

away after invoking Lord's blessings on Shridhara and his family members. Shridhara came to himself some time after the beggar went away and realised his "folly". One is not expected to serve the food prepared specifically for serving to the ancestors (invoked in the brahmins) to anyone else till the ceremony was over. He was very upset and asked the brahmins as to how he should expiate for his act. They said that the only way to atone is to take a bath in the sacred Ganges. But Shridhara felt that this was impossible to be done as the trip to Ganges will take many weeks. This implied that he will not be able to perform the shrAddha ceremony on that day. So it will be an act of omission and will invite serious sin. Shridhara felt that the only thing to do in such a predicament is to surrender to the Lord. So, in the following verses he explained his predicament to Lord Siva and prayed to Him to release Ganga from His matted locks as He did on an earlier occasion in response to the prayers of sage Bhagirata. The kindly Lord could not bear to see His devotee upset. So He released Ganga from His locks. The well in Shridhara's house started to overflow. Many animals like fish, tortoises came out along with the gushing waters. The villagers were astounded at the sight and were wonderstruck at the intensity of Shridhara's piety. They realised his greatness. They requested him to control the flow of the water which was threatening to flood the village. Shridhara prayed and the flow from Ganges subsided. All, including the brahmins who had been invited specially for the ceremony were only too willing to accept that if Shridhara took

bath in the waters of the well it will be equal to a bath in the Ganges. Shridhara was very happy at the decision of the brahmins. He took bath in the water drawn from the well and completed the shrAddha ceremony.

This incident is celebrated every year on the Amavasya day in the month of Krittika at the village. The faithful throng in large number at the house in Tiruvisanallur village where Shridhara lived on that day every year and take bath in the water drawn from the well. They believe that the bath gives the same benefit as a bath in the Ganges.

COMMENTS. The scriptures

assure that a true devotee will not encounter misfortune or problems in life. ନ ବାସୁଦେବଉକ୍ତାନାଂ ଅଶୁଭଂ ବିଦ୍ୟତେ କ୍ବଚିତ୍ । says

Vishnusahasranama in the phalashruti. Lord Krishna gives an assurance to this effect in Gita (9-31). କୌହ୍ଲେୟ ପ୍ରତିଜାନହି ନ ମେ ଭକ୍ତଃ

ପ୍ରଶଂସ୍ୟତି । The question, then, is why should devotees like

Shridhara and many others like Prahladha face problems? The answer

is that the problems they face may be attributed to prArabdham or

deeds they might have committed in their past births. But, though the

problem appears to be of serious nature to us, it does not appear to

be so to the devotees themselves. They do not lose their serenity in

the face of adversity, nor is there least change in their devotion.

ଦୃଷ୍ଟଂ ଦୃଷ୍ଟଂ ପୁନରପି ପୁନଶ୍ଚନ୍ଦନଂ ଚାରୁ ଗନ୍ଧଂ

ଛିନ୍ନଂ ଛିନ୍ନଂ ପୁନରପି ପୁନଃ ସ୍ବାଦୁ ଚୈ-ବେଷ୍ମୁଖଶ୍ଚମ୍ ।

ଦଗ୍ଧଂ ଦଗ୍ଧଂ ପୁନରପି ପୁନଃ କାଞ୍ଚନଂ କାନ୍ତବର୍ଣ୍ଣଂ

ନ ପ୍ରାଣାନ୍ତେ ପ୍ରକୃତିବିକୃତିଃ କାୟତେ ସଜ୍ଜନାନାମ୍ ॥

This says that a piece of sandal wood, when repeatedly rubbed against a stone emits only a pleasant flavour. Even when the sugarcane is cut into many pieces it will continue to taste sweet only. A chunk of gold when heated in the fire again and again will give out its natural shine only. So also, the qualities of the great people will not undergo the least change even at the end of their lives. To repeat, a devotee of the Lord will certainly encounter problems. They are designed by the Lord to bring out the devotee's unshakeable faith in the Lord so that others may understand his greatness. The devotee himself never complains that he is undergoing immense suffering. But he thinks of the Lord as usual for help. He gets it and is happy that his problem is solved. In fact, Kunti—the mother of Pandavas, cleverly converted the problems into advantage. She found from experience that she thought of the Lord whenever she faced a problem. Krishna promptly appeared on the scene and helped her. So, she prayed to Krishna that she should face problems every now and then so that she can have His darshan often. She said:

ବିପଦଃ ସନ୍ତୁ ନଃ ଶଶ୍ୱଭଞ୍ଜଃ ତତ୍ର ଜଗଦ୍ଭୁରେଃ ।

ଭବତୋ ଦର୍ଶନଂ ଯସ୍ମାଦପୁନର୍ଭବ-ଦର୍ଶନମ୍ ॥ Shri Bhagavatam (1-8-25).

