

Tradition 2025

GURU PŪRNIMĀ



In the early morning I remember the pure essence of the Ātman shining in my heart, which is the existence-consciousness-bliss, the Supreme Haṃsa (the pure white swan) that takes the mind to turīya which illumines the three states of dream, waking and deep sleep. I am that Brahman, which is without any division, and not this body which is merely a collection of five elements.

Remembering the Self at Dawn v1 (Hymn by Ādi Śaṅkara)

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GURU PŪRNIMĀ

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Message from Mahārāja Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī

श्री गुरुदेवाय नमः (śrī gurudevāya namaḥ)

A Bow to Śrī Gurudev.

शुभसन्देश (śubhasandeśa)

Auspicious message.

गुरुणा विना न ज्ञानम् (guruṇā vinā na jñānam)

Without Guru there is no knowledge.

This is why every year, the students, seekers of knowledge, celebrate Teacher's Day to look inwards and to remain on course to achieve their goal of higher spiritual levels.

I convey my good wishes and blessings to all students who are celebrating Teacher's Day.

I bless you all for divine knowledge and empowerment to create positive unity in the world.

Blessings to Mr Lambie and the entire team of the School, Trustees and everyone involved.

May you all celebrate this beautiful occasion to the fullest and resolve to serve the Teacher.

Blessings.

Received 4th July 2025



Guru Mantra

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णु गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुः साक्षात् परब्रह्मा तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

Gurur Brahmā Gurur Viṣṇu Gurur Devo Maheśvaraḥ
Guruḥ Sākṣāt Parabrahmā Tasmai Śrī Gurave Namaḥ

Guru is Brahma, Guru is Viṣṇu, Guru is the Supreme Lord Śiva.
Guru is both manifest reality and Absolute.
Salutations to that glorious Guru.

‘Three functions are performed by the guru: causing the birth of jñāna in the student; nurturing the jñāna so created; and destroying the obstacles on the path of jñāna. These encompass the functions of creation, protection and destruction. It is thus that the Gurumūrti becomes the Trimūrti.’

The Guru Tradition Pūjyaśrī Chandraśekharendra Sarasvatī Swāmī

The teacher is one who is endowed with the power of furnishing arguments pro and con, of understanding questions and remembering them, who possesses tranquillity, self-control, compassion and a desire to help others, who is versed in the scriptures and unattached to enjoyments both seen and unseen, who has renounced the means to all kinds of actions, who is a knower of Brahman and is established in it, who is never a transgressor of the rules of conduct, and who is devoid of shortcomings. He has the sole aim of helping others and a desire to impart the knowledge of Brahman only.

Upadeśa Sahasrī v6 Śaṅkara

There exist great and peaceful souls who, like the season of Spring, are ever doing good to the world. Having themselves crossed the frightful ocean of worldly existence, they help others to cross it for no reason of their own.

Vivekachūḍāmaṇi v39 Śaṅkara



Adi Śaṅkara statue at Kedārnath Temple



Guru Gītā

Chapter One verses 11, 14, 21, 25, 44, 45, 46, 47

पार्वत्युवाच ।

ॐ नमो देव देवेश परात्पर गङ्गुरो ।

त्वां नमस्कृर्वते भक्त्या सुरासुरनराः सदा

॥११॥

Pārvatīyuvāca om namo deva deveśa
parātpara jagadguro
tvām namaskurvate bhaktyā surāsuranarāḥ
sadā v.11

भगवन् सर्वधर्मज्ञ व्रतानां व्रतनायकम् ।

ब्रूहि मे कृपया शम्भो गुरुमाहात्म्यमुत्तमम्

॥१४॥

bhagavan sarvadharmajña vratānām
vratanāyakam
brūhi me kṛpayā śambho
gurumāhātmyamuttamam v.14

दुर्लभं त्रिषु लोकेषु तच्छृणुष्व वदाम्यहम् ।

गुरुब्रह्म विना नान्यः सत्यं त्यं वरानने ॥११॥

durlabham triṣu lokeṣu tacchṛṇuṣva
vadāmyaham
gurubrahma vinā nānyaḥ satyaṁ satyaṁ
varānane v.21

गुरुबुद्ध्यात्मनो नान्यत् सत्यं सत्यं वरानने ।

तल्लभार्थं प्रयत्नस्तु कर्तव्यश्च मनीषिभिः

॥२५॥

gurubuddhyātmano nānyat satyaṁ satyaṁ
varānane
tallābhārtham prayatnastu kartavyaśca
manīṣibhiḥ v.25

11 Pārvatī said:

Prostrations unto Thee, O Lord of lords,
Thou art the teacher for the whole world.
Thou art Supreme. Thou teachest the
knowledge of the Supreme. Gods,
demons and men always worship Thee
with devotion.

14 O Lord, O knower of all Dharmas, O
Śambhu, please narrate to me the glory
of Guru (preceptor) which is the best of
all Vratas.

