

गङ्गाष्टकम्/GANGASHTAKAM

Introduction:

Ganga Ashtakam is an octet composed by Adi Shankara in praise of the river Ganga. It is very beneficial to read this Ashtakam on "Ganga Dashahara dasami" which falls on Jyeshtha month Shukla paksha Dasami tithi (10th day after the new moon day) associated with star Hastham.

Dashahara means the removal of ten types of sins and so, whosoever takes bath in the river Ganga on Dasahara Dasami or at least meditates on Ganga will reap the benefits.

Our Kanchi mutt has brought to the notice of the devout public by publishing Ganga stotras, pooja procedures, snana sankalpa through the Veda Dharma Shastra Paripalana Sabha.

The ten sins committed by a Jiva are classified into three categories: -

Kayika - Sins committed by the body,
Vachika - Sins committed with words,
Manasika - Sins committed with thoughts

While the first two are committed by the gross body, the Manasika sins are committed by the subtle body.

The three sins related to the body (kayika) are described in the verse below from Manusmiriti :

अदत्तानां- उपादानं हिंसा चैवाविधानतः । परदारोपसेवा च कायिकं त्रिविधं स्मृतम् ॥

Adattanam upadaanam himsa chaivavidhanataḥ | paradāropasevā ca kāyikaṁ trividhaṁ smṛtam ||

1. Adattanaam Updadaanam : Taking gifts/ materials not given, refers to stealing the property of others
2. Himsa-ca-eva-avidhanatah : Creating violence and troubling others, not as per rules. When a policeman gives a punishment, that is permitted, as it is his job. Similarly, a soldier killing the enemy in a battle is as per his Vidhana/ duty. However, taking the law into one's own hands and troubling or harming somebody is kayika papam.
3. Paradara upaseva : Engaging in a relationship with other man's wife.

The four sins related to the words/ vak (vachika) are described in the verse below from Manusmiriti:

पारुष्यमनृतं चैव पैशुन्यं चैव सर्वशः ।
असंबद्धप्रलापश्च वाङ्मयं स्यात् चतुर्विधम् ॥

Paarushyamanrutam chaiva paishunyam chaiva sarvashah |

1. Paarushyam: Speaking cruel words. As the words are the form of Goddess Saraswathi, one should refrain from uttering cruel words.
2. Anrutham: Lying / uttering falsehood
3. Paishunyam: Belittling others or speaking ill of somebody in their absence. One should not encourage this habit of criticizing others.
4. Asambaddha pralapah: Talking useless or unconnected topics. i.e., talking too much

The three sins related to the manas/ mind are described in the verse below from Manusmriti:

परद्रव्येष्वभिध्यानं मनसानिष्ट चिन्तनम् |
वितताभिनिवेशश्च मानसं त्रिविधं स्मृतम् ॥

Paradravyeshvabhidhyanam manasaanishtachintanam |
Vitathaabhiniveshascha maanasam trividham smrutam.

1. Paradravyeshu abhidhyanam: Thinking of other man's property even in thought is sin. Thinking ill of somebody in mind. This includes thinking of other man's wife also.
 2. Manasa anishta chintanam: Thinking ill of someone, even when the other does evil
 3. Vitatha abhiniveshas ca: Thinking of useless activities or engaging the mind in non-useful thoughts.
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The Skanda Purana mentions the greatness of chanting the Ganga Ashtotram as below:

एतैर्दशविधैः पापैः दशजन्म समुद्भवैः |
मुच्यते नात्र सन्देहः सत्यं सत्यं गदाधर ॥
yethairdashavidhaih papaih dashajanma samudhbhavaih
muchyate natra sandehah satyam satyam gadadhara

उद्धरेद् नरकाद् घोराद् दशपूर्वान् दशावरान् |
वक्ष्यमाणमिदं स्तोत्रं गंगाग्रे श्रद्धया जपेत् ॥
Uddharet narakat ghorat dashapurvaan dashavaraan
Vakshyamanam idam stotram gangagre sraddhaya japet

Meaning: These ten types of sins committed in ten earlier births/ lives, are destroyed without any doubt. The ten generations before and after will be raised to great levels from their existing state, when this stotram is chanted with focus/ concentration on the banks of river Ganga. (It may be noted that a very similar benefit can also be achieved while performing kanyadan (marriage of a daughter) where ten generations before and after are uplifted.)

1. भगवति तव तीरे नीरमात्राशनोऽहम् विगतविषयतृष्णः कृष्णमाराधयामि ।
सकल कलुषभङ्गे स्वर्गसोपानगङ्गे तरलतरतरङ्गे देवि गङ्गे प्रसीद ॥

1. bhagavati tava tīrē nīramātrāsānōham vigataviṣayatṛṣṇaḥ kṛṣṇamārādhayāmi ।
sakala kaluṣabhaṅgē svargasōpānagaṅgē taralataratarāṅgē dēvi gaṅgē prasīda ॥

Meaning and Explanation:

भगवति तव तीरे नीरमात्राशनोऽहम् / bhagavati tava tīrē nīramātrāsānōham

भगवति - bhagavati – Oh! Bhagavathi; तव - tava - on your; तीरे - tīrē - banks; नीर - nīra - water; मात्र - mātṛā - only; अशनः - aśanaḥ - taking food; अहम् - aham - I am

Oh! Bhagavathi, I am sitting on your banks and taking only your (Ganga) water as food.

विगतविषयतृष्णः कृष्णमाराधयामि / vigataviṣayatṛṣṇaḥ kṛṣṇamārādhayāmi

विगत - vigata - lost; विषय - viṣaya - objects of enjoyment; तृष्णः - tṛṣṇaḥ - insatiable desire; कृष्णम् - kṛṣṇam - Lord Krishna; आराधयामि - mārādhayāmi -I worship;

I have lost insatiable desires on the objects of enjoyment, and I am now worshipping Lord Krishna.

सकल कलुषभङ्गे स्वर्गसोपानगङ्गे / sakala kaluṣabhaṅgē svargasōpānagaṅgē

सकल - sakala - all; कलुष - kaluṣa - sins/evil thoughts; भङ्गे - bhaṅgē - destroyer; स्वर्ग - svarga - heaven; सोपान - sōpāna - step; गङ्गे - gaṅgē - oh Ganga;

Oh, Ganga! You are the destroyer of all my sins; you are the staircase to attain heaven.

