



Guru Charitra

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1. Introduction

My contact with the spiritual tradition of Lord Dattatreya was quite fortuitous, a discovery by chance. When I was collecting material for the comprehensive account of Sai Baba of Shirdi, I came across the experience of one Kusa Bhav.

Kusa Bhav served his Guru, Sri Datta Maharaj* and learnt occult skills like mysterious transference of material objects. He could produce sweetmeats from "nowhere" by a wave of his hand with the power of mantra and distribute the same to amazed devotees as *prasad*. At one stage, he started pestering his guru to teach him black magic with which he could harm his opponents who derided him as a charlatan. The wise guru realized that it was not good for either of them to stay together any longer. He directed his disciple to seek spiritual guidance henceforth from Sai Baba of Shirdi and himself retired to the Himalayas to pursue his own spiritual quest for perfection.

When Kusa Bhav arrived at Shirdi, Sai Baba was wild with rage and would not allow him to enter the mosque. He said that the sweetmeats produced by the former were not 'created' as the gullible devotees supposed, but were merely transferred from elsewhere by the power of a *mantra*. Thus, he said, it amounted to theft and cheating. The sweetmeats thus pollute their devout recipients spiritually and would inspire them, in their turn, to hanker after cheap occult powers instead of seeking spiritual Enlightenment which is the only noble object of man's life. Sai Baba insisted that unless the visitor chose to give up his weird practices and leave off the power at the holy river Godavari, he would not allow the latter to come to him. Kusa Bhav vacillated for some time and, after much inner struggle, had to give in. He went to the Godavari, threw away the iron-bangle on his right hand and, taking the holy water in the palms, he vowed to give up all his occult powers as directed by Sai Baba. To his amazement, he discovered that he could no longer produce such material objects by a wave of his hand. Henceforth, Sai Baba allowed him to visit him at the mosque and instructed him to read Sree Guru Charitra 108 times and visit holy Ganagapur now and then. Later, Sai Baba blessed him with the power of obtaining sacred ash by merely thinking about him.

This incident drew my attention to Sree Guru Charitra as a potent means of winning the grace of a Perfect Master. Soon I discovered that the Marathi texts which devotees study at Shirdi are those of this holy work. But none of the devotees knew English and I had no occasion to learn its contents for quite some time.

Again, in the course of my study of the life of Sri Sai Baba, I came across incidents which demonstrated the spiritual identity of the great fakir with his equally great contemporary saint, Sree Swami Samarth, more popularly known as Sree Akkalkot Maharaj (1856-1878). Naturally, I was drawn to learn more about the latter and then I came to know that his life was a continuation of that of Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi, the second Avatar of Lord Dattatreya in this age, celebrated in Sree Guru Charitra.

I stumbled upon the subtleties of the Dattatreya tradition no less fortuitously. Ever since I visited Shirdi (1963) and studied the marvelous life of Sri Sai Baba, I traveled extensively in search of such a Sadguru so that I could dedicate my whole life to his service.

Once I visited Sri Ma Anandamayi at Naimisharanya (Uttar Pradesh) during the *Bhagavat Saptah*. At one of the daily expositions of the holy text, the revered speaker, Sri Akandananda Saraswathi remarked that only a living Sadguru could lead his devotee to Self-realization and that a Sadguru who had cast off his body, however great he might be, can only fulfil prayers for one's material good. He spoke in Hindi which I could only understand but cannot speak and so I could not discuss

with him. As Sai Baba was no longer available to me in flesh and blood, I wondered what I should do, but I had no chance to get the clarification.

After a few months, I visited Shirdi on a proposed stay of seven days. I wished to obtain Sai Baba's guidance and clarification in this matter. On the second day, I was very strongly impelled to visit my old student who was working in Pune. It was quite unusual, as I never visited anyone of my friends of kinsfolk. I had to yield to the impulse and I reached Pune. My friend was away at the office. So I left my bag in his house and went out, wishing to spend the time in going round the city till my friend's return. Quite accidentally, I enquired at a wayside florist whether there was any great saint worth visiting in Pune. The shop-keeper directed me to visit Sree Gulavani Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sree Vasudevananda Saraswathi.

As soon as I entered the muth, the aged saint greeted me saying, "Oh! the child of Sai Baba has come!" I at once realized that I could get reliable clarification for my problem from him. He heard my question and said, "What that learned speaker said is true of only those who attained Enlightenment through their efforts. But Sai Baba of Shirdi is not such a one. He is the *Avatar of Lord Dattatreya*. He manifests himself to his worthy devotees even today in his physical form and guides them. You are on the right track. Go ahead". When I took leave of him, I asked Sree Gulavani Maharaj to give me any books that might help me in my quest. At his call, a devotee gave me a Sanskrit translation of *Sree Guru Charitra* and a book of Sanskrit verses in praise of Lord Dattatreya. "These are the only copies left with us. You are fortunate in getting them", said the devotee. At once I realized that Sai Baba had blessed me with three things: the solution to my doubt, a version of *Sree Guru Charitra* which I could read and for which I was longing; and the *darshan* and blessings of an eminent saint of the Datta tradition. I was all the happier to learn later that Sree Vasudevananda Saraswathi used to read *Sree Guru Charitra* every day and that this, along with his other devotional practices, had won for him the *darshan* of Lord Dattatreya in a vision and his direct initiation with a *mantra*. The present work is a free English rendering of this work. I was more fully impressed by the value of the book when I learned that a large number of devotees were divinely directed to resort to Sree Akkalkot Maharaj as their Guru as a result of their devout study of *Sree Guru Charitra*.

About the Work

Sree Guru Charitra was first written by Sree Gangadhara Saraswathi in Marathi language. The eminent Marathi scholar L. R. Pangarkar says that first two incarnations of Lord Dattatreya, Sreepada Sreevallabha and Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi, the two protagonists of the immortal work, had flourished in the 14th and 15th centuries A.D. The original text recounts, in 53 chapters, the life and teachings of the two incarnations in about 7000 verses. In the late nineteenth century, Sree Vasudevananda Saraswathi, a famous saint of the Dattatreya tradition, translated the work in Sanskrit verses of equal number. Later, he was told in a vision by Lord Dattatreya that details pertaining to matters of Hindu religious ritual, have infringed on the proper theme of the work, was directed to abridge it into 2000 verses. The present translator and the Sanskrit pundit who had assisted him in reading the Sanskrit text were blessed with *darshan* and blessings of several great saints during and after the study and the translation of this Sanskrit work. This is quite in keeping with the subtleties of the Dattatreya tradition. The present English translator is still working hard to gather material about the historical background of the complete form in the subsequent editions of the work. first two Avatars of Lord Dattatreya. He hopes to furnish the same in a more com

The purpose of Translation

The present rendering into English is intended to serve a five-fold purpose. Firstly, its study is a very effective means of contacting the deeper perennial springs of spiritual wisdom of all religions through proper attunement of our psyche. For according to the Perennial Philosophy (or Sanatana

Dharma), the Spirit is the medium, Substratum or the essence, of which the whole universe is a manifestation. This Spirit or Essence is Lord Dattatreya which manifests itself as the great Sadgurus from time to time. When we study their life histories, their acts and teachings, our hearts are attuned to the Essential Spirit of Datta. Secondly, in the form of Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi, Lord Dattatreya has vowed to manifest Himself amidst us in response to our loving call. In the modern age of cultural chaos and confusion of values, it will be of immense help to mankind, if a large number of noble aspirants for spiritual perfection, their own and that of their fellows come together in Spirit in a process of collective self-attunement to the Eternal Spirit of Lord Dattatreya through widespread study of the work and, together, all of them call upon the Spirit of perennial Guru to manifest Himself amongst us and guide us along the path. Thirdly, as the life of Sai Baba of Shirdi, the latest and the most complete manifestation of Lord Datta, amply demonstrates, Dattatreya is the One Spirit that manifest Himself through all the Enlightened Spiritual teachers of today that belong to the various nations and religions. By the widespread study of *Sree Guru Charitra* and my other life-work Sai Baba the Master, ever large number of responsive souls amidst us would be able to draw richly upon the grace of all the Masters. Fourthly, a diligent study of these works would educate the masses of the devout souls to transcend the vicious, narrow barrier of religion and race and pray with the vedic seers, "Let uplifting thoughts come to us from all directions." Fifthly, these devotees would be sufficiently informed about the hallmarks of true Perfect Masters and would not fall a prey to viles of halfbaked, self-seeking charlatans who trade in instant, effortless "techniques" of pseudo-spiritualism.

Philosophical and Metaphysical Background of SREE GURU CHARITRA

As a backdrop to the marvelous account of the avatars of Lord Dattatreya, *Sree Guru Charitra* presents a comprehensive resume of the whole of ancient Indian philosophy of life. It envisages human life as a search for lasting contentment, peace and bliss as a struggle for complete unfoldment of its vast spiritual potential. All of Man's endeavours derive ultimately from this aspiration. Many fail to realize these goals in life owing to lack of proper understanding of Man's innate nature and his relationship to the rest of all existence of which human life is but one manifestation. Only when man understands the nature of the material universe as the manifestation of the One Universal Spirit and accordingly orients his life to it at the three levels of understanding, word and deed, can he hope to attain his goal. Those who succeeded in accomplishing this task have out of their spontaneous compassion for suffering humanity, enjoined a way of making all of one's life a single-minded pursuit of this goal, moulding all of one's natural instinctive drives to contribute to its realization. Thus the proper way of life is viewed as one continuous sacrament and ritual, made up of a series of several such, befitting the various stages of human life. Such a view of life derives from a direct experience of the spiritual process that underlies the nature of all existence from moment to moment, gained by the Enlightened Ones. Ancient Wisdom views the First Cause as the Nameless, Formless, Universal consciousness or the Spirit. The fundamental nature of this universal consciousness is to manifest the alternating states of activity and rest. The Pure Spirit was called the *Parabramhan*; its dynamic aspect is called *Prakriti*. The whole of nature we see around us, from the distant nebulae and galaxies down to the smallest "particles" and "fields" of modern Physics, constitutes *Prakriti* and its play. At the end of every active phase comes the state of total dissolution of all material existence and the two states are figuratively described as the "sleep and wakefulness" of Bramha, the Creator. In these are involved many sub-phases or cycles of time called '*Kalpas*', each bearing its own name. For instance, the present one is called the *Svetavaraha Kalpa*, literally 'the kalpa of the white Boar'. Each *Kalpa* is sub-divided into *Manvantaras* each having its own universal law-giver or Manu. Each *Manvantara* is again sub-divided into the sequence of four *Yugas*, of which there is a definition in *Sree Guru Charitra*.

At every phase of Total Dissolution or *Pralaya*, all the living creatures and all other aspects of the previous active phase of material existence are said to recede into a dormant state in a subtle form, just as all our feelings, thoughts and knowledge lie dormant in our individual consciousness during

deep sleep. When we wake up, all these re-emerge into manifestation. So does it happen with the recommencement of the active phase of the Universal Spirit.

Every active phase of the Universal consciousness is said to begin as a stir in the Divine Will (The Word, as the Bible puts it) to manifest Himself as the Many. According to Indian Scriptures, the first to be created are spiritual principles called the four *Brahma Manasa Putras* (the spiritual offspring of Brahma, the creator) who chose to remain forever as such, i.e., as fully enlightened sages and not get entangled. In the next phase of the active cycle were projected the *Prajapathis* (lit. the progenitors of material creation and living creatures) and sages like Atri who willingly chose to further the divine plan of creation. Then were projected the various conscious forces in nature described as gods by the Vedas. The rest of the material creation is a product of the collective, harmonious functioning of these conscious principles, described as the *Yagna*.

The whole of the active phase or *Prakriti* is characterized by three modes of functioning of the cosmic energy –*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* which can be described as Harmony, Activity and Confusion. After the evolution of the material universe, including the earth, with all its flora and fauna, sages like Atri manifested themselves on earth in human forms and propagated knowledge of the fundamental creative processes among mankind. This body of knowledge is the *Veda* which later came to be classified into the four *Vedas*.

The sages also tried to impart all this knowledge to as many as possible through religious philosophy, metaphysics and ritual. The whole process of creation, of which Man is a part, was presented as a spontaneous, joyful, creative process of self-fulfilling activity with no other aim or goal. Man can live in harmony with the rest of creation and with his own self (which is basically a manifestation of the cosmic or universal process) to the extent that he grows in this realization and he can thus transcend all those narrow, selfish concerns which shut out such understanding and which are, in their turn, products of lack of such an understanding.

Guru and Disciple

As such, man, with the help of this understanding, has to inform and mould his every thought, word and deed with the urge to realize this wisdom. That is, understanding moulds thought, word and deed. Cultured thoughts, words and deeds actualize his understanding and thereby perfect it. Thus, in the form of a chain reaction, man enters the real relentless stream of divine creation towards self-harmonization and perfection, freeing himself from the cocoon of petty selfish drives or needs that are projected as natural and legitimate by his limited, clouded view of creation. The latter is a blurred distorted image obtained through the sense medium of his wrong understanding, or more correctly, no understanding. When one realizes this harmonization with the rest of the creation, the basic disharmony with himself implied by his former concept of the discreteness, distinctness of his own self, 'other' selves and things is dissolved. And he realizes the unity that is the essence of the seeming diversity of forms. Such a one perceives the misery of others as remnants of disharmony of his own self and strives to resolve it while, from the strength of his own perfection, he knows that there are in fact no others to be saved from misery.

Such a one is called the Guru, the Teacher that can make all our life's struggle for lasting contentment and bliss, worth the game. Without him, the immense creation and one's own disharmonious life together seems an ocean of misery of phenomenal existence. With his help, it is an ocean of the bliss of Self-Realization. Anyone who knows or intuites this is bound to love the Guru. His heart's strength with which he had hitherto loved wealth, his life, wife and all else separately, is now put together in adoration of the Master.

It is on this basis that *Sree Gurucharitra* may be termed the glorification of the Guru who is Truth, the Way and the Life, and is worthy of being loved with all the strength of one's soul and heart, as the Christ puts it. The proper conduct of a true disciple to the Guru, as depicted in the stories in *Sree Gurucharitra* would seem childish forms of self-enslavement, if this truth is not understood. The details of a disciple's conduct are not something which can be formally implemented, but they constitute the spontaneous experience of love. The joy of such love consists in acting it out, living it out. It is not the veneration of an individual called the Guru; it is the spontaneous realization of the essence of the Guru; it is wisdom in action that is the ultimate object of one's own life's struggle. In short, only such a one is a disciple and, to him, the Guru is all the gods, all the holy places and the rest. What his own life cannot give him, he is sure that the Guru can, and hence the latter is dearer than the former, than his own life. Do not human beings stake their lives for love, wealth and fame etc., which cannot promise as much?

However, it is not everyone that can blossom into such a state of perfection, either of discipleship or Guruhood. They are always a handful, like the most eminent scientists, poets, or national leaders. Guruhood is the fruit of perfection in the discipleship, and ideal discipleship is itself a fruit of much preparation and endeavour. To ensure these to the best possible extent for the largest number, the sages have enjoined a scheme of life: The growing boy and girl also in the Vedic times- even before his mind is caught up in the web of 'natural' impulses born of wrong understanding, is left in the care of a learned man whose understanding was already stabilized enough to strive for the sole object of Self-realization. This was called *upanayana* and was preformed between the ages of 7 and 9 years. For about 10 to 12 years, the growing boy leads a life of strict discipline of body, mind and conduct and prepares himself to lead life as a continuous sacrament, aimed at achieving perfection. Those who gain unusual development among such *Brahmacharis* (celebrates) are permitted to renounce all worldly ties and pursuits immediately and to dedicate themselves wholly to the task of Self-realization in service of a Sadguru or a Perfect Master. Others are advised to accept their unpreparedness for the task realistically and marry girls who too were trained to cooperate with these in leading the ideal domestic life. The so-called arranged marriages are the relics of this tradition. Other forms of marriage, like the one by mutual choice of the partners (*Gandharva Vivaha*) too were allowed, though the former were preferred.

In Vedic times, so say some *Smriti* (Law) texts, *Upanayana* was enjoined for girls too. Owing to the growing demands on domestic life of the girls, this seems to have gone out of use. Subsequently, the girl of 8 or 10 years was married to a youth so trained and he was to be her Guru, guide, philosopher, friend and lover in one. The ideal of a wife thus came to be a replica of the Guru-disciple relationship as described earlier. We can see the parallelism between the ways of life enjoined on a disciple and on an ideal wife (*Pativrata*) briefly in *Sree Gurucharitra*, and more elaborately in the Puranas and *Smriti* texts. The total love that developed between so perfectly matched pairs was such that when the husband died, the wife found life so worthless that she preferred to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband's body (*Sati Sahagamana*). The inner feeling of self-dedication impels such an act and ensures her the very best of spiritual states after death. Later, this custom degenerated into a mere matter of family pride when, in the modern age, society has come very benignly to prohibit the practice. But even this *Sati Sahagamana* is said to be inferior to that ideal of love-relationship in which even the very knowledge of the husband's death led to the spontaneous and instantaneous death of the loving wife too. In its turn, this too was considered inferior to that power of women's loving faith which could revive her deceased husband, as depicted in the stories of Savitri and Satyavantha. The implication is that, just as an ideal disciple, by the power of his devotion to and faith in the Guru a the divine Trinity in one, won supernatural powers, a *Pativrata* too can win the same state by similar loving faith in her husband. As the husband was trained by his Guru already in the right way of life, he is considered the lawgiver to his wife who pursues the same goal of life. As her sons too would be similarly trained, she is expected to be under their care, if her husband dies earlier than she i.e, if she cannot opt for *Sati Sahagamana*. Ultimately, it is God as guru that saves the ideally trained man and God as her husband saves an ideal

housewife. Hence, it is specifically stated that a genuine spiritual teacher should initiate a woman only through her husband. This idea is implied when *Sree Gurucharitra* enjoins a woman to so revere her husband even if, in consequence of her misdeeds in a previous life, she were to obtain a husband who is wicked and cruel in this life. The same is implied when Sree Guru admonishes a seeker that forsook his Guru for being what seemed to be cruel and exacting. Besides, Sree Guru says to the said disciple that it is a sin even to see the face of one who forsakes his Guru. For it shows the latter's unworthiness. So too, a widow came to be looked upon as an omen of ill luck in the Indian society; for it was believed that her violation of the sanctity of marriage in some way in her previous life is responsible for her unfortunate condition in the present life. This might in fact be a device to ensure that a young widow takes all the precautions to see that her own devotion to her late husband does not waver through free mingling with men and women. The life of a widow is, like that of a sannyasi, total dedication to spiritual endeavour. Only, the latter lives under the care of her sons or brothers, while the former wanders homeless.

Such a plan of life enables man to see through the lure of instinctive drives and to qualify for the guidance of a Sadguru. It takes many lives to perfect and most of us fall off almost at every turn. The Sadguru perseveres through all of them to draw us again on to the path. This truth has been amply affirmed by even modern saints like Sai Baba of Shirdi and Swami Samarth of Akkalkot, the two latest avatars of Lord Dattatreya.

Sree Guru Charitra affirms the caste system of the Veda. The Veda views the society as an organism which naturally produces groups of individuals with different aptitudes and organs, so that each group can function like a specialised organ, for the well being of the whole. But, as man is endowed with intelligence, playing his legitimate part in the life of the total system involves deliberate choice and discipline under the guidance of the sages. This ensures further development of the individual's abilities which is imperative for his spiritual perfection. On the other hand, whenever faith in the system flags, the individuals attach fanciful values to certain occupations and scramble for them. In the ensuing struggle, the earlier identification of their groups with the names of castes plays havoc, as it now doing in India.

To ensure against such decay, each of the castes was taught its own *dharma*, its values and its relation to the *dharma* of the others. The *Sudra* who serves the other three castes and enables them to function effectively is the foot on which the social organism, or the Collective Soul stands. And hence devout Hindus bow to the feet of the Lord. *Vaisya* the producer or trader of all goods and grain, depends immediately upon the *Sudra*; so he corresponds to the thighs of the Lord. The *Kshatriya* who guards law and order within the society and protects it from external aggression is said to have originated from the arms of the Lord. The *Brahmin* is the guardian of all the branches of knowledge and their grand synthesis in the wisdom of the Self (*Brahman*). He, like the theoretician in the Marxist society, guides the material and the spiritual pursuits of the society in strict harmony and ensures that neither or them encroaches upon the other; the first three *ashramas* are the bedrock on which the fourth one stands and to which they lead.

Like all organisms, the social system too decays in time, despite all care. The direction of change is from its pristine state in the *Krita Yuga* to its total decay in the *Kali Yuga*. All through, the collective life-force strives its best to arrest and delay the process of social decay and repeatedly attempts to restore it as far as possible. The Collective Soul of mankind manifests itself as repeatedly the Spiritual Masters, the Gurus, to redefine tradition and to correct the aberrations of dogmatism. So did the Christ for the Jewish law and Mohammed for the Arab law. Thus the *Smriti* texts enjoin strict adherence to their dictates in general. They specifically state that the instructions of a perfect sage have a precedence, when one can find such. So too, regarding the implementation of law, one is told to follow the practice of the Wise as the model. Yet, human nature being a part of the natural phenomenon of decay, we find orthodoxy fanatically adhering to its own forms of inhumanity in the name of the sacred law, in spite of what the Gurus and tradition texts teach them. To counter this

trend, the sages strengthen the faith and wisdom in the hearts of individuals, that the practice of religious rites and rituals like *yagnas* and *Vratas* is an essential part of *Karma* or righteous action, intended to nullify the defects of past misdeed and ensure proper motivation for right action in the future births.

The assurance of Sree Guru that he would forever abide at Gangapur and go around the village for *bhiksha* at noon is literally true even today. It is customary for devotees visiting the holy place to go for *bhiksha* too. On my second visit to the place in 1975, while partaking of it under a tree, I remarked to a south Indian sadhu who sat by me, that Sree Guru's eternal presence might be a well-meant fabrication. At first, he seemed to doubt whether it would be worth the while to try to enlighten me. Later, his attitude changed. He said, "Listen, I have been visiting this place for a few decades. Once, as I was devoutly reading *Sree Gurucharitra* at the Sangama, I suddenly felt that I should try or recognize him some day when he comes for *bhiksha* and seek his personal blessing. Accordingly, I studied the holy book with ever greater zeal. At the same time, I began to observe every devotee that arrived there on days when visitors were the fewest, so that I can identify any other form in which Sree Guru might turn up for *bhiksha*. Day by day, my expectation grew up to a high pitch, when at last it was like an ecstasy that gripped by being throughout the day. One night, Sree Guru appeared in my dream like a pious brahmin and said in a stern voice, "Fellow, don't try to catch me amidst the crowd of visiting devotees. It is my secret and it does not behove you to probe it." The next minute, I woke up and reflected on the dream. I could vividly remember that despite his form and appearance, I was sure that he was Sree Guru. Evidently, my zealous prayer and trial have evoked a response from him. Having come thus far in my effort, should I relent? I decided to press on till I could achieve my object. Strangely enough, from that day onwards, I never again experienced that sense of his presence which swayed my whole being earlier. I was only quietly happy and assured that I was in sight of my success.

One day, the devotees of Gangapur were unusually fewer and it was my best opportunity to observe and note them individually. At about 7.30 a.m., the moment I finished my dip in the river and came to the bank, I had a severe headache and high fever. I was feeling giddy and extremely weak. At once, I lay down under a tree and fell asleep. When I woke at about 3 p.m., I was quiet well and very hungry. It was long past the hour of *bhiksha*. Yet as it was my vow to live only on *bhiksha*, I at once proceeded to a few houses and called out for the same. At all the places, I was told that they had nothing left to give me. At one house, when I doggedly pleaded, the master of the house was furious and said: "You seem to have come here only to fill your belly, you worthless sadhu! When you came for the noon-bhiksha, I gave you a roti!" I protested that I did not come for *bhiksha* that day at all. But a few passers by confirmed the man's accusation. I had to give in and I quietly walked away, crest-fallen and weak. I knew that something had happened that I should face such ridiculous situation. That evening, I felt weak and lost all my appetite and slept very early. Again, the same brahmin appeared in my dream: Admiring laughter, he was telling his companions; how he had fooled me. At last, he said to me. 'Yesterday, as you were asleep, I went in your form for *bhiksha*!' Henceforth, I gave up my foolish attempt. Now I know that Sree Guru is here and is quite responsive.

The sadhu met me the next day and incidentally told me that a few decades ago, the priests at the *muth*, on the eve of an important festival, were cleaning the padukas of Sree Guru with water and coconut fiber. The later contained a small piece of coconut-shell. When the priest rubbed a little hard, there was a scratch on one of the padukas and blood oozed out of it. The priests were all quite scared and tried their best to stop it but in vain. They panicked and sent word to His Holiness, Sree Vasudevananda Saraswathi who was then camping nearby. The holy one rushed to the *muth* and, when he chanted a few verses glorifying Sree Guru, the bleeding stopped.

"Would the padukas bleed again, if.....", I asked. "Perhaps they would, if the Lord chooses to bless you with such an experience!" the sadhu replied. Indeed, experiences are personal and cannot be

thus argued about. If we have such an experience, would it suffice another? Should we not put our hand to the plough and never turn back?

To Spiritual Aspirants

Identifying and contacting a Sadguru, a Perfect Master, is the crux of the problem of spiritual evolution of man, both collective and individual, especially in the present times, when the mass media and fanfare have made it more of a craze than a serious pursuit. Yet, fortunately for the serious-minded, there is a hope and a clear way; the devout study of Sree Guru Charitra.

The phenomenon is analogous to that of a remote control initially, leading to immediate personal contact: a gadget must be capable of receiving the remote commands; the seeker too has to evolve in himself, some potential which can respond positively to the subtle, all pervasive spiritual field of the Master. The study of Sree Guru Charitra does just this for us.

The Perennial Wisdom, as Aldous Huxley puts it, has affirmed with one voice, that man is potentially the Spirit – “The Kingdom of Heaven is within”. And it can be developed ad infinitum.

The study of Sree Guru Charitra focuses our inherently extrovert awareness on that spiritual potential in us, of which Sree Guru is an objective manifestation, an Archetype, a sort of reflector of our awareness on to its original Self. As we persevere diligently, our awareness gets oriented to his presence every moment of our life. At one stage, the message is strong and unmistakable; the goal, the Perfect Master is sighted. In his perpetual immediate presence, our potential matures and the Seeker and the Sought become one. Till then, Sree Guru Charitra is the Master, this end of this innate tie. And such a one never proclaims himself to the world. For him there is no world apart from the Master, no seeking for disciples and no need of constant reassurance of his credentials to anyone. The path may seem too long for some. But if one is genuinely interested in it, the pleasure of it is the journey; only such a one reaches the goal. For, it is not an outward journey with spatial and temporal implications, but it is an inward ripening. The fruit ripens through contact with the tree.

The proper method of studying the text is to begin it on a Thursday and to conduct it as below: Keep a beautiful picture of Sree Dattatreya and or of Sree Guru. Offer a light or a candle, joss sticks, flowers and sandal paste. Invoke His presence by chanting the verse in praise of the Guru, i.e., “Gurur Bramha” meaning, “Guru is the creator(Bramha), the preserver (Vishnu) and the annihilator (Maheshwara); Guru is the Absolute Himself. Adorations to such a Guru”. Then offer a few pieces of candy to Him. Then read the book as follows: The first day 7 chapters; second and third days, 4 chapters each; thereafter, two chapters per day. On the concluding day, feed three or at least one pious brahmin, sadhu or a poor man. We must look upon him as a form of Sree Guru. We keep reading like this over and over again. One may read it once in 3 days or even a day, ardently seeking His guidance.

Vijayadasami

1987

Acharya E. Bharadwaja

2. Chapter 1

As long as we do not realize the Supreme Self, the universe looks frightening as a snake that is illusorily projected on to a rope in darkness. The moment the Self is realized, the illusory nature of the

phenomenal universe is experienced. Let us bow to the Guru, who is the Reality, of the nature of Reality – Awareness – Bliss. The nondual reality which manifests itself as the many to the erring intellect, but which is realized to be One is indeed the parabrahman and Lord Datta is it- the one who in His mercy, manifested Himself as Lord Datta, the son of the sage Atri and Anasuya, to enable His devotees, Kartaveeryarjuna and King Yadu, to realize the Self. He again manifested Himself as Sreepada Sreevallabha, and Sree Narasimha Saraswathi to uplift His devotees. Even now, He responds to the call of His loving devotees at the confluence of rivers Krishna and Bheema and has been perpetuating His mission. The One Self who manifested Himself as the multiple universes and entered its form is Lord Datta Himself. He can be realized through gynana or knowledge. Those who transcend the duality of likes and dislikes born of sensory experiences of objects, through the power of discrimination get liberated from the strangle hold of ignorance. To such a one, only the Supreme Lord is the object of love. It is for the sake of such discriminating ones that the Lord assumes the sporting form of a human being. In every age, He thus manifests himself and restores righteousness through the adherence to His own duties enjoined by the scriptures and then shuffles off His form. In this cosmic cycle of the Day of Brahma, twenty-eight cycles of the four Yugas (cosmic epochs) had passed in the Swetavarahakalpa. Having known that even the cosmic deities become unresponsive in this wicked age of Kali, He again manifested Himself. He exists in the subtle form of a renunciate sage, manifesting His miraculous and divine sport at the confluence of the rivers Krishna and Amaraja. The glory of this manifestation of the divine is indescribable. Even at the moment of His birth, He uttered the mystic syllable “ Om ” and by the mere touch of his hand, He transmuted iron into gold. Even before he learned the alphabet, he taught the Vedas to his disciples and expounded the Vedanta to his parents in his childhood. Even at that young age, he visited the holy places of pilgrimage, practiced yoga and restored the tradition of renunciation to its pristine purity by his own practice. He cured the intestinal illness of his devotee by making him partake of the very food, which is prohibited by medical science. He transformed a tongueless man to an elegant expounder of wisdom. He terminated the poverty of a man by his mere blessing and enabled him to visit three holy places in the wink of an eye. He revived the dead, made a barren cow yield milk. He conferred the vision of His cosmic form on his devotee, Trivikrama and humbled the pride of the learned. He made a devotee of a low caste recite the Veda by his mere blessing. He terminated the widowhood of a lady and explained the subtleties of karma yoga to a devotee. He made a withered twig grow into a tree and blessed a barren woman with offspring by his mere look. He cured one of leprosy. He presented himself in eight forms simultaneously at the houses of his eight devotees on the holy day of Deepavali (the festival of lights). He transformed a farm that was prematurely harvested into one of plentiful yield. He performed and has been performing such miracles. It may be possible to count the stars in the sky, the grains of sand on earth and the drops of water in the ocean, but not the infinite divine attributes of the Lord. Though he is the Spirit without any form, he miraculously assumes a form and enters his devotee's heart through the gateway of his hearing and cleans his heart and liberates him in this very life from ignorance. The devotee who has transcended the dualism of joy and sorrow, whether he is free from his body or not, will surely attain perfection, the moment he works out the store of his karma called parabdha. This is a truth, which cannot be understood by those who do not bask in the association with the will, and who are thus blinded by the force of their infatuation and preoccupation with sensory pleasures. Those who lead their life according to the form of righteousness that is enjoined by scriptures; in accordance with their innate tendency; and those who have faith and devotion in the deities and saints; those who thus ever live in the light of their discrimination, are free from the false sense of agency in actions and free from craving for the fruits of their actions, are true renunciates who attain both divine security in life and liberation afterwards.

Having listened to such a noble and glorious account of the manifestation of Sree Guru, a Brahmin by name Namadharaka Sharma who, disillusioned with the cravings of mundane existence, ever lived, devoting all his life to the contemplation and glorification of the noble qualities of the Guru,

arrived at the confluence of the rivers Bheema and Amaraja. Thereby he realized the Lord. With the single object of directly contacting the divine self of the Guru, he worshipped Lord Ganeshwara in order to ward off impediments in his endeavour and Goddess Saraswathi, in order to obtain right knowledge. Then, he at last succeeded in achieving his object by glorifying the Guru, who reached out to him in the form of the story of his Divine Sport, recounted by a living human form.

Namadharaka glorified the divinity of Sree Guru thus: "Oh, All knowing one! Don't you know me? Oh, witness of the whole universe, don't you see me? Oh, all pervading one, don't you hear my cry? Or, even though you have heard me, do you choose to ignore me? IF you know what I am, why does my misery persist? In case you ignore me, is it proper for you to ignore your devotees? It is not proper for you to mean that I should resort to some other deity; for you are the one Spirit and Lord of all deities. Moreover, you are our ancestral deity. How could I leave you and seek the protection of some other deity? I know that you are my Lord. Or, you being the Supreme, do you ignore me, because I am but one among thy myriad creatures – just as the king is known to all his subjects but he does not know every one of them individually? This may be possible in the case of little knowing mortal of a king, but it cannot be so in your case. For oh Lord, you are all knowing. If you say that you would grace me in return for my service, or through offerings of charity, it is not proper. He who does good only in return for some service cannot be a true giver. Such a one is, indeed, a selfish giver. Just as the sun affords light and you have bestowed your grace on the sage Dhruva and Vibheeshana and bestowed the highest spiritual state on them. In a similar fashion, may you bestow on me your blessed vision! The nine types of treasures and the eight supernatural powers are your servants. Can you need anything? What is it that I can offer you? You are ever full. What can I do for you? Even ordinary kings on earth ever protect their servants. Oh you, Sustainer of the whole universe, you have already received my worship. Why do you ignore me? Oh, Lord of all deities, are you pained at some falling of mind? It is not proper for you who are the abode of grace to be so. Even a human mother does not mind if a child kicks her with its feet. Always the one or the other of the human parents ever protects their children. You are the Father and Mother of the whole creation. If you, who are my Father and Mother, are not merciful to me, I am helpless. It is not proper for you to say that you have withheld your mercy from me, owing to my failings. For all my actions are prompted by ignorance such is my innate nature. I am doomed to do all those things, which I condemn as bad. Do you say that I should undo them by the contrary righteous action? If most of my actions are holy and only a few of them are unholy, it is possible for me to rectify them through praayaschitha (penitentiary actions). Indeed, even such penitentiary actions, are afraid of me, even as a cow is afraid of a tiger. How is it possible to remove the blackness of a blackgram? Even so, how can japa and dhyana purify me, who am the very form of sin? Oh Lord, there is no sinner like me and there is no destroyer of sin like you, therefore give up your indifference towards me, Oh Lord, and protect me who has no other refuge. Even flint seems to melt with kindness at my cry of despair. What happened then to your mercy, Oh merciful Lord? Why don't you protect me, who is a slave of death?"

He started fasting unto death. One day he wandered about and finally fell asleep under a tree. He had a blissful dream in which he saw a great wandering yogi. He had matted hair and besmeared his body with holy ash. He wore a tiger skin and he wore rosaries of rudraksha in his neck and on his arms. The very sight of the holy one had completely quenched the blazing fire of his longing to see Sree Guru. With tears of joy, Namadharaka prostrated before the holy one, bathed his sacred feet in his tears of joy and wiped them clean with his own long hair. The yogi raised him up and blessed him by keeping his hand on Namadharaka's head and put holy ash on the latter's forehead.

3. Chapter 2

When Namadharaka woke up, his dream had infused in him a determination to contact that avadhuta on the physical plane. He wandered about, deeply meditating on the form he saw in his dream. At last, he saw a yogi who was merciful and who transcended the dualities like joy and sorrow. Indeed, he was the same yogi who appeared in his dream.

Namadharaka was thrilled to see him and the hair on his body stood up on end. With a quivering voice, he hailed the holy one thus: "Lord! You are my father, mother, protector, teacher and dispeller of fear. Whither are you going? It is my good fortune that you have appeared to me now. Fellow human beings flock around one, only in time of his prosperity and desert him in times of misery. Only the holy ones come to his rescue, when in distress. You are my all in all. And I am disillusioned with all worldly ties. I have realized the five miseries that afflict the mortals. I am one Namadharaka. I am desperately in search of Sree Guru and I am determined to even to lay down my life in the search. It is not possible for every one to dispel my deep despair. But at the very sight of you, my heart is filled with bliss. I therefore knew that only you could ward off my misery"**. The siddha (the perfect one) replied: "I am the disciple of Sree Guru whose devotees are ever assured of both physical sustenance during their life and spiritual liberation. He ever abides later on the banks of river Bheema. He is beyond the reach of the three modes of existence (thrigunas) and his true nature can be perceived only by yogis in their meditation. I have attained realization by the grace of Sree Guru and wander about this earth for the welfare of all beings. I am known as Siddha (the perfect one)".

Namadharaka said, "Lord! Your teacher Sree Guru is indeed our ancestral deity. I have been serving him with faith and devotion. How is it that he has been throwing me in this ocean of misery?" Siddha replied, "My son, even when others are angry with us, the guru ever protects us, his devotees. If, indeed, as you say, he were ever to get angry with us, there is none that can protect us from his wrath. Even when an ordinary mortal of a guru is angered, none can protect us. It looks as though you are estranged from the guru for such a breach of trust. He who is doubting and faithless is never accepted by one as disciple. Then who can grace him who has no faith in Sree Guru himself and who is therefore ignored by him". Namadharaka asked, "Lord, you have said that none can protect a man who has angered even a mortal of a teacher. Has this truth ever been confirmed in anyone's experience? Besides, how did the divine, who is beyond the three-fold nature of all phenomena manifest himself through the same?"

