

# **Veerashaivism**

## **A Guide Book**

Online - Version

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## VSNA President's Message

VSNA is proud to present to its readers – “Veerashaivism – A Guide Book” by Dr. Linga Raju, one of our founding VSNA life-member and former President of VSNA.

For the last 38 years, VSNA organization has endeavored to work towards its mission to – “Protect, Preserve and Propagate Basava Philosophy in North America”. This has been possible with resilient leaders such as Dr. Linga Raju among the authors who have contributed to VSNA's mission in the form of publications explaining to its members the tenets of Basava Philosophy in the language that is familiar to youngsters in the region.

The Annual Conventions of VSNA form a platform to revive various initiatives. During the 2015 New Jersey Convention, the "Plan for Model Veerashaiva Community" was inaugurated. The plan laid out simple steps how VSNA can be organized and revive the publication process to achieve Model Veerashaiva Community. This book is aligned with the building of the model community.

I thank Dr. Linga Raju for his persistent efforts to share his knowledge and deep understanding of Veerashaivism. So far, Dr. Linga Raju has 14 books published online on VSNA.ORG. This book – “Veerashaivism – A Guide Book” is the latest one. VSNA is also grateful for his generosity in sponsoring a print version of this this book.

We hope the readers will gain an understanding of Veerashaivism and in turn spread the words of Basava and his contemporaries to their colleagues and the younger generation in North America and elsewhere in the world.

Channu A. Kambalyal  
President, Veerashaiva Samaja of North America  
August 15, 2015

## Introduction

Veerashaivism owes its present form to Basava who is popularly known as Basavaṅṅa and respectfully known as Basavēshvara. In the twelfth century of Common Era (CE/AD) there was a great religious movement in the form of revitalization and reformation of the then existing Veerashaiva, Shaiva, and other Hindu sects, resulting in the new religious faction called Veerashaiva. This occurred in Karnāṭaka, India, and spread all over the world. The great leader of this movement was Basavaṅṅa. He founded an Academy of Veerashaiva Scholars (an assembly hall called Anubhava Maṅṭapa) where discourses about religion and society were held. Scholars from all over India were attracted to this place, and one among them was Allama Prabhu, popularly known as Prabhudēva. Prabhudēva was regarded as the most intellectual Veerashaiva scholar of the time, and he became the leader presiding over the deliberations in the Academy. A new Philosophical System was developed, and with accurate interpretation, practical implementation of the idea was carried out.

With the reformation of Veerashaivism, philosophy and practices of the Veerashaivas have been reiterated in a modified form in the vaṅṅanas. Vaṅṅana literally means 'that which is said' or 'that which is spoken'. Vaṅṅana is a rhythmic prose. Vaṅṅanas were widely used by the Veerashaivas to propagate knowledge and the right way of life among the masses. These vaṅṅanas are in the Kannaḍa language, the language of the local people of Karnāṭaka, India. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE, the vaṅṅanas have been compiled into the form of the main scripture of the Veerashaivas known as 'Shuunya Saṁpaadane'.

Shuunya Saṁpaadane means attainment of Shuunya, the Absolute State. The term 'Shuunya Saṁpaadane' is also used to mean the text of the vaṅṅanas compiled in the form of a document or a book with a title of Shuunya Saṁpaadane. Four versions of Shuunya Saṁpaadane have been compiled. The fourth compilation has 1543 vaṅṅanas. This Kannaḍa version has been translated into a comprehensive edition in English by the Karnatak University, Dharwar, India, containing not only Kannaḍa texts and vaṅṅanas but also English introduction, text, transliteration, translation, notes, and comments. A concise composition in English of Shuunya Saṁpaadane is available at vsna.org the Veerashaiva Samaja of North America web-site.

Shuunya Saṁpaadane is the quintessence of the Veerashaiva Philosophy. It is composed mainly in the form of discourses between various Veerashaiva Scholars. **Shuunya Saṁpaadane is the main scripture of the Veerashaivas.**

## Monism

Monism is an English term that refers to a view that 'Reality' is basically one. The Reality encompasses the whole universe as we know it and everything else in it, including the worldly existence. The Sanskrit term 'Advaitism' is usually applied for the English word monism. The basic meaning of Advaitism is the non-duality of Ātman (individual-Self) and Brahman (Universal-Self). The term 'Advaita' only negates duality – negates everything conceivable or expressible. All the descriptions of it could be only in negative language. The term 'monism' would mean predicating one positive thing or oneness. The philosophy of Advaitism is the belief that all is God and the Self is God. However, in general the term 'monism' is used for the 'Oneness' belief system of Hinduism.

Atheism is a belief that there is no God, and theism is a belief in the existence of a God or Gods. Monotheism, then, is a belief that there is only one God, but that does not necessarily mean that there is only one Reality. Monotheism could imply duality, meaning that there are two Realities - referring to the belief that God and the individual are two separate and distinct entities. Thus, monotheism is not monism; it could be called dvaitism, or dualism.

In the Oneness System the Reality has three categories. **The Immanent Reality** is the phenomenal universe. It is the abode of all living beings. It serves as a divinely devised training ground where, through pain and pleasure, and through life and death, all beings are driven to evolve in the Divinity. **The Transcendental Reality** contains, controls, and governs the Immanent Reality. All worship and adoration are offered to this Reality. It bestows emancipation to those who perfect themselves. The substratum of these two categories of Reality is **The Absolute Reality** which is considered as Pure Consciousness. This Reality cannot be worshipped directly, but **the goal of human life is to dissolve one's individuality into this Absolute Reality.**

Veerashaivas believe in the Oneness Philosophy. They use the term '**Śūnya**' pronounced as '**Shuunya**' for this Absolute Reality. Literal meaning of 'Shuunya' is 'void' or 'emptiness' or 'nothingness'. It conveys the meaning that there is nothing, yet there is something. It is at once Naught and Aught, Non-being and Being. It is neither form nor formlessness, neither time nor timelessness. It is indivisible, without a second, existence-consciousness-bliss, eternal and perfect. The Shuunya of Veerashaivas is the 'Infinite' or the 'Absolute'.