21 The Guru is Brahman and no other
than Brahman Itself, O Pārvatī. I declare
this Truth to you. Listen to my words
and believe, for this Truth is unknown to
anyone else in all the three worlds.

25 O Pārvatī, I declare unto Thee, with
all the emphasis at my command, that
there is no difference between the Guru
and the Ātman (Self). Therefore, efforts
should be made by seekers, men learned
in the scriptures, men of wisdom, for its
attainment.

गुकारश्चान्धकारो हि रुकारस्तेज उच्यते

अज्ञानग्रासकं ब्रह्म गुरुरेव न

संशयः ॥४४॥

gukāraścāndhakāro hi rukārasteja ucyate
ajñānagrāsakam brahma gurureva na
saṁśayah v.44

गुकारो भ

वरोगः स्यात्

रुकारस्तत्रिरोधकृत् ।

भवरोगहरत्वाच्च गुरुरित्यभिधीयते

॥४५॥

gukāro bhavarogah syāt
rukārastatritirodhakṛt
bhavarogaharatvāccha
gururityabhidhiyate v.45

गुकारश्च गुपातीतो रूपातीतो रुकारकः ।

गुणरूपविहीनत्वात् गुरुरित्यभिधीयते

॥४६॥

gukāraśca guṇātīto rūpātīto rukārah
guṇarūpavihinacvāt gururityabhidhiyate
v.46

गुकारः प्रथमो वर्णो

मायादिगुणभासकः ।

रुकारोऽस्ति परं ब्रह्म

मायाभ्रान्तिविमोचनम् ॥४७॥

gukārah prathamō varṇo
māyādiguṇabhāśakah
rukāroṣti param brahma
māyābhrāntivimocanam v.47

44 The letter ‘Gu’ denotes darkness, the
letter ‘Ru’ denotes the remover of
darkness. Brahman who is capable of
swallowing up ignorance is certainly the
Guru.

45 ‘Gukara’ means the disease of birth
and death. ‘Rukara’ means the destroyer
of births and deaths. On account of the
power of destroying the disease of birth
and death, the teacher is known by the
significant name ‘Guru’.

46 The letter ‘Gu’ denotes that he is
above the three Gunas and ‘Ru’ denotes
that he is beyond forms. Because he is
free from Gunas and forms he is called
Guru.

47 The first syllable ‘Gu’ creates or
makes manifest Maya and the Gunas.
‘Ru’ is Para Brahman that removes both
Maya and delusion, viz, I am the body, I
am the mind, etc.



Gurukṛpā

So the only recourse for the growth of consciousness is to go behind the stage, or in other words, to meditate. Unless this process is given back to the people, unless they are prepared behind the stage inside, which is not known to the world outside, it is impossible to play one's part according to time and place. The guidance of a realised man or of a School should enable one to make the best use of one's energy. This is the work. 65.1.2



A guru is a being who has gone through his spiritual development together with his material development, and has acquired a state worthy of a master. He can manage his own affairs and if asked can also help others manage their affairs.

The guru is ready to impart all he knows through his humility, sincerity and love and to do that every moment of his life.

74.74



The Sanskrit language came with the creation. With the creation the Absolute descended as the रस (rasa), the sweet taste and goodness which only the connoisseurs enjoy, for it is always hidden behind the apparent forms of everything.

Only the knowledge can help one appreciate the beauty of things and enjoy their taste. Only the erudite gets access to this rasa which is flowing in all things and which is the Absolute Himself. The guru alone can lead one to become able to know and taste the rasa. 74.74

A BLESSING

26th June '94.

Message from Shri Shāntānanda Saraswati, Shankarāchārya

निर्मनिमोहा जितसङ्गदोषा अध्यात्मनित्या विनिवृत्तकामाः ॥
द्वन्द्वैर्विमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञैर् गच्छन्त्यमूढाः पदमव्ययं तत् ॥
न तद्भासयते सूर्यो न शशाङ्को न पावकः ।
यद्गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद्गम परमं मम ॥

Free from pride and delusion, with blemish of attachment conquered, eversteady in the Self with desires completely renounced, liberated from the duality of pleasure and pain, the unfounded reaches that Goal Eternal, where neither the rays of the sun, nor moon nor fire have access, that is my Supreme Abode, having come there, no one returns.

Honour to the work so far,
Blessings for the work entrusted,
Invocation for the peace of the Soul,
Benediction for the Soul gone free.

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

Received on the passing of Mr MacLaren

Gurukṛpā

Gurukṛpā is twofold. Guru offers advice from personal application of the śāstra in his own experience and makes available the facility of मन्त्रदीक्षा (mantradīkṣā, initiation into a mantra) for meditation. 99.1.4

In our lives, spirituality should not only exist but it should be seen to exist; lawfulness should not only exist but it should be seen to exist; constancy of devotion should not only exist but be seen to exist.

