies and attained liberation. This is the height of Sādhana Intense longing for the Lord alone is the key to salvation. Rāmakrishna Paramahansa was prepared to cut off his own head when he felt frustrated on finding that he could not get the 'darshan' of Kāli, and this led to instant realisation The Gopis' love for the Lord and their devotion to Him were so all-consuming that all their ego was dissolved. They were prepared to transgress all norms of morality and even face ostracism by society. In fact, they had no body sense at all, and they lived only in Krishna, going beyond the accepted norms of virtue and sin, morality and immorality

(a-morality). In his Bhakti Sutras, Nārada cites these Gopis as ideal devotees of the highest order.

86. The Gopis were fully aware that Krishna was not a mere handsome neighbour of theirs, but the Lord Himself, incarnated for the good of the entire world at the specific request of Lord Brahma. They clearly avow this knowledge while lamenting Krishna's disappearance from their midst. (Gopikā Gitam, X-31-4: " O Krishna, we know it for certain that You are no Gopi's son. On the other hand, You are the witness residing in the hearts of all embodied souls. We also know that You have taken birth in this world, among these cowherd clans of ours in response to Brahma's prayer in order to save the whole world".)
87. The noblest type of Bhakti is where a devotee revels in the happiness and well-being of his or her beloved and is extremely miserable in the latter's misery. The Gopikās, in their lamentation, describe the state of their minds when Krishna used to leave daily for the forests in Brindavana for grazing the cows – "O Lord! How miserable we were when we thought of You running bare-footed with Your tender feet bleeding from the pricks of sharp stones and thorns while taking out the cows for grazing!" (X-31-11)

तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनं  
केवेभरीडतं कल्मषाहिम् ।  
श्रवणमलं श्रीमदाततं  
भुवे गुणन्ति त्ति भूपरदा जनाह ॥

(X-31-9)

The Gopikās sing, weeping “Lord, hearing Your stories and glories is a divine nectar which would rejuvenate and gladden the hearts of those dying with miseries. It can annihilate all our Vāsanās and sins as reiterated by the wise ones. It is only those devotees who are rich with the knowledge of the Lord’s glories that do great acts of charity by disseminating this knowledge among others”.

88. When Sukadeva starts narrating Krishna’s disportations with the Gopis (Rāsa Kreedā), King Parikshit abruptly interrupts him with a relevant question which troubles the mind of many a modern man and woman – “How can anyone extol the glories of a God who professed to incarnate himself for re-establishing the highest standards of virtue and morality in the world, but at the same time lends himself to criticism for carrying on intimately with the wives of others, which is condemned in the scriptures in no uncertain terms as a heinous sin?” (X-33-27 to 29).

89. Let us marshal the known facts

(1) Krishna is the Lord Himself, manifesting in His fullest glory as Pure Consciousness - “कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम्” “Krishna is verily the Lord Himself and none else.” He is thus the only Reality who has taken the form of the entire universe and all its inhabitants. The created universe has no existence or Reality of its own except as His sport and in relation to Him. Gauda Pada, in his “Kārika” on

Māndūkya Upanishad says the reason for the Lord’s sport is His nature दविस्यषिस्वभावाडियम्॥

(2) Lord Krishna is the Supreme Being who is installed in the hearts of all creatures in the universe, including the Gopis, their husbands, children and others. He is *not* an outsider but the very Self of all beings including even the Gopis – everyone is His and He is everyone’s. Everything is His own sport and the play of His internal Power or Sakti which is no different from Him.

(3) The Lord’s body is not made of the five elements of which the gross bodies of men, women and other creatures are made. His body is all Pure Consciousness.

**रमि रमशिाि व्रजसुन्दरीभ -  
र्यथार्भकह स्वप्रेतेवभ्रमह॥**

(X-33-17)

While dealing with the Leela (Rāsa Kreedā) of the Lord, it is stated - “The Lord sported with the Gopis just like a small child playing with his own reflection in a mirror or in water.” So, who were the Gopis, or for that matter, all other creatures? None but the Lord Himself, or if you wish, His reflections. So with whom or with what was He disporting? With His own Self or reflection!

(4) Also let us remember that the Gopis also included among themselves divine nymphs, certain great sages like Ugratapa, Satyatapa, Haridhāma and others, who as a result

of their intense Sādhana, were born as Gopis, to enjoy the bliss of treading the same earth as trodden by the Lord Himself – Brindavana. The various hymns of the Vedas which expressed a desire to play with the Lord in human form, also took birth as the Gopis. Mahāprabhu Chaitanya has termed the Gopis as “Prema Sanyasins “ (Nuns of Pure Love). It is the highest and purest form of love (which has nothing physical or carnal about it) where, without any volition of their own, all normal moral standards and virtues presented in the scriptures renounce such devotees. There is an aphorism of Nārada’s in his Bhakti Sutras –

**वदिनेर्न सन्यस्येत क्विलमेवच्छिन्नानुरागं लभती॥**

(5) The scriptures refer to Krishna as a person of unbroken celibacy. Even from the common-sense point of view, Krishna was hardly ten years of age while doing the Rasa Kreedā and it would be absurd to invest his association with the Gopis with carnal or sexual motives.