Shuunya of Veerashaivas cannot be worshipped directly. Therefore, Veerashaivas have conveniently adopted '**Liṅga**' as the highest principle that could be worshipped. According to Veerashaiva Philosophy, The Absolute (Shuunya), when activated by its own nature, manifests as '**The Liṅga**' that is to be worshipped, and the '**Aṅga**' that is the worshipper.

After this manifestation, the Aṅga is still within the Liṅga and the Liṅga is as complete/infinite as before. **Hence, everything is only one and there is no other; this is non-duality or oneness.** Liṅga is the highest Reality capable of being realized through devotional worship and meditation. Aṅga is the soul devoted to the worship of Liṅga. It is said that, Liṅga puts the devotional feeling into Aṅga, so that Aṅga will have the ability to attain oneness with Liṅga. The attainment where Aṅga and Liṅga become one is called *Liṅgāṅga-sāmarasya*. The Veerashaivas propound the theory or the argument that delineates the idea of 'sameness' or 'Unity' or 'Oneness'. This monism philosophy of Veerashaivas is called Liṅga-advaita or **Liṅgaadvaita** Philosophy.

The language seems to have been invented for the dualists who consider the individual and God to be two separate entities. It also seems that the idea of separateness of God and the individual is engraved in the mind. Veerashaivas being monists have to cope with this problem especially when interacting with others, and have to come up with a solution. Some examples of what can be done are as follows.

When one sneezes, what would the others have to say? It is customary here in North America to say 'God bless you'. But, it indicates that God is a different entity, and therefore, Veerashaivas have a hard time accepting it; Veerashaivas do not invoke a separate God. Therefore, for a Veerashaiva, it may be appropriate to simply say 'Bless you', and leave out the separate God. Another way to say something like that may be 'May you be blessed'.

Similarly, a dualist may say 'I pray God to bless you with immense health, happiness and a very long life'. Here it is to be pointed out that not only the Veerashaivas do not invoke a separate God, they also do not pray, they worship and meditate. Prayer is begging God to grant you and others some favor. The English word 'prayer' should be avoided. The same greeting may be reworded as 'May you be blessed with immense health, happiness and a very long life'.

Another example is when a dualist exclaims 'Oh my God!' In this type of circumstance, a Veerashaiva may say 'Oh my goodness!' or 'Oh my graciousness!' or something like that.

An obituary stated that so and so attained Liṅgaikya, and then it stated 'May the Lord Almighty take the departed soul to His Heavenly Abode...' Here, Liṅgaikya is appropriate. It means the person (soul/aṅga) has attained oneness with Liṅga. There is nothing higher than that. Liṅga is everything. A Veerashaiva does not beg a separate God for anything; the Veerashaivas do not believe in a separate God; the God is within you and also it encompasses the whole universe. There is no departing of the soul, it has become Liṅga; the soul does not go to any heavenly abode of a God, it has become God itself.

## Dedicated Work

The Kāyaka concept was one of the cardinal features of social reform in the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. The term 'kāyaka', pronounced as 'kaayaka', ordinarily means something related to the body. In the Veerashaiva system of life, it means dedicated manual labor. The labor may extend to the mental or intellectual field. The work is dedicated work in the form of worship.

Veerashaivas have a popular saying 'dedicated work is heaven'. This saying is to be interpreted as – 'while doing dedicated work, one creates heaven right here on earth'. It is not to be interpreted as – one goes to heaven after death by doing dedicated work. Veerashaivas, being monists, do not believe in a separate heaven or going to heaven after death; they believe in becoming one with the Absolute in this very life while still alive. The dedicated work aspects are summarized here:

- First, in the name of service to God, one should never beg. Such a beggar moves away from, rather than towards, realization.
- Second, while engaged in dedicated work, one should not mind anybody, they are all working with the 'One', as they are not exempt from work.
- Third, the labor of a Veerashaiva should never fetch more than what it is worth; may get less, but never more.
- Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the Veerashaiva to do work with a pure heart and mind, and always put one's best effort into the work. This is how one tries to express the Divine in oneself through one's work. Such work should never be motivated by greed or egoistic self. It is always dedicated to the Divine.
- Things earned by dedicated labor are holy. Things earned with avarice are unholy. Gambling is not holy. Veerashaivas should not partake in such unholy things.
- Money itself is neither holy nor un-holy; it depends upon how it is earned. Money earned with dedicated labor is holy; that earned with avarice is un-holy.
- If work and dedication take one to heaven, the heaven is just a worker's wage; it does not lead to the union with the Divine.
- All desire in any form or guise is to be eliminated.
- Once the sense of 'I' and 'do' are gone, the service itself will lead to the Absolute.
- One should tread the path with one's own legs.
- Devotion illuminated by knowledge, unless translated into action, is no devotion. Knowledge, devotion and action should go hand in hand.

These principles of dedicated work are applicable even to the present day circumstances. The Veerashaivas should continue to practice what Veerashaivism dictates in this regard.

## Dedicated Service

The Veerashaivas' activities are driven by this profound sense of service. Surrendering of all the fruits of one's labor to the welfare of humanity was one of the essential tenets of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Veerashaiva faith. The term 'dāsōha', pronounced as 'daasōha', means 'self-dedication or unreserved surrender'. Its simple meaning is dedicated service. It is closely associated with dedicated work. The work and all the earnings from work must first be offered to the godly – Guru, Jaṅgama and the community of Veerashaivas.