In relation to Śrī Śāntānanda-ji Mahārāja, whatever devotion you have, that should be fully established in your life through mental and emotional activities. Devotion to Mahārāja-ji should be transformed into devotion to the whole tradition of Teachers from the origin to the present Teacher. The tradition begins from Nārāyaṇa and is followed by Vasiṣṭha, Śakti, Parāśara, Padmabhava, Govinda Yogindra, Śaṅkarācārya, Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka, Troṭaka, Vārttikakāra and right up to the present Śaṅkarācārya.

The tradition continues up to the present Teacher. Therefore, your devotion should transcend to all the Teachers.

This should be taught to all members of the Schools. 2010. 1.1



Since the early 1960's, the School has been blessed by direct guidance from the Śaṅkarācārya of the Northern seat, or Maṭh, in India. These four seats were established by Ādi Śaṅkara in the Ninth Century AD to support Advaita and promulgate the Vedā.

The central theme of Śaṅkara's writings is the realisation that Brahman alone is real, to quote from his hymn 'Remembering the Self at Dawn', 'In whom this endless world is settled endlessly. In whom this endless world appears like a snake on a rope.' Thus he taught that the perceived difference between Ātman, the individual, and Brahman is an illusion, and that Mokṣa, liberation, is at hand. He promoted the Upaniṣads, and especially the Mahāvākyas, or Great Statements, giving each seat a particular Statement.

Śaṅkara was born in 788AD. His name means 'Accomplisher of Peace and Good'. He died in 820AD aged 32. An exceptional student, at the age of 16 he moved to the holy city of Benares, now called Vārāṇasī, where all the great scholars of the day gathered. Here he established himself and took on four disciples. This is when he began his famous commentaries on the Bhagavad Gītā, the Upaniṣads and the Brahma Sūtras.

He travelled widely within India, debating with scholars from different traditions and religions. He became legendary as a philosopher, poet, mystic and religious reformer, and it is accepted that there have been few minds more universal than his. He was intent on giving the people a sense of unity, exposing the contradictions of life, thought and false doctrines, and giving the freedom of a universal view. He was celebrated in the great temples and holy places in India where he lived, preached and helped to renovate the structures.



'Meditate at the feet of Gurudev. You will attain knowledge of the Ātman'.

Statue of Śrī Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, a gift from the Jyotirmaṭh Āśram.



Gurukṛpā

In his early thirties, having accomplished his mission to promulgate Sanātana Dharma (eternal law) that had been losing its way during the age of the Kaliyuga, Ādi Śaṅkara died at Kedārnāth in Northern India. Before his death, one of his disciples asked what they were supposed to do. King Sudhanvā was present, and he requested Śaṅkara should entrust four of his most distinguished disciples with the work of establishing four seats of wisdom, or Maṭhas, in the four parts of the country.

Thus the eternal wisdom of the scriptures would be passed down for generations to come using the lineage of the teacher/disciple. Śaṅkara said, 'Let Padmapāda, Sureśvara, Hastāmalaka and Troṭaka establish Maṭhas at the four corners of the country. He dictated the Mahānuśasanam setting out the rules and disciplines to be followed in the administration and operation of the Maṭhas.

Finally, he gave the Daśa Ślokī, Ten Verses, that he had chanted at his first meeting with his guru. He said that by contemplating the meaning of these verses, one would find the essence of all Vedāntic teaching.



Kedārnāth Temple

Padmapāda

Padmapāda grew up in southern India and his original name is unknown. Being born into a Brahmin family, he would have been educated in the Vedas from an early age, and at this stage would have been given a new name by his teacher. This was Sanandana which means ever-joyful. Being a very bright student, after his initial studies, he decided to leave his home town and pursue the life of an ascetic. On his travels he came in contact with Śaṅkara who was teaching in a city known in Śaṅkara's time as Kāśī or Benares, now named Vārāṇasī – considered one of the holiest cities in India through which the Ganges flows and where the ashes of Brahmins are still cast today.

When Sanandana met Śaṅkara, he prostrated himself before Śaṅkara and described his destitute situation of drowning in the attraction of worldly existence. He pleaded to be his disciple, saying to Śaṅkara, 'If you hesitate, pondering over my worthiness or otherwise for thy grace, you'll lose your reputation for boundless grace, for grace is not conditioned by considerations of merit. The reputation one gains for mercy and kindness through liberality to the poor and suffering cannot be had by making presents to the rich and opulent.'

Śaṅkara agreed to take Sanandana on as his disciple, and it is indicated that he was Śaṅkara's first disciple.

One day, when Sanandana was on the other side of the river Ganges washing clothes, suddenly Śaṅkara called out to him, 'Sanandana'. No sooner had he heard his name, Sanandana just started walking towards his Master. The actual path was round the river which would take some time. All that was in the mind of the disciple was that his Guru had suddenly called him, and he should be there as quickly as possible. Sanandana was walking on water, but with every step, a full-blown lotus sprang up to support his foot. Sanandana seemingly had no idea that he was walking on water. In his desire to reach his Guru quickly, he was almost running with every step being supported by a lotus! The other disciples who were watching this miracle were dumb-founded. They understood that it was nothing but the faith and devotion that Sanandana had for his Guru which made it possible for him to walk on water! Ādi Śaṅkara gave him the name Padmapāda, literally meaning 'lotus-foot'.



