

[Weaver](#)

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The Tirukural, "holy couplets," is a treasury of Hindu ethical insight and a literary masterpiece of the Tamil language, written by Saiva Saint Tiruvalluvar (ca 200 bce) near present-day Madras in South India. The text focuses primarily on the first three goals of life-*artha* (wealth), *dharma* (conduct) and *kama* (desire)-but also includes thirteen chapters on renunciate *dharma*, relating to life's fourth goal, *moksha* (liberation). In an extraordinarily compact verse form of fourteen syllables, the poet presents 133 subjects of ten verses each on relationships, human strengths and foibles, state-craft and more-1,330 verses in all. One of the world's earliest ethical texts, the Tirukural could well be considered a bible on virtue for the human race. In fact, it is sworn on in South Indian courts of law.

Although it has been translated into English by many scholars, the Holy Kural has never been widely known in the Western world. There is a similar work, written in modern times by the mystic Kahil Gibran, called the Prophet which has been widely distributed. Everyone knows and loves this great work. The Holy Kural parallels the Prophet in many ways. Both books speak in profound yet useful terms of love and friendship, of health and death, of joy and sorrow. Details of Tiruvalluvar's life are meager. It is known that he was a weaver and that his wife, Vasuki, was the perfect example of devotion and obedience to her husband. Several stories are told depicting the exemplary harmony in their marriage. The Tirukural was his only work, and though it is relatively short, it was sufficient to bring renown to the humble weaver, making him a venerated sage and lawgiver.

The Holy Kural is most useful in everyday life when its verses are committed to memory and meditated upon, quoted freely as our very own. We will sound wise if we remember and share these jewels. One of the greatest benefits of this scripture is to guide our actions and our thoughts, to direct our purpose in life and refine our interactions with our fellow man. Problems can be resolved in the light of the saint's wisdom. If something is going along wrong in your life, bring the forces of life back into harmony by studying the Holy Kural and applying its knowledge. That is

perhaps its main function-to perfect and protect our lives in the everyday world by preventing mistakes which can cause an unhappy karma, by preventing erroneous attitudes which can bring unnecessary sorrow into our experience. Yet, there is nothing in the Kural that has to be obeyed. Each of the couplets contains such insight, however, that we are drawn to it and want to obey.

Teach these gems to the children. This advice and admonition, coming from the world's most ancient faith and culture, will enrich every child's understanding of goodness, right conduct and right thought. It is essential that the values which are the substance of the Holy Kural-the do's as well as the don'ts-be carried over into the next generation with courage and persistence and fortitude so that our descendants are benefited by these age-old insights into universal laws, humanitarian laws and plain common sense.

The Kural does not contain a single ethical concept or expression that would offend another faith, and thus it is a fine introduction to the scriptures of the East. The Holy Kural may well be the meeting ground, the common ground, of all religions. It could well be called a Common Creed for the modern world. In the Tamil Language, tiru means "holy" or sacred, and kural means anything that is brief or short. In this case it describes the very difficult and disciplined kural-venpa meter in which the verses were written. Each distich, or two-line, verse is extremely short, containing just four feet in the first line and three in the second. As a rule the last foot of the first line or the first foot of the second line rhyme with the first foot of the first line. In many ways these couplets are similar to the Sanskrit shloka, such as in the Brahma Sutras. With subjects or predicates often only implied, the reader is left to intuit the meaning, and the result is a wide range of legitimate interpretations. To show the range of style and meaning, here is verse 92 as interpreted by six of the 150 known translators:

Rev. W.H. Drew (1840): Sweet speech with a cheerful countenance is better than a gift made with a joyous mind. Rev. G.U. Pope (1886): A pleasant word with beaming smile's preferred / Even to gifts with liberal heart conferred. K.M. Balasubramaniam (1962): E'vn more than gifting off with gladdened heart it is worthwhile / To greet the guests with pleasing words along with welcome smile. G. Vanmikanathan (1969): If one becomes a man of pleasant mien and sweet words, it is superior to giving with all one's heart. P. S. Sundaram (1989) More pleasing than a gracious gift / Are sweet words with a smiling face. Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order (1993): Better than a gift given with a joyous heart are sweet words spoken with a cheerful smile. The selected verses to the right were rendered into modern "American English" by two acharyas of the Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order at the request of Satguru Sivaya

Subramuniaswami.