Some of the explanation is summarized here:

- When one hears 'I am He' which means the one who has attained the Oneness (such a one is the Jaṅgama), one should not decline to do dedicated service. When Jaṅgama approaches, one should serve the Jaṅgama in whatever means possible.
- Things earned by dedicated labor are considered as something holy. Things earned with avarice are unholy. Therefore, only the things obtained through dedicated labor are to be offered to Jaṅgama.
- Money itself is neither holy nor un-holy; it depends upon how it is earned. Money earned with dedicated labor is holy; that earned with avarice is un-holy.
- Dāna pronounced as 'daana', means donation. It is not dedicated service. There are three types of donations: One type is when the donation is given with the expectation of something in return. This strings attached donation will not result in liberation, and it is not accepted by the Veerashaivas. The second type of donation is when the donation is made without any desire for something in return except the desire of dedicating it to the Lord. This type of donation implies duality, meaning that the giver and the Lord are two different entities. The third type of donation exemplifies the oneness philosophy of Veerashaivas. The recipient, the donor and the donation is all 'One'. With this type of donation, the donors do not feel that it is theirs to give. Everything came from the One and is going to the One. All the Veerashaivas are beneficiaries of such donation, and this type of donation is the best.

Dedicated Service of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Veerashaivas meant that all the fruits of one's labor are to be offered first to the God-kind, and not looked upon as a means for maintaining oneself or one's family. This type of prioritization is not acceptable to the present day situation. It is not practical. The earnings of dedicated work are to be looked upon as a means for maintaining oneself or one's family first, and then offered to the God-kind.



## Dedicated Life

Veerashaivas consider every day to be a pious day, as well as an auspicious and celebrating day. Practice of Veerashaivism includes all aspects of one's daily life. Veerashaivism, in a way, can be considered as an authority in regulating human behavior.

Veerashaivas are expected to lead a simple yet virtuous life incorporating austerity and restraint. Veerashaivas are to exhibit profound humility, and everyone is to be treated with respect. One should not make any caste discrimination, and should honor the nobility of all professions and the equality of all castes. Furthermore, in Veerashaivism, there is no gender inequality. It is part of the 'equality among all' doctrine. Veerashaivas consider men and women to be equal in all respects - not only in society but also in the religious aspects. It is to be pointed out that, although the Veerashaivas eliminated all the social inequalities, they did not eliminate the purity standard required of the individuals to be considered as equal.

One has to get rid of all the desires and passions such as - lust, anger/aggression, greed, infatuation/delusion, boasting/ego, and jealousy/envy. There is no room for hatred or violence of any kind. Love, knowledge, power, peace and bliss are the radiant expressions of the Divine. One has to express these in their daily lives. Veerashaivas should not have any problem to practice these principles in the present day circumstances.

Some of the above principles have been included in a simplified fashion as commandments in one of the vaċanas:

Do not steal,  
Do not kill (do not be violent),  
Do not lie,  
Do not be angry,  
Do not detest others (do not hate others),  
Do not glorify yourself (do not boast yourself),  
Do not belittle (do not insult),  
This is the inward purity,  
This is the outward purity.

## Some Veerashaiva Dictums

Veerashaivism, in a way, can be considered as an authority in regulating human behavior. The Veerashaivas are expected to practice what the religion teaches. In this regard, it may be worthwhile to review some of the dictates of Veerashaivism.

**Being a vegetarian:** Veerashaivas are vegetarians. Milk and milk products are allowed, therefore they are not vegans. Being a vegetarian is good for one's own health and also for the eco-system. This indeed is a very good dictum of the Veerashaivas. However, some exceptions may have to be considered. Those who have lactose intolerance, may not be able to consume milk, but, in mild cases, there should be no problem in taking yogurt and or cheese; other products such as soy milk are also available for them. In some severe cases or in individuals who are allergic to milk, one may consider eating unfertilized eggs. Veerashaivas are not supposed to consume eggs. Definitely not fertilized eggs.

It is to be noted here that, it is a Veerashaiva principle that no food is to be left in the dish after completing a meal, and care is to be taken to have food served in the dish as much as is necessary for one's fill. Hindus consider the food left in the dish after one eats to be 'untouchable'. But for the Veerashaivas, this issue of untouchability of leftover food, does not arise at all. The Veerashaiva principle of not wasting any food is a good one, especially when there is so much hunger in this world.

**Alcoholic beverages:** Veerashaivism dictates that one should not drink alcoholic beverages. In India, in the past, there was 'prohibition' – it was unlawful to produce, sell and/or consume alcoholic beverages. Even in the United States of America, there was 'prohibition' many years ago. Now, only the young under 21 years of age who are not allowed to purchase or consume alcohol.

Alcohol is a poison; it is toxic to the cells in the body. Furthermore, excessive use induces physical dependence – it is addicting. However, there is some evidence that in moderation, there may be some health benefit. But, one should not drink alcohol just for the so called health benefit. There are other measures that are more beneficial than alcohol for that purpose.

That being said, what do the present day Veerashaivas do? It seems that many Veerashaivas, particularly the women, do not drink alcoholic beverages. That is a good thing. If they do drink, it seems that they drink in moderation at social gatherings such

as at wedding celebrations and some parties. They do not, and they should not, drink regularly or daily.

**No smoking and no drug-abuse:** It is self-explanatory; there should be no problem in following this dictum in the present day situation.

**The 'bhavi' issue:** Bhavi is said to be a non-believer in faith or a non-believer of the Veerashaiva faith. A Veerashaiva is not supposed to associate with non-believers of the faith, and also not to dine with the non-believers of faith. This dictum is somewhat narrow-minded, and may not be practical nowadays. This type of guideline might have been applicable to a weak-minded person who might be persuaded by others to do something that is not acceptable to the Veerashaivas. A strong-willed Veerashaiva should not have any problem in this regard.

**Burial of the dead:** Unlike many Hindus, Veerashaivas bury their dead; they do not cremate the bodies. Some Veerashaivas bury the bodies in the sitting position. Burial in the sitting position does not seem to be practical nowadays. Furthermore, cremation in a crematorium, not on the pyre, seems to be acceptable for the present day Veerashaivas.

Another point to be made here is that, if the dead body of a Veerashaiva is buried in a cemetery, others do not go to the cemetery to visit or seek that person. That person is not there; that person has become one with Liṅga which encompasses the whole universe. And the Liṅga is also within the person seeking the other. The person who is seeking the other, may require some help from the Veerashaiva community. Sometimes when a Veerashaiva is buried in a large private family cemetery, the family may have established a charitable or an educational resource center at the site, then, of course, others may visit the site for that purpose.