Padmapāda

As this famous story indicates Padmapāda was renowned for his devotion which was directed towards his guru Śaṅkara. Each of the four primary disciples had a particular strength; Padmapāda's was recognised as his intense devotion.

Padmapāda believed overwhelmingly in the triple method of hearing, reflecting and concentration. His rational approach placed high emphasis on verbal testimony which means studying the scriptures, then putting questions to one's guru and allowing the answers received to dispel ignorance. Padmapāda concludes his writings by emphasising the absolute need for a guru.

Each of the four primary disciples is associated with one of the Mahāvākya, or great statements of Advaita Vedānta. Padmapāda's is Prajñānam Brahma, Consciousness is Brahman. This comes from the Ṛg Veda.

Each of the four disciples was sent to the four quarters of India to set up an ashram. Padmapāda became the first Śaṅkarācārya of the East, a seat which still exists today, in Purī, a coastal city on the Bay of Bengal.

Hastāmalaka

As a child, he would not talk, only sleep and eat when he had to, and did nothing by himself. At the age of 13, or of 7, depending on the account being given, his father took him to meet Ādi Śaṅkara in the hope that the ācārya could help him.

Ādi Śaṅkara asked him, "Who are you?" In twelve verses addressed to Viṣṇu, the boy answered, giving the essence of Advaita throughout. Ādi Śaṅkara was so impressed with the boy that he accepted him as his disciple and gave him the name Hastāmalaka.

One account says that, in answer to the ācārya's question, the boy had held out his hand on which he had placed the small round fruit of the āmalaka tree, a sour fruit rather like a gooseberry. It is also said that Ādi Śaṅkara named him thus because the knowledge of Ātman was as clear to him as an āmalaka fruit in one's palm.

Unlike the other disciples of Ādi Śaṅkara, Hastāmalaka did not talk or write much. It was once suggested to Ādi Śaṅkara that, because of his realisation of the Self, Hastāmalaka should write a Vārttika or commentary on the Master's Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya. The ācārya negated the suggestion by pointing out that, because Hastāmalaka dwelt entirely in the supreme Self, he would not stoop to write books.

He is famous for the original verses he spoke in response to Ādi Śaṅkara's question, now called the Hastāmalaka Stotram. Ādi Śaṅkara praised it as an exposition of the essence of Advaita Vedānta. One verse is as follows:

मुखाभासको दर्पणे दृश्यमानो
मुखत्वात्पृथक्त्वेन नैवास्ति वस्तु ।
चिदाभासको धीषु जीवोऽपि तद्वत्
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा

॥ ३ ॥

mukhābhāsako darpaṇe
dṛśyamāno
mukhatvātpṛthaktvena naivāsti
vastu
cidābhāsako dhīṣu jīvo'pi tadvat sa
nityopalabdhisvarūpo'hamātmā

The reflection of the face seen in a
mirror

Is not a thing that exists different
from the nature of the face;

The reflection of Consciousness in
the minds, the individual self,
is also like that;

That which by its nature is eternal
Knowledge am I, the Self. v3

Dvārakā Pītham (seat) advocates 'Tattvamasi' (That thou art) from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, arising from the Sāma Veda. Later Hastāmalaka also founded the Idayil Maṭham in Thrissur, Kerala, southern India. Hastāmalaka became the first Head of the Dvāraka Pītham, the western maṭh founded by Ādi Śaṅkara in Gujarāt.

This seat is also referred to as Śāradā Maṭh. The divinity worshipped here is Lord Śiva and His Śakti, Bhadrā Kālī ("auspicious" or "blessed" Kālī, who protects the good).

It is located in the city of Dvārakā which has become a significant pilgrimage centre.





Sureśvara

According to tradition before he became a disciple of Śaṅkara, Sureśvara was known as Viśvarūpa or Maṇḍana Miśra receiving a scholar's training worthy of his ancestry. He was well established and an extremely wealthy householder, when he met Śaṅkara. His wife was herself a great scholar and reputed to be an incarnation of the Goddess Sarasvatī. Maṇḍana was an upholder of the philosophy of ritualistic karma, that the attainment of heavenly joys through the performance of Vedic rituals was the highest end of life. There was no God other than Karma. Many debates on the Veda were held at his home exploring the message spoken of by the Purāṇas, viewing the creation and destruction of the worlds as a real process.

He held the opinion that Sannyāsa was meant for those who were idiots, lame, blind or in other ways disabled and were incapable of the strenuous life of a ritualistic householder, an escape for those who wanted to avoid the trouble and inconvenience of performing the Vedic rites properly. Moreover, he was said to have instructed his gate-keepers never to allow any Sannyāsin to enter the precincts of his home.

