

Sādhana Pañchakam – Class 1

Sādhana Pañchakam was written by Adhi Shankaracharya. Sometimes this is also called Sopana Panchakam or Upadesa Panchakam or Advaida Pañchakam. The word Pañchakam means a text consisting of five verses. It is called Advaida Pañchakam because these verses deal with advaidic teaching contained in Vedas. The word upadesa means teachings or instructions; five verses dealing with the instructions. The teaching in this verses are given in a graded manner. Sopanam means a flight of steps. Like a flight of steps, instructions are given to reach the goal. These five verses deal with a series of sādhanas or disciplines to be followed by every human being and that is why it is also called sādhana pañchakam. Sadhanam is means and sadhyam is end. The person who accomplishes the sadhanas is called sadhaka.

A series of sādhanas is given for two goals:

1. Discovering what is the goal of human life.
2. Accomplishment of the goal

Keeping these goals in mind, a scheme for life is presented. This scheme of life is given by vedas and scriptures. This is presented by Shankaracharya in five verses.

What is the scheme given by the Vedas? This scheme is known as varna ashrama vyavesthas; scheme of varnas and scheme of ashramas; Varna vyavesthas means dividing the whole society into four groups: brahmana, shathriya, vaishya, sudhras. This classification is based on the contribution towards the society. This classification was given by scriptures for social harmony and social growth.

The second scheme is ashrama vyavesthas or scheme of four stages of life. This scheme is presented for individual harmony and growth. In this work, Shankaracharya is primarily concerned about the ashrama vyavesthas. The four ashramas

are:

1. Brahmacharya: Student stage of life
2. Grihastha: Householder stage of life
3. Vanaprastha: Hermit stage of life
4. Sanyasa ashrama.

This scheme is almost gone and has only a skeletal existence. But internally and mentally everyone has to through this scheme.

For all the human beings, irrespective of varna or ashrama, the scriptures describe some common disciplines; universal disciplines; These disciplines are called samanya dharma; general disciplines and duties. These can be broadly classified into two: Avoidances (don't) and the second consisting of pursuits (dos). Each one consists of five; five don't disciplines are called yamas or nivruti and five do disciplines are called niyamas or pravriti bodha.

Yamas: Five avoidances

1. Ahimsa: Nonviolence; avoidance of harm to others by thought, word and deed.
2. Sathyam: Do not speak untruth; do not lie; It does not mean you always truth; do not speak untruth; so, this is avoidance of lie. Either speak truth or observe silence, but do not speak untruth.
3. Asteyam: Don't possess illegitimate wealth.
4. Brahmacharyam: Avoidance of illegitimate sexual relationships.
5. Aparigraha: Avoidance of possession of too much wealth, even though it is legal.

Five Niyamas: Disciplines to be pursued.

1. Śaucam: Purity; positively working for physical purity and mental purity.
2. Santosha: Positively developing a sense of

contentment.

3. Tapas: Willful self-denial; to avoid slavery to our organs.
4. Svādhyāya: The study of scriptures; with or without knowing meaning.
5. Eeswara Praṇidhāna: Worship of the lord.

Vishesha Dharmas (specific disciplines) are not universal but should be followed by segments of society. These vishesha dharmas are based on varna and ashrama designation of a person. They are known as varnashrama dharma or vishesha dharma or swadharma. Shankaracharya does not discuss samanya dharmas and prescribes vishesha dharmas at four stages of life.

The first stage is Brahmacharya ashrama – a student's life where a person is supposed to study vedic scheme of life. There was 12 years of study. First, he learns what should and should not do in each ashrama. Only after this study, a student can be called brahmachary. Brahma means veda and chary means the one who studies. This is the first stage: being aware of the vedic grand design.

The second stage is gragasthasrama in which one takes the life of activity as prescribed for his particular varna. This is predominantly discussed in the first portion of vedas or karma kanda; When a person follows this discipline, a person gets mental purity. Freedom from raga dwesha; likes and dislikes, because of which a person is generally disturbed. This indicates equanimity of mind or samatvam or chithasudhhi.

Third stage is vanaprastha ashrama; here extrovert physical activities are reduced, and mental disciplines are increased in the form of upasanas. This is discussed in the second portion of vedas or called upasana kanda. This gives a focusing faculty or converging faculty.

The fourth and final stage is sanyasa ashrama in which a

person is free from all psychological dependence and attachments. If this is done physically then, he is an external sanyasi. If it is done mentally, then he is internal sanyasi. This is the final discipline or Jñāna yoga or pursuit of spiritual knowledge, which corresponds to Jñāna kanda portion of vedas. By following this, a person becomes gyani. He becomes jivan muktha, the one who has discovered inner freedom or liberation.

In the first sloka, we get first two stages. In the second and third slokas we get third and fourth stages. In the fourth and fifth Shankaracharya gives general instructions to be followed.

Sloka 1

The scriptures should be regularly studied by you. This is done in the first stage of Brahmacharyam and continued in the other ashramas. First, Vedas are chanted then the meaning is studied and understood. Adhyayanam is chanting and mimamsa means understanding the meaning. To understand the meaning of the Vedas, one must know certain auxiliary sciences known as Veda angaṇi. If you want to understand physics, you must know mathematics. In brahmacharya ashrama the student learns Veda anga also. It is not mere technical expertise; he should know what to do when he comes out of this ashrama. He must have clear cut understanding of his goal and also how to conduct in the society. When life presents challenges, how to deal with them? In Brahmacharya Ashram, he studies the art of living and conducting in the society, in addition to learning their profession.