Siddha replied at length, "Long long ago, the non- dual Supreme Self wished to manifest Himself as many. That wish is the Lord's Maya, the divine creative power. When he was in the sleep of yogic trance, the whole cosmos was created by the power of Maya. From the navel of Lord Vishnu emanated a divine lotus, from which sprang Brahma, the creator. Knowledge of vedas was bestowed on him by Vishnu. In accordance with the Vedic wisdom, Brahma projected the universe. He also created the natural classification of the various codes of conduct for castes (Varna) and the four stages (Ashramas) of human life; to suit the human beings endowed with different propensities. He also created the cycle of the four yugas or universal epochs. Of these, Kritayuga is symbolized by the principles of truth, dispassion, wisdom and religious sacrifice. The intricacies and details of yagna or religious sacrifice characterize the Tretayuga (the third, when counted in the reverse order from the age of Kali, and which is thrice as long as the age of Kali). The Dwapara epoch is weapon wielding. Kali age has its tongue and genitals prominently displayed signifying the preoccupations of the age. He is dirty as a ghou. The Krita or Satya Yuga is 17,28,000 years long. The Treta is 12,96,000 years. The Dwapara is 8,64,000 years. The Kali age is 4,32,000 years in extent. So did the Lord ordain. Now listen to the story of the Guru, which was narrated by Brahma, the creator, to Kali, the spirit of the Dark Age, on the eve of its advent on earth. Kali said, "Lord! How can I ever hope to enter the earthly realm of existence which is inhabited by those who are righteous? My mind despairs even on hearing of it. I am the breaker

of the bridge of righteousness. I am the inspirer of grief, dispute, hate and the fire of craving. Even my brother is allied to lust and anger and he is dear to me as my very life. The godless, the unrighteous and the non-observer of religious vows are my very life. All the righteous ones in the Indian peninsula are my enemies. My very life is threatened at the sight of those who serve the guru, the deities, righteous Brahmins and their own parents. Even the very sight of a yogi or a sage is unbearable to me". Brahma replied, "You enter the mundane life of men through their instinctive propensities for sense-pleasures. The average life span of a human being in the Kali age is 100 years. Anyone can attain perfection at any time during his lifetime. So, don't leave him. But your evil tendencies will not be able to touch those who are devoted to the guru, god, deities and righteous Brahmins, and especially those who are devoted to the guru, just as water cannot moisten a lotus leaf. Even the gods cannot harm one who is devoted to the guru". Even Kali asked him surprised, "Lord! Why is the guru superior to the gods and why is the devotee of a guru unconquerable even for the gods? Has this truth been ever demonstrated? If so, may you narrate the incident". Brahma said, "Oh Kali, it is impossible to acquire wisdom without a guru. Even the gods achieve their objects through devotion to the guru. Once upon a time, there lived a sage named Vedadharmā, on the banks of the river Godavari. He had numerous disciples. Once he wished to test their devotion and said, "My beloved disciples, I have burnt out a major portion of my previous sins through my austerity. Yet a little of it remains. And I have to patiently bear its consequences in the form of a disease and live at the holy city of Kasi. Who among you is willing to attend on me during that period? He who is willing has to wash my body every day and ward off flies as I will have to suffer from severe leprosy". All the disciples were afraid and kept silent. But one of them by name Deepaka, came forward and said, "Oh, my Guru! No impurity should be allowed to impede you from attaining liberation. I shall willingly undergo that suffering in your stead. May you permit me to do so". "No, my son, I alone shall suffer for my sins. It cannot be taken over by my disciples. If you can, you serve me," said the guru. Deepaka assented and accompanied his guru Vedadharmā to Kasi. There the guru was overtaken by leprosy and the disciple started serving him. The whole of the guru's body was covered by the sores and he became blind. Also, he lost all sense of propriety in his actions. Often he used to get angry with the disciple and beat him. He used to demand food and service at odd hours. And he used to trouble Deepaka if he failed to furnish the same. In his agony, the guru often got wild and threw away the food, Deepaka got by begging, saying that it was bad and demanded good food. When the disciple set out for alms, the master used to call him back saying, "My body is covered with filth and urine and flies will trouble me. Stupid, where do you want to go, leaving me like this?" When Deepaka got ready to wash his body, the Guru prevented him saying, "I am dying of hunger, you wicked fellow! Don't you know that you have to feed me first?" Sometimes, after partaking of the food brought by the disciple he would tenderly say, "Son, you are worn out in serving me; lie down and sleep for a while". But by the time Deepaka fell asleep, he would yell, "You rascal, get up! How dare you sleep peacefully when I hungry? Go and get me food!"

In spite of such severe testing, the disciple served him cheerfully for he believed that his guru was the supreme lord incarnate. He willingly sacrificed his sleep and food in serving his master. He believed that the washings of the guru's feet were as holy as Ganges water and he never thought of anything else even for a moment. Charmed by the devotion of Deepaka, Lord Viswanadha (Siva) of Kasi appeared before him and volunteered to offer a boon and commanded him to ask for anything he liked. Deepaka said, "Lord, what do I gain by seeking a boon for myself? I shall find out from my guru whether he would be pleased to allow me to pray for his health", and promptly reported the matter to Vedadharmā. The latter grew wild and said, "I shall work out my sins only through suffering and I do not need any other means. Have you adopted this strategy in order to spare yourself the trouble of serving me?" The disciple returned to Lord Vishwanadha and said, "As my guru is not willing, I do not want to ask for anything". Lord Vishwanadha went away feigning anger. "He went to Vykuntha, the celestial abode of Lord Vishnu and told him, "There is a great sage by name Vedadharmā who is ill, living under a peepul tree at Kasi. He has a great disciple by name Deepaka. I lovingly went to him to grant a boon. He

who is absorbed in serving his Guru refused to ask me for anything". Lord Vishnu, longing to see him, at once appeared to Deepaka and offered to grant him a boon. When the Lord who cannot be persuaded to appear before a devotee even through the eight fold yoga, austerity, contemplation, religious vows and other religious practices, said to Deepaka, "Oh, pious one, in spite of the severest trials, you are faithfully serving your master and we are much pleased with it. You ask me for any thing you want". Deepaka replied, "Lord! The guru indeed is the god of the gods. Liberation is possible only through wisdom. Through wisdom one attains mastery over deities like you. What else do I need? If you are not pleased to go away like Lord Vishwanadha, bless me that my faith in my guru shall increase. As all other things are perishable, I shall not ask for any". Lord Vishnu said, "You already have immense faith in your guru. Therefore, I grant you the power to save those who yearn for faith and devotion through your fame. By glorifying the guru with vedic recitations and total surrender to him, I am ever pleased. I shall bestow my presence only on such. Even the Lord of death cannot cause any fear to such a devotee. What else need he fear? The eight supernatural powers serve him. There is nothing superior to it". When Lord Vishnu vanished, Deepaka reported this incident to his guru. Vedadharna was much pleased and, placing his blessing hand on the head of his disciple, made him a master of all Spiritual Wisdom.

It is only to proclaim the sanctity of Kasi and to test the devotion of his disciple that Vedadharna who was skilled in spiritual wisdom and liberated while living, took on himself the ordeal of illness. A true sage has no more sins to suffer. Oh spirit of Kali! There are several such stories that speak of the glory of the guru. They are indeed such as would sanctify those who recount them and their listeners. You go to the earthly plane of existence. But never cast your eye on anyone who is devoted to his guru!"

As per the command of Lord Brahma, the spirit of Kali entered the earthly plane and did as he was ordered. If even a mortal of a guru is so great, what to speak of the glory of a perfect sadguru? Whoever serves such a guru with true faith and devotion, shall achieve the supreme object of life. The doubting, however, shall never achieve anything. Therefore, Oh Namadharaka, if you wish for the highest good for yourself, you seek refuge in Sree Guru who still exists in human form and serve him with unwavering faith. Then you shall cross the ocean of misery, viz., this phenomenal existence".

**Sages say that the mere proximity of a realized mystic calms down the heart of the devotees. Even Sai Baba of Shirdi says that having met his Guru, he was not able to think of anything else, but was drawn into deep and incessant meditation on him.

4. Chapter 3

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Siddha replied at length, "Long long ago, the non- dual Supreme Self wished to manifest Himself as many. That wish is the Lord's Maya, the divine creative power. When he was in the sleep of yogic trance, the whole cosmos was created by the power of Maya. From the navel of Lord Vishnu emanated a divine lotus, from which sprang Brahma, the creator. Knowledge of vedas was bestowed on him by Vishnu. In accordance with the Vedic wisdom, Brahma projected the universe. He also created the natural classification of the various codes of conduct for castes (Varna) and the four stages (Ashramas) of human life; to suit the human beings endowed with different propensities. He also created the cycle of the four yugas or universal epochs. Of these, Kritayuga is symbolized by the principles of truth, dispassion, wisdom and religious sacrifice. The intricacies and details of yagna or religious sacrifice characterize the Tretayuga (the third, when counted in the reverse order from the age of Kali, and which is thrice as long as the age of Kali). The Dwapara epoch is weapon wielding. Kali age has its tongue and genitals prominently displayed signifying the preoccupations of the age. He is dirty as a ghoul. The Krita or Satya Yuga is 17,28,000 years long. The Treta is 12,96,000 years. The Dwapara is 8,64,000 years. The Kali age is 4,32,000 years in extent. So did the Lord ordain. Now listen to the story of the Guru, which was narrated by Brahma, the creator, to Kali, the spirit of the Dark Age, on the eve of its advent on earth. Kali said, "Lord! How can I ever hope to enter the earthly realm of existence which is inhabited by those who are righteous? My mind despairs even on hearing of it. I am the breaker of the bridge of righteousness. I am the inspirer of grief, dispute, hate and the fire of craving. Even my brother is allied to lust and anger and he is dear to me as my very life. The godless, the unrighteous and the non-observer of religious vows are my very life. All the righteous ones in the Indian peninsula are my enemies. My very life is threatened at the sight of those who serve the guru, the deities, righteous Brahmins and their own parents. Even the very sight of a yogi or a sage is unbearable to me". Brahma replied, "You enter the mundane life of men through their instinctive propensities for sense-pleasures. The average life span of a human being in the Kali age is 100 years. Anyone can attain perfection at any time during his lifetime. So, don't leave him. But your evil tendencies will not be able to touch those who are devoted to the guru, god, deities and righteous Brahmins, and especially those who are devoted to the guru, just as water cannot moisten a lotus leaf. Even the gods cannot harm one who is devoted to the guru". Even Kali asked him surprised, "Lord! Why is the guru superior to the gods and why is the devotee of a guru unconquerable even for the gods? Has this truth been ever demonstrated? If so, may you narrate the incident". Brahma said, "Oh Kali, it is impossible to acquire wisdom without a guru. Even the gods achieve their objects through devotion to the guru. Once upon a time, there lived a sage named Vedadharmā, on the banks of the river Godavari . He had numerous disciples. Once he

wished to test their devotion and said, "My beloved disciples, I have burnt out a major portion of my previous sins through my austerity. Yet a little of it remains. And I have to patiently bear its consequences in the form of a disease and live at the holy city of Kasi. Who among you is willing to attend on me during that period? He who is willing has to wash my body every day and ward off flies as I will have to suffer from severe leprosy". All the disciples were afraid and kept silent. But one of them by name Deepaka, came forward and said, "Oh, my Guru! No impurity should be allowed to impede you from attaining liberation. I shall willingly undergo that suffering in your stead. May you permit me to do so". "No, my son, I alone shall suffer for my sins. It cannot be taken over by my disciples. If you can, you serve me," said the guru. Deepaka assented and accompanied his guru Vedadhama to Kasi. There the guru was overtaken by leprosy and the disciple started serving him. The whole of the guru's body was covered by the sores and he became blind. Also, he lost all sense of propriety in his actions. Often he used to get angry with the disciple and beat him. He used to demand food and service at odd hours. And he used to trouble Deepaka if he failed to furnish the same. In his agony, the guru often got wild and threw away the food, Deepaka got by begging, saying that it was bad and demanded good food. When the disciple set out for alms, the master used to call him back saying, "My body is covered with filth and urine and flies will trouble me. Stupid, where do you want to go, leaving me like this?" When Deepaka got ready to wash his body, the Guru prevented him saying, "I am dying of hunger, you wicked fellow! Don't you know that you have to feed me first?" Sometimes, after partaking of the food brought by the disciple he would tenderly say, "Son, you are worn out in serving me; lie down and sleep for a while". But by the time Deepaka fell asleep, he would yell, "You rascal, get up! How dare you sleep peacefully when I hungry? Go and get me food!"

In spite of such severe testing, the disciple served him cheerfully for he believed that his guru was the supreme lord incarnate. He willingly sacrificed his sleep and food in serving his master. He believed that the washings of the guru's feet were as holy as Ganges water and he never thought of anything else even for a moment. Charmed by the devotion of Deepaka, Lord Viswanadha (Siva) of Kasi appeared before him and volunteered to offer a boon and commanded him to ask for anything he liked. Deepaka said, "Lord, what do I gain by seeking a boon for myself? I shall find out from my guru whether he would be pleased to allow me to pray for his health", and promptly reported the matter to Vedadhama. The latter grew wild and said, "I shall work out my sins only through suffering and I do not need any other means. Have you adopted this strategy in order to spare yourself the trouble of serving me?" The disciple returned to Lord Vishwanadha and said, "As my guru is not willing, I do not want to ask for anything". Lord Vishwanadha went away feigning anger. "He went to Vykuntha, the celestial abode of Lord Vishnu and told him, "There is a great sage by name Vedadhama who is ill, living under a peepul tree at Kasi. He has a great disciple by name Deepaka. I lovingly went to him to grant a boon. He who is absorbed in serving his Guru refused to ask me for anything". Lord Vishnu, longing to see him, at once appeared to Deepaka and offered to grant him a boon. When the Lord who cannot be persuaded to appear before a devotee even through the eight fold yoga, austerity, contemplation, religious vows and other religious practices, said to Deepaka, "Oh, pious one, in spite of the severest trials, you are faithfully serving your master and we are much pleased with it. You ask me for any thing you want". Deepaka replied, "Lord! The guru indeed is the god of the gods. Liberation is possible only through wisdom. Through wisdom one attains mastery over deities like you. What else do I need? If you are not pleased to go away like Lord Vishwanadha, bless me that my faith in my guru shall increase. As all other things are perishable, I shall not ask for any". Lord Vishnu said, "You already have immense faith in your guru. Therefore, I grant you the power to save those who yearn for faith and devotion through your fame. By glorifying the guru with vedic recitations and total surrender to him, I am ever pleased. I shall bestow my presence only on such. Even the Lord of death cannot cause any fear to such a devotee. What else need he fear? The eight supernatural powers serve him. There is nothing superior to it". When Lord Vishnu vanished, Deepaka reported this incident to his guru. Vedadhama was much pleased and, placing his blessing hand on the head of his disciple, made him a master of all Spiritual Wisdom.

It is only to proclaim the sanctity of Kasi and to test the devotion of his disciple that Vedadharmā who was skilled in spiritual wisdom and liberated while living, took on himself the ordeal of illness. A true sage has no more sins to suffer. Oh spirit of Kali! There are several such stories that speak of the glory of the guru. They are indeed such as would sanctify those who recount them and their listeners. You go to the earthly plane of existence. But never cast your eye on anyone who is devoted to his guru!"

As per the command of Lord Brahma, the spirit of Kali entered the earthly plane and did as he was ordered. If even a mortal of a guru is so great, what to speak of the glory of a perfect sadguru? Whoever serves such a guru with true faith and devotion, shall achieve the supreme object of life. The doubting, however, shall never achieve anything. Therefore, Oh Namadharaka, if you wish for the highest good for yourself, you seek refuge in Sree Guru who still exists in human form and serve him with unwavering faith. Then you shall cross the ocean of misery, viz., this phenomenal existence".

**Sages say that the mere proximity of a realized mystic calms down the heart of the devotees. Even Sai Baba of Shirdi says that having met his Guru, he was not able to think of anything else, but was drawn into deep and incessant meditation on him.

5. Chapter 4

Once King Yadu, the son of Yayaathi, saw in a forest, a recluse saint (avadhuta) and addressed him thus: 'Sir, every human being is impelled to strive and act by a longing for any one or all of the goals of life - righteousness, wealth, fulfilment of desire and liberation from ignorance and misery. But your attitude is quite different. You do not strive or act at all. I dare not say that you abstain from all action owing to lack of ability, skill or understanding. You are indeed quite capable, energetic and wise. Such as you are, why do you live in the forest, free from all desire? Even though you have neither kith and kin nor even a family, how could you be so blissful and self contented?"

The avadhuta replied, "My bliss and contentment are the fruits of self-realisation. I have gained the necessary wisdom from the whole of creation, through 24 gurus. I shall elaborate the same for you:

All creatures, in accordance with their previous store of karma assume different physical forms and live on earth. People plough, dig and tread the earth. They light fires on it. Still, the earth does not swerve from its course even by a hair's breadth. On the other hand, it feeds and houses all creatures. Seeing this, I learned that the wise one should never swerve from his vow of patience, love and righteousness under any circumstances. Besides, the many mountain peaks on earth are the abodes of holy shrines and of dense forests which usher timely rainfall for the well-being of all creatures. The many caves in them shelter different creatures. Several rivers which are indispensable for human weal have their rise in mountains. Stones and mud that are needed for building our houses, palaces and forts are afforded by mountains. Their peaks are most congenial for a life of contemplation and meditation which alone can ensure fulfilment of human life. Thus, as it were, the mountain exists solely for the welfare of all, materially and spiritually. From this I learned that the wise one should dedicate his life for the welfare of all living beings. The earth, with its mountains, was thus my first guru.

I observed that air is pure and odourless in itself. And it blows on both sweet or foul-smelling things without any discrimination or preference. Though it momentarily seems to take on

the smell of its surroundings, in a short while, it reveals its pristine quality. From this I learned that the individual also should live in a like manner. That a spiritual aspirant should live in the world, unaffected by the dualities of life like joy and sorrow and by the objects of the senses. He should keep his heart's feeling and his speech unpolluted by vain objects. As the wind takes on only very few of the qualities of the objects it contacts, a yogi should eat only what is just necessary to keep his body and soul together. Air blows for a short while and seems easily agitated, but soon regains its calm. So too, a yogi, should ever strive to retain inner calm, though living in the thick of the battle of life. As I have learned all this by observing it, air is my second teacher.

I have noticed that sometimes the sky (or space) gets thickly overcast, or filled with dust or smoke. At sunrise and during night, it apparently takes on different colours. But in fact, it ever remains its colourless self, and it is never touched or stained by anything. From this I learned that a true sage should remain ever pure like the sky or space, untouched or unaffected by anything in the phenomenal universe in time, including his own physical processes. His inner being is totally free from emotional reaction to things and events, even like the space.

Though many things appear in the sky or space and seem to demarcate and divide it into zones, it indeed ever remains an indivisible continuum. The Real Self, too is indeed such. Again, like the self the sky or space is omnipresent. Thus I accepted the sky or space as my third teacher.

My fourth teacher is the element of fire. Sometimes, it manifests itself as blazing flames; sometimes as smouldering embers, covered by ash. But it is always present in all objects as latent heat. In the latter form, it is omnipresent. When dry twigs are rubbed together for the fire-sacrifice, it manifests as ordinary fire which is said to burn down the sins of those who offer oblations. The god of fire accepts the offerings of everyone, irrespective of his moral worth and burns down his sins; but it still remains the ever pure divinity as the fire-god; he is untainted by the sins of such devotees. So too, a sage of perfect realisation should accept food of everyone, burn down his sins and bless the giver. Though fire has no specific form of its own, when it is associated with fuel that burns, it assumes such apparent forms. So too, the true Self, though formless in itself, appears in the forms of deities, human beings, animals and trees when it is associated with the respective physical structures. The source of all forms in the universe, as also their end, remains ever mysterious. All the things are manifest only in between their origin and their end. Their source and end is the true Self which is eternal, unchanging, unmanifest and omnipresent. The nature of the element of fire is such. By reflecting deeply on this truth, I have realised the Self. The manifest fire transforms the various things it consumes into the same ash. So too, the wisdom of self-realisation rejects the manifest forms and properties of things as illusion and realizes their one original essence as itself. Thus the element of fire is my fourth guru.

My fifth guru is the sun. Though the sun we see in our daily life is one, it appears as many when reflected by water in different vessels. Similarly, the one Real Self manifests itself as the many selves of living creatures when reflected by their physical structures. Again, in summer, the sun draws up the water on earth as vapour and again casts it down as rain in the proper season. So too, the sage gathers a lot of wisdom through his senses and imparts it to his worthy disciples at the proper time. Still, like the sun, he does not egotistically feel, 'I have gathered such wide knowledge and imparted it to so many!' Just as the sun illumines the many forms in nature to our vision, the sage too illumines the true nature of all things to his devotees. The self-same sun makes the lotuses blossom, but makes the water lillies close up. So too, human beings receive wisdom from a sage according to their receptivity but he blesses all creatures alike.

I have gained wisdom from a pigeon too. Once a pair of pigeons lived together on a tree. They bred their young and were bringing them up with deep affection and love. One day, a hunter caught the young fledgelings in a snare. The ladybird which returned from the forest with food for its young ones saw their plight and, unable to leave them, herself leapt in the snare to

share their fate. Shortly after, the male pigeon turned up and, unable to bear the separation from its sweet-heart, it too jumped in the snare and met its end. Reflecting on this, I realised how, even after being born as an intelligent human being, man is caught in the coils of possessiveness and brings about his own spiritual destruction. The Self which is originally free, when associated with the body and the senses, gets identified with it, and thus gets caught in the endless cycle of birth, death and misery. Thus the pigeon was my sixth guru.

The python is a sluggard, unwilling to move out briskly for its prey. It ties in its lurch and devours whatever creature it comes across, be it sufficient or insufficient to appease its hunger. From this I learnt that the man in search of wisdom should refrain from running after pleasures, and accept whatever he gets spontaneously with contentment. He should live, ever contemplating his true Self. Even when he does not get anything to live by, he should trust god and fast. Like the python, he should shake off sleep and wakefulness and abide in a state of incessant meditation on the Self. Though endowed with a sturdy body, he should refrain from all actions which are characterised by a sense of agency and by a desire for the results of action. He should withdraw the power of perception from all his senses and centre it on the Self. Like the python, he should be unmindful of both purity and impurity. Like it, he should keep off from human haunts and be ever immersed in the purity of inner contemplation. Thus the python was my seventh teacher of wisdom.

Contemplating the marvellous nature of the ocean, I have gained much wisdom. Any number of overflowing rivers may join it, yet the sea maintains its level. Nor does its level fall even - by a hair's breadth in summer, when all the rivers dry up. So too, the sage of wisdom does not get elated by the joys of life, nor does he get depressed by its sorrows. Just as the sea never crosses its threshold on the beach, the wise one never transgresses the highest standards of morality under the pull of passions. Like the sea, he is unconquerable and cannot be troubled by anything. Like the unfathomable ocean, his true nature and the depths of his wisdom cannot be easily comprehended by anyone. The sea never casts out its pearls and it never allows any useless stuff to remain in it for long. So too, a sage does not surrender any of his natural virtues, nor does he allow even a single error to creep into his nature. The ocean which has taught me thus, is my eighth teacher.

I often observed that the moth (or, more precisely, a grasshopper) is tempted by fire to jump in it and get burnt down. So too, the unthinking man is enticed by the illusory pleasures of the senses and thus gets caught in the ceaseless cycles of birth and death. The power of his evil deeds draws him down to the bottom of the spiritual ladder. On the other hand, the wise one, when he catches even a glimpse of the fire of wisdom, leaves everything aside, leaps in it and burns down the illusion of being a limited self. Thus the moth was my ninth teacher.

The elephant was my next teacher. The human beings raise a stuffed cow-elephant in the forest. The wild tusker mistakes it for a mate, approaches it and is then skilfully bound in fetters by the cunning human beings. So too, the unregenerate man is tempted by the opposite sex and gets bound by the fetters of infatuation. Even when the bull-elephant succeeds in finding a mate, it is soon challenged by other male elephants in heat and it often gets killed in the fight. It was in this fashion that wicked kings like Ravana and Duryodhana were annihilated by their infatuation for the fair sex. The seeker after liberation should learn to be free from lust. The elephant was thus one of my teachers.

The ant stores up lots of food materials which it neither eats nor gives away in charity to any other creature. In consequence, other more powerful creatures, are tempted to plunder the ants. So too, the man who lays by treasures of merely material things becomes a victim of robbery and murder. But the ant has something positive to teach us, too. It is a tireless worker and is never

discouraged by any number of obstacles and setbacks in its efforts to gather its treasure. So too, a seeker after wisdom should be tireless in his efforts for Self Realisation. This noble truth has the little ant taught me.

The fish greedily swallows bait and is at once caught by the angle-hook. From this, I realised how man meets his destruction by his craving for delicious food. I learned that the wise one should eat only wholesome food in order to sustain his life and health. It is truly said that when the palate is conquered, all else is conquered. Besides, there is a positive feature in the fish. It never leaves its home, i.e. water. So too, man should never lose sight of his true self, but should ever have his being in it.

The thirteenth guru that has awakened my spirit is a prostitute named Pingala. One day, she eagerly awaited a particular client in the hope that he would pay her amply. She waited and waited till late in the night. When he did not turn up, she was at last disillusioned and reflected thus: "Alas! how stupid I am! Neglecting the divine spirit within, who is of the nature of bliss eternal, I foolishly awaited a debauchee who inspires my lust and greed, and who is most likely to inflict on me the most unbearable torments. Henceforth, I shall expend myself on the Self, unite with Him and win eternal joy. Through such repentance, she attained blessedness. Besides, reflecting on its obvious purport, I also realized that a spiritual aspirant should likewise reject the lure of lesser spiritual powers which are mere by-products of sadhana. I learned that desire on either of the planes, and the temptation to secure things from other's hands are the seeds of misery; that renunciation of these is the sole means of realising infinite joy.

Once I observed an arrow-maker who was totally absorbed in moulding a sharp arrow. He grew so oblivious of all else that he did not even notice a royal pageant that passed by. This sight awakened me to the truth that such single-minded, all-absorbing contemplation of the Self spontaneously eliminates all temptation for the trivial interests of the world. It is the sole secret of success in spiritual discipline. Thus the arrow-maker is my fourteenth guru. Similarly, I noticed that little boys and girls are playful and carefree. They know neither honour nor dishonour. They cannot nurse a grudge or a prejudice against anyone. They do not know what is their own, or what belongs to others. They do not need any external objects or conditions to be happy. Their happiness springs from their own selves, their innate creativity. I realized that the sage of perfect enlightenment is also such. A playful boy thus happened to be my fifteenth teacher.

Of all things in nature, the moon is unique. It appears to wax and wane during the bright and dark fortnights. In fact, the lunar globe ever remains the same. In this, it is like the 'self' of man. While a man appears to pass through the stages of infancy, boyhood, youth, maturity and old age, his real self remains unchanged. All changes pertain only to the body and not to the self. Again, the moon only reflects the light of the sun; but has no such of its own. So too, the soul or mind of man is only a reflection of the light of awareness of the real Self. Having taught me this truth, the moon came to be my sixteenth guru. It bestows joy and coolness to all creatures. Similarly, the sage of perfect wisdom propagates the grace of god and thereby quenches the fire of misery. Yet, like the moon, he does not expect any reward or recognition.

While wandering about in search of wisdom, I observed that the bee is lured by the sweet scent of the lotuses, at sunset. It sojourns in the lotus, as the latter closes up for the night, and thus gets imprisoned. So too, a wandering monk, if he is not wise and wary enough, is tempted by the same objects and dainty dishes offered to him by house-holder devotees as tokens of their regard for him. Such a one easily yields to their persuasion to linger, and finally, stay on in their houses, and is enslaved by the luxuries. Therefore a monk should be careful to accept of them only what is just necessary to keep his body and soul together, and should not bother the householder-devotees much. He should make it a principle not to live with them. Besides, the bee wanders from flower to flower and, without hurting them in the least, draws honey. So too, a spiritual seeker

should study all the holy scriptures but retain in his heart, only that which is essential for his spiritual practice, and discard all claims to mere scholarship. The honey-bee neither consumes its rich store of honey, nor does it give it away to anyone. In consequence, it tempts the honey-vendor to rob it off its store. The instruction is clear: The wise one does not store food for the next meal or even for the morrow, but accepts only what his hands and stomach can hold for the moment. Such is the teaching I imbibed from my seventeenth teacher, the honey-bee.

It is said that deers are very fond of music and that poachers employ it to lure them before hunting them. From this, I learned that a spiritual aspirant who has a weakness for merely secular music will soon get bogged down by passions and sensual desires, till he ultimately loses whatever spiritual progress he has achieved earlier. Such, indeed, is the story of sage Rishyashrunga. The deer that taught me this truth is my eighteenth guru.

A bird of prey is my nineteenth teacher. One day, I saw one such carrying away a dead rat. Many other birds like crows and eagles attacked it, now kicking on its head and again wpecking on its sides in their endeavour to knock off .the prey. The poor bird was thus very much pestered. Atlast, it wisely let its prey fall and all the other birds rushed after it. Thus freeing itself from so much botheration, the first bird quietly perched on a tree top and sighed in relief. From this, I learned that a man who runs after worldly pleasures will soon come into dash with his fellow-beings who too run for the same, and has to face much strife and antagonism. If he learns to conquer his craving for worldly things, he can spare himself much unhappiness. I realised that this is the only way to peace in this world.

Once, I observed a family visit a maiden's house, seeking her hand in marriage for their son. At that time, her mother was away from home. So the maiden herself had to entertain the guests with refreshments. She at once started pounding foodgrains with a pestle. The bangles on her hand started knocking against one another, producing sound. She was afraid that the guests might hear the sound and be unhappy for having caused her so much of trouble. As a Hindu maiden, she is not expected to remove all the bangles on her hands at any time. So she kept two on each hand and removed all the rest. Even then, they were knocking against each other and were making noise. So she kept only one bangle on each hand this time and she could finish her task in quiet. Reflecting on this, I realised that when a number of spiritual seekers live together, a lot of unwanted gossip ensues and no spiritual practice can be pursued with a single-minded effort. Even when two seekers stay together, it is no better. Only in solitude can he assiduously carry on his task. Knowing this, I henceforth resorted to solitude. Thus, a maiden happened to be my twentieth guru.

I observed that the serpent never builds a dwelling for itself. When white-ants have raised an anthill for themselves, the serpent eventually comes to inhabit it. Similarly, worldly people have to endure many hardships in raising houses for themselves, while a recluse monk does no such thing. On the other hand, he makes such muth his temporary abode. The monasteries are raised by worldly men and the-monk lives in them; or, he lives in old dilapidated temples, or underneath shady trees. Thereby, he avoids the snares or possessiveness. Again, the serpent's ways of living remain a mystery hidden from the notice of human beings. Similarly, a practising yogi should keep his modes of spiritual practice and even his existence hidden from the curious gaze of worldly men. Only then can he carry on his yogic practices undisturbed. Yet again, the serpent moults, leaving off its old skin. So too, at the end of his life, the yogi leaves his body deliberately and in full awareness of his own true Self and is not frightened by the phenomenon of death. On the other hand, he casts off his old body as happily as he does his worn out clothes and dons new ones. Thus has my twenty first guru taught me.

The spider is my next teacher. It weaves its web from the thread which it secretes in the form of a fluid. After sometime, it gathers up the web into itself. Such was the ancient belief. In a similar way, the Supreme projects the whole creation out of itself and after sometime, withdraws it into Itself at the time of dissolution. The individual soul too, bears the senses and the mind within itself and, at its birth as a human being or any other living creature, it projects them out as the sense organs, organs of action and the whole body. In accordance with its latent tendencies, the creature thus born, gathers up all the means and objects needed for its living. At the end of its life's duration, the soul once again withdraws the senses, mind and acquired tendencies at the hour of death. Thus have I learned from the spider.

The caterpillar is also one of my teachers of wisdom. The wasp carries its caterpillar to a safe corner and closes it up in its nest and goes on buzzing about it. The young caterpillar is so frightened by the incessant buzzing, that it cannot think of anything else than the buzzing wasp. Through such unintermittent contemplation of its mother, the caterpillar too, soon grows up into a wasp! In a like fashion, a true disciple is so charmed and over-awed by the spiritual eminence of his own guru that he cannot think of anything or anyone other than him. Through such contemplation, he soon blossoms into a great spiritual Master himself. The caterpillar is thus my twenty third guru.

Water is my twentyfourth guru. I observed that it quenches the thirst of every creature, serves to wash it and affords it health and coolness. It sustains innumerable trees and plants. While it thus serves all living beings, it is never proud of itself. On the other hand, it humbly seeks the lowliest of places. The sage too should likewise bestow health, peace and joy to every creature that resorts to him. Yet he should ever live as the humblest of god's creation.

With such humility and devotion, I looked upon the whole of god's creation as my teacher, gathered up wisdom and, through patient effort, I realised my goal of spiritual enlightenment".

6. Chapter 5

Namadharaka Sarma asked Siddha, "Oh great soul, you have said that the Lord incarnated twice during the age of Kali. I long to hear all about these avatars." Siddha was very happy to notice the humility and faith of Namadharaka., He said, "It is good you have asked me of these. For it purifies the one who recounts it as much as it does the listener. So listen attentively. The Lord ever incarnates on earth in order to check evil ways and strengthen the righteous forces in man. In this age of Kali, he first manifested himself as Sreepada Sreevallabha for the same end.

To the east of where we are, there is a village named Pithapur (East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh). There lived a brahmin couple, Appala Raju Sharma and Sumathi, who were devotees of Lord Datta. They had many children, of whom only two survived. These too were sons, but as misfortune would have it, one was lame and the other was blind. Like orthodox Hindus, they believed that unless they had a son who could efficiently discharge all the religious rites and duties, their souls had no hope of entering the portals of heaven. They worshipped Lord Datta for the fulfilment of their hearts wish and never failed to offer food to mendicants and monks. They looked upon all such as the very forms of Lord Datta. One day, they were performing the annual *ceremony in their house and many brahmins were invited as guests for the feast. Tradition holds that none should eat on that day before these guests partake their food.

But Lord Datta appeared at their threshold in the form of a renunciate sadhu, bearing the staff and the water-vessel (kamandalu) and asked for food. The head of the family was not aware of it. The housewife, with immense faith that the visitor was none other than the Lord to whom the whole annual ceremony was being offered, gave him food even before the brahmin guests were fed! Her faith touched the Lord's heart and He at once granted her a vision of his true form. The divine form which Sumathi witnessed was such that neither a thousand eyes can fully comprehend it,

nor a thousand tongues describe it. In His six divine arms, he held the conch, the disc (chakra), the trident of Siva (trishula), the drum (damaru), the water - vessel (kamandalu) and the rosary (japa mala). His glorious form had three heads. Clad in a tiger's skin and his body besmeared with sacred ash (vibhutt), he looked like a silver mountain in moonlight. His matted hair hung down like ropes, as though in order to help his devotees to climb out of the mire of phenomenal existence.

The blessed housewife drank the divine glory of the Lord's form and felt that the highest object of her birth was fulfilled. The Lord said, "Mother, I am pleased with your devotion. Even before you fed the brahmin guests, you have given me food with the full faith that this is the Lord in the guise of a holy sannyasi. Now, ask me for anything you wish and it shall be granted". The nectarine words of the Lord seemed to penetrate every cell in her being. Her eyes were blessed by the sight and now her ears were sanctified by His sweet words. "Lord", she said, "You, whose vision is not attained even by great yogis, have blessed my sight with it spontaneously, out of sheer compassion for me! You have even accepted food from me, on this day. And thereby, the spirits of our ancestors, for whose welfare we are performing the annual ceremony are all blessed. You are, indeed, the wish- fulfiller of your devotees. You have already addressed me as mother. So I have no need to ask of you anything further. Make me worthy of being addressed by you as such ie., bless me with a child as divine as you are and keep up your word!"

Hearing her words, the Lord thought, "She's asking me for the same favour as did Anasuya of yore." Then he said, "You shall have a son as great as I am, but then you must remember one thing: You will have to implicitly do as he tells you. Do not forget this in your attachment to the idea that he is, after all, your son!" So saying, the Lord disappeared.

Still rapt in the spell of her divine experience, blessed Sumathi at once went to her husband and said, "Sir, I have transgressed the divine law: the brahmin guests are not yet fed. Lord Dattatreya came to our house in the form of a sannyasi for offerings of food. Believing that he is the Lord of this annual ceremony and the Lord of all religious sacrifices, I gave him food". Raju said, "My virtuous one, we offer food to the brahmins on this occasion and consecrate the whole ceremony to the Lord Vishnu. If, then, that very Lord had personally received your offering, it is all the noble fruit of your deep faith in Him. This noble act of yours has blessed all of us. Lord Dattatreya, in order to bless his devotees and the righteous ones, wanders about in the guise of a random guest at the lunch hour. That's why it is said that a random guest has to be treated as the very embodiment of Lord Dattatreya. If, owing to our inadvertence, the guest goes away unappeased, it means that the Lord himself is displeased with us:" Then Sumathi told him of the divine vision the Lord had bestowed on her and of his granting her wish for a divine son, along with the caution he gave. Raju Sharma was over-joyed to learn all that and congratulated her saying, "You have indeed sought a blessing that would purify our very lineage and the whole world". He then completed the ceremony scrupulously.

