

THE FUN AND EASY TRICK FOR CORRECT SANSKRIT PRONUNCIATION

ī/śva·ra pu·rī/ . ī/śva·ra pu·rī/

Fish or Feesh?

ish·va//ra pu·rī// **OR** ī////śva·ra pu·rī////

In the case of the sanskrit word 'Īśvara' , the 'feesh' sound would be correct!

Dear English-speaking friends, Namaste.

Many years ago, I discovered this important thing which truly helped me to stop distorting sanskrit words grossly. Please, please, please I beg you, do not become offended. This is a great discovery in phonetics that is equally valid in English as it is in Sanskrit. We may all have heard some foreigners mis-pronouncing FISH as FEEEEESH. And if they happen to be our language student, we would be obliged to make them repeat the correct version of the word for it *does not sound nice* to the ears of those whose mother-tongue it is. Isn't that true? However for those of us (like myself) whose first language ever learnt was English, our sense of what I call Natural Phonetics is distorted because we get used to the sound of a word by hearing it, and later on, we just memorize its 'correct spelling' however arbitrary or 'wrong' that may be. The result is that the correct pronunciation of a word is learned only by hearing it from a speaker. And that is why perhaps 99.99% of English speakers cannot decipher the phonetic symbols given in a dictionary after every word.

Eg. From <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phonetic> :-

phonetic

adjective pho-net·ic \ fə-'ne-tik \

That is further complicated by the fact that every English or American dictionary uses a totally different set of phonetic alphabets - there has never been any standardization. Therefore, some of the bigger dictionaries resort to providing a common word sample of their symbols as a footnote on every page! Here is an example of this from the **Thorndike Barnhart Advanced Dictionary** (explanation of symbols in the red circle).

Aa

A¹ or **a**¹ (ā), *n., pl. A's or a's.* the first letter of the English alphabet.

a² (ə; stressed ā), *adj. or indefinite article.* 1 some single; any: *Call a doctor.* 2 one: *a million dollars.* 3 each; every: *once a year.* 4 the same: *two at a time.* 5 one kind of: *Chemistry is a science.* 6 to or for each: *ten dollars a day.* [Old English *ān* one]

► **a, an.** **A** is used before words pronounced with an initial consonant sound, as in *a man, a year, a union.* Before words pronounced with an initial vowel sound, *an* is used, as in *an apple, an iceberg, an upset.* Before words beginning with *h* in an unaccented syllable, as *historic, historian,* usage is divided; formerly, in these words, the *h-* was not pronounced, and *an* was used before them; now, the *h-* is pronounced, and most people use *a,* although *an* remains in use.

A² (ā), *n., pl. A's.* 1 the sixth tone of the musical scale of C major. 2 a grade given to student work of excellent quality.

a-, *prefix.* 1 in; on; to: *Abed = in bed.* 2 in the act of ___ing: *Aflutter = in the act of fluttering.* 3 in a ___ condition: *Aweary = in a weary condition.* [Old English *an, on* on]

a hat	i it	oi oil	ch child
ā age	ī ice	ou out	ng long
ā̄ far	o hot	u cup	sh she
e let	ō open	ū put	th thin
ē equal	ō order	ū rule	th then
ēr term			zh measure

A | abbreviate

a = { a in about
e in taken
i in pencil
o in lemon
u in circus
< = derived from

counters or beads that slide back and forth, used especially in Asian countries. In the picture, beads above the middle bar count five each when lowered toward the bar, and beads below the middle bar count one each when raised toward the bar. Beads above and below the middle bar are totaled in each row. Numbers are shown below each wire for the setting of 1,352,964,708. 2 slab forming the top of the capital of a column. See **column** for picture. [**<** Latin **<** Greek *abax, abakos*]

Abadan (ā' bā dān'), *n.* city in SW Iran, known for its oil industry. 294,000.

a baft (ə bāft'), *adv.* at or toward the stern; aft. —*prep.* back of; behind. [**<** *a-* on + Middle English *baft* behind]

abacus (def. 1)

How do we visualize the phonic difference between 'fit' and 'feet'?

It is obvious to us **if it is a common word from our Mother Tongue**. Eg. If English is our Mother Tongue, then we spontaneously know that **'fish' is correct** (with a very short 'i' that is tightly bound by the consonants before and after it - see the diagram below of the Shot Man With Two Wives), and that **'fееeesh' is incorrect** (with a long 'i' sound that is connected only with the consonant before it but totally divorced from the consonant after it - see diagram below of the Loooooong Man With Only One Wife).