Notes:

In some versions, instead of the word गङ्गे - gaṅgē , सङ्गे- saṅgē is mentioned which can also be taken as correct, meaning “along with me” in my travel to heaven.

तरलतरतरङ्गे देवि गङ्गे प्रसीद / taralataratarāṅgē dēvi gaṅgē prasīda

तरल - tarala - splendid; तर - tara - more; तरङ्गे - taraṅgē - waves; देवि - dēvi - Oh Mother; गङ्गे - gaṅgē - ganga; प्रसीद - prasīda - bless me;

Oh, Mother Ganga! your waves are more glittering and splendid than any other object. Please bless me.

Summary:

Oh! Bhagavathi, I am sitting on your banks and only taking your (Ganga) water and not taking any other food. Having lost insatiable desires on the objects of enjoyment, I am worshipping Lord Krishna. Oh Ganga! destroy all my sins and lead me to the path of heaven. Oh, Mother Ganga! your waves are more glittering and splendid than any other object. Please bless me.

2. भगवति भवलीला मौलिमाले तवाम्भः कणमणुपरिमाणं प्राणिनो ये स्पृशन्ति ।

अमरनगरनारी चामर ग्राहिणीनां विगत कलिकलङ्कातङ्कमङ्के लुठन्ति ॥

2. bhagavati bhavalīlā mauḷimālē tavāmbhaḥ kaṇamaṇuparimāṇaṃ prāṇinō yē spr̥śanti ।

amaranagaranāri chāmara grāhiṇīnām vigata kalikalāṅkātaṅkamaṅkē luṭhanti ॥

Meaning and Explanation:

In this verse, Adi Shankara is describing the benefits of touching the Ganga water.

भगवति भवलीला मौलिमाले - bhagavati bhavalīlā mauḷimālē

भगवति - bhagavati - Oh! Bhagavathi; भव - bhava - Shiva; लीला - līlā - sporting; मौलि - mauḷi - head; माले - mālē- ring

Oh! Bhagavathi! you are sporting in the form of a ring on the head of Shiva.

Notes:

Out of the eight important names of Shiva, भव/bhava is the first one.

तवाम्भः कणमणुपरिमाणं प्राणिनो ये स्पृशन्ति / tavāmbhaḥ kaṇamaṇuparimāṇaṃ prāṇinō yē sprśanti

तव - tava - your; अम्भः - ambhaḥ - waters; कणम् - kaṇam - a drop; अणु परिमाणं - aṇu parimāṇaṃ - the measure of an atom; प्राणिनः - prāṇinah - living beings; ये - yē - whichever (any); स्पृशन्ति - sprśanti - touch (touch the water) ;

If any living beings touch a drop of the measure of an atom of your water

Notes:

Here प्राणिनो - prāṇinō refers to any living being. Even birds have attained moksha, by losing their lives in the river Ganga. Ramakrishna Paramahansa mentioned that he has witnessed living beings (like a bird, not just human beings) when dying on the banks of Ganga attaining moksha. If any being dies in Kashi, Devi Parvathi keeps the form (body) of that being on her lap and Lord Shiva utters Rama Nama in the right ear thus enabling it to attain moksha. If one touches Ganga water, they attain moksha. For this very reason, Ganga water is stored in all households for use in an emergency.

अमरनगरनारी चामर ग्राहिणीनां विगत कलिकलङ्कातङ्कमङ्के लुठन्ति / amaranagaranāri chāmara grāhiṇīnām vigata kalikalāṅkātaṅkamaṅkē luṭhanti

अमर - amara - Deva (devas live yuga after yuga); नगर - nagara - city; नारी - nārī – women (Apsara women); चामर - chāmara - chamara; ग्राहिणीनां - grāhiṇīnām - holders; विगत - vigata - freed; कलि - kali - Kali (the current yuga is called as Kali) ; कलङ्क - kalaṅka - dosha(evil); आतङ्कं - ātaṅka – fear/terror; अङ्के - maṅkē - on their lap; लुठन्ति - luṭhanti - roll;

They will be freed from the fear of evils in Kali and roll in the lap of Apsara women in the city of Devas (Amaravathi) who hold chamara in their hands.

Notes:

अमरनगर- amaranagara- The city of Amaras i.e; devas. They are called Amaras as they have consumed Amrutha (Nectar) and don't die (not eternal) - meaning they live much longer than humans. They live yugas after yugas and the city where they live is called Amaravathi.

These are all indications of benefits one reaps by having devotion towards Ganga and touching her waters. Even if one thinks of Ganga with devotion, she will come to them.

गंगा गंगेति यो ब्रूयाद्योजनानां शतैरपि ।
मुच्यते सर्वपापेभ्यो विष्णुलोकं स गच्छति ॥

Ganga Gangeti yo brooyaat yojanaanaam satairapi |
muchyate sarvapapebhyo vishnulokam sa gachchati ||

Even if one is hundreds of yojanas away from Ganga, just by mere chanting her name with devotion they will reach Vishnu Loka.

Summary:

Oh Bhagvathi! you are sporting in the form of a ring on the head of Shiva. If any living being (not only human beings) touch a drop of measure of an atom of your waters, they go to the city of Amaravathi and roll in the laps of Apsara women of Amaravathi city who hold chamara in their hands.