Not long after, Sumathi conceived and delivered a male child at the proper time. She gave birth to one who is indeed birthless. Astrologers and priests had all prophesied that Lord Datta Himself was born as her son and praised her good fortune. Indeed, He kept his word to Sumathi and, as he can have no equal, he had to take birth as her son. As the child had all the divine features besides celestial radiance, it was fittingly named as Sreepada. This was the first incarnation of Lord Datta in the age of Kali.

As days and months passed, the child Sreepada grew ever more glorious, like the waxing moon and attained the age of eight. As per the tradition, he was invested with the sacred thread. Normally, after the sacred thread ceremony a boy has to be trained by a guru for 8 years before he can memorize the Vedas completely. But this boy, Sreepada, started imparting vedic knowledge to his pupils right from the moment of his upanayana (sacred thread ceremony). It was all a purely divine miracle. In him was demonstrated the truth of the dictum that all the knowledge acquired in one's previous lives springs up spontaneously in the present life, like things recollected.

Meanwhile, his father Raju Sharma wished to get his son married and even started looking for a suitable girl. When he heard of it, one day, Sreepada said, "Father, you need not search for a bride anew. The perfect and divine bride is awaiting me. She is the treasure of yoga. Hence, I shall

renounce all. As I am Sreepada Sreevallabha {meaning the consort of Sree or goddess Lakshmi}, I shall gain liberation even without the need of begetting a son" **. The determined aim of his son to forego marriage pained the father. With tears in their eyes, the parents said to Sreepada, "if you were to leave us, as a wandering sannyasi, we shall be like fish out of water. Even though you are the Lord incarnate, you have taken birth as our son. Is it proper for you, then, to leave us to perish in the ocean of grief of separation? How can you, the protector of righteousness, not fulfil the duty enjoined upon every son?"

Then, pointing at their two sons, they said, "Indeed, even by contemplating on you (i.e., when you leave us), one can cut asunder the self-perpetuating rounds of birth and death. But when we look at these blind and lame sons, our minds are again caught up in the whirl-pool of worldly concerns".

His heart, melting with compassion at the sight of the tears in their eyes, Sreepada touched his brothers and made them whole in a trice! What is impossible for the almighty and the lord of the universe?

The miracle dispelled the veil of delusion that blinded their understanding. As the realisation that he is all-pervading had dispelled the illusory grief of being parted from him, it even seemed a sin to them to confine him at home and keep him off from all creatures who are, indeed, his children. Then his mother said, "Lord, your maya has deluded me into looking upon you chiefly as my son. In fact, the whole cosmic egg is within your being. That you are my son is but a convention. You should keep my understanding clear of this delusion".

Then the Lord granted her the vision of his real, divine, form. The handsome, tender, lad at once appeared radiant like a million suns and pleasing as a myriad moons. His blissful nature seemed to enliven every atom of existence. "Mother, you ever contemplate this form you now see. You shall soon transcend the ocean of this illusory, phenomenal existence and attain eternal unity with me. These two sons of yours shall live to their full span of life and serve you with devotion. They shall be learned and wealthy and you shall be blessed with grand children and great grand children. They too shall win fair renown", he said.

As the brothers praised his glory, Sreepada said to them, "Look upon your parents as the embodiments of the divine parents and serve them well. And I shall renounce all". Then he circumambulated thrice around them in reverence. With their permission, he renounced all worldly ties and trekked to several holy places like Dwaraka, Brindavan, Mathura, and Badrinath. After wandering there for sometime, he marched down to the holy Gokarna in order to bless the spiritual seekers there. There, Lord Siva manifested himself in the form of the Mahabaleswara Linga which was installed by Lord Ganesha. Hence the place came to be the spiritual resort of innumerable seekers after the Spirit, down the ages".

*Hindu ritual observance involving offerings to the gods for the uplift of the souls of departed ancestors of Appala Raju.

** Hindu scriptures say that begetting a worthy son is the only way for one to attain better states of being after one's death.

7. Chapter 6

Namadharaka asked, not surprised a little, "While Kasi, Badrinath and Kedarnath have been esteemed since hoary times for their holiness, we can understand why Sreepada visited them. But what is great about Gokarna that he should go all the way to visit it? Please enlighten me on this point!"

Siddha replied, "Once the mother of Ravana, (the demon king of the Ramayana fame) wished to attain Kailasa (the abode of Lord Shiva) and with this object, she started worshipping an earthen Shiva Linga. Ravana who was proud of his might wished to remove the whole of Kailasa to his mother's presence. Using all his might, he lifted up the whole mount of Kailasa on to his head. This caused a great commotion in all the celestial realms of existence and the whole of our earth shook, as though the very end of creation was at hand. Goddess Parvati prayed to Lord Shiva to duly protect the worlds from so untimely an end. Then the latter pressed down the mount Kailasa under his foot till the mighty Ravana was almost crushed beneath the pressure. In great fear of death, the demon king Ravana humbly prayed to the Lord in desperation. The Lord's heart was at last touched with compassion and he uplifted Ravana. In gratitude, the latter sang most melodiously in his praise. Lord Shiva was pleased with his song and offered to grant him a boon. Ravana submitted, 'My capital of Lanka is all built of gold and is beyond the reach of anyone. The goddess of wealth is my maid servant. Brahma, the creator is my court-astrologer. All the gods including the Lord of Death are my attendants. So there is nothing which I cannot secure. Now, my mother wished to live for ever in Kailasa and serve you, and so I came to take it home. O Lord, if at all you wish to grant me a boon, grant me that I could take the Kailasa along with you to my city of Lanka!' The Lord of Kailasa replied, "Ravana, what will you or your mother do with this mount Kailasa? I shall bestow on you my Atma Linga which is incomparably superior to Kailasa. By worshipping it, you will attain to my own state of being." Ravana gratefully accepted the same and very happily returned to Lanka with it.

Sage Narada, the messenger of the gods, witnessed the whole incident and reported the matter to them. In great anxiety Brahma, Vishnu and Narada approached Shiva and asked him why he granted such a potent Atma Linga to a demon king like Ravana. They said, 'Is it proper that he who is a thorn in the flesh of all beings attain to your power and glory?' 'I was too captivated by his charming song to consider the unwisdom of my spontaneous gesture and so bestowed it on him without a second thought. By now he could not have reached Lanka yet and something can be done at once to retrieve it', said Shiva and prompted Narada and Ganesha to contrive a way to somehow deprive the demon King of the Linga. Accordingly Narada at once approached Ravana with the speed of thought and addressed him, 'Oh! Ravana, whence are you coming and whither are you bound?' Ravana replied, 'Having won the heart of Lord Shiva, I have gained this Atma Linga which I am taking to Lanka' and showed it to him. Narada said, 'Oh! Ravana, once a terrible beast started killing all the wild buffaloes near a forest. At last, the Holy Trinity hunted it down and made each one a Shiva Linga from its horns. They transformed them into their selves and henceforth treated them as their Atma Lingas. This is one of those three and can bestow the eternal proximity of Lord Shiva and hence immortality and infinite power. As he went on elaborating its glory, Ravana interrupted him and said, 'Oh! sage, I do not have time to hear of its glory'. But Oh Ravana it is time for your evening prayer! How can you go away without attending to it?' said Narada and sat there elated that he could find so potent a reason for delaying the demon king's progress to his homeland. Meanwhile, Lord Ganesha came there in the guise of a young celestial. Ravana accosted him in a stern voice, 'Who are you? Where are you going?' The boy celestial replied, 'I am the son of one Uma and Shankara, I am frightened by your demeanour, let go my hand!' 'Hold this Linga just for a short while. I shall show you my golden city Lanka and you can happily live there', insisted Ravana. 'I cannot hold this heavy Linga. Besides, I will not come to Lanka which is the city of terrible demons' said the celestial. However, Ravana pleaded with him again and again, thrust the Linga in the hands of Ganesha and made for the nearby sea to attend to his evening prayers. 'O Ravana! When I can no longer hold this, I shall call out to you thrice and if, by that time, you do not turn up, I shall place the Linga down here itself!', said Ganesha. No sooner did Ravana leave the spot than Ganesha called out to him thrice and when he could not turn up, the celestial meditated on Lord Vishnu and kept the Shiva Linga on earth! The gods above witnessed the successful accomplishment of that plan. Later, Ravana returned and at the sight of the Linga kept on earth, was much depressed. He beat the young lad Ganesha and, with all his might, tried to lift up the Linga. The whole earth shook under the force but the Linga did not budge even a little. Ever since, the Linga

came to be called Mahabaleswara Linga; ie., the Linga of the Almighty Lord. As the Linga is in the shape of the ear of the cow, the place where it is located came to be known as the Holy Gokarna ('Go' meaning 'a cow'). The place is as sacred as Kailasa. There Lord Shiva dwells with all his retinue of gods. Hence, the place came to be a resort of earnest seekers after spiritual perfection. Gods, demons, mortals and even human beings have got their wishes fulfilled in this place by the grace of Lord Shankara. Thus it is one of the most sacred places. An ancient legend testifies to its great sanctity.

A king by name Kalmashapaada became a fierce demon through the curse of sage Vasishtha. Once the demon killed and devoured a pious brahmin. The brahmin's wife then cursed him thus: 'Even after you regain your earlier human form, on the expiry of the curse of Vasishtha, you shall perish the moment you unite with your wife; for you have cruelly deprived me of my life's companion!' In course of time, the curse of the sage expired and the king returned to his capital city. When his queen received him with the utmost joy he recounted to her the curse of the brahmin's wife! She was shocked beyond measure to know that the joy of their reunion after such a long separation was embittered by the curse. Both the king and the queen went on pilgrimage in the hope of finding redemption from the sin and the consequent curse. In the course of their wanderings, they met the sage Gouthama and confided to him their plight. The sage replied in compassion: 'Do not fear, Oh king! When we have such a holy and wishfulfilling place as Gokarna, what can the sin of killing a brahmin do to you? All the water in that place is as holy as the Ganga and all the stones there are potent as Shiva Lingas. There is nothing which cannot be achieved in that place which is wholly filled with such holy water and innumerable Shiva Lingas. I shall recount an incident which I had witnessed there.'

When a woman of Chandala* clan died at Gokarna, the attendants of Shiva came to take her soul to Kailasa! When I asked them about it, they said: 'This woman was a brahmin's daughter in her previous life. When her husband died in her childhood, in that life, under the influence of lust, she lived as the concubine of a wealthy businessman. When her kinsfolk came to know of it, they forsook her and performed the religious rites of retribution. Henceforth, she cast all sense of shame to the winds and started living a detestable life openly. She got addicted to liquor. One day, when she was drunk she mistook the calf of a cow for a goat and ate its flesh, keeping its head for the next day. When her lover arrived the next morning, she saw the calf's head and started bemoaning that a tiger had killed the calf. She committed several such sins and, in consequence, she suffered much in hell and was reborn as a woman of the chandala clan in this life. She was born blind and suffered from leprosy. After some time, the parents who cared for her had died. Having no one to care for her, she arrived at Gokarna. She starved for several days and begged for food, on a holy Shivaratri**. As it was customary for devotees to fast on that day, they had nothing to give her except a handful of Bel leaves which were used for the worship of Lord Shiva. As they were not fit for eating, she dropped them down. One of them fell on a Shiva Linga. Thus, even without her knowing it, she happened to fast on the Shivaratri day and worship the Shiva Linga with a bel leaf. Thereby, all the sins of her previous life were burnt out. And so we, the attendants of Shiva, have now come to take her soul to His abode in heaven.' So saying, they besprinkled her body with ambrosia (Amruta) and took her to the higher world in a divine vehicle. If the righteous act which she had unknowingly performed was so efficacious, you can imagine how much more so could continuous worship be. So, Oh king, you proceed to Gokarna and serve the Lord there. You shall be free from the sin'. In accordance with the counsel of the sage Gouthama, the king and the queen went to that holy place and freed themselves of the curse through austerity. In such a holy place as this, Sreepada lived for three years. Having uplifted several seekers there spiritually, the Lord went to Kuruvapura and disappeared there."

*The class of humans who were considered fallen for not adhering to any code of spiritual culture.

**The holy night on which Lord Shiva is said to have manifested himself in the form of Linga for the worship of his devotees.

8. Chapter 7

Namadharaka Sharma asked Siddha, "Divine Master, please explain to me why the Lord who sported in a human form for the uplift of sadhus disappeared at Kuruvapura."

Siddha replied, "The guru wanted to assume another mortal form and hence had left the old one. Now listen to that story:

In a village on the banks of river Krishna, the wife of a vedic brahmin by name Ambika gave birth to a son. As ill-luck would have it, the boy happened to be a dullard and an idiot. When he grew to the age of eight, his father performed his sacred-thread ceremony and initiated him with the Gayatri mantra. As he was unable to utter the mantra properly, his father used to grow desperate and beat him. Then the brahmin's wife used to intercede on her son's behalf, saying, 'Oh Sir! he is a congenital idiot. We have nothing to gain by punishing him except regrets. If you beat him again, I shall jump into a well and end my life'. The brahmin realised his folly and kept quiet. In course of time, he passed away, leaving his wife and son to live by begging. All the villagers used to heckle the son saying, 'Oh, son of a learned man, you live in vain. You are not fit to live by sacred alms. It is better that you drown yourself in the river'. Unable to stand the ridicule any longer, one day, he made for the river to commit suicide. And his mother followed him with the same intent. Then Lord Sreepada who was, at the moment, bathing in the river, stopped him saying, 'Oh brahmin, do not be hasty; otherwise you would incur the sin of committing suicide, as well as the sin of killing a brahmin. No one can help you out of it. It is better for you to live on, facing any amount of suffering.' The brahmin lady then said, 'Oh holy one, people are humiliating me for being cursed with the birth of a stupid son. They consider it a sin even to see my face. What could I gain by continuing to live?'. The Lord was moved by compassion at her words and said, 'Mother, by committing suicide, you only add to your former sins and you will have to suffer more in the next life. Therefore, devote your whole life to the worship of Lord Shiva. You shall be blessed with a noble son in your next life'. She said, 'Sir, I shall do as you say. But tell me whether anyone has really benefitted in the past by doing so'.

Lord Sreepada replied, 'Once a king by name Chandrasena ruled the country with Ujjain as his capital. His friend, one Manibhadra, obtained the Chintamani or the wishfulfilling gem by the grace of Lord Shiva. Knowing how invaluable the gem was, several kings planned to grab it and invaded the country. Then king Chandrasena and his friend Manibhadra meditated on Lord Shiva and worshipped Him at the proper hour. Seeing their Saturday worship, several urchins of the village gathered in front of their houses and commenced worshipping Shiva in a like manner. They were so absorbed in worshipping the Shiva Lingas with bel leaves and flowers that their mothers had to drag them into their houses for lunch. One such cowherd boy opened his eyes in the middle of his meditation and he was very sorry that his worship of Lord Shiva was interrupted by his mother. In order to expiate the sin of it, he was ready to commit suicide! Then the all-seeing Lord Parmeswara (Shiva) appeared before him and offered to grant him a boon as a reward for his intense devotion. But all that the boy asked for was that he should be pardoned for his sin. The Lord said, 'My child, owing to your devotion, you shall attain my eternal proximity. Your mother, out of ignorance, has committed the folly. Still, as she had witnessed my worship, she shall have the good fortune of giving birth to the avatar of Lord Vishnu in her next life'. So saying, Lord Shiva disappeared. The Shiva Linga there was shining with a divine splendour. The kings who invaded the country saw that and realised what a pious soul the ruler of the country was. They realised how unholy it was to think of waging a war against such a one. Completely converted, they paid a friendly visit to his palace and all of them together proceeded to have a look at that splendid Shiva Linga. They were happy at its sight

and honoured the cowherd boy with plenty of wealth. The mother of that cowherd boy was later reborn as Yesoda of puranic fame and came to be known as the mother of Lord Sree Krishna, the avatar of Lord Vishnu. You too shall obtain like merit by worshipping Lord Shiva'.

Then she asked, 'Lord! The fruits of worshipping Shiva, you say, accrue to me in the next birth. But how shall I bear the remaining part of my present life? Oh merciful one, bless me to be a happy mother'. Melting with compassion at her petition, the Lord uttered the pranava, 'Om', and placed his hand on the head of her son by way of blessing. Instantly, the boy became a wise one and an eloquent speaker. The Lord then commanded him to serve his mother and said to her, 'Now, mother, you are free from care. Devote the rest of your life to the worship of Lord Shiva. In your next life, you shall have a son of my stature'. She happily returned to her village and dedicated her life to the worship of Lord Shiva.

Then the Supreme Lord, Sreepada reflected thus: 'I have assured her, by way of blessing, that she shall have a son of my spiritual stature. But there can be no other like me! Therefore, I shall keep my word by taking birth as her son'. Thus the unbounded-one willed his own birth once again. Even then, as there was much left to be accomplished for human weal in his present manifestation, he has not left off his identity as Sreepada. Though unseen, he has been granting the wishes of those who serve him".

Having heard all this, Namadharaka asked, "Holy Sir, why did Lord Sreepada choose to manifest himself again before the mission of his first manifestation was accomplished? How could he fulfil the wishes of his devotees while being invisible? Please substantiate this".

Siddha replied, "Oh Namadharaka, the Lord is eternal. As He is the seed of the whole universe, his activities are infinite. So his purposes are infinite. In fact, he is ever in front of his devotees, granting their prayers. Yet he is invisible to all those who are blinded by the spirit of the Kali age which can be described as the scum to time. Now I shall illustrate how he has been granting the wishes of his devotees, though he is invisible to them.

There was a brahmin who lived as a businessman. Being a devotee of Sreepada Swami, he vowed to his Lord that he would feed several brahmins if he prospered by the grace of the Lord. Accordingly, he earned a fortune. Promptly, he started for Kurupura to fulfil his vow. On the way, at sunset, a band of robbers joined him in the guise of pilgrims and, at night, killed him in a solitary place. Lord Sreepada appeared there and killed the robbers with his trident. One of the band of robbers humbly submitted to him and said: 'As for myself, Oh Lord, I have not joined the brahmin with any evil intent. Please consider this and do unto me what I deserve'. The Lord told him to keep a watch on the brahmin's body, joined the severed head to the trunk and sprinkled it with holy ash and water. The brahmin revived, but by the time he sat up, like one awakened from sleep, the Lord disappeared! He was frightened at the sight of the dead bodies of the robbers and learned of all that had happened from his lone companion. He was very sorry that he was not blessed with the sight of the Lord who saved his very life. 'The Lord has taken so much trouble for my sake and granted his sight to the robbers, but not to me who has been serving him for long! How unlucky am I?' However, he gathered his belongings, proceeded to Kurupura, fed 4000 brahmins and profusely honoured them with gifts of money. Lord Sreepada has performed many such divine acts in his subtle form. He can even be seen by those who are pure of heart. Eventhough he later manifested himself as Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi, he has been manifesting his divine powers in his subtle form at Kurupura too. That village has become so holy by his eternal presence that those who live there gain the merit of performing all holy rites like the recitation of Veda, religious sacrifice, spiritual discipline and charity. Even those who live elsewhere will win his grace by contemplating his divine name, 'Digambara, digambara, Sreepada vallabha digambara; Digambara, digambara, Avadhutachinthana digambara'

9. Chapter 8

Namadharaka eagerly asked Siddha to recount to him all about the next manifestation of Lord Datta. Siddha replied, "Indeed, the divine acts of this second avatar cannot be completely comprehended even by great yogis. So, remember that however much I might narrate them, my account is bound to be fragmentary and incomplete.

I have told you that earlier, Sreepada Swami told a brahmin lady to devote her life to the worship of Lord Siva. She did accordingly and, as a result of it, she was born in North India in a pious family and was named Amba. She grew up into a handsome, chaste girl and she was married to a pious young man by name Madhava Sharma. She was devoted, heart and soul, to the service of her husband. His noble company added to the holy tendencies she developed as a result of her spiritual discipline in her previous life. She now became an ardent devotee of Shiva. In course of time, she gave birth to a son. The child did not cry, as is usual, at birth. On the other hand, the only sound he uttered was 'Om' and every one there was amazed at it. Astrologers assured Madhava Sharma that their child was indeed an avatar of the Lord. They also prophecied that he would renounce all worldly ties and that he would uplift the fallen souls. They said that Madhava Sharma was indeed blessed by the birth of such a child.

The news that this child uttered the sacred syllable immediately at birth spread to the neighbouring cities and towns. Devout men and women came to see the child in great numbers. At the proper time, the child was named Narahari. The name signified that he was the dispeller of the sins and miseries of human beings.

Another miracle took place a little after his birth. At first, his mother did not have enough lactation. The parents were thinking of purchasing a she-goat, or arranging for a wet-nurse, to feed the child. But this was not necessary. For, when the little hands of the child touched the mother's breast, there was profuse lactation. The parents who were already worried that the extraordinary child might suffer from evil eye of the large number of visitors, decided to keep this miracle a secret.

The child Narahari grew upto be a handsome boy of five, but he could not speak and the parents were very much worried about it. One day, the boy conveyed to them through gestures that he wished to be invested with the sacred thread. Accordingly, Madhava Sharma performed the sacred thread ceremony of his son at that early age. Young Narahari learned the Gayatri Mantra, adopted the vows of a young celibate (Brahmacharya), accepted the first offering of food from his mother's hands and at once recited the three Vedas. It was evident that He was indeed the Master of all sacred Wisdom. He then paced thrice round his parents with all the reverence due to them, as the physical representatives of the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God, the Creator and Sustainer; and as representatives of God, the Father, Mother and Teacher of all humanity and said: "Owing to the profound realization that the human body is impermanent, dispassion has come over me. So please permit me to renounce all worldly ties and dedicate my entire life to the highest wisdom. As I am endowed with a keen understanding and steadfast discrimination, I am not in danger of swerving from my spiritual path. You need not worry about my life".

The parents were shocked at his words and wept, saying, "You are our only child. If you desert us in this fashion, who is to take care of us in our old age, and of our welfare in the realms beyond death?" You may as well renounce the world after leading the life of a house-holder for some time, and, after begetting sons." Narahari replied, 'Mother, scriptures ordain that one should renounce the world only after living as a house-holder for some time. But this is imperative only in the case of those who cannot conquer their desires. But owing to my previous state of existence, I am endowed with innate dispassion even at my birth. So, I do not want to enjoy the objects of the senses which can only lead to misery. So, I shall pass on from the state of celibacy directly to the life of a sannyasi. Thereby, I shall only confirm my perfection. Indeed, there is no nobler course than this to one who is endowed with discrimination. In this age of Kali, the average span of life granted to man is a mere hundred years. Half of it is spent in sleep. Part of the rest is spent away in the ignorance of boy hood and the waywardness of youth. Another large chunk of it is frittered away in

the service of the family and kinsfolk. The senility of old age gobbles up another portion of what little is left to him. But, after all wealth, family ties and responsibilities are as unreal as a dream. Youth is transient as a flower which soon withers. Thus life is very short when viewed in the light of the only purpose of it, i.e., Self-realization. The wheel of time destroys all forms of life, including the gods, relentlessly. To be emotionally attached to anything in this phenomenal world amounts to mere self-betrayal and is self-defeating too. This body, with the skin as its surface layer, flesh, bones and the blood within, is as frail a structure as a water bubble. Excessive fondness for one's wife and children is the root of all other evil tendencies. In itself, this body of ours is made of inanimate matter and is ever changing and perishable. Only the 'Self' within is eternal and is our only true being. Joys and sorrows of worldly life are merely relative, subjective and are therefore illusory experiences to the realized. Man can break the fetters of this illusion only through the grace of the guru. He who is born as a noble brahmin and yet does not do anything to secure liberation from this illusion deceives himself. Therefore, Oh mother, do not hinder me in my resolve. You shall be blessed with some more children. Go on meditating on me and thereby you shall cross the ocean of misery and ignorance too'. So saying, Narahari again blessed his mother with the vision of his divine form. She perceived it through the eye of wisdom and was at once reminded of her previous birth. So she said to the Lord:

'Holy one, you are indeed Lord Sreepada, who, in my previous life, saved me from my unwise resolve to commit suicide. I bow before you. Your glory cannot be comprehended in its fullness even by the four-faced Brahma. How then can I, a deluded mortal, know it? Even this little wisdom was bestowed on me by your grace and as a result of my good fortune. You are, indeed, the Unbounded One. All the universes have their being in your infinite expanse. To say that you are born to me as my son is but a fallacy; for you are eternal. But the whole of my ancestry and that of my husband are sanctified by your birth in our family. Yours is the omnipotent will. I shall not hinder your resolve to renounce the world for the welfare of all sentient beings. Bless me that this glorious vision of your divine form is forever impressed on my heart. You have assured me that I shall be blessed with a few more children. Pray, stay with us, atleast till such time!' Lord Narahari graciously acceded to her request and stayed away. The blessed couple used to worship the Lord every day with full awareness of his divinity. Many were the learned who flocked to him for the elucidation of intricate questions in scriptural knowledge. Many of them got their doubts clarified and attained Self-realisation. This is no task to one who could uplift even the dull witted.

In course of time, Amba was blessed with the birth of twins. When they were three months old, Narahari said to his mother, 'Mother, you are now blessed with these two children. You shall have two more sons and a daughter. Please permit me to renounce the world now'. She consented. He covered his head with a piece of cloth, put on wooden sandals, covered his body with the ochre robe and wore a codpiece. Taking a staff in his hand, he set out from his home in joy.

On his way to Badarinath, Narahari reached the holy Varanasi (Kasi) in the guise of a seeker after liberation. There, at a secluded spot, he sat in the yogic posture of Vajrasana and restrained his vital breath. He assumed the yogic gesture (mudra) of khecheri and meditated on the subtle internal sound of nada. The sages of that holy place recognised him to be the Lord himself, prostrated to him and addressed him thus: 'Holy one, you have assumed a human form in order to re-establish the pristine purity and dignity of the great institution of sannyasa. It was formally established by Sree Sankaracharya of yore and is now in a fallen state, almost non-existent in its true form. May you propagate it again! The wicked who are deluded by the dark age of Kali, unable to recognise the bliss of Self-realisation, have come to shun the blessed sannyasa. Even though it is terrible to the faint-hearted, this age of Kali is capable of bestowing bliss much more easily than the other ages. Pray, secure for us this supreme path to Bliss!'

Granting their wish, Lord Narahari, in accordance with holy tradition, resorted to His Holiness Swami Krishna Saraswathi as his guru and from him took the vow of sannyasa. Henceforth, he came to be known as Sri Nrisimha Saraswathi. He relinquished the tuft of hair (sikha), the sacred thread and all. He formally took the vow of lifelong celibacy. Thus he became a full-fledged sannyasi who

has transcended the opposites of joy and sorrow and the limitations of a self-centered will. This World Teacher has laid down the tradition of sannyasa for seekers after liberation and expounded the same to his disciples thus:

"Great good accrues through sannyasa which consists of the following acts: (1) Prayaschitta or holy rites of atonement for one's sins of the present and previous births, including the wilful acts and also those done unwittingly; (2) Ashtasraaddhas or the eight rites of obsequies which are offered to all worldly relations including one's previous self; (3) Virajaahoma or the fire-oblation signifying the crossing of the river of death; (4) Gayatripravesa or entering the spirit of Gayatrimantra; (5) Yeeshanatraya tyaga or the relinquishment of concern for life, wife, children and wealth; (6) Bhooaraadi sannyasa or renunciation of desire for the joys and possessions in heaven and on earth; (7) Sikhaasuutra sannyasa or relinquishing the tuft of hair** and the sacred thread; (8) Guruprapatti or resorting to a Guru who expounds to the seeker, the meaning of the four cardinal tenets of Vedanta i.e., the Mahaavaakyas, viz., 'Pragnaanam Brahma' (pure awareness is Brahma); Aham Brahmaasmi (My real self is Brahma); Tatvamasi (Thou art indeed That); Ayam atmaa Brahma (This self is indeed Brahman). He also learns of: Panchiikarana (analysis of the phenomenon of manifestation of the five basic elements of existence as this creation and the body); Yogapatta (or the title of a Monk); Paryankasowcha (the vow of keeping one's bed pure and giving up the use of any soft and comfortable beds other than one's garment); Swadharm Vichaara (or understanding of the spirit of the traditional practices of the life of sannyasa).

When someone who has renounced the world in the said manner, leaves his body, it has to be preserved in the earth, or left in water; but should not be cremated. One has to understand the implications of sannyasa and adopt it only if he is competent and qualified to do so."

Thus Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi expounded the nature of sannyasa to some and the meaning of the Vedas which can secure the true objects of life (Purusharthas) to others. Then, he proceeded in his wanderings round the country in a clock-wise direction, along with his disciples. He took holy dips in all the holy rivers along the way and reached the sacred place where the river Ganga joins the sea. There he pursued the practice of yoga. Later, he again set out on his trek and arrived at holy Prayag, where he expounded the philosophy of Vedanta to a pious brahmin named Madhava and initiated him into sannyasa. Then he proceeded homewards to see his mother again."

Having heard thus far attentively, Namadharaka asked, "Who is that Krishna Saraswathi who had the fortune of being the revered Guru of the Lord Himself? Why did the Lord Himself need to be initiated by him into Sannyasa?" Siddha replied:

"Just as Sri Rama became the disciple of sage Vasishta, and Sri Krishna resorted to sage Sandipani, Sree Nrisimha too resorted to Krishna Saraswathi. For, once he assumed the human form, it behoves that he should respect the Holy Law of mortals***. which alone ensures their lasting good. Else, the Law will fall into a general neglect. Hence, the holy ones never ignore it. Even the Bhagavadgita says, 'Whatever the best of mortals does, the world follows'. Now I shall tell you the spiritual lineage of Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi.

'Siva was the first Guru. Vishnu was his first disciple. Brahma was the disciple of Vishnu and henceforth the lineage went on like this: Brahma, Vasishta, Shakthi, Paraasara, Vedavyasa, Shuka, Gaudapaada, Govinda, Shankarabhagavatpaada, Viswarupa, Bohdhajnaani, Simhagiri, Iswara, Nrisimha, Vidyateertha, Sivateertha, Bhageeradhi Theertha, Vidyaranya, Malayaananda, Devateertha, Yaadavendra Saraswathi, Krishnaananda Saraswathi, who initiated Lord Nrisimha of our story into sannyasa. This Krishnaananda Saraswathi was ripe in age and wisdom. Hence Nrisimha resorted to him'

*The religious law of Hindus says that only a man who is blessed with a son can attain to blissful-states of existence after his death as a result of the annual observance of ceremonies by his son in honour of the manes.

**A !ad had to keep only a tuft of hair, sikha, along with the sacred thread, ever since he entered the first stage of life, celebacy or brahmacharya, as a token of dedication to studies.

*** It is interesting to recall that the Christ sought baptism from John the Baptist and when the latter wondered that He who was greater than himself should do so, the Christ replied that it should be so for 'righteousness' sake.

10. Chapter 9

Namadharaka asked Siddha, "Holy one! Sree Nrisimha, after having renounced all worldly ties, why did he again visit his mother? Was it not a transgression of the vow of sannyasa? Also tell me who his disciples were and what he did later".

Siddha replied, "As per his religious vows, Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi went round our country and then returned home to see his mother. For, the mother is worthy of reverence even to a renunciate. Hence, he decided to pay his respects to her.

Besides, he started on his wanderings from her presence and the ritual rounding of the travels has to end there. One has to return to his Source, after all! He had seven disciples and they were Baala, Krishna, Upendra, Janajyothi, Sadaananda, Madhava and Siddha (i.e., myself). All of us have the title 'Saraswathi suffixed to our names. Besides these, a few other disciples of him accompanied him to his village. There he blessed his brothers, sister and parents and was duly honoured by them all. Then his mother Amba, recalling her previous birth said to her husband, 'Sir, when I had a good-for-nothing son and was about to commit suicide, in order to escape, the misery, Lord Sreepada protected me and this Nrisimha is the reincarnation of the same Lord. He then assured me that in my next life, I would have a son of his own spiritual stature. As he has no equals, he now took birth as my son, out of compassion for me and his natural truthfulness.'

Then, addressing Shree Nrisimha she said: `Now that you are my son, as per the worldly point of view, it behoves you to uplift us from this ocean of misery, dispelling the divine power of illusion which now holds me down.' Sree Guru replied, 'That family into which a true sannyasi is born, along with their ancestors of twenty one generations earlier, will be uplifted spiritually and saved from the miserable round of births and deaths. Even those earlier ancestors who sank to worse states of existence in consequence of their sins will be saved. Now, mother, that I am born as your son, you need fear nothing. You shall attain liberation at Varanasi'. Hearing these words, his sister Ratna said, 'Lord, what shall become of me hereafter? I am afraid of being left behind in this miserable cycle of births. As you are the Sadguru, please save me!'

Sree Nrisimha said, 'My dear, to a lady, her husband is the sole refuge. You shall cross this ocean of misery through unswerving devotion to your husband. In your previous birth, you caused estrangement between a man and his wife and you even killed a cow. In consequence, your husband will become a sannyasi and you will suffer from leprosy.' At these words, his sister broke down and wept. The Lord consoled her saying, 'My dear, you will reap these consequences in your ripe old age. You shall be made pure again by meeting me'. Later, along with his disciples, he went away to the banks of the holy river Godavari. That river was brought from its heavenly abode to this earth by sage Gouthama of old, to atone for his sin of having killed a cow.

There was, in that village, a man suffering from chronic and excruciating pain in his abdomen. He tried to cure himself of it by several means but in vain. Unable to bear it any longer, one day, he resolved to commit suicide by drowning himself in the holy river. So, he tied a big boulder to his neck and was ready to jump into the river. Sree Guru saw him, called him near and asked him why he sought so desperate an end. The man said, 'Lord, I shall die of this abdominal pain any way. This ailment makes it impossible for me to eat my food. Food, indeed, is the origin, sustenance and annihilation, vital energy and the very life of creatures. Is not death better than intolerance of food? Probably, either in this life or in a previous one, I have not offered food in charity to any one; or I might have stolen that which rightly belongs to either a brahmin or a cow; or I might have insulted my parents; or I might have abstained from the worship of the gods; or I might have

driven away guests and brahmins from my threshold; or perhaps, I had enjoyed the pleasures of life with my wife, deserting my parents. I must have committed one of these sins and, perhaps, I have not done any meritorious deeds to deserve proper food in this life. I now suffer for it. In consequence, I have not been able to extend a helping hand to any one in my life. I am a mere burden to this earth.' So saying, he lamented his fate.

Sree Guru consoled him saying, 'Oh brahmin, do not fear! I shall administer you a medicine which will enable you to eat normally'. Just at that moment, a brahmin by name Sayamdeva arrived and prostrated to the guru. He hailed from the holy city of Kanchi in the South and belonged to the Koundinya Gotra. At that time, he was serving in the court of a muslim ruler. Sree Guru addressed him thus. 'Sayamdeva, this brahmin, unable to bear his pain, wishes to die. I shall administer a divine remedy to him. At first, feed him sumptuously with a delicious meal'. Sayamdeva submitted, apprehensively, 'Lord! even if he takes food once a month or a fortnight, he suffers a lot. If I feast such a one, am I not killing him?' Sree Guru smiled and said, 'Do not fear, Sayamdeva, no physician is abler than I. Without any hesitation, give him a full feast. I shall take care of the rest of the matter'. Sayamdeva agreed: 'Lord, I shall do as you say. But, pray, may your holiness too come along, with your disciples, and accept my hospitality. I shall offer myself as your disciple. Graciously accept me and save me.' The guru agreed and, at the proper hour, went to Sayamdeva's house along with his disciples. The latter received Sree Guru with due reverence and offered him proper worship, chanting vedic mantras like Purusha suktha and Rudra suktha. He then partook of the holy washings of the guru's feet (paadattheertha) along with the members of his family, worshipped even the disciples of the master and served food to all the guests. The ailing brahmin guest too ate to his fill in the company of the Lord, who is the guru of those gurus who can grant salvation to their devotees. At once he was free from his trouble! In the holy company of the master, dispassion dawned in his heart and he worshipped the Lord with profound faith.

Sayamdeva, while massaging the Lord's feet, submitted: 'Swami, by serving your feet, all my holy acts and my very life are blessed. And so are my ancestors. I am really fortunate. They say that the Ganga washes off our sins, the moon dispels heat, and that the kalpiavrikshu ends all misery. But you uplift souls, even as the wind lifts up shreds of cotton. Eventhough you are originally unborn, in order to protect the righteous, you have taken birth. Bless me that I and the descendants of my family could serve you. Save me from the one -thing that is troubling me. The muslim ruler whom I serve is a destroyer of life. Every year he kills a brahmin. Now he has sent for me, with the same intent, I fear'. Sree Guru said, 'Do not fear, Sayamdeva! Go to that wicked ruler. You shall be honoured by him and sent safely back. Do not worry'. Indeed, when Sayamdeva visited the ruler, the latter honoured him with gifts of jewels, ornaments and new clothes. The muslim king was at first enraged at Sayamdeva's delay in presenting himself at the palace. But he suddenly fell down unconscious and, when he regained senses, his attitude underwent a radical change with regard to that blessed visitor. So the devout brahmin returned and prostrated to Sree Guru. Who can annoy the true devotee of the guru?

