

Eternal Contributions of Jagadguru Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Acharya

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Introduction:

Jagadaguru Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Acharya is one of the great acharyas of Sanatana Dharma (Vedic Hinduism). He was born in 1017 A.D. This year is his 1000th birth anniversary. It is celebrated in India and around the world on May 1, 2017. He lived for 120 years in the period 1017 A.D to 1137 A.D. He was born in Sri Perumbudur near Chennai in Tamilnadu. His parents were from a highly traditional background. His mother was Srimati Kantimati and father was Sri Asuri Keshava Somayaji who was very well known for his knowledge of Sanatana Dharma (also known as Vedic Hinduism) and performance of Yajnas. It is universally established that Sri Ramanuja Acharya is one of the great seers of Sanatana Dharma. The term Acharya is described in a verse as below.

*Aachinoti cha Shaastraarthaan Aachaare Sthaapayatyapi
Svayamaacharate yastu Tamaachaaryam Prachakshate*

Which means “an Acharya is one who is not only has an expertise in Vedic Scriptures but also explains it well. Then in addition to his following the scriptural guidelines, he also guides others to follow and further establish them”. In the full meaning of this verse, Bhagavad-Ramanuja Acharya was an Acharya. Also, Jagadguru means that any spiritual seeker from any part of the world (Jagat) can follow the path given by Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Acharya.

Brief account of his life

Younger years

The devoted couple Srimati Kantimati and Sri Asuri Keshava Somyaji did not have children. However once in a dream of Sri Asuri Keshava Somyaji, the Bhagavan Parthasarathi appeared and him that he has been pleased with the devotion of Sri Somayaji and the Bhagavan Himself will be born as a son for the couple. After one year, Srimati Kantimati gave birth to a baby boy who was radiating with brilliance. His maternal uncle Sri Shaila Poona, who keenly observed the characteristics of the boy, named the boy as Sri Ramanuja. It is said that Sri Ramanuja carried the characteristics of Sri Lakshmana, the devoted brother of Bhagavan Sri Rama. Also, Sri Lakshmana is said to be the incarnation of Serpent Adishesha who serves as a bed for the Supreme Being Narayana. The young Ramanuja was growing up with all the divine qualities. His parents had a deep respect for another great devotee named Sri Kanchi Poorna, although he was not a Brahmin by birth. Sri Ramanuja not only had a deep respect for Sri Kanchi Poorna but also considered him as his Guru. Even from young age Sri Ramanuja maintained that it is only the sincere devotion to the Supreme Being that is important

not anything else such as physical appearance, birth, wealth etc. Later Sri Ramanuja was married to Sri Rakshamambal.

Alternate Interpretation

Then Sri Ramanuja went to learn Advaita-Vedanta with the well-known master Sri Yadava Prakasha. Initially the master liked very much Sri Ramanuja for his sincerity, intelligence and hard work. However certain differences occurred during the interpretation of the nature and qualities of Supreme Being. On one occasion the master Sri Yadava Prakasha was explaining a mantra from Taittiriyaopanishat and it was "Satyam Jnanam Ananatham Bramha". The master was explaining that the Bramhan does not have any attributes to qualify and describe. This mantra would mean that Brahman is Truth, Knowledge and Infinite. Just as the same cow cannot be described as having two horns, one horn or broken horn, the Infinite Bramhan is formless and has no attributes. However, hearing this explanation, young Sri Ramanuja said with humility, that "Oh. Master, the mantra does not give this meaning that Bramhan is without any attributes. It is very much possible that an object can have many qualities or attributes at the same time. For example, a flower has fragrance, color, softness in it and Sun has heat and light. Likewise, Bramhan, has all the great qualities in it. Hearing this explanation master Sri Yadava Prakasha could not tolerate this alternate interpretation of Sri Ramanuja. Several incidents like this occurred and hatred and jealousy started developing in Sri Yadava Prakasha and later he along with some associates planned to kill Sri Ramanunja in a journey of the group to Kashi. Sri Govinda came to know about it and he helped Sri Ramanuja to escape into a forest. Then the divine couple Sri Lakshmi and Sri Narayana saved Sri Ramanuja and after several years Sri Yadava Prakasha repented for his sins against Sri Ramanuja and became his disciple.