One of the many stories around the meeting of Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana has Śaṅkara avoiding the gate-keepers and climbing over the walls of Maṇḍana's household and presenting himself for debate. As Maṇḍana was itching for a discussion with a worthy opponent, he accepted the challenge to debate with Ādi Śaṅkara on the understanding that the vanquished would become a disciple of the victor and accept his school of thought. He was certain he would win but Śaṅkara defeated him in a debate lasting 18 days umpired by Maṇḍana's wife.

As agreed, Maṇḍana renounced his life as a householder and his belief in Karma and became a sannyāsin and a disciple of Śaṅkara, who gave him the name Sureśvara (Lord of the Gods – from Sura which means god or deity, and Ívara, which means lord or controller).

During his travels with his disciples across India, in the south at Śṛṅgerī, on the banks of the river Tuṅga, Śaṅkara is said to have witnessed a snake unveiling its hood like an umbrella to provide shelter from the hot sun to a frog undergoing labour. Astonished that natural enemies had gone beyond their instincts, he knew this was a holy place and stayed there for twelve years. He is said to have installed a sandalwood idol of Sarasvatī as Śārādā there and thus established his first monastery, the Śṛṅgerī Maṭh Pīṭham.

He appointed Sureśvara as its first head. The Śṛṅgerī maṭh now includes two major temples, one dedicated to Śiva built in the 14th century and the other built in the 15th century dedicated to Sarasvatī.

Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge and arts in the Hindu tradition, is the presiding deity of the monastery. The mahāvākya associated with this maṭh is Aham Brahmāsmi which occurs in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, belonging to the Śukla-Yajur-Veda.

Tradition tells how Sureśvara came to write commentaries on a few of Śaṅkara's work. He approached Śaṅkara desirous of writing a critical explanation or analysis of Śaṅkara's great commentary on the Śārīraka-bhāṣya and was given permission. But Śaṅkara's other disciples persuaded him to withdraw that permission because of Sureśvara's past beliefs, saying he was not to be trusted and would write a perversion of Śaṅkara's commentaries. Śaṅkara relented and gave the work to Padmapāda. But, Śaṅkara, not doubting Sureśvara quietly asked him to write an independent, non-commentary work to show him. Thus he produced the Naiṣkarmya-siddhi.

This work presents Advaita philosophy clearly and simply, and is famous for the beauty of its style and the soundness of its reasoning.

On producing the Naiṣkarmya-siddhi, he prayed to his teacher, stating it was not for fame or gain or patronage that induced him to produce the work, but from obedience. 'Today I have not the least trait of a householder ... Nothing is stationary in human life. Mind is the cause of bondage and liberation. If a man is pure in mind, it is immaterial if he is a Sannyāsin or a householder. I became a Sannyāsin not merely because I was defeated in argument, but because, through your instruction, I was able to grasp the truth of the Ātman and feel the urge for renunciation of the world and all its attachments. After all, the purpose of a debate is to arrive at the truth.'

After this, Śaṅkara entrusted Sureśvara with the work of writing analyses on two of his commentaries – the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and the Taittirīya Upaniṣads. And other works came later. Thus he became known as the Advaita tradition's Vārttikakāra (commentator), meticulously and critically examining Śaṅkara's work.



Sureśvara

Sureśvara stood firm upholding the guru-disciple tradition, looking to the guru as the source of reception of the Vedānta and one's own illumination. He states that the transmission of the tradition is "for purposes of purifying our understanding by the testimony of those who know Brahman".

He extolled Śaṅkara as "the highest breaker of the bonds of primal ignorance, the omniscient, established in the Supreme Self, our guru, the teacher of gurus, who by the role of reason removes ignorance"

The Debate



This famous debate between Ādi Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana Miśra, a follower of the Mīmāṃsā school of thought that focused on the ritualistic and ethical aspects of the Vedā, was initiated by Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara respected the older man's scholarship and wished to engage him in a debate on the merits of their respective philosophical schools.

Following is an excerpt.

Śaṅkara

My mission in life is to establish the truth of the Vedānta by defeating in debate all who hold an opposing view.

Maṇḍana

To me, who am ever awaiting the arrival of a competent scholar to enter into debate, your arrival is welcome. Let us now hasten for the debate.

Śaṅkara

Brahman, the Existence, Consciousness, Bliss Absolute, is the one ultimate truth. This is the supreme knowledge as also liberation, and it brings about the cessation of future births. The Upaniṣads, which form the crown of the Vedas, are the authority in support of this proposition.

Maṇḍana

The Vedā or the Upaniṣads cannot be a proof of pure Consciousness for words can reveal only objects but never a pure subject-objectless Consciousness which is beyond words and effects. In the light of it, actions alone constitute steps leading to liberation.

Narrator

Leaving this argument open, Maṇḍana now adopts a new position and argues:

Maṇḍana

Let us give up the contention that Tattvamasi, That Thou art, is an injunction for meditation. What harm is there in understanding it as an assertion of similarity between Brahman and Ātman, and interpreting it by saying you are a spirit similar to Brahman, and not that you are the same as Brahman?