Sree Guru said to him, 'You have totally surrendered yourself to me, body and soul. All your wishes shall be fulfilled. You will meet me again after sixteen years'. Thus blessing Sayamdeva, Sree Guru went to holy Vaidyanadh and later his whereabouts were not known. In order to strengthen the faith of the devotees, the Lord performed many such divine acts. For, the Lord wishes that his creatures should attain salvation by serving him with faith. In order to inspire gratitude in their hearts, he blesses them with worldly good. By gratefully serving him thereafter, they learn to aspire for liberation. Then they meditate on him with perfect dispassion to worldly things. Later, by the grace of the Lord, with the help of the four great teachings (Mahaavakyas) they attain union with the Supreme Self. Their ignorance thus destroyed, they attain eternal peace. That peace makes them compassionate, unbound, beyond the pairs of opposites. Enjoying the bliss of their Self thus, they wander about, unaware of a world apart from them, looking like spectres. Through the touch, worship and sight of the Sadguru, great spiritual powers are gained quite spontaneously. He who centres his inner life on the Sadguru either through hate, fear or love is indeed blessed. He shall attain

to the same state of being as the guru. The means of seeking god are indeed simple. He can only be inferred through the intellect. The Self and god are indeed one with the Self of the guru."

Hearing the words of Siddha, Namadharaka asked him. "Why did Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi, ever gracious to His devotees, choose to live incognito? What happened to his disciples thereafter?" Siddha replied, "As the number of disciples swelled immensely, the Lord, wishing to live in solitude, said to his disciples: 'One becomes the twice-born through the sacred thread - ceremony (upanayana). Henceforth, he wears the sacred thread, the loin band (mekhala) and the staff. Observing the vow of celibacy, he performs such rites as tending the sacrificial fire in the morning, noon and sunset. He lives by seeking offerings of food from noble house-holders and studying the vedas. He has to abstain from sleep during the day. Whatever offerings of food he gets, should first be offered to his guru and he should accept what the guru is pleased to give him of it. Thus he studies for twelve years and, at the end, makes an offering to the guru and should perform the fire-offering called samaavarthanahoma. Then, in accordance with the direction of his guru, he should marry and henceforth observe the vows and discipline enjoined on the householder by religious law. Well versed in the Vedas, sastras and dharmas, he should perform religious sacrifices and maintain all those who are fit to be fed by him. After some time, he should give away everything he has to his son and, along with his wife, retire to the forest. Henceforth, he should abstain from all concerns of social life, conquer his senses and live an austere life till he is wholly purified. Then, with the consent of his wife, he should take the vow of sannyasa.

The vow involves attentive chanting of God's name (japa), living by alms and continuous meditation. He should then abstain from even hearing stories regarding women. He should not use vehicles for travel, or a cot for sleeping. Such a monk should not sleep during the day, but should ever be aware of the real Self. He should always use vessels made of bamboo, wood, earth or the shell of a gourd. He should ever carry the staff and eat only during the day. He should constantly visit holy places throughout the year, never resting in any place for more than three days. While he is ever on the move physically, his mind should be fixed on his one goal. If the state of his body does not permit him to wander, he should stay in a holy place, always meditating on Lord Vishnu.'

So saying, Sree Guru had sent away his house-holder disciples, and then addressed his renunciate disciples: "Varanasi, Prayag, Sreerangam, Purushottamam, Sreesailam, Naimisharanya, Kurukshetra, Badarinath, Gokarna, Kanchi, Ayodhya, Gokula, Mathura, Dwaraka, Maya, Avanti, Karvir, Gangapur, Devakanya, Guhashrama, Sethubandha are the important places of pilgrimage which you shall all visit. These besides such holy rivers as the Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswathi, Vipaat, Marudwitha, Vithastha, Chandrabhaaga, Reva, Godavari, Amaraja, Sarayu, Bhima, Krishna, Kaveri, Tunga, Kshipra, Tapivedika; Charmanvathi, and Gandaki are all holy. These were all sanctified by the wanderings of Sree Guru. All these are therefore as holy as Ganga. A monk should visit all these and all sacred tanks in the land and pay them his respect in accordance with the ritual observances proper for them. When new water flows in rivers during the rainy season, the rivers are said to be in menses. Except those who dwell on their banks, no one should bathe in them till after about ten days.

Similarly, for wells and tanks, the prohibited period is one day and for the less important rivers, it is three days. All of you visit the holy places as I have directed you, bathe in the rivers I have mentioned and join me at Sreesailam in the year of the Plentiful Harvest (Bahudhaanya)." Thus he had sent away all his disciples. I alone, among them, wished to stay on in his service, ever meditating on his lotus feet. The same Guru, Lord Dattatreya, graciously expounded to me the same path to wisdom as he did to kings Yadu and Karthaveerya of yore. Oh Namadharaka, I am pleased at your humility and discipline and so I shall teach you the same. Thereby, the Bliss of Self, the State of Vishnu, shall accrue to you".

11. Chapter 10

Namadharaka wished to know what Sree Guru did after sending away his disciples on pilgrimage. So, Siddha went on: "Oh Namadharaka, Sree Guru stayed at Vaidyanath for one year. As I already told you, I stayed away with him. One day, a brahmin who was dull-witted came to him, prostrated in reverence and submitted thus: 'I strove hard for spiritual perfection. But I could gain neither perfection nor even a capable guru. So I now take refuge in you. Please teach me the way to liberation.' Hearing these words, Sree Guru said, 'Son, first of all tell me, who had taught you the way to perfection? Else, how could you have ever tried for it?' The brahmin replied, 'Swami, I first resorted to a guru. But he was very hard-hearted. He went on extracting my services and put me in much hardship. So I deserted him.' Sree Guru was shocked at his words and berated him: 'Alas, what have you done! It can never be for your good. It is a sin even to look at the face of one like you, who has deserted his guru. Get away! Indeed, one who is unwilling to bow before his guru in humility, serve him with love or wait on him for instruction with patience and implicit obedience will never win the grace of the guru'. The visitor felt miserable and said 'Sir, how am I to recognise a genuine guru? How to serve him? I betrayed my guru out of my ignorance. Please save me!'

Sree Guru was moved at his helpless petition and said, 'The guru is one with Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He is incomparable. His true nature cannot be realised by an ignorant one like you. Nor can those blinded by ignorance like you, ever know what it is to serve him. I shall recount an ancient legend which will enlighten you:

During the age of Dwapara, there was a sage by name Dhoumya. He had three disciples with him viz., Baida, Aruni and Upamanyu. In order to test their devotion, one day, Dhoumya said; "The rice crop in my farm is withering for lack of water. One of you should go and water it". At once Aruni rushed to the farm and dug a canal from a pool for the water to flow into the field, but the bund would not hold despite all his exertions. He did not despair. He then resolved to give up his life in his efforts and lay down in place of the bund and made the water flow into the field. After some time, Dhoumya arrived on the scene, saw his field watered and lovingly called out to his disciple. Aruni heard the call, but was unable to reply. So he made a mild noise. Following the sound, Dhoumya came to him, raised him up and was touched by his devotion. Through the power of his blessing, he made his disciple wise and enlightened like himself. He then declared the term of Aruni's discipleship as completed and sent him home, where he became very famous as a man of wisdom.

Later, one day, Dhoumya said to Baida, "You watch over my field and when it is ripe, bring it home". Baida agreed, watched over the field day and night, harvested it and piled the grain in a heap on the farm. He then went to his guru and asked him for a cart to fetch the grain. Dhoumya gave him a bullock cart. When Baida was returning with the produce, the cart got stuck up in soft mud on the way. When the bullocks could not pull the cart out, he dragged it out with his own mighty effort. Suddenly, Dhoumya arrived there and, pleased with Baida's devotion, blessed him too with enlightenment.

Later, the sage ordered the third disciple, Upamanyu, to tend his cattle. Eating only a spare meal every day, Upamanyu tended the herd with the utmost care. Dhoumya who usually sent lunch to his disciple at noon suddenly stopped doing so. Upamanyu had nothing to eat and he was very hungry.

Henceforth, he started begging his food. Dhoumya noticed this and asked: 'How could you manage to be so strong and active?' Upamanyu submitted that he was sustaining himself with the food he begged from the houses of brahmins. Then Dhoumya demanded that the food thus obtained should be delivered to him. Henceforth, Upamanyu gave away what he obtained from his first round of begging to his guru and subsisted on what he got from a second round of begging. The guru learned of it and demanded that he be given that also. Upamanyu did so and quenched his hunger by drinking the milk that was left in the udders of cows after their calves had drunk their fill. Dhoumya learned of that and reprimanded him, saying, 'If you do so you will become as stupid as any of those dumb creatures'.

Then poor Upamanyu reflected that the latex of the calotropis plant is not the left over of any calf and hence a harmless substitute for milk. He did so and the poisonous oozing at once made him totally blind. Groping for his way home, the poor youth fell into a well on the wayside. The cattle returned home but without their herdsman. Dhomya went out in search of his disciple and found him in the deep well. His heart was moved at Upamanyu's ungrudging obedience and he told him to chant vedic mantras in praise of the Aswini gods. Upamanyu did so and thereby regained his sight. The sage was pleased with him and blessed him with all knowledge. Thus Upamanyu realised his goal. Even the disciples of Upamanyu became as great as he.

Udanka, one of the disciples of Upamanyu, once performed the holy sacrifice of Sarpayaga (the snake sacrifice) and thereby caused the destruction of countless serpents. He was able to summon even the great Indra, the king of the gods, at the behest of King Janamejaya, the master of the ritual. It was only by pleasing the guru thus that his grace could be won. Therefore, Oh brahmin, serve your former guru himself with all your heart. Through his grace alone you will be able to attain peace and liberation'. The brahmin submitted, 'Lord! It is possible to weld a broken metal vessel, but it is not possible to weld a broken heart. So too, it's impossible for me to win back the heart of the former guru, once it has been broken by my stupid conduct. So I cannot hope to approach him again. I shall pay for my sin by giving up my life in your very presence!' Seeing that he was really repentant, Sree Guru kept his boon-bestowing hand on the brahmin's head in a gesture of blessing and told him to think of his former guru. When the brahmin did so, he at once realised that Sree guru was not different from his former guru and fell at his feet. Sree guru said, 'Son, you shall work out the fruits of you previous actions and soon attain perfection. Incessantly meditate on my true form which I shall show you now and perform all your ordained acts, surrendering the fruits thereof to me'. So saying, the Lord blessed the brahmin with the vision of his divine form. Later, Sree Guru went to the bank of the river Krishna. There he restored the tongue of a brahmin who lost it."

12. Chapter 11

Namadharaka was eager to know the details of the miracle. So, Siddha resumed his account:

"Oh Namadharaka, in a town called Karveer, there lived a brahmin couple. They had a son who was illiterate. People heckled him saying, 'You are indeed an animal without a tail and horns but endowed with only two legs. It is the good fortune of cattle that you do not feed on grass. Education is a treasure of which no one can be robbed. It grows by being given away to one's disciples. It can make even the lowest of the lowly, a great man. Even a poor man can gain wealth through the power of education. Like a chaste wife, education affords pleasure and it protects us like a mother. It comes to one's rescue in a crisis, like a friend. In doing good, it is like the father. It's like the guru in enlightening us. You who are devoid of such precious education are indeed a beast'. The boy felt humiliated. He at once retired to the forest, forswore food and sleep and meditated on the Divine Mother. As she did not grant him her vision, he cut off his tongue and offered it to her and vowed that he would offer her his head the next day. That night, the Divine Mother appeared in his dream and said, 'There is a sannyasi on the other bank of the river Krishna. Seek refuge from him. It will do you good.'

Accordingly, the young man visited Sree Guru the next day and bowed to him in reverence. Sree Guru placed his hand on the young man's head in blessing. At once the young man regained his tongue, and also attained mastery over all branches of learning in a trice. There is nothing strange in this. Such defects as dull-wittedness are destroyed in those who ever meditate on the sacred feet of Sree Guru, which-have in them such mystic signs as Vajra. What to say then, when the Lord Himself personally blessed a man? The brahmin youth returned to his native place, Mahurapura, and by leading a life of spiritual discipline, attained perfection.

Later, Sree Guru set out in the southern direction. After visiting the holy place of the eight sacred rivers (ashtateertha), he proceeded to the place of the confluence of river Krishna with five other sacred rivers. Then he reached the western shore and stayed there for some time. In this place,

rivers Saraswathi, Siva, Bhadra, Surabhi and Bhogavathi join the two rivers Krishna and Veni. Thus, It came to be known as the confluence of seven rivers. It is the most sacred of all places of confluence of rivers. This place has the township of Kurupura which is as holy as Kurukshetra, a confluence of rivers as holy as Prayag and a Yugaalaya (shrine of the Yuga) like Kasi. The fig tree (Udumbara) in this place can be called the Kalpavriksha. God Amareswara of this place is as great as Lord Viswanadha of Kasi. Here abide the sixty-four yoginis. By worshipping them, man can attain godhood. He who bathes at this confluence of the rivers in the lunar month of Maagha is sure to attain heaven. Here are a crore holy spots. The place can bestow liberation on those who aspire for it, worldly comforts on others and is pleasing to the pious. The Lord made his abode under a fig tree.

In this village of Amarapura lived many learned brahmins. One day, Sree Guru went to the house of a brahmin and called out for alms. As there was no rice in the house, the housewife offered him a vegetable. The Lord was satisfied with this. But while leaving that house, he uprooted the creeper that afforded vegetable to that family and walked away to his hermitage. The housewife saw that and said to herself, 'Alas, why did he uproot this plant? I hope I have not committed any folly to incur his displeasure'. Her husband consoled her saying, 'Oh pious one, do not weep. Joy or sorrow is the result of one's own previous actions and are never caused by others. The whole creation is subservient to the Lord. One has got to experience pain or pleasure at the allotted time. No one can alter it. He who gives us life, sustains us. The Lord who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe looks equally on a beggar or a king, the intelligent and the unintelligent. Do not be sorry for the destruction of the plant. This act shall prove for our own good'. So saying, he tried to replant it and in the process, discovered a treasure pot underneath! At once he went along with his wife to Sree Guru and reported the matter. Then the Lord said to him, 'Oh blessed couple, this is a profound secret. If you proclaim it, the treasure will vanish. Enjoy this wealth and pleasure along with your children. Later you shall attain liberation. Go home for the present!' Returning home, the couple devoted all their time to meditation on the Lord."

Namadharaka asked, "Oh! holy one, why did the Lord live by alms? Besides, when the peepul tree is so sacred, why did he take shelter under a fig tree?"

Siddha replied, "Son, living by alms is the way of Lord Siva. That is why Lord Datta manifested Himself as a mendicant and accepted cooked food as alms in accordance with the scriptural injunctions. Now for your second question: Lord Vishnu, in his manifestation as Man-lion* (Narasimhaavataara), tore the demon king Hiranyakasipu's body to pieces and destroyed him. Afterwards, owing to the poisonous action of the demon-king's blood the Lord's claws pained very much. He was relieved of the pain only through the efficacy of the leaves of the fig tree. Out of His love and mercy, He henceforth entered the spirit of the fig tree. Henceforth, this tree has acquired the power to destroy the sins, agony and misery of the Lord's devotees. Lord Vishnu proclaimed that he, along with his consort, goddess Lakshmi, would abide in the fig tree. Wherever the Lord who is the Self of the whole Universe is, there abide the vedas, all the holy places of pilgrimage, holy rivers and gods. Therefore, the fig tree has come to be a veritable Kalpavriksha on earth. Hence, in this place, the Lord, then manifest as Sree Guru, was being worshipped by the yoginis and fed by them everyday. Not knowing this, certain brahmins of this place wished to observe how Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi lived without seeking alms from the village of Amarapura and hid themselves nearby. One day at noon, seeing the manifestations of the yogic power of Sree Guru, they were scared and ran away in dismay. Then they employed one Ganganuja to keep watch over the Guru's movements and ways. After witnessing several spontaneous manifestations of the Master's divine power, he was converted and became a staunch devotee. He used to visit the Master everyday and render homage to him.

One day, Ganganuja came for the darshan of the Lord and witnessed a miracle. As the water in the river Krishna gave way, Sree Guru walked into it! The devotee also followed him in amazement and saw him enter a heavenly city on an island. Then Sree Guru sat on a high throne and was accepting the worship offered to him by the Yoginis. The Lord noticed Ganganuja and said, 'Who are you? Why have you come here?' The devotee replied, 'Lord! my name is Ganganuja

and I belong to this region. I came for your darshan. How deluded are mortals that take you for a man!

The Lord blessed him and said, 'My son, as long as I stay in this part of the country, do not divulge what you have seen to any one'. The man agreed. Henceforth, he used to visit Sree Guru every day and pay his respects with greater faith. One day he asked the Lord, 'Holy one, they say that a pilgrimage to Tristhali is very meritorious. Please enlighten me about it'. The Lord was pleased with his question and said:

'The three holy places, Prayag, Varanaasi (Kasi) and Gaya are collectively called Tristhali (the trio of holy places). So too, in this place, the confluence of the rivers, the Yugaalaya and Karvir together constitute the Tristhali. Then the Lord made the man wear his own wooden sandals and mysteriously transported him to both the Tristhalis, ie., to the six holy places in all, which are hundreds of miles apart. When they were back again, as mysteriously, the Lord said, 'I have shown you both of them; you recognise the similarity between them, follow the path of righteousness that befits you and attain liberation'. Accordingly, Ganganuja broke the shackles of ignorance through meditation on the guru and attained liberation in course of time.

Later, once the Lord reflected: 'The glory of this place is spreading fast. Hence, many unrepentant sinners will flock to this place, along with the righteous. So, I will have to change my abode'. The Yoginis of the place knew of this and one day, they entreated him saying, 'Lord, leaving us all, where do you intend to go?' and they wept. He consoled them and said, 'Oh Yoginis! Indeed, I shall ever abide here, but to the eyes of the ignorant, I shall seem to have left this place. Lord Amareswara, Goddess Annapurna, Lord Vighneswara and I shall ever be here, fulfilling the wishes of the devout. Henceforth, this holy place shall grow famous and become a populous town with many comforts. Such obstinate forms of illness as typhoid, diseases of the eye, leprosy, diabetes, tuberculosis, asthma, paralysis and chronic diseases of the digestive system shall be miraculously cured in this place. Barren women will be blessed with children. The poor shall be blessed with wealth and the devout shall be liberated. In short, every one shall be provided with the object of his desire. A sacred bath, taken at the confluence of the rivers on days of sacred festivals, will bestow on devotees the merit of having given away a thousand cows as a gift. Even a little of japa, homa (fire-oblation) and bestowing gifts on pious brahmins will secure infinite religious merit to the performer. Every step which a devotee takes in circumambulating any holy object in this place will confer on him the merit of having performed the religious sacrifice called Aswamedha (the horse-sacrifice). Any ritual offering made shall elevate one's ancestors to the divine realms'. Having thus comforted the Yoginis, Sree Guru left his wooden sandals under the holy fig tree and blessed them saying, 'Whoever takes a bath in the Ashta theertha and worships my padukas along with the Yoginis, shall secure the fulfilment of their wishes' and he left the place for the banks of the river Bheema".

*This manifestation of 'Man-lion' or 'Narasimhaavataara' is one of the ten mythological avatars of Lord Vishnu, 'descended' in order to destroy the demon-king Hiranyakasipu and is not to be confused with Nrisimha Saraswathi, the protagonist of the present hagiography 'Sree Gurucharitra'.

13. Chapter 12

As Siddha went on thus recounting the divine acts of Sree Guru, Namadharaka Sharma, who was listening attentively asked: 'Sir, you have said that Sree Guru left the banks of river Krishna, for the banks of river Bheema. Yet you say that he abides on the banks of the former river as the invisible Spirit, answering the prayers of the devout! Has anyone experienced the truth of this claim? If so, I long to hear atleast one instance of it'.

Siddha began: 'Oh Namadharaka, the Supreme Spirit of Self does not have anything like movement from place to place, location or any particular state of existence. What seems so is but

the divine play of the Lord. He will be experienced as per one's own attitude to him. Now listen: In course of time, people came to know from Ganganuja how the Lord blessed the Yoginis and assured them of his presence there in spirit. So they worshipped the padukas with due reverence. Indeed, all their wishes were fulfilled. I shall recount one incident.

There was a brahmin lady living in that area. All her children died immediately after. In desperation, she revealed her plight to a pious and learned brahmin priest. The latter was divinely inspired to tell her thus: 'Madam, there can be several karmic causes, belonging to one's previous lives, for the loss of one's children in the present life. It can be the consequence of killing cows, brahmins, dogs, snakes and children, or of stealing other's wealth. In your previous life, you unfairly appropriated the wealth of a brahmin of the Sounaka Gotra. He has become a vengeful spirit and has been killing all your children. One is obliged to reap the consequences of one's misdeeds of a former life. There is no other way to workout one's past karma. You too shall do so'.

The lady could not bear these words. She prostrated to his feet and begged him to teach her a way out of her pitiable plight. The latter replied, 'Madam, perform the religious rites necessary for the elevation of the brahmin's soul to higher realms of existence, along with the special rites of absolution and repentance. Observe such religious vows for a full month. Then take a-holy dip in the Ashtatheertha and worship the sacred padukas and the fig tree. Then feed brahmins and give away gifts of money plentifully to a pious brahmin of Sounaka Gotra.' The lady submitted, 'I do not have a plentiful store of money. I shall certainly observe the monthly vows and worship the padukas'.

Subsequently, the brahmin lady, started observing the vow along with her husband. On the third night, the spirit that was killing her offspring appeared in her dream. She immediately ran to Sree Guru who was seated under the fig tree and sought his refuge. Sree Guru consoled her and sternly reprimanded the spirit, 'You, mean spirit! How dare you threaten a helpless woman?' The latter replied, 'Lord, it is not proper for you to be partial to her. She misappropriated my money in her previous life. In order to win it back by tormenting her, I have assumed this form'. Sree Guru said, 'By assuming this form and frightening her like this, you will not achieve your salvation. I shall teach you the means of attaining higher realms of being. Listen: It was in a previous life that she deprived you of your wealth. In this life she is poor and has no means of paying you back. I shall see that she scrupulously performs religious rites which will secure higher states of existence for you and I shall make her offer as much money as she can manage, to a man of your Gotra. Besides, I shall secure liberation for you. If this satisfies you, it is well. If it doesn't, do what you can, but I shall certainly protect her!' The spirit submitted, 'Lord, at the very sight of you, I am freed from the thrall of my evil tendencies. You may do as you please and I shall be satisfied.' Sree Guru turned to the lady and said, 'My dear, did you hear what he said? You do accordingly and he shall be liberated. Thereby, your offspring will prosper'. And the Lord disappeared.

The lady woke up and informed her husband about the dream and acted accordingly. Thereby, she was freed soon from the cursed torment and from the fruits of her former misdeed. Later, Sree Guru again appeared in her dream, gave her two fruits and said, 'My dear, feed brahmins and eat these fruits!' When she woke up, she found the fruits by her side and did as she was told. Soon she conceived and, in course of time, she was blessed with handsome twins. The happy couple performed all the rites enjoined by sastras and brought up the children with love and tenderness. In their eighth year, they made all the arrangements necessary to invest the first child with the sacred thread. To their amazement, the boy was laid up for a few days with typhoid and died. The mother could not withstand the calamity. She beat her breast and lamented loudly saying, 'My son! Where have you gone? How long will you sleep? Wake up! It's time for lunch. Take your food and play in the frontyard. Your playmates are awaiting you. I cannot live without you. Of the five children born to me, you are my very life. At your birth, all the grief caused by the loss of earlier children was wiped clean from my heart. Leaving me in the ocean of grief, where did you go? It's cruel on your part to do so. Who will support us in our old age?'

The people who gathered there tried to console her saying, 'Lady, your lamentation will not revive the child. Do not weep. Death does not spare even gods, seers and demons. Think upon this truth: Even avatars like Rama and Krishna had to pass away.' She was disconsolate and said, 'The fruit that was given to me by the Lord and which saved me from the wrath of the spirit has now proved fruitless. Henceforth, who can trust His promises? I shall take this news with me to the worlds beyond death!'

Then a sage emerged from the crowd, approached her and said, 'My child, why do you lament the death of a son? It does not deserve to be lamented. Think: Is he the body, or the soul? If he is the body, even now he is before your very eyes with all his flesh, bones and skin, as before. If he is the soul, then he is ever birthless and immortal. Whom do you lament then? This world which has originated from Time, karma and the three modes of manifestation (Gunas), is like a magic show. How can it be trusted as real? All relationships like mother and son are self-conceived and transient. It is as coincidental as the coming together of two logs of wood, drifting down a flowing river. Who was your husband in your previous life and who was your son? Can you tell me? Birth and death are subject to time. Like day and night, both these are inevitable. Just as youth succeeds boy-hood, death also confronts the embodied soul. This delusion can be overcome only through the grace of the guru. One who is born is bound to die. So, do not weep. The dead cannot be brought back to life by grief, lamentation or by any other means.'

The lady interrupted him saying, 'Sir, your metaphysical teaching does not appeal to me at the moment. How can I ever trust the Lord who has given me the fruits, but failed to keep his promise?'

The sage replied, "Then, my child, go to him from whom you have received the blessing.'

The lady took up the corpse and quickly reached the hermitage of Sree Guru. There she furiously knocked her head against the holy Even at sunset, she refused to give away the dead body for the performance of the last rites. All the people went away, leaving the poor couple. That night, Sree Guru appeared in her dream and said, 'My child! How have I wronged you? I have even blessed you! The vital force had already left the body of your son, but I have brought it back'. So saying, the Guru disappeared. When she woke up, she could not contain her joy at the sight of her son who was alive. She showed him to her husband. The blessed pair were immensely happy. With redoubled faith, they paced around the fig tree thrice and prostrated to the The brahmins of the village came to know of the miracle and glorified Sree Guru. The brahmin pair had a dip at the confluence of the sacred rivers, worshipped Sree Guru, fed brahmins and returned home. Their son grew up to be a youth of great learning and suave manners. He lived up to a ripe old age in wealth and prosperity. Similarly, many others have achieved the objects of their wishes in that holy place. In this age of Kali, Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi is very much alive in spirit. He responds to every call of his devotees, ever ready to bless them. Whoever serves him with faith and devotion shall prosper, even like the brahmin lady."

14. Chapter 13

Namadharaka asked Siddha, "Holy Sir, tell me what the Lord did after arriving on the banks of river Bheema."

Siddha replied: "The Lord stayed for a long time at Gandharvapura (Gangapur). The confluence (Sangama) of rivers Bheema and Amaraja near the place is as holy as that of the Krishna with the five other sacred rivers. For some time, Sree Guru lived there incognito, sustaining himself by holy alms (bhiksha) with the intention of uplifting the devout who offered it to him. As he was accepting bhiksha from the poor, the well to do of the place spoke light of him. As the sun continues to shine bright and cause day-light even when hidden behind the clouds, and as musk

continues to give out its perfume even when it is concealed in a box, it was impossible for the Lord's divine attributes to be hidden from the folk for long.

One day, the Lord went to the threshold of a poor brahmin for alms. There he saw a very old barren she-buffalo and asked the lady of the house for its milk. The housewife said, 'Sir, we have been using this buffalo to carry loads. For it's barren and it does not yield milk: Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi laughed and said, 'Mother, do not tell me lies!' Finding no other way, she fetched a vessel and milked the buffalo, just to show the Master that her words were true. Lo, milk flowed plentifully from its udders! Amazed at the strange transformation in the creature, she boiled the milk and offered it to the Lord. The latter drank of it with gusto and left for his abode on the banks the river. The Master of the house, having heard of the powers of the Lord's words, at once proceeded to the Sangama along with his wife, worshipped him and received his blessings.

The servants in the brahmin's house came the next morning and were amazed to see the old barren buffalo yielding milk. The news flashed across the land and reached the ruler of that region. The latter ascertained it from the brahmin and visited the hermitage of the Lord, along with his royal retinue. He then approached Sree Guru and prostrated to his feet. Even at the very sight of the Holy One's divine form, the king's heart was fired with devotion. As tears of joy and love trickled down his cheeks, he submitted in a quivering voice, 'Sir, I am your humble slave. May you bless and protect me!' The Lord said, 'Oh Prince, I am a sannyasi; I live and move about in this wilderness and survive by begging food from others. Why have you, a wealthy and powerful Prince, come to me? What can I do for you?' The chief said, 'Sir, you are the Supreme Spirit, just sporting in a human form and not really a common mortal. I request you to grace my city and sanctify it'. Sree Guru acceded to the request, sat in the royal palanquin and set out. The chief personally served him, held the royal umbrella over Sree Guru's head and fanned him, as the royal procession moved on. The, royal attendants sounded drums and trumpets all along the way. The chief walked by the side of the palanquin as one among the royal attendants. Pious brahmins chanted the vedas, while the heralds loudly proclaimed the progress of the Lord of Spiritual Wisdom to the town. People hailed the Lord all along the way. Thus the pageant reached the western gate of the chief township. As the palanquin passed a little inside the gate, Sree guru noticed a cruel brahma rakshasa (a wicked and powerful spirit) on the top of a peepul tree. At the very sight of Sree Guru, the ferocious spirit was becalmed. At once, he got down from the tree; rendered homage to Sree Guru and submitted 'Lord, pray uplift me from this abominable state of existence!' The Lord of Divine Mercy put his right hand on the spirit's head in blessing. At once the spirit attained a visible human form. Sree Guru said to him, 'My son, if you take a dip at the Sangama, you will attain liberation at once.' The spirit prostrated to Sree Guru and took the bath. He immediately left his physical form and attained liberation. The chieftain, amazed at the power of the Lord's blessings, glorified him and led the palanquin into the town. He immediately raised a muth (monastery) and lodged Sree Guru in it. Later, the chief worshipped the Divine Master every day, served him and thereby he eventually transcended the terrible ocean of misery.

Yielding to the persistent pleadings and devotion of the chief, the Lord stayed on at the place. Everyday, he used to perform his daily rituals at the muth, take his bath at the holy Sangama and, despite the entreaties of the chief to the contrary lived by begging in the outskirts of the town. At that time, there lived a learned brahmin by name Trivikrama Bharati in the neighbouring village of Kumasi. He learned of the ways of Sree Guru from hearsay and criticised him as a sannyasi, fallen by transgressing the ideal standard of life of true renunciation. For, it is enjoined in the scriptures that a sannyasi should not live under the protection and patronage of a chief. The omniscient Guru knew the innermost thoughts of Trivikrama Bharati. One day, he said to the chief: 'At Kumasi there lives a sannyasi by name Trivikrama Bharati. He has been berating me for my ways. I have to go and set him right'. The chief was pleased at his words and begged his permission to accompany him. He then summoned all the pomp of procession for Sree Guru, seated him in the royal palanquin and proceeded to Kumasi.

Trivikrama Bharati was a learned sannyasi and an ardent devotee of Lord Nrisimha (the man-lion avatar). On that day, when he sat for his daily meditation, the Lord did not grant him his mystic vision, as he usually did. Trivikrama was deeply disappointed and, with a yearning heart, prayed, 'Oh Thou ocean of Mercy, the Lord of Thy devotees, Lord Nrisimha! Why am I not able to enjoy Thy blessed presence today? Lord, bless me with it!' After he meditated for a long while, he heard a voice from within, telling him that the Lord is on the-banks of the holy river. He immediately proceeded there. Through the yogic power of Sree Guru who had already arrived and encamped at the place, he saw a large gathering of sannyasis. At first he fainted. When he came to his senses, he again saw the same large congregation of sannyasis. Then Sree Guru addressed the dazed ascetic: 'Trivikrama, I am the sannyasi whom you have been vilifying, in the pride of your spiritual accomplishments and learning, as a hypocrite and a fallen one. Just now I have tested you. It is evident that you are a devotee, of Lord Nrisimha and you are well-versed in the Dharma Sastra (the code of holy life). Yet, if you are indeed a true renunciate, tell me what you have renounced. How can one whose soul is perturbed by attachment to fame and pride of learning and hatred, ever be a sannyasi? I have, indeed, come here to learn of the attributes of a hypocrite of a sannyasi by seeing you. Oh learned one, reflect deeply upon this and you will know the truth, by the grace of Lord Nrisimha!' Trivikrama Bharati was humbled. He said, 'Oh Lord, overwhelmed by your yogic power, I am unable to find words for my profound experience. Oh Ocean of Mercy, Thou self-controlled one, may you protect me! I have realised that the religious merit of my life-long meditation has earned for me this meeting with your holiness. You are indeed the Lord on whom I meditate! I seek your refuge. May you pardon my misdeeds.'

Pleased with the candour, new-found humility and repentance of Trivikrama Bharati, Sree Guru granted him the sight of his real, divine form. Trivikrama was able to see the king and his retinue that accompanied him but could not stand the glory of the Lord's presence. He saw the king fanning Him like a humble servant. It was indeed the cosmic form of the Guru that he saw. Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi then said, "Trivikrama, I have granted you the blessed vision of my divine form which cannot be attained even through prolonged cultivation of mystic vision. For I am pleased with your devout practice of dhyana." The next moment, the humbled sannyasi once again saw the mortal form of Sree Guru in front of him. Emerging from the mystic vision, Trivikrama sang in praise of the Lord, 'Oh Thou Spirit of the Universe! Indeed, I haven't meditated on you with a heart, body or mind that are pure enough. I even vilified you. Yet you have graced me and I am blessed indeed. You have granted me the vision of your cosmic form (Viswarupu) which was vouched to Arjuna of yore. Oh Hari,* I am drifting away in the ocean of nescience. Pray, carry me in the bark of wisdom to the shore of True Being'. The Lord assured him, 'Stay here and you shall transcend nescience through wisdom and attain the ultimate goal'.

Again the Lord returned to his monastery with all the retinue and there he expounded the path of Karma Yoga to his devotees.

*Lit, 'the destroyer of Sin and Ignorance' one of the divine names of Lord Vishnu of the Hindu Trinity.

15. Chapter 14

Namadharaka asked Siddha, "Holy one, after having expounded the supreme doctrine of Gnana Yoga which is the highest means to attain liberation, why did Sree Guru again proceed to explain the intricacies of Karma Yoga at length? This has raised a doubt in my mind: Karma or action is born of nescience. How then can it be employed to annihilate the nescience? Pray, clear my doubt".

Siddha replied: 'Namadharaka, just as the crab, at its birth, is said to break open the womb which has conceived it, so too, karma which is born of ignorance can be employed as the means to

destroy its own source. Again, a brass vessel which is used for cooking, gathers soot. Later, when it is rubbed with dust gathered from elsewhere and the vessel is dipped in running water, the soot is cleared off; its original metallic sheen is revealed. So too, the performance of karma without attachment for its fruits, and later, by renouncing action itself and passively accepting the experiences of life, a man becomes the repository of such virtues like perfect control over his senses, mind and body. Only such a one can attain perfection in the final, true, renunciation of karma. In fact, no one can at any time remain free from action. For life itself, like all other phenomena, is the dynamic function of the three modes of gunas of nature. The ignorant man will get attached to it through desire for its fruit, while the enlightened one remains detached to its results, employing it just as a means of perfecting his faculties. The perfect gnani continues to perform karma yoga in order to teach the world by setting up an example. 'I am aware that people follow the path I tread and so I perform all actions meticulously' - so said the Guru once. Now listen to the miraculous acts of the Lord pertaining to karma yoga. By listening to them, the fetters of nescience will be broken and liberation accrues.

In those days, one of the neighbouring states was ruled by a muslim king who was cruel and who was particularly hostile to brahmins. He used to summon learned brahmins, force them to recite the vedas in his court, contrary to Hindu Law, on promise of gift of money. Tempted by the offer, some brahmins gathered about him and did as he wished. He used to listen to the merely literal exposition of the vedic mantras and then he used to vilify the sacred vedas and the pious brahmins who were esteemed for their proficiency in the vedas. He thought that the principles of righteous living contained in the vedas were false. Once, two despicable but learned brahmins who were puffed with the pride of their learning visited the king and said: "We are well-versed in vedas and sastras. We challenge you to present before us any pundit who is as learned as we, in your court, for a metaphysical debate.*" The king summoned all the learned brahmins of that place, but none of them dared to accept the challenge, being over-awed by their claims of scholarship. So, with the consent of the court and the court-scholars, the king honoured the visitors by parading them around the city on an elephant in a grand procession, and later bestowed on them valuable gifts. Such, indeed, is the fate of false vedic scholars who are entangled in the lure of pomp, wealth and luxuries and who are unconcerned with the moral fall implied in such a conduct.** At last, the visitors said: 'Oh king, without frequent learned debates, the fruit of our learning goes in vain. Please grant us the royal permission to challenge and defeat all the scholars of the land in public debates and secure written testimonies of the same'. The king acceded to that request in vicious glee. At once the visitors extracted the written testimonies of their victory from the royal priest and went away in search of further conquests and glory.