(6) **आसामहा चरणरिजुषामहं स्यां।  
वृन्दावनिर्कमेर्गुल्मलतौषधीनाम्। (X-47-61)**

Uddhava who carries Krishna’s message to the Gopis from Mathura and who thinks that the Gopis might be some uncultured village belles just infatuated with Krishna, is shocked to find their deep love and unparalleled devotion. He prays – “Would to God that I became a bush, creeper or plant in Brindavana so that the dust of the feet of the

holy Gopis would sometime fall on me too during their walks and I may be blessed!”

90. The entire Rāsa Kreedā episode with the Gopis, if chanted or listened to, is believed to remove all the “ diseases” of the heart, including, in particular, sexual desires. According to a famous commentator, Jiva Goswami, this episode is designed to attract even completely worldly persons, more interested in erotic sentiments and romance, to the Lord.

91. The next important episode, namely Krishna’s marriage with Rukmini, occurs in the Lord’s adult life. Rukmini was the daughter of Bhīshmaka, the Vidarbha king. Having heard unstinting praises of Krishna, then ruling over Dvaraka, from several visiting sages and others, Rukmini had decided that she would marry Krishna only. As her elder brother was not favourably disposed towards Krishna, she was betrothed to Sisupāla, the Chedi king and the date of the marriage was also close at hand. Rukmini got perturbed and sent a message to Krishna through a dependable Brāhmana, requesting him to come and take her away by force. In the message, she said – “O Lord of unparalleled beauty in all the three worlds! From the time I first heard of Your excellence, I had fallen for You and Your glories, entering through my ears, have been cooling down my body which was yearning for You. The only benefit in having eyes is to be able to see Your form. I am yours and please do not allow Sisupāla or others to

claim me. May all the vows observed and the worship done to the Lord, the Guru and others result in granting this desire of mine. Before I am married to Sisupāla tomorrow, please come *incognito* along with Your army chiefs and carry me away by force. You are the one the dust of whose holy feet is desired by even Lord Siva for destroying His Tamoguna. Now that I have known about You, if I do not get Your Grace in this birth, I shall die pining for You with my body starved by rigorous discipline birth after birth till You relent and accept me”.

92. To many it sounds strange that while barely two days remained of Parikshit’s life, within which time he had, if at all, to attain the much-desired Moksha, here was Sukadeva entertaining the King with the episode of Rukmini’s romantic love for Krishna. Actually the “message of love” from Rukmini to Krishna is a “love letter” from a Jiva (Jivātma, an individual soul) to the Lord, the Supreme Self

“Rukmini” means ‘golden-hued’ and the Jivātma is described in the scriptures as golden coloured (हरण्मयहृरिषह) A Jiva (a normal person) is wedded in every birth to a life of ‘Sisupāla’, i.e. bearing and protection of children (Sisu = child; pāla = protection/protector); marrying, earning, begetting and rearing children – these are the only activities of most persons who live ordinary lives. A rare Jiva comes to hear of the Lord’s glories in Satsanga. Hearing (sravanam) is always the first step in spirituality. Having once heard of the Lord and having once lost his

heart to Him, the Jiva is not prepared to be wedded to the life of Sisupāla, but wants the Lord Himself The Jiva is helpless and it is for the Lord to relent and take it away by force from the worldly environment. If the Lord’s Grace is not forthcoming in this birth, the Jiva is determined to do tapasya (penance) birth after birth and leave the body till it attains Him. It is firm determination and complete surrender which are capable of bestowing success in our spiritual quest. This is the significance of Rukmini’s message of love. It is not a mere ‘earthly’ romantic tale.

93. Then comes the episodes of Krishna marrying seven more princesses like Satyabhāma, and then 16,000 princesses languishing in the prisons of Bhowmāsura. Nārada who was never tired of savouring the glories and leelas of the Lord visits all the homes of Krishna’s wives numbering 16008 and finds one Krishna in each house, engaged in various duties as an ideal house-holder. Somewhere he is seen fondling his children; somewhere consuming the remnants of the food from leaves off which Brāhmanas had eaten; somewhere immersed in meditation; somewhere conferring on affairs of the State with his counsellors; somewhere listening to the Purānas and to the Lord’s glories; somewhere doing personal service to his parents; and so on.

**स्मायावलाकिलवदेशतभावहापर-**

**भ्रूमण्डलप्रेहतसीरतमन्त्रशौण्डेह ।**

**त्न्यस्तु षाडिशसहस्रमर्णे-**

**र्यस्योन्द्रियं वेमेथतुं करणेनेवभ्यह ॥**

(XI-6-18)



Though the Lord was playing the role of an ideal house-holder, all the 16,000 and odd beautiful damsels using all their wiles with their winking glances, charming play of eyebrows and eyelashes, bewitching smiles and other artifices, were unable to create even a single ripple in the absolutely detached mind of the Lord. (What then to speak of a Rāsa Kreedā at the age of ten!)

The 8 principal wives represent the eight miraculous powers (ashta siddhis) and the other 16,000 wives represent the 16 major categories of objects of temptation. All the temptations come to us through any one or more of the 11 Indriyas (5 senses of perception, 5 senses of action and Mind) and the 5 objects of temptation made up of the 5 elements (earth, air, water, fire and space). All temptations from the world are in thousands under the various permutations and combinations of the 16 categories mentioned above (16 based on the constituent elements of objects and the sources i.e. 11 senses) through which the temptations are absorbed. This seems to be the significance of the 16,008 wives of Lord Krishna.

94. In the Rājasūya sacrifice performed by Yudhishtira when Lord Krishna was forced to behead Sisupāla, an effulgent light from the latter's body was seen entering the Lord.