## Devotion, Worship, and Meditation

According to Veerashaiva Philosophy, The Absolute (*Śūnya*), when activated by its own nature, manifests as '**The Liṅga**' that is to be worshipped, and the '**Aṅga**' that is the worshipper. After this manifestation, the Aṅga is still within the Liṅga and the Liṅga is as complete/infinite as before. Hence, everything is only one and there is no other. This is non-duality or oneness philosophy (Monism/Advaitism). Liṅga is the highest Reality capable of being realized through devotional worship and meditation. Aṅga is a soul devoted to the worship of Liṅga. Any individual soul cannot be an Aṅga; only when the soul becomes a worshipper of Liṅga, then it becomes an Aṅga. It is said that, Liṅga puts the devotional feeling into Aṅga, so that Aṅga will have the ability to attain oneness with Liṅga.

**Bhakti** in general means devotion. Bhakti is not prayer. Feeling of devotion is always there in Aṅga, because, as stated above, at the time of manifestation Liṅga has put the devotional feeling into Aṅga. But the devotional feeling or mental attitude of devotion has to be associated with devotional activity either physical or mental. The activity, physical or mental, expressed by devotion is worship.

Devotion denotes the concept of devotee and the Divine; it implies duality. This has to be reckoned with. Veerashaivas are monists (non-dualists). They believe in only one Reality. In order to overcome this duality situation, Veerashaivas have adopted what is recommended in the Upaniṣads.

Veerashaivas use the term '**Sad-bhakti**'. Veerashaiva *Sadbhakti* has a special significance. It means right devotion, true devotion or real devotion. In Veerashaivism, the love of the enlightened individual is directed towards one's own Real Self. According to the Veerashaiva Philosophy, devotee and the Divine are not two different entities, but two different names of the One Indivisible Reality.

**Worship**, as stated above, is the mental or physical activity expressed by devotion of a person. Worship is not prayer. Worship means homage, reverence or religious deep respect. 'Namaḥ' in 'Ōṃ namaḥ Shivaaya' means obeisance. Obeisance is bowing down with deep respect, or submission. Veerashaivas consider the worshipper and the worshipped to be one and the same.

**Meditation** means to think, to consider, to ponder. Meditation is not prayer. After stabilization of the mind, and only after that, the mind is focused on the inner Self; this is meditation. Disciplining of the mind and the thought process is an important part for spiritual advancement; without that discipline, one cannot proceed to meditation.

When meditating, in order to achieve the super-consciousness state (*Nirvikalpa Samādhi*), one has to focus the mind, breath, reason, knowledge and thought on one point, and remain in that will-less condition. Otherwise, when the meditative focus has some sort of an object in it, somewhat of a lower type of Samādhi (*Savikalpa Samādhi*) is attained where there is some retention of self-volition when absorbed into the super-conscious state.

Meditation on the Supreme-Self is for the purpose of Self-realization, and does not allow any shifting; one has to adhere to it, constantly repeating the same process, until the objective is reached. All meditations, other than the one on the Supreme-Self, are symbolic meditations. Self-realization is not the aim of all the symbolic meditations. In the symbolic meditations, one meditates on a visible or visualized object outside one's own innermost-Self, and exalts it as a great Deity or Brahman itself. During symbolic meditations, the symbol should be regarded as superior to what it actually represents.

**It should be noted that Veerashaivas do not pray.** They worship and completely surrender, and also, they meditate and contemplate on the inner Self. Use of the English word 'prayer' should be avoided. The word 'prayer' means an earnest request for something as in the act of petitioning God to grant a favor; it is kind of begging God to sanction something. It indicates duality – that the individual and God are two separate and independent entities. Veerashaivas believe in oneness philosophy (monism), therefore, they do not pray. They worship and meditate.

Another point to be made is that Veerashaivas do not go to a temple to worship. They do not worship idols or images of some God. Furthermore, Veerashaivas do not use any priests or such intermediaries in the worship and meditation.

## Liṅga Worship

Liṅga is the highest Reality capable of being realized through devotional worship and meditation. **Liṅga abiding within, eternally upon the point of Consciousness, and gets worshipped internally, is the Veerashaiva-Liṅga.** For an ordinary individual, it may be difficult to directly go to internal Liṅga worship from the start. Therefore, first, there is external worship of Liṅga in its gross form. Next is the worship of Liṅga, both with form and without form. Then there is worship of formless internal Liṅga; that is the internal worship.

Veerashaivas consider Liṅga to have taken triple-form in the body, life, and mind, as *Iṣṭaliṅga*, *Prāṇaliṅga*, and *Bhāvaliṅga* respectively. Thus, *Iṣṭaliṅga* represents the body, and it is one of the three divisions of Liṅga. *Iṣṭaliṅga* is not an idol or an image of true Liṅga, it is the Liṅga itself. Veerashaiva *Sadbhakti* (true devotion, pure devotion or right devotion) requires not only the liberation of the soul but also the liberation of the body, life, and mind. And what is more important is that all these three are to be made into the nature of the Divine, and be united with the Divine. It is through the realization of these three Liṅga divisions that one has to advance and attain to the Absolute.

Simple meaning of 'Iṣṭa' is 'adored' or 'desired'. The *Iṣṭaliṅga* is the symbolic Liṅga used for worshipping and longing for the attainment of the true Liṅga. *Iṣṭaliṅga* is the physical form of Liṅga that is worn on the body by Veerashaivas. It is bestowed to the disciple by a Guru. That Liṅga is the *Iṣṭaliṅga* that is to be worn on the body. After the death of the body, the *Iṣṭaliṅga* is to be buried in the ground with the body.

The syllable *Om̐* is engraved in Kannaḍa (NA) on the *Iṣṭaliṅga*. *Om̐* represents everything – the formless and timeless Absolute as well as the entire temporal (in time) universe in form. However, it is to be noted that that one should never seek features in the Liṅga.