In the course of their travels round the country, the two scholars approached the learned sannyasi, Trivikrama Bharati, and said, 'If you are indeed a knower of the vedas face us in a public debate, or else give us in writing that we are the victors!' The sannyasi replied: 'Scholars like you are indeed worthy of worship. I am no such. Further, I am a sannyasi and so victory and defeat are the same to me. What if I win or loose in the debate? Then they produced the testimonials of the victories they had won earlier and demanded, 'Either you commence the debate, or issue a testimonial of our victory'.*** So Trivikrama wanted them to follow him to the presence of Sree Guru where it can be decided whether he would participate in the debate straight away, or issue a testimonial. As Trivikrama, in all his humility, proceeded on foot, the proud visitors proceeded in well decorated palanquins. Trivikrama entered the monastery of Sree Guru and addressed him: "Supreme Lord, just as the owl cannot witness the glory of the sun, these pundits who are blinded by nescience cannot know you for what you are. Pray, free me from the, vexation of these fellows who are incensed with pride and self-glorification".

Sree Guru summoned the scholars into his presence and said to them, 'What do you hope to achieve by such a demand, revered Sirs?' They said: 'We are scholars par excellence. We have

been travelling about this land to defeat all fellow scholars in public debate, with the royal permission. Your disciple has brought us to you. Do you know the vedas?'

Sree Guru said, 'My dear ones, you know how many were the demons (Raakshasas) that were undone by their own pride. Indeed, there is no one who knows the whole of the vedas which are without beginning or end. In ancient times, sage Bharadwaja did tapas in order to master the whole of the vedas and vowed himself to a life of celibacy. Pleased with his austerities, god Brahma granted him ever longer spans of life time, during which the sage mastered prodigious parts of the scripture. Yet, much more remained to be mastered, till at last Brahma showed him the glowing mountain of vedic knowledge that remained to be learned! Sage Bharadwaja wondered how long it would take to master it all and whether he could ever hope to do so in all eternity. Lord Brahma then gave him a few handfuls of that vedic lore. Till now, sage Bharadwaja has been learning it and has not yet finished it.

Later, sage Paila of yore studied the Rigveda; Vaisampaayana studied the Yajurveda; jaimini studied the Saamaveda; Sumanta studied the Atharvanaveda. Sage Vedavyasa was their guru. In the previous cycles of existence, those endowed with very long life studied all the existing portions of the veda. But in this dark age of Kali, people are dull-witted and are content with learning a few branches (Saakhas) of each of the vedas and yet they proudly claim to have mastered them in tota. Indeed, they are slaves to wealth, delicious food and women. Hence, they do not attain spiritual perfection despite all their life of learning.

Once sage Vyaasa enumerated the branches (Saakhas) and 'limbs' of the vedas (Vedaangas). Ayurveda is the secondary branch of knowledge related to the Rigveda; it is bright as gold; it belongs to Atri goha and has the Gayatri metre (Chandas). It has Brahma as its presiding deity and is two forearms in length****. It has wide and long eyes and a vividly built neck. It has four branches in it, viz., Saakala, Bhaashkala, Saamkhyayani, Aswalaayani and Maanduukya Saakhas. It has eight other branches called Jata, Maala, Sikha, Lekha, Dhawaja, Danda, Radha and Ghana . It has six limbs of learning called Niruktha, Vyaakarana, Jyotisha, Chandas, Sikha and Suutra. Who can ever hope to master the whole of the Rigveda which is so vast?

Now about Yajurveda: It is bright like the sun and is five forearms high. It bears a skull. It is lean and tall. Dhanurveda is its secondary veda; it has the Trishtup metre (Chandas). It belongs to the Bharadwaja gotra. Its presiding deity is Lord Vishnu. It has eighty six branches. At present, only eighteen of them are extant. It has six limbs. Who can thoroughly master this veda which is so extensive?

Saamaveda is self-restrained (Daanta), pure and is decked with flower-garlands. It wears skin as raiment and bears a staff. It is six fore-arms in height. Gaandharva or the knowledge of music is its secondary veda. Lord Rudra (or Shiva) is its presiding deity. Jagati is its metre. It belongs to Kaasyapa goha. It has seventeen branches and six limbs. Now, only nine of its branches are extant. Who can ever hope to master it all?

Atharavana Veda is mighty and turbulent in nature, white in complexion and is of the form of desire. It is auspicious and is well-contented with its own spouse. Yantraveda or knowledge of mechanics is its secondary veda. Anushtup is its metre. Lord Indra is its presiding deity. It has nine branches and five Kalpaas. Who has ever known it through?

In this Indian subcontinent, during this dark age of Kali, brahmins are reciting the vedas in the company of the unworthy. That is why they lack sattwaguna (pure longing for true Being). The vedic mantras are kept safe from popular idle curiosity by such ritual initiations as Utsarjana and Upaakarma. When truly learned, they are capable of bestowing everything worthy on its knower, like

the mythical wish-granting cow(Kaamadhenu). The whole of creation is under the control of the deities; the deities are under the power of mantras; the mantras are in the possession of pious brahmins. Such brahmins are worthy to be worshipped even by Lord Vishnu. During the Krita (fourth) age (ie., the age of wisdom and truth), brahmins refused to accept any prize or possession, even if someone offered them kingdoms and all. Hence, they were spiritually very powerful. Even deities were under their command. Still, they were not proud of it at all. On the other hand, they were rich in humility. Such proud ones like you had only become brahmaraakshasas (wicked spirits endowed with magical powers) in the past.

The impatient scholars interrupted Sree Guru; saying, 'Holy sir, why tell us all this? Either face our challenge if you dare, or else tender your testimony of our victory in learning.' Then Sree Guru beckoned to a low-born man who was passing that way, drew eight lines on his body with sacred ash and said, 'Tell me who you were!'. The man at once attained knowledge of his existence seven lives earlier and said: 'Lord, in the first of these lives, I was a hillman named Maatanga. In the second, I was a hunter named Raavana. In the third, I was named Gaangeya. In the fourth, I was a farmer. In the fifth, I was a caste-merchant named Somadatta. In the sixth life, I was a Kshatriya (ie., of the warrior caste) named Govardhana Varma. In the seventh, I was a brahmin and I had thoroughly learned the vedas and sastras (or sacred laws)'. Then Sree Guru sprinkled sacred ash on his body and said, 'If you indeed were a vedic scholar, may you vanquish these brahmins in a scholarly debate!'

The visitors were amazed at and scared by this miracle and the power of the Master that could work it in a wink. They submitted to Sree Guru, sought his refuge and craved to be spiritually uplifted. Now it was Sree Guru's turn to admonish them. He said: 'You have recited the vedas in the presence of a hostile and an alien (ie., the muslim king). You have scorned sannyasins and pious brahmins. In consequence of such sins, you will become brahma raakshasas. If you repent. for your sins, live on in peace for twelve years, reciting the vedas with devotion, then you shall be liberated.' The brahmins then proceeded to the holy Sangama, took a holy dip, left off their mortal bodies, took birth as demons and stayed there. At the end of twelve years, once they saw a pious brahmin who forgot one of the mantras he was obliged to chant on the occasion. They taught him the same and thereby they were liberated.

In this manner, those who are infatuated with pride and thereby swerve from the path of righteousness and those who scorn pious brahmins and sannyasins will be born as Brahmaraakshasas in wild forests. Only through true repentance for their misdeeds will they become pure again."

*In olden times, great Masters of wisdom used to debate in the royal court and whoever could establish his as the proper teaching for the moral betterment of the people was gladly accepted by the vanquished scholars, the king and the people. Religious preaching by fanatical individuals, involving the lure of wretched money and blind hatred of other religions was never known.

** According to tradition, a true knower of vedas is expected to be indifferent to pomp, pleasure and luxury, and to public honour. Humility, austerity and indifference to claims of vedic scholarship are the virtues expected of them. It is considered shameful for such to stoop to royal recognition and wealth.

***As a true renunciate, he was not expected to participate in claims to glory or recognition and not even the identity of a vanquished claimant for the same. On the other hand, when the holy religious tradition to which he dedicated his very life is threatened by such base attitudes, he cannot keep himself a passive spectator.

****Aratni was an ancient unit of length or height and is equivalent to the length of the forearm from the elbow to the base of the little finger.

16. Chapter 15

Namadharaka who listened to the account of Sree Guru's life and deeds with faith and devotions wished to know of one point in greater detail. He said to Siddha, "Holy Lord, you have said that through the grace of Sree Guru, a fallen brahmin became a wise one. Pray, tell me what has happened to him afterwards."

Siddha said, "My son, the brahmin was spiritually awakened by the grace of the Guru and prayed to him, 'Please tell me why I am fallen from my former state.'" Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi replied:

"Virtuous deeds elevate us to the higher realms of existence, while sinful ones drag us down to lower states of being. Thus the ego will ever be shuffling between the higher and lower realms of existence like a rotating automaton. Those who desert their gurus, mothers, wives, children, their ordained path of righteous living and their deities of worship will suffer the respective punishments in their subtler bodies soon after their death. Then, in order to work out those consequences of their sins which can be experienced only by a gross physical body, they will be born in this earthly realm with gross bodies in the wombs of the low born ones. So too, the one with a violent nature, the false one, and one who rails at sadhus, pious brahmins, gods, holy places of pilgrimage, vedas and sacred texts, the one who spoils public water tanks, wells, gardens and public roads and religious sacrifices, the one who eats on such holy days as ekadasi on which religious vows are to be observed, one who indulges in sexual union on festive days, on the holy days, on days of ceremonial offerings to the manes and in water; the one who betrays the trust reposed in him; one who takes back what he had given away to someone as a gift; one who fails to keep his word; one who deliberately shoulders the tasks which legitimately belong to others; one who always proclaims purposefully the meritorious deeds he has performed and the wicked deeds of others; one who boasts of greatness which he lacks; one who heartily associates with the wicked, murderers and thieves; the murderer, one who practises such forms of black magic as killing others; one who undertakes to treat a patient without really having the necessary medical knowledge and thereby endangers the lives of others; one who has cast away his sacred duties and one who causes grief to others - all these will pay for their misdeeds in the subtler bodies after death, in the world of Death. Then, to suffer for their sins which can be atoned for only through gross physical bodies on earth, they will be reborn in the families of the lowest of the low".

On hearing these words, Namadharaka had a doubt. So he said, "Sir, when I hear you talk of the subtle body and the world of Death, I have a question to ask you. And only you are capable of answering it. I only hesitate for fear of interrupting the continuity of your story".

Siddha said, "Namadharaka, it is better for you to present your question as soon as it arose. For, if you do not get it cleared, your mind will be diverted from my account of Sree Guru in ruminating over it. In this manner, it is better for you to put forth the question and be done with it rather than shutting it up in the heart for fear of interrupting my account".

Overwhelmed by the loving patience of Siddha, Namadharaka bowed to him and said: "It is said that the soul reaps the consequences of its actions in the next birth. For instance, this life, I perform some actions which are meritorious and some which are otherwise. I will have to reap the consequences of both in my next life. But, how come, they say that the soul, after leaving this body,

will suffer the consequences of its actions in the subtler realms like heaven and hell. How is it that the soul has to experience the consequences of its actions twice - once in the subtler realms beyond death, and again in the next birth? Is it just or proper that it should be so? It looks as though one has to experience the effects of a single action twice! How is it?"

Siddha replied, "Namadharaka, your doubt will not be resolved unless you listen very attentively to what I say. As you have said, it is not proper for the soul to reap the consequences twice for the same act. This physical form can stand and experience only. joys and sufferings of a particular kind. Hence, it is called 'the body which is destined to die, or fall' (patanaavadhi, maranaavadhi, sarira). This body, for instance, cannot withstand the suffering called death. It is fit only to experience pleasures and sufferings within that range. The soul experiences these pleasures and pains which can not be experienced through the physical body in the subtler realms of heaven and hell. The body which suffers the torments of hell is not the material body, but it is the subtle suukshma body. It is also called the yaatana sarira or 'the body that suffers'. Thus the soul experiences these punishments of its sins which are beyond the range of the abilities of the physical body to suffer, in hell. In order to experience these sufferings of a lower order than death, the soul again takes birth in this world with a material body. Thus the consequences of one's actions that the soul suffers in hell and heaven are distinct from the consequences of action experienced in the next birth on earth. There is no question of one paying for a single act twice, as you seem to suppose".

Thus, his doubt dispelled, Namadharaka asked Siddha, "Be pleased to tell me what kinds of sins lead to what kinds of rebirths".

Siddha explained: "Earlier, I have explained to you to some extent what sinful deeds in this birth lead to one's rebirth in the families of sinners (chandaalas). Besides, one who is vengeful, one infatuated with a low-born woman,* one who has given up holy acts enjoined by sastras for daily and occasional observances, one who rides a bull, one who sells ginger, leaves, cows and vedas, one who partakes of a cow's milk without first offering it to the Supreme Lord of the Creation, one who eats prohibited food stuff, one who accepts the offerings of the wicked, one who robs others of their livelihood, one who sleeps during the twilight hours (morning and evening sandhya) at dawn and sunset, even if such a one were a brahmin in this life will be born in the next as a sinner (chandaala).

The punishment for sins which have to be endured through the subtle body in the realm of death (yamaloka) are eight crores and forty lakhs in number. Of these, twenty one are the most prominent ones. Lord Yama ordains the appropriate punishments to sinners.

The sinner leaves his gross physical form on earth. Immediately after that, the attendants of Death (Yama) tie up his vital forces and put them in the subtle body (Yaatanasarira) and lead him along a path in which every step forward is fraught with terrors. Then the soul will experience unbearable thirst and hunger and finds it extremely difficult to walk along. But the attendants of Death will frighten him till he faints with pain and fright. They restore him to his senses and drag him along the river of pus and blood called vaitarini so that he sinks and floats in it by turns. Thus they take him to the presence of the Lord of Death (Yama). Thereafter, undergoing all kinds of suffering in his subtle body, he again takes birth on earth to experience the punishments for his sins which can only be experienced by him through it. If, somehow, he does not take birth, owing to the force of the accumulated store of psychic associations (vaasanas), he wanders about as a spirit, ghost or ghoul and suffers the attendant sufferings.

Now listen further: One who betrays his teachers or guru and who puts pious brahmins to shame becomes a brahma raakshasa. One who serves mean fellows will be born as an ass. One, who eats alone, leaving his unexpected guest (athithi) hungry will take birth as a hen. He who steals

other's money will be born as a camel. He who pilfers fruits, leaves and vegetables will take birth as a monkey. One who steals honey will become a bird in his next life. Stealing of flesh makes one a raven. One who steals cooked rice will be born as a rat; and the one who steals water will take birth as a chaatka** bird. One who commits theft of food grains will become a locust. By stealing gold, one takes birth as a worm, insect and a bird. By stealing grass, one will be born among the grass-eating cattle. One who eats food without consecrating it with the appropriate mantra will be a crow in his next life. One who betrays a friend will be a kite. The boastful one will take birth as a crane.

He who hurts the feelings of others will suffer from diseases of the heart in his next life. He who deserts his guru and one who steals gold will suffer from leprosy. He who tortures pious brahmins will be overtaken by consumption in his future life. He who steals others' books will be born blind. He who betrays trust through ingratitude will suffer from nausea and vomitings. He who misappropriates public money will suffer chronic disease of the glands of his neck (ganda roga). He who usurps others of their wealth will have no children in his next life. One who steals garments will be a leper. He who utters falsehood or scandalizes others or steals food - these three types of sinners will suffer from diseases of the spleen. Theft of oil makes one suffer from stinking diseases of the mouth. Theft of bronze and iron will make one suffer from white leprosy. He who swallows the funds of temples and shrines will be born anaemic.

Indeed, Oh, Namadharaka, all the diseases are consequences of past sins. He who embraces a woman who does not legitimately belong to him will be born a hundred times, as a dog. He who wilfully steals the sight of the private parts of a woman will be born blind. He who entices the wives of his relatives will become an ass and a snake. He who embraces others women with bad intent will suffer heart pain in his next life. He who entices and cohabits with the wife of his uncle or a friend will be born as a dog. Women too, when they commit such sins as adultery will suffer like punishments in the future births".

As Sree Guru went on, Trivikrama asked him, "Holy Sir, if once anyone, knowingly or unknowingly, commits any of these sins, is there no means at all of salvation from the same? Is one condemned to go through this miserable round of births?"

Sree Guru smiled and replied. 'My son, Trivikrama, the sins that accrue from one's previous misdeeds can be washed off through hearty repentance, through penitentiary religious acts and by confessing, one's sins in the public assembly and by gladly receiving the punishment thereof as per the judgement of the elders. If one is not really capable of observing the penitentiary vows, he can save himself by giving away a cow or its price as gift to a pious brahmin. Part of the sins can also be undone by taking the 'ten-baths' (dasa-snaana), by performing 200 Praanaayaamas and by gifting away gold. But by devoutly serving the Sadguru, even very great sins will vanish. Indeed, there is no better means than this.

Now I shall explain to you a few of the penitentiary vows (vrata) enjoined in the sastras.

Praajaapatya Krichhra Vrata: For three days, one takes food only in the day and fasts at night. During the next three days, he fasts during day and eats only at night. For three days thereafter, he accepts whatever food comes to him unasked, as the Lord's gift (prasaad). Then for three days hence, he has to fast completely.

One who is incapable of observing such a vow can, in its stead, do japa of the Gayatri mantra 10,000 times; then he should offer ghee as oblation to sacred fire with the chanting of Gayatri mantra 1000 times. Then he has to feed 12 pious brahmins and offer them cows and money (dakshina) as gifts. Those who cannot afford to gift away cows can offer money instead, to the best of their ability along with a small quantity of gold.

Chaandraayana Vrata: In the brighter half of the lunar month, one should take only one morsel (ie., mouthful) of food on the first day; two on the second day and so on. Thus he should go on increasing the number of morsels of food. From the next day of the darker phase of the moon, he should go on reducing the number of morsels again by one per day, so that he takes 14 morsels on the 14th day (ie., the day before the newmoon day). As the food intake is increased and reduced as per the phases of the moon, it is called the Chaandraayana Vrata. Through its performance, one can undo his earlier sins to some extent.

The right manner of taking food consists in partaking of twelve morsels in the day and fifteen at night. This is sufficient to maintain the body in perfect health. By eating only a little food for one month, or subsisting on only milk will also purify a man from his sins to some extent. When leaves of bel (bilwa) tree, peepal twigs, lotuses and darbha grass are put in water and the water is used for bathing, it removes some of the sins. Pilgrimages also purify a man, though partially. Holy dip in the Ganga or in the sea at Rameshwar, the performance of japa and other spiritual practices in holy places will cleanse one of even the sin of killing a pious brahmin.

The following sins can be annihilated through the corresponding japa of the Gayatri mantra.

No. of japa	Sins destroyed
100,000	Drinking
100,00,000	Killing a Brahmin
800,000	Adultery with the Guru's wife
700,000	Stealing gold

Sastras enjoin the chanting of the following portions of the Vedas for one month for the annihilation of all sins: the 610 Pavamaani suukthas, the two suukthas of Indra and Mitra, the Sunassepa suukthas commencing with "Kasyanunam", Santhi suukthas like "Samna Indra", the suukthas of "Thrisuparna", paurusham Naachiketam and Aghamarshanam. One who has committed all the major sins (Mahaapaapas) has to do the same, but for six months.

The pacification of all sins to some extent can be achieved by sipping water in which darbha grass is kept and by partaking the pancha gavya (or the five products of the cow, viz., its urine, dung, milk, curd and ghee ie., classified butter.) If both the husband and wife have committed sins, then both of them have to observe the penitentiary vows. Even if one has not personally committed sins, but associated himself with sinners, he shares them. Such a one has to observe the penitentiary vows.

Namadharaka, mark this one truth carefully: Suppose a pot is full of toddy. And it is placed in the river Ganga. However long it is kept like that, the liquor does not escape from the pot, nor does a drop of the holy Ganga water enter the pot! So too, if one is not devoted to Lord Vishnu (the all-pervading Divine), his sins are not washed away by any number of penitentiary vows he may observe. One has to observe the vows with faith in, and devotion to, the Lord. In the absence of faith and devotion, it is useless to observe these vows:" So said Sree Guru to the fallen brahmin and added, "You have deserted your parents in your previous birth. So you are now born as a Chandaala in this life. If you take bath every day at the Sangama, you will be purified."

The chandaala said, "Lord, I am already purified by the Ganga-like current of your grace. Henceforth, may I be made a member of the brahmin community" Sree Guru replied: "My son, if the impurity of your physical constitution is totally dispelled, that will certainly be possible. I shall recount the story of sage Viswamitra which pertains to this truth: In ancient days, Viswamitra who was a Kshatriya by caste, wished to become Brahmarshi and did intense Tapas. Then gods granted him their vision and directed him to serve sage Vasishtha in order to realize his ambition. Accordingly, he approached the sage and prayed that he be accepted as a Brahmarshi. But the latter did not agree to do so for the rajasic nature still existed in him. Viswamitra grew angry with him and killed all the hundred sons of Vasishtha with the spiritual power acquired by tapas***. Indeed, he wished to kill the sage too, but was afraid of his brahmic power ie., totally sattvic nature of his tapasic power. Subsequently he prayed to the sage in repentance, and as per his order, did tapas (austerity) for thousands of divine years. Again, owing to his infatuation with the divine damsel Menaka, all his tapas came to naught. Again he did Tapas with redoubled resolution and finally, he became a Brahmarshi. You too shall be born a brahmin in your next life (ie., when the tamasic taint in your nature shall have been washed away in the present life through devotion to Sree'Guru)."

The man prostrated to the feet of Sree Guru and said, "Once a piece of iron is alchemised into gold, it will be henceforth regarded as gold only and not as iron. So too, by the power of your grace I have become a brahmin. So please rehabilitate me in that caste." Sree Guru+ then ordered one of his disciples to bathe the man in the river. When he was so bathed, the man totally forgot all that had happened a little earlier and went away as the fallen man he already was. Then Trivikrama Bharati asked Sree Guru, "Lord! Why did the man go away as a fallen one in spite of the fact that he was graced by you and sanctified by the bath in the holy river?" The Master replied, "The earlier revelation he had was due to the spiritual power of the holy ash that was applied to his body. As soon as he bathed in the river, the ash was washed away and with it, his knowledge of his previous lives too. So he went away as he was earlier". Then Trivikrama requested the Guru to expound the virtues of holy ash in greater detail. The latter recounted the following story from the Puranas.

"Once upon a time, sage Vaamadeva was wandering about in his supreme state of gnana, immersed as he was in Brahmananda, quite detached from all touch of worldliness. When he was passing through a dense forest, a Brahmaraakshasa attacked him with the intent of devouring him. The moment the latter touched the sage's body he was uplifted from the miserable state of existence and at once the memory of his previous existences dawned in him. So he bowed to the sage and said:

"Swami, I was a king in one of my previous lives. Then I was blinded by pride of wealth and lust. I enjoyed sex pleasures with all kinds of women - be they poor or rich and of every caste or social status. The people of my land feared that their women were not safe in my realm and so migrated to other parts of the land along with their families. I died after some time and suffered untold torments in hell along with the spirits of my ancestors. When the sufferings I was due to experience with my subtle body were through, I again took twenty four births on earth in different forms. The sequence of my births was: a tiger, python, wolf, pig, dog, fox, stag, wild fowl, monkey, mangoose, crow, bear, cock, cat, donkey, frog, tortoise, fish, bandikoot, owl and elephant. In my twenty fifth birth which is the present, I have become a Brahmaraakshasa. Having reaped the full consequences of my evil acts, I have contacted you now and thereby gained this noble transformation. The ancient saying 'The religious merit of seeing sages is great; that their touch is destructive of sin' is now confirmed in my case. Now, noble Sir, please tell me, what is the cause of present transformation and uplift ?"

The sage replied, 'My son, owing to contact with the sacred ash on my body, you have gained the knowledge of your previous existences. This ash was bestowed on me by Lord Shiva Himself. The power of the holy ash is indeed unimaginable. Once upon a time, a brahmin who was being dragged by the attendant angels of Death to the terrible hells was saved by the touch of the holy

ash. At once he was taken by the attendant deities of Lord Shiva to the blessed Shivaloka and he attained one-ness with the Lord."

On hearing of it, the erstwhile Brahmaraakshasa prayed to the sage Vaamadeva: 'Is this holy ash so hallowed? Indeed, I long to besmear myself with it at all times. Please enlighten me regarding its preparation and the prescribed method of applying it to my body. When I was a king, I arranged means of living to several pious brahmins. I got wells sunk wherever there was water scarcity. Perhaps, such noble deeds have secured for me this meeting with you, once the consequences of my previous misdeeds were exhausted'.

Sage Vaamadeva went on: 'My son, in ancient times, sage Sanathkumara went to the Supreme Lord and prayed to Him, "Oh three-eyed and the five-headed one, thou shinest with the glory of the weapons in your ten hands, which ever chastise the wicked; thou the wearer of the serpent as your sacred thread, thou dressed in a tiger's skin! The crescent moon shines on thy brow. Thou with your head covered by matted locks which are sanctified by holy Ganga, thou the Supreme Lord, the One ever-united with the Mother of Creation, thou the in-dweller of your devotees' hearts, I prostrate to your feet again and again. Thou Ocean of Mercy, the Cause of the whole creation! The various kinds of yoga practices and religious sacrifices enumerated in the sastras of yore for the liberation of the souls bound in ignorance are very difficult to practise. So, Oh Lord, teach us an easier means of attaining that goal and crossing this ocean of misery of phenomenal existence".

Lord Shiva was well pleased with his adoration and said, "my son Sanathkumaara, the easiest means of attaining liberation is the proper use of holy ash. All of one's sins are destroyed merely by the application of the ash to one's body in the prescribed manner which is as follows: The holy ashes of a religious fire-sacrifice or ashes made from cowdung-cakes should be fetched. It should be consecrated by chanting such mantras as the one commencing 'Bhasmaagnim'. Then it should be applied to the forehead and other parts of our body by holding it with the thumb and the index fingers, and chanting the mantra commencing Tryayusham'. Thus three beautiful lines (horizontal) will be drawn on the forehead. These are called the Bhasma Tripundras. They signify the three sounds (A,U,M), the 'Trinity of gods', the three gunas, the three souls (Jivaatma, Pratyagatma and Paramaatma), the three powers, the three chandases (metres), the three Vedas^{***}, the three realms or states (lokaas) of existence, the Trishavanas (ritual baths at dawn, noon and sunset). This holy ash burns up one's sins. All can wear it in this manner (ie., irrespective of caste distinctions). Even if one does not know the relevant mantras and is an ignorant one, if he wears it with faith and reverence, it will be as efficacious. There is no other thing which will help one to attain liberation. One who has reviled at cows or the ladies of another's family, or one who has betrayed them, one who spoils full-grown crops, one who purposely hurts the minds of others, one who sets houses on fire, one who sells such holy things as betel leaves and the vedas, one who is given to uttering falsehood, one who accepts base things from persons of a base temperament, one who commits adultery with widows and Shudra women-all those who commit such other sins as these, either knowingly or unknowingly, if they regularly apply holy ash with faith and reverence, shall be liberated. The darbha (or Kusa) grass which is capable of securing all the (four) objects of man's efforts, the holy ash and rudrakshas - by wearing these, one becomes worthy of honours even in the divine realms of existence (heaven). It needs no mention that the holy ash which can annihilate the sins of thousands of past lives can eradicate all diseases. By wearing the holy ash, one can secure all the higher states of existence (lokas) and gradually attain to Kailasa (the highest loka, the abode of Lord Shiva). This is the easiest means which you have wished to know". Thus has the Supreme Lord expounded to sage Sanathkumaara.' So saying, sage Vaamadeva offered a little of the holy ash to the erstwhile Brahmaraakshasa and told him to apply it to his body. The moment he did so, he left off his body of a rakshasa and was liberated. Anon came a heavenly aerial vehicle, took him in and left (for the heavenly realms). So, Trivikrama, apply the sacred ash to your body with full awareness of all I have told you".

Trivikrama agreed to do so, prostrated to Sree Guru and went away.

* 'low - born' in consequence of such wicked deeds as are mentioned above; 'low-born' because such a soul is born in situations or social classes in which life is free from moral restraints.

** Chataka : A mythical bird that is said to subsist on droplets of rain water, even before the latter falls on the ground.

*** This was the most concrete demonstration of the truth of what sage Vasishtha said.

*+ Sree Guru, by his uncanny knowledge has already detected the traces of rajasic and tamasic tendencies in the man that prompt him to insist on such recognition even without the necessary inner transformation.

+++ According to one ancient tradition, only Rig, Yajus, Saama vedas are -the true vedas and Atharva veda is not considered as a separate Veda in itself.

17. Chapter 16

Namadharaka said, "Sir, the more I listen to your account of Sree Guru's divine acts, the more I long to hear further". The zeal of Siddha was whetted by the former's noble yearning and he went on: "Son, at Mahurapura, there lived a wealthy brahmin named Gopinath. However much he could live in luxury and comfort, he was depressed as though he had no cause for happiness; for he was not blessed with children at all. In fact, several children were born to him, but some of them died soon after birth, while rest expired after living for a few days. With a keen desire for offspring, they took to the worship of Lord Dattatreya. After some time, he was blessed with a son who survived. In gratitude to the Lord, they named him Datta. Under the lavish affection of the parents, the child grew up to be a handsome boy, endowed with all noble qualities. He was distinguished for his cultured mind and his peaceful demeanour. In the joy of bringing up the sweet boy, the parents forgot all the former griefs. The boy soon grew up, like the moon in the brighter half of the month.

When Datta attained the age of eight, his parents performed his sacred-thread ceremony at an auspicious hour and put him on the course of vedic studies. After he attained

the age of 16, he was married to a girl named Savitri who was well-matched to him in beauty and noble qualities. Like the mythical divine pair Rati and Manmatha* they were bound to

each other with the strongest ties of mutual love and devotion. They were a passionate pair like the pair of mythical Chakravaaka birds, and were unable to bear the briefest separation from each other. They trod the path of righteousness, being prompted by the utmost care for each other's welfare. Such was her zeal in the service of her beloved that any number of hours of the hardest work did not tire Savitri in the least. She could not bear to be separated from him even for a short while. In his absence, such comforts, luxuries and things of beauty like the flowers, the silvery light of the full moon, ornaments and even delicious food, proved unbearable to her as she could not share them with him. Flower garlands were like thorns to her and delicious food was like poison.

As though the wicked goddess Fortune could not bear the sight of their perfect love and harmony for so long, young Datta was afflicted with tuberculosis. His parents were very anxious about his deteriorating health and tried all kinds of medical treatment they could provide. But, to their utter disappointment, nothing seemed to help. Finally, all medical men declared that his ailment was

incurable. As days and months passed, young Datta was getting pale and emaciated, even like the moon waning towards the approach of the new-moon day. All the time, he was very much troubled by incessant shortness of breath, cough and phlegm. In addition to the disease, the young man was very much worried (about the happiness and health of his young wife and her bleak future if he were to die). This worry further beclouded his vitality. Soon he was reduced to a bundle of bones with hardly any flesh. Young Savitri too was very much worried about his condition and lost all her appetite and sleep. She could not bear to eat or sleep more than her beloved did and soon she too was reduced physically and mentally into a mere shadow of her husband. The fetid smell that emanated from poor Datta was unbearable even for the physicians who treated him. No one except his wife could bear to be by his bedside, or to attend upon him in any other manner. All the time, she was immersed heart and soul in keeping him as clean and comfortable as possible, by applying the finest scents to his foul-smelling body, massaging his aching limbs and administering medicine at the appointed hours. Besides, she arranged for special prayers and worship for his recovery, with the help of learned priests. She even gave away valuable gifts to the pious and the poor for the love of God. But inspite of all this, the terrible disease did not abate even by a hair's breadth. Only the zeal of Savitri in the observance of the vow of Pativrata was growing more and more intense, as days passed. Everyone who came to see and console the unfortunate couple and the aged parents of Datta, said that jealous Fortune was working havoc with their life of happiness and love. Unable to bear the sight of the happy countenance of young Savitri in the prime of her youth, wicked Fortune, they said, has chosen to eclipse her radiant moon-like face.

Gopinath and his wife, in the forenoon of their life, could not bear the sight of their sinking son and, what was worse, the plight of their young daughter-in-law. Having despaired of his recovery and even of his survival, they felt it cruel to permit the young house wife to subject herself to such a terrible ordeal as serving such a sick husband. They warned her to keep away from him and to protect herself from the pestilent and pernicious infection, but she would not relent. Her young husband's health being so helplessly consumed by the raging disease, she felt she had nothing else to safeguard and protect, not even her health, beauty or life.

Atlast, one day, young Datta said to his parents, choking with sorrow: "This fell disease that consumes me must be the result of my wicked deeds in a former life. As such, I shall bear it stoically with fortitude and patience, and accept the proper culmination. Henceforth, you need not worry on my account in the least:". Turning to his young wife, he said, "In a previous life, I must have been your sworn enemy, wreaking my vengeance in this fashion. It is time you accept the truth and forsake me. Go home to your own parents and try to live as happily as you can and forget all about me." The tender heart of the young housewife broke out in unrestrained sorrow and she said, amidst tears, in a choking voice: "You are the Lord of my life, master of my destiny and the only joy of my life. I have none beside you to live for. For a true wife, her husband is everything, but not her parents. I can no longer live as a separate individual; the moment I leave your company, the spark of life will no longer hold my soul and body together. My deserting you will thus amount to my committing suicide, which is said to be the most unpardonable of sins and from which I shall never be saved.

There still haunts in the innermost recesses of my being, the hope that divine mercy is all-powerful and can work the seemingly impossible miracle of saving your life for my sake. I firmly believe that the more I heartily exert myself in your service, and consume the brightness of my countenance in loving watchfulness in your attendance, the brighter the vital spark in you will grow. I believe that if God blesses a soul which is drowning in the ocean of misery, it shall, in a trice, be transported to the very pinnacle of joy and health. Such a Merciful Lord is indeed our only refuge and he is all-powerful."

With a stern resolve, she then humbly bowed and touched the feet of Datta's parents in reverence and said: "I learn that at Gandharvapura lives a saint, a very holy and powerful sannyasi named Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi. Something tells me from within that with his blessing and grace, my

beloved will once again be restored to his former health and strength. If you accord your kind permission, I shall take my husband there. Gopinath and his wife too discovered a new strength and hope in her words and said: 'If you have such unflinching faith, do take him there at the earliest possible. May the Lord bless you'. The young couple once more bowed to them, received their blessing and at once started on their final enterprise. The noble lady Savitri took all possible care to conduct her husband comfortably to Gandharvapura. She arranged a soft-cushioned palanquin for him and instructed the bearers to walk slowly and steadily so as not to jolt her ailing lord. She lovingly held him against soft pillows and walked beside the palanquin. After trekking like this for several days, across hills and forests, the party reached the neighbourhood of their holy destination. But to her utter disappointment, she found that her husband was dead! Her only hope being thus thwarted and the only basis of her existence knocked out, she found nothing to live for. With the flames of suppressed grief raging in her heart like a volcano, she took the final resolve to end her own life too. The natives of that place who were helpless witnesses of her dire misfortune, had some how managed to dissuade her from such a precipitate act of despair. She was shocked to the very core of her being and did not know what else she should do next. Such a forlorn existence seemed utterly meaningless and unbearable for her. Soon the imprisoned grief burst out thus in loud wailing:

'My dear, why have you deserted me like this? Whither have you left? If you do not return to this body and give us cheer and comfort, neither your father, mother nor I, your dear wife, can survive and you will incur the sin of killing us all. Is it not said in the sastras that if you have no sons, your sacred debt to your ancestors would go undischarged? Besides, you have not even instructed me as to where I should spend the remaining days of my widowed life. What is more, how can I see your parents with my widowed countenance? Now that I am a widow, people henceforth consider the very sight of my face an ill omen. Alas! My plight is like that of a creature which has come to a river to slake its thirst but which is, instead, devoured by a cruel crocodile on its very banks! Or like a weary traveller who was crushed to death by the sudden fall of a tree underneath which he sought to repose; or like a cow that, having come to graze, was killed by a tiger; or like a devotee who was crushed to death by the fall of the shrine to which he came to seek divine protection. I have come for the darshan of Sree Guru and to seek his protection for my ailing husband, but I lost my husband even as I approached the place!

O! Sree Guru, fearing that you will be constrained to grant health for my ailing husband, have you chosen to rob him of his life's spark even sooner? If you mean that it is not in your power to ward off my husband's fell disease, to whom else shall we turn for protection? Have you achieved any greatness or glory by such a deed as this? Now I shall carry the news of this great achievement of yours to the other worlds. O Mother, goddess Gouri, have you chosen to forget all the vows which I assiduously observed all through my life in your honour? What has happened to your power and mercy that can annihilate the misfortune of widowhood? Alas, all the suspicious signs of a housewife have been heartlessly robbed from me by death. As the ship of my life danced blissfully on the bosom of the ocean of life, the terrible whale called death has gulped the very bark of my holiness as a housewife'. Wailing thus, she again and again recalled every word and gesture of her late dear husband and sank ever deeper in grief and fell on his cold, dead body in boundless fondness.

