

Cardinal Principles of the Veerashaiva Religion

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The Veerashaiva religion epitomizes to a greater extent than others our Way of Life and Reality. What does this mean and imply? It simply means that our religion derives its inspiration from the way of life we lead and live by. To the Veerashaivas life is not imaginary but it is Real and that we have the ability to transform it into Heaven or Hell. The philosophy of the Veerashaiva religion is tempered with rationale and reason. It attaches a great value to Ethics and Spiritual Experience, Good Character, Self-Understanding and Self-control.

**This world of mortals is,
Truly the Maker's mint,
Those who conduct and acquit creditably,
Here in this world,
Will also be honored there,
Those who do not conduct,
And acquit creditably 'here',
Will not fare well 'there'
Oh! Kudalasangamadeva.**

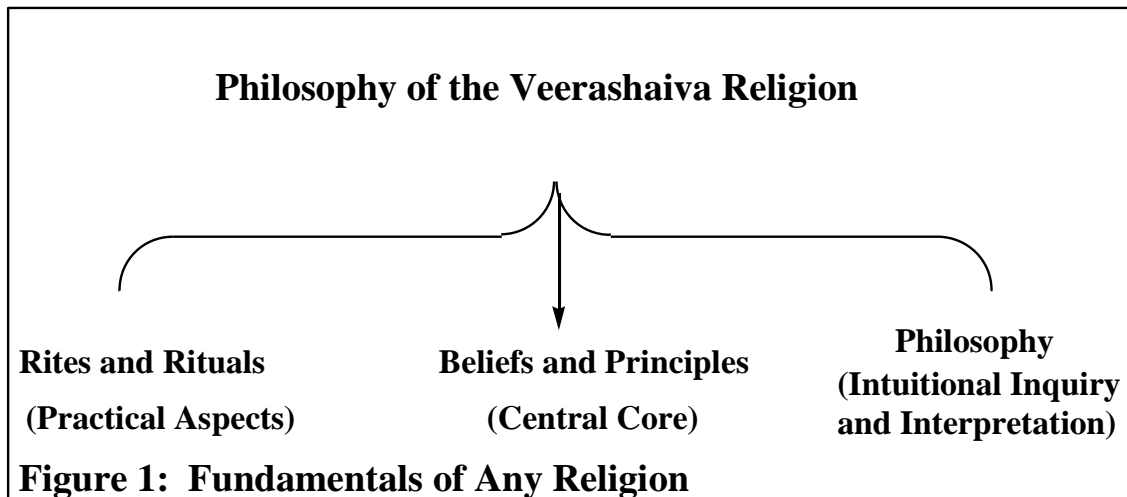
An Individual with Ethics is known as Acharavanta or Lingavanta.

**If you should speak,
Your speech should sparkle like a pearl necklace,
If you should speak,
Your speech should sparkle like a bright sapphire,
If you should speak,
Your speech should be as clear as a crystal,
If you should speak,
Your speech should be pleasing to the Lord,
If your words do not match your deeds,
How then are you going to please,
Lord Kudalsangamadeva?**

Steal not, kill not
Speak not the untruth,
Be not angry,
Show not contempt for others
Don't showcase your pride,
Don't speak ill of others,
This is the way to internal purity,
This is the way to external purity,
This is the way to win Lord Kudalsangama's favor.

Rites form an important part of a religion whereas Rituals serve and symbolize psychologically uplifting and popularizing means. Rituals are often pompous and superfluous.

Lingadiksha and worship of the isthalinga form the most fundamental rite of the Veerashaiva religion. The isthalinga issued by the Guru at the time of the *diksha* (investiture) ceremony, should always be worn on the person for the rest of her/his life. The lingadiksha is a simple but poignant religious rite conducted at the home of the child or in a *matha*. During this ceremony the Guru blesses the aspirant, gives him/her the isthalinga and whispers in her/his ears the *Shadkshara mantra*. The mantra should be recited twice daily during the worship of the isthalinga. The isthalinga is an important part of an individual's religious life. It stays with the person from his/her cradle to his/her grave. The same lingadiksha is performed whether the child is a male or a female. This again symbolizes the fact that men and women are equal in the eyes of Shiva and the society.