3. ब्रह्माण्डं खण्डयन्ती हरशिरसि जटावल्लिमुल्लासयन्ती स्वर्लोकादापतन्ती
कनकगिरिगुहागण्डशैलात् स्खलन्ती ।
क्षोणीपृष्ठे लुठन्ती दुरितचयचमूर्निर्भरं भर्त्सयन्ती पाथोधिं पूरयन्ती सुरनगरसरित्पावनी नः पुनातु
॥
3. brahmāṇḍam khaṇḍayantī harasīrasi jaṭāvallimullāsayantī svarlōkādapantī
kanakagiriguhāgaṇḍasailāt skhalantī |
kṣōṇīpṛṣṭhē luṭhantī duritachayachamūrnirbharam bhartsayantī pāthōdhiṃ pūrayantī
suranagarasaritpāvanī naḥ punātu ||

Meaning and Explanation:

ब्रह्माण्डं खण्डयन्ती हरशिरसि जटावल्लिमुल्लासयन्ती / brahmāṇḍam khaṇḍayantī harasīrasi
jaṭāvallimullāsayantī

ब्रह्माण्डं - brahmāṇḍam - Bhramandam (Cosmic egg, containing all the 14 worlds); खण्डयन्ती
- khaṇḍayantī - breaking; हर - hara - Shiva; शिरसि - śirasi - head; जटा - jaṭā - matted hair;
वल्लिम् - valli - creeper; उल्लासयन्ती - ullāsayantī - adding lustre;

Ganga adds lustre to the creeper-like matted tress of Shiva, flowing with a great force as if the waters are breaking the Cosmic egg.

Notes:

This verse describes the flow of the waters of Ganga. She is starting from Brahma loka, then flows to Swarga loka, followed by Prithvi loka (earth) and leading to the Pathala loka.

स्वर्लोकादापतन्ती कनकगिरिगुहागण्डशैलात् स्खलन्ती / svarlōkādapantī

kanakagiriguhāgaṇḍasailāt skhalantī

स्वर्लोकात् - svarlōkā - from the Swarga loka; आपतन्ती - āpatantī - falling; कनकगिरि -
kanakagiri - golden mountain (The Meru mountain is supposed to be golden); गुहा - guhā -

caves of; गण्ड - gaṇḍa - cheek area (mountain valley); शैलात् - śailāt- mountain; स्खलन्ती - skhalantī - tumbling down;

She is tumbling down through the caves and valleys of the golden Meru Mountain falling from the Swarga loka.

**क्षोणीपृष्ठे लुठन्ती दुरितचयचमूर्निर्भरं भर्त्सयन्ती / kṣōṇīpṛṣṭhē luṭhantī
duritachayachamūrnirbharam bhartsayantī**

क्षोणी - kṣōṇī - the Earth; पृष्ठे - pṛṣṭhē - face of; लुठन्ती - luṭhantī - rolling; दुरित - durita - sins; चय - chaya - group / heap; चमूः - chamūh - army ;निर्भरं nirbharam - violently; भर्त्सयन्ती - bhartsayantī – abusing, deriding, reviling;

As she rolls on the face of the earth, she drives away with a violent force the army of groups/ heaps of sins of the people who come in contact with her.

**पाथोधिं पूरयन्ती सुरनगरसरित्पावनी नः पुनातु / pāthōdhiṃ pūrayantī suranagarasaritpāvanī
naḥ punātu**

पाथोधिं - pāthōdhiṃ - sea (ocean); पूरयन्ती - pūrayantī - filling; सुर नगर – sura nagara - city of Devas; सरित् - sarit - river; पावनी - pāvanī - purifier; नः - naḥ - us; पुनातु - punātu – may protect;

The river coming down from the city of Devas (Amaravathi), filling the ocean, the purifying Ganga, may she protect us.

Summary:

Ganga adds lustre to the creeper-like matted tress of Shiva, flowing with a great force as if the waters are breaking the Cosmic egg. She is tumbling down through the caves and valleys of the golden Meru Mountain falling from the Swarga Loka. As she rolls on the face of the earth, she drives away with a violent force the army of groups of sins of the people who come in contact with her. The river coming down from the city of Devas, Amaravathi, filling the ocean, the purifying Ganga may protect us.

4. मज्जन्मातङ्ग कुम्भच्युत मदमदिरामोदमत्तालिजालं स्नानैः सिद्धाङ्गनानां कुचयुग विगलत्
कुङ्कुमासङ्गपिङ्गम् ।
सायं प्रातर्मुनीनां कुशकुसुमचयैः छन्नतीरस्थनीरं पायान्नो गाङ्गमम्भः करिकलभ
कराक्रान्तरंहस्तरङ्गम् ॥
4. majjanmātaṅga kumbhachyuta madamadirāmōdamattālijālaṃ snānaiḥ siddhāṅganānāṃ
kuchayuga vīgalat kuṅkumāsaṅgapīṅgam ।
sāyaṃ prātarṃunīnāṃ kuśakusumachayaiśChannatīrasthanīraṃ pāyānnō gāṅgamambhaḥ
karikalabha karākrānta raṅgastaraṅgam ॥

In this verse, Adi Shankara plays various kinds of metaphors to describe the joy one would get through the waters of the river Ganga.

Meaning and Explanation:

**मज्जन्मातङ्गं कुम्भच्युतं मदमदिरामोदमत्तालिजालं / majjanmātaṅga kumbhachyuta
madamadirāmōdamattālijālaṃ**

मज्जन् - majjan - immersed; मातङ्गं - mātaṅga - elephant; कुम्भ - kumbha - frontal globe
temples on the forehead of an elephant; च्युत - chyuta - falling; मद - mada - rut fluid; मदिरा
- madirā - liquor; मोद - mōda - become happy; मत्त - matta - intoxicated; अलिजालं - ālijālaṃ
- a group of honey bees;

Groups of honeybees become intoxicated with happiness by drinking the liquor-like rut fluid
coming down from the temples on the forehead of the elephants that are bathing in Ganga.

**स्नानैः सिद्धाङ्गनानां कुचयुगं विगलत्कुङ्कुमासङ्गपिङ्गम् / snānaiḥ siddhāṅganānām
kuchayuga vilasatkuṅkumāsaṅgapīṅgam**

स्नानैः - snānaiḥ - taking bath; सिद्ध- siddha - Siddha; अङ्गनानां - aṅganānām - women; कुचयुग
- kuchayuga - pair of bosom; विगलत् - vigalat - applied; कुङ्कुम - kuṅkumā - Kumkum/ A
red powder worn ceremonially and cosmetically on the forehead esp. by Hindu women;
आसङ्ग - āsaṅga - in contact; पिङ्गम् - piṅgam - red colour;

Women of Siddha group come down to take bath in the river Ganga, and the waters turn
red as they get in contact with the kumkum-adorned bosom of the Siddha women.

