


# The Divine Life of Ramanuja

## General Collection

 **Date:** 2026-01-30

 **Description:** A detailed journey through the life, miracles, and teachings of Sri Ramanuja.

 **Tags:** Ramanuja, biography, spirituality, bhakti, Sri Vaishnavism

## Early Life and Lineage

Ramanuja was born in **1017 AD** (the Kali year 4119) in the village of **Sriperumbudur**. His lineage traces back to the great teacher **Yamunacharya (Alavandar)**. Yamunacharya's son was Deivathukkarasu Nambi, whose son was **Periya Tirumalai Nambi**. Periya Tirumalai Nambi had two sisters, Bhudevi and Sridevi. Bhudevi was married to **Kesava Somayaji** of Sriperumbudur. Ramanuja was born to this couple in the month of Chithirai under the star Thiruvadirai (Arudra).

## Original Name

At birth, he was given the Tamil name **Ilaya Perumal**. His parents chose a Tamil name rather than a Sanskrit one, which was later Sanskritized to Ramanuja (the younger brother of Rama).

## First Guru and the Famous Correction

Ramanuja's first guru was **Yadava Prakasa**, who held classes in the mandapam of the temple at **Thirupputkuzhi** (near Kanchipuram).

A major conflict arose during a lesson on the **Chandogya Upanishad**. The guru interpreted the phrase *kapyasam pundarikam* (describing the Lord's eyes) crudely, stating the Lord's eyes were red like a "monkey's posterior" (*kapi* = monkey, *asam* = posterior).

Ramanuja, who was massaging the guru's legs, began to cry, and his tears burned the guru's thigh. Ramanuja offered a **famous correction** and a more dignified interpretation: \* *Kapi* refers to the sun (one who drinks water via rays). \* *Asam* means blossomed. \* Therefore, the phrase means "**Lotus eyes that have blossomed under the sun**".

## Attack by the Guru

Threatened by Ramanuja's intellect and corrections, Yadava Prakasa plotted to kill him during a pilgrimage to the **Ganges**, as there were no witnesses there. During the journey, Ramanuja's cousin **Govinda** overheard the plot and warned Ramanuja by writing on the wet sand: "*Brother, do not stay, my oath upon you*".

Ramanuja escaped into the forest but got lost. A hunter couple (Lord **Varadaraja** and **Perundevi Thayar** in disguise) appeared and guided him. Ramanuja fetched water for them from a well, and suddenly found himself back in **Kanchipuram**. That well is known as **Salai Kinaru**.

## Seeking the Path and Clearing Doubts

Ramanuja devoted himself to the service of **Thirukkacchi Nambi (Kanchipurna)**, a non-Brahmin devotee who fanned the Lord Varadaraja and conversed with Him. Ramanuja wished to accept him as a guru, but social circumstances (his wife discarded the food Kanchipurna had eaten) prevented this, causing Ramanuja great sorrow.

Ramanuja later asked Kanchipurna to clear his doubts directly with Lord Varadaraja. The Lord provided **six definite words (commands)**: 1. **Ahameva Param Tattvam**: I (the Lord) am the Supreme Truth. 2. **Darshanam Bhedam Eva Ca**: The philosophy is distinction (Jivatma and Paramatma are different). 3. **Upayeshu Prapatti Syat**: Surrender (Prapatti) is the way. 4. **Antima Smriti Varjanam**: Last-minute remembrance of the Lord is not mandatory for the surrendered soul. 5. **Dehavasane Mukti Syat**: Liberation occurs when the body falls. 6. **Purnacharya Samasrayaha**: Seek **Periya Nambi (Mahapurna)** as your guru.

## True Meaning of Sannyasi 🧘♂️

While scripture traditionally held that only Brahmin males could achieve Moksha through knowledge-based Sannyasa, Ramanuja provided a revolutionary interpretation. He defined Sannyasa as "**Samyak Nyasah**"—complete surrender. He argued that anyone who surrenders the burden of their soul's protection to God is a true Sannyasi, thus opening the path of Moksha to everyone regardless of caste or gender.

### The Tower Incident: Compassion Over Salvation 🗼

Ramanuja sought the meaning of the **Charama Sloka** (the third secret) from **Thirukkoshtiyur Nambi (Goshti Purna)**. He was made to walk from Srirangam to Thirukkoshtiyur **18 times**. Finally, on the 18th visit, he received the instruction under a vow of secrecy, with the warning that revealing it would lead to hell.

Immediately after, Ramanuja climbed the temple tower/vimana and shouted the mantra to all the people assembled there. When his furious guru asked why he disobeyed, Ramanuja replied: "**If they get Moksha (Vaikuntha) by hearing this, I do not mind going to hell.**" Moved by his compassion, the Guru embraced him and called him "Emperumanar" (My Lord).