**Iṣṭaliṅga provides a focus for daily worship** by individuals in the privacy of their own home. The worship is not done in public, and definitely not done for applause or admiration. In spiritual life, the aspirant is hampered by dogmatic rites, egoism, attachment to the world, etc. Unless one has rid oneself of these, one cannot make any progress in spiritual attainment. The concept of discipline or spiritual practice is important. But the real worship is not with material things, it is with pure devotion and knowledge. To an ordinary devotee, the details of the physical acts of *Iṣṭaliṅga* worship, as directed by a Guru, are necessary only to strengthen the will. First there is worship in the gross form as worship of the physical *Iṣṭaliṅga*. Then the worship shifts to the internal worship of the formless internal Liṅga.

**If one claims that the mere wearing of an Iṣṭaliṅga, and ritualistic worship of Iṣṭaliṅga guarantee liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, that person is mistaken.** Undue preoccupation with traditional or customary rites and rituals associated with the Iṣṭaliṅga worship are condemned by the Veerashaivas.

**The external Iṣṭaliṅga will be of any value only if it stimulates the spiritual growth of the soul.** If the seeker is to gain strength in this pursuit, the seeker cannot have it by blind belief or perverse argument. Firm faith, coupled with thought and practice, is necessary for spiritual advancement. Each individual is responsible for working out his or her own relation to Liṅga and to Liṅga's grace.

It is important to note here that the obedient worship of Iṣṭaliṅga by a disciple as advised by the Guru, takes the disciple to heaven, after death, as a reward. Going to heaven does not result in liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, and does not result in the attainment of oneness with the Liṅga. In order to attain this oneness with Liṅga, one has to practice Liṅgayōga which is the method of a gradual spiritual rise and development of Aṅga. It will enable the Aṅga to attain its objective to become one with Liṅga.

## Prāṇāyāma

Prāṇāyāma is pronounced as 'praṇāyāma'. Prāṇāyāma is complete control and distribution of vital energy in the body by means of regulation of breathing. Prāṇa means energy, and yāma means control. Prāṇa is the universal energy or the cosmic power that is confined in the body. It flows through conduits in the body. Prāṇa and the conduits were visualized during yogic meditation by the ancient sages when anatomical nerves and blood-vessels were not clearly known to them. Expression of Prāṇa is through breathing. While Prāṇa is linked to this vital function of the body, it is not the breath itself. The flow of energy in the body is regulated and controlled by fine, deep and rhythmic breathing. While there are many techniques of performance of prāṇāyāma, the following type is practiced by Veerashaivas.

Veerashaivas practice prāṇāyāma only in its elementary form. It is performed while the person is seated comfortably in the yoga-meditation position. Simple posture for yoga-meditation that can be held for a sufficient time without any discomfort is the sitting position. For meditation, one should have a seat which is neither too hard nor too soft. The correct posture is to sit straight and cross-legged with eyes looking straight out and hands resting on the lap. For some individuals, sitting cross-legged may not be comfortable; for them, sitting on a chair with legs down resting on the floor is acceptable.

Every aspect of breath-control is performed in a relaxed manner, and there should not be any jerky/sudden movement. **Fine breathing is a noiseless breathing through both nostrils.** It is not breathing through one nostril and then the other. Deep-rhythmic breathing is not deep-rapid breathing which may lead to complications. There are three aspects – inhalation, exhalation, and retention. Inhalation is accomplished by taking in a large breath of air smoothly. Exhalation of the breath is gradual, relaxed and smooth. Retention of the breath occurs twice, once at the end of inhalation, and then at the end of exhalation. End-inhalation breath-hold is not natural because the breathing muscles are not relaxed. It should not be forced. If stability of the breath-hold is lost, the breath has to be released. Duration of this retention of the breath is what is comfortable for that person. End-exhalation breath-hold is natural because all the muscles are relaxed then. The duration of this retention is also what is comfortable for the individual. **One should not focus on the time it takes to inhale, exhale or to hold the breath. Rhythmicity gets established naturally on the basis of the body's needs.** During this process of breath regulation, one feels a gradual expansion of the chest, and feels the air reaching all parts of the lungs. This allows full utilization of the life-breath.

This process of breath regulation moves life-energy throughout the body. The energy is distributed throughout the body via the innumerable conduits (energy passageways).



Breath-control directly affects the ascending and descending currents of life-force. In an ordinary individual, the currents exist in a haphazard manner, and pose as obstacles for a free flow of vital-energy. The yōgic meditative practice of self-purification places these currents in a proper order of alignment. When breath regulation becomes effortless, the person is totally absorbed in its fineness.

Prāṇāyāma, as practiced by the Veerashaivas, is applicable not only for spiritual fitness but also for physical and mental fitness. Specifically, mental calmness ensues from this practice. This technique does not lead to any type of respiratory or gas exchange complication. Some other techniques such as breathing rapidly (hyperventilating) and then holding the breath may lead to serious complications. Breathing is a vital function; one cannot live without it. The Veerashaiva technique changes the pattern of breathing to achieve mental calmness and focus, without interfering with the homeostatic mechanisms of the body.

Breathing moves air in and out of the lungs. The inhaled air gets humidified mainly in the nasal passages. Breathing through one nostril may interfere with this function, particularly in the dry winter season. Furthermore, one-nostril breathing requires specific action to close the other nostril, and also may produce some snoring type of sound. Both detract from calmness and concentration. At sea-level the partial pressure of Oxygen ( $O_2$ ) in the inhaled air saturated with water vapor is about 150 millimeters of Mercury; that of Carbon-di-oxide ( $CO_2$ ) is practically zero. Gas exchange takes place in the lungs. The de-oxygenated blood coming to the lungs has  $O_2$  at 40, and  $CO_2$  at 46. After gas-exchange in the lungs, the oxygenated blood has  $O_2$  at 100, and  $CO_2$  at 40 with a pH of 7.4 (approximate numbers for a normal adult). The circulatory system distributes this blood to all the tissues in the body. In the lungs, ventilation of air by breathing, and perfusion of blood by circulation are matched to maintain the physiological values by automatic control of breathing and heart-circulation function. The Veerashaiva technique of breathing does not interfere with this control.