The verses of Gangashtakam are given below. The translations of the verses given here are not exact.

ଶଂଭୋ ଭବନ୍ନାମ ନିରନ୍ତରାନୁସନ୍ଧାନ ଭାଗ୍ୟେନ ଭବନ୍ତମେବ ।

ଯଦ୍ୟେବ ସର୍ବତ୍ର ତଥାନ୍ତ୍ୟଜେନ୍ଦ୍ୟ ପଶ୍ୟତ୍ୟହୋ କୋନ୍ତ୍ର କ୍ଳତୋଽପରାଧଃ ॥ ୧ ॥

O Lord Shambhu! I am used to repeating Your name all the time. As a result I am blessed to see You only every where. So, today I saw You only in this outcaste also. Is there anything wrong in this?

ଅସ୍ତ୍ରେଷ ମନ୍ତ୍ରଃ ପିତୃଯଜ୍ଞ ନିଷ୍ଠେ ଗତାୟୁର୍ବୋ ଯୋ ବିହିତୋଽପଚିତ୍ୟେ ।
ଦୂରାତ୍ନୁ ତନ୍ନାମଜପେନ ଶୁଦ୍ଧିଃ ନ ସ୍ୟାତ୍ କଥଂ ମେ ସ୍ମୃତିରର୍ଥବାଦଃ ॥ ୨ ॥

Let me agree that a bath in the Ganges is the proper atonement for my transgression of the rules pertaining to the shrAddha ceremony. But the Smriti texts say that even if one just repeats the name "Ganga" few times he becomes pure. Can not I take recourse to this expediency in this situation?

ତ୍ବନ୍ନାମନିଷ୍ଠା ନ ହି ତାବତୋ ମେ ଶ୍ରଦ୍ଧା ଯତଃ କର୍ମସୁ ନ ପ୍ରଦତ୍ତା ।
ତ୍ରେଶଜ୍ଞବଂ ମେ ପସୁପାତ୍ତରାୟଃ ମୁଚ୍ୟେୟ ତସ୍ମାକ୍ୱଥଂ ଆର୍ତ୍ତବନ୍ଧୋ ॥ ୩ ॥

O Lord, I accept that I have not got that intense faith in Your name that I can give up performance of duties like shrAddha. Thus I am in an awkward situation, like king Trishanku. How do I get relieved from this situation?

ଯଦ୍ୟଦ୍ୟ ତେ ଶ୍ରୀଜ୍ଞବିନଷ୍ଟିରିଷ୍ଠା କୋନ୍ତ୍ର ତତୋନ୍ୟଜରିତୁଂ ସମର୍ଥଃ ।
ଶ୍ରୀଜ୍ଞେ ବୃତାଃ ପୂର୍ବଦିନୋପବାସାଃ ନାନ୍ୟତ୍ର ଭୁଞ୍ଜୀୟୁଃ ଇଦଂ ତୁ ଶିଦ୍ୟେ ॥ ୪ ॥

If it is Your wish that the shrAddha

should be missed let it be lost. I cannot go against Your will.

But, what about the brahmins who have been specially invited for the occasion? They have been fasting since yesterday and will not take food at any other place.

ଶ୍ରଦ୍ଧାଲବ୍ଧଃ ଶ୍ରୀଜଗନ୍ନାଥପୂଜାର୍ଚ୍ଚନା ସ୍ୱାମ୍ନୋପରୋଧଂ ବିଦଶନ୍ତ୍ୟ ଧୀରାଃ ।

ଯସ୍ମିନ୍ନୁପସ୍ଥାପିତଂ ମହାନ୍ତଃ ତତ୍ତୋଚିତଂ ଯଦୟା ବିଧେହି ॥ ୫ ॥

These brahmins

are noble souls. They have prescribed the expiation, not with any selfish motive but only to make sure that the shrAddha should not become deficient in any manner. They have not taken into account the inconvenience that they will face in the process.

ଗଙ୍ଗାଧର! ତ୍ୱଭଜନାନୁରାଗ ଭୀତ୍ୟା ଗୃହେ କୁପକୃତାବଗାହଃ ।

ଜାନେ ନ ତୀର୍ଥାନୁରଂ ଅନ୍ୟ ଗଙ୍ଗାଂ ଆସ୍ତାଦୟେନଂ କଥମାର୍ତ୍ତବନ୍ଧୋ! ॥ ୬ ॥

On account of the

fear that the chanting of Your name should not be interrupted even for a moment, I have been taking bath only in the well in the house itself. I do not know any other holy river or waters.

This being the case, how will I go in search of Ganga?