Once we can visualize what makes the two words sound different, then we can apply that same principle on ANY long syllable in Sanskrit without hesitation or fear, for Sanskrit is always written with perfect phonetics, i.e. every Sanskrit word (if written in Romanized Sanskrit with the correct Diacritics*) is to be pronounced exactly as it is spelt!! [There is never a need for additional phonetic guides as in an English dictionary!]

*[To understand what diacritics are, please go through my three video lessons found on this page www.bit.ly/SANSKRIT_UPPER_CASE]

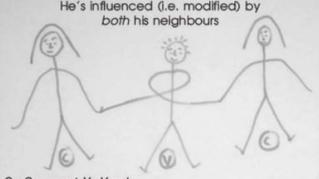
श्री ब्रज रीति चिन्तामणि

The Concept of 'Breaks' After Looong Vowels

An extract from "Perfect Sanskrit Pronunciation for Beginners" Course taught by Dina-Anukampa Dasa (dinaanu@gmail.com), author of Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Śloka Book For Daily Recitation

'Shot' Vowels: The Man With 2 Wives

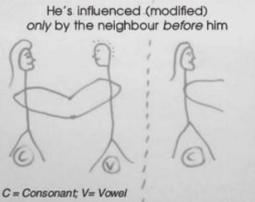
He's influenced (i.e. modified) by both his neighbours



C = Consonant; V = Vowel

'Looong' Vowels: The Man With Only 1 Wife

He's influenced (modified) only by the neighbour before him



C = Consonant; V = Vowel

208

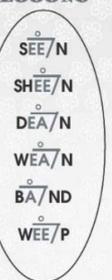
Śrī Vraja Rīti Cintāmaṇi

'SHOT'



EACH VOWEL LINKS ITS NEIGHBOURS

'LOOONG'



EACH VOWEL BREAKS ITS NEIGHBOURS

In any language, if a 'looong' vowel is changed to a 'shot' (short) one, the original word cannot be recognized. Therefore we must consciously stress the consonant after every 'shot' vowel. Similarly, we must place the stress/emphasis on the vowel itself when it's a 'looong' one. The mark indicates where to place the stress. (In this book, all 'looong' vowels are marked with / .

An example to illustrate how mispronouncing a long vowel as a short one produces the opposite meaning:

[yasya prasāda/n na [gatih] kuto/ [ˈpi]

= By the mercy of my spiritual master, I'll never go back to Godhead. (yasya=by whose, prasāda=mercy)

[yasya/prasā/da/n na [gatih] kuto/ [ˈpi]

=Without the mercy of my spiritual master, I'll never go back to Godhead. (yasya=by whose, aprasāda=without mercy)

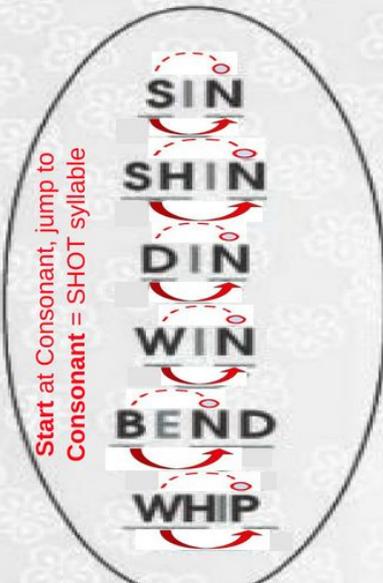
209

The key to clearly understanding what makes the word sound 'right' or 'wrong' to the native speaker is to visualize A BOUNCING BALL....and think of THE MAN WITH 1 or 2 WIVES.

This BOUNCING BALL will always start the sound off with the consonant on the left of the vowel:-

If it is a 'SHOT' vowel, the sound-ball jumps from the initial sound, across that vowel, to the next sound. However, if it is a 'LOOOONG' vowel, the sound jumps directly onto that loooong vowel, and the next sound is added in like an after-thought. Here we illustrate that bouncing ball using common words:

'SHOT'



Start at Consonant, jump to Consonant = SHOT syllable

EACH VOWEL LINKS BOTH ITS NEIGHBOURS

'LOOONG'



Start at Consonant, jump to Vowel = LOOOONG syllable

EACH VOWEL BREAKS ITS RIGHT NEIGHBOURS

N.B. In the above lists, if we pronounce the word on the left as if it were the word on the right, & vice versa, we will feel distaste in our mouths! Try it: "It is a SEEN to tell lies!" However, this feeling of distaste when mixing up short & long vowels happens only with our Mother tongue, not when we speak other languages! Our ears are actually deaf to such errors in languages not learnt during early childhood!