As Savitri thus was lost in the depths of grief, an ascetic wearing rudrakshas and vibhuti, and holding a trident in his hand, with long matted hair, approached her from among the crowd and addressed her thus: 'My daughter, why do you wail so sorely? Quiet yourself! Don't you know that the dead will never return despite all our grief and wailing? After, all, death is natural to all creatures and our worldly relations are only tentative and transcient: it is like two birds coming together on a tree for a night's rest and the next morning, each of them goes its own way. Again, it is like two logs of wood drifting together down a stream; the next moment, a stray wave parts them again. So too, souls come together in this life just by an accidental coincidence of circumstances. Such indeed is the relationship of a wife and her husband too. Else, if there be any abiding relationship between the two, you should be able to say whose wife you were in your previous life. If you reflect deeply, you

will realise that no one in this world is essentially related to any other in any manner whatsoever. For, the spirit within us which is our essential Self, is all-pervading, beyond birth and death. When it is associated with the physical structure made of the five material elements, it loses sight of its true nature and wrongly identifies itself as an individual and claims someone as its husband and some other as its father and so on. When, you consider deeply, you will at once realise that all such feelings and emotions, are merely our mental creations, projected by our basic ignorance.

In itself, the individual soul is without form. When it is associated with the three modes of nature, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, the soul is individualised. It falsely identifies itself with the material structure which it enlivens, and thus gets caught in the web of joys and sorrows. But when you consider these with discrimination, it will be clear to you that the birth of the body is not the birth of the soul, nor does the death of the body constitute the death of the soul. When an individual is endowed with a perfected intellect, he will be able to penetrate beneath the web of illusion and thereby break it asunder. Such a one will no longer be subject to any kind of sorrow. One may mistake a flower-garland for a snake in semi-darkness but once a light is fetched to examine it, that illusion ceases and the true nature of the garland is revealed. Similarly, till one attains true wisdom, the phenomena of birth and death seem real and, in its turn, the soul seems to be subject to the pairs of life-experiences like joy and sorrow. Therefore, one must pull together one's own intellectual strength of steadfast understanding and thus cross the delusion of sorrow and suffering once and forever. Such a crisis in life as this is the most opportune occasion for it. If, by our inadvertance, we let slip the priceless opportunity, namely, this human birth, it is hardly possible to get such another again'.

Grief-stricken Savitri passively listened to his discourse and when he concluded, she put forth her own argument: 'I have set out on the long trek to this place, leaving all my kith and kin at home, in great hope of my husband's recovery. But even on the way, he breathed his last. Now I am utterly helpless and you are my only guide. Show me a way out of my dire calamity!'

The compassionate sadhu replied: "A devoted wife needs no complex form of sadhana or spiritual discipline to attain the true object of life i.e., wisdom of the Self. Loving service of and devotion to her husband is in itself the supreme path for her. Sage Brihaspathi has taught thus: "The whole of the phenomenal existence will come under the control of a Pativrata. The lady who ever attends on her husband like a shadow and serves him with all her love and looks upon such loving service of self-dedication as her spiritual vow; she who, in loving reverence, spontaneously partakes of the washings of her husband's feet as the holy water of Ganga and cannot relish any food other than her husband's left over as consecrated food; she who receives his orders as the holy writ, such a one never loses her composure whenever he gets angry, but on the other hand, calms him down with all the love she can command. Such a one is a Pativrata. There is nothing she cannot accomplish in this world. Such a one never fritters her precious time in light and frivolous courtesy-calls on her neighbours and acquaintances. She never communicates anything to her own kith and kin without the knowledge of her husband. Even if he happens to be weak, poor or even given to immoral ways, such a Pativrata never wavers in her faith that he is the embodiment of the divine, but serves him accordingly. The customary and auspicious accessories of a housewife like turmeric and kumkum are to her the most precious and dear ornaments. For they are said to be most conducive to her husband's well being. She knows no comfort of her own beside his happiness and comfort. On the other hand, a woman who opposes and contradicts her husband will be born in her next life as a bitch. A housewife who abuses him will be born as an owl. She who cares to appease her palate with delicious food of her own liking and is unmindful of her husband's tastes will be born as a pig. The wife who speaks angrily and harshly to her husband will be born dumb in her next birth. She who threatens and warns her husband will be reborn as a tigress. An adulterous and unfaithful wife will be reborn as a worm or insect.

My daughter, sastras lay down that the ideal duty of a housewife on the death of her husband is saagamana ie, putting an end to her own physical existence through self-immolation on

the funeral pyre of her husband. Or, as an alternative, she may live on, strictly observing the vows of widowhood: it consists in shaving off her hair, sleeping on bare earth, taking food only during the day and abstaining from the use of such luxuries as the betel-and-nut, and the use of materials enjoined by the sastras for a housewife. She must wear only a white garment at all times. During the holy months of Kaartik, Maagh and Visaakha, taking the special holy bath every day, and observing the vow of chaandraayana, she must spend the rest of her life in listening to devotional accounts of the divine acts of the Lord. She must scrupulously protect her chastity and also her natural charms from the notice of others. I have just recounted to you only the regulations that were laid down by sage Brihaspathi. You may choose sahasgamana if you like. For, thereby you will be able to save your husband from the kingdom of death (yamaloka) and elevate him along with you to heaven. Even the gods will honour and obey the wish of such a great pativrata".

Savitri listened attentively and said, 'Revered Sir, I am in the prime of my youth and hence it is safer for me to perform sahasgamana'. The sadhu was very much pleased and said: "Pious one, you have well said. As you have come a long way for the darshan of Sree Guru, first of all, pay your respects to him. Then take the holy dip in the river, put on a clean garment and then give away the materials that should be used by a housewife to pious couples as tokens of your heartfelt repentance for the sins of a former life which have brought you now into such a plight. Take these rudrakshas and wear them round your neck. Take this holy ash and apply it to your body. Then besprinkle your late husband's body with the holy washings of Sree Guru's feet. And then perform sahasgamana'. So saying, he gave her some rudrakshas and holy ash and then went away.

Then, accordingly, Savitri gave away the said gifts to pious brahmin couples and then said to her companions: "Go home! Henceforth, Parameswara (Lord Shiva) and his consort, goddess Parvathi, are my parents. I shall join them only, but don't divulge to the aged parents, of my sad calamity. Else, they would at once die of the grief. Tell them that both of us are faring well here"

After sending them away, she picked up the fire for her husband's funeral and her own sahasgamana and boldly walked at the head of the bearers of the dead body. With all her beauty of youth, and steadfast religious devotion to her late husband, which informed her moral courage and zeal to commit sahasgamana, she looked like Parvathi of yore, proceeding for her tapas to win the hand of Lord Shiva in eternal union of marriage. All the amazed spectators marvelled at her boldness and paativratya. They felt that she who had not fully enjoyed the bliss of wedded life and who is still in the bloom of her youth was surely blessed in that she is sure to uplift even her entire race in public esteem. They accordingly glorified her virtue. She arrived at the cremation ground, bowed before the sacred fire and duly worshipped the housewives who had assembled there. Then she reflected deeply on the teaching of the sadhu and wore the rudrakshas round her neck. She then besmeared her body with the holy ash given by the sadhu and took the blessing and permission of the vedic pundits. Chanting verses in praise of Sree Guru, she then proceeded to the Sangama. All along the way, she mentally addressed Sree Guru thus:

'Oh thou Supreme Spirit! You are the bestower of everything, the owner and Lord of Creation, the sole refuge of all pious souls, the ocean of mercy. You are manifest as the holy Trinity. Hitherto, countless mortals like me have been getting all their wishes fulfilled, just by an iota of thy grace. Now I too shall fulfil my object and take your fame even to the very heaven. Till now, many dead people were raised, restored to health by the power of thy presence. Many that were caught up in terrible crises could thus win freedom from fear. The poor and wretched were blessed with wealth and the ignorant ones gained knowledge. In such a holy place as this, today, I shall attain spiritual identity with you, along with my husband, through sahasgamana: Glorifying the Lord in this fashion, she quickly arrived at the sangama and bowed to the divine feet of Sree Guru.

Sree Guru greeted her with a smile and blessed her saying, 'May you be blessed with a long life of a housewife; may you give birth to eight children who would become as famous as the Ashta Vasus!' The assembly of devotees who waited on him were all amazed at the impossible blessing, and

compassionately informed him of the young lady's plight. Sree Guru said, in a stern voice: 'My word shall never go in vain! Fetch the dead body here!' In the meanwhile, some vedic pundits arrived and worshipped the Master, chanting the rudra mantras. Soon after, the dead body was fetched and kept on the ground in front of him. Sree Guru cast a searching glance at it, muttered the rudra mantras and sprinkled holy water on it. At once it was revived and young Datta sat up like one awakened from deep sleep! Young Savitri was beside herself with joy and wonder. Her eyes filled with tears of joy, she at once prostrated to Sree Guru, ran up to her dear husband and recounted to him all that had happened. Datta too was immensely happy and he, along with his wife, heartily glorified the divinity of Sree Guru. All the people who had gathered there loudly hailed the Master.

However, one among the crowd was jealous and cunning in his scepticism. He wryly remarked: 'Why glorify this sannyasi? God's decree that was subtly written on the brow of Datta is being realised at the proper time; he came back to life only as per that divine writ. How can this sannyasi be now credited with such a miracle?' Sree Guru turned to the man and said: 'In fact, the Creator had ordained only thirty years as the span of Datta's life in the present birth. He shall live a hundred years in his next birth. Now I have exchanged the one for the other, so that Datta can live for 100 years in this life and only for 30 years in the next one'. So saying, by his mere look, he granted the mystical knowledge of three-fold time to this sceptic and enabled him to see for himself, that original divine writ of the Creator. When the man was convinced, all the people around once again hailed Sree Guru. The latter turned to the happy young couple and blessed them saying, 'May you live long together with wealth and universal fame!' Pleased with the blessing, the young pair took their holy bath at the sangama and duly worshipped the Master. Just then, the sun set. The Master attended to his twilight prayers and returned to his muth, with the devotees."

* Manmatha is the god of love; famous for his surpassing beauty. His wife Rati was his match and their mutual love is a favourite Hindu myth.

18. Chapter 17

Namadharaka was enthralled by the account of the divine acts of Sree Guru and said, "Swami, when the young man Datta died on the way to Gandharvapura, and when his wife Savitri was lamenting, a sadhu came to her and expounded to her the most opportune and precious teaching. Who was he?"

Siddha replied: "Namadhaka, listen to what happened next and you will know it; after the young man Datta was brought back to life, the youthful pair stayed away at the holy sangama (as an act of their-grateful devotion to Sree Guru). The next morning, Savitri again took darshan of Sree Guru and asked him the very same question and the Great Master replied:

'My daughter, I myself came to you in the form of that sadhu and tested your mettle. You were blessed (in that you had my darshan, teaching and prasad; also because you were able to stand up to the highest ideals of womanhood). You did not seek to take advantage of the convenient portions of my teaching and timidly opt for a life of widowhood, out of fear of death. Your unswerving love and devotion to your husband have prompted you to choose only Sahagamana which is capable of securing the greatest good to his departed soul. Only because you have rigorously, but out of unbounded spontaneous love for your husband, pursued the vow of paativratya ever since you were married, you could so effortlessly and fearlessly court your death by self-immolation on his funeral pyre. Out of appreciation of your ideal conduct, I chose to alter the very writ of Brahma the Creator. You are indeed blessed:

Savitri then said: 'Holy Sir, in the form of that sadhu, you have given me some rudrakshas. May you be pleased to expound to me the efficacy of the same'. Sree Guru replied: 'My daughter, your

dear husband was brought back to life by the' divine power of those rudrakshas. Their power is in fact limitless. That is why, they have come to be the ornaments of Lord Shiva, himself. They can bestow even liberation from birth and death, for those who are ever mindful of their power of holiness. Wearing them, one wins the religious merit of having bathed in the holy river Ganga. They contain very valuable medicinal substances. Just as Lord Shiva wears the sacred ash on his body and bears the holy Ganga on his head, he wears thousands of rudrakshas on his person. If anyone wears them on his body with faith and reverence for them, or performs japa with a rosary of rudrakshas, or even simply wears them on his body, his sins are annihilated and purity accrues to him. One who wears them with full faith is unconquerable even to the deities. He who cannot utilize such an easy but effective means of spiritual unfoldment is indeed a beast. The proper manner of wearing them is 32 rudrakshas around the neck, 40 around the tuft of hair (Sikha), 1 between the eyebrows, 24 around the fore-arms, and 107 about the chest. Now listen to an ancient legend that brings out their greatness:

Once there was a king named Bhadrasena in Kashmir. He and his minister had a son each. The two lads used to spurn precious ornaments as of little worth as pebbles, but they used to wear rudrakshas with the utmost faith and reverence. The king wondered at their strange ways and once, when he took darshan of sage Paraashara, asked him about the two boys. The great sage who is gifted with mystical knowledge explained thus:

"Bhadrasena, once there lived a beautiful courtesan in the ancient township of Nandigram. She was very rich and used to give away huge amounts to the poor and the pious as gifts. As she was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, she adorned even her two pets, a cock and a monkey, with rudrakshas and kept these creatures in her dance hall. One day, Lord Shiva appeared at her threshold, in the guise of a wealthy merchant, in order to test her faith. On seeing his pious and learned demeanour, the courtesan sent word to him through her female attendant, 'If you would offer me the entire religious merit of your devout study of the vedas, I shall live and serve you like a devoted wife for three days and abide by every wish of yours'. On hearing this, the merchant spoke lightly of her virtue: 'How can a courtesan ever have the truthfulness and dedication like a devout house wife?' Then the courtesan stepped forward, swore by the holy Shiva Linga that she would live up to her promise in thought, word and deed. Accepting the challenge, the wealthy visitor swore by the sun and the moon that he would keep up his part of the agreement and, as a token of accepting her as his legitimate wife, tied a bracelet round her wrist and gave her a precious Shiva Linga as his wedding gift. She too kept the Linga in the court hall and pleased him in every way like a true wife.

One day during the stipulated period, the mansion caught fire and was completely burnt down, along with the cock, monkey and the merchant. Then the courtesan, not heeding the dissuasions of her kinsfolk, gave away all her wealth in charity, bowed to the sun god who is the eternal witness of all pledges, and leaped into the flames by way of sahasana, as a devoted wife does. Then Lord Shiva appeared to her in his real form and said, 'I have tested you. Though you are a courtesan by the accident of your birth, at heart you are a true wife. Seek any blessing and I shall grant your wish!' She prayed to him for eternal proximity of Lord Shiva, both for her and for her kinsfolk and he granted the same at once. That pet monkey is now reborn as your son, oh king, and the cock is reborn as the son of your minister. However, by virtue of the subtle psychological tendencies of their former lives, they now kwe to wear nothing but rudrakshas.

Then king Bhadrasena enquired of the sage regarding the future prospects of his son. The great sage Paraashara said: "Your son will die on the seventh day hence. Yet, do not fear. For, Lord Rudra is the Saviour.

At first, Brahma so made the creatures that by introversion of the special senses and by discrimination, they would be able to practise righteousness. On the other hand, he created unrighteousness as the result of indiscrimination and extroversion of the senses. It is Devendra (or Indra) who protects righteousness and it is Yamadharmaraja who punishes creatures for their unrighteousness. The attendants of Death are indeed lust and rancour. It is through their agency that Yamadharmaraja drags the sinners to his realm of death. These moral failings like lust assail the intellect, mind and the organs of sense and drag the weak-willed to the world of death. But they cannot affect the Self (Atman) which is essentially eternal.

Brahma delivered the Yajurveda from his southern face and from it, Lord Rudra, in the form of the hymn called Rudra Suktha. Those who devoutly recite the latter with full knowledge of its meaning and firm faith in its divine power are never touched by lust and other failings. That is why, all mortals began to chant it everyday. Eventually, there came a time when there were no longer any sinners on earth. The realm of Death (Yamaloka) fell into disuse and looked deserted. The god of Death complained of it to Brahma and the latter showed him a way of regaining his sway over at least some souls, by ordaining thus: 'He who chants the Veda with irreverence i.e., while dozing, standing, walking, after drinking, or even simply without faith in its holiness will be a sinner against God Himself. You may legitimately drag them to your world and chastise them for their sins. Hence the Lord, conqueror of Death is the only true Saviour of souls. Therefore, you get abhishek (bathing the Shiva Linga with water and other precious materials in honour of Lord Shiva) performed by pious and learned brahmins. If you do so, your son will be saved from certain death'.

The king Bhadrasena did accordingly. On the seventh day, as per the prophecy of the great sage, the attendants of Death arrived there to drag the soul of the prince to that kingdom. Even at their approach and their subtle and invisible presence, the prince fainted. Then the priests sprinkled on him the holy water with which Rudrabhisheka* was performed. At once the attendants of Lord Shiva arrived, drove away the attendants of Yama and thus saved the young prince from certain death. The king who was happy beyond all bounds gave away liberal gifts of money to the priests and, having sent them away, took darshan of sage Paraashara. In the meanwhile, the divine sage Narada appeared there and explained to the king, whatever had happened at the crucial hour in the subtler supra-sensuous plane and added: "Yama questioned his divine accountant of the merits and sins of all souls, Chitrakupta, as to how the son of Bhadrasena, who was destined to die at that time owing to his previous karma, happened to be spared his life. The latter then showed the divine writ which clearly stated that the prince would be saved from untimely death by the sacred power of the rudraksha and that he would live on to the full span of life. Thus it was evident that when the 'counsel of sage Paraashara was obeyed, the power of the rudraksha** saved the life of the prince so that the holy writ of Brahma the Creator Himself was altered, as explained by Sree Guru earlier. Then Narada blessed the king and went away.

Then Savitri said to Sree Guru: 'I am blessed by your very darshan. However, please initiate me with a sacred mantra, so that I could always remember you with unflickering attention'. Sree Guru replied: 'My daughter, for a woman, unwavering devotion to her husband is the only proper salvation. That is why no mantra should ever be taught to a woman. Listen:

In ancient times, there was a terrible war between the gods and the demons. As soon as some demons were killed, their guru Shukracharya was reviving them again with the power of his mantra, called Mrita Sanjeevini ^ . On seeing this, Devendra, the king of the gods, was scared and prayed to Lord Shiva. The latter swallowed Shukracharya himself. But the guru of the demons emerged in his subtle form along with urine from Shiva's body and again resumed his mission of reviving the demons killed in the war. Then Devendra approached the guru of the gods, sage Brihaspathi, and sought his counsel. The latter determined that the only way open, was to neutralise the efficacy of the Mrita Sanjeevini mantra itself and he employed his own son Kacha for the secret mission.

One day, the wise young man Kacha went to the hermitage of sage Shukracharya and sought to be accepted as his disciple. The latter hesitated, but when his handsome daughter Devayaani who was enamoured of Kacha insisted, he acceded, out of extreme fondness for her. Some of the shrewd demons suspected Kacha's intention and warned Shukracharya. As he did not heed their counsel, they secretly killed Kacha. When Devayaani was grief-stricken Shukracharya, in order to cheer her, revived Kacha. Next time, the demons killed Kacha, burned his body, mixed the ashes in liquor and made Shukra charya drink it. Devayaani was again disconsolate. Unable to stand her grief, Shukracharya learned through his yogic vision that Kacha was within his stomach in the form of ash. He said to his daughter in utter helplessness, "If Kacha is revived, he will emerge from my belly and I will die. Then no one can raise me back to life, as none but I know the needed mantra." Devayaani pressed her contention saying, "Teach me the mantra and I shall bring you back to life with its help". Shukracharya, out of extreme fondness for her, did so and thereby the mantra lost all its efficacy. Thus Kacha's mission was a success. That is why no woman should be initiated with a mantra. You may, in its stead, undertake some other spiritual practice if you wish.

Savitri then said, 'In such a case, please teach me a vow or some ritual practice, as your memento'. Sree Guru replied, "A vow which can help anyone to win salvation is Somavaara Vrata ie., Monday-Vow. I shall illustrate its efficacy: In ancient times, in the land of Aryavarta in North India, there ruled a king named Chitravarma. He was blessed with a daughter who was a paragon of all virtues, by the grace of Lord Shiva. When her father inquired of her future prospect, many of the astrologers asserted that she would live all her life as a housewife. But one among them put forth the opposite view and said that she would be widowed very early. The king was much depressed on hearing it. When the child grew up to be a girl of 12, she too heard of it and she was much dejected. She at once approached the great woman sage Maitreyi and begged her to teach her a way out of the ominous prospect. Maitreyi said: "Perform the Somavaara Vrata and its presiding deity, Lord Shiva, will protect you. The procedure is as follows: Fast during day time on a Monday and worship the Lord at night; dinner is optional. The abhisheka offered during the ritual worship destroys sins; worship of the pedestal bestows empire in a future birth; sandal-offering bestows the good fortune of being a life-long housewife; the incense offering bestows Saugandhya*+, the offering of light bestows devotion and faith; betel and nut offering bestows wealth; salutation bestows all the purusharthas (the legitimate objects of life). The offering of the mind through tapi bestows lordship (Aiswarya); by offering food to pious and learned brahmins is obtained all-sided contentment; by offering dakshina (money) one accrues much money; Stotra or glorification of the Lord with appropriate verses bestows heaven after death.

Later the maiden was married to a prince named Chitraangada. The king kept the happy pair with himself. One day, the prince went out for a swim in river Kalindi and was drowned. Even his dead body could not be discovered. The princess resolved to perform Sahagamana but everyone forcibly prevented her from doing so. So she undertook the vow of performing Somavnara Vrata every Monday throughout her life. When Chitrangada was drowned, there he was rescued by the river nymphs of the nether world (Naga Kanyas) and they led him to their Lord Vasuki, the serpent king. The latter lovingly poured ambrosia in the mouth of the unconscious prince and brought him back to life. Later Vasuki learned of his family background and of his devotion to Lord Shiva. Then with great love and reverence sent him home on the back of a heavenly horse. Thus the prince repaired to his young wife and kinsfolk and lived very happily. Somavaara Vrata is so efficacious. So you may observe it".

Savitri then and there observed the Vrata in the company of her husband. Later, with the consent of Sree Guru, she left for Mahurapura. Henceforth, every year, she used to visit Sree Guru for his darshan and to receive his blessing. With his grace, the happy pair attained both worldly and heavenly joys. Namadharaka, in this way, Lord Dattatreya, who is of the essence of the highest good of all existence, appeared in the human form as Sree Guru and protected his devotees. Besides, by his wanderings he sanctified the very earth; Siddha concluded.

* Rudrabhisheka is a form of ritual worship in which a Shivalinga is bathed in water which is continuously poured over it, to the accompaniment of the chanting of the vedic mantra called the Rudra Suktha. The continuous pouring of water on linga stands for the stream of our consciousness which is directed into an incessant meditation on Shiva, the Supreme spirit, as manifest in the myriad forms in creation. Sprinkling it on the prince here stands for invoking the cosmic life-principle of the Lord to enliven him.

** Rudraksha: It means 'The eye of Lord Rudra or Shiva'. Wearing the Rudraksha signifies living in the constant awareness of the Lord's vigilant and gracious eye on one's self. Rudra is the Supreme consciousness or Pure, choiceless, Awareness, or the Bodhi of Buddhism, the Real Self or I which Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi always pointed to as the goal of the seeker after perfection.

^ lit. means 'the reviver of the dead'.

*+ Saugandhya: A derivative of sugandha which means a fine scent. The term may mean material prosperity which enables a person to enjoy fine perfumes in her next life; or, it may mean one of the yogic accomplishments by which the yogi's body itself emanates fine scents; or, it may symbolise noble tendencies which are called Subha vasanas. (Vasana lit, meaning 'odour'.)

19. Chapter 18

Namadharaka said: "Swami, my mind which was at first buried deep under the dense darkness of ignorance and illusion is now awakened by the dawn of your teaching and as such, it is thirsting to know ever more of the divine acts of Sree Guru and not content, however much I have already listened to".

Siddha was happy to hear this and replied: "My son, you are indeed awakened. The very fact that you hunger and thirst to know more of Sree Guru and his deeds shows that divine grace has indeed dawned on your heart. Now listen further:

Once there lived a brahmin who was content with whatever he had. He never dined at another's house or expense. Such is the natural tendency of the peaceful and of those devoted to the scrupulous performance of their religious rites, both in the letter and spirit of the holy writ, as their life-long vow. But his wife noticed that their neighbours freely dined at other's houses as holy guests at religious ceremonies and accepted of the gifts of money and new clothes given away by the hosts. She found fault with her husband for not doing likewise and securing for her such a variety of possessions. One day, a wealthy man invited this pair also along with several others for a feast at his house. But as usual, this brahmin would not consent to attend the same. His wife, finding all her persuasions in vain, approached Sree Guru and complained to him of her husband's indifference to her wishes. Sree Guru tried his to explain to her the desirability of his vow, but she persisted. He then summoned her husband and ordered: "Today, break your vow and take your wife to the feast." The brahmin obeyed the Master's word and took his wife to the feast. When every one was feasting, the housewife came to know that the food was polluted by a pig and she at once complained of it to her husband. The pair was much disgusted and later complained to Sree Guru. He said to the housewife: 'Have you realized the wish of eating another's food?' She apologised for her folly. He then exhorted her that it is always good for her to be guided by him in all matters. The brahmin was wild with her and yelled, 'It is owing to the stupid obstinacy of this wicked woman that my vow had to be broken, and with such a consequence! I never committed such a vile error ever since I was born and then he burst into tears.

Sree Guru comforted him saying, 'My son, do not fear. No sin or blame accrues to you on this account; on the other hand, your wife has learned a lesson from it and her attitude in that matter, is

permanently corrected and she will never repeat her folly. Besides, when any pious house holders' ceremonies are to suffer owing to the non-availability of a brahmin or a priest, you should help him by accepting his invitation for lunch'.

'Then Sir, tell me whose food could be accepted and whose food is forbidden', said the brahmin. The Master replied: 'Pious brahmins, those well-versed in the vedas, the teachers, one's own kith and kin, one's disciples, maternal uncle-one can properly take food from them. The food that is offered by one who is on the ritual vow of performing a Yagna, or of one who is dedicated to the contemplation of Brahman, or the food that is left over after the offerings at a Yagna - such food is by far the holiest. Food cooked exclusively for one's own self is unworthy. One who is not given to righteous living, one who undertakes the duties that, as per the religious law, belong to a person of another caste or stage of life*, the man given to rancour, the impure man, impure food, and those who are bent on harassing their kinsfolk - food should never be accepted from any of these. By constantly eating at another's expense, one exchanges one's own religious merit for the host's sins and demerit. Another's food accepted on the holy day of full moon will destroy all the religious merit that accrues from months of righteous living. Eating in the company of those who are forbidden, or eating without the proper consecration by the chanting of the related prayers, constitutes sin. The meal cooked by even one's own daughter could be eaten only after the latter is married and is blessed with offspring. One should accept food or money from persons of noble nature and a noble way of living, and even that, only on auspicious occasions like eclipses, and in holy places. Articles and materials of use that are forbidden should never be accepted or recieved. If, under any inescapable situation, one were to transgress the ancient code in any manner, one can purify oneself by performing japa of the Gayatri mantra. Those noble ones who take particular care of those who are in dire misery in giving away gifts would never suffer from want, debt or disease. Those who neglect their holy duties, those who are fond of tasks that legitimately belong to others, would come to grief even in this life. Hence, adhere to your religious law with all reverence and faith in it. But remember that faith in the Lord is the bedrock of all righteousness".

* The tasks of life - social and individual - are allotted to the individuals by the ancient law as per their caste which originally was based on distinctions of innate aptitudes and abilities and as per their stages of life.

20. Chapter 19

Namadharaka asked, "Holy Sir, Sree Guru has already expounded the Paths of Gnana (Wisdom) and Karma (Disciplined Activity), which are self-sufficient; why then did he find it necessary to expound the Path of Bhakthi (Devotion) too?"

Sree Guru explained: "Of all the Paths, Bhakthi is the best. That is the only means of accomplishing anything. Hence it is indispensable for all. In fact, Bhakthi, Gnana and Karma are not distinct from one another. They form a unity and assist each other in leading us to Brahmajnaana (Perfection of Wisdom). The latter cannot be achieved by any one of the paths alone.

The devotee who is ever vigilant, and of a Sattvic nature, is the dearest to the Lord. The man devoid of Bhakthi would be lost in the Ocean of phenomenal existence, even though he is assiduous in practising the Karma yoga. As man's faith in and devotion to God grows stronger, he becomes more and more disinterested in worldly things. Only such a one can pursue the life of virtue and righteousness which is dear to God. Then his heart gets purer and he becomes fit for Wisdom. Only one who can achieve such a synthesis of Bhakthi, Gnana and Karma can realise Non action. Thereby, he will be freed from the bondage of action. Now, listen to the stories of the Beloved of the Faithful, and steadfast devotion will strike root in your heart:

Every day, some devotee or the other used to visit the Master and invite him and his disciples to lunch. Once, a poor man by name Bhaskara Sharma arrived with provisions of food enough for only three persons. But before he could arrange bhiksha for the Master, some one or the other used to do so, and Bhaskara Sharma used to join the band of guests. Three months passed thus. His fellow-disciples started insinuating him that he was making a living for himself thus, on the pretext of offering bhiksha to Sree Guru.

At last, Sree Guru came to know of this and said to Bhaskara Sharma: "Today you arrange bhiksha* for me and all the disciples including yourself!" The latter was immensely happy. He fetched vegetables and prepared the food. The Master then ordered him to invite all for lunch. When he did so, they heckled him saying, "We are more numerous than the grains of food you have cooked! How dare you invite all of us?"

When poor Bhaskara Sharma communicated the same to Sree Guru, the holy one himself personally commanded all of them to join him at lunch. In perfect obedience to his word, all of them took baths, washed their dishes and turned up. As per the Master's order, the food was consecrated and then, as behoves a cultured host, Bhaskara Sharma entreated all of them, 'Pray all of you, young and old, lunch to your hearts content. When the food was being served, it was found that though the preparations were meagre, what was actually being served was enormous in quantity. Even after it was served to many people, what was still left in the vessels was as much as at first prepared! Everyone ate to his full. Then the Master ordered that the poor, and even the other creatures like crows and dogs, should be fed. At last, after ascertaining that none was left unfed, he threw the rest of the food to the fish in the river. So plentiful was the food available!

All those who partook of that day's feast were astounded to recollect how incredibly delicious were the dishes served on that day. They said, 'We heard that once, when the Pandavas** were in deep distress, Lord Krishna came to their rescue by feeding the large group of sages who arrived as their guests, by his divine power. Now we have witnessed the same miracle. Though the food prepared was scanty, the number of people fed today has exceeded four thousand. Though Bhaskara Sharma served the Lord for hardly three months, he has proved to be a true disciple. Thus has he earned such grace from the Master!. Then they glorified the divine power of Sree Guru.

Now listen to another event : There was a barren lady of sixty years named Ganga. She used to visit the Master everyday and serve him with firm faith. One day, pleased by her loving service, Sree Guru said, 'What is your heart's wish?' She replied: 'It has been declared by the saastras that those who are not blessed with sons have no hope of attaining heaven. And that the souls of even those of their ancestors who, by virtue of their merits, have attained heaven, lose their blissful state and fall to a lower state. Hence, barren as I am, I am much alarmed at my plight. Sree Guru said: 'Owing to the force of your Karma, you are caught deep in the ocean of delusion. Now that such wisdom has awakened in your heart, you shall be blessed with two sons'. Amazed at his words she said, 'I have ever been a born-barren woman. Yet, by your grace I shall be blessed with motherhood". As a token of his pledge, she tied the end of her garment in a knot and continued: 'All my life was spent in the observance of religious vows in the fond hope of being blessed with sons. With a superstitious persistence have I circumambulated the peepul (ficus religiosa) and worshipped it with due ceremony!' Sree Guru retorted : What you say is a falsehood! Once Lord Brahma said to sage Narada:

"Divine Sage! Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and I ever reside in a peepal tree. All the deities inhabit its branches. The oceans exist in the twigs. All the sacred rivers dwell in the branches. Sacred cows, religious sacrifices (yagnas), the great sages and even the Vedas dwell in its tender leaves. The peepul tree which is so holy should be duly consecrated and worshipped. One should not touch it during night, at twilight hours and during the time of rain. One should observe such vows as of continence and silence with all of one's mind, word and deed and then worship the sacred tree. You must besmear the lower part of its trunk with cow dung and chant the Swasthi Mantra. Then you should bathe it and worship it according to your means. You should contemplate Lord Vishnu with his eight divine arms. You should wrap a clean cloth or a thread round the trunk. Then, either while repeating the Divine Name or chanting a mantra, you should circumambulate it with a slow and steady pace. Both at the commencement and the completion of each circumambulation, you should bow to it with a concentrated mind. If you do so, poverty, delirium, danger, sin and other kinds of suffering will be terminated. Every step that is taken around the tree with full faith will be as efficacious as the performance of the Aswamedha*** sacrifice. If you chant the mantra of Saturn, the tormentation by spirits will be ended. If the Rudramantra is recited, fear of death will be averted. The fruit of feeding pious and learned brahmins thereafter, bathing, japa and performance of religious sacrifice underneath it is indeed unbounded. Wishes for sons and grand children will be granted. He who plants a peepul tree will be elevating his entire lineage to heaven. As many pious brahmins as one tenth of the number of circumambulations should be fed and, a golden image of a peepul tree, a cow and gingely (thill) seeds should be given away as daana*+ . If you do these, your wish will be fulfilled. Therefore, take a dip in the Sangama and worship the tree there accordingly. You will be blessed with two sons.'

Ganga said, 'Sir, now I am sixty years old. Yet, I shall, upon your word, do so with faith' and then she commenced her daily circumambulations. On the fourth day, at night, Sree Guru appeared in her dream and said, 'After worshipping the tree, eat the fruit which Sree Guru gives you and you shall be blessed with offspring'. She at once woke up and informed her husband of her dream and continued her avowed adorations with greater zeal. One day, the Master gave her two fruits and said, 'After completing your vow, give away proper gifts and then eat fruits. In the earlier ages (yugas), there were different kinds children. In this age of Kali, only those born of one's womb those who are adopted are considered as one's sons. It is that even at the very sight of one's begotten son, the parents assured of heaven hereafter+. You shall be blessed with sons. This will be the fruit of serving me with faith'.

Ganga went home and did as Sree Guru directed her. After a few days, she had her first menses ever and, after her purificatory bath on the fourth day, she went for the Guru's darshan, along with her husband. After returning home, that night, she concieved. All the people in the village were astonished and praised her good fortune.

Her husband, Somanath, got the appropriate religious ceremonies (pumsavana) etc., performed. At the proper time she delivered a girl child. Astrologers predicted that the girl would come to be a pativrata who, through her paativratya, shall elevate all her kinsfolk in holiness. When the child was twelve days old the elderly parents took her for darshan of Sree Guru, placed her at his feet, prostrated to him and said, 'The family-tree that been barren has borne fruit by your blessing. If the fruit proves to be good, all the passers by along life's path would benefitted. Indeed, barrenness is better than having wicked offspring'. Sree Guru caressed the tender child and said, the astrologers have foretold of her will come true. This time, do you wish to have a dullard of a son who will live a hundred years, or a son who will be a bright, learned one, but who will have a shorter span of life?' The old couple submitted that they wished to be blessed with a son who will be learned and pious, though of a shorter life. Sree Guru blessed

them accordingly and sent them away. In course of time, she had two sons. In this way, the barren lady, Ganga, became a mother by serving the Master with unwavering faith.

With the passage of time, her children grew up to be wealthy ones and they too, in their turn, had several children and, after their death, attained the heavenly realms. Their daughter too, as per the blessing of the Great Master, grew up to be an ideal housewife and reached higher states of being, along with her husband. But such good fortune accrues only to those endowed with zeal and faith. Those devoid of these qualities, just as the born-blind cannot see the sun, fail to win divine grace. The happy couple renounced worldly ties, donned ochre robes and dedicated the rest of their lives to the service of the Master. Thereby, they attained liberation.

So too, a man named Narahari Sharma was afflicted with leprosy. He surrendered himself to Sree Guru and submitted, 'Oh Lord Hari⁺⁺, thou the very being of Bliss ultimate, you love your devotees as your own children. I have heard of your fame and come to you for succour. The learned brahmins consider it a sin even to look at my face⁺⁺⁺. Even the austerities I have practised in holy places and my prayers have not cured my fell disease. Pray, heal my illness by your grace. If you too say you cannot do so, I have no choice other than committing suicide in your holy presence, in the hope that atleast in my next life I shall win religious merit!'

The Master's heart was moved and he said, 'Even though disease is a consequence of your wicked deeds in a past life, it will be wiped out. If you have faith in my word, plant the dead branch of a fig tree at the Sangama and go on watering it every day. You will be healed on the day the stump puts forth leaves!'

Narahari Sharma started doing as he was directed. All those who beheld the absurd act of Narahari commented: "You are an irreparable sinner and hence the Master has meant his order only as a sort of unending punishment. Else, how can a dead branch put forth leaves again? May be, the Swami only implied that your disease, which is a consequence of past sins, cannot possibly be eradicated.' However, Narahari stuck to the Master's order and persevered in his efforts. When someone reported what he was doing to Sree Guru, he said; "He does it right and he shall be relieved, by virtue of his steadfast faith. There is no other effective means in this world than faith. The Mantra, a brahmin priest, an astrologer, or a physician and the Guru-men derive their benefit from these, only according to their faith in them. In this regard, sage Suuta told the sages:

"Once upon a time, there lived a king named Simhaketu. He had a son named Dhanumjaya. One day, the latter went to a forest for hunting and, when he was tired by the chase, he rested in an old, dilapidated shrine of Lord Shiva. He had a tribal man, by name Sabara, as his attendant. He fetched a Shiva Linga and asked him for instruction in the proper manner of worshipping it. The king said, 'In the company of your wife, worship it in a clean place. Besmear your body with the ashes of a funeral pyre[^] and then distribute prasada "and then he proceeded to explain the details of the ritual worship.

