

Mahā Mr̥tyuñjaya mantra

Swāminī Ātmaprakāśananda

ॐ त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ।

*Om. tryambakañ yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭi vardhanam.
urvārukamiva bandhanān mṛtyormukṣīya mā'mṛtāt*

Mṛtyu means *kāla*, the time factor, death

Jaya means victory

The compound, *mṛtyuñjaya*, means one who is victorious over death.

Victory over death means recognising one's self as being timeless, already free from mortality: in other words, having right self-identity. Becoming victorious over death doesn't mean that one is going to live for thousands of years; it means recognising the *svarūpam* of the *ātmā*, recognising timelessness as the nature of the Self, knowing the nature of the Self as already being immortal. Resolving the wrong identity of what is subject to mortality is what is meant by 'becoming victorious over death'.

For that, all one needs is knowledge, self-recognition. In knowledge alone one recognises that the nature of the Self is pure knowledge, thereby understanding the Self as already being free from mortality, being timeless, thereby resolving one's wrong identity. This, in fact, is knowledge. Therefore, all we need is knowledge.

In this knowledge one can resolve one's wrong identity by recognising the actual Self. Along with the wrong identity, fears and insecurities also resolve. That is the beauty of it. The fear of the phenomenon called death, which rises as a thought, resolves.

How long will there be fear? As long as there is wrong identity, so long will there be the phenomena called fear and insecurity. So only in resolving the wrong identity will fear and insecurity be resolved along with it – simultaneously. For fear to be resolved for good, for the sense of insecurity to be resolved for good, the wrong identity has to be resolved for good. For this, right recognition of the Self

is important. So all we need is knowledge. This knowledge will bless us with utter fearlessness. When the sense of fear and insecurity become resolved (in resolving the wrong identity, by recognising the Self as already immortal) then there is utter fearlessness, which is absolute strength and courage.

Absolute strength is when one is not shaken by anything. The softest-minded or kindest person can be the strongest person. Absolute strength is absolute fearlessness, absolute courage, absolute bravery, and this is possible when you become free from fear and insecurity for good. You become free from fear and insecurity for good only when you resolve the wrong identity.

Wrong identity is natural for every human being – nobody is superior here. So how can this wrong identity resolve? By having right identity, by the mere recognition of exactly what the Self is in terms of its *svarūpam* (nature). Because it is the subtlest, the Self is available for recognition only in terms of its *svarūpam*. Why *svarūpam*? Because Self is formless, it has no *rūpam*, no form. So the only way to recognise the formless one, subtler than the mind, is in terms of its *svarūpam*, its nature. Once recognised, one needs to focus attention on it, and ascertain it. In knowledge one is free. This becoming free from the fear of death, having right identity, resolving wrong identity, is overcoming mortality: *mṛtyuñjayaḥ*.

If we chant this *mantra* we will be relatively strong, brave, courageous. (Absolute strength, bravery and courage comes from knowledge of *ātmā* alone.) As you start chanting you will feel relatively free from insecurities and fear, and you will become clear-minded, so you will have good physical and mental health. If you have faith in this it will definitely bless you with health. People do not understand or believe this. Have no doubt, it will bless you with good physical health, it will bless you with clarity – there is nothing that this *mantra* does not bless one with, because it blesses one with knowledge.

In fact it is a prayer for knowledge – you are not analysing the nature of the Self here. It is not a *mantra* for *svarūpa anusandhānam*, contemplation. It is a prayer. Understand its meaning and pray intensely. Seek help and pray. Prayer, as a will-involved auto-suggestion and as a *karma* (action), is 100% effective.



There are two sentences in this mantra:

Om. tryambakaṅ yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭi vardhanam : first sentence;
urvārukamiva bandhanān mṛtyormukṣīya mā'mṛitāt: second sentence.

The verb in the first sentence is *yajāmahe* - we worship. Whom do we worship? We worship the Lord. In Vedic mantras when we worship the Lord, we always mean the whole, which is also inclusive of the one who is praying. The different layers of personality which constitute the individual, along with the consciousness, is also part and parcel of the whole. The whole includes everything. *Īśvara* is the whole, nothing is excluded.

