

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

31st Anniversary Souvenir

August 13, 2017
Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania



न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।

na hi jñānena sadṛśaṃ pavitraṃ iha vidyate
Bhagavad Gītā 4.38

In this world, there is no purifier equivalent to knowledge.



पुरमेकादशद्वारम् अजस्यावक्रचेतसः। अनुष्ठाय न शोचति विमुक्तश्च विमुच्यते। एतद्वै तत्॥

puramekādaśadvāram ajasyāvakraçetasah |

anuṣṭhāya na śocati vimuktaśca vimucyate | etadvai tat ||

The city with eleven gates belongs to the birthless ātmā which is of the nature of undifferentiated consciousness. Meditating on (this), one does not grieve and having become liberated (while living), he becomes liberated (here after) also. This is indeed that Brahman.

Anniversary Message from Pujya Swamiji

A teaching institution, such as this Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, exists as long as there is meaningful teaching. A group of students with a love to know and a teacher who has a certain knowledge to impart make a gurukula.

In the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, the subject matter is one that is fundamental for a fulfilled human life. The commitment of the students to gain this life – fulfilling knowledge implies a great deal of maturity on their part. If the teacher has the vision and the tools to unfold the vision, then you have the necessary components for a gurukula.

But, to put these components together and make this teaching happen in a gurukula setup, the necessity for supporting factors like voluntary service and money are obvious. That we could find all these factors is evident in our celebrating the successful completion of the first year of this new, yet ancient gurukula.

I thank all of you who are directly and indirectly involved in this endeavor and look forward to your continued commitment.



Swami Dayananda

(taken from 2nd Anniversary Souvenir, 1987)



यथोदकं शुद्धे शुद्धम् आसिक्तं तादृगेव भवति। एवं मुनेर्विजानतः आत्मा भवति गौतम॥

*yathodakam śuddhe śuddham āsiktam tādrgeva bhavati |
evam munervijānataḥ ātmā bhavati gautama ||*

The ātmā of the wise sage becomes (the same as Brahman) just as pure water,
poured in pure (water), becomes the same alone.

Anniversary Message

As Pujya Swamiji used to say “Gurukulam is your home away from home”. In fact, some people feel that it is ‘the’ home, because here, you get what you get at home, love, warmth, comfort and of course, good food!

Here there is peace and tranquility, teaching and prayers, yoga and meditation. There is beautiful landscaping and nature walk, peace and tranquility.

The most important is, of course, the teaching which gives you new insights in life to bring about self-growth and true happiness.

We invite you to make Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, your home away from home- if it is not already so- and get the most out of what the Gurukulam has to offer.

Viditatmananda

Swami Viditatmananda

Sunday, August 13, 2017
9:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
at the Gurukulam Campus

Program

~ *Music Concert* ~

Maharajapuram Ramachandran

~ *Dignitary's Address* ~

Dharmatma Dr. Yegnasubramanian

Chairman, Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation, USA
& Canada & Sri Guruvaayoorappan Temple, NJ

~ *Anniversary Address* ~

Sri Swami Veditatmananda
on "*Śaraṇāgati*"

~ *Banquet Lunch* ~

Question-Answer Session (*after lunch*)

Sri Swami Veditatmananda

Childcare Provided

तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥९०२६॥

tadahaṃ bhaktyupahr̥tam aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ ||

I receive that offering which is imbued with devotion of the
person whose mind is pure. *Bhagavad Gītā* 9.26

With deep appreciation to all those, visible and behind the
scenes, who give generously of their time, skills, resources,
and most of all, loving care to keep the gurukulam healthy and
growing. Like any good family, this *guru-kulam* thrives
because each and every family member is doing his or her best to
contribute. We all have reason to be thankful for the results of
our combined efforts.

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of Vedanta, Sanskrit, Yoga and
Vedic Heritage*

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*On the occasion of the 31st Anniversary, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam thanks its
Board of Directors and Board Members for their continued support.*

With Blessings of Pujya Sri Swami Dayananda Sarsawati

A New Lecture Hall – Dining Hall Complex is underway
at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam premises.

We Thank the following donors who donated/pledged \$ 10K - \$ 25K and above for this project.

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We need more donors in the category of 10K & 25K for Kitchen equipments and furnishings of the Dining & Lecture Halls. Please be a part of this tradition & Puja Swamiji's vision. To make your donation/pledge, or for more information please contact Ashok Chhabra at 570-350-4475 OR Suddhatma Chaitanya at 570-656-0189

ARSHA VIDYA GURUKULAM

A New Lecture Hall/Dining Hall Complex

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam is beginning construction of a new Lecture Hall/Dining Hall complex. Over a period of time, the demand for the gurukulam services has increased necessitating a new complex. This was Pujya Swami Dayanandaji's vision and efforts are under way to make it a reality.

The proposed building will be located next to the rear parking lot. It will have a First Floor and a partial basement for a total area of 33,800 square feet. Several additional parking spaces are proposed near the building. A loop road will go around the building, providing handicap drop-off at the side of the building together with a service entry at the rear. The main entrance will be through an outdoor paved patio which will have seating and landscaping.

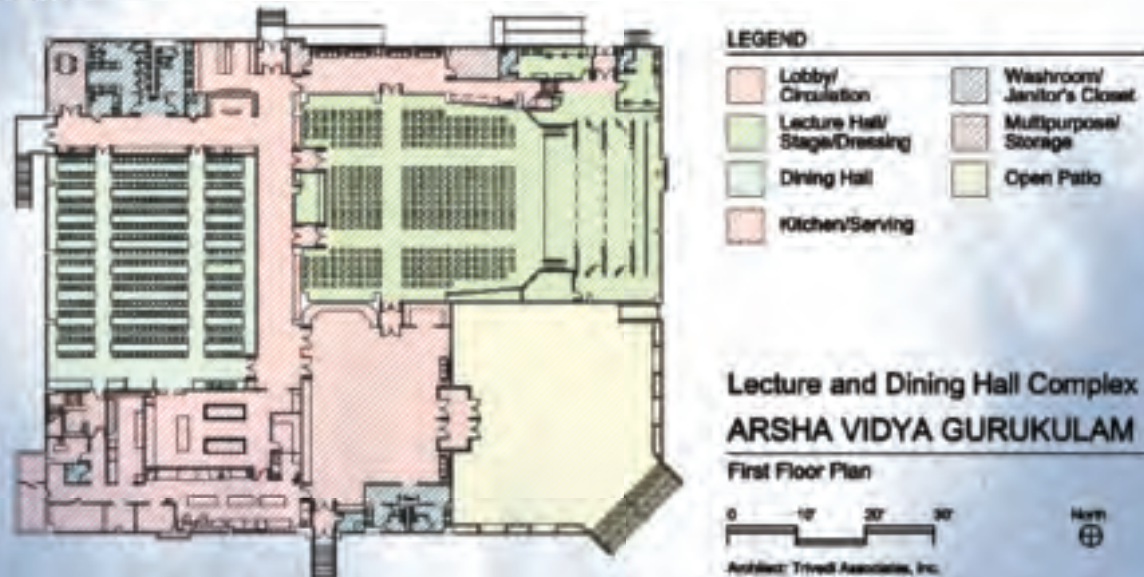
The building will house a Lecture Hall, a Dining Hall and a Kitchen on the first floor. The Entrance Lobby will have a beverage counter, display areas and a coat and shoe space. The Lecture Hall will be accessed through vestibules, providing sound seals for the space. It will seat about 400 people. Seating will be movable. It is envisioned as a multi-purpose space to be used for lectures, religious and cultural programs. Handicap accessibility will be provided for the stage through a platform lift. There will be a side entrance to the stage through a ramp and loading dock. Dressing rooms will be located adjacent to the stage, together with a chair storage room. A sound booth will be located at the rear of the Hall. There will be acoustic treatment on the walls and ceiling of the Lecture Hall.