Notes:

Siddha women have the power to even go to Swarga Loka and take bath in the Ganga
flowing there but they prefer the Ganga flowing on earth as it is more purifying.

**सायं प्रातर्मुनीनां कुशकुसुमचयैः छत्रतीरस्थनीरं / sāyaṃ prātar munīnām
kuśakusumachayaiḥ Channatīrasthānīraṃ**

सायं - sāyaṃ - evening; प्रातः - prātaḥ - morning; मुनीनां - munīnām - of sages and saints; कुश
- kuśa - darbha grass; कुसुम - Kusuma - flower; चयैः - chayai - groups/ heaps; छत्र - Channa
- covered; तीरस्थ - tīrastha - on banks; नीरं - nīraṃ - water;

The waters on the banks of the river Ganga are covered by heaps of flowers and darbha
grass left as offering to the river both morning and evening by the sages and saints .

**पायात्रो गाङ्गमम्भः करिकलभ करक्रान्तरंहस्तरङ्गम् / pāyānō gāṅgamambhaḥ karikalabha
karākrāntaraṅgastaraṅgam**

पायात् नः- paayaat naha - may protect us; गाङ्ग - gāṅga - of Ganga; अम्भः - ambhaḥ -
waters; करि - kari - elephant; कलभ - kalabha - young; कर - kara - trunk; आक्रान्त - ākrānta
- water gets agitated; रंहः - raṅhah - getting forth, throwing water forcefully; तरङ्गम् -
taraṅgam - waves;

The water is getting agitated, and the waves are intensified by the play of the young elephants throwing water from their trunks forcefully. That kind of Ganga water may protect us.

Summary:

Ganga, which is full of several crowds of bees rushing to drink liquor-like rut fluid coming down from the temples of the bathing elephants, which is fully red because of the kumkum (vermillion) flowing from the twin bosom of Siddha women while taking bath, which is full of different types of floating grasses and flowers after the salutations done by saints in the morning and evening and whose waters are getting agitated and intensified by the repeated playing of the young elephants throwing water from their trunks forcefully, may protect us.

5. आदावादि पितामहस्य नियम व्यापार पात्रे जलं पश्चात्पन्नगशायिनो भगवतः पादोदकं पावनम् ।
भूयः शम्भुजटाविभूषण मणिर्जहोर्महर्षेरियं कन्या कल्मषनाशिनी भगवती भागीरथी दृश्यते ॥

5. ādāvādi pitāmahasya niyama vyāpāra pātrē jalam paśchātpannagaśāyinō bhagavataḥ
pādōdakaṃ pāvanam ।
bhūyaḥ śambhujaṭāvibhūṣaṇa maṇirjahnōrmaharṣēriyaṃ kanyā kalmaṣanāśinī bhagavatī
bhāgīrathī dṛśyatē ॥

Meaning and Explanation:

आदावादि पितामहस्य नियम व्यापार पात्रे जलं / ādāvādi pitāmahasya niyama vyāpāra pātrē
jalam

आदौ - ādau - at the beginning; आदि - ādi - beginning; पितामहस्य - pitāmahasya – of
grandfather; नियम - niyama - rules; व्यापार - vyāpāra - procedure; पात्रे - pātrē - in vessel; जलं
- jalam - water;

The vessel used at the beginning by Brahma, the primeval grandfather of the human society, to perform the procedures as per rules (to perform anushthana) holds Ganga waters.

Notes:

आदि पितामहः- ādi pitāmahah - The primeval grandfather - Brahma. From the right side of Brahma's body, Swamyambhuva Manu, and from the left side Shataroopa were born as a man and a woman. From them, all other humans were born. The name Swayambhuva originates from the word Swayambhu that refers to Brahma. As Swayambhuva Manu is the son of Brahma, he got his name so. Kashyapa, the grandson of Brahma and son of Marichi, created the entire creation. All creations - Devas, Asuras, birds, animals, serpents are his creation. He had several wives. Each wife has created some part of the creation. From Diti, Daityas (Asuras) were born, from Aditi, Adityas (Devas) were born, from Vinata Garuda and eagles, from Kadru Serpents were born. Humans were born not of Kashyapa, rather from Swayambhuva Manu. Hence, Brahma is called the grandfather of all human beings.

नियम व्यापार पात्र – niyama vyapara patra- the vessel that holds water which is used to perform anushthanams like aachamanam etc., as per the rules, which is also known as Kamandala.

पश्चात्पन्नगशायिनो भगवतः पादोदकं पावनम् / paśchātpannagaśāyinō bhagavataḥ pādōdakaṃ pāvanam

पश्चात् - paśchāt - later; पन्नग - pannaga - serpent; शायिनः - śāyinaha - resting on;
भगवतः - bhagavataḥ - lord (Mahavishnu); पादोदकं- pādōdakaṃ - waters remaining from wetting the feet; पावनम् - pāvanam - purifying;

Later the lotus feet of Lord MahaVishnu resting on the serpent are wetted and thus the Ganga waters become purifying.

Notes:

पादोदकं- pādōdakaṃ - Ganga water had the purifying effect by being touched by MahaVishnu during Trivikrama/ Vamana Avatara. When he measured the Universe, one foot went up to Brahma Loka and Lord Brahma offered water from his kamandalu on Bhagawan's foot.

भूयः शम्भुजटाविभूषण मणिर्जह्नोर्महर्षेरियं कन्या कल्मषनाशिनी भगवती भागीरथी दृश्यते / bhūyaḥ śambhujaṭāvibhūṣaṇa maṇirjahnōrmaharṣēriyaṃ kanyā kalmaṣanāśinī bhagavatī bhāgīrathī dṛśyatē

भूयः - bhūyaḥ - again; शम्भु - śambhu - shambu (Lord Shiva); जटा - jaṭā - matted tress;
विभूषण - vibhūṣaṇa - decoration ornament; मणिः - maṇih - jewel; जह्नोर्महर्षेः -
jahnōrmaharṣēh - of Jahnu Maharshi; इयं - iyaṃ - this; कन्या - kanyā - daughter; कल्मष -
kalmaṣa - sin (impurities); नाशिनी - nāśinī - destroyer; भगवती - bhagavatī - Devi; भागीरथी -
bhāgīrathī - Bhageerathi, another name of Ganga; दृश्यते - dṛśyatē - is seen.