That Lord is the universal natural law and order, which exists in knowledge and is involved in all the functions of the whole *jagat* (manifest and unmanifest world). Pure knowledge is *Īśvara*, the Lord. Reality is the Lord. Reality is pure consciousness, pure consciousness is Reality. Pure consciousness is self-existent and is the existence of everything that is here. Reality and pure consciousness are not two different things.

Everything exists in pure consciousness. The universal law and order, all the elements, all the elementals, the whole *jagat* – known and unknown – exists in that Reality only. There is no Lord other than that Reality. The whole *jagat* is a manifestation of that Reality. *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, is the whole universal natural law and order. So *yajāmahe*, we worship the Lord.

There are three words describing the Lord in this mantra:

Bhagavān is *tryambakaḥ*; *Bhagavān* is *sugandhiḥ*; *Bhagavān* is *puṣṭi vardhanaḥ*

ambakam – eye; *trīṇi* – three

Yasya Īśvarasya trīṇi ambakāni, saḥ Īśvaraḥ tryambakaḥ: That Lord who is endowed with three eyes is *tryambakaḥ*.

tryambakaḥ – three-eyed, the person with three eyes.

This describes *Bhagavān*. We already have problems understanding the Lord without trying to imagine someone with three eyes. What does 'three-eyed' mean? What are the eyes here?

That, without the presence of which, eyes cannot see objects, which manifests as light, in the presence of which alone the eyes can see, is meant by 'eye' in this *mantra*. There are three main sources of light: sun, moon and fire.

This whole *jagat* is *Īśvara*, and the whole *jagat* is opaque in nature. The world of opaque objects only becomes revealed (shines) after the light, otherwise the world of opaque objects will remain unknown as a ‘non-existent’ *jagat*. They all shine because of the presence of light. Minus sun, moon, fire, we could not even produce electricity. For any object to be seen they must each be able to reflect light, and there must be light. The Lord, the whole, who is manifest as everything and is also manifest as the three-fold source of light is said to have the three sources of light as three eyes. This is just a description of the Lord, the whole.

Who is the seer in all the eyes? Awareness alone is the seer of the seer. There is no seer, every seer is awareness only who sees the mind and, through the mind, sees the seeing power and, through the seeing power of the eyes, sees the *jagat*. We need to understand that there is no ‘seer’ outside awareness. The seer is awareness, the hearer is awareness, the experiencer is awareness, the one who smells is awareness, the one who is the knower of taste is awareness. Awareness is not any thing: awareness does not see, or smell, or hear or do anything. Awareness is just awareness. Therefore the seer, smeller, taster, hearer, one who feels the touch, is awareness.

Minus awareness there is no seer, no knower, no ‘awarer’. Awareness does not perform any function. The knower is awareness, the hearer is awareness, the seer is awareness. The one who is manifest as the seer in all beings is awareness. The Reality of all the three sources of light is also awareness. Existence of everything is awareness. Therefore the Lord, the whole, the entire cosmos, endowed with three sources of light – sun, moon and fire – as three eyes, is said to be *tri-ambakaḥ*.

Om. tryambakaṅ yajāmahe: We worship the Lord, the whole, whose nature is pure awareness, who is endowed with three sources of light as three eyes.

sugandhiḥ

gandhaḥ means smell; *sugandhaḥ* means fragrance, sweet fragrance
sugandhiḥ is that which is fragrant, anything which has fragrance.

That which is fragrant always has the power to attract the mind, and take the mind towards itself. The attention of the mind will be easily carried away by *sugandha*. You don’t have to go physically to where there is sweet fragrance, but the mind will go there naturally. Fragrance is of the nature of grabbing, dragging away, taking the mind towards itself. Even ordinary *sugandha* does this. So in order to make ordinary minds understand, the *mantra* uses the term *sugandha*.