The food serving area will be accessed through the corridor. The kitchen will have cooking, storage, and washing areas. The basement level holds a multipurpose space, a small conference room and support spaces for the Gurukulam staff and volunteers. Every effort is being made to incorporate "green" sustainable practices into the building. This includes a Geothermal source of energy and reduction of garbage disposal.

The budget for this complex has increased from \$8 million to a more realistic \$11 million, after receiving the bids from the contractors. We have already received \$2 million from Mrs. Amita Patel, who donated this amount in memory of her husband, Manubhai Patel. An anonymous donor has pledged to donate 2.5 million to match the donations received from donors who pledged \$25,000 or more. Thanks to the generous pledges and donations of more than 117 supporters, we reached more than enough to receive the matching donation. We still need more donors in order to avoid taking a loan of 4 million from the bank to complete this project.

Donors will have permanent plaques displaying their names inside the building, to commemorate their generosity and commitment.

Please be part of this tradition.





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souvenir possible.*

सदाशिवसमारम्भां शङ्कराचार्यमध्यमाम्।
अस्मदाचार्यपर्यन्तां वन्दे गुरुपरम्पराम्॥

Our Pranams to
Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati
and other Teachers



Sharad and Lata Pimplaskar
Uma, Michael and Aadi Stewart
Ravi Pimplaskar



SRINGERI SADHANA CENTER

Sri Dakshinamnaya Sharada Peetham, Sringeri, Karnataka State in India is a serene, divine and glorious abode of Gods, Goddess Sri Sharadamba and the great Acharya's. The Acharya's (akin to the Pope) are born to propagate the value of Sanatana Dharma. The present Acharya of the Peetam, His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Sri Bharathi Tirtha Mahaswamiji is the 36 th Pontiff. He selected and conferred as the 37 th Pontiff of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Sri Sri Vidhushekhara Bharathi Mahaswamiji. They are the Shankaracharyas at Sringeri.

Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation (SVBF), Inc USA is an overseas affiliate of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri, India. It is located in the scenic lush green hills of the Poconos. SVBF is a registered non-profit organization in USA, approved by the Federal Government as a tax exempt institution and determined by IRS as a 501© 3 organization.

SVBF USA takes and follows all aspects of its parent institution in India. The mission of SVBF is identical to its parent, namely following the footsteps of the Pontiff to protect Dharma (righteous path) and proceed along as a law abiding entity. SVBF has been fortunate to find a very suitable place in Reeder's village of the Jackson Township to build a facility complex with various buildings to practice Hinduism religion in a very peaceful and serene atmosphere.

A brief description of the site facilities provides a glimpse of the activities at the center.

A **new temple** was built and inaugurated in July 2008. Temple building is a single floor structure. The images in the authentic temple are sculptured in granite / marble and permanently installed according to the scriptures. The temple has a big hall with adequate room for conducting the daily rituals attended by devotees. SVBF conducts about 12 major events in a year at the Sringeri Sadhana Center.

SVBF has plans to open additional centers in the USA. It has selected Detroit as it's Mid- West Center and Houston as the center for the South and San Diego as the West Center.

In an adjacent building, the foundation houses its **community hall** for conducting discourses, music concerts etc. It contains

the library, a conference room, and other rooms for students to read and research materials.

The scriptures require the priests live close to the temple. Thus, there are 4 houses (**priest quarters**) built for the priests in the temple complex.

SVBF provides all the facilities required to practice the Hindu religion rituals in USA. Thus it built a facility on the site (**Sradda Bhavan**) to conduct Sradda (yearly ceremonies) by the devotees for the departed souls. The facility is fully equipped with a shower, kitchen and dining area to conduct the event in the most traditional manner.



TEMPLE BUILDING

It is the normal practice for a Peetam to provide free food to its devotees or visitors coming to the temple. We have religious cook who prepare the food as per scriptures and offer to the Gods and then the same is brought to the Bhojana Shaala for distribution to the devotees.

We have a number of devotees coming from various parts of USA to worship and spend some valuable quality time at the center. We provide

accommodation in the **guest houses**. They can stay for a night or two by contributing a minimum stipulated donation.

The Hindu religion dharma demands that we protect all living beings and in particular the cow. Cow is a sacred animal for the Hindus. The site has a **Go Shalla** housing cows and calves. The milk from these cows are used for the religious needs at the facility

Everyone in this world wishes to live with Happiness, Peace and Prosperity. If this desire has to be fulfilled, then everyone should follow the path of righteousness referred to as Dharma in the Hindu religion. In the modern world with so many demands every individual finds it difficult to spend a few moments for himself and delve upon his inner self to know oneself in a better manner. It is necessary to create such an environment for such persons. This concept of a village at the Sringeri Sadhana Center in Stroudsburg is built with that thought in such a way it could lead to be a modern spiritual center for all Hindus in the Western World.

BHAKTI

By Swami Dayananda

In gaining knowledge of Brahman, once one has the *śāstra* and the *guru*, what more is needed? Nothing more is needed. If a person has a *guru*, he will definitely know, for if the *guru* is there, the *śāstra* is there. And if the *śāstra* is there, it means there will be knowledge. Therefore, the *śāstra* says, “*ācāryavān puruṣo veda*, one who has a teacher knows.” This is a very bold statement. But someone may say, “Swamiji, I have a *guru* but nothing happens.” “Did you do what the *guru* asked you to do?” “He only says to do *japa*, etc.” That points out one more thing that one needs—*bhakti*. *Bhakti* *avehi*, know through *bhakti*.

The grace of the *śāstra* and the *guru* are not enough. You need the grace of *Īśvara*. The word ‘*bhakti*’ indicates that need. Coming from the Sanskrit root *bhaj*, *bhakti* conveys the meaning of doing *seva*, service. There are a lot of *duritas*, results of past wrong actions, which manifest in the form of various obstacles that come in the way of accomplishing one’s goals. In our daily prayers like *sandhyā-vandana* or when performing rituals on special days, there is a *saṅkalpa* that we do. We say, “I do this *karma* to please *Īśvara* through the neutralisation of all *duritas* I have accumulated so far.” The phrase ‘to please’ means to earn the grace of *Īśvara*. You achieve this by removing all your *duritas*.