Images below: Sandalwood model of the 133-foot high stone statue of Saint Tiruvalluvar to be installed on Minor Rock at Kanya Kumari. Right upper: Illustrations of six verses by Mrs. Saroja Nagarathnam. Right lower: Scenes of the on-going carving project in South India.

In Praise of God 1

"A" is the first and source of all the letters. Even so is God Primordial the first and source of all the world.

The Blessing of Children 66

"Sweet are the sounds of the Flute and the lute," say those Who have not heard the Prattle of their own children.

Impartiality 120

Those businessmen will Prosper Whose business Protects as their own The interests of others.

Not Coveting Another's Wife 142

Among those who stand outside Virtue, there is no greater fool Than he who stands with a lustful Heart outside another's gate.

Avoidance of Backbiting 190

If men perceived their own faults As they do the faults of others, Could misfortune ever Come to them?

Charity 229

More bitter than even A beggar's bread is the Meal of the miser who Hoards wealth and eats alone.

Abstaining from Eating Meat 257

When a man realizes that Meat is the butchered flesh Of another creature, he Must abstain from eating it.

Austerity 261

It is the nature of asceticism To patiently endure Hardship and not To harm living creatures.

Ascetic Pretense 279

The arrow is straight but cruel; The lute is crooked but sweet. Therefore, judge men by their acts, Not their appearance.

Truthfulness 297

Not lying, and merely Not lying, is beneficial For those who can't practice And won't practice other virtues.

Renunciation 341

Whatever a man Has renounced, From the sorrow born of that He has freed himself.

Eradication of Desire 361

At all times and To all creatures The seed of ceaseless Births is desire.

The Merits of the King 382

Four are the characteristics Which a king cannot lack: Fearlessness, generosity, Wisdom and industriousness.

Deliberation Before Action 467

Embark upon an action after Careful thought. It is folly to say, "Let us begin the task Now and think about it later."

Understanding Timeliness 489

When a rare opportunity Comes, do not hesitate, But swiftly accomplish tasks That are otherwise impossible.

Unjust Reign 551

More malicious than a professional Murderer is the king Who rules his people with Injustice and oppressiveness.

Avoidance of Tyranny 562

He who wishes his Prosperity to long remain Will raise the rod severely, But let it fall softly.

Perseverance 611

Never say in weakness, "This task is too difficult," For perseverance will give The ability to accomplish it.

Being Undaunted by Troubles 623

Trouble itself they Send away troubled Who do not trouble Themselves at the sight of it.

Ministers 633

He who can divide the enemy, Bind friends more firmly And reunite estranged allies Is indeed a minister.

Modes of Action 678

Just as one elephant may Be used to tether another, So one task may be the Means of accomplishing another.

Not Dreading the Audience 723

Those who can brave death On the battlefield are common. But rare are they who can face An audience without fear.

Fortresses 744

The ideal fortress is spacious but Vulnerable in very few places And is capable of depleting The foe's determined will to storm it.

False Friendship 821

The friendship of those who Feign affection is an anvil On which to hammer you When the opportunity arises.

Ignorance 843

The suffering that ignorant men Inflict upon themselves Can hardly be caused Even by their enemies.

Understanding the Nature of Enmity 872

A solitary man who Provokes hatred from many Is more of an idiot Than lunatics

are.

Medicine 942

The body requires no Medicine if you eat Only after the food you Have already eaten is digested.

Farming 1031

Wherever it may wander, the World must follow the farmer. Thus despite all its hardships, Farming is the most esteemed work.

Wealth's Goddess dwells In the hospitable home Of those who host Guests with a smiling face.

To utter harsh words when Sweet ones would serve Is like eating unripe fruit When ripe ones are at hand.

Like a tortoise withdrawing five Limbs into its shell, those who Restrain the five senses in one life, Will find safe shelter for seven.

Attach yourself to Him who Is free from all attachments. Bind yourself to that bond in order That all other bonds may be broken.

Two are the eyes of those Who truly live One is called numbers And the other letters.

Load too many of them And even peacock feathers Would break The cart's axle.