

Daivadaśakam - The Universal Prayer

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Abstract

Daivadaśakam is a philosophically sound prayer, addressed to one God acceptable to all religions of the world. In its ten verses Narayana Guru contains his entire philosophical vision. In this prayer, the Absolute is praised as one God. This prayer begins with the word “God” and ends with the word “happiness”. Means and end are unitively recognized. In this, prayer, favours of Universal values alone are asked for universally. The eight verses between the first and the last could well be considered as philosophically unfolding the proper path towards this enlightenment. The attainment of this wisdom results in the realization that what was initially thought of as the samsarasagara is no longer so, but the ocean of God’s Glory from which one does not wish to get out but instead to become immersed in and dwell forever.

Keywords: God, happiness, means, end, God-realization.

1. Introduction

Narayana Guru (1856 – 1928) is part of the traditional hierarchy of Vyas, Śuka, Yajñavalkya and the other great Guru’s of the Upanishadic tradition. He has brought out scientific view to the traditional wisdom and kept his thought as closely as possible to the language of the modern man. In the spiritual literature of India, from the most ancient to the most modern age, it was Narayana Guru who wrote a philosophically sound prayer addressed to one God, acceptable not only to Indian spiritual tradition in general, but to all the religions of the world. There are many philosophically rich poems of Narayana Guru. Of these, Daivadaśakam could be considered as the simplest. Though written in the form of a prayer the Guru could contain his entire philosophical vision in its ten verses. In this prayer the Absolute is praised throughout. That Absolute is related with everything that depends on the Supreme. This prayer begins with the word *daivam*, which means “Oh God” ends with the word *sukham* which means “happiness”. The means for gaining happiness is to turn to God. Thus God becomes both

the means and end. When end and means are unitively recognized and understood that is called yoga. In that sense we can say this prayer is a prayer of *Yoga*. In this essay, an earnest attempt is made to delve into the depth of the philosophical vision that fills the ten verses of Daivadaśakam and will take the spiritual aspirant to the goal of God-realization.

We have seen that Daivadaśakam is in the form of a prayer. An advaitin really needs no prayer, for in his perception there is no duality between the supplicant and God. He may feel that those who follow him needs a prayer, aspiring for the perfection of wisdom, need a prayer. Such prayers should be a means for them to attain the height of the non-dualistic perception. The major part of the spiritual literature of Indian tradition is in the form of hymns and prayers in which *bhakti* or devotion was given an important role. All these centered around one God variously named by many poetically minded seers.

2. Prayer as a pathway to God

Prayer is the incessant effort made by people to keep their will always attuned to the will of God. The Sanskrit word for it is *prarthana* (pra + arthana). *Arthana* means, “to earnestly ask for something” and pra stands for *prakarshana* “properly”, *All prayers* ask for some favour.

In short, prayer is a psychological phenomenon that manifests in all humans, the religious or non-religious as well.¹

3. Text : Daivadaśakam

English translation by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati.

Daivadaśakam is a prayer of non-dual wisdom. In this prayer, favours of Universal values alone are asked for.

Verse 1

From the most high, O Divine,
protect us here,
do not leave us.

¹ Vijaya Rama Swamy, Devotion and Dissent in Indian History Ed. Foundations, 357, (2014).

You are the navigator
of this ocean of ephemeral becoming,
and (to us) your name is a mighty
steamship.

Prayer in this first verse is “Oh God, keep watch on us here”. The word *daivam* is derived from the root ‘div’ which means light. Light dispels darkness and it also illuminates real nature of things. It is at once self-luminous and an agent that luminates.

In this verse, this world is equated to an ocean of misery and a devotee is considered as a helpless being caught in that miserable ocean. God is considered as a great navigator who can take this helpless person across the ocean. Thus the word of God or the name of God is equated with a steamship.

It is ignorance that causes fear and pain. Wisdom can bring fearlessness and happiness. The highest of all wisdom comes from God-realization.²

Verse 2

Counting one by one, when everything
perceivable is done with,
then the seeing is steadied even so’
let the inner self attain its rest in You.

The favour asked for in second verse is “let this mind attain rest pulsation less in you”. The Guru considers this verse to present the core of *Jnāna* or wisdom.