Durita means *pāpa*, the result of a wrong action, which is the cause for sorrow and pain. Centered on one’s body there can be obstacles in the form of diseases. Centered on the world there can be obstacles such as a quarrelling neighbour and so on. Then there are obstacles from unseen forces. These three types of obstacles that cause sufferings are caused by *durita*. One has to pile up enough grace of *Īśvara*, through prayer and prayerful *karmas*, to neutralize the *duritas* so that one can be at the right place at the right time. The following narration will enlighten us on the need for *Īśvara*’s grace.

One day, a blind person was returning from the fort after seeing the king. He had to come out of the fort. Nobody was available to guide him to the door except the inner gatekeeper, and he would not leave the gate. The blind man asked for some help and the gatekeeper said, “You take the help of this wall by passing your hands along it until the main door comes. Then you can go out and someone there will help you.”

So the blind man went along the wall, but again came back to the gatekeeper’s post. The gatekeeper asked,

“Why did you come back here?”

“I thought this was the gate.”

“How did you miss the gate?”

“I went along the wall, but there was no gate.”

“How can you say there is no gate? There is a gate.”

How did he miss the gate? This man kept walking and touching the wall, but one time he had an itch, so he removed his hand from the wall to scratch and then went on walking. Thus he went round and round because he had the itch exactly when he passed the gate to go out. The itch came only at that time. Think of that. This is only because of some *durita*.

Similarly, when one has to understand the *śāstra*, one falls asleep while listening. The *guru* is teaching well and the person also listens, but at the time of an important revelation, he falls asleep. Then he wakes up and hears only the grammar. This is *durita*. When I was attending a Vedānta class on *Brahma-sūtra* in Rishikesh, one swami used to sleep in the class. He did want to listen, but he used to fall sleep. The teacher would not talk about it, he would just continue teaching. But one day, he himself could not take it any more. He said in Hindi, “*ye sunne ka baat hai, ye sone ka baat nahi hai*,” this is a matter for listening and not for sleeping.” Sleep is a *durita*, an obstacle to one’s effort. One must do a lot of *pūjā*, *japa*, etc., and only then do things fall into place. There is no other way. To earn the grace of *Īśvara*, *bhakti* is necessary.

Bhakti is to be understood as action done with *bhakti*. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Arjuna asks a question, “What happens to a person who, even though endowed with *śraddhā*, puts forth inadequate effort and hence does not make it in this life?” *Śraddhā* is there, but something else is not. What is that missing ‘something’? The missing piece is *Īśvara-anugraha*.

The word ‘*anugraha*’ is translated as ‘grace’ in English, but there is a difference between the two. *Īśvara* determines grace, but you earn *anugraha*. If *Īśvara* decides to whom he should give grace, every day he should make a lucky dip. Otherwise, on what basis will

Īśvara extend his grace? If you say that there is some good *karma*, then the result of that good *karma* alone is *anugraha*. Why should we use the word ‘grace,’ then? It is a graceful translation of *anugraha*. We do not know which *karma* was responsible for this blessing, this favourable situation, and so we can use the word ‘grace.’ If we cannot connect the action with the desirable result, then we say it is grace.

In this *janma*, birth, we have brought along with us some *karmas*. They are collectively called *prārabdha-karma*, *karma* that has begun to fructify and is getting exhausted now. This *prārabdha-karma* has some good *karma*. We cannot say when it was gathered. We cannot say it was gathered in the previous *janma*, for that birth could have been as a donkey. From the *sañcita-karma*, accumulated *karmas*, certain *karmas* precipitate looking for a body, clamoring for a body. Those *karmas* that clamor for a body are many. One set of *karmas* may be ready to give you a *janma* of a cat and another, a *janma* of a rat. Different types of *karmas* are clamoring, “I want,” “I want,” “I want.” Among them, the powerful ones cause this particular body.

If you come to Vedānta, the next *janma* is assured to be a good *janma* for you because you have to pick up the thread. Already, because of good *karma* done now or before, you have come to Vedānta. You desire *mokṣa*. You are on an onward track and you never trace back. Why? Because this journey is a journey you have set for yourself, and you are given an assurance in the *Bhagavadgītā* by the Lord, “Any one who performs good actions never reaches a bad end. Having gained the worlds belonging to those who do good actions, and having lived there for countless years, the one who did not succeed in yoga, a spiritual pursuit, is born in the home of the wealthy and cultured people who are committed to *dharma*. Or he is indeed born into the family of wise yogis.” Even as a child he would be listening to Vedānta.

I once went to Ahmedabad from Bombay. In the Bombay airport, there was a big queue for security check. Boarding was announced for the Ahmedabad flight and I was standing in the security line; the line was very long. Then an airline staff member came and called “Ahmedabad.., Ahmedabad.., Ahmedabad.., Ahmedabad...” Now, all those bound for Ahmedabad were taken out of the queue and led to the security lounge separately, ahead of others. So even if you are in queue, you cross all the others and board the flight.

This is also how *Bhagavān* calls: “*mokṣa.., mokṣa.., mokṣa.., mokṣa..*” If you are ready to board the *mokṣa* flight, you are taken out of the big queue of other *karmas* waiting to give you a body, and taken forward by Īśvara. So this is the law of *karma*.

The law of *karma* is not ordinary. Once you start this journey, everything else has to just stand and watch. In fact, the power of all other *karmas* gets weakened. Their clamour becomes less. They all have power if you do not have this pursuit. If you have this pursuit they have no power. You are taken forward. That is the assurance.

Therefore, even if you have *śraddhā* but do not have the grace of the Lord, the mind has to undergo a certain process of purification to remove the *duritas*. If you have more *duritas*, you have to have more grace. A *durita* will have its own say and you have to neutralise it. You remove the power of a *durita* by bringing more Īśvara into your life, then you find that *duritas* have no big say over you; they are mechanical. They can create some uncomfortable situations, but those situations really do not affect you. That capacity to be not carried away by *durita* is earned by you, the *jīva*, through Īśvara-*anugraha*. How do you earn Īśvara-*anugraha*? Only by *karma*.

There are two types of *karma* that earn grace. One is *iṣṭa*, Vedic rituals, and the other is *pūrta*, *seva* activities. There is no third type. These are the only two means of earning *anugraha*. And for this you need to perform your daily *pūjā*, *japa*, and so on.

Everyone has an unprepared mind in the form of *duritas* and *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes. One has to neutralise these so that one does not come under their spell. For this, one must have Īśvara in one’s life.