**ध्यायंस्तन्मयतां यातां भावाँह भवकारणम्॥** (X-74-46)

For three continuous births, Sisupāla's mind had been full of enmity for the Lord; and as he was constantly thinking only of the Lord with fierce intensity born of enmity, he ultimately became identified with the Lord. It is the mind that is responsible for birth. By constant meditation, though in hatred, Sisupāla's soul got merged with the Lord.

95. The story of Sudāma, the erstwhile classmate of Krishna proves that the Lord does not need anything more valuable than pure love from his devotees. Krishna says "A leaf, a fruit, a little water, offered with real love and devotion is enough to please me!" (X-81-4).

**सर्वासामेँसद्धीनां मूलं तच्चरणार्चनम्॥** (X-81-19)

One can get all riches and worldly prosperity too, if needed, by worshipping the Lord with Love.

## Chapter XI

# Mukti Skandha

96. Many scholars and devotees consider the eleventh Skandha to be the most instructive and the most precious as it covers the entire scope of spiritual Sādhana in a single Skandha, and that too, as narrated or revealed by Lord Krishna to Uddhava. Some call this portion – the Uddhava Gita. In view of this, it is, in a sense, a repetition of the salient points brought out in the earlier Skandhās.

97. This Skandha starts with the conversations of nine Yogiswaras who dispel various doubts raised by King Nimi (Videha). The first of these Yogis, Kavi, narrates some of the disciplines which lead to the realisation of the Lord:

(1) It is our identification with our bodies that leads us to fears and miseries of all types. The body does not have a real existence as such as it is असत् (unreal, that which does not really exist). It is only by worship of the Lord who is the soul of the entire universe that we can rid ourselves of our fears and miseries. (XI-2-33)

(2) Whatever activities we perform, through our mind, body, speech or senses, due to our natural qualities, etc., should all be surrendered to the Lord. The doer should never expect the results of his action to accrue to him.

This type of activity, consecrated to the Lord, will not bind us.

(3) The vacillating mind should be controlled and made free from all thoughts..

(4) One should live bereft of all attachments, listening to the glories of the Lord and chanting the Lord's names loudly without any shyness.

(5) In order to cultivate 'ego-less-ness', one should prostrate before rivers, oceans and all beings as manifestations of the Supreme Being.

(6) Continuous contemplation of the Lord will bestow devotion, dispassion and intimate knowledge of the Lord, and finally leads to liberation. (XI-2-36, 38, 39, 41, 43)

98. Then Hari, the second Yogi, defines the best devotee. The one who looks at all beings with love and reverence as the Self and as the Lord who is the Self of all beings, is the best among devotees. The one in whose mind no seed of desire ever sprouts and whose sole refuge is the Lord, is the best among devotees. The one whose mind never swerves from the remembrance of the Lord even for a fraction of a second and is never tempted even by the splendour and prosperity of the three worlds, is the best among devotees (XI-2-45, 50, 53)

99. Prabuddha, another Yogi, outlines the following Sādhana for getting out of the Lord's Māya which involves us in an illusory world:

- (1) To begin with, one should get a Guru (Preceptor), well-established in the Brahman and Vedanta (philosophy of the Supreme). One should learn from the Guru the Sādhana to be practised and should treat the Guru as his Self and the Lord.
- (2) One should seek the company of holy persons (Satsanga) and keep one's mind detached from all worldly things. One should cultivate compassion, friendship and humility while dealing with all beings, cleanliness, forbearance, silence, straight-forwardness, study of scriptures, celibacy, nonviolence, equal vision, etc. One should see everything as a manifestation of the Lord Himself. One should be engaged always in hearing, chanting and meditating on the glories of the Lord. One should surrender oneself, one's wife, children and possessions, at the feet of the Lord. One who practises these will be able to transcend Māya easily (XI-3-21, 23 to 25, 27, 28).

100. The next most famous episode is about the twenty-four preceptors (Gurûs) from nature, from each of whom Dattatreya Avadhûta learnt an important lesson. These 24 preceptors are: earth; air; space; water; fire; moon; sun; pigeon; python; ocean; moth; honey-bee; elephant; honey-gatherer; deer; fish; the prostitute Pingala; Kurara bird

(osprey); child; unmarried maiden; arrow-smith; serpent; Spider; and wasp. Let us see very briefly the main lesson Dattatreya learnt from each of these Gurus in a positive (i.e to be followed as a model) or in a negative (i.e. to be avoided) way.

**Earth** - Despite being trampled under the feet of so many beings, Mother Earth remains unmoved. Likewise, a man of self control should not swerve from his chosen path and should remain impervious to all attacks from external sources.

Further, from the mountains and trees of the Earth, one should learn to live for others and strive to serve all other beings.

**Air** - A spiritual aspirant should remain unattached just like the Air which never gets tainted despite its coming into contact with various types of objects.

**Space (sky)** - A sage should remain ever identifying himself with the Supreme being as immanent in all objects of the universe (movable and immovable) and dissociating himself with the body just like the all-pervasive space which remains immanent in all objects and at the same time not imbibing any of the characteristics of those objects.

**Water** - Being by nature pure, friendly and sweet tempered, a sage purifies people just like the Ganga water which

purifies men by sight (seeing), by touch and by being praised.

**Fire** - Shining with the power of austerities, a sage remains totally unaffected and unpolluted though eating anything and everything just like the Fire. Sometimes he keeps his glory hidden and at other times he reveals himself to his earnest devotees. By consuming the food offered by donors he burns up the latter's past and future sins just like the fire.