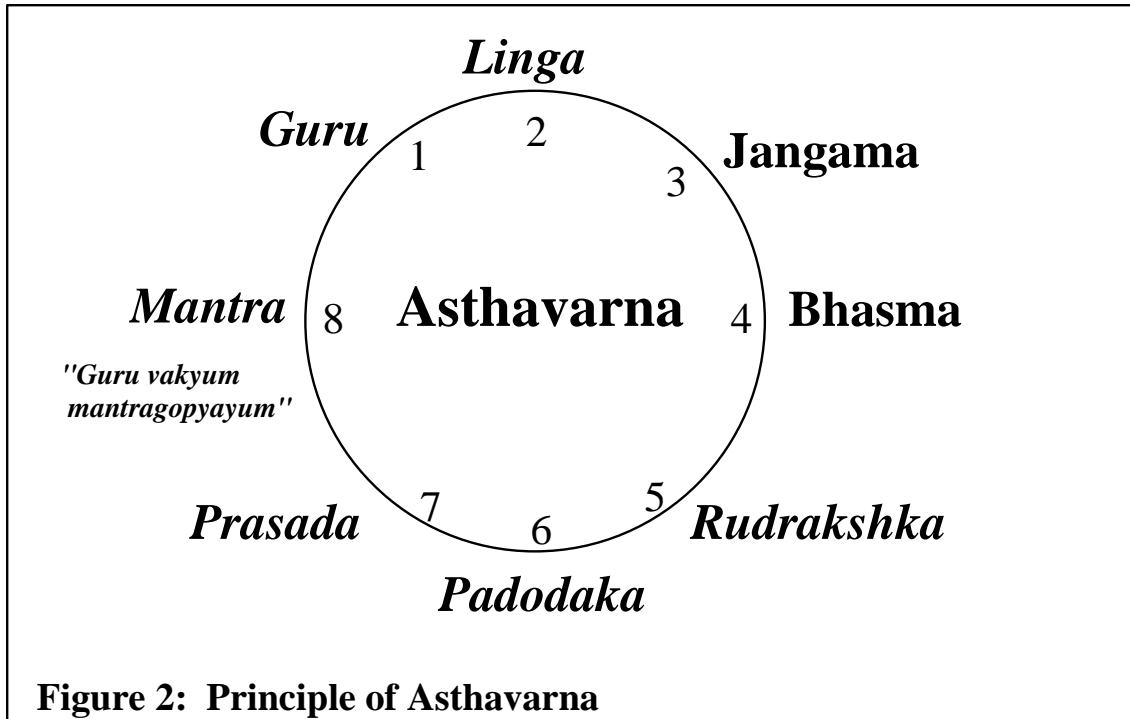
The basic tenets of the Veerashaiva religion have attracted the attention of the sophisticated mind. The reasons for this are: (1) it practices and preaches equality of men and women, (2) it practices and preaches that all men are equal in the eyes of God, (3) it practices and preaches that the freedom of work and worship are the birth rights of every person, (4) it practices and preaches the worship of ONE GOD, (5) it practices and preaches that people should not be exploited in the name of religion, (6) it practices and preaches the egalitarian way of life, (7) it practices and preaches that those who are more fortunate should help the less fortunate members of the society, (8) it practices and preaches compassion and kindness and (9) it practices and preaches non-violence, (10) it disclaims and disdains from the philosophy of karma, (11) it does not subscribe to the concept of heaven and hell and (12) it neglects and negates the concept of reincarnation.