A Very Common Error

'yap' is correct

An example to illustrate how mispronouncing a long vowel as a short one produces the opposite meaning:

yasya prasā/dā/n na gatiḥ kuto/ 'pi
= By the mercy of my spiritual master, I'll never go back to Godhead. (yasya=by whose, prasādā=mercy)

yasyā/prasā/dā/n na gatiḥ kuto/ 'pi
= Without the mercy of my spiritual master, I'll never go back to Godhead. (yasya=by whose, aprasāda=without mercy)

'yā/p' is wrong

Just by mis-pronouncing an 'a' as an 'ā', we totally change the meaning of the sanskrit sentence!

Above is a sample of a typical, common mistake unintentionally made by English-speaking devotees, even if they are familiar with Sanskrit. (Even though we know the theory that 'ā' is long and 'a' is short, we can only get it right spontaneously for our mother tongue, as in the example of 'fish' and 'feesh', 'din' and 'dean' etc. However, when it comes to a non-native language such as Sanskrit, our subconscious English patterns of pronunciation take over! I do not mean to discourage anyone. I too suffered greatly from such mispronunciation for years, and those who knew Sanskrit and cared enough for me used to point it out.... But the error would recur.. Because they did not get to the root of it. After more than 15 years of teaching Sanskrit pronunciation and mulling over it, I finally had the realization visually presented in the above diagrams. So now, it takes only an attitude of willingness to learn plus perhaps 5 minutes to study the examples illustrated above, then we can uproot this wrong pronouncing habit quite easily. So in case my revealing this problem hurts any reader, please forgive me. I am not criticising for the sake of finding fault, but I have the simple solution at hand and I just wish to share it effectively, and therefore I have tried to analyze and explain the problem. I humbly leave it to you to experiment with so that very quickly, you too may be blessed with the sharpened hearing to pick out long vowels and self-correct yourself whenever pronouncing them! Happy chanting! Haribol!

Your humble servant, in the sacred service of Sri Guru and Sri Gauranga,

Dina-Anukampana Das

~~~~~  
Here are two typical errors (hear on youtube, Caitanya Caritamrta Narration  
<http://www.vedabase.com/cc/adi/17> verses 8 and 9):-

A.  
<https://youtu.be/VZW4DK0XAMU?t=2m36s> - ishvaaara or iiiishvara  
Answer: It should be iiiiiishvara, and not ishvaaara as recorded above

B.  
<https://youtu.be/VZW4DK0XAMU?t=2m34s> - gaaaya or gayaaaa  
Answer: It should be gayaaa, and not gaaya as recorded above

#### MY SINCERE APOLOGY

My spiritual master, Sri Srimad Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami Sripad Maharaj and also HH Srila Jayapataka Swami Maharaj instructed me to continue teaching Sanskrit pronunciation because foreign devotees need it. Therefore I am trying my best. Please forgive me if inadvertently I have offended you in this attempt. I apologize sincerely.

~~~~~  
P.S.

~~~~~ A common objection ~~~~~

**‘But Prabhuuuuuu..... Srila Prabhupada did not want us [his followers] to learn Sanskrit’**

For those of us who may happen to be followers of HDG Sri Srimad A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, there has been this ‘instruction’ passed around by hearsay that HDG did not want his followers to learn Sanskrit. However this incident that went on for 3 weeks in Tokyo illustrates clearly his instruction to all his followers to learn at least the Correct Pronunciation. If you have that doubt, kindly ponder over the points discussed in this paper:

[www.tiny.cc/prabhupada-on-sanskrit](http://www.tiny.cc/prabhupada-on-sanskrit) Thank you.

Link for sharing this document:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eVJlfhvAfh-DE01jDQfRt5selXQ4dbK9qCrIPL-07f4/edit?usp=sharing>

Or its PDF version: [www.bit.ly/SANSKRIT2](http://www.bit.ly/SANSKRIT2)