Thereafter, Sabara worshipped the Shiva linga accordingly every day. One day, he could not secure the ash from a funeral pyre and was much upset at it. His wife addressed him thus: "My Lord, this my physical frame is consecrated for the accomplishment of dharma(righteousness). You may burn my body, thus secure the needed ash and offer it to Lord Shiva. Leave your vain infatuation for my body, I shall sacrifice the transient body to achieve the eternal nearness to Lord Shiva. After all, (as per the Hindu law) my body is but a half of your

own!" and she even insisted. Then the man bolted her inside the hutment and set fire to it. Afterwards, he offered the ash of her burnt out body to Lord Shiva and then besmeared his own body with it. After the ritual worship, at the time of distribution of the prasada, by the force of daily habit, he called out her name too. The wonder of it, she came forth as usual and received the prasada. And his hut was in front of him as before. In amazement, he questioned her about it and she replied, 'I just feel as if I awoke from deep slumber; I know nothing else!' Then both of them realized the power of Lord Shiva and glorified him heartily. The Lord appeared in front of them and blessed them with joys. Such is the power of Bhakthi".

So saying, Sree Guru sent the people away. Then on his way to the Sangama for his bath, he threw the water in his water-vessel (kamandalu) on the dead branch of the fig tree which was tended by Narahari. Lo, it at once put forth tender leaves, and as instantly did Narahari's leprosy vanish. The latter was amazed and, overwhelmed by intense faith and devotion, he glorified Sree Guru thus: "Lord ! Your splendour is like that of a million suns, yet thy grace is as cool and pleasant as that of a million moons. You are worshipful even for gods and you are the repository of the whole universe. I shall ever meditate on you who are the bestower of all wishes. You are like the sun to the darkness of cosmic illusion (and ignorance). I bow to thee. You are free from any qualities, yet you are with them! Worthy of being served by your devotees, you are the bestower of boons; I bow to thee. You are like a lion (the destroyer) to the six internal enemies like lust, which are like full grown bull-elephants. You are the very embodiment of Bliss Absolute. I shall meditate on you who have manifested yourself to protect righteousness. Thou bestower of wishes and the cause of all existence, I shall ever worship thee. Thou lotus eyed one, the bearer of the staff (danda) and kaamandalu, the Merciful One, I seek refuge in you. You are the object of knowledge of Vedanta^^; you have the sun, moon and fire as your three eyes. You are of the nature Naada, Bindu and Kalaa^^^, the dispeller of the fire of craving, I bow to thee. You are the destroyer of misery, fear and suffering and bestower of yoga. Thou inhabitant of the banks of rivers Krishna and the five Gangas, I shall serve you. Thou without a beginning, a middle or an end, thou of inscrutable power, the Absolute Self, thou whom neither the mind can comprehend nor the speech delineate, I surrender myself to thee. The four-faced Brahma himself is unable to sing thy glory; how can I ever hope to do so? The thousand headed Adishesha himself was dumb-founded at the sight of thy glory. Even the vedas have failed to describe your divinity!"

Sree Guru was pleased with his intense devotion and said: 'Son, by my grace, you shall gain spiritual power, wealth, fame and noble offspring. You shall become the knower of yogic wisdom. Like you, your descendants also shall be devoted to me. You come away along with your wife and stay here!' Narahari did accordingly and was blessed with children and grand children and all else. He was liberated even while living, by the teaching of Sree Guru. Like him, his descendants were devoted to Sree Guru.

Namadharaka, all this is the fruit of devotion to the Guru. One of your ancestors was fortunate enough to win the blessing of Sree Guru. It is owing to that that you are now blessed with such loving faith in him. Even this is by the blessing of the Master. I feel that even among your descendants there shall certainly be born a progressing soul", said Siddha.

* the food offered to a holy mendicant with devotion.

** The five sons of King Pandu in the Mahabharata, the protagonists representing the virtuous.

*** lit , the horse-sacrifice which bestows the greatest religious merit on its performer.

*+ religious gift given away to the pious.

+ Hindu scriptures say that only the son should perform the funeral rites of the father at his death and the annual offering to the manes. Only then can the departed soul hope to reach heaven. The religious ceremonies need a lot of training, insight and proficiency in concentration of mind. As such, the parents have to take the utmost care to get their sons well -trained. The childless parents were permitted to adopt son and train him.

++ One of the Divine Names of Lord Vishnu, lit., meaning, one who "destroys" sins.

+++The sense of sight impresses upon our mind the subtle likeness of the things and the persons we see, in a subtle manner and pollutes the mind of the weak mortals. The sages are unaffected by it and, on the other hand, they purify those they look at.

^Symbolic of the sublimation or annihilation of the false identification with one's body, in the fire of at-one-ment with the Spirit.

^^ The Reality which Vedanta (e., the teaching of the Upanishads) seeks to realize.

^^^The primordial sound which is said to be the stuff of existence is Nada. The bliss consciousness aspect of the self is Bindu, The degrees, of manifestation of the Self which phenomena are, are the Kalaa.

21. Chapter 20

Namadharaka said, "Holy Sir, you have said that I owe my faith in the Guru to my ancestor. Who was he and how did he come to serve the Lord?"

Siddha replied: "One of your ancestors, by name Saayamdeva served Sree Guru at Gandharvapura* and won his grace. At first, Saayamdeva heard of His glory, visited Him, bowed and sang in ecstasy:

'Oh thou Supreme Spirit, the Light that transcends all, O Sri Narasimha Saraswathi, all the holy places reside in thy holy feet (paada)**. You are the embodiment of the holy Trinity and not a common mortal. You are Lord Brahma, thy Kamandalu is full of the holy water of compassion for all creatures. Thou art Lord Vishnu, come on earth to restrain the wicked and protect the virtuous, in the form of a sannyasi. You are Lord Shiva whose yogic look, fixed ever on the tip of His nose, is capable of liberating his devotees from sin, craving and destruction. You, by whose grace a dead man was revived, a barren buffalo had yielded milk, a withered twig sprouted again and the fallen are uplifted again, who can recognize you for what you are?'

Sree Guru said, 'My son, I am pleased with your devotion. May all thy descendants be blessed with faith in me. I am seeing you again after such a long time! Where are you living? How are your wife and children?'

Saayamdeva replied, 'Lord, by your grace, all of us are safe. I am living at Kanchipura. I have come to serve your holiness.'

Sree Guru said, 'It is hard to serve me. For I move about from one place to another. Now I stay in a village, now I live near the river and again, in the midst of a wild forest. I stay where my whim takes me'.

Saayamdeva submitted, 'Lord, I shall serve you wherever you be.'

Sree Guru consented. Later, one day, he went to the Sangama along with Saayamdeva. In order to test the latter's devotion, the Lord caused it to rain untimely. It was a heavy downpour with loud thunder and lightning. It was very cold in the open. Even though his teeth were chattering in the biting cold; Saayamdeva covered his Guru with his own garments and served him. After about five or six hours, the rain abated. Then Sree Guru said to him, 'The cold air is troubling me much. Go to the nearby village and get some fire.'

Saayamdeva proceeded in the darkness, amidst the drizzle and the biting cold. He had to find his way only in the occasional flashes of lightning. He proceeded to the muth and was returning with fire. When he stood in one place, looking around for the spot where the Guru stayed, he found two enormous serpents on either side! In fright, he chanted the name of his Guru and ran about. Then, at a distance, he heard the vedic chant emanate from the Sangama. Inferring his direction therefrom, he ran ahead and soon reached the spot. He found the Guru seated, totally unaffected by the cold and rain, and was amazed at it. The Guru said to him, "Don't fear! I have sent the serpents to guard you on the way!" Even before his eyes, the two venomous creatures, approached the Lord, bowed their hoods to him and vanished. The Guru added, 'It is hard even for the gods to come by such service of the Guru. Saayamdeva was happy at his words and said, 'Supreme Lord, expound to me the way of service to the Guru which is the highest means of salvation.'

Sree Guru began: 'Saayamdeva, listen! A true disciple ever follows the guru like his shadow, never leaving him, and serves him whole-heartedly. He dedicates everything he has, including his body, for the service of the Guru. He looks upon his guru as the embodiment of the Supreme Lord of creation, delights to take only his prasada*** as food and the washings of his feet as the all-sanctifying drink. He loves to listen to the divine acts of his mission on earth and makes his life, a continuous meditation on him. when the Guru enjoins a piece of work, the disciple stakes all to achieve it, however difficult it might seem. Having once commenced his efforts to that end, the true disciple, at all costs, sees it through. Even the Lord of Death will be afraid of laying his hold on such a faithful one. There is an ancient dialogue between goddess Gowri and her consort Iswara (Lord Shiva), to illustrate the point. Now listen to it:

Thwashta Brahma (one of the creators in a cosmic cycle) once served a Guru. The Guru wanted to test his steadfastness and said, "My son! every year, rain water leaks into my hermitage. So, raise a beautiful house for me!" The Guru's wife said, "Fetch me a blouse which is good and natural, but is marvellous!" The son of the Guru said, "Get me a pair of sandals which would be comfortable either in water or ditches, fitting my feet and which can take me wherever I wish to go!" The guru's daughter added, "Get me a pair of ear-rings, a single pillared palace of ivory with live- elephants in it and a cooking vessel which will not gather soot." Thwashta proceeded to the forest to procure all these things and he resolved firmly even to stake his life, if necessary, in the effort. There, a merciful sadhu approached him. Thwashta visualised his own Guru in the sadhu, prostrated to, him and revealed his mission. Then the sadhu said:

"My son, nothing is impossible of achievement when the All-Merciful Lord Viswanadha is in Kasi. All sins are annihilated even at the very glance of the Lord. The bliss that abides in his presence is indescribable. The bestower of the four objects of human life + personally initiates everyone who dies in Kasi with the taaraka mantra++ and thereby bestows liberation." The disciple humbly asked, "Where is Kasi of which you speak so, highly? Where is that Lord Viswanadha? Is he in Heaven or on earth? Please enlighten me of these."

The sadhu replied, "My son, one attains liberation even at the sight of Lord Viswanadha. I shall be blessed with his darshan by, taking you there". So saying, the sadhu took Thwashta with him to

Kasi in the wink of an eye, by virtue of his yogic power! He also showed the various holy places on the way, explaining to him in detail the glory of every one of them. Then he showed him Lord Vishwanadha, took him to the shrines of Bhavaneesa Hari, Vighneswara, Bhairava and Subrahmanya. Finally, he took Thwashta to Ganga and made him take the holy dip and perform ritual worship and then give away gifts to the poor. The sadhu told the disciple to install a Shivalinga there, to win the grace of Iswara. The next moment, the sadhu vanished.

Thwashta realized that his own Guru had appeared in the form of the sadhu to test his faith and bless him accordingly. As per his instruction, Thwashta installed a Shivalinga and worshipped it with faith. Lord Vishwanadha appeared before him and said, " My son, you are made pure by your devotion to the Guru. You are indeed blessed. Now tell me what you wish to have." Thwashta bowed to the Lord and submitted, "Lord, grant me all the things which my Guru and the members of his family have asked me to procure for them." The Lord blessed him saying, "May you attain mastery in all arts, all branches of learning and by your skill, you shall attain fame in the three worlds too!" So saying, the Lord disappeared. Soon, Thwashta returned to his Guru and gave what he and the members of his family asked of him. The Guru was pleased with his resourcefulness and blessed him saying that he would be elevated to the divine rank of the Creator, Brahma; that he would be able to command the nine types of treasure and that he should ever be untouched by care and suffering. Accordingly, Thwashta attained fame in the whole world. This story was recounted by Lord Shiva to goddess Gowri. So one should serve the Guru and follow his instructions diligently."

Saayamdeva sang in wonder: "I have indeed seen all that you have described, with my own eyes! Where am I, where is Kasi, and where are you? I could see what I have never seen before. You are not a common mortal, not even one of the gods, but the Supreme Spirit!. You who are the Parabrahman, transcending all action, have, by your own will to become the many, created Brahma (the Creator) and, through him, you have projected the whole universe. Though you are above all modes (gunas) of existence, you have descended on earth through the modes of existence which are your own and, as part of your cosmic play, you destroy the wicked. Oh Lord Nrisimha saraswathi, I bow to you. Your descent on earth is for the establishment of righteousness and is a pleasure to the gods. Your descent, like the sunrise, dissolves the immense darkness of Ignorance. You are the protector of the Law. Oh Thou Bliss of all, you have assumed this form of a sannyasi which is free from all impurity and is dedicated to truth, blessed and sanctifying. You bestow salvation on creatures who are lost in the sea of phenomenal existence. You have bestowed the power of speech on the dumb, sight on the blind, progeny on a barren woman, life on a dead man, and the blessed life of a housewife on a widow! Your divine power has achieved the impossible. Oh thou, the abode of the liberated souls, thou art the bestower of liberation and of all the wishes of thy devotees. You are the dispeller of want, sin and craving. The vedas have glorified you as beyond speech. Oh thou Lord of yogis, you are the refuge of all holy places, the very life of blessed ones, the philosopher's stone of the devotees, the treasure-trove of divine powers. I worship thy feet which are the centers of holiness even for pious souls. Even learned ones debate concerning the divine mystery of thy feet. Oh Holy One, you are beyond the Vedas and thy nature is indescribable. You pervade the whole universe by your eight bodies⁺⁺⁺. Thou art the original form of the pranava[^]. I bow to Thee. This form of yours which has graced the banks of rivers Krishna and Bheema, is fit to be meditated upon by those who of tranquil mind. May you bless me that this, your form, may abide steadily in my heart!"

Shree Guru said: "My son, I am pleased by your hymn of praise. I have blessed you with pure faith, unspoilt by any other desire. Indeed all your decendants shall be blessed with faith in me. Henceforth, you resign the service of the foreign king and stay on here with your family!" Saayamdeva please Sree Guru by acting upon his command.

Often, Saaymdeva sang the praise of the Guru; "Oh Lord of the three modes of existence, you are the omnipresent Spirit, without a beginning and an end. By virtue of my meritorious acts in

the previous lives, I am blessed with your darshan. Even at the touch of the dust of thy feet, I am purified of all my sins. I, who am burnt by the flames of discontent, am made tranquil at the sight of thy face. Like the piece of iron which is transmuted into gold at the very touch of the philosopher's stone, I who was earlier caught in the miserable plight of phenomenal existence am uplifted to the state of blessedness."

Beginning with such a hymn of praise, Saayamdeva wrote the story of Sree Guru in Kanarese. Sree Guru was pleased at it and saying, "Saayamdeva, your first son Naganatha is my chosen devotee", placed his hand in blessing on the boy's head. Young Naganatha who was dumb by birth, at once became as wise a teacher as Brihaspati^^. Then Sree Guru said to Saayamdeva, "Your wife is virtuous. She shall be blessed with four sons. As you are wealthy, do not ever think of serving the foreign king and you shall be blessed." Sree Guru continued, "There is a religious vow called Ananta Vrata which burns out the sins of those who observe it. At the instruction of Sree Krishna, Dharmaraja observed the vow and thereby won divine pleasures and bodily passage to Heaven. May you observe it." Saayamdeva replied, "Oh Lord! You are indeed Lord Ananta to us. And your service is Ananta Vrata. Who then, is the Ananta you speak of? May you expound the details of the observance to us "

Sree Guru went on, "Once upon a time, the architect for the demons, Maya had built a unique palace for Dharmaraja in which he could perform the famous sacrifice of Rajasooya. The palace was of such uncanny nature that Duryodhana who entered it saw water where there was none, and hard ground where there was indeed water, slipped and fell down. When the whole assembly of royal princes laughed at him, the proud prince felt insulted. He took revenge, on the host by winning for himself all the brothers and wife of Dharmaraja and finally Dharmaraja himself, in an unfair game of chess. Then he commanded all of them to live in wild forests. Accordingly, Dharmaraja went to the forests and there lived in suffering and danger, along with his brothers and wife. After sometime, when Shri Krishna visited him, Dharmaraja poured out his tale of misery and said, "Lord, you are hailed as the Protector of Thy Devotees. Do you not know of our sufferings?'

Lord Krishna said, 'Oh Dharmaraja, the fruition of one's previous karma is indeed relentless. However, it cannot torment those who are devoted to me. So you observe the vow called Ananta Vrata. Indeed, I am Lord Ananta and the vow is dear to me. I am the Lord of all that is; for I am in all the forms of existence. I am above karma, motive and the modes of existence. This vow has to be observed on the 14th day (chaturdasi) of the dark half of the lunar month of Bhaadrapada. This vow can bestow infinite blessings on the observer. Listen:

Once there was a sage named Sumanta who belonged to the Vasishta gotra. His wife Bhaargavi died immediately after giving birth to a baby and the sage married again. But his second wife was an ill-tempered shrew and she troubled him much. At the proper time, Sumanta gave his virtuous daughter in marriage to one Kaundinya. Once young Kaundinya visited his father-in-law's house and stayed there for two months. At last, unable to put-up with the wild temper of his mother-in-law, he got ready to return home along with his wife. The shrew of a lady refused to give him the customary gifts due to a newly wedded son-in-law. She even refused to allow him the expenses of his journey. Sumanta was helpless. At last, he gathered up a small quantity of wheat from the heap outside the hermitage and gifted it to Kaundinya. The latter set out along with his wife and by noon, reached the banks of a river where he rested for a while.

There his wife saw a few housewives observing a religious vow and asked them what it was. They said that they were observing the Ananta Vrata. At her request, they told her the details of the observance: "After taking bath, one has to put on red clothes and prepare a ritual bracelet with fourteen pieces of thread. Then, keeping darbha-grass over a pot, one has to worship it as the very

form of Lord Vishnu. Fourteen special dishes have to be prepared and gifted away to pious brahmins. The new bracelet has to be worn in place of the old. Married couples have to be fed sumptuously. This vow has to be observed on that particular day for 13 consecutive years. In the fourteenth year, at the end of the observance, pious brahmins and poor people have to be fed. This is the best of religious vows. You will do well to observe the vow yourself". The young lady observed the vow to the best of her means and gave away half the store of their wheat and returned to her husband.

Kaundinya and his wife resumed their journey. As they passed through a village, the wealthy inhabitants of it requested him to settle down in their village, which he did. In course of time, by the grace of Lord Ananta, he became rich and was much honoured for his learning and piety. One day, he had an argument with his wife and, in his pride, he plucked away the ritual bracelet from her wrist and, despite her warning, threw it in the fire. Shortly after, his house caught fire and all his wealth was destroyed. Robbers stole away whatever was left behind. He realized that it was all a result of the wrath of Lord Ananta at his misdeed. In bitter despair and repentance, he roamed about the forest, asking every cow, tree and mountain that he encountered, regarding the whereabouts of the Lord Ananta. At last, the merciful Lord Ananta appeared in the form of an old brahmin, consoled him, led him to a town which he created by his divine power and there revealed his true form. Kaundinya glorified the Lord thus:

'Oh Supreme Lord Ananta, omnipresent Spirit! Pardon the sacrilege I have committed in my ignorance.' The Lord was moved and blessed him saying, "By my grace, may you be freed from misery. May you enjoy riches and, at the end of your mortal existence, may you adorn the sky as the constellation punarvasu!" Kaundinya submitted: "Lord, earlier I have received some mystic signs. The first was a mango tree, the fruits of which were not eaten by anybody. The second was a castrated bull which could not eat fodder. The third was a pair lakes from which no creature ever slaked their thirst. I have also seen a miserable donkey, elephant and an old brahmin. May you explain their significance to me!"

The Lord explained: "The mango tree you saw is a man of learning who did not impart his wisdom to his disciples. A wealthy man who gifts away a worthless piece of land is the bull. The pair of lakes are people who merely exchange things in the name of giving away religious gifts. The donkey you have seen is a man who is enslaved by rancour. A man who is wild with lust is the elephant. I am the old brahmin you have seen. All those you have seen have just now been freed from their previous karma." The sage Kaundinya glorified Lord Ananta and secured all the wishes of his heart. Therefore, Oh Dharmaraja, you too observe the Ananta Vrata. You will be benefitted," said Sree Krishna. Dharmaraja did accordingly, vanquished his enemies, enjoyed the pleasures of kingship and entered heaven even with his physical body." Saayamdeva observed the Ananta Vrata and spent the rest of his life in the service of the Guru and at last, attained liberation. Indeed, by the grace of Lord Nrisimha Saraswathi, all his descendants attained liberation. Oh Namadharaka, you are born in such a family. Therefore, you shall surely cross this ocean of misery and reach the Lord of Immortality," said Siddha.

* Now known as 'Gangapur'.

** paada lit., a foot, meaning both 'a line' in a Sanskrit verse, or the foot of a creature, here the latter. The phenomenal universe in which exist all holy places is said in the Vedas to be a fraction of the Spirit which is infinite. Sree Guru is the Spirit (cp. 'My Father in Heaven and I are one')

***The disciple should procure food and offer it all to the Guru. What the Guru is pleased to leave of it, should be lovingly accepted as Ids prasada. In image-tiwrship, food is ritually offered to the deity (naivedya) and is afterwards distributed to devotees as prasada. The Guru is the living deity.

+ Righteousness, livelihood, fulfilment of legitimate desires and ultimate liberation from sorrow.

++ The mantra which liberates a soul from ignorance.

+++The five elements, Sun, Moon and the Self.

^Pranava - The sound 'Om' or 'Aum'

^^Brihaspati is the wise and learned teacher of the gods.

22. Chapter 21

Sree Guru replied: 'Indeed, the Self is all-pervading and yet, it manifests Itself differently in different places. This holy place is capable of bestowing liberation on the devout. I shall recount a famous anecdote to illustrate the point: In the land of Kiraataas, there was a king named Vimarshana. He was kind hearted and devoted to the gods and pious brahmins. Even though he earned the merit of worshipping Lord Shiva in his previous birth, owing to certain misdeeds of that life, he used to eat and drink all those things which were prohibited by saastras and he led a profligate life. Once his wife asked him, "Lord, with all your vices, how could you come to have such deep faith in Lord Shiva?"

The king replied: "In one of my previous lives, I was a dog in the city of Pampa. On a holy Shivaratri, I happened to go to the temple of Shiva. The devotees who assembled there beat me severely and I died then and there. By the merit of dying in the presence of Lord Shiva on such a holy day, I am now born in a royal family. All the beastly traits which you see now in me derive from my previous existence as a dog. Those subtle tendencies in me cannot but manifest themselves!" Then the queen persuaded him to enlighten her about her own previous life. He said that in that life she was a female pigeon at holy Sreesailam. "As a result of your life long stay at such a holy place, you have now become my queen." Then she asked him about the future lives of them both. He said: "In the next life, I shall be born as the prince of the kingdom of Sindhu and you shall be born in the royal family of the land of Sanjaya and we shall be united in marriage. In the life after that, I shall be the king of Sowashtra and you, born as the princess of Kalinga, shall be my queen. In the third birth hence, I shall be the king of Gaandhaara and you, as the princess of Magadha, will be my queen. In the fourth birth, I shall be the king of Avanti and you, as the princess of Dasaarna, will be my queen. In the fifth life, I shall be a king named Ananta and you, as the daughter of king Yayaati, will be my wife. In the sixth life, I shall be the very handsome king of Paandya and you, as the virtuous princess of Vidarbha, will marry me. In that life, we will enjoy kingly pleasures and perform many great religious sacrifices. In the seventh birth, we will attain liberation by the grace of sage Agasthya. In this manner, even animals and birds will attain to higher states of existence. Indeed, it is human beings who, through the force of their earlier evil actions, will be born subsequently as various other creatures in nature. But the gods will ever take care that they do not fall away from their heavenly states."

Then Sree Guru brought back Tanthuka to the Sangama near Gangapur in as mysterious a way and ordered him to retire to his village. A few people of the village had also joined him and, on the way, asked him why he got his head shaved. He told them how Sree Guru took him mysteriously to Sreesailam and how he got his head shaved there as per the custom of the place. They could not believe his words and said, 'Till a few hours ago, this man was here! He is weaving fairy tales.' At night, all of them came to the Sangama, observed fast and kept a vigil till dawn, chanting the name of Lord Shiva.

A fortnight later, all the kinsfolk of Tanthuka returned from Sreesailam. They wondered when they learned that he was back at Gangapur far ahead of them. They realized that it was all the

grace of Sree Guru. The people at Gangapur also confirmed Tanthuka's words. Through incessant service of his Master, he eventually freed himself from the shackles of his previous karma and attained the highest bliss that transcends the pairs of opposites like joy and sorrow. Who can ever know how many are the souls that were thus liberated through devotion to the Guru? In the same manner, there were two poets who attained liberation by celebrating the divine glory of Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi in verse. Infinite are the divine acts of the Lord and no one can ever know them in full. The vedas themselves have betrayed their inability to comprehend His glory."

Namadharaka longed to know the story of the two poets in full. So Siddha gladly resumed his account: "A brahmin by name Nandi Sharma was afflicted by leprosy. In order to free himself of it, he practised severe austerity (tapas) at Thuljapur. One day, goddess Bhavaani appeared to him in a vision and directed him to worship goddess Chandaleswari. Accordingly, he went there and practised austerities for seven long months. One day, the goddess appeared in a vision and directed him to serve the sannyasi at Gangapur to realize his object! The brahmin was shocked and even lost his patience and remonstrated her. 'Are you, a goddess, not ashamed to tell me to serve a common mortal? What happened to your divine power? If you could not help me yourself, why have you not told me so even earlier and spared me all my long, strenuous efforts?' Without a word, the goddess disappeared. The man again pursued his austerity to win her favour, but it was in vain. At last, finding no other way, one day he went to Gangapur to see the sannyasi, as per the direction of the goddess. Strangely enough, in spite of his repeated enquiries, no one at Gangapur directed him to the Lord. At last, an old man told him that the Master was due to arrive there for the holy Shivaratri. Meanwhile, some of the local devotees of Sree Guru had conveyed to Him the news of the arrival of Nandi Sharma.

Immediately, Sree Guru summoned Nandi Sharma and said, "Why have you come here to serve a common mortal, leaving aside the many deities? For, no mere mortal can ever free you of your fell disease." Nandi Sharma immediately realized the stuff of which the sannyasi was made, that He was indeed the Supreme Lord Himself. He prayed, 'Lord, pardon me my error. I am dull of intellect and a sceptic, a fallen sinner. You, on the other hand, are the ocean of mercy and filial love for your devotees. I seek your refuge. I have none else to help me. Soon after my marriage, I was afflicted by this foul disease. Even my parents and wife have left me. Even the gods have refused to respond to my prayers. I find it better to end my life than to prolong such a tale of misery. Oh Thou Supreme Self, if you too look on me with a cold eye, I shall be compelled to take my life!' The merciful Lord was moved at his plight and said, 'Do not fear, my son! This disease is a result of your previous sins which can be washed off only through patient endurance. Indeed, you have gained this faith in me now, only because the results of your evil karma have worked out. Now you take a dip in the holy Sangama: Then the Guru turned to another disciple by name Somanatha and said, 'Take this Nandi Sharma to the river for a bath, guide him in worshipping the nearby peepul tree and then bring him back!'

Accordingly, Nandi Sharma finished the bath and worship at the Sangama, returned to the Master and prostrated to his feet. The Lord lovingly raised him up and said, 'My son, Nandi Sharma, stand up and look at your own body!' Nandi Sharma was amazed to find that all his body was clean except for a small ugly patch on the leg. He turned to Sree Guru and asked him why the patch was left behind. Sree Guru said, 'You had a trace of doubt in your heart and hence this patch has remained.' Nandi Sharma bowed to him and prayed earnestly, 'Oh Supreme Lord, is it possible that a man should drink ambrosia and yet, simply because he mistakes it to be water, that he could be subject to-death? Does the fire cease to burn, simply because a man touches it in ignorance?'

Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi said: 'Everything happens according to one's faith. If a man loses his sight through his own fault, can he see the sun? At first, you had the doubt that nothing can be gained through the service of a guru. This patch is a consequence of it. Still, there is a means of

getting rid of it. You sing a hymn of praise which, on the basis of the teachings of the vedas, expresses your realization that I am not a mere mortal. Thereby, you shall realize your object: The brahmin felt helpless and trembled with apprehension and said, 'O Lord Supreme, you are the indweller of the hearts of all creatures. What need I to tell you? How can I compose a hymn when I am totally illiterate? Tell me something else which is in my power to do.' Sree Guru said, 'My son, just as the tusk which has grown out of an elephant's mouth cannot be withdrawn to its root, the words I have uttered cannot be taken back. You must do as you are told.'

At once, great learning and poetic ability welled up in Nandi Sharma's heart. Love and reverence for the Guru had cloyed his heart. And he commenced singing his hymn in a trembling voice: 'Oh Supreme Lord! Thou art That (Reality). You are the Doer, Sustainer, the Eternal Witness, the true Self of all! You have projected all creatures from the three modes of prakriti (nature) and thereby projected the whole universe of things, both the moving and unmoving. Among all the sentient creatures, only a human being is fit for Enlightenment. Even he is deluded by Thy power of maaya. He is enmeshed in the web of motives and, in consequence of his sins, wanders about amidst the horrors of hell. And he cannot free himself even in the course of the vast cosmic epochs. Even if his soul passes to higher realms of existence by the force of his virtuous deeds, as soon as their effects are worked out, he falls back to the realm of the moon. There, he feeds himself of food and takes the form of sperm. At the time of conjugal union of his prospective parents, he merges with the oval secretion of the mother-to-be and settles down in her womb. There he stays for a day in the form of a thick fluid and, for the next five days, he assumes the form of a bubble. After eighteen more days, he assumes a more solid form. In a month's time, he grows more solid. In the course of months, he develops the various parts of the physical body, such as a head in the first month, neck in the third, skin, nails and hair in the fourth. From the fifth month onwards, the orifices like nostrils, ears and mouth appear. Movement starts in the seventh. In the eighth month, intellect starts manifesting itself. Thus by the ninth month, his body is fully formed, and he takes birth. (Then he grows and dies and thus passes on from womb to womb, endlessly. I have passed through all this gamut of experiences. In this life, I am illiterate, old, diseased and was in despair, Oh Lord, may you uplift me! I shall ever worship you henceforth!).

'Oh Lord! Owing to the pulsations of the womb, the human being emanates from it and at once loses his understanding and is deluded. During his infancy, he has no freedom, nor can he communicate his agony to others. He loses sight of the very idea of winning his way to higher states of spiritual existence. During his boyhood, he forgets himself in play and, in youth, he is totally preoccupied with sexual drives. Blind to all good and bad, he is engulfed in a hectic pursuit, of sensual pleasures, like a beast. In old age, he will be obsessed with the fear of approaching death. He is overtaken by illness like cough and breathing troubles. Finally, he dies without gaining any mastery over his senses.

In this way, a clear half of the whole span of man's life is spent away idly in night and sleep. Major portions of what is left are wasted in play during boyhood, and worldly occupations in middle age. In old age, he is not free but is dependent on others. Thus, the precious human life is wasted away. Human life proves worthwhile only through devotion to you and through association with the wise and the devout. Therefore, may you bless me with faith in you and worthy association all my life! Then Nandi Sharma turned to the people who gathered there and said: 'Oh my brothers and sisters, Sree Guru who is right in front of us is the Supreme Lord Himself and not a common mortal, as he looks. Those of you who wish to gain your welfare would do well to take refuge in him, either through the practice of yoga, or through listening to and meditating on his teaching. The Lord ever abides by those who are thus, devoted to Him. For, he can be won over only through faith.

The brahmin again turned to the Guru exclaiming, 'Oh thou Supreme Lord, even the Vedas have failed to describe Thy glory. Indeed, no one can enumerate Thy glories which are infinite and

are above the power of speech and mind to comprehend.' When he finally bowed down in reverence, he found that even the little patch of dirty skin on his body had been cleared! Then, at the instruction of the Guru, he came away to Gangapur along with his wife, lived there for long and recorded the divine acts of Sree Guru.

One day Nandi Sharma read out his verses to another poet named Narakesari, living in a nearby village. The latter was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva and he believed that the gods alone are worthy of adoration and worship. It was his vow to compose a verse in praise of Lord Kalleshwara (as the Lord Shiva was called in the local temple) every day. So he appreciated the poetry of Nandi Sharma's verses, but objected to the glorification of a common mortal like Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi. Later in the day, during his daily worship of Lord Kalleshwara, when he was meditating on the Linga, Sree Guru appeared in that form, laughed and taunted him saying, "Where is your Lord Kalleshwara?" So he quickly concluded his meditation and rushed for darshan of the Lord at Gangapur! There, as he began to sing the five verses he had composed in his praise, Sree Guru said to him, 'Why do you set aside the Supreme Lord and glorify a common mortal?' Amazed Narakesari replied: 'Lord I have indeed mistaken you for a common mortal. May you shower your mercy on me, dispel my ignorance and grant me true wisdom. My delusion is now dispelled and the merit of all my previous acts of austerity has borne fruit in this moment: May you accept me as your disciple and bless me!'

Sree Guru was pleased with the devotion of the visitor, gave him a comment, and said, 'You continue to worship Lord Kalleshwara at your place. For, I myself am there in that form.' Narakesari submitted: 'My Lord, I am not to forego your immediate presence. Bless me with the good fortune of serving you. Without much difficulty I have gained you who are the divine, wishfulfilling cow (kamadhenu). I am the humblest of your disciples. May you not be indifferent to my plea.' The merciful Lord then accepted him as his disciple and bestowed on him the bliss of Self-realization. Thus Narakesari also served the Master for long by singing his glory in his poems."

23. Chapter 22

Namadharaka said to Siddha: "Holy Sir, the more I listen to the stories of the Guru, the more my appetite for them is whetted. It is my good fortune that I could come into contact with such a one like you who is not tired of my insatiable thirst for the stories of the Guru. Siddha replied: "Namadharaka, how long can you go on drinking thus of the nectar of the divine acts of Sree Guru who is the manifestation of the Supreme Spirit and is of the nature of Reality-Awareness-Bliss? And who can ever recount to you the unfathomable and infinite glories of the Lord? In the vastness of immense space, from the smallest moth to the biggest of birds, so many creatures fly. But each of them can cover only a little of it, in proportion to its own might. So too, I shall narrate the divine deeds of the Lord to the best of my ability.

Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi is very, kind and loving to his devotees and he conducts himself in accordance with their attitude to him. The Lord is originally formless and of the nature of pure *Satthva*, free from all cravings and unborn. However, by manifesting *buddhi* or intellect as one of his attributes, he became, the Self of the universe. Though He is all pervading, He manifested himself as Lord Brahma in the Satyaloka, as Vishnu in the Vaikuntha and as Maheswara in the Kailasa, so that sages might be blessed with his sight. As there are many devout souls on earth who take refuge in Him only, He wished to manifest Himself to them. To this end, He has been manifesting Himself on earth in every epoch and uplifting those who serve Him, by His grace. Who can ever capture in speech, the boundless love of the Lord for his devotees? For, though by Himself, in Spirit, He is ever complete and fulfilled, in his human manifestation, He wanders to the houses of His devotees for *bhiksha*. All these, His divine acts, but demonstrate His love for His devotees. He who cannot be reached in other Yugas even through severe austerities, responds readily to us in this yuga

by our mere thought of Him, with a heart full of love. Therefore it is our good fortune that we are living in this age of *Kali*. The Lord who is the slave of His devotees, moves about like a begging sannyasi in this place.

Once, several devotees coming from seven different villages visited Sree Guru on the eve of holy Diwali or the festival of lights. Everyone of them came to him with a wish to take him to his house on the holy day. Accordingly, one from each of the villages, by turns, had put forth the same request: 'May you be pleased to grace our house and stay with me for atleast five days'. Sree Guru replied: 'You are seven and I am one! How can I attend the celebration which go on simultaneously in all the seven places? I can only stay for one day with each of you. If all of you can agree to this, it will be nice.' But the next moment, he added, "I am a slave of my devotees. I will accompany those who could take me with them!" There naturally ensued much argument and wrangling among the devotees as to who should take him. One of them appealed to the Lord, 'Oh Sir, pray, do not ignore my invitation, simply because I am not as rich as the others.' Another interrupted him saying, 'My Master, I may be rich, but I will be a pauper without your grace: Everyone of them finally bowed to him praying that his own invitation be honoured above the rest. Finally, the Guru said, 'I shall visit all your houses. All of you may go home happily: When they were about to take leave of him, all of them had a doubt whether they can take his word for a promise. Sree Guru who knew their hearts called everyone of them separately and told him, 'I shall visit only your house. But do not reveal this to the others!' Everyone of them thought that the Master really meant to visit his house only. Thus all of them departed happily. Later, however, the devotees at the *muth* sadly said, 'Lord, if you leave us and go away to another village on the holy day, how unhappy do we feel!' the Master said, 'I shall not go any where! Do not be anxious on that account.'