This presentation addresses **Three Cardinal Principles of Veerashaivism**; namely:

1. *Asthavarna*, 2. *Panchahara* and 3. *Shatsthala*

1. The Concept of Asthavarna

The word 'Asthavarna' means eightfold shield or vesture which protects a devotee from the impurities of the mind and leads him/her towards the final salvation. The interpretation of the term has some psychological connotation. In simple language, the term Astavarna implies and suggests an eightfold aid to achieve spiritual progress and the final salvation. It is somewhat similar to Buddhism's Eightfold Path though the aids used are different. According to the hierarchical order the concept comprises of: (1) Guru, (2) Linga, (3) Jangama, (4) Bhasma (Vibhuti), (5) Rudraksha, (6) Padodaka, (7) Prasada and (8) Mantra. A brief description of the eightfold shield is given below.



These should not be confused with **Buddhism's Eightfold Faith:**

1 Right View

1 and 2 are called Wisdom training

2 Right Intention

3 Right Speech

3 and 4 are known as Ethics training

4 Right Action

5 Right Livelihood

6 Right Effort

7 Right Mindedness

7 and 8 are known as Mediatation training

8 Right Concentraion

(1) **Guru:** The Guru occupies a pivotal place in Veerashaivism. The term has a fine metaphysical meaning. A Guru is the reflection of God. He lives amongst his fellow beings. Since the Veerashaiva religion considers a man to be potentially divine and rejects the concept of the original sin of man, a Guru is considered to be a holy person. It is he who initiates a devotee into the divine secrets of the religion. It is said, “*Guru vakyum, mantragopyayum*” (The Guru’s words form the sacred mantra). It is he who performs the *linga-diksha* (religious initiation or investiture ceremony), thus enables the devotee fit to receive the spiritual knowledge and secrets to salvation. It is he who provides an insight and introduction to the religious experience. It is he who gives the necessary religious instruction and training. It is he who provides rational explanations to the devotee when he/she cannot get over the hump and are stuck on the path. A Guru’s presence inspires the disciples to wear and worship the Isthalinga for the rest of her/his life. An individual encounters three types of impurities during the course of his/her life: (1) inherent impurities, (2) impurities of perception and (3) impurities arising from actions. The Guru removes all the impurities, blesses and enjoins the disciples to lead a virtuous and righteous life. Since the Guru imparts a wealth of knowledge and personal experience to his/her disciples and shows the righteous path, the Guru is regarded as the “spiritual mother”. Hence, the Guru occupies the first place among the Asthavarinas.

(2) **Linga:** The *Linga* is the epitome and the center of all Veerashaiva religious practices and observances. It isn’t just a symbolic representation of God; it represents His divinely sublime presence. A Veerashaiva is also called a Lingayata or Lingavanta, for he/she wears on his/her person the isthalinga given by the Guru. The Guru places his hand on the head of the disciple, invokes God’s blessings on the isthalinga and gives it to the disciple to wear and worship it for the rest of his/her life. A detailed description of the concept and meaning of the Linga is given elsewhere.

(3) **Jangama:** The *Jangama* is the third asthavarina and is an itinerant *jivanmukta* (liberated soul). A jangama can also function as a Guru. He travels around the country to guide and provide religious and spiritual enlightenment and education. Since a jangama has no worldly attachment and has renounced all desires and worldly pleasures and pursuits, the jangama is free from the limitations of the feelings of “I”, “My” and “Mine”, etc. The greatest value of the Jangamas to the society is their dual nature; that they are from within and without the society. They are from ‘within’ means they are human beings just like everybody else. They are from ‘without’ means they do not lead a worldly life and are without any bondage and as such are emancipated souls. Their presence and participation in the community life serve as a source of joy, an infinite source of the love of God and a spiritually uplifting experiences. Since they are bereft of personal desires, they represent what is best in the society. Since the Jangamas are supposed to have burnt all taints of mind and sense to ashes, they are considered to be the

holiest of the holy. In principle, the Veerashaivas are enjoined not to distinguish between the Trinity of Guru, Linga and Jangama.