Śaṅkara

Of what is this similarity asserted? Is it of merely being a spirit, or having the distinctive features of Brahman as the soul of all, omniscient, omnipotent? The first, similarity of spirit, is already accepted. The second cannot be because it goes against the plain meaning of the Vedāntic sentence that the Ātman and Brahman are one.

That they are one cannot mean that they are two similar, but different, entities.



The Debate

Maṇḍana

Let it be maintained that the similarity asserted is that they are both eternally conscious entities. In respect of qualities like 'being the soul of all', let us say they are there, but they are covered by ignorance and only look as if they are not there. By accepting this meaning, the basic oneness remains, whilst for all practical purposes the difference also is asserted. Can we not get over the difficulty suggested by you this way?

Śaṅkara

If you are prepared to go so far, why do you hesitate to say openly that they are one? When you admit that the difference perceived is not real but only apparent, being caused by ignorance, then the reality is that they are one.

Maṇḍana

But don't you think that the doctrine of similarity helps to repudiate materialism? For, by comparison with yourself, it helps you to understand what is meant by speaking of the cause of the world as intelligence. The only self-conscious intelligent entity you understand is yourself, and the intelligent nature of another entity can be understood only by observing and accepting similarity.

Śaṅkara

Why misinterpret the Mahāvākya simply to deny materialism, when this is already done directly by passages such as, 'That thought, let Me become many'. Moreover you have to distort the statement, 'That thou art' into 'That is like you'. Where is the justification for all this distortion?

Narrator

The debate was intense, and at times, it seemed as if neither side would emerge victorious. However, in the end, Śaṅkara emerged as the winner, as Maṇḍana's wife, Ubhaya Bhārati, intervened and posed a question that could only be answered by one who had experienced both worldly pleasures and spiritual enlightenment.

Śaṅkara responded by describing the experience of self-realisation and liberation, and Maṇḍana accepted his defeat.

Following the debate, Maṇḍana became a disciple of Śaṅkara.

Troṭaka

Another of the four principal disciples of Ādi Śaṅkara was known in later life as Troṭaka or Toṭaka. It is said that Troṭaka, known then as Giri, met Ādi Śaṅkara at Śṛṅgerī which was a place frequented by a large number of virtuous people noted for their hospitality and performance of Vedic Yajña. Śrī Śaṅkara is said to have laid the corner stone for the present temple.

From the moment that Śrī Śaṅkara accepted him as his disciple, Giri lost himself in the service of his master. In his life he exemplified the spirit of service and dedication to his guru, even at the expense of knowledge. In this respect he is on a par with Bharata, Rama's illustrious brother, and with Hanūmān, Rāma's devotee.

According to Madhava Vidyāranya, Giri "was noted for his obedience, industry, righteousness and taciturnity. His devotion to the service of the teacher was such that he would do all things for him anticipating his every want. He would follow Śaṅkara like a shadow and would never do anything before the teacher smacking of disrespect."



Tradition has it that the devotion of Giri to his master was very profound; but he did not profit much from his teachings. He seems to have felt that a strong personal devotion to the Guru was of far greater importance than a mere intellectual grasp of the teachings. The latter influenced only the intellect, while the former bound the whole personality to the Guru. He used to absent himself frequently from the classes taught by the Preceptor, preferring to do personal service to the teacher without wasting even that time in mere listening. Śrī Śaṅkara, who was aware of the depth of his disciple's affection and reverence towards himself, did not mind his



Troṭaka

absence during the discourses. But the other disciples, including Padmapāda had a contempt for this ignoramus whose gurubhakti, devotion to his guru, was not apparent to them.

One day the class was about to commence and all the other disciples were present but the Guru did not begin his lessons, clearly waiting for someone. Becoming impatient of the delay, Padmapāda suggested to the teacher that since all the students had come, the discourse might start. “Let Giri also come”, were the words of the Master. Padmapāda, who had a contempt for the intellectual backwardness of Giri, exclaimed rather hastily that perhaps the nearby wall could act in place of Giri.

What happened next is partially explained by these words written by a disciple of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in a knowledge sheet about what happens in the presence of the Satguru:

“Knowledge flourishes, sorrow diminishes, without any reason joy wells up, lack diminishes and abundance dawns and all talents manifest. To the degree you feel connected to the Guru, these qualities manifest in your life.”

Hence, with a view to teach the students that an intellectual grasp of philosophical teachings was of secondary importance and that a right attitude and reverence were very necessary in the spiritual sphere, Śrī Śaṅkara silently blessed the absent Giri with a complete knowledge of the Vedāntic truth. Giri, who was still engaged in washing his Master’s clothes, suddenly felt an upsurge of his intellect and had a divine flash of illumination.

While others took years or perhaps several births to realise the truth, Giri was able to perfect this state of realisation almost in an instant.

Gratitude to the Guru, whose compassion had inspired him with divine knowledge and bliss, made Giri spontaneously praise Śrī Śaṅkara in eight verses (Toṭaka Ṣṭaka) in Toṭaka metre with each verse ending in the refrain:

“Bhava Śaṅkara deśika me śaraṇam” “O Preceptor Śaṅkara, Be my refuge!”