There were *vaidika-karmas* in all the eras, in all *yugas*, but in *kali-yuga* they are not often pursued. Who performs *karmas* like *agnihotra* these days? Even if a person does *agnihotra-karma*, he may be doing it just to be able to say, “I am an *agnihotri*,” rather than for neutralizing his *duritas*. That is why this is *kali-yuga*. Then, what else can one do? What is the redress for people in *kali-yuga*? What is the way out? *Hari-nāma*, taking to the Lord’s name, is the only refuge. *Hari-nāma* stands for all actions done with *bhakti*. It will therefore include *pūjā*, *arcana*, *pārāyaṇa* like *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*, and so on.

We divide *karmas* in a three-fold way based upon the means of accomplishing them. There are *kāyika* physical; *vācika*, oral; and *mānasa*, mental *karmas*. Mental, *mānasa-karma*, comes under *dhyāna*, while *iṣṭa* and *pūrta* *karmas* are physical and oral. Any *karma* is will-based because you choose to do a *karma*. Physical, *kāyika-karma*, includes all types of *pūjās*. In it, all three means—body, speech, and mind—are employed. Limbs, like hands, are involved, and you are repeating the names of *Bhagavān* and various chants. The mind is also involved. There is an altar of worship and varieties of materials such as incense, flowers, water, and so on. Here we have to note one thing. The limbs, like hands and *vāk*, the organ of speech, are both organs of action. If so, actions done by speech will naturally be considered *kāyika-karma*. Why has it been mentioned separately as oral, *vācika-karma*? Even though both the limbs and speech are organs of action, there is a slight difference. The function of speech is special, because through it the thoughts become manifest. When you speak you throw light; thus *Agni*, fire, is the presiding deity who controls speech. Sometimes when you speak, heat is generated, but *Agni* is of the nature of light, and therefore speech is meant to throw some light upon a subject. Even though speech is an organ of action, it is not like hands and legs, so it is considered separately. When you wish someone ‘Happy Birthday’, it is an oral *karma*, and when you give a gift, it is a physical *karma*. Of course you had to remember the birthday and decide to do all this. Thus, when you do physical, *kāyika-karma*, all three means are employed, so the result it can produce is greater than that of a purely oral or mental *karma*.

Now, there are two types of *phala*, result, for a *karma*: *drṣṭa*, the result that is immediately seen, and *adrṣṭa*, the result that is unseen. *Puṇya-pāpa* are *adrṣṭa*. The *adrṣṭa-phala* for *kāyika-karma* is definitely greater because all three means are employed. This *karma* can become more and more elaborate, increasing the result. When fire is involved, priests are involved, and *dakṣiṇā* is involved, one incurs a lot of expenditure and puts forth a lot of effort. That certainly has more results.

All types of prayers are *karmas* and, being *karma*, prayer has a result. All prayers are valid. Whether you pray in Hebrew or in Sanskrit or in Tamil, a prayer is a prayer. *Bhagavān* is not going to be confused. He will take note of it.

I never say all prayers are one and the same. I also

never say that all religions lead to the same goal. All religions cannot lead to the same goal because our goal is right here. Others think that their religious goal is after death. If they lead a faithful life with prayers, probably, they have a chance in the afterlife—but there is no guarantee. For us, the goal is right here. We may accept all religions, but all religions do not accept even that.

There was a big discussion once in Delhi. An important leader from the Hindu religion was there, and a leader from another religion was also present. The Hindu leader said, “We accept all religions.” The other person said, “That is your problem. You do not have a religion, and that is why you accept all religions. We have the right religion, and that is why we do not accept all other religions, which are false.” The discussion ends there. There can be no further discussion. They do not accept what you say. It is not true that all religions lead to the same goal. This is a bluff, and it has to be called. But you can say that all prayers are valid. That is correct. We accept that.

All prayers are valid, and every prayer has its own result. We have an elaborate system of prayers, with specific prayers for different purposes because of our vision, our understanding, and knowledge of *Īśvara*. We have *devatās*, deities, for different functions and we can invoke a specific *devatā* for a specific purpose.

For instance, you pray to Lord Dhanvantari for the removal of diseases. When you undergo a treatment, you do not know what all happens. For modern allopathic medicines, the contraindications are written on the sheet enclosed with the medicine. It may say that there is a one-percent chance of developing a brain tumour, but otherwise, the medicine is wonderful. So when you read all this, you understand that you had better say a prayer. One in a billion wins the lottery. For that also, you have to pray. Here you pray to Goddess Lakṣmī. We have to have *daiva* with us. In every attempt we have to take prayer into account to control the hidden variables. Therefore, our Vedic tradition has varieties of prayers. There are not just broad-spectrum prayers, but also very specific prayers.

Since the *kāyika-karma* produces more result than a *vācika-karma*, we need that result. I am just giving you the psychology of it now. When you perform *karma*, a ritual, you are making an effort. Whatever little *bhakti* you have is converted into real *bhakti* when you make

effort. That is why Lord Krishna says, “One who gives even such small things as a leaf or a flower or fruit or just water, but with *bhakti*, I accept it.” Why should one give a leaf etc., when *Bhagavān* does not take anything? It is not for *Bhagavān* to take, but to make your *bhakti* real.

With *bhakti* you make an effort: you get that tulasi leaf, you get the fruit, you get a little water for offering as *arghya*, oblation. In all this, action is involved. What is important is *karma*. When you do that *karma* with *bhakti*, whatever *bhakti* you have becomes real *bhakti*. You fake it and make it. When you do an action, the emotion becomes real, therefore you act it out. You act out your emotions; you actualise them through an action. The action makes the emotion real, and the real emotion makes you act, and thereby, you turn into a *bhakta*. Otherwise, this *bhakti* remains only as some kind of a feeling. *Karma* is necessary to make it real because you have to make some effort in doing the *karma*. You may ask,

“Can I do this *karma* mentally?”

“You can do it mentally, but why not physically?”

“What will others think?”

“Others will think that you are doing *pūjā*. They will think that you are a *bhakta*.”

“I do not want to be branded as a *bhakta*.”

“Let them brand you as a *bhakta*. Get a name like that. Earn the name ‘*bhakta*’.”

For all the wrong reasons, such as laziness, false ego, etc., we want to escape. Because of the very fact that you want to escape, you have to do it.

There can be different types of problems in your *śravaṇa*. For instance, understanding may not take place while listening to the *śāstra* because the unconscious creates a disturbance in the mind. The more you bring in *Īśvara*, the less is the hold of the unconscious over you because *Īśvara* becomes father, mother, everything. That is how you deal with the unconscious. Simple things become a problem because the unconscious will not let that knowledge happen. It will only create doubts. What is obvious never becomes obvious. One always wonders why one does not understand this. Therefore, *Īśvara-anugraha* is necessary here.

Bhakti is meant for a prepared mind, *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*. *Śraddhā* itself will lead one to *bhakti*. We must do this *kāyika-karma* to keep away all the obstacles. So too, *vācika-karma*. Daily recitation of the *vaidika-*

sūktas is the best thing to do if you know them; even listening to them is wonderful. Or any recitation like *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma* is good. You can also sing in praise of *Bhagavān* if you know music. Even though *Bhagavān* likes *śruti*, etc., he will not run away if you do not have it, because he has no place to go; he is a captive audience.