Again, this daughter of Jahnu Maharishi, is like a decorative ornament in the matted tress of Lord Shiva like a jewel. Devi Ganga is also seen as Bhagirathi who is the destroyer of sins.

Notes:

जह्नोर्महर्षेः -jahnōrmaharṣēh- when Ganga started flowing in the earth, she made lots of noise and went inside the ashrama of Jahnu Maharishi. He was in meditation and did not like the disturbance. So, he drank the entire water of Ganga. Later, at the request of Bhagirathsa, he released the water through his ears. Hence, Ganga is known as Jahnavi, the daughter of Jahnu Maharishi. Since Ganga waters were in the ears and later released, this is the reason we touch our ears while doing pranayama to purify the hands that would have impure air from the nose.

भागीरथी – bhāgīrathī- Bhagiratha brought Ganga to Earth by doing a severe penance towards Brahma by standing on one foot raising both his hands, and Brahma released the waters. Ganga was coming with a force that cannot be withstood by the Earth. So, he did penance towards Shiva to hold the powerful Ganga water and Shiva locked the water in his tress from flowing out and again he did penance to release the water in drops. As Bhagiratha brought the river to the earth, Ganga is also called Bhaagirathi, daughter of Bhagiratha.

The name of Ganga in Swarga loka is – Swar Ganga, in Bhooloka (earth)- Bhaagirathi and in Patalaloka – Patala Ganga.

Many shlokas talk of the greatness of Ganga. One such from Mahabharata quoted by Bhagawan Vyasa is as below:

वाङ्मनः कर्मजैर्ग्रस्तः पापैरपि पुमानिह ।
वीक्ष्य गङ्गां भवेत्पूतः अत्र मे नास्ति संशयः॥
Vaangmanah karmajairgrastah papairapi pumaniha
Veekshya gangaam bhavetpootah atra me naasti samshayah

Sins committed by humans on earth by thought word and deed, without any question will be cleansed/ purified by just a mere glance or meditating (with devotion) on Ganga. There is no doubt about this.

Summary:

Ganga, the water in the vessel used for anushthana at the beginning by the primeval grandfather of the human society i.e., Brahma, later got further purified by touching the lotus feet of Lord Maha Vishnu resting on the serpent, a decorative ornament in the matted tress of Lord Shiva like a jewel, the daughter of Jahnu Maharshi, who is also seen as Bhagirathi, is the destroyer of sins. The Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are associated with Ganga.

6. शैलेन्द्रादवतारिणी निजजले मज्जज्जनोत्तारिणी पारावारविहारिणी भवभयश्रेणी समुत्सारिणी ।
शेषाहेरनुकारिणी हरशिरोवल्लीदलाकारिणी काशीप्रान्तविहारिणी विजयते गङ्गा मनोहारिणी ॥
6. śailēndrādavatāriṇī nijajalē majjjanōttāriṇī pārāvāravihāriṇī bhavabhayaśreṇī
samutsāriṇī ।
śēṣāheranukāriṇī haraśirōvallīdalākāriṇī kāśīprāntavihāriṇī vijayatē gaṅgā manōhāriṇī ॥

Meaning and Explanation:

शैलेन्द्रादवतारिणी निजजले मज्जज्जनोत्तारिणी / śailēndrādavatāriṇī nijajalē majjjanōttāriṇī

शैलेन्द्रात् - śailēndrāt - from the chief of the mountains (Himalayas); अवतारिणी - avatāriṇī - coming down; निजजले - nijajalē - in her water; मज्जत् - majjat - those who immerse themselves (take bath); जनः - janah - living beings; उत्तारिणी - uttāriṇī - raising the spiritual standards;

She raises the spiritual standards of any living being that takes bath in the waters of Ganga, coming down from the chief of the mountains (Himalayas).

पारावारविहारिणी भवभयश्रेणी समुत्सारिणी / pārāvāravihāriṇī bhavabhayaśreṇī samutsāriṇī
पारावार- pārāvāra - ocean (पार - pāra – this shore; अवार - avāra – that shore ; this shore to that shore refers to the ocean); विहारिणी - vihāriṇī - sportily joins; भव - bhava - samsara; भय - bhaya - fear; श्रेणी - śreṇī - rows of; समुत्सारिणी - samutsāriṇī - drives away;

Ganga waters drive away and remove rows of fear of samsara while she sportily joins the ocean.

Notes:

पारावार-pārāvāra- Huge sheet of water between this shore and that shore refers to the ocean. A river is represented as a woman, and the ocean is represented as a husband. All rivers merge with the ocean, and the merger brings joy to the river, as she meets her husband. People take baths at the points where the rivers merge with the ocean to gain spiritual merits.

शेषाहेरनुकारिणी हरशिरोवल्लीदलाकारिणी / śeṣāheranukāriṇī haraśirōvallīdalākāriṇī

शेष - śeṣā- Adi Sesha ; अहिः - ahih: - - serpent; अनुकारिणी - anukāriṇī - follows; हर- hara - Shiva; शिरः - śirah - head; वल्ली - vallī - creeper; दल - daḷa - leaf; आकारिणी - ākāriṇī - shape/form;

She takes the form of a leaf in the creeper which is the tress in the head of Shiva and flows following the path of the serpent Adi Sesha in terms of her length and width.

Notes:

शेषाहेः अनुकारिणी śeṣāheh anukāriṇī - - AdiSesha the serpent holds the entire world on his head. Similarly, river Ganga also covers a large part of the earth. She is coming down from the Himalayas and travels all the way to the eastern side and is the longest river known in Bharat (India). So, she is referred as following the path of AdiSesha. Another concept is, like Adishesha holds the huge earth, she is also very wide in some places, thus compared to AdiSesha. The matted tress of Shiva is compared to a creeper, and Ganga appears as a leaf of the creeper.