It is clear that the composition of this work in Toṭaka metre earned for him the name of Toṭakācārya. Repeating these verses he approached his Guru’s holy presence and, in the midst of all his disciples, proceeded to compose

another work now known as Śrutisārasamudhāraṇa (Extracting the essence of the Śruti). The aim of these verses is to bring out the essential meaning of the Upaniṣads: that Brahman is real, the world is mithyā and that the essential nature of the jīva is none other than Brahman.

As for the other disciples, once they heard this masterful utterance of Troṭaka’s they thought, “It must indeed be the grace of the Ācārya that enabled this fellow to compose the great poem in Toṭaka metre, embodying all the highest teachings of the Veda.”

Thus, on witnessing the wisdom and the poetical skill that their co-disciple had acquired through his devotion to the Guru, Padmapāda and the others abandoned their pride of learning and came to hold him in high regard.

Ādi Śaṅkara tasked his four principle disciples with continuing his work of reviving Sanātana Dharma as a way of living and expounding the teachings of Advaita Vedānta through study of the Vedā and Upaniṣads. In addition they were to revive and maintain Sanskrit and establish the āśrams as centres of learning.

In the Mahānūśasanam Śrī Śaṅkara specified where in India the Pīṭhas (seats) should be established, which Veda they should study and the mahāvākya they should reflect upon.

Troṭaka was appointed to the northern seat of Badrīnāth, an area in which Śaṅkara had spent many years engaged in ascetic practices before his 16th birthday. Ādi Śaṅkara assigned the Northern seat the Atharva Veda with it’s Mahāvākya of Ayamātmā Brahma: This Ātman is Brahman. The seat is called Jyotimath and is visited whenever the present Śaṅkarācārya goes on circuit. When not there, his image is placed on the chair in the audience room.

As regards the qualities of an ācārya who is to occupy the seats, Ādi Śaṅkara declared:

“Only he who is pure, has control of his senses and is versed in the Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Yoga and Śāstras is eligible to sit on my Pīṭham.”



Mahārāja Śrī Brahmānanda Sarasvatī

Śaṅkarācārya of Jyotirmāṭh

Rājārām Mīśra was born to a respected Brahmin family near Ayodhyā, northern India. He was a serious child, who even at a young age restrained his actions and senses, and he loved to be alone.

When he was nine, as was the custom, arrangements were made for his marriage feast and the start of the way of the householder. But for him it was clear that his path was non-attachment and mokṣa, or freedom. So in peace, he simply set-off, walking along the Ganges towards the Himālayas. When questioned by the police, who twice tried to return him to his family and all its material wealth, he said, 'From many lifetimes I am coming doing auspicious actions, and the results of that is my wealth. My body will proceed whilst there is this holy form of wealth, and will go on until the day that ends. Then that transient body will also become still. Don't think about me anymore. Apply yourself to your own work.'

When given a jug of milk by a bystander concerned to see such a young, skinny boy surviving alone in the mountains, he tipped much of it into the Ganges to give back to the river for the water he had drunk. There are many references to food being left for him and the God of the Ganges always giving back to him. From his complete faith and perfection, he said, "When God gives, He gives all that is required", and Guru Dev's life is testament to that statement.



For years he lived in forests, caves and mountains, living on fruits, seeds and roots. Under the guidance of Kṛṣṇānanda Sarasvatī Jī, known as Swāmī Jī, he studied Vedānta and the Commentaries of Ādi Śaṅkara, following the highest Vedic paths.

In 1906, at the Mahā Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, he became a sannyāsīn, or renunciate, and was renamed Śrī Swāmī Brahmānanda Sarasvatī, later known as Guru Dev or Divine Teacher.

Although he continued to live in isolation and he made it hard for people to gain an audience with

him, his complete dedication gained the respect of Kṛṣṇānanda Sarasvatī Jī who encouraged him to live near the towns so that people could visit him. When questioned by others why he thought so highly of Guru Dev, Swāmī Jī said, 'He is much more fit than us, and is learned and peerless in giving answers and in removing doubts.'

For over 160 years the Northern Seat at Jyotirmāṭh had been unoccupied. The search to find the Śaṅkarācārya was ongoing. A candidate was sought by officials from the All-India Dharma Organisation and respected monks and pandits.

There was no doubt that Guru Dev held all the requisite virtues and he was repeatedly approached. His disciples encouraged him to accept saying, 'This work of gurudom is impossible for an ordinary person. By your birth, karma and tyāga (renunciation), you are revered. You are the equal of Ādi Śaṅkara.'

In 1941, at the age of 70, he finally accepted the position of Śaṅkarācārya of Jyotirmāṭh, saying, 'You want to put a lion in chains who moves about the jungle freely. But if you so like, I honour your words and I am ready to shoulder the responsibilities of the monastery management. By shouldering this responsibility, I would be serving the cause for which Ādi Śaṅkara stood. I dedicate myself fully for the mission.'