Three Oaths

Then later Sri Ramanuja left Sri Yadava Prakasha and continued his service of bringing water from a well to the Pooja of the Bhagavan Varadaraja Swami in Kanchi. Then at that time another great acharya called Sri Yamuna was at the Srirangam and he had known about young Sri Ramanuja and his sincerity, devotion and scholarship. Sri Yamuna Acharya was not feeling well sent a disciple of him named Sri Mahapoorna to bring Sri Ramanuja to Srirangam. As soon as they reached Srirangam, they found that Sri Yamuna had just then passed away. Sri Ramanuja was into tears and as he saw the three fingers in the right hand of the body of Sri Yamuna Acharya was folded. Then Sri Ramanuja declared three oaths for which the three folded fingers became straightened. The *three oaths* that Sri Ramanuja took are that

- (1) *I will remain committed to Sri Vaishnava Philosophy. I will arrange for a commentary on the Nammalavar's Tiruvaymoli and propagate the doctrine of self-surrender approach (Sharanagati) to the Supreme Being Narayana for spiritual liberation.*

(2) I shall write a commentary on Bramha sootras of Sri Vyasa Maharishi accounting for the earlier works and

(3) In the honor and memory of Sri Parashara Rishi (the author of Vishnu Purana), I will name a great Vaishnava by that name of Sri Parashara.

Commands of Bhagavan Sri Varadaraja

Sri Ramanuja returned to Kanchi and requested Sri Kanchi Poorna to ask Bhagavan Varadaraja Swami for the clarifications regarding the next steps to be taken. Sri Kanchi Poorna who was known to converse with Bhagavan Sri Varadaraja Swami asked Bhagavan on behalf of Sri Ramanuja. Then Bhagavan Varadaraja Swami gave following six commands and they are:

- (1) I (as Supreme Being) is the cause of this universe*
- (2) The differences between individuals and Supreme Being are clear*
- (3) The approach of self-surrender to the Supreme Being is a guaranteed one for spiritual liberation*
- (4) My sincere devotees undoubtedly achieve liberation*
- (5) My devotees reach Me (Supreme Being) after passing away and*
- (6) May Sri Ramanuja approach Sri Maha Poorna and you (Sri Kanchi Poorna) communicate quickly this to Sri Ramanuja.*

After listening this from Sri Kanchi Poorna, Sri Ramanuja was joyful and started immediately towards Sri Rangam to meet Sri Maha Poorna. As though destined, Sri Maha Poorna also was coming to meet Sri Ramanuja and they both in a place called madhurantakam. Then and there itself Sri Mahapoorna initiated Sri Ramanuja into Sri Vaishnavism through Samashrayanam (imprinting of the Chakra and the Shankha onto the shoulders along with mantras). Then Sri Ramanuja took both Sri Maha Poorna and his wife to his house in Sri Kanchipuram.

Renunciation

Although Sri Rakshamambal (wife of Sri Ramanuja) was a good lady but was not broad minded as her husband Sri Ramanuja. In addition to her disagreements with her husband Sri Ramanuja, she quarreled several times with the wife of Sri Maha Poorna, whom Sri Ramanuja as a disciple respected very sincerely. One day Sri Maha Poorna and his wife left abruptly the house of Sri Ramanuja. This perturbed Sri Ramanuja as his vision was compassionate and broad minded to help with equanimity all spiritual seekers. Later he sent his wife Sri Rakshamambal to her parents' house, as she wanted to help them in a marriage of her cousin. Then Sri Ramanuja went to the temple of Bhagavan Sri Varadaraja Swami in Kanchi and offered himself through renunciation for service with the life-long divine mission. Then Bhagavan Sri Varadaraja Swami blessed

Sri Ramanuja with the title of “*Yatiraja*” (*King among renunciates*). Then he became Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Acharya as “Bhagavad means Blessed by Bhagavan”. Then he continued to stay at Sri Kanchipuram. Meanwhile Sri Yadava Prakasha realized and repented his sins against Sri Ramanuja Acharya and became a disciple of Sri Ramanuja Acharya. Sri Yadava Prakasa was named as Sri Govinda Jeeyar.