You can sing what is to be sung. What is to be recited, you recite. What is to be chanted, you should chant. You should not sing *Gāyatrī mantra*. All the Vedic hymns are to be chanted. What is to be read should be read. Prose is to be read, a verse is to be recited, a Vedic hymn is to be chanted, and a song is to be sung.

Generally, we have all three *karmas* in our daily prayers: *kāyika*, *vācika*, and *mānasa*. This three-fold prayer produces *anugraha* and keeps all the obstacles away. Even if you have understood Vedānta, the clarity increases. You never do away with *Īśvara*. Either he is in the form of you, or he is in the form of your worshipful altar. He is never gone.

All the above come under *iṣṭa-karma*. The other set of *karma* is *pūrta-karma*, in which you fulfil the needs of the society, community, country, and humanity in general. All reaching out *karmas*, so-called charitable activities, are *pūrta-karmas*. Charity is not a very charitable word. We all live on others’ charity. Where is the question of our doing charity? We have our breakfast because of others’ charity. Somebody has to produce, harvest, transport, distribute, prepare, etc. the food. We are always indebted to a number of forces. So when I can give, I give, and when I have to take, I take. Everybody is a consumer and everybody is a giver. When you give more than you consume, that is maturity. That is called *pūrta-karma* and it produces *puṇya*.

A list of *pūrta-karmas* are given in the *smṛtis*: Providing for water sources such as wells, ponds, and lakes, building temples, distributing food, and building rest houses are called *pūrta-karmas*. You can include more according to the present-day needs, like providing a clinic, a hospital, a home for children, and so on. We have only these two types of *karma*, *iṣṭa* and *pūrta*, to neutralize our *duritas*. You do them with *bhakti*, and by these acts of *bhakti* you gain the *adhikāritva*, competence, to study the *śāstra*. Once *adhikāritva* is there, which includes *śraddhā*, you gain this knowledge with the *guru*’s teaching.

(Excerpt from the *Vākya-vicāra*)

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DEVOTION

By Swami Veditatmananda

Devotion is love or attachment for *īśvara*, the Lord. Within itself, this love also includes reverence and *śraddhā*, faith. Therefore, love accompanied by a deep feeling of reverence and *śraddhā* is called devotion. Devotion is an emotion of the mind and when it gets expressed, it takes the form of serving *īśvara*, meditating upon *īśvara*, and leading a life committed to knowing *īśvara*. Serving and offering oneself to *īśvara* is called *karma-yoga*. Meditating upon *īśvara* is called *upāsanā*, and pursuit of knowledge of *īśvara* is called *jñāna-yoga*. Devotion is a means of attaining *īśvara*, and the Bhagavad Gita beautifully delineates this devotion alone at length. The first six chapters of the Bhagavad Gita primarily discuss *karma-yoga*, the second set of six chapters deal with *upāsanā*, meditation, and the last six chapters have knowledge as the prime subject. *Karma-yoga* and *upāsanā* are the means to worship *īśvara* with attributes, whereas *jñāna-yoga* is the means to know *īśvara* who transcends attributes. Worshipping *īśvara* with attributes is the first stage of devotion, and knowing *īśvara* in his true nature, which is *nirguṇa*, without attributes, is the second stage of devotion. The duality between *īśvara* and the devotee is retained in the worship of *īśvara* with attributes, whereas there is negation of duality in the knowledge of and contemplation upon the *nirguṇa*.

Surrender and offering oneself unto *īśvara* is the attitude which is ever-present in devotion. It is the *ahaṅkāra*, ego, which separates the human being from *īśvara*, and therefore it is this *ahaṅkāra* that is offered unto *īśvara* in the process of devotion. What is called *ahaṅkāra* is nothing but identification with one's body-mind complex and a strong sense of 'I'-ness in it. Removing identification with this complex and identifying oneself with *īśvara* is the process of surrender or offering. To be able to do so, it is necessary to understand both *īśvara* and *jīva*, the individual.

Īśvara

This universe is a creation and *īśvara* is its creator. Any creation, say of a pot or cloth, calls for a minimum of two causes, namely the efficient cause, meaning the creator who creates the object in an intelligent manner, and the material cause, meaning the material from which the object is made. In the creation of a pot, the pot maker is the efficient cause and clay is the material cause. Generally speaking, these two are different and

independent of each other, but that is not the case in the creation of the universe. In the creation of the universe, *īśvara* is the efficient cause. He is the creator, sustainer, and dissolver of this universe, while along with his *māyā*, creative power, he also becomes the material cause of the universe. But *māyā* is not a second entity independent of *īśvara*. It is totally dependent upon *īśvara*. It appears to exist and shine only because of *īśvara*. Therefore, *īśvara* along with his *māyā* becomes the material cause of the universe. *Īśvara* coupled with *māyā* is called *īśvara* with attributes, or *saguṇa-brahman*, *brahman* with attributes. *Īśvara* transcending *māyā* and obtaining as its substratum is known as *nirguṇa-brahman*, *brahman* without attributes. Generally speaking, words such as *īśvara*, *bhagavān*, *prabhu*, etc., are used for *saguṇa-brahman*, whereas words such as *brahman*, *paramātmā*, etc., are used to denote *nirguṇa-brahman*. But there are no hard and fast rules regarding it. These words are seen to be used for both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa brahman*. A given word's meaning is to be derived from the context of where and how it is used.

Being the efficient or the instrumental cause, *īśvara* is the creator, sustainer, and dissolver of the universe. He is omniscient because he knows the creation inside and out. He is omnipotent because he can accomplish anything whatsoever. He is the governor who governs everything from within and without. Therefore, whatever happens or can happen in the creation is all within the scope of the laws designed by *īśvara*. Nothing whatsoever has the freedom to transgress the laws of *īśvara*. *Īśvara* is independent and the creation is dependent. *Īśvara* is the controller and the creation is controlled. *Īśvara* is the ordainer of actions. Every action that takes place is due to *īśvara*'s inspiration and strength. Every action happens within the framework of his laws. Moreover, *īśvara* is also the dispenser of the results of actions. It is he who decides what should be the result of a given action, when and how it should be dispensed. Thus, it is *īśvara* who dispenses the results of actions to every *jīva* in keeping with his or her actions.

Īśvara is full and complete. He does not suffer from any sense of lack. *Īśvara* is totally free from any needs and demands, and therefore whatever he does is for the welfare of all beings. All that he does is prompted by a sense of service, offering, and benevolence. This is exactly why we see benevolence everywhere in his cre-

ation. It is this spirit of benevolence which enables trees to yield fruits, which makes the sun shine and rivers flow, and so on. *Yajña*, the self-offering which *īśvara* does, is emulated by his creation. To illustrate, the sun offers itself to form clouds, clouds offer themselves in the form of rain, rain transforms itself in the form of trees and herbs, and they in turn offer themselves to become food for living beings. Food offers itself to become blood and semen. Offering in the form of the union of the egg and sperm results into the birth of the living beings. In this manner, the *yajña*, act of offering, is all-pervasive in the creation. Because of that, there is co-operation. Everything in this creation helps others and receives help in return. This is the reason or secret behind the harmony in the creation.