The most fundamental problem that all philosophizing tries to solve is, how to relate systematically and understandably, the world we perceive, the perceiver or the knowing mind and the Ultimate Reality are to be intuitively perceived as essentially one and how one is to arrive at, is summarily portrayed by the Guru in this verse.

The Ultimate Reality, called Brahman in Vedānta is what is thought of as God in this prayer. The Vedāntic explanation of the world is that, it is Brahman that manifests itself undergoing no intrinsic change.

All this visible or knowable in essential content, is unconditioned Consciousness alone.

This Consciousness, felt by the person who perceives as the knowing mind is called *dr̥k* in Vedānta, literally “the eye”, and signifying the knowing subject. The object is called *dr̥śya* (the visible).

Sankara deals with this topic in his book *Dr̥k-dr̥śya-viveka* (Discriminating the knower and the known). “The countables” referred in the present

verse are equivalent to what Sankara means by *dr̥śya* in that work.

If an object seen is *dr̥śya*, then the eye that sees it is the *dr̥k*. Such objects could be countless, but the eye or *dr̥k* remains one alone. If this eye may have some conditions like bad sight or no sight, they may be known to the mind that functions from behind. Then the eye is a *dr̥śya* and the mind is its *dr̥k*. The mind also may have its own altering states, they may be known to the Consciousness. In this Context mind also may be *dr̥śya* and Consciousness its *dr̥k*. Then there is no *dr̥k* that makes Consciousness *dr̥śya*. Thus Consciousness is both *dr̥śya* and *dr̥k* at the same time.

When it is aware of itself. This Consciousness, therefore, sometimes is called *sakshi-chaitanya* (witnessing consciousness). That all inclusive Consciousness is what we called God here. The knowing mind, if it intends to know itself, should find its oneness with, and merge with god. This God is what assumes the form of all that was first universally seen as the observables though presented as a process of one stage following another in actual experience.

Pure consciousness in essence the three cannot remain distinct realities either.

Verse 3

Ever having given as food and clothes
and Providing for all such needs
making us rejoice in our contentment
You are our only Lord.

Though verse three sounds like asking for our daily needs, it really makes no request as such, instead it admits only that God already provides us with everything we need with no lapse. The only favours asked for in this verse are for God’s caring protection and the happiness of all. Through this text the Guru, teaches us an ideal way of praying to God.

Verse 4

As ocean, wave, wind and depth
Let us within see the scheme
of us, nescience,
your glory and you.

The present verse makes the request for granting a clear understanding of a philosophical truth. How all beings in the world are to be intuitively perceived as belonging to a single functional system with the help of the ocean analogy. The four elements associated with the ocean are compared one by one, to the four factors

² Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati,
Daivadaśakam, Narayana Gurukula, 8,
(1981).

associated with the Real. More than understanding each pair separately, their unitive existence that forms structurally perfect and functional whole has to be taken into account. These factors – ocean, wave, wind and depth – exist together.

One inseparable from the other. So too, we, māya, God's Glory and God are inseparably one. Other such discernible universals could also be correlated likewise. Their co-existence also to be perceived here.³

Verse 5

You are that act of creation, the creator
and the myriad variety of what is created;
oh God, are you not the very stuff
of which everything is created?

The fifth verse considers how God relates to its creation. A set of four factors involved in the context of creation are equated to God.

They are the Creator, the substance for creation, the act of creation and the created things. All these four are seen here as inseparable from God and shows how God relates to creation with reference to the māya principle. One of the basic common philosophical problems is from where did this world originate. Narayana Guru admits the ājata vāda (theory of no birth) given in the Aitareya Upanishad. Ātma alone existed here in the beginning: nothing else was present even to pulsate. This Ātma brooked upon. Itself as if a bird sits on its egg with the desire to create the world just as a chick merges in due time from a hatched egg, so the world emanated from the Ātma the universal and the particular aspects of what appears to be the senses and their objects, hunger and edibles - all took place in a proper order. Finally Ātma looks at everything thus created and sees in all of these.

The material cause in the creation of all the worlds is thus Ātma. The incidental cause of this creation also is Ātma; the essential content in everything in the format of a praise to God.