Compassion to all

Then through the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Ranganatha of Srirangam, Sri Maha Poorna sent Sri Vara Ranga to bring Sri Ramanuja Acharya to Srirangam. Sri Ramanuja Acharya came to Srirangam. Then he went to learn about the significance and the inner meaning of the Narayana Ashtakshari Mantra from Sri Goshti Poorna. When Sri Ramanuja went to Sri Goshti Poorna to learn about that Mantra, Sri Goshti Poorna turned him away. Again, and again Sri Goshti Poorna sent him away as though testing Sri Ramanuja’s sincerity. However, Sri Ramanuja with persistence went to Sri Goshti Poorna for 18 times and at last Sri Goshti Poorna with divine instruction told Sri Ramanuja that this Mantra is highly potent and sacred as anyone who gets this would reach Sri Vaikuntha (abode of Supreme Being Narayana). So, he said to Sri Ramanuja to keep the Mantra and the knowledge as secret. Then Sri Ramanuja after learning the mantra and the knowledge was moved by compassion that it should all sincere devotees to help them spiritually. So, Sri Ramanuja went up on the top of gopuram (spire) of a temple and said in a loud voice to all devotees assembled in the hall there that anyone who learns this Mantra would reach Sri Vaikuntha. Then as Sri Ramanuja was coming down then he met Sri Goshti Poorna who was full of anger and asked Sri Ramanuja that why he pronounced loudly about the Mantra and said he (Sri Ramanuja) would go to hell for doing what he did. Then Sri Ramanuja moved by compassion humble said Sri Goshti Poorna that he as a single person would not mind going to hell, as many sincere ones having learned the Mantra would go to Sri Vaikuntha and would be spiritually fulfilled. Listening to this statement with loving compassionate outlook of Sri Ramanuja, not only Sri Goshti Poorna’s anger melted away but he also embraced Sri Ramanuja.

Managing Temple in Srirangam

After this Sri Ramanuja Acharya was requested to not only lead the Sri Vaishnava devotees in Srirangam but also was requested to manage the Srirangam temple. Sri Ramanuja with his sincerity, integrity and able leadership transformed the Temple with many positive changes. The head priest of the Temple not at all liked these changes and he decided to kill Sri Ramanuja. So, he added poison to the teertha (sacred water) and gave it to Sri Ramanuja. As Sri Ramanuja took that teertha, not only nothing happened to him but he was dancing and very joyful. Seeing this the head priest was shocked and he fell at the feet of Sri Ramanuja Acharya seeking forgiveness. The compassionate Sri Ramanuja Acharya in the name of Sri Ranganatha excused him. The head priest was transformed.

Two oaths fulfilled

Then Sri Ramanuja Acharya in Srirangam was teaching the philosophy of devotion and surrender as per the Philosophy and works of Alwars called Nalayira Divya Prabandham (4000 hymns of devotion), which is in Tamil language. Thus, he fulfilled his first oath. To collect the earlier work of Bodhayana on Bramha-Sootras, Sri Ramanuja went to Kashmir with his disciples and with the blessings of Devi Sharada learnt about the work of Bodhayana. Then Sri Ramanuja with his disciples came back to Srirangam and then wrote the celebrated commentary to Bramha Sootras, which was named as Sri Bhashya. Thus, he fulfilled his second oath.

Third oath fulfilled

Then Sri Ramanuja Acharya with his disciples undertook an All-India pilgrimage tour. In this tour, he also debated with scholars from all parts of India and won over them. Thus, he firmly established the Vishishta-Advaita (Qualified Non-Dualism) philosophy based on Vedas, Upanishads, Agamas and the Nalayira Divya Prabandham. Then he returned to Srirangam. Kooresha and his wife Andal were very close disciples of Sri Ramanuja Acharya. With the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Ranganatha, Kooresh's wife Andal gave birth to twins. Then Sri Ramanuja Acharya blessed the couple and then named the children as Sri Parashara and Sri Vyasa. Later Sri Parashara grew into a saintly scholar to follow Sri Ramanuja Acharya. Thus, Sri Ramanuja Acharya fulfilled his third oath.