### Fulfilling the Master's Vows 🖐️

When Ramanuja rushed to meet **Yamunacharya (Alavandar)**, he found the master had already passed away. However, three fingers on the master's hand were folded. Ramanuja understood these as unfulfilled wishes and vowed to fulfill them, one of which was to write a commentary on the **Brahma Sutras** (Prasthanatraya) to clarify the path of Vyasa. Upon taking this vow, the fingers straightened.

To write this commentary (**Sri Bhashya**), he traveled to the **Sarada Peetham in Kashmir** to read the **Bodhayana Vritti**. When the manuscript was stolen back by the library guardians after he read it once, his disciple **Koorathazhwan**, who had a photographic memory (*Ekasandhagrahite*), recited the entire text back to him, allowing Ramanuja to complete the work.

## Further Studies

Ramanuja sought his uncle, **Periya Tirumalai Nambi**, at **Tirumala** (Tirupati) to learn the meanings of the **Ramayana**. He studied under him for one year and learned the **18 Rahasyas** (esoteric meanings).

### Trials and Recognition

**Poisoned:** In Srirangam, a temple official named **Uttama Nambi** grew jealous of Ramanuja's influence. He conspired to have his wife serve Ramanuja **poisoned food**. The wife, realizing Ramanuja's greatness, served the food but prostrated before him as a signal. Ramanuja threw the food into the Kaveri river, and the fish that ate it died. Ramanuja then undertook a fast until his guru, **Thirukkoshthiyur Nambi**, intervened.

**Kanakadasa's Praise:** **Kanakadasa**, a prominent poet and devotee from the Dvaita tradition in Karnataka, composed a rare kirtan praising Ramanuja, titled "**Ramanujare Namō Namō**". This highlights Ramanuja's influence across philosophical lines.

**Divine Complaints:** There is a tradition where four forms of Goddess Lakshmi—**Perundevi** (Kanchipuram), **Ranganayaki** (Srirangam), **Padmavathi** (Tiruchanur), and **Yadugiri Nachiyar** (Melkote)—discuss Ramanuja. They humorously complain that Ramanuja gives them no privacy with the Lord because he is constantly reciting prayers (like the *Gadyatrayam*) or performing festivals for them.

### The Final Years and Instructions

Ramanuja lived for **120 years** (two full cycles of 60 years). Even at the age of 120, just before his passing, he was seen performing **Arghyam** (a daily water ritual). When disciples asked why a liberated soul needed to do this, he commanded that as long as one has a body, one must perform **Nithya Karma** (daily duties) to set an example.

## The Five Final Commandments

Just before he passed away, his disciples asked for his final orders. Ramanuja provided a **graded series of five alternatives**. He designed these options so that if a disciple found one path too difficult, they could attempt the next, ensuring there was a path to liberation for everyone regardless of their intellectual or physical capacity.

1. **Study and Propagate the Sri Bhashya** 📖 The highest instruction is to study the **Sri Bhashya** (Ramanuja's commentary on the Brahma Sutras) and teach it to others. This is a "massive work" and a significant intellectual undertaking, often requiring years of study under an Acharya.
2. **Study and Propagate the Arulicheyal (Divya Prabandham)** 🕯️ If one finds the Sri Bhashya too difficult or struggles with the Sanskrit language, the alternative is to study and propagate the **Arulicheyal** (the Tamil Divya Prabandham). This ensures that those who may not be versed in Sanskrit can still pursue knowledge through the Tamil verses of the Alvars.
3. **Perform Service (Kainkaryam) in Holy Places** 🪄 If a disciple cannot study the texts (due to language barriers or lack of capacity), they should perform physical service in the **Divya Desams** (holy shrines) that Ramanuja favored. Examples of such service include grinding sandalwood paste or picking flowers for the deity.
4. **Recite the Dvaya Mantra** 🧠 If physical service is not possible (specifically mentioned for those with physical ailments like spondylitis making manual labor difficult), the disciple should stay at home and constantly recite the **Dvaya Mantra**. This path requires mental focus and concentration.
5. **Serve a Devotee (Sri Vaishnava)** 🤝 If a disciple lacks the concentration required for constant mantra recitation, the final and most accessible command is to simply perform service for a **Sri Vaishnava** (a devotee of the Lord) and place their trust in that devotee. This entails serving a **Bagavathothaman** (a great devotee) and relying on them for salvation.

Ramanuja's distinct approach was to provide these "OR" options—ensuring that no one was left without a means to serve God.

---

**Reference:** [Watch the Video Explanation](#)



## Acknowledgment & Disclaimer

These articles are based on discourses by **Sri Dushyanth Sridhar**, who renders discourses in English & Tamil on Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Vishnu Purāna, Bhagavad Gitā, Vishnu Sahasranāma, and Divya Prabanda in the upanyāsam, pravachanam, or kālakshepam style. Visit <https://desikadaya.org> for more information. These notes are presented solely for educational purposes to help viewers download and benefit from these teachings. Any incorrect interpretations or inaccuracies are mine and unintentional—please forgive me. For any feedback, please send an [email](#).



Generated from UpanyasamNotes

Sacred Wisdom Preserved • January 31, 2026