ନାହଂ ତପସ୍ୱୀ ସଗରନ୍ୱବାୟଃ ଜାନେ ନ ଜହନ୍ତୁଃ ଚରତି କ୍ୱବେତି ।

ଶଂଭୋ! ଜଟାକୁଟମପାତୁଶୁଷ୍ଟବେତ୍ୟଧ୍ୟର୍ଥେନେ ନାଲମୟଂ ବରାକଃ ॥ ୭ ॥

I am not an ascetic like Bhagiratha nor do

I know the whereabouts of the sage Jahnu. I am not qualified
even to pray to You to release Ganga from Your locks.

ଗଙ୍ଗାଧରାଖ୍ୟା ଗତିରତ୍ନ ନାନ୍ୟା ତାମାଶ୍ରୟେ ସଙ୍କଟ-ମୋଚନାୟ ।

ହୃତ୍ ପ୍ରବାହଃ କଥମତ୍ର କୃପେ ବିଷ୍ଣୁର୍ଜତୀଶଃ ଖଲୁ ତେ ପ୍ରସନ୍ନଃ ॥ ୮ ॥

So, Your name Gangadhara is my refuge. I see
no other way out. Oh! What a wonder! Even as i say this, I see
the well overflowing! surely, the Lord has shown mercy.

ଗଙ୍ଗୋତି ଗଙ୍ଗୋତି ହରତି ଗୁଣ୍ଡନ୍ ଆୟୁର୍ବିତୋହଂ ଦୟାୟା ପୁରାରେଃ ।

କୃପୋତ୍ତିତୋୟଂ କରୁଣାପ୍ରବାହଃ ଗାଙ୍ଗଈରାୟାତ୍ର ଜନାନ୍ ପୁନାତୁ ॥ ୯ ॥

As I repeat the name "Ganga", the very mercy
of the Lord has taken the form of a flood and submerged me. May
this flow of the waters of Ganga purify the people in the days to
come.

CONCLUSION. One may ask as to how it was possible for
Shridhara to have a vision of Siva in a beggar. The answer is that
he was convinced that every thing in this world is the Lord only
and there is no second thing. Krishna says this in the Bhagavad
Gita. He explains that He manifests Himself as the world using the
power of maya. Though He is every thing in the world, people are
deluded by the powerful maya. Their vision is veiled. They see the
objects and overlook the God behind them. As an example, we see that
several ornaments are made of a piece gold. They are given various
names like bangle, chain etc. If we think a bit we will find that

the word "bangle" is not a substance but only a name given to a particular shape of gold. Gold can exist as gold but bangle cannot exist without the gold. Similarly, a person can go to sleep and have a dream. The dream is not substantial and is dependant on the dreamer; but not the other way round. Such things as the ornament that have no separate existence but have shape and name are called unreal objects or ମିଥ୍ୟା ବସ୍ତୁ . They do not have a permanent existence. A bangle may be melted and made into another ornament any number of times. They are therefore impermanent or ଅନିତ୍ୟମ୍ । But the items like gold that lend substance to them are known as real or ସତ୍ୟମ୍ । They are permanent or ନିତ୍ୟମ୍ . They do not change when the ornament is changed. We may say that gold pervades the bangle as, really speaking, there is no such thing as bangle. Krishna says He pervades the entire universe.

ମୟା ଚତମିଦଂ ସର୍ବଂ ଜଗଦବ୍ୟକ୍ତ-ମୂର୍ତ୍ତିନା । Gita(9-4). The right knowledge will, then, be to understand first that the ornament is gold. Overlooking the very existence of gold will be a major error and will have serious consequences. Extending this idea, we should be able to see that every thing in this universe ବିଶ୍ୱବ୍ତ୍ତ୍ୱମ୍ is impermanent and changing. People and animals come and go. So do the seas and mountains. We learn that even the sun and the stars are not permanent but have limited life only. Thus, the universe is ଅନିତ୍ୟମ୍ only. These impermanent, changing objects are many names and forms of the Lord only. In other words God is the real thing or ସତ୍ୟମ୍ । God gives substance to the world and is the

substratum or ଅଧିଷ୍ଠାନମ୍। Krishna explains this to Arjuna and says the right vision is to see Him every where. But we are taken by the world and do not see the God hiding behind it. To start with, we do not see the Lord within us, but identify ourselves with the bodies. This results in numerous problems. We have to take care of the body, ensure it is fed and clothed properly. We require so many things to protect it and keep it happy and secure. To get all these things we have to work hard. The need for comfort and security makes us desire many things. We get a family and friends around ourselves. We import their joys and sorrows on to ourselves. This leads to likes and dislikes. We like things and people who add to our joy and comforts and dislike those who do not. This corrupts our minds. As we go on working hard for ourselves and our family and friends, we do many things that are right and many times compromise with values and do wrong things. The results are puNyam and pApam. We have to enjoy the fruits of the puNyam and pApam in our account and to do this we have to take one or many births. Repeated births and deaths is sorrow only. The only way out of this problem is to have the right vision that shows that God is in every thing and every where. Yama tells this to Nachiketha in Kathopanishad. (2-1-10).