Love of his Disciples

Meanwhile in Tamilnadu, the Chola King was Kulottunga, who turned out to be a fanatic Shaiva follower used persecution to declare Saivism to be the state religion. In that he summoned Sri Ramanuja Acharya as leader of Sri Vaishnavism and make him sign and declare that Shaivism to be state religion and Bhagavan Shiva to be the only deity to be worshipped. The disciples of Sri Ramanuja Acharya sensed a possibility of physical danger due to this confrontation. The disciple compelled Sri Ramanuja Acharya to escape and move out of Tamilnadu. Sri Ramanuja reluctantly agreed. Sri Kuresha impersonated himself as Sri Ramanuja and Sri Maha Poorna went to the King's court. The king became furious when he came to know of this situation and he ordered immediately to pull out the eyes of both Sri Kuresha and Sri Maha Poorna.

Journey to Karnataka

Sri Ramanuja Acharya with some disciples made their way to a place called Tondanur near Melkote, a hill-place in Karnataka, which was ruled by a Jain King Bittideva. There Sri Ramanuja Acharya won a major debate with the Jain scholars and thus most of them got converted to SriVaishnavism including the King and he became King Vishnu Vardhana. Sri Ramanuja Acharya not only liked Melkote but also stayed

there for about 14 years and built a major temple. He came to know that a beautiful deity Sri Sampathkumara (used for procession) was taken away by a girl called Bibi Lachimar, the daughter of Sultan of Delhi. Then he went to Delhi and brought back and installed the deity at the Melkote temple but Bibi Lachimar also came to Melkote. Sri Ramanuja Acharya recognized the intense devotion and love of Bibi Lachimar and allowed her inside the temple to worship the deity. Later when there was a new King in Tamilnadu, the devotees of Srirangam very much wanted him to come back. However, the devotees in Melkote were very reluctant to let him go back to Srirangam. Finally, they agreed to have a sculpture of Sri Ramanuja to be made and installed in the temple. Then Sri Ramanuja embraced that sculpture to transfer spiritual energy into that sculpture which can be seen even today. The Sri Ramanuja Acharya moved back to Srirangam and this time his age was about 60 years.

Moving back to Srirangam

Then for the next 60 years Sri Ramanuja Acharya lived peacefully teaching the principles and philosophy of Sri Vaishnavism to hundreds of devotees in Srirangam. Once while giving a lecture, he went into a deep trance. When devotees asked him after he came out of trance, Sri Ramanuja Acharya said that he was moved to know that at the same time a sculpture of him was made and installed at his birthplace Sri Perumbudur. Such was the love of his devotees. People from all parts of the India went to listen to the great Acharya. His simplicity, compassion and love of humanity spread around India. He wrote nine everlasting works establishing Sri Vaishnava Philosophy and Vishishta-Advaita. Later he installed his disciple Sri Parashara as the successor for him. Then Sri Ramanuja Acharya became absorbed more and more into Divine-Consciousness. Then his devotees requested more and more interaction with him. Sri Ramanuja Acharya suggested them to have a sculpture of him done. When the sculpture was done Sri Ramanuja Acharya infused his spiritual energy into it.

Vishishtaadvaita

Sri Ramanuja Acharya also systematically (through the lineage of earlier acharyas namely Sri Naada Muni also known as Naatha Muni and Sri Yaamuna Muni) established the Philosophy of Vishishtaadvaita (referred as Qualified Non-Dualism) based on the triadic Vedic foundations of Sanatana Dharma, which are Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad-Gita. Vishishtaadvaita is based on the triad namely Chit (sentient), Achit (non-sentient) and Para-Tatva (Supreme Reality also referred as Narayana and Ishwara). It is our experience that Chit (all sentient beings) as individual beings have a soul (Jeeva) with its body (deha). It is also seen that in life, the soul and its body are integrated and inseparable. Achit refers to all non-sentient things of the universe. Vishishtaadvaita philosophy establishes that the Supreme Being (referred as Narayana, Paratatva, Ishwara) has His body as Chit (all sentient beings) and Achit (all non-sentient). Hence this One Supreme Being (Sriman Narayana) is inseparably present as indweller in Chit as well as Achit and is second to none and hence qualified non-

dualism. It is also important to note that the Supreme Being (Narayana) has incomparable and inexhaustible good qualities, which are to be acquired through purusharthas (dharma, artha, kama and moksha) by the individual human beings for total fulfillment in life through their intense devotion (Bhakti) and total surrender (Sharanagati) to Supreme Being (Narayana).