(4) **Bhasma (Vibhuti):** The word '*bhasma*' means holy ashes. Bhasma symbolizes the burning of the impurities associated with the mind and the soul. It serves as a symbol of inner purity. It is an external ritualistic symbol and serves dual purposes. It reminds the person wearing it that he/she has no impurities such as anger, avarice, envy, hatred, infatuation, jealousy, lust and pride, which are usually associated with mind and hence is free from bondage to life. Secondly, it reminds us of God's presence among us and when we share it with our fellow beings during the community worship, it fosters the belief that we are all equal in the eyes of God.

(5) **Rudraksha:** *Rudraksha* is derived from 'aksha' (eye) and 'Rudra' (Lord Shiva) and means the eyes of God. The word has a mythological connotation. Lord Shiva was doing Shivayoga. His intense gazing made his eyes watery and as the eye-drops trickled down, they froze to hard beads! They symbolize the inner eye and hence pure vision. In reality, they are of plant origin; dried parts of a tree. The beads are strung into a garland and used as a rosary. It seems that all Shaivites use them.

(6) **Padodaka:** It literally means the water from the holy feet! Since the things touched by the holy beings become holy, water touched by Guru/Jangama becomes holy. According to the Veerashaiva tradition, there are ten types of *padodak*. It is the symbolic process of washing the guru's feet as wathing off the taints. A similar symbolic act of washing the feet is done by the Catholics during the Easter Holiday Celebration.

(7) **Prasada:** In general parlance, it means a favor such as an object given by the Guru/Jangama. However, in practice it means consecrated food offerings to God, Guru or Jangama. It represents 'holy eatable food'. According to the Veerashiava tradition, there are eleven types of *prasada*. Prasada also suggests cleanliness, calmness, purity and equanimity of the mind. In practice, it represents the food offered to the Guru/Jangama and/or blessed by them. Thus, the food offering is sanctified by the Guru's touch into the prasada. This food offering is then shared with the congregation. Hence, the prasada has a special spiritual and social significance. In the same way the food is offered to Shiva becomes transformed into the prasad.

(8) **Mantra:** The word '*mantra*' is derived from the root '*mana*' (to mind) and '*trau*' (to save or to protect) and means that which protects those who recites it. It is simply a thought expressed vocally into the form of words of praise. It usually consists of words arranged in a certain sequence. Ritualistically, the mantra has to be intoned in the proper fashion, sequence and rhythm.

2. The Principle of Panchachara (Five-Fold Ethical Behavior/ Conduct)

The word ‘*achara*’ means conduct, behavior, attitudes, manners, morals etc. This one word defines one’s ethical and moral responsibilities to oneself, to one’s family, to one’s community, to one’s country and to one’s God. The integrity of an individual is measured not by the yardstick of his profession or wealth but by his character, conduct and actions. Every action of the human being is attended by its consequences, both good and bad. When one obeys one’s conscience, one does not have to worry about bad consequences. The bad consequences arise from not heeding the conscience and yielding to anger, desire, greed, jealousy and temptation. The *acharas* show a righteous path. An individual with ethics and morals is called *Acharavanta* or *Lingavanta*. Ethically speaking, this means that ‘the *achara* is equated with the *linga*’. There are five prescribed *acharas*: (1) *Lingachara*, (2) *Sadachara*, (3) *Shivachara*, (4) *Bhrstyachara* and (5) *Ganachara*.