**Moon** - The waxing and waning stages are only for the digits of the moon, its core remaining unchanged. The lesson is that growth and decay are only for the body and not for the Self.

**Sun** - Even though the yogi absorbs the various objects with his senses of perception he does not revel in them just as the Sun absorbs the water through his rays and releases it in proper time as rain (without retaining it). Further, the one Sun appears as many reflections in various pots of water. Similarly, it is the same Self which appears and is seen as many in the various beings.

**Pigeon** - Once, a male Pigeon and a female pigeon saw their young chicks (fledgelings) having been entangled in a hunter's nest. Being sorely distressed at this plight and moved emotionally due to their undue attachment to those children, both the parent pigeons threw themselves too into the net, to the delight of the hunter. Thus a house-holder who fails to keep his senses under control and is attached

to his family is subject to sufferings and hardships along with his family.

**Python** - One should put up with hunger and be satisfied with whatever comes to him by way of food just like the python, without making any effort to obtain it.

Though fully healthy and active, an aspirant should not engage his senses, mind etc. in action but lie quiet like the python with his mind ever alert and vigilant in respect of the ultimate objective in life.

**Ocean** - A sage should be like the ocean, still and calm but deep and profound, unfathomable, boundless and unperturbed.

**Moth** - With its fatal attraction for fire, it perishes in it. Similarly, the person who lacks in self control falls a victim to the charms of the opposite sex and perishes.

**Honey Bee** - Collects the essence of flowers in small quantities from a large number of flowers. Man should learn to extract the essence of the Scriptures (Sastras) as the bee does. A mendicant should collect alms from house to house, just enough for the upkeep of his body and should never hoard food even for the morrow. If he accumulates, he will perish like the bee along with that accumulated property.

**Elephant** - An ascetic should avoid all contacts with the opposite sex as otherwise he will get bound just as a bull

elephant gets entrapped through contact with a cow elephant.

**Honey-gatherer** : If the hard earned money collected by the miser is neither given in charity nor used for self enjoyment, it will be knocked away by somebody just as the honey gathered by bees is taken away by the honey-collector.

**Deer** - An ascetic should not listen to vulgar music. He should learn a lesson from the example of the deer which gets captured while rapturously listening to music.

**Fish** - It is caught and drawn to death by swallowing the baited hook. Similarly, a man who falls a victim to the attractions of the palate will perish ultimately.

**Pingala, the Prostitute** - One day, a prostitute called pingala, who was earning her living by satisfying the sensual desires of men, was expectantly waiting till midnight in vain for some rich customers to come. Suddenly, the realisation dawned on her as to how stupid she had been in running after petty men who only gave her sorrow, fear, worry and delusion while she had ignored the most loving eternal and bounteous lover viz. the Lord who was seated closest to her (within her heart). The lesson is that one should give up one's hankerings after sensual pleasures which lead one to sorrows and sufferings and take refuge in the Lord.

**Kurara bird** - A kurara bird having a piece of meat in its beak was pursued and attacked by other bigger birds.

Only when it dropped that piece of meat it could get peace. Similarly, the more a sense object is sought after by men, the more it is a source of suffering. Possession leads to strife and lack of peace.

**Child** - A child bothers not about either honour or insult. It is free from worries and immersed in joy of self and plays all alone by itself. A sage should imitate this behaviour.

**Unmarried maiden** - An unmarried maiden, dehusking paddy on the sly, found that the bangles on her hand were making a jingling sound and betrayed her activity. When she removed all the bangles except one on each hand, no more sound was made or heard. If too many people live together, it will result in quarrel or mutual gossip. So a sage should travel alone, like the single bangle on the girl's wrist, conversing with none.

**Arrow smith** - A smith making an arrow-head had his mind so fully concentrated on his job of forging the arrow-head that he remained unaware of a king along with his retinue passing by. Similarly, an aspirant's mind should be fully absorbed in the Ātman without any awareness of objects inside or outside.

**Snake** - A snake has no house of its own but is happy living in the holes made by other creatures. A sage should be a wanderer, homeless. Building a home of his own will result in sorrow and suffering.

**Spider** - Just as a spider brings out its web from within its body, sports in it for sometime and then withdraws it into itself, so does the Supreme being create, spread and withdraw the universe, all by Himself.

**Wasp** - It brings a worm and keeps it in its hole. Listening to the constant tapping on the wall of the hole, the worm in mortal fear, constantly thinking of the wasp, eventually assumes the form of the wasp itself. So should aspirants concentrate on the Lord and attain His form.

These 24 preceptors may be classified as follows:

14 preceptors who provide us with positive lessons: Earth, Air, Space (sky), Water, Fire, Moon, Sun, Python, Ocean, Child, Arrow-Smith, Spider, Serpent, Wasp.

7 preceptors who teach us bad lessons to be avoided (negative): Pigeon, Moth, Elephant, Deer, Fish, Kurara bird (osprey), Unmarried Maiden.

3 preceptors who teach us both positive and negative lessons: Honeybee, Honey-gatherer and Pingala, the prostitute.

Having expounded how we can learn from these 24 external preceptors in Nature, Dattatreya Avadhûta finally sums up by saying that one's own body is the best instructor.

