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24 Guru's Of Sri Dattatreya As Depicted In Narayaneeyam

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Abstract

The Narayaneeyam, a devotional poem composed by Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri, describes the 24 gurus of Dattatreya, a revered divine figure in Hinduism. These gurus, drawn from nature and everyday experiences, embody the profound spiritual lessons that Dattatreya gathered through

meticulous observation. Each guru represents a specific divine attribute or wisdom teaching, such as patience learned from the earth, purification from water, and detachment from the wind. This concept emphasizes that spiritual wisdom can be acquired from all aspects of creation, including the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, ether), celestial bodies (sun, moon), animals (python, honeybee, elephant), birds (pigeon, hawk), and even human beings like a courtesan and a child. Through contemplation of these gurus' inherent qualities, spiritual seekers can cultivate virtues such as selflessness, adaptability, and concentration. This distinctive approach to spiritual learning in Hindu philosophy highlights both the interconnectedness of all beings and the omnipresence of divine wisdom within nature.

Keywords: Dattatreya, Narayaneeyam, 24 gurus, Hindu philosophy, wisdom nature, spiritual lessons, virtues, observation, elements, animals, self-realization

INTRODUCTION

The Uddhava Gita, also known as Hamsa gita, is a sacred dialogue between Bhagavan Krishna and his dear devotee Uddhava and is found in the 11th canto of the Bhagavata purana. It offers profound teachings on devotion, self-realisation and the nature of the material world. Krishna emphasises surrender, selfless service, and the illusory nature of attachments. The Uddhava Gita Guides seekers in the path of spiritual enlightenment, providing insights into yoga, meditation and the supreme absolute. It is a timeless source of wisdom and inspiration for those seeking divine love and liberation. The story of the gurus of Avadhuta Dattatreya occurs in the Uddhava Gita. The term Avadhuta means an ascetic, who has renounced all worldly attachment and connections. This is described in Bhattathiri's Narayaneeyam, a hymn that summarizes the essence of the Bhagatha purana. The description of the 24+1, Guru can be found in the 93rd Dasaka (24 Gurus) of the Narayaneeyam. This story serves as a metaphorical representation of the diverse sources of wisdom that can

be found in every aspect of nature. It highlights the idea that spiritual teachings are not limited to formal teachers or scriptures alone, but can be collected from everyday experiences and observations seeking 'know-it-all gurus' in unwise and obstruct spiritual growth. Instead recognising that everyone and everything can be a valuable teacher allows for growth and protects against disappointments and heartbreaks. Embracing every situation and experiences as a learning opportunity opens doors to profound wisdom, even in the face of unpleasant or what one might call, bad experiences. In this chapter, Krishna responds to Uddhava's request to be taken back to the spiritual world. Krishna advises Uddhava to detach himself from personal attachments and redirect his focus forwards Krishna, while maintaining an equal and unbiased perception of the world. Krishna explains that the material universe perceived through the senses is illusory and temporary and one should control the senses and realise the self as expanded everywhere. By acquiring conclusive knowledge and practising it, Uddhava would perceive the pure self and become dear to all living beings. Krishna emphasised that those who are peaceful, endowed with knowledge and see Krishna within all beings and things will never again fall into the cycle of birth and death. Uddhava, recognising Krishna as the giver of yoga perfection, expressed his humility and acknowledged the difficulty of renouncing material enjoyment for those attached to sense gratification.

He confessed his own foolishness in identifying with the body and bodily relationships seeking guidance he requested Krishna to teach him how to easily carry out his instructions. In relation to this, Krishna proceeds to narrate a timeless dialogue that took place between the illustrious king Yadu and Avadhuta. Dattatreya who had 24 spiritual gurus. The Avadhuta, whom king Yadu son of Yayati, encountered, wandered in ecstatic transcendental bliss, seemingly unpredictable, when asked about the cause of his wandering, he said that he had received knowledge from 24 distinct gurus.

These gurus comprising the earth, wind, sky, water, fire, and other elements taught him numerous valuable lessons. Some of these lessons included the significance of being sober, serving others, showing commitment, finding contentment, maintaining purity, understanding the nature of Atman, gaining clarity, seeking purification, relinquishing desires, acknowledging the presence of the supreme Atman, recognising the Atmans immutability comprehending different modes of perception and being wary of excessive attachment.

