

भज गोविन्दम्  
BHAJA GOVINDAM  
of Sri Shankaracharya

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**EMESCO**

# भज गोविन्दम्

## 1

भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं  
गोविन्दं भज मूढमते ।  
सम्प्राप्ते सन्निहिते काले  
नहि नहि रक्षति डुकृङ्-करणे ॥ १ ॥

*bhaja govindaṃ bhaja govindaṃ  
govindaṃ bhaja mūḍha-mate ।  
samprāpte sannihite kāle  
nahi nahi rakṣati ḍukṛṅ-karaṇe ॥ 1 ॥*

मूढ-मते *mūḍha-mate* – Oh! Person of deluded mind; भज *bhaja* - worship; गोविन्दं *govindaṃ* - Govinda; काले *kāle* – while the time (of death); सन्निहिते सम्प्राप्ते (सति) *sannihite samprāpte (sati)* – has come close; डुकृङ्-करणे *ḍukṛṅ-karaṇe* – the (recitation of) grammatical line; हि *hi* – because; न *na* – not; हि न रक्षति *hi na rakṣati* – because it does not protect.

1. Oh! Person of deluded mind! Contemplate on Govinda; contemplate on Govinda; contemplate on Govinda. The recitation of grammatical line does not protect when the time of death has come close.

**Explanation:** Knowledge of external world is endless and our idea of scholarship is to know as many sciences as possible. All this knowledge is acquired by man by observing the universe. Vedanta wants to examine the nature of the observer. Hence a greater goal for the human being is to know his own self.

What is the self? Anybody would answer the question by telling his name, his accomplishments, his social status, physical description and so on. It means that by the word self, we identify with the body-mind-

complex and with the social identity that we have. When the *Upanishads* (and recently Ramana Maharshi) ask the question ‘Who am I’, they are not ignorant of our tendency to identify with the body-mind-complex. They ask us to investigate whether such assumption is right. The *Upanishads* teach that our real identity is not what we assume it to be but it is the eternal and all-pervading consciousness which the scriptures call Brahman.

The exhortation ‘*Bhaja Govindam*’ is repeated thrice. Following the tradition of our scriptures we can take it as referring to the three types of obstacles in the path of realization – those due to bodily or mental troubles (*ādhyātmika*), those due to external physical causes (*ādhibhautika*) and those which are providential, such as a sudden adversities like accidents, cyclones etc (*ādhidaivika*). The first type can also be understood as the lack of internal harmony due to desire, anger, greed and such negative emotions. The second type relates to lack of harmony in our relations with the external world. The third type relates to lack of harmony in accepting providential happenings.

The triple exhortation can also refer to the *tri-karāṇa-s*, the three aspects of human interaction – mind, speech and action. Harmony among these three is called the purity of *tri-karāṇa-s*. Disharmony means that a person thinks something, speaks something else and does a totally different thing. This is not purity of the three aspects. Sri Shankara in the above verse is emphasizing the importance this purity.

The name Govinda usually refers to Lord Krishna. Sri Shankara in his commentary on the *Vishnu Sahasra-nama* has given several meanings for this word. One such meaning is *gobhiḥ vindate enam* – one who is realized through the Vedas. This refers to the Supreme Reality, Brahman. Thus the whole text *Bhaja Govindam* is multi-layered. It can be understood at the level of mere devotion and also at a philosophical level.

The word *bhaja* has several meanings. The most common meaning is worship of god. As the proponent of non-dual philosophy Sri Shankara cannot be expected to stop at the level of worship of divine, which is essentially dual in nature. The word *bhaja* also means to enjoy, to experience such as in the expressions *na bhejire .. bhītim* (Bhartrihari, Subhashitani 1-71) which means that the gods did not experience fear.