The news that a saviour of Jyotirmāṭh had been found spread throughout India. In the north, a huge wave of religious awakening took place, and invitations came from all directions. Guru Dev's main tasks were to create the new Maṭh, and to return the people of the north to the Vedic path, or Sanātana Dharma, Eternal Law.

There was much to do. Some were concerned and suggested that since the Maṭh must be restored in a very beautiful form, then a lot of wealth would be needed and how could that be attained.

In his inimitable way and with utmost faith, he replied simply:

'You people gave me to sit on the Dharma Siṅhāsana (the Lion Throne of Dharma), and I am sitting on it, and all the tasks relating to that are given to us too. Therefore you people should now sit free from anxiety.'

Mahārāja Śrī Brahmānanda Sarasvatī

Subsequently, responsibility for the regeneration of Jyotirmaṭh is now ours, and that restoration will indeed happen.'

He travelled all over India giving audiences and receiving tumultuous welcomes, and he went to the Mahā Kumbh Mela in 1942. There was a spiritual awakening in all the places he visited. He flew the victory flag of Sanātana Dharma. The land surrounding the maṭh, where local farmers had encroached, was returned to the Maṭh. A two-storey 30-room structure was built. Very soon Jyotirmaṭh became a haven for pilgrims.

Asked for his reactions to the end of World War II, he said that real and long-lasting victory occurs only when the internal foes are conquered, these being the subtle hexagon of ambition, anger, greed, false attachment, vanity and jealousy within each of us. Unless such unbiased rulers are found, lasting peace and happiness in the world will not be possible.

Guru Dev developed a practice of meditation suitable to the householder. This method was spread globally by Maharṣi Maheś Yogī, one of his disciples.

In May 1953, not long after a visit from his doctor, Guru Dev sat up, crossed his legs and closed his eyes in meditation, and left his body. All India Radio broadcast news of his death and many came to pay their last respects. His body was taken on a specially decorated coach connected to the Delhi Express and transported to the Brahmānivās Aśram in Vāraṇasī. Finally it was lowered into the Ganges.

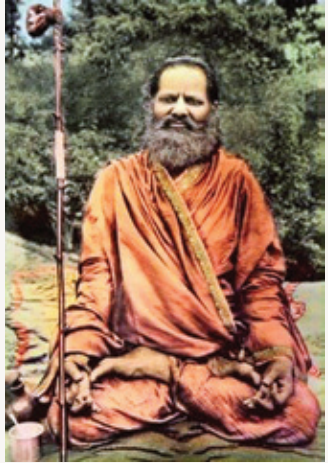


Image credits:

Cover: Volodymyr Kucherenko

Pg 5: Helmant Julka

Pg 8: Top - from the book 'Darshan' - Frank Papentin

Pg 12: Alok Kumar

Pg 16:

Top left - Kṛṣṇānanda Sarasvatī Jī

Remaining images - Guru Dev - Paul Mason Collection

Pg 17:

Top left - Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī - Richard Beal Collection

Top right - Paul Mason Collection

Middle left - from 'Darshan' by Frank Papentin

Bottom two - Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī

Pg 28: Guru Dev - Paul Mason Collection

Chairman's Statement

The Jyotirnidhi Nyasa Trust

Following the direction given by Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati to the School in February last year, the Trust has decided to use its energy and resources to support the teaching of Sanskrit, particularly to children.

To that end we are reopening our appeal for donations and encouraging the generosity which was present until the recent Indian blockage prevented our donations reaching the Ashram. Please go to our website (Jyotitrust.com) for details.

We have already offered scholarships to children in both the Senior Boys and Senior Girls at St James Schools here in London.

By way of encouragement, we have discovered that children who take up the study of Sanskrit often outperform those who don't. Is this because intelligent people study the ancient language or because the language makes them more successful and intelligent? Or both?

In the words of His Holiness: If the children are made to practise Sanskrita, then their future will be bright.

This year we would like to thank the Auckland School of Philosophy for producing the booklet you are now reading. They have done a superb job, tracing and praising the line of teachers who have transformed so many of our lives.

Thanks too are due to the team working on the Sanskrit font. We have updated the symbol for the letter Cha.



We still holding our breath on the issue surrounding the publication of the translation from the Hindi into English the biography written by the present Shankaracharya on his teacher and predecessor, Shri Shantananda Saraswati. We will not give up hope.

Best wishes

Jeremy Sinclair

This booklet was published by the Auckland School of Philosophy on behalf of the Jyotirnidhi Nyasa Trust. Charity 1075831.

When the intelligence is still unawakened, one should fill two quarters of the mind with enjoyment of pleasure, one part with study of the scriptures and the other with service of the guru. When it is partially awakened, two parts are given over to the service of the guru and the others get one part each. When it is fully awakened, two parts are devoted to service of the guru and the other two to the study of scriptures, with dispassion as the constant companion.

The Yoga Vasiṣṭha (The Supreme Yoga p244)