Thus the creator, the act of creation, the substance for creation and the things created are all different functional modes of one and the same Consciousness-Reality, which really is inconceivable and ineffable.⁴

Verse 6

³ Guru Muni Narayana Prasad *Shorter Philosophical poems of Narayana Guru*, D K Printworld, 215, (2010).

⁴Guru Muni Narayana Prasad *Shorter Philosophical poems of Narayana Guru*, D K Printworld, 258, (2010).

Are you not Māya, the wielder of māyā
and also the rejoicer in māyā?
Are you not the True One who,
having removed māya., grants the Supreme
Union?

The present verse brings in the main factor that causes Consciousness to emanate as everything subtle and gross, mental and physical.

Māya is the primeval desire in God to unfold as everything that results in the creation of the world.

Māya's function also is inherent in the Real or God. Hence the words, "you indeed are māya".

You grand us the Supreme Union

The person of God-Realization is God itself, only that God in this case assumes the form of a human being. Such a person is known as a Guru. Then to say that it was a Guru that awakened the person from his or her slumber.

God created us because of Its own mysterious power of māya. The very same god also rescues us from this māya and proffers us.

Sayujya (the state of Supreme Oneness with God), the union in which a Guru always lives.

Verse 7

You are existence, knowledge and the endeared value;

You Yourself are the present, the past and the future;

When considered, You are none other than the articulated Word also.

Narayana Guru defines God as *satyam*, *jnānam* and *ānandam*-truth, knowledge and happiness in verse seven. He further qualifies it as the experiencing of the present, the memory of the past and the dreams and expectations of the future. He identifies word with God. Oneness of God and words is universally recognized in all spiritual traditions, as the supreme intelligence that is imminent in creation. Not only that – the very word with which I praise you is none but you. All is nothing more than a sportive Self - display of the one Consciousness.⁵

Verse 8

⁵ Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, *Daivadaśakam*, Narayana Gurukula, 61, (1981).

That state which fills, inside as well as outside,

Brimfully with Your glory,
We adore That, Blessed God of Goodness
Hail, victory to You.

In this verse, the Guru, stated clearly that after realizing the very word with which one praises God is the Absolute, the Supplicant becomes overwhelmed with the glory of God. Then even the thinnest line between the adorer and the adored vanishes.

As God is identified also with word, glorifying the word is as good as glorifying God. The word is the spirit of God, and man is animated by spirit; hence glorifying God is accomplished by making all thoughts, words, and actions express the maximum excellence of the Spirit. In that state one sees his own Self as the most adorable, manifested in so many forms.

Verse 9

Victory be to you, God of gods'
Ever intent on saving those in need.
Victory be to you, Blissful intelligence
through and through.
Hail, Oh! Ocean of Mercy.

Thinking of God as always intent on giving salvation to those in miserable situations is very common among the religious. The one who prays here is evidently is that of being lost in the ocean of samsara. Thus, this prayer could be treated as that of a seeker. Life is felt to be full of miseries.

The very vision of God, which is blissful intelligence through and through, transforms the ocean of misery into the ocean of compassion on seeing God's mercy throughout our life, we also naturally become merciful in the life in the true sense.

Verse 10

In the deep ocean of Your glory.
Immersed, let us all become.
There to dwell, dwell everlastingly

Daivadaśakam ends with the supplicants expressing a final wish: may all of us become immersed in the ocean of Glory, to attain identity with it and to experience, its eternal happiness *sayujya* or liberation.

4. Conclusion

In Vedanta, the Ultimate Reality is *Sat-cit-ānanda*. The Ultimate goal of the supplicant is to experience oneself as *Sat-cit-ānanda*. The very same experience of Liberation is poetically portrayed here as the supplicant's immersion in the ocean of God's Glory and dwelling in it forever in Felicity Supreme. The attainment of this liberation is the goal prayed for concluding this text. Thus the first and last words put together *daivame sukham* gives the sum and substance of the overall nature of this text as well as what is to be ideally prayed for.⁶

Daivadaśakam is the first universal prayer, which has come from an Indian pen. It was composed by Narayana Guru keeping in mind his close disciples and devotees. Nowadays, in the morning and evening hours, one can hear this prayer being recited in many houses in several parts of the world. The increase the number of his adherents as time marches from one generation to the next is a clear indication of the worthwhileness of his teachings.

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