One can learn invaluable lessons from one's own very body. Through repeated births with incessant misery as its fruit, the lesson of dispassion is learnt. It is with the help of the body that one is able to reflect on truth and then practise discrimination. But one should remain unattached on the understanding that this body would belong to dogs and jackals after death. This human body, which is attainable only after countless births is a rare and precious blessing. A wise man should, therefore, strive to use this body for the attainment of liberation which is our ultimate goal. To do otherwise and to misuse it for sense enjoyment is suicidal.

Thus Dattatreya Avadhûta illustrates very clearly how, if only we are observant, we can learn many lessons from Mother Nature herself.

101. Next comes Hamsāvatāra (manifestation of the Lord in the form of a swan). The first four sages, Brahma's sons - Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra - once requested the Creator to clarify a doubt for them. All the things of the world enter into the mind and become deeply embedded in the conscious or the subconscious mind. The mind, in its turn, enters into all the things of the world as likes and dislikes. When we sit down for meditation, the entire world comes before us as we are fully steeped in it. Thus, as the mind and the things of the world have both become inextricably mixed with each other like the ingredients of a 'halwa', how are we to

separate the mind from the things of the world and keep it on the Lord?

102. As Brahma was unable to answer the question, the Lord Himself came before them as a Swan (Hamsa) and told them “ Do not try to separate the one from the other

**मद्रू उभयं त्यजति॥ (XI-13-26)**

The entire world has come out of your mind The things of the world are only thoughts. The world is firmly seated in your mind and you always think of worldly things. Throw away both the mind and the world together and remain in the form of the Supreme Being. This is the ultimate teaching in Sādhana”

103. The tragedy of mankind is that man refuses to understand what his real state is and does not want to be in that real state, but only in an artificial state The practice of “STILLNESS”, set out in the preceding paragraph, which is advocated in the Yoga Vāsishtha as also in recent times by Ramana Maharshi, is a direct method for God-realisation Without getting discouraged, if only we can practise for some time every day to remove the thoughts as and when they come into our mind, very soon we will be able to still the mind and keep it free from all thoughts. The ideas of “I” and the “world” are all only thoughts. During sleep, we have no thoughts In the thought-free state what remains is the Real Self which is the form of

the Lord. Remain as the Brahman (as described in the scriptures – unattached, uninvolved, free from all activities, impervious to external impressions of joy and sorrow; praise and blame, etc.) and keep the mind still. Our mistake is that we always approach this with a firm pre-conviction that it is not possible to remain without thoughts, and such an approach is the main impediment. If one persevered in this practice, one will find it to be the easiest path. Our real form is the one in which no thoughts exist – and what difficulty can there be in our remaining as what we are in Reality?

104. Uddhava then asks a beautiful question of Lord Krishna “Different objectives like fame, virtue, truth, control of senses, riches, etc. are proclaimed by different great souls as the only goal worth striving for. Are they all equally good alternatives or are some more important than the others?”

**अकिंचनस्य दान्तस्य शान्तस्य समचित्सह।**

**मया सन्तुष्टमनसह सर्वाह सुखमयाह देशह॥ (XI-14-13)**

In reply, Lord Krishna declares that the realisation of the Self or the Lord is the only one which constitutes a person’s ultimate goal. Those who declare otherwise, or who consider the means themselves to be the goal are all misguided persons befuddled by Māya.

105. In the early stages of Sādhana, a Sādhaka distinguishes a particular environment as favourable and another as unpleasant or even disturbing for performing his Sādhana.

When once his mind gets cultivated, reaches a state of equanimity, having renounced all possessions and riches, and is happy in his own Self (or the Lord), all environments and all circumstances become favourable and full of joy.

106. As and when a person loses himself in the contemplation of the Lord and in chanting His names and listening to His glories, his mind gets purified and he begins to see clearly the subtlest principle, namely, the Lord. So long as a person goes on thinking of worldly things, he will get immersed in the world. So long as he goes on contemplating on the Lord, he gets immersed in the Lord who is the Ultimate Reality. For effective contemplation of the Lord, one should completely avoid the company of the opposite sex as also that of persons who seek the company of the opposite sex. One should meditate in solitude. Attachment to no other thing in the world is as harmful as attachment to the opposite sex, which will only lead to bondage and misery. (XI-14-26, 27, 29, 30).

107. नृदहिमाद्यां सुलभं सुदुर्लभं  
प्लवं सुकलीं गुरुकर्णधारम्।  
मयानुकूलानि नभस्वतपिरतं  
मुनिं भवाब्धिं न तरति स आत्महा॥ (XI-20-17)

“All Sādhanās are possible only when we are endowed with a human body. This body of ours is the most efficient boat. Make the Guru the oarsman who will guide the boat and take it across the ocean. The Lord’s Grace is the

favourable wind in which the boat can sail swiftly and you can easily cross the ocean of Samsāra (phenomenal world). Not to make use of the body in this manner is equivalent to committing suicide.”

108. Uddhava’s mind gets bogged down with Krishna’s exhortation on the various types of Yogās such as Sāṅkhya, Jñāna, Bhakti, etc. He finally asks the Lord in despair – “I find that all the yogic methods enunciated by you are difficult to practise unless a person has cultivated self-control. Kindly tell me some easy means to reach the Lord”.

And Krishna explains -

(1) Whatever may be the activity you may be engaged in, always do it remembering the Lord and as a humble offering to Him. Do not look forward to enjoying the results of your activity, but dedicate the action wholly to the Lord. Never seek any enjoyment from any external source in the world, but revel only in your own Self.