Nalayira Divya Prabandham

Nalayira Divya Prabandham refers to 4000 verses of Divine Compositions in Tamil language. This sacred literature was discovered by Sri Naada muni and was propagated by Sri Yaamuna muni. This devotional literature also equivalent to Vedas, which expounds Sharanagati, is an outpouring of spiritual experiences, which were composed by the 12 Alvars who lived about more than 4500 years ago. The term Alvar means that “one who is immersed in the deep experience of the Supreme Being (Narayana)” and also “one who rules over Supreme Being (Narayana) by the unconditional devotion and love”. These Alvars are from all backgrounds such as varnas and positions in life. One Alvar among these 12 Alvars is Lady Andal whose composition is the well-known Tiruppavai (meaning the sacred vow), which is generally sung by vaisnavite devotees both at homes and temples. This is particularly observed in the month of Margaseersha (mid-December to mid-January). The Alvars emphasize that it is only through bhakti and sharanagati that one achieves the spiritual fulfillment in life. It is to be noted that Sri Ramanuja Aachaarya was an expert in both Vedic literature as well as the Nalayira Divya Prabandham.

Sharanagati

The principle of sharanagati has its roots both in Vedic literature as well as bhakti literature such as in compositions of alvars and nayanamars in Tamil, compositions of dasas and sharanas in Kannada, compositions of innumerable saints in various languages of India. Sri Ramanuja aachaarya emphasizes in his works that sharanagati certainly leads the intense seeker to the realization and abode of Narayana. The verse below describes the various components of sharanagati.

Aanookoolasya Samkalpaha Praatikoolaasya Varjanam Rakshishyateeti Viashwaasaha
Goptritvaavaranam tatha AtmaNikshepaha-Kaarpanye Shadvidha Sharanagatihi

Which means that the six components of sharanagati are

(1) *Aanookoolasya Samkalpha referring to tune one's thoughts, speech and actions to the will of Supreme Being Narayana. This also means that one sees and interacts through harmony and compassion with all sentient and non-sentient things, as they are inseparable from Sriman Narayana.*

- (2) Praatikoolasya Varjanam refers to relinquishing all thoughts, speech and actions that are against to the will of Sriman Narayana.
- (3) Rakshishyateeti Vishwaasha refers to the unmoving faith and conviction that it is only Sriman Narayana who is the protector and supporter of our life and living.
- (4) Goptritvaavaranam refers to the realization that it is only the grace of Sriman Narayana that we desire and hope to seek for our protection and spiritual fulfillment.
- (5) Kaarpanya refers to the utter helplessness in our efforts that we will experience if not for the protection of Sriman Narayana.
- (6) Atmanikshepa refers to offering one-self to the Grace of Sriman Narayana.

Rahasya Traya

The Rahasya Traya refers to the three specific mantras, which form the basis for Gadya Traya. The first mantra of the Rahasya Traya is the Moola Mantra, which is Narayana Ashtakshari namely the “*Pranava follwed by Namō Narayanaya*”. The meaning of Moola Mantra indicates surrender of Jeevaatman with salutations to Paratatva namely Sriman Narayana. The three syllables of Pranava namely A-kaara refers to Sriman Naaraayana, U-kaara refers to subservience (of Jeevaatmans) and M-kaara refers to the Jeevaatmans who are waiting to be liberated. The second mantra is the Dvaya Mantra, which has two lines. The first line is “*Sriman Narayana Charanou Sharanam Prapadye*”. The meaning of this first line is that I take refuge in the lotus feet of Sriman Narayana, with whom Sri Mahaalakshmi is always there. The second line is “*Srimate Narayanaya Namaha*”. The meaning of this second line is that I surrender with salutations to Sriman Narayana, accompanied with Sri Mahalakshmi. The Charama Shloka is the verse (18.66) of the Bhagavad-Gita, which is “*Sarva Dharmaan Parityajya Maamekam Shranam Vraja. Ahma Tvaa Sarva Papaya Mokshayishyaami maa Shuchaha*”. In this verse, Bhagavan Krishna, who is none other than Sriman Narayana commands Arjuna (as the devotee) to relinquish all dharmas and surrender by taking refuge solely in Him (Krishna)? Then Krishna assures that He will release the devotee (Arjuna) from all sins and commands “do not grieve”. Here relinquishing all dharmas mean to give up all egocentric doerships and ownerships. Thus, it is seen that the Rahasya Traya emphasizes Sharanagari as an effective path for reaching the goal of eternal servitude to Sriman Narayana, which brings bliss and complete spiritual fulfillment in life.