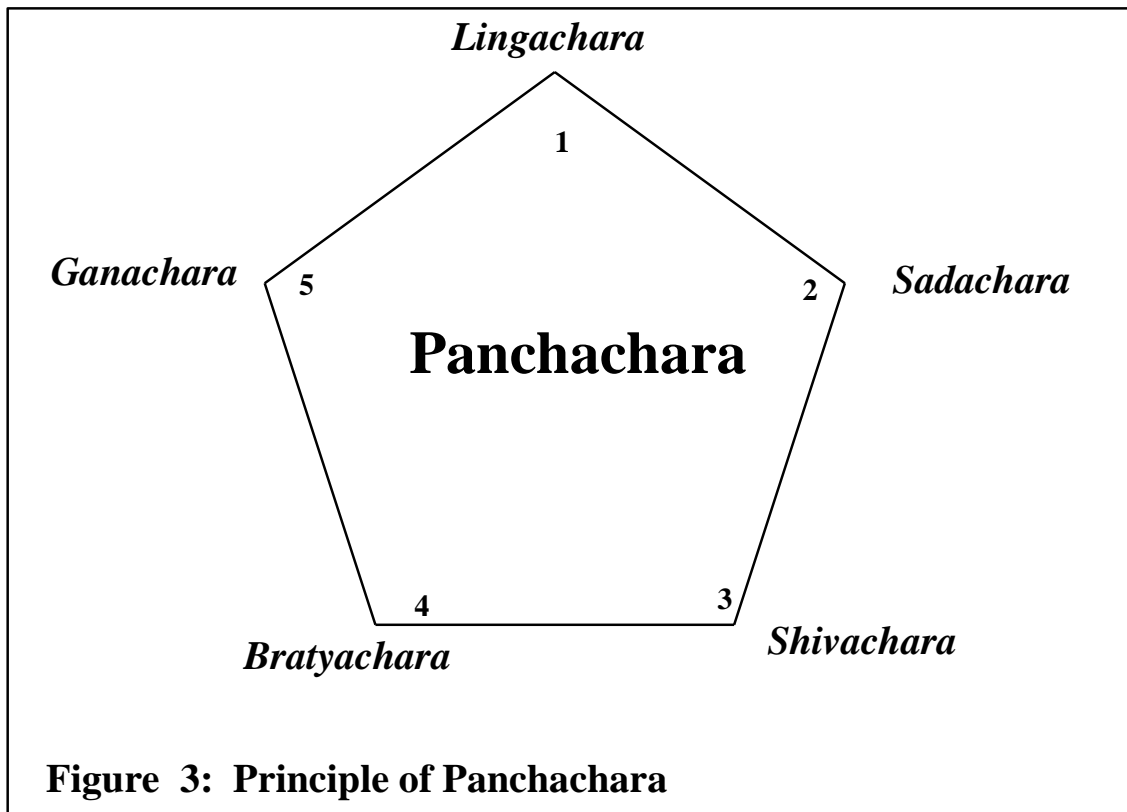


Figure 3: Principle of Panchachara

(1) **Lingachara** asks every Veerashaiva to worship Shiva in the form of the Isthalinga. It asks people to wear the isthalinga on his/her person. The *linga* should be worshipped twice daily; once in the morning and once in the evening. The wearing of the *linga* on the body was not required until Basava arrived on the scene in the 12th Century.

He proclaimed that it was incumbent on every Veerashaiva to wear the Isthalinga on body. The thought behind this requirement was to convince the individuals that God resides within the person all the time and hence, to be mindful of attitude and conduct. Indirectly, this tells the Veerashaiva that he/she does not have seek God in the temples, or in the caves or in the forests, for God is with and within the person all the time. It also tells the devotee to be faithful to God who is with him/her all the times. Thus, the lingachara builds one's character and conduct. These attitudes that go towards building one's character include discipline, self-restraint, respect for law and other's rights and property. They also warn one to be mindful of desires and coveting. The steadfast practicing of these values leads one to a life endowed with God's grace and blessing.

(2) **Sadachara** asks a Veerashaiva to choose a professional vocation and to lead a moral and ethical life and living. A person is enjoined to earn money to support his family, community and other obligations. To make the community self-sustainable, the community members have must pitch in and support it. Basava prescribed *kayaka* for every able bodied person. Here *kayaka* denotes an individual's manual labor. Basava preached the dignity of labor and that a man should be judged not by the nature of their profession to earn a living. Just as every person has to be treated with respect, every *kayaka* should be respected as such. Basava considered work as worship and as such every body irrespective of the status in life must work. Basava asked the faithful to contribute their fare share to the community by way of *Dasoha*. This was intended to discourage begging.

What if a person with impure heart and thought performs rigorous penance and pooja!
Would Lord Kudalsangama trust her/him?