(2) Always go to holy places and Ashramas where devotees and holy persons abound.

(3) Celebrate all festivals such as Deepavali, etc. very well, arranging for Bhajans, singing in praise of the Lord and chanting of His names, set to musical accompaniment.



(4) Try to see the Lord as pervading all beings, both inside as well as outside, that is, when we see a being, what we see should be the being (body) as the Lord, the inside of the body (the Self) as the Lord, and the outside of the body also, pervaded by the Lord. Initially this may be possible only in imagination but a day will come when it will turn out to be real and we will clearly see the Lord manifesting Himself in everything. One should develop an equal vision whereby one will be able to see a high-born Brāhmana, a downtrodden person, a thief, a saint, a violent person, a non-violent person – all as the same Lord without any difference or complex or ego. This will enable us to get rid of jealousy, competition, hostility, superiority or inferiority complex, ego, etc. Cultivation of such an equal vision and seeing the Lord in all beings is the most important Sādhana for God-realisation.

(5) A person who abandons all duties and activities and completely surrenders himself to the Lord's will and mercy will attain immortality and verily attain the Lord's Self (XI-29-9 to 12, 14, 15, 34)

## Chapter XII

### Āsraya Skandha

109. The twelfth Skandha begins with a description of the all round degeneration in KALI YUGA where all virtues like Truth, kindness, forbearance etc. will decay.

In this age, wealth will be the criterion for declaring one as one of high birth. Might will become right and will be the determining factor in meting out justice. Business will tantamount to the practice of fraud. A Brāhmana will possess no excellence except for wearing a sacred thread. A man rich in the vocabulary of abuses will be deemed as a scholar. Men will live to eat. Dharma or virtues will be practised only for gaining fame and reputation. The rulers will be greedy and cruel and degenerated into mere robbers. Monasteries will become places for enjoyment like homes and there will be little difference between an Ashram and a house. Thus when the Kali age advances and men become animal-like, Lord will incarnate as Kalki and will destroy the evil doers. From that time KRITA YUGA will begin.

110. Suka concludes Bhāgavata on the seventh day with this injunction to king Parikshit that he should abandon the feeling that he was going to die - a feeling befitting only animals. The real I (Ātman) is ever unborn and the

physical death in the waking state is just like one experiencing the decapitation of his own head in a dream. The Ātman is not one with the body but only its witness - not affected by death. It is just like the Electricity which is apart from the Bulb and remains uninjured and unaffected even when the bulb is shattered to pieces. It is because of the mind created by an inexplicable power of the Lord called Māya that one identifies his Self with the body-mind complex and thus gets entangled in the cycle of birth and death. King Parikshit bows down to Suka Deva and openly declares that by his blessings and having heard the excellence of the Supreme Lord for seven days from the latter's mouth, he has since attained the highest state of the supreme bliss of Brahman (Supreme Being) and thus got freed from any fear. After the departure of Suka Deva, the king remained fully absorbed in the unity of the Self with Brahman, having dissociated himself from the body consciousness while Takshaka, the serpent king, came and inflicted the fatal bite on him, true to the curse imposed on him. This was a unique case where the king could evolve into and achieve the highest state of eternal bliss just by hearing for seven days the glories and disportations (leelas) of the Lord.

111. कृता यद् ध्यायतां विष्णुं त्रितायां यजतां मखैः ।  
द्वारि पिरचर्यायां कलौ तद् हपरकीर्तनात् ॥

Each Yuga has its own standard - high or low - of Dharma, and, in accordance with the moral fibre of the people

of that Yuga, its own prescription for attaining the Lord. After recounting the various defects of Kali Yuga resulting in the people falling from the virtuous path, Vyāsa extols Kali Yuga as being exceptionally fortunate in that the easiest means for attaining the Lord have been prescribed for this Yuga. Though, admittedly, Kāli is the repository of all evils — and most of us today are witnessing the moral quagmire into which present-day mankind has pushed itself — still, it has a supreme virtue: a person may free himself of all attachments and attain God-realisation simply by singing the glories of the Lord and chanting and hearing His names. In other words, whatever a person could attain in the Krita Yuga by meditation on Vishnu; in the Treta Yuga by performing sacrifices; in the Dvapara Yuga by devoted service and worship — all that he may attain in the Kāli Yuga by extolling the Lord. How simple, and how exceptionally fortunate we are, in this Kali Yuga, despite the all-pervading evil around us!

112. Vyāsa started the Bhāgavatam with an invocatory hymn addressed to the Ultimate Reality with neither name nor form, and that verse contains the entire essence of the Vedanta philosophy as expounded in the Brahma Sūtras and the Upanishads. In the valedictory verse of the Bhāgavatam, Vyāsa declares that chanting of the names of the Supreme Being alone is capable of destroying all the sins which stand in the way of God-realisation. In these days when people want God-realisation and liberation while holding on tightly to the world with one hand, and

are reluctant to tire themselves mentally or physically, the easiest way is chanting the name of the Lord, which can be done at all times, eating, walking, travelling, or cooking in the kitchen, etc. – in short, while engaged in any activity whatsoever, anywhere. Every letter of the Samskrit alphabet is one aspect of the universal force or power (sakti) in which form the Lord has manifested Himself in the world. The first letter अ (A) which stands for the power Amrita Varshini, if chanted for a long time, can bestow long life. Similarly the letter ई (ee) is Eesaani which can bestow the power of controlling others and, being the Māya beeja, also has the power of removing Māyā. The names of the Lord are all combinations of different sound forces whose vibrations will permeate our mind and body, purify them as well as the ambient atmosphere and finally lead us to the Super-conscious state of Samādhi, resulting in God-realisation .