Indeed, during the celebration of Diwali, the Guru assumed seven identical forms and graced the houses of all the devotees in the seven places simultaneously, with his presence in his eighth form, he stayed at his *muth*. The omnipresent Lord stayed for five long days in all the eight places! The seven devotees again visited the *muth* in the holy month of *Kartik* and they were telling one another that Sree Guru had graced their respective houses during the festivities of Diwali. The disciples at the *muth* intervened and said, 'In fact, the Lord had not left the *muth* at all during the five days celebration. He graced us all by his presence here. Consequently, every one of them accused every other of telling lies. When the argument drew the attention of Sree Guru, he said, 'Do not dispute among yourselves. I am everywhere!' Everyone was struck dumb with amazement and joy. Together, they all sang his glory: 'Thus, Supreme Lord, unable to fathom your mystery, we wrangle and dispute about you. How could our common language ever acknowledge thy glory adequately, when even the Vedas have failed to do so? Verily, you are the In-dweller of the heart-cave of every creature. Oh Thou all-pervading one, your divine birth and acts aim only at blessing thy devotees. Be pleased to bless us that we are not deluded by thy power of cosmic illusion. Ay, may we not be deluded by all that is seen and heard (by our illusory senses)'. The Lord blessed them all saying, 'Amen!' (***Thathaasthu!***).

In this manner, the Lord who is of the nature of RealityAwareness-Bliss had sported his divine acts which are inconceivable to us. The Lord is pleased only by our faith and he never cares for our race, ritual conduct, age, beauty, learning, wealth and resourcefulness. I shall illustrate what I mean:

There was a peasant who, by adhering to the occupation of farm labour that is enjoined on him by ***saastras (swadharm)***, enjoyed worldly prosperity and finally attained liberation. Everyday, he attended to his labours and as Sree Guru passed that way towards the Sangama for his daily bath, bowed to him. In order to make the passage comfortable to the Guru, he removed stones

and thorns on the path and levelled it. One day, as the Guru passed that way, the man bowed to him as usual and again resumed his work. Sree Guru then asked him, 'Why do you bow to me every day? What do you hope to gain thereby? Tell me your heart's wish!' The man replied, 'My Lord, I hope to enjoy worldly pleasures and prosperity. By your grace, my farm looks luscious. Even though I am a sudra I am your devotee and hence I hope I will not be ignored by you:

Sree Nrisimha Sarawathi saw that the whole field was rich with ears of grain, though not yet ripe for harvesting. He turned to the labourer and said, 'My son, if you have any faith in my word, harvest the field completely by the time I return from the Sangama.' As soon as Sree Guru went away, the farmer went to the landlord and requested him to fix the terms of payment in grain, so that he could at once reap the corn. The landlord said in surprise, 'But it is not yet time for harvesting!' and refused to spell out the terms. The farmer said, 'Sir, I promise to give twice the amount of grain I have given you last year'. He persisted and somehow extracted the needed document in writing.

Immediately, he called the labourers and started reaping the corn. His wife was shocked to know that he had started harvesting the field much in advance of the proper season. She at once ran, along with her children, to the field and tried to dissuade him. However, he put her off by threats and went ahead with his work. Such indeed, is true faith and devotion. For the love of the Lord, Bharata had sacrificed his attachment to his mother; Prahlada had left his father and Vibheeshana forsook his brother. The farmer's wife ran to the landlord and complained to him saying, 'Oh sir, in foolish obedience to the words of a sannyasi, my husband has started harvesting the crop before it is fully ripe. Pray, stop him!' The landlord sent word through his man, commanding the farmer not to go ahead with his foolish plan. The farmer stood his ground saying, 'You cannot frighten me out of my work as long as I have the record of terms of agreement!' The messenger had to return to the landlord and conveyed the reply to him. The landlord was helpless. He said to the farmer's wife, 'Woman, how can I go back on my word? I cannot command him now, as he too has grown rich of late. The woman returned to her husband wailing. The man did not budge but finished his job. He calmly stood in wait for the master to return.

In a short while, Sree Guru came there, looked at the field and asked the farmer why he acted in such an odd manner. 'You have done what no one else would ever dream of doing! Alas, I was only joking when I told you to do so. What is to become of your living, and how are you going to pay the landlord's share, now that the fruits of a year's labour have gone a waste? Why did you harvest the field before it was ripe?' Unperturbed; the farmer said, 'My Guru's word is the law unto me. Nothing else can bestow the like rewards on me. I am not worried about my living. For He who has blessed me with this birth shall Himself sustain me!' Then Sree Guru said, 'If, indeed your faith is so great, it shall be so!' and went his way to the muth. The farmer, with no other thought in his mind than the holy form of Sree Guru, carted the grain home. Shortly after, when the sun entered the constellation of moola, there was heavy rain and the whole field was full with corn, ripe for harvest! Everyone, including the farmer's wife, marvelled at the miracle. The woman touched her husband's feet in reverence saying, 'My good Lord, you are a true devotee of Sree Guru. Pardon me my ignorance.' The farmer happily proceeded to the field and performed ritual worship to it. They saw Sree Guru returning from the Sangama and bowed to him.

The farmer addressed him, 'My Lord, your holy feet are my wish-fulfilling gem, your word is the life-reviving force and your form is of the nature of Divine light. Just as the owl is not able to see the light of day, the ignorant ones cannot perceive your true nature. By the fruit of my previous meritorious actions, I shall seek your divine abode. I am indeed blessed. May your holy self ever think of me lovingly'. Sree Guru said, 'Even a man given to wicked ways will be made holy by serving me with singleness of mind. Such shall attain the same state of bliss as does the man of

virtue and faith. Therefore, your house shall ever be blessed with plenty and your heart will ever be rooted in faith. You need not harbour any doubt in this regard'.

When Sree Guru went away, the farmer went to the landlord and said, 'Sir, I shall give you twice the quantity of grain mentioned in our agreement. For the yield is twice as plentiful as every year.' The landlord said, No, I shall not accept even a grain more than what we have agreed upon. I do not want any grain earned in transgression of my word. What you, have obtained by the grace of Sree Guru belongs to you. It is enough if you give me what is my due.' The farmer too took for himself what was his due and distributed the surplus to the needy. By the grace of Sree Guru, he grew rich and continued to serve his Master. I believe that the place where this miracle took place is hallowed."

On hearing the words of Siddha, Namadharaka had a question to ask: "Oh Mahatma, leaving aside such holy places as Kasi, why did the Lord choose to live in this place?"

Siddha replied: "The Lord saw that the holy places in Gangapur are surrounded in all directions by deities and so he chose this as his abode. Once, some people of this place wished to go to Kasi. Then Sree Guru told them, 'In this age of Kali, the holiness of all places of pilgrimage gets hidden from public access. I shall show you some such here itself*.' So saying, he showed them the holy spots at Gangapur and explained thus:

'This is Sangama. This verily is (as holy as) Prayag. These are the *Shatkula teerthas***.' This Sangama is the confluence of the three rivers, the Triveni***. This is the river Amaraja. Whoever takes a dip in it shall be freed from his sins and will achieve immense religious merit and his wishes will be fulfilled. Once Lord Shiva gifted nectar to god Indra to revive all those gods in his army who were killed by the demon Jalandhara in war. A little of it spilled in this place and it took the shape of a holy river. The same is this river Amaraja (the river of immortal born of nectar) which can destroy the fear of death. The peepul tree here is as holy as the famous Wishfulfilling Tree. The streamlet near it is what is known as *Manoratha* (lit, aspiration) teertha. In front of it is the famous *Santosha* (beatitude) teertha. The Shivalinga there (known as 'Rudra') is Vishweshwara, the Lord of the Universe. Whoever goes round the Shivalinga in the proper manner and, touching the genitals of the Nandeeswara with his left hand and keeping the thumb and fore finger of the right hand on the two horns, looks at the linga through the intervening space (between the two fingers and the two horns of Nandi) will attain the status of a god.* For the uplift of the souls on earth, Shiva had sanctified Kasi. A devotee of Lord Shiva who attained liberation while in body lived in this place, like one stupefied. He considered inner contact (identification) with the body as venomous as a snake, sensual pleasures as poison and women as corpses.

One day, he summoned all his kinsfolk and said, 'Look, here is Kasi!' They requested him to show him the same, more clearly. Then he prayed to Lord Shiva. The Lord appeared before them along with the whole city of Kasi about him. Similarly, the *jeevanmukta* showed them the Shivalinga of Lord Vishweshwara in the sacred water tank called the *uttama kundah*. (lit., the excellent lake) He then told his people, 'This is the city of Kasi. Everyone should undertake the holy pilgrimage here in a proper manner every year. Our family deity is Lord Vithal. Yet the pilgrimage to Kasi which is performed *here* will wash away our sins and grant us our wishes.'

As Sree Guru went on with his account, his sister by birth, a lady named Ratna, came there and bowed to him. At once he said to her, 'Do you remember what I have told you?' Then she recollected the former incident and noticed leprosy on certain parts of her body. When she was sorry for it, the Lord said, "If you are prepared to reap this consequence of a previous sin in your

next life, you shall now be made clean". Ratnadevi replied, 'Lord, bless me that I have no more births. I do not want anything else: Then the Guru said, 'If anyone takes bath in the Papanasa Teertha for three days, he shall be freed from the sins of seven previous births, what to speak of freedom from leprosy?' She did accordingly and the disease vanished. Then the Guru showed them Koti Teertha (the lake of crore holy lakes) 'Those who take the holy dip here on auspicious days, practise such devotion as japa and religious charity will be blessed with infinite reward.' He then showed them the Rudrapada Teertha and said that the ritual acts that are to be performed there are the same as for Gaya. He also said that the (Chakra Teertha which is at the end of river Krishna is equal in holiness to holy Dwaravati and even four times as holy. 'Even a sinner who takes bath there will be blessed. To the east of this village is Gokarna, where abides Lord Shiva in the form of Kalleswara and is also known as Mahabaleshwara. The Manmatha Teertha there is as sacred as the sea. By performing **abhisheka** to Shiva in the month of Shraavana and by celebrating the festival of lights in the month of Kaarthika, one's wishes are fulfilled and much good accrues.' Henceforth, the people started following Sree Guru's instructions. Knowing that the place is so sacred, Sree Nrisimha Saraswathi had opted to live there. He is indeed the fulfiller of his devotee's wishes. He uplifted a muslim king spiritually. Even though such a holy one dwells amidst us, the ignorant masses cannot recognize him, just as the born-blind cannot see the sun."

* Sree Guru subtly indicates that there is a close correspondence, between the holy places in the objective world outside and the corresponding principles in our inner awareness. When the latter are fully developed and awakened and are unclouded by baser passions in a person, such a one can spiritually summon up the subtle and holy forces corresponding to the various holy places in the world outside. Indeed, it looks as though the spiritual potencies of various holy places are found spread all over the whole universe. 'When the Perfect Master chooses to live in any place, his spiritual potencies being fully developed, spontaneously awaken the counter-parts of the holy places in the world outside in the very place of his choice. In saying that in the Kali age, the holy places get 'hidden', the sastras meant that the inner spiritual potencies of Mankind are completely overcast by their baser passions. And to that extent, relatively to such persons, even the holy places in the objective world lose much of their responsiveness to their devotion.

** Shat means Six; Shat kula teerthas are six holy springs or streams that confluence.

*** The confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi.

+ Nandeeswara is the idol of the divine bull which is depicted as reclining in front of a shrine of Shiva. He is said to be the vehicle of the Lord. Symbolically, Shiva represents pure consciousness in us and Nandi can be taken to stand for the physical and mental bodies in one. Touching its genitals with the left hand represents the conquest of lust and seeing Shiva from between its horns represents the fixing of attention in the centre of the eye brows in meditation, when pure consciousness is cognised. Speaking in yogic terms, we may say that touching the genitals with the left hand symbolises the pressing of the yogic centre near the genitals with the left heel. Thus the body-mind complex is united in directing the attention on to the pure consciousness. More elaborate meaning can be given but this serves our purpose here.

24. Chapter 23

Namadharaka asked Siddha: "Holy one, you have vividly described to me the greatness of these holy places. It was as though I could see them all clearly with my own eyes. Wherever the Lord manifests himself, there abide all the gods and holy Places. Therefore, as you have said, this Sangama is as holy as the confluence of Ganga and the five holy rivers. In this place, even the birds and beasts which take a dip in the river and drink this water are sure to obtain liberation. Even by listening the holiness of this place, our hearts are purified. For those who live in this place, the

final state of liberation is at their command. Those who yearn for liberation resort to the path of Bhakti. Earlier, I too longed for liberation. By listening to your accounts, devotion to the Lord without any (such) other motive has banished even the desire for mukti*. The only thing that pleases me now is singing the glory of my Lord. Sweeter still is drinking the nectarine accounts of the divine acts of the Lord. The whole of your being is filled with such accounts. Therefore, be pleased to recount the same to me. Who was the muslim king you spoke of? How could such a fallen one earn the grace of the Lord?"

Siddha commenced his account: "Namadharaka, it is by the grace of the Lord that such a noble longing has captured your heart. You are indeed blessed. I too enjoy immensely the pleasure of recounting the stories of the Lord.

When Lord Sreepada Swami lived in flesh and blood at Kurupura, a washerman used to take his darshan, bow to Him and serve Him with all his heart. One day the Lord, pleased with his devotion, said, 'Fellow, one day you will be a king!' The man was immensely happy to hear the word. One day, he happened to see the ruler of the land, sporting in the waters of the river, in the company of beautiful maidens and thought: 'Great must be the guru of this king! Else, how could he have come by such royal pomp and luxury? He is truly blessed. How can I ever dream of such a good fortune?' At once, Lord Sreepada (who too came there for his dip) knew his innermost thoughts and said to him: 'My dear, you are now quite old; you will not be able to enjoy such pleasures even if you get them now. I assure you that in your next life, you will be a king and enjoy such pomp and power. Do not feel anxious.' The washerman said, 'Lord, the blessing you have given agrees with my heart's desire. It will be possible only for a youth to enjoy such pleasures in full. But pray, grant me that I shall be blessed with firm faith in you, inspite of my royalty, in my next life.' Sreepada blessed him saying, 'May it be so!'

After some time, the washerman died and was reborn in a royal muslim family in the city of Vaidhurya. In course of time, he became the king. Yet, owing to the force of the subtle tendencies of his former birth, he was endowed with a high sense of justice, a sense of loving equality to all creatures and loving regard for the Hindu gods and pious brahmins. Some of his fanatical ministers were not pleased with his spirit of tolerance. They often counselled him saying, 'Oh mighty king! It is proper for you to stick to the tenets of your own religion. Your present ways are unworthy of even being conceived of in your mind. When all human beings are equally endowed with similar organs, flesh and blood, how can the Hindu institution of caste-system, for instance, be approved of by you? How can the Supreme Lord abide in such inert and material objects like idols, and trees like the peepul, which Hindus worship?'

The king replied: it is the dullness of your intellects that makes you think so. By creating different individuals with different aptitudes and abilities in thought and action, the Lord Himself has created the various castes'. The Supreme Lord is all-pervading. Just as children are taught alphabets and simple words and are thus, in gradual stages, led to higher levels of understanding, it is proper that the simple-hearted folk should first learn to practise steadiness of heart and mind in meditation with the help of idols and forms. Such steadiness in meditation leads to higher states of understanding and wisdom. Then they will be able to comprehend the Supreme, all-pervading, formless God. Even a mirror, when it is covered with dust, cannot reflect the object properly. When the dust is wiped off, a clear image is obtained. So too, as long as the mind is impure, it cannot grasp a clear conception of the Lord. But when it is purified through such devotional practice as meditation, it can understand the glory of the Formless. It is therefore proper that I respect pious brahmins too who are the knowers of the perennial wisdom of the Vedas which is its own authority. For, their practice accords with their understanding. You too will do well to imbibe my attitude to them. Such brahmins are deemed divine even by the gods. Indeed, all those who live in accordance with the holy laws enunciated by the Vedas and the smritis are worthy of reverence.

Therefore you should outgrow your fanatical and communal prejudices: The counsellors were not pleased with his logic, but they could do nothing else than keeping their own counsel.

After some time, the king was laid up with severe boils on his thigh. Several physicians had failed in their efforts to cure him and the king could not bear the suffering. He could not even take food. One day, he sent for a pious brahmin and humbly requested him to suggest a way of getting rid of the disease. The brahmin said, 'Sir, you are a muslim king and I am orthodox brahmin. If you do what I say, your people will not spare you. So I shall offer my suggestion only in strict privacy: The king agreed and accompanied the brahmin to a far away place, a theertha (a hallowed place). There, the brahmin said to him: "Disease is always a consequence of the sins of our former lives. It can be cured by giving away religious gifts (daana **, or by administering medicine, or by worship of deities. But the most efficacious means is to take darshan of great mahatmas, which indeed cleans us of all our sins. I shall recount a story to illustrate my point:

Once upon a time, there lived a fallen-brahmin in the city of Ujjain. He left off the principles of right conduct enjoined by the sastras to the winds and lived the life of a libertine. Besides, he was infatuated with a courtesan named Pingala. However, by virtue of the religious merit of a former life, sage Rishabha once came to their house. The brahmin and his concubine received him with due reverence and worshipped him. They partook of the washings of his feet, fed him sumptuously and put him to sleep on cosy cushions. As he slept peacefully, they stood by in attention, with folded hands, ready to answer his calls. The next morning, the sage woke up and went away. By virtue of such a meritorious act, both the brahmin and his woman were born in their next life in a pious kshatriya (warrior caste) family. The brahmin was born as the son of king Vajrabahu of the land of Dashaarna. One of the other wives of the king was jealous of her good fortune and poisoned the royal queen when she was pregnant. However, by the grace of God, the queen did not die, but gave birth to a handsome son. The bad effect of the poison, however, showed itself by causing ugly blebs and boils to appear on the bodies of the mother and the child. No physician could cure them. As they could not take any food, they were emaciated and very ill. The king was persuaded by his other wives to desert them in a wild forest. Henceforth, he lived happily with his second wife. The unfortunate queen suffered much on account of the boils on the body, dangers from the wild beasts in the forest and stones and thorns all along the path. Often, she prayed to god in this manner:

"Oh Lord, I cannot bear this suffering any longer. It would be better for us to be devoured by a lion or a tiger. Only such an event seems to be capable of relieving us from this plight." In the course of her wanderings, one day, she saw a herd of cows. Approaching the herdsmen, she cried out to them that she was about to die of thirst. They showed her the way to the nearest lake. She went there, quenched her thirst and rested herself for a while. Meanwhile, a group of women came there to take home drinking water in pitchers. She then addressed them and enquired who the blessed king of the land was, that they should all look so happy and contented. They told her that their king was of a wealthy merchant caste and his name was Padmaakara. Even as they were telling her of the noble disposition of the king, royal attendants came there. The unfortunate queen followed the guards to the royal palace and poured her tale of woe to the king Padmaakara.

The king was moved by her account and accorded her his protection. In course of time, the condition of her son deteriorated and he succumbed to the boils. The unfortunate mother lamented: 'Oh my son, you have deserted me in this ocean of misery! Do you not care for all the hardships I had to face for your sake? I was separated from my husband and parents only on account of you. I loved you as my very life. I cannot live without you!

By a strange coincidence, sage Rishabha came there, heard her lamentation and said, Mother, why do you wail in vain? This world is illusory and transient. The merely material, mortal

body does not deserve to be invested with the illusory fondness and feeling as for a son. Just as the worm dwells in its improvised nest of thorns and acts in its proper manner as long as life exists in it, the soul inhabits the body which is built in accordance with one's previous actions and undergoes the various karmic effects. The soul which seems to have sprung from the workings of karma, the modes of nature (gunas) and time, is indeed an aspect of the all-pervading consciousness. Indeed, he is originally beyond all relationships and difference of sex. The phenomenal body which has both births and deaths is based on ignorance. Still, as this nescience is beginningless, the jeeva or the individual soul is said to be endowed with bodies from times without beginning. Knowing this, you should keep up your mental poise and face your praaradha with courage. Devote the rest of your life to the service of the Lord!

The unfortunate mother replied: 'Lord, the wisdom which you have so compassionately expounded to me cannot take root in the heart of me who am in the grip of ignorance. May you do to me that which would console my heart. When I am in such dire distress, you have come to me as the embodiment of the Lord's grace'. The compassionate sage knew by his yogic power, that her dead son was his devotee in his previous life, and sprinkled a little sacred ash on the corpse. At once, the boy came to life and sat up like one who woke up from deep slumber! The sage, by his mysterious power, blessed the boy with a sword, a divine armour and the strength of 12000 elephants*** and told the mother, 'Your son is blessed with long life and royal authority. He will be invincible' and the sage went away. In course of time, the blessings of the sage fully bore fruit. Thus the power of holy sages cannot be adequately described. Therefore seek the protection of such a one", said the learned brahmin.

The muslim ruler was pleased. He said, "You have well delineated the divine competence of saints. But where can we now find such a one? Be pleased to tell me, if you happen to know of such a one. Do not hesitate to do so for fear that I am an alien, being a muslim." The brahmin said: "I heard that there is, at the celebrated confluence of Bheema and Amaraja rivers, the greatest of renunciate sages, a sannyasi who is omnipotent as the Lord Himself. Seek his protection and you will realize your object!"

The ruler at once returned to his capital and set out with all his royal retinue, to pay homage to the sage. He first arrived at Gangapur and enquired of the people there, "Where is the holy sage of this place? Please direct me to him!" The innocent folk were scared at the sight of the ruler and of an alien faith+ and would not speak. The ruler assured them, "Sirs, I have come only to pay homage to the holy one. Please do not entertain any suspicions regarding my intent. Please tell me where I can find him!" Only then did they tell him that the Guru was at the Sangama.

The prince alighted from his royal palanquin and humbly proceeded to the hallowed spot on foot. On seeing him, the Guru addressed him with loving familiarity, "Oh my dear washerman, why didn't you see me for so long?" At once, the memory of his previous life was awakened in the prince and all his former devotion was stirred in his heart. With a quivering voice, he recalled: "Lord, you were the holy one, Sreepada, and I was the washerman and your humble slave. Now I am a prince only through the power of your former blessing. Thou, of omnipotent will, pardon my delay!". He said, "Immersed in the royal pleasures and pomp with which you have blessed me, I lost sight of Thee, the bestower of it all! Have mercy on me, your humble servant and a fallen one. This, my stubborn illness, has proved instrumental in securing for me this blessed meeting with thy holy self. Thereby was my forgetfulness dispelled and the former facts vividly recalled!" The loving Master smiled and demanded;

"Show me thy diseased parts!" The prince looked up and, finding no such in any part of his body, was amazed. He burst out in a flood of praise: "Lord this illness, I feel was but thy servant. It has dragged me, an unrighteous one and a sinner, to thy blessed presence. Having accomplished its allotted task, it has vanished. Pray, uplift me, who am lost in this ocean of miserable existence

which is but a shadow without any substance, through thy teaching!" The Master, in a voice full of authority asked, "Have you fully enjoyed the royal pleasures, or have you any more desires left unfulfilled? Consider well and say!"

The prince submitted, "By your grace, all my longings have been fulfilled. But I wish that your holiness should see the regal splendour you have blessed me with." The Master replied, "Oh prince, how can I ever step in your realm where holy cows are slaughtered? If I do so, the people of the four castes (i.e., native Hindus) will blame me, and so will your fellow muslims blame you for according me such a royal welcome." The latter pleaded: "I am not a prince in fact! I am but a washerman and your humble servant when you were Lord Sreepada! I shall prohibit the slaughter of cows in my principality. Pray, grace it with your visit!" The Lord yielded saying, "It is not in my nature to turn down or ignore the wishes of my devout ones. I will go with you!"

The prince was overwhelmed with joy and bore the Master's Padukas (sandals) on his head. He seated Sree Guru and his disciples in royal palanquins and followed them on foot. The Master noticed it and said, "Son, we have a long way to go. It does not behove a prince to proceed in this fashion." The prince protested, "Pray, do not address me as such, for I am no prince. I am but your slave and a washerman! I shall at once transfer my royal authority to another and I shall devote my life to implicit obedience to thy dictates." The Lord said, "Son, rulership is always a manifestation of the divine guardians of the cardinal directions. Being blessed with such, it does not behove you to treat yourself that way. You may deem it as my command and come along on horse-back!" The prince obeyed. As they proceeded, the Master again said: "We that are adherents of religious law and renunciates, should not travel with a princely personage like you and of an alien faith, lest it cause confusion and misapprehension in the minds of the people. So I shall go ahead and you come after and join me there". So saying, the Master reached the holy place of Papanasa Thirtha⁺⁺, 44 Kos⁺⁺⁺ away, miraculously, in just half a minute. The disciples who were there were pleasantly surprised to find him in his devotions. Naganatha then took him home and offered him worship and bhiksha. After lunch, the Master said that a muslim prince was coming to meet him at the holy spot and went there again.

After a little while, the muslim ruler arrived at Papanasa Thirtha and, seating Sree Guru in the royal palanquin and taking all the disciples with him, proceeded to the city of Vaidhurya. The whole city was well beautified with floral arches. Sree Guru was taken in a royal procession with song, dance, music and a rich pageant. Cries of "Glory to Sree Guru!" went up in the air. Then the Master was led, walking on a silken carpet, spread all along the way and was finally seated on the royal throne. Music and dance were ordered in honour of the august visitor. Thus the prince showed the Master to all his people. The bigoted ones among the muslim population were displeased at the honour accorded to a Hindu saint. But the devout ones praised him. Then Sree Guru said to the prince, "Now that I have seen your people, are you satisfied?" "Not completely, noble sir. Accord me the blessed opportunity of serving you and uplift me spiritually too. I surrender all that is mine to your holiness!" said the ruler. "Son, right worthily have you acted and I am pleased with your gesture. I shall grant your wish" said Sree Guru and crowned the ruler's eldest son as king and successor. Then he said to the former ruler, "Son, renounce all desires and proceed to Sreesailam. I shall give the necessary instruction to my disciples (at Gangapur) and then proceed thither. There you will again be blessed with my darshan." Then he bathed in the river Godavari and went to the confluence of Bheema and Amaraja. The devotees there were delighted to see him and threw a dinner for all to celebrate the occasion. Then the Guru said to them: "Our fame has spread everywhere. Even those who are devoid of true devotion will flock to this place, out of selfishness and greed. Hence I shall leave this place and proceed to Sreesailam".

When the Master got ready for departure, the natives of the village rushed to him and begged him not to deprive them of his divine presence, but to stay on. The Lord said, "Do not feel sad that way. How can I bear to be away from my devotees? I only seem to leave for Sreesailam

only to the grosser vision of the physical, but I will ever abide here in my real state as the Spirit or the real Self. I will seek my noon bhiksha in this village and accept your loving devotional services in this muth. My living presence will be experienced by anyone who bathes in the Sangama, worships the holy peepul tree and takes darshan of my padukas here".

Then the natives of Gandharvapura and the disciples accompanied Sree Guru and his four companion-disciples up to the limits of the village and accorded them a moving send off. When they all returned to the muth, they verily found the Master seated in it! Then they realized that whatever he said was literally true. Some of the disciples stayed back at the village. Renunciate disciples, Krishna Saraswathi, Bala Saraswathi and Upendra Saraswathi were already away on their and wanderings to holy places. Sayaamdeva, the two disciple-poets and I accompanied the Master to Sreesailam.

When we all reached the Paatala Ganga^, as per the Master's wish, we prepared a beautiful float with the leaves of banana and flowers. And singing the glories of the Lord, we placed it on the waters of the river. Sree Guru stepped in and sat on it. Only then could we divine his intent (that it was our final-parting) and we shed tears. The Lord smiled and consoled us saying, 'I am always with you. You need not grieve. As a token of that, when I reach my real abode (or state), four flowers will come to you, floating in the river. That will be my ultimate prasada to you'.

That was a Friday, in the dark-half of the month of Magh, in the year of Bahudhaanya^^. The Lord, seated on that floral float, drifted along the flowing river. Soon after, as per the Masters promise, four flowers^^^ came to us, drifting on the river, against the current! We four of us picked them up". So saying, Siddha showed the holy flower which he lovingly treasured as the Guru's final gift, to Namadharaka and added:

"The Master can be seen even to day by the virtuous and the devout. Only the unrighteous cannot experience his living presence. Taking his daily dip at the holy Sangama, he ever abides there. In fact, he has been blessing devotees with his divine acts (leelas) on countless occasions. Whoever can fully plumb the profundity of his divine power? The aspirations of those who worship him there with true love will be fulfilled. Indeed, the Lord is ever present with those who incessantly adore him. The miraculous experiences of such will ever remain hidden in their own hearts. Hence, worship him with the simplicity of your heart's love and remember, he is the granter of prayers!"

Namadharaka was immersed in the ecstatic joy of having listened to the stories of the Lord's play and bowed to Siddha in profound gratitude.

Thus ends Sree Vasudevananda Saraswathi's Samhitaayana Guru Dwisahasri (being a Sanskrit paraphrase of the original Marathi work Sree Guru Charita of Gangadhara Saraswathi) made by him at the specific command of Lord Dattatreya.

Om Sree Dattatreya Namaha!

*That is, Namadharaka has already a foretaste of liberation. In that state, there can no longer be any desire for it. There exists a love for the Self

**daana or religious gift should not be confused with ordinary charity. In giving a daana, the wise man directs the gifts to the All-pervading Spirit that is manifest in the person of receiver. Daana is thus an offering to God with humility and faith, whereas ordinary charity is inspired by compassion for a suffering fellow-being.

***The sword symbolises alert spiritual awareness and discrimination with which the soul can cut asunder, illusory bonds of ignorance. The armour is called Siva kavaeha ('literally, the armour of Shiva'). It symbolises wisdom which will protect him from the onslaught of evil propensities in the transition of the soul from the earthly existence to the divine level. The strength of 12 thousand elephants is the consequent inner strength which he obtained by contact with such a mighty sage.

+ For, they heard of the bigotry and hostility of such to the native faith its holy men.

++ lit., "the holy place that destroys sin"; in a holy place, nearer from Bider but far from the Sangama.

+++ 1 kos is equal to 2 miles

^the popular name of the river Krishna which flows through the deep valley at Sreesailam.

^^Bahudhanya means 'the year of the plentiful harvest';

^^^Flower of the holy lotus.

25. Appendix

Many are the blessed souls who, by daily devout study of this work, have earned the grace of Lord Dattatreya and his unerring guidance respecting to their Perfect Masters. A few instances: Vasudeva Sastri (b. 1854), a very poor but devout brahmin of Mangaon, used to read *Sree Guru Charitra* since his boyhood. One day, Lord Datta appeared in his dream and said, "Go to Nrisimhavadi. You will get the needed money and company too!" The next morning, a rich man who had earlier got his astrological guidance turned up and paid him Rs.250/-. Meanwhile, his neighbour, a devotee of Lord Datta, requested Sastri to accompany him on a trip to that very place! On the way, when they sojourned at a village called Boregaon, Lord Datta again appeared in his dream and said, "At Narasobavadi, take *darshan* of Govindaswami!" Accordingly, on reaching the place, even while they were enquiring where Govindaswami lived, the great saint himself approached them and addressed Sastri familiarly, by name and enquired after his welfare!

At that time, Sastri was reading *Sree Guru Charitra* only formally, as a part of his family-tradition, but not with zeal. One day, Govindaswami said, "Sastri, why not worship Sree Guru?" As Sastri was devoted to the *japa* of the *Gayatri mantra*, the recitation of the Veda and tending the sacred fire, he did not agree. The same night, Lord Datta appeared in his dream and initiated him with a mantra. The next morning, Sree Govindaswami saw him and said, "Hello, you are initiated with a mantra. Now, learn the method of its *japa*!" and taught him the same. Sastri accepted Sree Govindaswami as his Sadguru and, under his care, grew up to be a Sadguru himself, a sannyasi, entitled Sree Vasudevananda Saraswati. The then Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Sringeri, H.H.Sree Chradrasekhara Bharathi Swami, hailed him as the very manifestation of Lord Datta.

One young Panduranga took *darshan* of Sree Vasudevananda Saraswathi at Narasobavadi and henceforth considered him as his Guru. Unfortunately for him, the saint attained Mahasamadhi shortly after. Young Panduranga prayed to Datta for guidance when he heard a voice, "Read that sacred book!" thrice. On his way home, he visited his uncle. The latter used to revere his text of Sree *Guru Charitra* which he devoutly read every day. As he grew too old to do so, now he was anxious as to whom he could entrust it. It suddenly struck Panduranga that it was the 'sacred book' which Datta directed him to read and he gladly received it. He was pleasantly surprised to know that the book was personally given to his uncle by Sree Sai Baba of Shirdi, an avatar of Lord Datta. By diligent and devoted study of it, he blossomed into Sree Sadguru Rangavadutha Maharaj of Nareswar.

Glossary

Glossary	Meaning
Amrit (a)	Ambrosia
Ashrama	four stages of human life
Ashta teertha	holy place of eight sacred rivers
Athithi	A random guest who arrives suddenly for a short stay a day from another place. Hindu Saastras enjoin the householder to serve such a one with food without bothering about his virtues, caste or creed.
Atma Linga	"form" of soul
Avadhuta	recluse saint; a liberated sage who had so completely shaken of the ignorant identification with his body that he is no longer conscious of even his physical needs as a bath, dress, food or ritual practices.
Bel	leaves of Bilwa tree, the leaves of which are considered particularly dear to Lord Shiva, the last of Hindu Trinity.
Bhiksha	holy alms
Brahmarakshasa	a wicked and cruel spirit (demon)
Buddhi	intellect
Chakra	the disc carried by Lord Vishnu
Chandas	metre (in poetry)
Chataka Bird	a mystical bird that is said to subsist on droplets of rain water to fall into its mouth even before the drop falls on the ground.
Dakshina	offerings (Say of money, cows etc.)
Darbha grass	a kind of grass, sacred for puja and other ceremonies
Darshana	1. a vision of the divine form involving an expansion or extension of one's level of consciousness resulting in the functioning of supra-sensory perception. 2. to go, meet and worship a holy saint with devotion and faith. The devotee receives the invaluable blessings from the saint according to his devotion.
Dasa snaana	ten baths
Dharma sastra	the code of righteous life

Glossary	Meaning
Dhyana	meditation
Diwali(Deepavali)	the festival of lights
Dwadasi	twelfth lunar day from either the full moon or new moon day
Gnana	knowledge
Gotra	clan, amongst Hindus
Gunas	(three) modes of manifestation of the spirit - Sattva, Rajas and Tamas
Homa	fire oblation
Japa	attentive chanting of God's name
Kalpa Vriksha	the wish fulfilling tree
Kamandalu	the water vessel of a sadhu, who always carries it with him
Karma (Prarabdha)	deeds belonging to previous lives, which have already started giving their fruits.
Karma	deeds belonging to one's previous lives
Khecheri Mudra	a yogic posture
Kirataas	a set of people
Magha	a lunar month in the Hindu calendar
Mahavakyas	great teachings
Mukti	lit. liberation from the rounds of birth and death
Muth	temporary/permanent abode of saints (Hindu equivalents of a monastery)
Nada	internal sound
Pativratiya	undaunted devotion to husband
Pada theertha	holy washings of saint's feet
Padukas	sandals (usually wooden) of saints
Prakriti	nature
Parabrahman	the Absolute Reality
Pranava	"Om" the first sound (life giving)
Prasad	Lord's gift, food offerings etc. given away to devotees after worship
Prayaschitta	penitentiary actions or holy rites of atonement
Puranas	the quasi-legendary, quasi-historical accounts of ancient kings with a good amount of mythology, symbolism and moral teachings incorporated into them, like the Mahabharata
Puranic	as mentioned in Puranas
Purusha suktha	vedic mantras praising the Purusha, the absolute.
Rakshasa	demon
Rudraksha	The dried fruit of rudraksha tree; it is considered as per the puranas as the eye of the Lord Rudra. It has great purifying and healing effect. It is very sacred to the devotees of Shiva (Rudra).
Rudra Suktha	vedic mantras praising the Rudra, God of destruction
Saakhas	branches (say of vedas)
Saastras	holy scriptures
Sadhana	spiritual practice

Glossary	Meaning
Sangama	place of confluence of rivers
Sarpayaga	the snake sacrifice
Siddha	the prefect one
Sikha	tuft of hair worn by Hindu Brahmins
Smritis	Upanishads
Sukshma sharira	subtle body
Tapas	austerity
Teertha	holy water; hallowed place
Thrigunas	three modes of existence
Tristhali	the trio of places (Prayag, Varanasi and Gaya)
Udumbara	fig tree
Upanayana	Hindu sacred thread ceremony
Vaasana	accumulated store of psychic associations
Vajra	a mystic sign in the sacred feet of Sree Guru
Vajrasana	a yogic posture
Varna	castes
Vedaangas	"limbs" of the vedas
Vibhuthi	sacred ash
Vishwa rupa	vision of the cosmic form
Vrata	penitentiary vows enjoined in the saastras
Vyakuntha	celestial abode of Lord Vishnu
Yaafana sarira	the body that suffers the punishments after death
Yagna	religious sacrifice; the vedic ritual symbolizing the whole of creation as a play of divine powers
Yamaloka	realm of death
Yuga	the four cosmic epochs (viz. Kritayuga, Tretayuga, Dwaparayuga, Kaliyuga)
Yugalaya	Shrine of the Yuga