Really speaking, there is one thing that is sought after always and everywhere by all the minds: peace, happiness, fullness. What is attractive to all of us is happiness, fullness and peace. The peace which goes with fullness is very desirable, it is *sukham*, luxury. There is no greater luxury than revelling in fullness and enjoying the peace which goes with it.

A fact about the nature of Reality, a fact about the Lord, is that consciousness, *ātmā*, the Lord, is of the nature of fullness, happiness. And that fullness is always very attractive. That fullness, knowingly or un-knowingly, is what is sought after by every mind in every action.

Therefore that Lord, the Reality, which is of the nature of fullness, which attracts all the minds towards itself, is said to be *sugandhiḥ*. Just as *sugandhaḥ* is of the nature of captivating the minds towards itself, so also the Reality, which is of the nature of fullness, and attracts all the minds towards itself, is said to be *sugandhiḥ*. In this context *sugandhiḥ* is happiness personified, an embodiment of happiness, of the nature of fullness, which attracts minds towards Itself.

puṣṭi vardhanaḥ

vardhati - grows, develops, increases; *vardhanaḥ* – growth, maturing, maturity.

puṣṭi health;

puṣṭi vardhanaḥ developer of health: nourisher, one who nourishes.

How does *Bhagavān* nourish? By remaining as the very existence of everything, remaining as the very source of energy. The ultimate source of energy is consciousness, remaining as the very existence of energy, thereby remaining as the very nutrients in all plants and vegetation. One who, remaining as the very source of energy, enlivens, energises, nourishes all beings, is *puṣṭi vardhanaḥ*.

When you say *puṣṭi vardhanaḥ*, you should touch every cell in your body, you should really mean it.

tryambakam sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam yajāmahe

“We worship the Lord, the whole, whose nature is pure awareness, who is endowed with three sources of light – sun, moon and fire – as eyes; the one who is of the nature of happiness (limitlessness) which attracts all the minds towards itself, just like sweet fragrance; the one who energises and nourishes and enlivens all beings by remaining as the very source of energy.”

By thinking of the Lord in this way we express our acknowledgement of what the Lord is. We acknowledge how the Lord blesses us with everything. We express our acknowledgement of what we enjoy from the Lord. Expressing acknowledgement is itself also an expression of gratefulness and humility – I cannot be healthy unaided, I cannot even nourish my own body. The first line of this mantra is a heart-felt expression of worship of the Lord, in acknowledgement of the extent to which we are helped.

Thereafter, we pray:

urvārukamiva bandhanānmṛtyormukṣīya mā'mritāt

mukṣīya is an imperative, passive word which means 'may I be liberated' *bandhanāt* – from bondage. This means we are caught up somewhere, we are bound by something. That's why we want to be released from bondage. Who's binding you? From which bondage do you wish to be liberated? *mṛtyoḥ bandhanāt* from the bondage of death

“May I be liberated, freed, relieved, released from the bondage of death. May I not be subject to the time factor.”

My identity is with this body, my identity is with the mind, my identity is with the *prāṇas*, my identity is with the gross matter: the material product, the *sūkṣma* and the *sthūla śarīre*, the subtle and gross bodies. Why? I am helpless. It's not that I want to have this identity: I am so helpless and innocent that I do not even know that my identity is wrong. And, in keeping with my wrong identity, the notion I have is that I am mortal. I have a date of birth, I have a date of death and in between I have a life filled with ups and downs – all because of wrong identity which gives rise to *ahaṅkāra*, the wrong notion about the Self.

All wrong notions entertained about the self are *ahaṅkāra*. I am this, I am that, all the notions, the opinions, the views one has about one's own Self, are *ahaṅkāra*.

Ahaṅkāra being there, naturally this body is definitely subject to mortality and is of the nature of constantly undergoing changes. Why? Undergoing change is the nature of matter. Therefore the material body will be constantly undergoing change – that's why fresh skin becomes wrinkled skin.