113. Aspirants who were scared away by notions of rigorous, time-consuming austerities normally associated with spiritual disciplines, should derive immense cheer from the message contained in the preceding paragraph, which outlines the simplest ever recipe for Sādhana. One does not have to take time off from one's other pressing day-to-day activities for mentally chanting the Lord's name. A suggestion: whenever possible, try to chant His names loudly at least for a few minutes so that the vibrations of those letter-sounds reverberate forcefully through your mind and body and infuse new vigour in you. Over a

period, you will find that you become an addict to this, that slowly the frustrations and tensions in your mind and the fatigue in your body give place to an indescribable peace of mind: and that a sea-change takes place in your life. Later, if you ever feel like it, you can increase the duration of your chantings; try to understand the significance of the names you chant; participate in religious discourses; seek the company of holy persons; or simply sit down and meditate on the glories of the Lord. Various disciplines and Sādhana's have been indicated in the various Skandhas. If you are unable to adopt any of them, the least you can do is to follow the “ Kali Yuga recipe” which is also an “instant recipe” for the 20th/21st centuries. Experience it and be rewarded. The Lord's Grace is waiting for you to open the door.

114. Now that we have come to the end of our spiritual quest, it will be rewarding to turn back and recapitulate the essential aspects of Sādhana covered in Skandhās IX to XII.

1. A real devotee does not retaliate even when others openly try to destroy him; even without being appealed to, the Lord invariably and without fail protects such a devotee because he harbours no ill will, rancour or malice against any offender.

2. A Sādhaka should always avoid the company of worldly persons and should never allow his senses to go to worldly objects. He should either remain in absolute solitude,

constantly remembering the Lord or if company is unavoidable, resort to the company of holy persons.

3. Carnal desires are like fire which is nourished by the pouring of ghee into it. One should not remain in the company of a woman alone, even if she be one's mother, sister or daughter as overpowering senses may tempt even a strong person into the wrong path.

4. King Rantideva furnishes an outstanding example of a monarch who is prepared to sacrifice his all including his life in the interests of humanity. Even when death was staring at him in the face, all he wanted was to take over the misery and unhappiness of others and make them happy.

5. However much one may consider the story of Lord Krishna to be a myth, yet there is no getting away from the fact that it is still a story of the Lord who incarnated himself in human form. Even by listening to it, the mind of a Sādhaka who has been able to get rid of his Vāsanās easily achieves concentration which can readily take him to the super-conscious state of Samādhi.

6. While the body and the senses are attending to various activities as per prārabdha (karma, destiny), a spiritually evolved soul will and should remain as pure witness-consciousness and there will be no ego which will attribute "doer-ship" to itself.

7. A Sādhaka should never think that he can attain God-realisation through his own efforts - nothing is achieved without the Lord's Grace, and one has to pray - and keep on praying for it.

8. Simply by listening to the exploits of stealing by the Lord, the mind gets single-pointed concentration which leads one to liberation (Steya Yoga).

9. Incessant prayer for the Lord's Grace; quietly experiencing prārabdha - caused joys and sorrows; and prostrating to the Lord with heart, speech and body constitute a three-in-one Sādhana as advocated by Brahma in one of his hymns of praise to the Lord.

10. The noblest type of Bhakti is where a devotee revels in the happiness and well being of his or her beloved (Lord) and is utterly miserable in the latter's misery. The Gopikas are the outstanding examples.

11. The entire "Rāsa Kreedā" episode, if chanted or listened to, is believed to remove all the "diseases" of the heart, especially erotic sentiments and desires and to attract even completely worldly persons to the Lord.

12. When once the Jivātma comes to hear of the glories of the Lord, it yearns and pines for union with the Paramātma, if not in one birth, in birth after birth persistently until it finally attains the goal. This is

symbolised by Rukmini's message to the Lord and her marriage to Him.

13. One should continuously and constantly think of the Lord, not necessarily with love and devotion. Even intense hatred and enmity for the Lord, incessantly practised, can take one to liberation.

14. The Lord does not ask for anything more than pure love from His devotees. A leaf, a fruit, a little water, offered with real love and devotion is enough to please the Lord.

15. In the process of dispelling the doubts of king Nimi, nine Yogiswarās explain some of the disciplines which lead to the realisation of the Lord.

(a) It is our identification with our bodies which do not really exist that causes fears and miseries. We can rid ourselves of these fears and miseries only by worship of the Lord who is the soul of the entire universe.

(b) All our actions, performed through our mind, body, speech, senses etc. should be surrendered to the Lord without expectation of any results from them for ourselves. This kind of action, consecrated to the Lord, will never bind us.

(c) The vacillating mind should be controlled and freed from all thoughts.

(d) One should be bereft of all attachments, listening to the Lord's glories and chanting his names loudly without shyness.

(e) In order to cultivate egolessness, one should prostrate before rivers, oceans and all beings considering them as manifestations of the Supreme Being.

(f) Continuous contemplation of the Lord will bestow devotion, dispassion and intimate knowledge of the Lord and will finally lead to liberation.