काशीप्रान्तविहारिणी विजयते गङ्गा मनोहारिणी / kāśīprāntavihāriṇī vijayatē gaṅgā manōhāriṇī

काशी - kāśī - Kasi (The city of Varanasi); प्रान्त - prānta - the area of; विहारिणी - viharīṇī - she is sporting; विजयते - vijayatē -is victorious; गङ्गा - gaṅgā - Ganga; मनोहारिणी - manōhāriṇī - enchanting and taking away our mind;

She is sporting in the city of Kashi (Varanasi) and enchants the mind of the viewers. Let her be victorious.

Notes:

काशीप्रान्त – kāśīprānta- Ganga flows from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. Kashi is regarded as the most sacred city for the Hindu community. People go to Kashi and take bath in the Ganga and perform pitru shraaddha. In Sanatana Dharma, one must perform pitru shraaddha (offerings to forefathers) at least once in a lifetime in Kashi and Gaya. Traditionally, people visit Kashi, to have darshan of Lord Viswanatha, Visalakshi and Annapoorna.

Summary:

Ganga waters, coming down from the chief of the mountain (Himalayas), drive away and remove rows of fear of samsara of any living being who takes bath in those waters. She sportily joins the ocean (who is considered as the husband for all rivers). She is in the shape of a creeper's leaf in the head of Shiva and flows following Adi Sesha in terms of majesty and width. She is sporting in the city of Kashi (Varanasi) and enchants the mind of the viewers. Let her be victorious.

7. कुतोवीची वीचिस्तव यदि गता लोचनपथं त्वमापीता पीताम्बरपुरनिवासं वितरसि ।
त्वदुत्सङ्गे गङ्गे पतति यदि कायस्तनुभृतां तदा मातः शातक्रतवपदलाभोऽप्यतिलघुः ॥
7. Kutōvīchi vīchistava yadi gatā lōchanapatham tvamāpītā pītāambarapurānivāsaṃ vitarasi ।
tvadutsaṅgē gaṅgē patati yadi kāyastanubhṛtāṃ tadā mātaḥ
śātakratavapadalābhōpyatilaghuḥ ॥

Meaning and Explanation:

कुतोवीची वीचिस्तव यदि गता लोचनपथं / Kutōvīchi vīchistava yadi gatā lōchanapatham

कुतो - kutō - from where?; वीची - vīchi - waves (here he refers to the waves of Samsara);
वीचिः - vīchihi - waves (Waves of Ganga waters); तव - tava - your; यदि - yadi - if; गता - gatā -
come; लोचन - lōchana - eyes; पथं - patham - range;

If your (Ganga) waves come in the range of my eyes, then the wave of samsara (cycle of birth and death) cannot come near me (from where it will come?).

Notes:

This is a poetic way of mentioning that samsara cannot frighten Jiva once he/she had darshan of Ganga. Here, it is mentioned “Waves of samsara” as, samsara is always compared to an Ocean, and it is bound to have waves. These waves come one after the other and frighten jiva - भव भय श्रेणी /bhava bhaya shreni that we saw in previous verse.

त्वमापीता पीताम्बरपुरनिवासं वितरसि / tvamāpītā pītāambarapurānivāsaṃ vitarasi

त्वम् - tvam - you; आपीता - aapita - having been drunk (here refers to Ganga water); पीताम्बर-
pītāmbara- wearing yellow silk dress (Mahavishnu); पुर निवासं – pura nivāsaṃ- residing in
Vishnu Loka; वितरसि – vitarasi - bestow/ grant;

She bestows Vishnu's abode (Vishnu Loka- Vaikuntham) to those who consume (drink) her water.

Notes:

At the time of last breath, Ganga water or Tulasi water is given to the person so that he is bestowed with Vaikuntam. During Deepavali or Naraka Chaturdashi bath, adding Ganga water to the water in our house makes it more sacred. It is said on the day of Deepavali, "तैले लक्ष्मीः जले गंगा -Thaile Lakshmiḥ, Jale Ganga" meaning Lakshmi is in oil and Ganga is in water.

त्वदुत्सङ्गे गङ्गे पतति यदि कायस्तनुभृतां - tvadutsaṅgē gaṅgē patati yadi kāyastanubhṛtām
त्वत्-tvat - your ; उत्सङ्गे - utsaṅgē – on the lap; गङ्गे- gaṅgē- oh! Ganga; पतति - patati - falls;
यदि - yadi - if; कायः - kāyah - body ; तनुभृतां - tanubhṛtām - of any living being that has body

Oh Ganga! If the body of any living being falls on your lap (if they take bath)

Notes:

Shastras mention that when one goes to any holy river (like Ganga), first they should have the darshan, perform achamanam, and then only put the foot and take bath. Directly touching the waters with foot is a sin. If we observe closely this shloka, Adi Shankara mentioned the greatness of Ganga with darshanam, achamanam and bathing.

तदा मातः शतक्रतवपदलाभोऽप्यतिलघुः - tadā mātaḥ śāntakratavapadalābhōpyatilaghuḥ
तदा - tadā- then; मातः- mātaḥ-oh! mother; शत क्रतव - śāta kratava – of one who has done
hundred Ashwamedha yagas (of Devendra); पद - pada - state (position); लाभः - lābah -
attaining; अपि-api - even that; अति लघुः – ati laghuḥ- very small

Oh! Mother Ganga, attaining even the position of Devendra, will be very small for him (the one who has taken bath in Ganga).

Notes:

शत क्रतव - śāta kratava : This is an adjective of शत क्रतु - śāta kratu - One who has performed a hundred Aswamedha yagas. This is the pre-requisite for the position of Devendra.

अतिलघुः - atilaghuḥ : Adi Shankara referred to Devendra position as very small here since the person who takes bath in Ganga with utmost devotion is eligible to go to Vishnu Loka.

Summary:

If the waves of waters of the Ganga come in the range of one's eyes, then the wave of samsara (cycle of birth and death) cannot come near him. If one consumes the Ganga water, he will be blessed to reside in Vishnu's abode (Vaikuntham). Oh! Mother Ganga, even attaining the position of Devendra will be very small for the one who falls in your lap (takes bath).