ଯଦେବେହ ତଦମୁତ୍ତ ଯଦମୁତ୍ତ ତଦନ୍ବିହ ।

ମୃତ୍ୟୋଃ ସ ମୃତ୍ୟୁମାପ୍ନୋତି ଯ ଇହ ନାନେବ ପଶ୍ୟତି ॥

He says that one who sees plurality is condemned to be born and die again and again. Krishna says that

by intense devotion one gets an understanding of the Lord's true nature and gets such a right vision. Gita (18-55).

ଭକ୍ତ୍ୟା ମାଂ ଅଭିଜାନାତି ଯାବାନ୍ୟଶ୍ଚାସ୍ମି ତତ୍ତ୍ୱତଃ ।

Thus a true devotee is able to see the Lord in every being.

ବିଦ୍ୟାବିନୟ-ସଂପନ୍ନେ ବ୍ରାହ୍ମଣେ ଗବି ହସ୍ତିନି ।

ଶୁନି ଚୈବ ଶ୍ୱପାକେ ଚ ପଶୁତଃ ସମଦର୍ଶିନଃ ॥ Gita (5-18).

He says that a person endowed with wisdom sees the same brahman in a brahmin endowed with wisdom and humility, in a cow, an elephant as also in a dog, and in an outcaste who eats a dog. Sage Narada said the same in his advice to Yudishtira. Bhagavatha (7-14-9).

ମୃଗୋକ୍ତ-ଶର-ମର୍କାଶୁ-ସରୀସୃପ୍ତଗମକ୍ଷିକାଃ ।

ଆତ୍ମନଃ ପୁତ୍ରବତ୍ ପଶ୍ୟତ୍ ତୈରେଷାମନ୍ତରଂ କିମତ୍ ॥

One should look upon a deer, camels, donkeys, monkeys, rats, reptiles, birds and flies as though they were his own children. What is it that makes them separate from these (own children)?

The vedic seers had this grand vision. The great vedic hymn Shri Rudram has three hundred salutations to the Lord, not by His names, but as being available in various beings, both animate and inanimate. He is saluted as being the one available in the streams, shoals, clouds, lightnings, trees, grass, animals like horses, vultures and even in cheats and thieves! Because the hymn contains such a lofty idea its recitation is very inspiring. But, everyone may not be expected to study the scriptures like the upanishads, Gita and Shri

Rudram. Understanding this limitation of the people in general our rishis had incorporated these valuable ideas in the popular hymns. We see these names encountered above ବିଶ୍ଵମ୍ , ସତ୍ୟଃ , and ଅଧିଷ୍ଠାନମ୍ in the Vishnusahasranamam. One of Lalita's names in Lalitasahasranamam (No. 734) ମିଥ୍ୟାଜଗଦଧିଷ୍ଠାନାଃ (i.e.) She is the substratum of this unreal universe, says this fact explicitly. As we keep on reading or reciting these prayers, the great vedantic truths contained in them will gradually enter our mind and change our concept of God. That is why we have the practice of pArAyaNam or reciting such stotras daily. By repeated reading we will understand that God is not a Being residing in remote places like Vaikuntha or Kailasa, but He is very intimately available in any thing we see or hear about – including our bodies. This is said in the Narayana Suktam

ଯଜ କିଂଚିଦ୍ଜଗତ୍ସର୍ବଂ ହୃଦ୍ୟତେ ଶୁଭ ତେଽପି ବା ।

ଅହର୍ବହିଷ୍ଠ ତସର୍ବଂ ବ୍ୟାପ୍ୟ ନାରାୟଣ-ସ୍ଥିତଃ ।

Understanding and accepting the facts stated above will cause a great change in our personality and attitude. We will know that we are surrounded by God resident in all things and beings. So, we are never alone or away from Him. This idea will give us great sense of security, as we can get His help at any time or place.

Krishna says this in Gita(6-30).

ଯୋ ମାଂ ପଶ୍ୟତି ସର୍ବତ୍ର ସର୍ବଂ ଚ ମୟ ପଶ୍ୟତି ।

ତସ୍ୟାହଂ ନ ପ୍ରଣଶ୍ୟାମି ସ ଚ ମେ ନ ପ୍ରଣଶ୍ୟତି ॥

Since He is in all things and beings we will show great

respect and love for them. We will enjoy immense peace of mind and confidence. This is how the great men like the sages and saints could be calm and enjoyed happiness. Thus Shridhara's experience teaches us an important lesson to be followed in life.

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