(3) **Shivachara** enjoins Veerashaivas to observe strict monotheism, that is, belief in one and the only one God, Shiva in the form of the Istalinga. Call Him by whatever name you choose but He is one and the only ONE. This is why the Veerashaivas are not expected and supposed to go to the temples to worship God. The *upasana* - worship - of Lord Shiva must be done by worshipping the Itshalinga and no other deities. The shivachara expects the faithful not to distinguish between fellow human beings, for they all equal in the eyes of Shiva. Once the Veerashaivas receive the Isthalinga from the Guru/ Jangama, they become equal in all respects and all differences disappear.

(4) **Brhatyachara** is characterized by the devotee's humility and submission to Shiva's Will. A devotee has to cultivate being humble and modest during the course of his/her sojourn towards his/her brethren and the Guru/Jangama. Basava's words, "There is none lower than I am. There is none higher than the Shiva-devotees", speak eloquently

of the virtue of humility and modesty. A Veerashaiva should be non-violent, compassionate and kind towards animals. A true brhatyachari is he who has achieved oneness with Shiva and has subjugated his will to Shiva's Will. A true brhatyachari performs his/her actions without expecting any benefits and rewards.

(5) **Ganachara** describes the relationship between the individual member and the community at large and asks the members to strive for the overall welfare of the community of which he is a part. The Veerashaivas are expected to lead a life of purity and virtue and to raise the level of community life. Veerashaivism enjoins them to wage a non-violent fight against injustice, social inequalities and superstitions. The ganachara exhibits "a spirit of vindication". Basava's words, "Does not the hen call its kin when it spots a morsel of food? Does not a crow call its kith when it spots a fistful of water? A devotee of Shiva without such feelings towards his fellow beings is worse than a crow or a hen". This sentiment emphasizes the importance of sharing one's good fortune with less fortunate community members.

In summary then, the principle of *panchachara* prescribes puritanical practice of ethical and moral life for the overall betterment of the individuals, as well as that of the community at large. Channabasava's vachana furnishes a subtle yet succinct description of the Panchachara in simple words:

**Lingachara purifies the body
Sadachara purifies the mind,
Shivachara purifies the soul,
Bhratyachara purifies the speech
Ganachara purifies the behavior.**

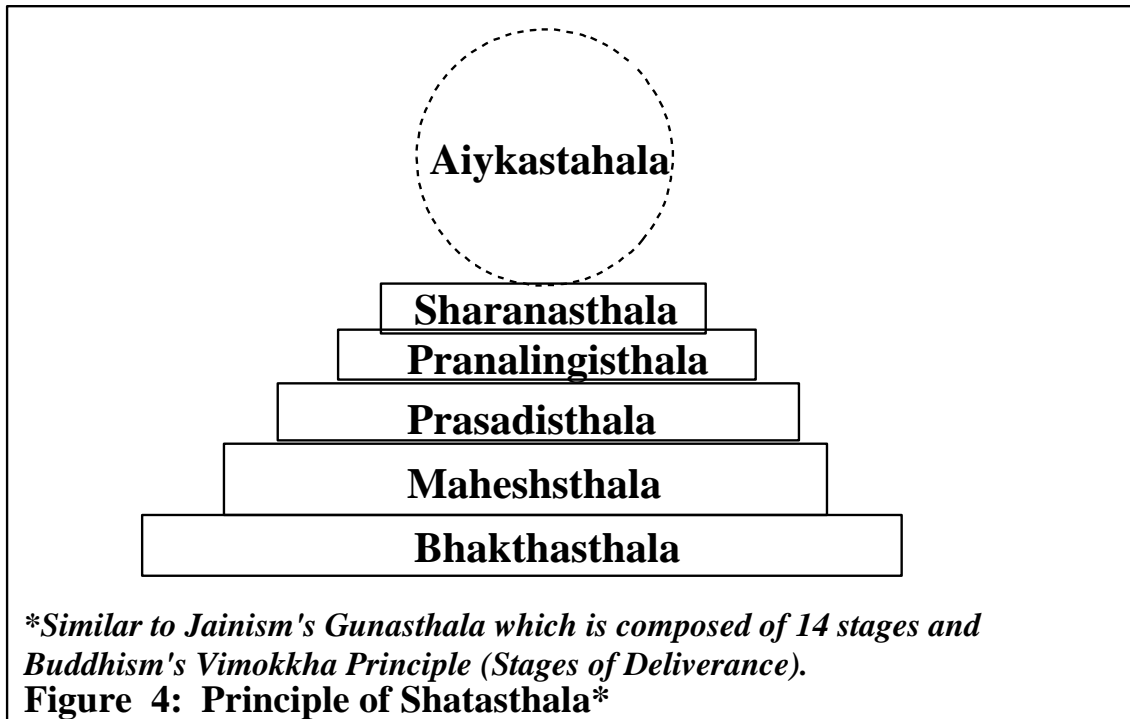
3. Principle of Shatsthala (Six Stages):