Works of Sri Ramanuja Acharya

Sri Ramanuja systematically developed the philosophy of Vishishtadvaita through nine works. They are Sri Bhashyam (commentary of the Bramha Sootras of Sri Veda Vyaasa), Bhagavadgita Bhashyam, Vedanta Sangraha, Vedanta Deepa, Vedanta

Sara, Sharanagati Gadya, Sriranga Gadya, Vaikuntha Gadya and Nitya Grantha. Sri Ramanuja Acharya established the Vishishtadvaita based on the works of twelve Alvars and all other Previous Acharyas such as Nada Muni and Yamuna Muni.

Gadya Traya

Gadya Traya contains three prose compositions namely

- (1) Sharanagati Gadya
- (2) Sriranga Gadya and
- (3) Vaikuntha Gadya.

Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Acharya spontaneously composed these three gadyas on the panguni uttaram day (March-April) in which special celebrations takes place in Srirangam in the august presence of the Divya Dampati namely Sri Ranganatha (Sriman Narayana) and Sri Ranganayaki (Sri Mahalakshmi). Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Acharya who systematically presented the philosophy of Vishishtadvaita emphasizes that the Sharanagati path is open for all seekers of all backgrounds. In the Gadya Traya, he clearly shows the various aspects of Sharanagati. He composed the Gadya Traya with outpouring of Surrender (Sharanagati) approach to demonstrate that this approach can be integrated into life and transform oneself.

In the *first Gadya namely Sharanagati Gadya*, there are four parts. In the first part, Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Acharya addresses Sri Mahalakshmi and surrenders to Her. Then he seeks mediation of Sri Mahalakshmi and pleads that She should enable his surrender to Sriman Narayana. This is like a child goes to its Mother first and then requests Mother to speak to Father on its behalf. It is also traditional that when one goes to a Vishnu temple, first one has the darshan of Sri Mahalakshmi and then the darshan of Sri Vishnu. In the second part Sri Mahalakshmi blesses Sri Ramanuja Acharya with overflowing compassion and fully assures that his sharanagati at the lotus feet of Sriman Narayana will be effective forever. Then in the third part Sri Ramanuja Acharya profusely describes innumerable auspicious qualities of Sriman Narayana, which characterize His Swarupa (natural form). He pleads with outpouring heart that Sriman Narayana with His compassion and kindness nature to pardon him (jeevatman) from all types of crimes committed through mind; speech and body in negative activities carried out and for the duties not carried out. Then Sri Ramanuja Acharya pleads that he be blessed with supreme knowledge and unfailing pure devotion towards Sriman Narayana. In the fourth part, Sriman Narayana fully blesses Sri Ramanuja Acharya and assures that He will fully take care of him. Sriman Narayana advises Sri Ramanuja Acharya to repeat (as spiritual practice) the Dvaya Mantra with contemplation of its meaning. Sriman Narayana also guarantees Sri Ramanuja Acharya that he will be blessed undoubtedly with supreme knowledge and eternal servitude. Then Sriman Narayana assures that Sri Ramanuja Acharya will be blessed with Bliss through the Vision and Knowledge of Sriman Narayana and Devotion to Sriman Narayana.

In the second *Gadya*, which is a short one namely *Sriranga Gadya*, Sri Ramanuja describes Sri Ranganatha as Sriman Narayana, who is the Master governing all three types of jeevaatmans namely nitya sooris (eternal), mukta (liberated) and baddha (bonded). Sri Ramanuja pleads Sriman Narayana for the eternal servitude in spite of his shortcomings. Sri Ramanuja vividly describes that as the fire dwells in the wood and oil dwells in the sesame seeds likewise the negative karmas and their effects reside inside us, which propel to do sins. Sri Ramanuja surrenders and seeks mercy with blessings from Sriman Narayana. Then he also pleads that Sriman Narayana should make sure that total devotion is blessed upon him (jeevatman) based on heartfelt plea. Then He addresses in ecstatic way through His glorious qualities such as Ocean of Compassion! Controller of everything! Substratum of everything! etc.