One important aspect of gas exchange is to be noted: Excessive air moving in and out of lungs when not needed, as in hyperventilation, results in a proportionate decrease in  $CO_2$  with an increase in pH (more alkalinity). This by itself could be detrimental. Also there is very minimal if any significant increase in  $O_2$ . This disparity is to be understood. Breath hold after hyperventilation causes another problem. The  $O_2$  which had not increased much, decreases, and this could be dangerous. Many other non-Veerashaiva techniques could also result in other such problems.

**Once the fine, deep and rhythmical breathing is established, the focus is changed from breath control to meditation while maintaining such breathing.**

## Liṅgayōga

The practice of Liṅgayōga takes the individual back to the original source in the reverse order in which the individual came into existence. Thus, the concept of Creation is important for the Veerashaivas. According to Veerashaiva philosophy, the Creation is as follows:

'In the beginning the Absolute, when activated by its own nature, created within the Self, an infinity of macrocosms and myriad of microcosms (souls). And when the twenty-five categories (*tattvas*; *tattva* means 'that in itself', meaning quality of being that or inherent principle) were attached to the souls, the souls forgot their true nature, and in asserting their body, became subject to pleasure and pain, to freedom and bondage, and became captive to desire and death. They became subject to the worldly life cycle of births and deaths. But some of them receiving the touch of the grace of Liṅga, learnt to despise the influence of corporeal existence and achieved freedom from the worldly life of births and deaths. The same Liṅga bestowing grace upon them, made them one with its own Supreme-Self.'

It is said that Veerashaivas, who are sometimes referred to as Liṅgaayatas, start with the Liṅga and end with the Liṅga, and therefore, they are Veerashaivas/Liṅgaayatas, not merely because they wear Iṣṭaliṅga on their bodies.

The practice of Liṅgayōga is not to proceed through any set of formal image-worship, and not to perform sacrificial ceremonies; and it is not a prescribed form of chanting mantras. It is by sincere devotion, aspiration, and surrender that the goal is to be achieved. Complete change, down to the physical, is to be sought for the purification of the total being. It is said that the more the lower nature is purified the easier is the descent of the higher nature (the Divinity). The purification of the lower nature and the manifestation of the higher nature progress side by side.

Liṅgayōga is the very life and soul of the Veerashaiva spiritual discipline and religious practice. Liṅgayōga is all-comprehensive and includes in it everything that the religious practice expresses. There are five preparatory sthalas. Then there are the six main sthalas of Ṣaṭsthala. After that there is one more sthala, namely, Jaṅgamasthala. Thus, Liṅgayōga is inclusive of all the twelve sthalas, not just the six sthalas of Ṣaṭsthala. The term 'sthala' is used here to mean a stage, a temporary resting place for a progressing soul on its spiritual journey to attain oneness. At each stage the aspirant gets more spiritual experience sufficient enough to advance/ascend to the next higher stage. These twelve sthalas are described next.

***Piṇḍasthala:*** The literal meaning of 'piṇḍa' is 'lump' or 'round mass', and refers to the body of a fetus or of a person. In Piṇḍasthala, piṇḍa means a purified individual-self Aṅga which is aspiring to be united with the Universal-Self Liṅga. In spiritual terms, the Aṅga is still in the stage of the enwombed unborn fetus. The soul of limited potency and limited knowledge is subject to revolve in the cycle of worldly life. This ordinary soul is not Aṅga. But by virtue of spiritual maturity one becomes pure of mind. Once the conscience of the soul is pure, there arises a clear devotion. Because of this devotion one aspires to know the Divine. Divine immanence can be recognized only by one who is aspiring to achieve the goal. Thus, the characteristic of Piṇḍasthala is that the aspiring soul Aṅga visualizes the existence of Liṅga in one's own body.

***Piṇḍa-jñāna-sthala:*** Jñāna here means discriminative knowledge. In this stage, the soul grasps the discriminative knowledge. With this knowledge, Aṅga realizes that it is totally different from the body, senses, and intellect. This discriminatory knowledge is grasped through the 'I-notion'. I-notion means 'I possess a body', 'I have sound senses', 'I understand', 'I remember', etc. On the basis of this, one should be able to discern that the soul exists, and that the soul is different from the body, senses, and the intellect. Then one should be able to discern that I-notion itself is not the soul because the I-notion does not exist in sleep, and therefore that the I-notion is not eternal. The soul, which resides in a transitory body, is eternal.

***Saṁsārahēyasthala:*** Saṁsāra is the cosmic process where one passes through a succession of births and deaths without any progress in breaking the cycle of births and deaths. In Saṁsārahēyasthala, one develops disgust for the worldly life of cycle of births and deaths, and detaches from the transient worldly pleasures by virtue of refined impressions. The teaching is as follows.

Māyā, pronounced as Maayaa, is the power that obstructs the understanding of Reality. It masks or hides the true identity, and thus results in ignorance and egoism. The soul not knowing its true nature plunges into Māyā and identifies with the body; as a consequence the individual becomes fond of pleasures and passions associated with the body, and thus the individual is not in a position to realize the Divine presence. All beings are subject to happiness and misery of worldly existence. A common person believes that the birth is the beginning and the death is the end and that that is all there is to life. The human beings with perishable bodies harbor instinctive cravings; and those who are caught in the cravings cannot realize the Divine. The soul is driven by a compelling passion for worldly pleasures. This thirst is not satisfied by enjoyment. The more one tries to appease the sense organs and the senses, the more dissatisfied one becomes. This causes distress and misery. Such an individual, fond of the body and pleasures associated with it, is not in a position to realize the Divine presence. The individual has to understand that the body and the soul are not identical. One has to get rid of all the

desires and passions such as - lust, anger/aggression, greed, infatuation/delusion, boasting/ego, and jealousy/envy. There is no room for hatred or violence of any kind. One who has purged all desires and passions, attained contentment, and has realized the difference between the body and the soul, advances further in one's path towards the Absolute.