If the 'I-sense' is not with the body, then you will be objective towards the body. If you have objectivity towards the body, you will not be shaken by death. Identity with the body makes one feel subjective; if identity is not there you will be

objective. How can we be objective? By not being affected in any way by something being there or something not being there. Why? Because you accept that *it is!* Body 'is', okay. Body 'is' getting older, okay. Body 'is' not, okay. If you are objective, you will not be affected. All our afflictions exist only because of our subjectivity.

The fundamental problem is the belief in smallness being centred on 'I'. When the problem of smallness being centred on 'I' is resolved, when you are objective, then you are free and not really bothered at all if something happens to the body. Your lack of objectivity is due to subjectivity, because of identity with the body, because of the sense of smallness centred on 'I'.

Therefore, we pray for release from bondage, *bandhanāt*. What really binds you? It's not only the body, but also the mind, and also the *prāṇas*. If you are objective towards the body, you can also be objective towards the mind and *prāṇas*.

How can I be objective towards my own body-mind-sense complex? By not being subjective.

How can I not be subjective? By not identifying with the body-mind-sense complex.

How can I resolve the identity with the body-mind-sense complex? Not physically, but in terms of knowledge. Resolving the wrong identity will give objectivity.

How can I resolve my wrong identity? By having the right identity.

How can I have right identity? By recognising what the Self is. Self-knowledge will help you recognise the *svarūpam* of the Self, and thereby help you resolve the ignorance-born wrong identity, thereby help you resolve subjectivity too.

We are only bound by our notions.

Time is, space is, objects are, body is, matter is, everything is. Undergoing change, they continue to exist. Nothing is destroyed here. Matter is subject to relative destruction. *Ātmā* is not destroyed even relatively. There is no such thing as 'absolute destruction' of anything. That is a most beautiful thing to know.

Therefore bondage is notional, there is no real bondage. *Mokṣa* is not real, there is no real *mokṣa*, as there is no real bondage. If bondage is real, you will never be relieved; if *mokṣa* was real you wouldn't need to seek *mokṣa*. Bondage is not

real, it is notional. What is the cause of the notion? It is because of the lack of objectivity, because of subjectivity, because of the wrong identity caused by ignorance: it is all notional.

That is why *mṛtyoḥ bandhanāt mukṣīya* means, ‘may I be liberated from the bondage of death, which is purely notional’. Having the wrong notion corrected is resolving the notion, for which we need knowledge. We really seek *Bhagavān*’s help: Please may I be liberated from the bondage of death.

How can I be liberated when there is no real bondage? Just as you are ‘as though’ bound, so you have to be ‘as though’ released. One prayer implies all other prayers. “Oh Lord please bless me with knowledge of the Self. May I recognise the Self, thereby may I have right identity, may I resolve wrong identity, may I resolve subjectivity, may I be blessed with objectivity – which is freedom.”

Objectivity implies utter fearlessness, strength, freedom from insecurity. Revelling in joy, in fullness, implies utter fearlessness. This is what real strength is. Knowledge is real strength. May I be liberated, freed, from the jaws of death, the time factor, which is purely notional. Time itself exists in awareness. How can awareness be bound by time?

For self-knowledge, what do I need? I need knowledge of the Self. An ascertained vision of the Self needs contemplation on the Self. I need to recognise what the Self is, I need to dwell upon the nature of the Self (which is contemplation). So for that vision I need to have a contemplative disposition.

“Please Lord bless me with the contemplative disposition of the mind and, thereby, bless me with the capacity to contemplate on the nature of the Self, to have the ascertained vision.”

How should I be in order to contemplate on the nature of the self? The mind, which is so distracted, goes everywhere. A distracted, wandering, meandering mind is not available for contemplation. If the mind is dispassionate, it is a mature mind. A mature mind recognises the limitations of everything, and knows the value of knowledge. A mind which recognises the value of knowledge, naturally would be dispassionate towards other things.

In Vedānta we do not say: you have to give this up, don’t have passion for anything, give up everything. No. We say, please discover the value of knowledge; it is enough. The passion for knowledge will help one have dispassion towards other things.