It is the heart and soul of the Veerashaiva religion. The ultimate goal of the Shatsthala is "to transform the wild psychic force into the mild mystic grace." Basava asked Channabasava to explain and expound Shatstahala before the Sharanas dispersed from Kalyana. This is the last work that Channabasava did after Basava's lingaiyka and during his own stay at Ulavi. That is why many vachana-writers have called Channabasava as the: Shatsthalachakravarti".

The Shatsthala Siddhantha is the heart and soul of Veerashaivism. Its ultimate goal is 'to transform the wild psychic force into the mild mystic grace'. There is no doubt that there are some common features between the Vedic and Veerashaiva religions just as there are some commonalties between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Vedas are the precursors to the Shivagamas, the spiritual source of Veerashaivism. In addition, there is

a striking similarity between the Veerashaiva shatsthala path, Jainism's Gunasthana (guna means modes or tendencies of being or existence) and Buddhism's Vimokkha Principle (stages of deliverance).

Jainism's gunasthana is composed of 14 stages while the Veerashaivism's psychic concept consists of: (1) *Chitta* (consciousness), (2) *buddhi* (intellect, wisdom), (3) *ahankar* (ego), (4) *mana* (mind), (5) *jnana* (knowledge) and (6) *bhava* (will); each one of these items can be matched with the six stages of the Shatsthala pathway.



Three names are intimately associated with the Principle of Shatsthala:

- (1) *Channabasava, 12 th Century; (2) ** Shivayogi Shivacharya, 13th Century and (3) *** Tonatada Siddhalingeshavra, 15th Century.**

* Prof. Sakhare says, "Channabasava formulated Shtasthala under the guidance of Allama Prabhu and Basava."

* Dr. Tipperudraswamy states, “Basava entrusted the writing of Shatsthala to Channabasava who achieved Lingaiyka at Ulavi after completing the task assigned to him by Basava.”

** Shivayogi Shivacharya belongs to the Panchacharya school.

*** Tonatada Siddhalingeshavra’s samadi is located at Edeyur. Has authored the book, “Shatsthala Jnanasaaramrata”. This has been translated into English under the caption “Essence of Shatsthala” by Prof. A. Menezes and S. M. Angadi, and published by Karnatak University (1978).

Sthala literally means a **Stage**. However, it has a more subtle, sublime spiritual sound around it; in that the sense of Sat, Chit and Ananda is implied with **Sthala**. It also means a stage in the soul’s journey on its voyage to final union with the Linga/Atman/Shoonya.

Channabasava divides each of six stages into 6 sub-stages. He further subdivides each of the sub-stage into 6 sub-sub-stages and thus bringing the total to **126** steps. **Shivalinga Shivacharya**, however, has divided it into **101** steps.

INTERESTINGLY, ONE MAY START AT ANY STAGE OR ACCOMPLISH HER/HIS OBJECTIVE IN ONE STAGE.

It all depends upon how well one is prepared and how steadfast is one’s commitment to the cause and the course.