***Māyāvilāsaṣṭakā-śthala:*** As stated above, Māyā is the illusive power that obstructs the understanding of Reality; it masks/hides the true identity, and thus results in ignorance and egoism. In this śthala the individual-self recognizes its identity to be one and the same as that of the Universal-Self. At this stage it does not become one with it yet. The soul has to rid itself of Māyā by recognizing that the Self is different from Māyā and that the play of Māyā is working against the realization of the Self. One who is caught up in the web of Māyā, continues to be ignorant without self-knowledge. One has to free oneself from the self-inflicted ignorance and acquire the right knowledge. In order to achieve this, one has to have a pure mind which is devoid of any restless activity, and has to have a clear consciousness. Stabilization of the mind is of prime importance so that one can then proceed on to contemplation and meditation in one's spiritual progress.

The term 'monkey-mind' is used for the explanation of the restlessness of the mind. Just as a monkey jumps from branch to branch to pluck the fruit and eat it, the restless human mind leaps from one sense-organ to another to grasp at and enjoy the sense-objects. The restlessness of the mind is a great hindrance in the way of discipline. Life, mind, and intellect remain impure, if the stillness of the soul is not attained. Restless activities of the mind are to be brought to a stable status, not through force or suppression, but through persuasion, and by directing the expression towards a more socially or culturally acceptable way of life. Disciplining of the mind and the thought process is an important part for spiritual advancement; without that discipline, one cannot proceed to meditation.

One must not venture into any bad thoughts or thinking of harming other beings; at the verge of such, those thoughts are to be diverted into good thoughts or thoughts of helping others. Sometimes it may be necessary to avert such bad thoughts by chanting as many times as necessary, either silently or aloud, the simple mantra 'Ōm'. Some may prefer to chant the six-syllable mantra – 'Ōm Namaḥ Shivaaya'. Once the restlessness of the mind disappears, the mind itself merges with the Self.

Mind is a matrix with innumerable instincts, impulses and emotions, both good and bad. If the bad takes the upper hand, the aspiration of spiritual advancement is as good as dead, and is far removed from the Divine. When one perceives the difference between good and bad which depict the nature of conscious Self and the non-self, the path the seeker should take to experience the joy of the Self will be illuminated.

***Liṅgadhāraṇasthala:*** Liṅgadhāraṇa is the investiture of Liṅga to a disciple by a Guru.

First is the aspect of the Guru. Guru is a master of spiritual knowledge who has realized the state of identity with Liṅga. Guru instills spiritual knowledge into the disciple. An aspirant who yearns for self-realization is impelled to seek a competent Guru. The seeking and striving of the disciple goes on until the aspirant reaches the spiritual that takes the form of Liṅga. To such a seeker whose mind is peaceful and controlled, the learned Guru imparts the knowledge of the Absolute in its very essence, the knowledge by which one knows the true imperishable Being. Each individual is responsible for working out one's own relation to Guru and Liṅga. There is no necessity of an external Guru for the one who is well advanced in the path of self-realization. For the thorough-going monist the Reality is beyond duality; it is only 'One'. For the one who is well advanced in one's spiritual attainment, when the certitude that one's own-Self is the Absolute, is attained, that knowledge itself becomes the Guru. But, for ordinary individuals who are not spiritually advanced, the need for an external Guru seems to be indispensable.

Second is the type of initiation. The mental-type process of initiation is meant only for the ones who are at a higher plane of consciousness and are well advanced in their spiritual attainment. The other type of initiation, involving the physical process, is said to be for the ordinary aspirants who are in a lower plane of consciousness. This physical process is carried out by the Guru. It involves rites and rituals such as besmearing the body with sacred ash, placing the palm on the disciple's head, whispering the mantra into the disciple's ear, and investing the Iṣṭaliṅga on the seeker's palm.

Third is the process of initiation performed by the Guru. It accomplishes the following: The disciple is purified of the three impurities or taints (malas) by the grace of the Guru. *Āṇavamala* is the impurity that subsists in the soul; it keeps the soul separated from the Divine. *Māyāmala* is associated with Māyā and it keeps the soul ignorant of its own nature. *Kārmikamala* is the taint associated with the individual souls which enjoy or suffer according to their deeds. These three malas are wiped out by the grace of the Guru.

Next there is Divine descent into the mind, life and matter in the form of Liṅga. The abstract form of Liṅga is the formulated grace of the Guru. It descends from above into the disciple. It forces its way from the mental (Bhāva) to the vital (Prāṇa) and from the vital to the physical. In its passage it purifies the mind and makes it into Bhāvaliṅga, purifies the life/prāṇa into Prāṇaliṅga, and purifies the body and appears on the palm of the disciple as the symbol of the Divine, the Iṣṭaliṅga. With this Divine descent, the person is passion-free. The Divine expressions are **Love, knowledge, power, bliss, and peace**. After this Divine descent, one is expected to have the radiant expressions of the Divine.

This mere sight of the Divine is not enough to be united with the Divine. The seeker must then ascend in six stages (**Ṣaṭsthala**) to attain oneness.

**Bhaktasthala:** Bhakta is one who has bhakti. Bhakti in general means devotion. Bhakti is not prayer. Feeling of devotion is always there in Aṅga, because at the time of manifestation Liṅga has put the devotional feeling into Aṅga. But the devotional feeling or mental attitude of devotion has to be associated with devotional activity either physical or mental. The activity, physical or mental, expressed by devotion is worship.

Bhakta is characterized by a state of enlightened faith in Liṅga. In this stage, one intensifies one's true devotion, leads a virtuous life, and incorporates austerity, restraint and dedicated work in one's daily life. Bhakta's daily life includes worship of Liṅga in the morning, performing dedicated work, serving the community, and treating everyone with respect and humility.

**Māhēśvarasthala:** One who already has intense devotion, develops firm conviction in the faith of Liṅga. The seeker gives up all practices of rites and rituals, and gives up any other previously practiced faiths. Māhēśvara is one who is patient and has unflinching faith in Liṅga.