In third *Gadya* namely *Vaikuntha Gadya*, Sri Ramanuja declares that for carrying out nitya kankarya (eternal servitude) to Sriman Narayana, the most effective path is Sharanagati. He also prescribes how one should carryout things after having done sharanagati. Vaikuntha is the divine abode (without any defects and shortcomings) of the Supreme Being Sriman Narayana. Sri Ramanuja gives a fascinating description of Sri Vaikuntha. In Vaikuntha, there are beautiful gardens, ponds, birds, flower plants, creepers, sweet sounds, etc. At the center of all this grandeur, are seated Sriman Narayana with His consort Sri Mahalakshmi and entire entourage of Nitya Sooris who are doing eternal servitude to the Divya Dampati (Divine Couple). The palatial place and the pillars are studded with gems and diamonds. Then Sri Ramanuja describes the outpouring affectionate look of Sriman Narayana on seeing the muktas (liberated ones) whom He accepts for doing servitude. Sri Ramanuja pleads with outpouring heart that when he will realize Sriman Narayana directly face to face? This is because Sriman Narayana is everything to him. Then Sri Ramanuja describes the final step that Sriman Narayana, Himself calling the muktas to His proximity, places His lotus feet on their head, which results in one getting immersed in indescribable spiritual ecstasy.

Final message

As Sri Ramanuja Acharya decided to leave his physical body, all devotees assembled around him. The all devotees requested the great Acharya for his advice as how to live in this world. Then Sri Ramanuja Acharya said

- *A devotee who has truly surrendered himself at the feet of Supreme Being should not dwell upon any thought of his future because any anxiety felt in that connection only shows a hypocrisy in his self-surrender.*
- *Also the present situation of a devotee is fully determined by his past karmas (actions), so it is not proper to grieve over it.*

- *Let not performance of your duties be regarded as a means for achieving worldly ends, but treat them as service rendered to the Supreme Being.*
- *Study the Sri Bhashya and teach it to others.*
- *If this is not possible, study the sacred compositions of Nammaalwar and other Alvars (Nalayira Divya Prabandham).*
- *If this is not possible, spend your lives in sacred places on earth such as Srirangam and Melkote.*
- *If this is not possible remain where you are, and throwing all burdens on the Supreme Being, remain immersed in the contemplation of Narayana Dvaya Mantra.*
- *If none of the above is possible, seek a truly holy person full of wisdom, devotion and desirelessness and move with him and follow his advice.*
- *In this life on earth, find out by careful discrimination your friends, enemies and the indifferent.*
- *Holy persons are your friends. Those who are atheistic and hate God are your enemies. The worldly-minded ones are indifferent.*
- *Develop and rejoice your association with friends.*
- *Remember that the all-merciful Supreme Being will bless you with all that you pray for in your life.*
- *Never beg or receive anything from enemies.*

Concluding Remarks

Thus, the life of the great Sri Ramanuja Acharya is full of messages and advises for the spiritual seekers. Sri Ramanuja Acharya is a Devotee, Philosopher, Social Reformer, Messenger for Equality and Compassionate Organizer. His life, message and works have impacted the world. His emphasis on simplicity, straightforwardness, pure devotion and total dependence on the Supreme Being shows a clear path. May we all remember Sri Ramanuja Acharya but also study his life and message not only on the occasion of his 1000th birth anniversary but also spread for all the interested spiritual seekers of the world. The message, philosophy and teachings of Sri Ramanuja Acharya will not only help the spiritual seekers but also contribute to the betterment of the world.

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Dr. M.G. Prasad is a spiritual disciple of His Holiness Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer of Karnataka. Dr. Prasad has written several books on Hinduism. He regularly gives lectures on various topics of Hinduism at several institutions. He conducts satsangs on Hindu scriptures. He is a member of the advisory board to the office of religious life at the Princeton University and a member of the advisory council of the Hindu Temple Society of North America in Queens, New York. He has received several awards including Kannada Kala Ratna from Kannada Koota, New York and Vishwa Hindu Ratna from the Forum for Hindu Awakening, Virginia and 2017 Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award from Who's Who Publications Board. Dr. Prasad is a Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering at Stevens Institute of Technology. For his research contributions to the field of Acoustics, he has been elected as a Fellow of Four Professional Societies namely American Society of Mechanical Engineers, Institute of Noise Control Engineering and both Acoustical Societies of America and India. He received the 2015 Outstanding Educator Award in Noise Control Engineering Award. For details please visit: www.taranga.us