Before beginning with the 24 gurus, I would like to once again point out that the story highlights the importance of spiritual knowledge and the diverse sources from which it can be acquired. It encourages individuals to observe and learn from their surroundings, both in nature and in the experiences of others, to progress in the path of self realisation and transcendence. The Avadhuta says, I have taken shelter from 24 gurus who are the following.

The earth, wind, sky, water, fire, moon sun, pigeon, python, ocean, moth, honeybee, elephant, honey gatherer, deer, fish, pingala the dancing girl, the Osprey, Child, arrow maker, serpent, spider was +1 which is my own body. Let us begin with what learn from each of 24+1 gurus.

1. The earth

Dattatreya learned from the earth the virtue of patience, stability and dedicating his life to the service of others. Just as the earth remains steady and bears all things without expecting anything in return, he realised the importance of enduring difficulties and staying steadfast.

Narayaneeyam of Melpattur Narayanabhattathiri is a condensed version of Bhagavata in which the greatness of the 24 gurus is explained. The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the first guru Earth is as follows:

भूमिः सर्वाक्रान्ता अपि नहि चलति

ततः सत्क्षमां शिक्षयेयं¹ —

2.The wind

Through the observation of the wind, both within his own body as the vital air and externally he gained the wisdom to find contentment in the basic sustenance of life, and to preserve purity amidst the influences of the physical body and sensory distractions.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the wind is:

तत् तद्विषयपरिचये अपि अप्रसक्ति ईशः

समीरात् गृहीयाम्²-

3.The sky

By contemplating the sky, he attained the understanding that the Atman transcends all material forms, remaining individual and beyond perception.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the sky is :

आत्मनः व्याप्तत्वं च निर्लेपतां च

गगनगुरुवशात् मे भातु³-

4.The water

From his observation of water, he imbibed the lesson of being naturally transparent and purifying in his own essence.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the water as follows:

उदकवत् अहं स्वच्छः पावनः मधुरः च अयं⁴-

5.The fire

From fire, he imbibed the wisdom of consuming all things without being infected , symbolising the ability to transcend impurities. He also understood the fire's power to ignite the in auspicious desires of those who offer contributions to it. Further more, he learned from fire the profound truth that the supreme Atman infuse every living form, assuming diverse identities while remaining inherently unchanged.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the fire as follows:

वह्निवत् सर्वान्नीनः अपि दोषां मा स्म गृह्णाम् तरुषु तं इव मां

सर्वभूतेषु अवेयाम्⁵-

6.The moon

Moon illuminated his understanding of balance and detachment just as the moon cycles through its various phases . Dattatreya realized the significance of not getting entangled in the fluctuations of life. Instead, he embraced a state of remaining untouched by the changing types of birth, growth, vanishing and death that the material body undergoes.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the moon as follows:

शशिनः कलानां पुष्टिः नष्टिः च इव तनोः न आत्मनः अस्ति इति विद्यां⁶-

7.The sun

Dattatreya, imbibed selflessness from observing the sun. Just as the sun selflessly light and warmth upon all beings without discrimination, he learned the significance of serving others and spreading positivity without any selfish motives. Further more , from the sun, he gained the wisdom and insight to avoid entanglement while encountering sensory objects.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the sun is as follows:

तोयादिव्यस्तमार्त्ताण्डवत् तनुषु (आत्मनः) एकतां त्वत् प्रसादात् विद्यां⁷

8.The ocean

Avadhuta Dattathreya, learned the virtue of patience from the ocean . The ocean tolerates the continuous flow of rivers and never overflows. He imbibed the quality of patience and learned to remain calm and composed in the face of challenges and constant change.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the ocean as follows:

सिन्धुवत् अगाधः स्यां⁸ -

9.The moth

Avadhuta Dattatreya learned that just as a moth flies into the fire and ends up destroyed, one who lacks control over their senses, upon encountering worldly pleasures is immediately drawn towards them. The enticement causes them to lose their spiritual bearing and fall blindly into the depths of material existence.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the moth as follows:

शिखिनि शलभवत् योषिदादौ मा पमं⁹ -

10.The honey bee

Similar to how a honeybee gathers nectar from flowers of all sizes, a wise individual should extract the essence from all religious scriptures.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the honey bee as follows:

भृंगवत् सारभागी भूयासां किन्तु तद्वत् धनचयनवशात्

ईश, अहं मा प्रणेशं¹⁰ -

11.The elephant

In order to catch a male elephant, a trap is set using a stuffed female elephant as bait. The male elephant , enticed by the sight of the female , eagerly approaches only to fall into the pit fall laid in its path.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the elephant is :