8. गङ्गे त्रैलोक्यसारे सकलसुरवधूधौतविस्तीर्णतोये पूर्णब्रह्मस्वरूपे हरिचरणरजोहारिणि स्वर्गमार्गे ।
प्रायश्चित्तं यदि स्यात्तव जलकणिका ब्रह्महत्यादिपापे कस्त्वां स्तोतुं समर्थः त्रिजगदघहरे देवि गङ्गे
प्रसीद ॥
8. gaṅgē trailōkyasārē sakalasurevadhūdhautavistīrṇatōyē pūrṇabrahmasvarūpē
haricharaṇarajōhāriṇi svargamārgē ।
prāyaśchitaṃ yadi syāttava jalakaṇikā brahmahatyādi pāpē kastvāṃ stōtuṃ samarthaḥ
trijagadaghaharē dēvi gaṅgē prasīda ॥

Meaning and Explanation:

गङ्गे त्रैलोक्यसारे सकलसुरवधूधौतविस्तीर्णतोये - gaṅgē trailōkyasārē sakalāsuraavadhūdhautavistīrṇatōyē

गङ्गे- gaṅgē- Oh Ganga!; त्रैलोक्य- trailōkya - of three worlds; सारे- sārē - essence; सकल- sakala - all ; सुर- sura - Deva; वधू - vadhū- women; धौत - dhauta - bath (washes) ; विस्तीर्ण - vistīrṇa - very broad; तोये - tōyē - water;

Oh, Ganga! the essence of all the three worlds (upper world, earth, and patala loka which constitute the Brahmanda), all Deva women (apsaras) come to take bath in your wide waters.

पूर्णब्रह्मस्वरूपे हरिचरणरजोहारिणि स्वर्गमार्गे - pūrṇabrahmasvarūpē haricharaṇarajōhāriṇi svargamārgē

पूर्ण - pūrṇa - full; ब्रह्म - brahma - Parabrahma; स्वरूपे - svarūpē - form; हरि - hari - Maha Vishnu; चरण - charaṇa - feet; रजो - rajō - dust; हारिणि - hāriṇi - takes away; स्वर्ग - svarga - heaven; मार्गे - mārgē - passing through;

Oh! Ganga, the full form of Brahman, you are taking away the dust of lotus feet of Maha Vishnu while passing through swarga (heaven).

Notes:

पूर्णब्रह्म- Poorna is given as an adjective of Parabrahman. Parabrahman expresses itself in different forms - either in a part form or in a full form. It manifests as a full form like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva. They are poorna brahma swaroopas (full form). There can be a part-form like Vyasa Bhagavan. He is an Amsha avatar of Sree Maha Vishnu.

Ganga is also known as Brahma Drava in our scriptures and various Puranas, meaning Brahman in the form of liquid. There is a famous shloka - ब्रह्म द्रवेति विख्याता पापं मे हर जाह्नवि / Brahma draveti Vikhyata papam me hara Jahnavi.

Oh! Jahnavi. You are celebrated as Brahma Dhrava. Please remove my sins.

Also, it is mentioned औषदं जाह्नवी तोयं / Oushadam Jahnavi Toyam - The waters of Jahnavi are medicine for all illnesses, including the illness of samsara.

Bhagavan says in Bhagavad Gita that स्रोतसामस्मि जाह्नवी - srotasām asmi jāhnavī – meaning, of flowing rivers/streams, I am the Ganga.

प्रायश्चित्तं यदि स्यात्तव जलकणिका ब्रह्महत्यादि पापे - prāyaśchitam yadi syāttava jalakaṇikā brahmahatyādi pāpē

प्रायश्चित्तं - prāyaśchitam - expiation; यदि - yadi - if ; स्यात् - syātt – can be; तव - tava - your जल - jala - waters; कणिका - kaṇikā - a very small drop; ब्रह्महत्या - brahmahatya - killing a brahmana; आदि - ādi - etc; पापे- pāpē- sins:

A small drop of the Ganga water can remove the great sins like killing a brahmana.

Notes:

The killing of brahmana comes under “Pancha Maha Pataka” (Five great sins). So, if Ganga waters can be an expiation for a great sin like killing a brahmana, it can wash off other sins as well.

**कस्त्वां स्तोतुं समर्थः त्रिजगदघहरे देवि गङ्गे प्रसीद - kastvām stōtuṃ samarthah
trijagadaghaharē dēvi gaṅgē prasīda**

कः - kaha - who ; त्वां - tvam - you; स्तोतुं - stōtuṃ - praising; समर्थः- samarthah - capable त्रि
- tri - three; जगत् - jagat - three worlds; अघ - agha - sin; हरे- harē-removes; देवि- dēvi-oh
devi!; गङ्गे- gaṅgē - Oh Ganga!; प्रसीद - prasīda – be pleased;

Oh Devi! Oh Ganga! Who is capable of praising you, you are capable of removing sins of all the three worlds, be pleased with me.

Notes:

If a small drop of water can remove an intense sin like killing a brahmana, who will have the capability of praising you. No praise will be adequate as even Goddess Saraswathi cannot praise you.

Summary:

Oh, Ganga! You are the essence of the three worlds. You have wide waters where all Deva women (Apsaras) come to take bath. You are the form of Poorna Brahman. When you are passing through swarga, you carry the dust of the lotus feet of Maha Vishnu. If a small drop of your waters can be the prayashchitta (atonement) for great sins like killing a brahmana, then who has the ability to praise you. Oh Devi! Ganga! you are removing the sins of the three worlds, be pleased with me.

9. मातर्जाह्वि शम्भुसङ्गमिलिते मौलौ निधायाञ्जलिं त्वत्तीरे वपुषोऽवसानसमये नारायणाङ्घ्रिद्वयम्
।
सानन्दं स्मरतो भविष्यति मम प्राणप्रयाणोत्सवे भूयाद्भक्तिरविच्युता हरिहराद्वैतात्मिका शाश्वती ॥

9. mātārjāhnavī śambhusaṅgamilitē mauḷau nidhāyāñjaliṃ tvattīrē vapuṣōvasānasamayē
nārāyaṇāṅghridvayam ।
sānandaṃ smaratō bhaviṣyati mama prāṇaprayāṇōtsavē bhūyādbhaktiravichyutā
hariharādvaitātmikā śāśvatī ॥

मातर्जाह्वि शम्भुसङ्गमिलिते -mātārjāhnavī śambhusaṅgamilitē

मातः - mātaha - oh Mother!; जाह्वि - āhnavī - Oh! Jahnvi (daughter of Jahnu Maharishi);
शम्भु - śambhu - Shiva; सङ्ग - saṅga - associated; मिलिते - militē - attained

Oh! Mother Jahnvi, attained the association with Shiva by adorning his head.