īśvara is compassionate. He is nothing but benevolence. Therefore, we see care and concern everywhere in his creation. The inconceivable strength of that omnipotent *īśvara* is meant for the protection of every being. Knowledge of that omniscient *īśvara* is meant for the care of every being. He is very well aware of who will need what at what time, and he makes arrangements to fulfill those needs. Food, sleep, protection from fear, and procreation are the basic needs of the living beings. There is provision in the creation to meet these needs. Here, each and every living being is taken care of. The different and particular needs of the beings as required at different stages of their growth are fulfilled accordingly. Destruction is the flip side of creation. Therefore, destruction is also evident everywhere in the creation. Destruction is a necessity for new creation, and it should not be looked upon as a sign of *īśvara*'s cruelty. Ultimately, it is a blessing in disguise.

The primary needs of human beings are *bhoga*, enjoyment, and *mokṣa*, liberation. *īśvara* has made provision for both of these. He has endowed the human being with an intellect, with which he can study and understand nature and use its potential to fulfill his material needs. With the same intellect, the human being can discriminate between what is right and what is wrong, what is *dharma*, righteous, and what is *adharma*, unrighteous, and choose the right path, thereby climbing the ladder of spiritual growth. If a human being succumbs to his impulses and chooses the unrighteous path, he faces its rather painful consequences. But this serves as an eye-opener and gives him an understanding of what is *dharma* and what is *adharma*. This understanding helps him take recourse to *dharma*, which in turn enables him to attain both material and spiritual prosperity. *īśvara* has also revealed the *mokṣa-śāstra*,

which gives mankind the knowledge of the means to attain the ultimate goal of life, namely *mokṣa*, liberation. *īśvara* himself comes in the form of the teacher and teaches the seeker, awakens him from the beginningless sleep of ignorance, frees him from all notions and *saṃsāra*, the life of becoming, by giving him the knowledge of the true nature of the self.

The same *īśvara* is the material cause of the creation, meaning *īśvara* is manifest as the very creation. The nature of the material cause is that it pervades its effect, just as clay pervades the pot. Similarly, *īśvara* being the material cause of the creation, he pervades the entire creation. He manifests as the taste in water, as light in the sun and the moon, as effulgence in fire, as fragrance in earth, as the brilliance of the brilliant, as the strength of the strong, and as righteousness in the one who is steadfastly committed to *dharma*. Each and every thing in the creation is pervaded by *īśvara*, whether it is *sāttvika* (pure, serene), *rājasa* (active, restless), or *tāmasa* (inert, sluggish, torpid). But the beauty is that along with being all-pervasive, *īśvara* is also transcendent at the same time. That is why in spite of pervading all names and forms which are *sāttvika*, *rājasa* and *tāmasa* in nature, *īśvara* remains untainted by them. *Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are nothing but his costume or outer covering. He manifests himself in the form of the creation by putting on the apparel of the three *guṇas* (attributes), namely *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. He pervades all names and forms, and simultaneously transcends them. Therefore, even though he appears circumscribed and limited from the standpoint of an *upādhi*, limiting adjunct, or a given name and form, in reality he is ever limitless, complete, eternal, pure, of the nature of knowledge, and ever liberated or free.

Being both the efficient and the material cause of the creation, *īśvara* is one without a second. Whatever is there in this creation is *īśvara*. There is absolutely nothing in the creation that is not *īśvara*. The universe is his glory, his adornment. His power, his knowledge, his brilliance, his majesty and prowess are immanent in the universe. They are evident in the sun, moon, constellations, planets, mountains, rivers, trees, animals, gods, human beings, demons, etc. Wherever we see some grandeur, power, brilliance, splendor, beauty, etc., it is nothing but the manifestation of a fraction of *īśvara*'s glory. It is he who upholds this entire creation. He is the very *ātmā*, the self of the creation. Not only is *īśvara* manifest as this universe, he also transcends it because he is also the substratum of the universe. The universe forms only a fraction of his glory. Transcending the

creation, *īśvara* firmly abides in his limitless nature.

Worshipping this immanent and transcendental *īśvara*, *jīva* (the individual self) can attain fullness. He can fulfill the purpose of his life.

Jīva (The Individual)

The Upaniṣads narrate that having made the creation in the form of names and forms, *īśvara* entered it. This entry is not similar to the entry of a bird into the nest, but is like that of space entering the pot.

But wait a minute, space was very much there even before the creation of the pot. What is meant by space entering the pot?

The entry of space into the pot means the birth, beginning, or arising of space's identification with the pot. This gives rise to the birth of a new entity called the 'pot-space,' as it were. From the standpoint of the nature of space, there is no difference whatsoever between the pot-space and the vast space. This is because the walls of the pot cannot in any way create division in space. It is not that space is in the pot; in reality, the pot is in space. But imagine if somehow a notion arises in space that "I am circumscribed by the pot," "my pervasiveness or scope ends with the pot," "I am different from the limitless space, and different from other pot-spaces too." If this notion arises, then in spite of being limitless, space will suffer from the complex of being limited. Space that has the notion of being limited by a pot is called pot-space. Imposing the limitedness of the pot upon itself is what is called the entry of the space into the pot.

In a manner such as this, *īśvara* has entered the *upādhi*, limiting adjunct, namely the body-mind-intellect complex made of five elements. In other words, he is identified with it and takes the *upādhi* as 'I.' He first takes himself to be the limited *upādhi* and then he constantly suffers from a sense of limitation. *īśvara* suffering from the notion of being limited, in spite of being limitless, is called *jīva*. He has entered the *upādhi* from head to toe, as it were. When identified with the organ of speech, he is called the speaker and when identified with the eyes, he is called the seer. Similarly, identified with the ears he is called the hearer, identified with the mind he is called the thinker, identified with the intellect he is called the knower, and so on.

Moreover, taking the body as 'I' leads him to entertain various notions such as, "I am a woman, a man, tall, short, fair, brown, handsome, ugly, young, old,

mother, father, son, daughter, etc.." These notions are called complexes. Each of these complexes becomes a source of sorrow for him. It is ironic that this *jīva*, whose real nature is none but *īśvara*, takes himself to be a dependent, helpless and hapless creature. But when he comes to know that everything, including himself, is nothing but the glory of *īśvara*, the infallible reality of everything, that his own self is nothing but *īśvara* and there is nothing other than *īśvara*, he becomes free of sorrow. He gets established in the limitlessness that is his true nature and attains the ultimate goal of life.

