

Forty Steps to God-Realization

This is a loose translation, adapted to modern life, of Ādi Śankarācārya's "Sādhana Pañcakam." In the 5 verses of this composition, the Ācārya lists the ways and means which can be readily followed by all students of Advaita Vedānta seeking direct experience of the Divine State. In Advaita, sādhana (i.e. a spiritual path or discipline that leads to liberation) cannot be in the form of worship, invocation, surrender, or sacrifice; instead, the 40 instructions enumerated here constitute the Advaita Vedānta Sādhana. The translation was compiled by Dr. Sudhākar Kulkārṇi from a lecture given in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by Swāmi Bodhānanda Saraswati on Thanksgiving Day 2002 (November 28, 2002). It was presented by Dr. Kulkārṇi at the Bhāratīya Temple of Lānsing on Gaṇeśa Caturthī Day 2003 (August 31, 2003). In the notes at the end of this translation, we have indicated the places where the present translation departs significantly from the literal meaning of the text.

1. Study the Vedas (scriptures, science, art and music, etc.) every day. 2. Perform well your duty. 3. Work is worship. Just do it with your best effort. 4. Give away your expectations and be detached from the results and benefits of your duty. 5. Be always positive in thought, speech, and action [a]. 6. Understand that there are pleasure and pain cycles in life. 7. Cultivate desire for Self-Realization (God Realization) by detachment. 8. Get rid of your confinements arising from anger, envy, memory, and attachments.

9. Seek the company of men of wisdom (holy people). 10. Cultivate faith in God, who is the creator and ruler of this world. 11. Calm your mind by reducing desires and cultivating patience. 12. Do not perform work that burdens you. 13. Learn from the Seekers of the Truth, and teachers who teach based on their own life experiences. 14. Listen to your teacher (Guru) with open mind and practice his/her teachings. 15. Ask your Guru about the nature of the Supreme Reality (Brahman). 16. Be passionate about your goal of God-Realization [b].

17. Contemplate the teachings of the scriptures. 18. Rely on the teachings of the scriptures to resolve conflicts in your life [c]. 19. Accept things as they are, that they are so by the grace of God [d]. 20. Contemplate on the highest Truths. 21. Say it often to yourself that you are made in the image of God. You are Divine!!! 22. Give up your ego. 23. Understand that you are Divine, an immortal spirit (Ātman) residing in this body. 24. Do not argue with the learned (parents, teachers, elders, and holy men).

25. Eat moderately [e]. 26. Treat food as a medicine [f]. 27. Be happy with a simple diet. 28. Be content with what you have by the grace of God and your own efforts. 29. Success and failure, pleasure and pain, praise and criticism, are cycles in life [g]. 30. Do not indulge in meaningless conversation; avoid gossip. 31. Be detached from events in the world. Practice silence, and do not react immediately [h]. 32. Refuse to be influenced by the kindness of others as well as their criticisms.

33. Enjoy solitude. 34. Enjoy the Bliss of peace of mind, "Samādhi," by making the mind absolutely quiet and engaged in the Supreme Divinity (Brahmaṇ, Om, Iṣṭa Devatā or the deity chosen by you for worship based upon your liking). 35. Know that the entire world is a manifestation of God. 36. See the world as the glory of God. There is no adversary role with the world. Therefore, no encounter can make you unhappy [i]. 37. Show repentance for past wrongs by performing benevolent actions in the present and future. 38. Witness ups and downs in life with detachment, without feeling that "I am a doer" [j]. 39. Enjoy and bear with the results of your past actions (karma). 40. Thus, realize that you are Divine. This is the final state of the self-realization process.

Literal translations of some of the instructions:

[a] Strive against the call of sins.

[b] Listen, in depth, to the Upaniṣādic declarations.

[c] Take refuge in the views of life extolled by the Vedas.

[d] Avoid perverse arguments; keep yourself out of useless discussions.

[e] Cure the disease of hunger.

[f] Swallow daily the medicine which is in the form of alms.

[g] Endure cold and heat and such other pairs of opposites.

[h] Be indifferent.

[i] Recognize that the finite world is a projection of the Self.

[j] Through wisdom, become detached from future karmas.