(g) The best among devotees is one

- who looks at all beings with love and reverence as the Self and as the Lord who is the Self of all beings.
- in whose mind no seed of desire ever sprouts and whose sole refuge is the Lord.
- whose mind never swerves from the remembrance of the Lord even for a fraction of a second and is never tempted even by the splendour and prosperity of the three worlds.

(h) Māya can be transcended by satsanga; by detaching the mind from all worldly things by cultivating compassion and friendship towards all beings, cleanliness, forbearance, humility, silence, straight - forwardness, study of scriptures, celibacy, non-violence and equal vision by listening to,

chanting and meditating on the glories of the Lord, and by surrendering all one's possessions including wife and children at the feet of the Lord.

16. Mother Nature provides us with any number of preceptors from each of whom we can learn either a positive lesson which will take us forward or an aspect which we should avoid if we are to go forward on our spiritual journey. Dattatreya Avadhûta cites 24 preceptors from each of whom he learnt a lesson like forbearance from earth etc.

Out of them, fourteen preceptors viz., Earth, Air, Space, Water, Fire, Moon, Sun, Python, Ocean, Child, Arrowsmith, Spider, Serpent and Wasp teach us positive lessons.

There are seven preceptors teaching us lessons which we should avoid, i.e. negative lessons ; i.e., Pigeon, Moth, Elephant, Deer, Fish, Kurara Bird and Maiden.

The remaining three preceptors viz., Honey Bee, Honey Gatherer & Pingala teach both positive and negative lessons.

Dattatreya Avadhûta next says that one's own body is also a very good preceptor. It teaches dispassion, the need for practising discrimination and non-attachment as the body is perishable; and finally the need to give up sensual enjoyment and attain the supreme goal of liberation.

17. The Sādhaka may be tormented by the question as to how to take away the mind from the worldly objects with which it is inextricably united and to put it on the Lord. The answer furnished to Brahma and to his sons Sanaka and other sages by the Lord Himself was: Throw away both the mind and the world together by assuming the form of the Supreme being-that is keeping oneself detached, without ego and simulating all the attributes of the Lord or Self. This is the ultimate teaching in Sādhana.

18. Man's real state is one in which no thought exists in the mind, but it is our tragedy that we neither believe in such a state nor want to be in it. If only we practise for some time every day, it is possible to achieve complete stillness of the mind and remain in a thought-free state which is the form of the Brahman - unattached, uninvolved, free from all activities, impervious to external impressions.

19. Lord Krishna declares that realisation of the Lord or Self is the only objective, as distinct from fame, virtue, truth etc., which constitutes a person's ultimate goal.

20. When a Sādhaka's mind gets cultivated, it reaches a state of equanimity, it is happy in the Self, all environments and all circumstances become favourable for Sādhana and full of Joy.

21. Thinking only of worldly things, a person gets immersed in worldly things but thinking of the ultimate

Reality - the Lord alone, the mind gets totally immersed in the Lord. For effective contemplation of the Lord, one should avoid the company of the opposite sex as also of persons who seek the company of the opposite sex as attachment to no other thing in the world is as harmful as attachment to the opposite sex.

22. The human body with which we are most fortunately endowed after repeated births is the most efficient boat for crossing the ocean of Samsāra. Make the Guru the oarsman and he will guide the boat and make it cross that ocean. The Lord's grace is the favourable wind in which the boat can sail swiftly. Not to make use of this splendid body and opportunity in this manner is equivalent to committing suicide.

23. When Uddhava whose mind was confused by the various paths of yoga asks the Lord to explain some easy means of reaching the Lord without the rigours of Yoga, Krishna says:

a) Perform all your activities ever remembering the Lord and as a humble offering to Him. Visit holy places where devotees and holy persons abound. Celebrate all festivals such as Deepavali, singing the Lord's praises, chanting His names etc.

b) One who abandons all activities and surrenders oneself completely to the Lord's will and mercy will attain immortality and verily attain the Lord's Self.

24. God realisation can effortlessly be attained by one in this dreaded Kali Yuga by extolling the Lord and chanting and listening to His names. What a simple but efficacious recipe and how exceptionally fortunate each one of us is to have, available to us, such an effortless path to attain Him even while performing any activity in our routine life.

115. CONCLUSION: Srimad Bhāgavatam is not a mere book. It is the very Lord manifested as the sound (word) force. The Lord is infinite and His words have myriad interpretations - and each one of them is correct too - as they are meant for Sādhakas with varying levels of spiritual aptitude, capacity, etc. in the light of their Vāsanās (latent tendencies). In 1957, under my Guru's command, I started doing Bhāgavata Saptāha in Vasishtha Guha in the U.P., Himalayas once a year. By my Guru's overwhelming compassion, newer and newer understandings dawned on me and fresh meanings flashed in my mind as the years rolled by in the process of reading the Bhāgavatam and expounding it year after year. As many of my friends had been persuading me to commit to writing my thoughts on the Bhāgavatam, I have made an attempt to do so and this is the result. Wherever I have added some comments of my own, they are based either on my little scriptural knowledge or mostly what I have gleaned from the mouths of various Sādhūs and devotees while in their holy company.

In keeping with the very last verse of the Srimad Bhāgavatam, let us “Prostrate to that transcendental Lord Hari, thinking of whose names destroys all sins, and surrendering to whom dispels all miseries and sufferings.”

**नामसुतीर्तनं यस्य सर्वाप्रिणाशनम् ।**

**प्रणामाि दुहखशमनस्तं नमोम हपरं रिम्॥**

(XII-13-23)