Offering

Devotion is the means to attain this goal of life. *īśvara* is the goal, the end, and he can be attained or realized by his grace, by his favor. In reality, *īśvara* is not to be attained because he is ever attained. What is to be done is to bring to manifestation the *īśvara* who obtains as the very self of the seeker, as the very self of everything. We have to realize our oneness with *īśvara* by removing the veil of *avidyā-kāma-karma* (ignorance giving rise to desire, which again leads to action to fulfill that desire), which creates a false distance. The devotee is constantly striving to erase this false distance, and *īśvara* too is seen to be favorable to the devotee. The goal is accomplished by the combination of commitment, eagerness, and surrender on the part of the devotee, and favor and grace on the part of *īśvara*. In fact, a devotee sincerely believes that *īśvara*'s grace is the only cause of his success. He even believes that the means of success such as eagerness, sincerity, and surrender which he could invoke from himself are also due only to *īśvara*'s grace. *īśvara* occupies the premier place in a devotee's life. The portals of his heart are left open for *īśvara*. It is *īśvara* who navigates his life, as it were. Unswerving faith in *īśvara*, complete acceptance of *īśvara*, and total surrender unto *īśvara* are the traits that constantly manifest in a devotee's life. As devotion grows, the distance from *īśvara* decreases. The devotee comes closer to *īśvara*. This closeness or proximity culminates in identification, and ultimately in complete oneness.

The reality or one's true nature is veiled, as it were, by ego, the sense of 'I' and mine, and by the attachment and aversion born of self-ignorance. This veiling stifles the manifestation of devotion in our heart. In fact, the self is of the nature of love, and therefore devotion for *īśvara* should be natural and spontaneous. But ego, attachment, aversion, and craving for sense objects have rendered the human heart callous. Devo-

tion and love cannot be experienced with such a heart. To make such a heart malleable so that devotion will manifest in it, Lord Krishna gives a four-step program in the Bhagavad Gita. In fact, these are four steps of *jīva*'s offering unto *īśvara*. The first is offering the result of action to *īśvara*, the second is offering the very action, the third is offering the mind, and the fourth is offering the very *ahankāra*, ego, to *īśvara*. We will now discuss all four in brief.

Offering the Result of Action

Offering the result of action means offering unto *īśvara* one's likes and dislikes for the result of action. When an action is prompted by a like or a dislike, the result becomes very important because it is the desire for a particular outcome that has really inspired a given action. Thus, the happiness or unhappiness of the one who performs the action depends upon the outcome of the action. If the result is in keeping with the expectation or if it exceeds the expectation favorably, then there is a feeling of success. This in turn gives rise to elation. Conversely, if the result is not in keeping with the expectation, there is a sense of failure, which in turn begets sorrow. Both elation and sorrow are reactions. Elation is the expression of *rajas*. Sorrow is the expression of *tamas*. When the mind is freed of these reactions, it becomes *sāttvika*, pure, quiet, alert, learning. Devotion arises in a *sāttvika* mind. To gain freedom from elation and sorrow, Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita advocates detachment from the result of action, saying:

You have the right to perform action, but never to determine the result thereof.

Bh.G. 2.47

The Lord says that action is a privilege given to you, and may you make the best use of it. May you perform your action in keeping with *dharma*. Even if you perform the action prompted by a desire for a particular outcome, still do not violate the order and values. Do not sacrifice the means, the values, the quality of the action for the sake of the end. Likes and dislikes lodged in your heart will pressurize you to sacrifice the values. They will pressurize you to exploit someone, cheat someone, and even to steal. But do not give in to this pressure. Live a life characterized by a commitment to values. Sacrificing values may appear to give some short-term material benefit, but spiritually it entails a big loss. Sacrificing values will escalate likes and dislikes in you, it will steadily build

up attachments and aversions in you. This will lead you away from *īśvara*, away from your goal, and you will naturally become a victim of unhappiness and sorrow.

The order which runs the creation manifests itself as *dharma*, righteousness, and the values in life. This order is nothing but the manifestation of *īśvara*. Therefore, adherence to *dharma* means respecting *īśvara*. Adherence to values calls for an inner strength, and that comes only when there is *śraddhā*, faith, in the order that is inherent in the creation. Keeping in check the base tendencies such as greed, selfishness, etc. may not be an easy task. It requires prayer to seek help from *īśvara*. Thus, self-control, *śraddhā*, and prayer, which are the limbs of devotion, automatically get implemented along with the implementation of *dharma*.

In the first phase of devotion, action is performed to fulfill one's desires because this person has not yet gained freedom from his needs. He still has a sense of responsibility toward family members, has ambitions to fulfill, and also suffers from a sense of insecurity. Moreover he still does not have the *śraddhā* that *īśvara* will take care of all his needs. Therefore, actions performed by him are generally prompted by desires. The result of the action is important for him, and generally speaking it is looked upon as success or failure. This in turn gives rise to reactions such as elation or depression. In the verse quoted above, the Lord clearly says that it is not given to you to decide the outcome of the action. Therefore, regardless of what the outcome of the action is, accept it gracefully. Do not insist or demand that you should always be successful. Failure is also a reality of life. Do not feel frustrated if the result is not in keeping with your expectation. Learn from the result that you have received and proceed further. Have faith in the fairness of *īśvara* and rest assured that a good action is never in vain. It is not right to conclude that an action has failed just because the result is not in keeping with your expectations. You may not have received the result of the action as per your expectation, but have faith that you will definitely receive the dividend of your noble action, and march ahead without getting disheartened.

As far as the result of the action is concerned, a devotee has a different perception. He does not brand the result as either success or failure. He knows very well that *īśvara* is the dispenser of the results of actions. Each and every result of the action really comes from *īśvara*. The result of the action is *prasāda* and it is always beneficial. *Prasāda* may be sweet, sour, salty,

or even bitter. Regardless of the taste of the *prasāda*, a devotee accepts it happily and gracefully. In this manner, accepting the outcome of the action with the attitude of *prasāda*, as coming from *īśvara*, is called *prasāda-buddhi*, graceful acceptance. Gracefully accepting the result of action is also nothing but devotion to *īśvara* because a devotee attempts to look upon situations occurring in his life as the grace of *īśvara*. With the faith that *īśvara* always does that which is the best for him, a devotee looks upon all the situations occurring in life as opportunities to grow. He does not blame anybody for the adversities, nor does he blame himself for that. Even in adversity, he sees the grace of *īśvara* as a blessing in disguise. Happiness or favorable situations are obviously the direct grace of *īśvara*. Thus, in all the circumstances, either favorable or unfavorable, a devotee remembers *īśvara*.