मौलौ निधायञ्जलिं त्वत्तीरे वपुषोऽवसानसमये नारायणाङ्घ्रिद्वयम् सानन्दं स्मरतो भविष्यति मम प्राणप्रयाणोत्सवे - mauḷau nidhāyāñjaliṃ tvattīrē vapuṣōvasānasamayē nārāyaṅghridvayam sānandaṃ smaratō bhaviṣyati mama prāṇaprayāṅōtsavē
 मौलौ - mauḷau - on the head; निधाय अञ्जलिं – nidhāya añjaliṃ- keeping hands in the form of anjali; त्वत् तीरे – tvat tīrē- on your banks (on the banks of river Ganga); वपुषः - vapuṣaha - body (form); अवसान - avasāna - the end/close; समये - samayē - at that time (of the end of life); नारायण - nārāyaṇa - Lord Narayana; अङ्घ्रि द्वयम् - ānghri dvayam - twin feet; सानन्दं - sānandaṃ- along with the bliss; स्मरतः - smarataha - thinking; भविष्यति- bhaviṣyati – will happen to me; मम - mama - my; प्राण - prāṇa - life; प्रयाण - prayāṇa - travel of the prana (when prana leaves the physical body and travels); उत्सवे - utsavē - celebration ;

On the banks of Ganga, at the time of the end of my life when the celebration of travel of prana starts, if I can fold my hands and keep on top of my head and think of the happiness of joining the twin lotus feet of Narayana (so moksha can be attained).

Notes:

प्राण प्रयाणोत्सवे – prana prayāṅōtsavē- For a gnani, leaving the body is a celebration. Here Acharya says even to a devotee on Ganga’s banks it should become a celebration, thinking of the bliss of joining the lotus feet of Narayana.

Body is constituted of pancha bhutas. When the body dies all these five elements leave and join the respective five major elements outside the body (sky, water, fire, air, and earth). Prana is air element, and it is the last element to leave and the most vital one, hence it is mentioned. For gnanis the prana leaves from the hole on top of the head (Brahma Randhram). That is why they break coconut on the top of the head when a gnani attains siddhi. For others it leaves through other orifices like ears or eyes or mouth etc.

Dying on the banks of river Ganga is auspicious. Moksha is attained when the circumstances are propitious. Whatever one thinks at the time of death, he becomes that in the next birth. That is why when a person is on death bed it is important to make him think of Bhagawan rather than speaking mundane things. Ganga water should be given and Karna mantra is supposed to be chanted while he is alive which nowadays happens only after death. Even prayaschittas like various Daanas are supposed to be done while alive.

भूयाद्भक्तिरविच्युता हरिहराद्वैतात्मिका शाश्वती - bhūyādbhaktiravichyutā hariharādvaitātmikā śāśvatī

भूयात्–bhūyāt- let it happen; भक्तिः –bhakti – devotion; अविच्युता- avichyutā- never falling from the lofty level; हरि –hari- Narayana (Mahavishnu) ; हर –hara- Shiva; अद्वैतात्मिका- advaitātmikā- with no distinction; शाश्वती – śāśvatī- eternal, constant;

Let eternal Bhakthi dawn in me and never fall from that lofty level and not make any distinction between Hari and Shiva so that I can attain Moksha.

Notes:

अद्वैतात्मिका - no distinction should be made between Hari and Shiva. This is one of the pre-conditions for attaining moksha. Only with that kind of eternal devotion one will be able to think of Lord Narayana at the time of prana leaving the body.

10. गङ्गाष्टकमिदं पुण्यं यः पठेत्प्रयतो नरः। सर्वपापविनिर्मुक्तो विष्णुलोकं स गच्छति ॥

10. gaṅgāṣṭakamidaṃ puṇyaṃ yaḥ paṭhēṭprayatō naraḥ Isarvapāpavinirmuktō viṣṇulōkaṃ sa gachChati ॥

गङ्गाष्टकमिदं पुण्यं यः पठेत्प्रयतो नरः - gaṅgāṣṭakamidaṃ puṇyaṃ yaḥ paṭhēṭprayatō naraḥ
गङ्गा -gaṅgā- Ganga; अष्टकम् इदं- āṣṭakamidaṃ- this poem of eight verses; पुण्यं- puṇyaṃ-
sacred; यः- yaḥ-whoever ; पठेत्- paṭhēṭ- chants (reads) ; प्रयतः- prayatō- with concentration
with all efforts; नरः - naraḥ- human being;
Whichever human being chants (reads) this punya stotra of eight verses on Ganga taking
efforts to read with full concentration

Notes:

प्रयतः- prayatah- In all stotras, Acharya is keen to remind us how one should recite a
stotram. Here he says one must put all efforts to read with full concentration on attaining
the benefit and not thinking of something else.

सर्वपापविनिर्मुक्तो विष्णुलोकं स गच्छति - sarvapāpavinirmuktō viṣṇulōkaṃ sa gachChati

सर्व पाप-sarva pāpa- all sins; विनिर्मुक्तः- vinirmuktah- completely relieved (relief from
samsara); विष्णुलोकं- viṣṇulōkaṃ–world of Vishnu (Vaikuntham); स- sa- that person; गच्छति
– gacchati-goes;

That person is relieved of all sins and proceeds to Vaikuntha the abode of Mahavishnu.

Summary:

Whichever human being reads with full concentration all the eight verses on Ganga which is
full of punya, is relieved of all sins and proceeds to Vaikuntha the abode of Sri
Mahavishnu.

॥ श्री गङ्गाष्टकम् सम्पूर्णम् ॥
॥ Sri Gangashtakam Sampurnam ॥