(1) **Bhaktasthala** involves the worship of Guru, Linga and Jangama. When one understands the true meaning of this sthala, one conceives the true meaning of the trinity of Guru, Linga and Jangama. Through this sthala one becomes free from the desires of the body and mind and becomes a bhakta by virtue of his/her belief in Shiva.

(2) **Maheshsthala** involves the actual practice of the above concept, which enables one to lose the desire for material wealth, coveting what is not one’s own and longing for unrighteous sensual pleasures. The belief in Shiva becomes an unflinching faith through the observance of Maheshsthala.

(3) **Prasadisthala** states that all things in this world are gifts from Shiva and whatever humans receive as God’s gifts must be returned to Him via the intermediacy of the jangama, who represents Shiva. Since the seeker offers back the gifts from Shiva, this is considered to be the prasadisthala.

(4) **Pranalingisthala** makes one aware of the inner being. Here the seeker comes to believe that the Linga is the Jangam and all actions are transformed into prayers. When one steadfastly practices this sthala, one forgets one's body and mind and begins to see and feel the presence of the inner voice, while reaching a state of self-enlightenment through personal experience.

(5) **Sharanasthala** endows an individual with the feeling and knowledge of God's presence in his/her own soul and begins a direct dialog with Shiva. This sublime feeling enables the seeker to see Shiva within himself/herself and in every other human being. The soul becomes filled with shiva-jnana, shiva-bhakti and shiva-worship. Every thing becomes shivamaya (filled with Shiva's presence, and not *maya* or illusion). At this stage one does not falter, one is self-sustained and self-aware of Shiva's Grace.

(6) **Aiykasthala** forms the final stage, which permits a Veerashaiva to fulfill her/his life's destiny. It is the culmination of the sublime achievement. One is at peace from within and without. His/her soul is filled with heavenly bliss. There are no desires and no wants. There is just the Supreme Shiva beckoning the soul to come and embrace Him.

There seems to be some controversy about how to accomplish one's objective, namely achieving **aikya** of **Jiva** with **Shiva**. Some say one can achieve this in any one of the six stages. Some say, the first three stages are just to prepare the ground work. For example, Dr. Nadimath says, 'the first stage is for believing in Shiva, the second stage is for demonstrating one's steadfast faith in Shiva and the third one is for creating awareness of the distinction between **jiva** and **Shiva**, between **atman** and **paramatman**, between the **individual soul** and the **universal soul**. That is we use the first three stages to purify the soul, which becomes tainted when it derives enjoyment from the desires of the mind. During its sojourn in our body, the soul tends to enjoy mundane things associated with life. That is how it gets its taint and that is why we have to **cremate our desires**. This purification of the soul is achieved through a dedicated worship of the instalinga (or through Shivayoga). If we accept Dr. Nandimath's suggestion, then we need to progress through all of the six stages to achieve Lingaiyka.

Some of us think that we can purify our mind, body and soul through fasting and penance; or punishing ourselves physically. Allama Prabhu says It ain't so! And it won't work that way. Please, listen to what he says:

Those who vow to live on milk,
Will be born as cats,
Those who live on garbanzos;

Will be born as horse;
Those who vow to live on flowers,
Will be born as bees;
Those who vow to live on water,
Will be born as frogs;
Such folks shall never acquire the knowledge of Shtasthala;
Guheshvar, does not like those that do not
Demonstrate dedicated devotion.

In summary, the following eloquent quotation from the Shunysampadane best describes the Veerashaiva concept of the Shatsthala Siddhantha:

**The individual being becomes,
Bhakta by virtue of his/her belief in Shiva
Mahesh when belief transforms itself into unflinching faith,
Prasadi if he/she remains steadfast therein,
Pranalingi on being enlightened by self-experience
Sharana when sustained by self-awareness there of,
Aikya on attaining the final beatitude,
Arising out of the union of awareness,
With the Absolute.**

Resource Book:

“Essence of Shatsthala”, Tontadarya Siddhalingesavara (15th Century), A. Menezes and S. M. Angadi (Translaotrs), Karnatak University, Dharwad (1978).