Like the monkey holding onto one branch, swinging, will leave it only when it can catch hold of another branch, similarly we can all catch hold of *jnānam* by knowing the value of knowledge. Once one knows the secret that real luxury is not in holidays and the like, it is in revelling in knowledge, then you will be committed to the pursuit of knowledge and naturally, effortlessly, you become disinterested. Dispassion is something to be discovered and not to be imposed or forced.

“O Lord, even though I have the knowledge, because of some sort of weakness because of habitual errors, the force of the life which I have been living drags me towards wrong things. Please bless me with firm knowledge of the value of knowledge. Help me, thereby, discover a passion for knowledge. Make me mature and help me discover dispassion towards other things.”

All this is implied by one word: ‘*urvārukam iva*’. *Urvārukam iva* is asking for maturity. There is no need to become ‘knowledgeable’ – when you know the value of knowledge you are mature. Then when you commit to the pursuit of knowledge, and you gain knowledge, you are the most mature. You cannot mature any more, you have reached saturation point.

The sweet melon, *urvāruka*, grows on very thin, tender creepers and the fruit is very heavy. That is why it is always left to spread on the ground. The fruit is attached to the creeper by a stalk. The fruit slowly grows till it becomes fully ripe. At that time it detaches itself from the stalk and, without moving, lies wherever it is. For the fruit to detach itself from the stalk it merely needs to become ripe; it remains attached to the stalk as long as it remains unripe.

Similarly we hold onto objects for our happiness and pleasure as long as we are immature, as long as we don’t know the value of knowledge. Once we know real luxury lies in revelling in knowledge, when we know the value of knowledge, when we become committed to the pursuit of knowledge, then we are mature.

There is no need to give up anything. Be with everything, but don’t over-value things. We need infrastructure to live this life to discover happiness. Dispassion doesn’t mean that you should keep away from things. How can you keep away from things? Everything is *Bhagavān* here, where can you run away to? Wherever you are, you’ve got to be with everything; but in your mind you should know very clearly not to over-value things (or under-value things). Enjoy what you need to live this life, but know that there’s no happiness here, that happiness is something to be discovered – not attained – and that life is here to discover that happiness. Having understanding is being mature; naturally you become dispassionate towards other things, you don’t crave for things for happiness.

“O Lord, just as the ripe *urvārukam* detaches itself from the stalk, make me mature, thereby help me discover dispassion by helping me recognise the value of knowledge. Then, O Lord, please bless me with knowledge, gaining which alone, I can resolve this notional bondage. May I discover the fullness that is already there as the *svarūpam*, and thereby resolve my wrong identity, thereby resolve my subjectivity, and become free from bondage, the fear of death, the sense of insecurity, and be utterly fearless.”

You always want to emphasise the prayer, to make the expression most emphatic so that *Bhagavān* will definitely bless you, so that he doesn't miss your prayer. Whenever you repeat things, it is for emphasis to make sure you are heard. Similarly, we sometimes use a double negative for emphasis:

mā amṛtāt “O Lord, may I not be taken away from the accomplishment of *mokṣa*.”

‘May I not be liberated from immortality’ means: may I be blessed with immortality, may I be blessed with knowledge of the Self which is already immortal.

This verse will bless one with relative empirical, physical, mental well-being, and also the absolute well-being of *mokṣa*. That is why this mantra is very effective.



Om. Tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam

Om. We worship the Lord, the whole, whose nature is pure awareness,
who is endowed with three sources of light – sun, moon and fire – as eyes;
who is of the nature of happiness which, just like sweet fragrance,
attracts all minds towards itself;
who, by remaining as the very source of energy, nourishes all beings.

urvārukamiva bandhanānmṛtyormukṣīya mā'mritāt

O Lord, just as the ripe *urvārukam* melon effortlessly detaches itself from its stalk, make me mature, thereby may I be freed from bondage of death.
May I not be taken away from the accomplishment of *mokṣa*.