वशया गजः इव तरुण्या मा बद्ध्यासं¹¹ —

12.The pigeon

By observing the Pigeon, Dattatreya discovered the harmful effects of excessive affection and attachment. He realised that although the human body presents an opportunity for liberation, becoming deeply attached to family life. Similar to the pigeon, can be likened to a person climbing to great heights only to experience a sudden fall. This taught him the importance of striking a balance between love and attachment and to avoid getting entangled in excessive worldly attachments that hinder spiritual progress.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the pigeon :

स्नेहात् व्याधात्तपुत्रप्रणयमृतकपोतायितः मा स्म भूवं ¹² —

13.The python

A saintly person emulates the passive nature of a python, relying on natural sustenance and renouncing material pursuits. They consume whatever food comes their way, regardless of its abundance, taste or quality. During times of scarcity, they willingly fast demonstrating their physical and mental strength, devoid of desires and unnecessary engagement.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the python is as follows:

शयुवत् प्राप्तं प्राशन् क्षुधं अपि सहेय ¹³ —

14.The child

I have neither honour nor dishonour like a care free child , I roam this world , finding joy and amusement solely in the realm of the Atman. Two kinds of individuals exist without worries .They are the innocent and simple minded who like a child, finds immense happiness and the enlightened ones who have transcended the influence of material nature, reaching the realm of the absolute.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the child is :

अतिशिशुवत् त्यक्तमानः सुखं वर्तेय ¹⁴ —

15.The fish

Just as a fish falls into the fatal trap of a fisherman's hook, driven by its desire for taste, a foolish person is similarly led vanished by the powerful urges of the tongue resulting in their decay conquering the tongue is the key to mastering all the senses and exercising self control.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the fish is as follows:

बलिशे द्रष्टः इव भोज्ये न अत्यासज्जेय ¹⁵ -

16.Pingala , the dancing girl

Pingala's story serves as a powerful lesson she eagerly waited for a promised visitor who would fulfill her desires only to be left waiting all night in arrogant. Eventually , she recognised the futility of seeking external happiness and turned her attention inward, focusing on the Atman or the true SELF. This teaches us not to

rely on others for material benefits. The temptation to seek objects from others only leads to misery and frustration.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the pingala as follows:

पिङ्गलावत् निराशः सुष्या¹⁶ –

17.The osprey

An osprey , holding its prey was attacked by stronger birds of prey. In a life threatening situation, the hawk abandoned its meal and found true happiness . Similarly, letting go of worldly possessions leads to a peaceful and spiritual life. One must therefore overcome the overpowering feeling of lust. Failure to do so leads to trapping, preventing individuals from escaping its clutches and following the right path of liberation.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the osprey is as follows :

सामिषः कुररः इव भर्तव्ययोगात् विभो अन्यैः न हन्यै ¹⁷ –

18.Honey gatherer

A greedy person works hard to accumulate wealth, but often fails to enjoy it or share it with others . This is like a bee producing honey that is later stolen by someone else. Even if one tries to protect their wealth, there are always those who can steal it.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the honey gatherer is :

धनौघं न आर्जयेयं हि , माध्वीहरः इव अन्यः तं हर्ता¹⁸ –

19.The deer

A saintly person, residing in the renounced order of life in the forest, must firmly abstain from songs or music that promote material enjoyment instead, the saintly person should attentively observe the lesson imparted by the deer, who falls prey to the enchanting melody of the hunters horn and subsequently meets its demise . By studying this example, the saintly person learns the importance of avoiding worldly temptations that can lead to their entanglement and destruction.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the deer is as follows:

ग्राम्यगीतैः मृगवत् मा मुहं ¹⁹ –

20.The maiden

Once, a young girl found herself alone at home, as her parents and relatives had left for another place soon, several men arrived, seeking her hand in marriage. Despite being alone, she warmly welcomed them and began making preparations to serve them a meal. As she beat the rice her conch shell bracelets clashed loudly , causing her to worry that the guests might perceive her family as poor due to her engaging in such laborious work . Being clever, she removed two bracelets from each wrist, reducing the noise yet, even with two bracelets remaining, they continued to collide and make noise. So she took off one bracelet from each wrist, resulting in complete silence. Wherever there are many people living together, conflicts are inevitable. Even when only

two individuals reside together, there will be silly conversations and disagreements. Therefore, to avoid conflicts, one should choose to live alone, drawing inspiration from the example of the young girls bracelets.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the maiden is as follows:

विभो एकशेषः कन्यायाः वलयः इव निःसहायः वर्जितान्योन्यघोषः चरेयं ²⁰ —

21.The arrow maker

When one's consciousness is fully absorbed in the absolute truth, the perception of duality and distinctions between internal and external realities vanish. By the story of an arrow maker who was so engrossed in perfecting a straight arrow that he remained oblivious to the presence of the passing king, not even casting a glance towards him.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the arrow maker is as follows:

इषुकृत् क्षमाभृदायानघोषं इव त्वच्चित्तः न परं अवबुद्ध्यै ²¹ —

22.The serpent

A Sage, embracing solitary path, roams without a fixed abode or sanctuary, maintaining constant vigilance and discretion in his conduct. His words are measured, devoid of companionship. Constructing a home for one's temporary existence is a futile and burden some endeavour, just as a serpent, thrives in a home built by others. The sage finds contentment in his life. Fearless in the face of death, he welcomes its arrival and effortlessly discards the mortal coil, mirroring the graceful shedding of a snakes skin.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the serpent is as follows :

उन्दुरोः मन्दिरेषु अहिः इव अन्यप्रणीतेषु गेहेषु निवसानि ²² —

23.The spider

Narayana, the supreme reality, is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Just as the spider releases silk from its mouth, manipulates it for a while and eventually consumes it. Similarly, the supreme personality of Godhead emanates his personal, potency from within himself. Thus, he manifests the intricate web of the cosmic creation, enjoys it and ultimately withdraws it back into himself.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the spider is as follows :

त्वं त्वत्कृतं जगत् त्वयि एव क्षपयसि इति ऊर्णनाभात् प्रतीयां ²³ —

24.The wasp

A wasp compelled a weaker insect to enter its hive, where it kept the helpless insect trapped filled with intense fear, the captive insect constantly meditated on its captor. Remarkably, without abandoning its own body. The weaker insect gradually attained the same state of existence of the wasp. This illustrates how one's constant concentration determines the state of existence one achieves.

The sloka in Narayaneeyam about the wasp is :

त्वच्चिन्ता त्वत्स्वरूपं कुरुते इति पेशकारात् दृढं शिक्षये ²⁴ —

After briefly describing his 24 gurus Avadhuta Dattatreya comes to the final Guru he says he has a part from the 24. It is Avadhuta's ownbody. In Narayaneeyam;

विड्भस्मात्मा देहः च गुरुवरः भवति संचिन्त्यमानः यः विवेकं विरक्तिं धत्ते²⁵

Avadhuta says to king Yadu, now please listen , as I share the knowledge I have acquired through observing my own body. The body is a constant source of suffering burdened by the need for maintenance and its inevitable destruction. Despite its existence to serve others , I see it as a teacher of renunciation and discrimination urging me to wander in detachment. In order to please the body one must divide their care among various responsibilities such as the spouse, children, animals, home and relatives just as a tree drops its seeds and eventually withers away the body, at the time of death, must relinquish all the wealth, its painfully accumulated.

Those were the 24+1 Guru of Dattathreya as depicted in Narayaneeyam also in Bhagavata purana described its beautifully. Avadhuta Dattathreya is often depicted with several elements. Here is a brief description of the symbolism associated with Dattathreya.

1. The three heads signify the divine trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva-creation, preservation and transformation.
2. The cow symbolises the earth ,provider of resources and nurturing abundance .
3. The 4 dogs beside him represent the four vedas, the sacred scriptures guiding humanity.

Conclusion

Apart from improving one's understanding of life and nature, It saves people a hell of a lot of time, which they would otherwise spend on matters that can neither cause everlasting pleasure nor contribute towards their spiritual evolution. Focus on asking questions, listening attentively, studying diligently, contemplating deeply, analysing critically , understanding comprehensively and internalising profound truths. Have a blessed , enriching and fulfilling life ahead. Discover how the simplest element of life, birds, trees, revers and more can become our greatest teachers. Sri Dattatreya teaches respect for the world, which is a manifestation of the Supreme Soul. His teachings encourage students to reinvent themselves as spiritual beings living on this sacred earth.

He teaches that a particle of the Supreme Soul resides in all living beings. Through their example, we learn to evolve, grow and lead a peaceful stress free life. Expand your consciousness, find inspiration and embark on a path of self realisation by learning from the magnificent world by nature. Observing and learning from nature to achieve harmony and sustainability. By teaching the world is sacred Dattathreya's ancient teachings also contain a valuable messages for modern environmental education for sustainable development.

Notes and References

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