In this stage, one understands that one who wavers and entertains the desire for another god or gods is neither brave nor resolute. Thus, the seeker develops steadfastness of faith in Liṅga. Removal of doubt and misgivings, and development of full confidence in Liṅga worship, enhances the depth of devotion. As devotion becomes intense, rites and rituals are dispensed with, and only the internal worship is developed. The silent contemplation of the Divine remains the only yearning.

**Prasādisthala:** In this stage, one exhibits attentiveness or careful vigilance in one's dedication. Anything dedicated with sincerity and without reservations will become Prasāda. One who dedicates it is a Prasādi. Prasāda that ensues is calmness, tranquility, serenity and such. The mental sign that shows purity is Prasāda. One, whose pure mind is always absorbed in the Liṅga, experiences the state of non-duality.

In this stage, one dedicates oneself as the offering to the Divine. One, who, by offering the body, mind and will, to Guru, Liṅga and Jaṅgama, has achieved purity of the body (shuddha), clarity of the mind (siddha) and perfection of the will (prasiddha), that one is the partaker of the grace of the Divine that is Prasāda. Everything is offered with a sense of self-dedication and self-surrender. The offerings are to be free from any taint; if attachment or craving persists, the transformation to Prasāda will not be effected. When ignorance and the sense of ego are completely eliminated, and the offering is made with

sincerity and humility, Prasāda ensues, and poise and peace are attained. Serenity is characteristic of the Prasādi.

***Prāṇaliṅgisthala:*** Self-experience is the main characteristic of Prāṇaliṅgisthala. The seeker's vision tends inwards and gets clarified. The body is a temple that enshrines the Divine. The vital-breath which courses through the body, worships the Liṅga with the flower of right aspiration. The breath, when regulated, emits fragrance and serves as a bouquet of flowers for the Liṅga enshrined in the body.

The breath regulation, **Prāṇāyāma**, is practiced only in its elementary form by the Veerashaivas. Please see 'Prāṇāyāma' article. This process of breath regulation moves life-energy throughout the body. Breath-control directly affects the ascending and descending currents of life-force. In an ordinary individual, the currents exist in a haphazard manner, and pose as obstacles for a free flow of vital-energy. The yōgic meditative practice of self-purification places these currents in a proper order of alignment. When breath regulation becomes effortless, the person is totally absorbed in its fineness. The seeker experiences vivid impressions of light, sound and taste. When the vital-energy moves through the central nervous system, the external world is kept at abeyance and a peerless peace wells out. The Prāṇaliṅgi gets convinced beyond doubt that the Absolute is the subtlest of the subtle, is the Imperishable and the Unchanging. Prāṇaliṅgi sees one's own-Self permeating the whole universe.

***Sharaṇasthala:*** Experiencing of pure delight by the seeker as a result of deep and continued meditation, is the main feature of this stage. Experiences of Prāṇaliṅgisthala in the form of intermittent flashes and streams of sensations are replaced in Sharaṇasthala by the Self seeing its own form shining in Divine splendor. Remembrance of work-a-day world is gone, illusion of will is burnt, awareness of the body is forgotten, and all external phenomena have crumbled, and all this is replaced by a serene mood. There is no motion of any kind, the mind is stilled, and individual consciousness is overcome. Where the conditioned or unconditioned mind stops, there the stillness reigns; where consciousness of being oneself reaches an end, there ecstasy/aananda dwells, and one beholds the light of the Liṅga as a resplendent blaze.

There is an important concept - it states that there is a head above another head, and that the head above swallows the head below. These two heads refer to two kinds of knowledge – a higher supra-mental knowledge and a lower empirical knowledge. The empirical knowledge resolves into supra-mental knowledge, and the sense of duality is replaced by the knowledge of the significance of the Union. It also means that the lower individual consciousness is taken over by the upper Supra-Conscious state. The seeker experiences Aananda/bliss.

***Aikyasthala:*** Aikyasthala is characterized by a state of only one consciousness where there is no volition, no motion, no word or speech, and where all consciousness of time and space is suspended. There is no separate consciousness of the individual. In this Supra-Conscious state, the one has reached true Reality – It is indescribable, and the great white light is everywhere. Here the Self is absorbed in the intense and focused meditation on the transcendent passing over the limits of mind and entering into the ecstatic state. *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* is where the super-consciousness state is completely devoid of any psychic residue or mental deposits. This Supreme state is not conscious of anything. To attain it, one has to focus on nothing but the contemplation on the Self which is Shunya. Somewhat of a lower type is the *Savikalpa Samādhi* where there is some retention of the self-volition when absorbed into the super-conscious state.

Having gone through the spiritual hierarchy of six-stages, the seeker has attained oneness. This attainment while still alive is the liberation in life called Jīvanmukti. The one who has attained the Jīvanmukti state is a Jīvanmukta.

***Jaṅgamasthala:*** Jaṅgamasthala is the ultimate stage. Jaṅgama is a Jīvanmukta, the one who has attained oneness with the Absolute in this very life when still alive.

Having attained the Absolute through Liṅgayōga, the one has become a Jaṅgama. Jaṅgama is the one who has been liberated from the cycle of births and deaths in this very life. Although Jaṅgama has become one with the Absolute, Jaṅgama still has the body. Wearing the body as garment, Jaṅgama continues to serve humanity. The Jaṅgama is described as the one with leg-less walk, hand-less touch, and mouth-less taste. Jaṅgama requests earnestly for the Supreme alms, not the ordinary alms but the unreserved surrender to the Supreme. Jaṅgama moves for the redemption of mankind, and blesses the aspirants by mere will. With illumined knowledge and enlightened action, the great one acts as a source of Divine Grace.

**It is to be noted that the attainment of oneness is a lifelong process.** It does not happen overnight or in a few years. **Also, it is to be noted that the Divine experience is meant to be attained during life, not after death.** The Veerashaivas consider every day to be a pious day, as well as an auspicious and celebrating day. **Practice of Liṅgayōga is not just worship, acquiring right knowledge and meditation; it includes all aspects of one's daily life.**





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