In this manner, even when an action is performed with desire, if it is in keeping with *dharma* and the outcome of the action is accepted as the *prasāda* of *īśvara*, there is an element of devotion in it. This devotion dissipates the existing likes and dislikes as well as the demoniac tendencies such as desire, anger, greed, etc. Generally speaking, whenever we begin to perform an action, demoniac tendencies immediately arise in the mind and try to influence the action. But performing actions in keeping with *dharma* necessitates curbing these tendencies, which gradually get dissipated. Again, when the result of the action comes, the likes and dislikes lodged in the heart cause a favorable outcome to give rise to pride and an unfavorable outcome to give rise to anger. But if the outcome is accepted as *prasāda*, then there is a sense of gratitude towards *īśvara*. In that case, likes and dislikes do not get any chance to breed and flourish in the heart. This is how likes and dislikes get dissipated. Thus, devotion for *īśvara* in the form of detachment toward the outcome of the action gradually liberates the devotee from the grasp of likes and dislikes. He gains peace and freedom from fear. He now makes his entry into the second phase of devotion, which is offering his actions unto *īśvara*.

Offering Action

Now the devotee worships *īśvara* with his actions. Previously he perfumed his actions for himself, for his family, or for gaining happiness in the other world. His actions were indeed in alignment with *dharma*, but they were accompanied with the desire to acquire what he did not have (*yoga*) and to protect what he had (*kṣema*). His actions were prompted by a self-centered agenda.

But with the arrival of the attitude of *prasāda-buddhi*, the graceful acceptance of the outcome as coming from *īśvara*, and the performance of actions in keeping with *dharma*, the pressure of likes and dislikes and anxiety for *yoga* and *kṣema* decrease. The devotee now understands that it is really *īśvara* who takes care of his *yoga* and *kṣema*, and he is merely an instrument in performing actions.

This faith and understanding on the part of the devotee lead him to perform his actions only as an offering to *īśvara*. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita :

*yataḥ pravṛttirbhūtānām
yena sarvaṁ idaṁ tataṁ,
svakarmaṇā tamabhyarca
siddhiṁ vindate mānavaḥ*

One from whom is the origin and activity of all beings, one by whom this (creation) is pervaded, worshipping that (*īśvara*) by the performance of one's duties, the human being achieves success.

Bh.G. 18.46

The entire creation is a manifestation of *īśvara*. In the form of the indwelling self, *īśvara* is the impeller of all activities at the individual as well as the total level. He abides in the hearts of all the beings. Everybody and everything is his manifestation. Therefore, serving *īśvara* means serving the world we confront. Service to humanity is really service to *īśvara*. To serve *īśvara* obtaining in the form of all beings, it is necessary that the heart of the person who wants to serve should be free from attachments and aversions, partiality and cruelty, for anyone. He or she should be free from the desire of deriving personal acclaim or any other gain. The purpose of action is to please *īśvara*. Now the action that is performed is not only in keeping with values and codes of righteousness, but is also done without any desire to fulfill a personal agenda. This individual now has no personal axe to grind through action. Whatever limited requirements he has are fulfilled by *īśvara*. Therefore, over and above his requirements, whatever *īśvara* has showered upon him is offered back to *īśvara* by him.

Serving *īśvara* obtaining in the form of the creation is easier said than done. It is the nature or the tendency of the world to provoke likes and dislikes in our heart. Therefore, even when actions are performed selflessly, the likes, dislikes, fear, etc. that are embedded in the heart are provoked to some extent. Therefore, a devotee needs a setup or atmosphere that does not arouse reac-

tions from him. It is for this reason that actions offered unto *īśvara* also include *pūjā* (worship), *japa* (repetition of a name of *īśvara*), etc. It is stated in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam that listening and singing praises of the name, form, qualities, sport, and abode of *īśvara* are the best among actions. Therefore, with reference to offering action unto *īśvara*, we shall discuss them in brief.

Pūjā (Worship)

Pūjā includes various actions, such as propitiating one's *iṣṭa-devatā*, personal deity, offering flowers unto him, venerating him, welcoming him, and offering different gifts to him. *Iṣṭa* means that which is desirable, dear, chosen, favorable, venerable, and revered. The particular form of the deity which is dear to the devotee, one for whom the devotee has a special corner in his heart and one whom he reveres the most is called his *iṣṭa-devatā*. Different devotees love and respect different deities depending upon their *saṃskāras* (tendencies carried forward from past births), upbringing, personality, beliefs, and needs. Vaiṣṇavas have a special liking for some form of Lord Viṣṇu, Śāivas like some form of Lord Śiva, and Śāktas have a special liking for some form of Śakti. These devotees worship the personal deities chosen by them. *Pūjā* is performed on the image of the *iṣṭa-devatā* or in a picture or a portrait of the deity or on some *pratīka*, symbol, or sometimes even in a *yantra*, mystical diagram. In a typical *pūjā*, the devotee first meditates upon the *devatā*, welcomes him, gives him a seat, washes his feet, bathes him, decorates and embellishes him with clothes, ornaments, garlands, etc., offers flowers, incense, lamp, food, shows him *ārati* (showing of lamp with five or more lights and waving it around the image from head to foot), offers *pradakṣiṇā* (circumambulation), does *namaskāra* (prostrations), sings his praises, etc.

All the three—body, speech and mind—are involved in *pūjā*. To illustrate, while giving the bath, water is poured upon the *devatā* with hands, a *mantra* (sacred chants or a sacred text) or hymn is recited by the organ of speech, and *īśvara* is devoutly meditated upon in the mind. In this way, the devotee's entire personality is involved in the *pūjā* and there is very little scope for mechanicalness or distraction. During *pūjā*, various rituals or actions are performed and so the mind gets a wide field to roam around. Moreover, the *devatā* is the focus of every action. *Pūjā* therefore allows the mind to maintain a flow of thoughts centered upon the *devatā*. Maintaining the flow of thoughts wherein the object of every thought is the same is called meditation. In this

manner, *pūjā* becomes the means or stepping stone for meditation, which is the next step.

We can invoke either the *saguṇa* (with attributes) or the *nirguṇa* (without attributes) aspect of any deity. For example, in the image of Śrī Krishna, we can invoke Krishna as a child who steals our heart by playing the flute, or the one roaming in Vrindāvana (the place where Krishna lived as a child), lifting the mountain Govardhana, or we can invoke the omniscient Nārāyaṇa as *saguṇa-nirākāra* (with attributes and yet formless) and ultimately, we can invoke *nirguṇa-nirākāra brahman* (*brahman* without attributes and form) in the same image. Out of these three—*saguṇa-sākāra* (with attributes and form), *saguṇa-nirākāra* (with attributes but without form), and *nirguṇa-nirākāra* (without attributes and form)—the aspect to be invoked depends upon the devotee's inclination.

There is a sequence for performing the different steps in a *pūjā* and there is a method of performing each step. Therefore, alertness is called for in performing each step. *Pūjā* becomes a useful means for cultivating alertness and concentration of the mind.

In *pūjā*, there is no interaction with another human being. All interaction is with the Lord, for whom we have no likes and dislikes. There is devotion for him in our heart. The Lord in turn has no likes and dislikes toward us. In fact, he is the mother and father and everything to all of us. Being the indwelling self of everyone, the Lord knows us thoroughly, and the best part is that he accepts us as we are. It is because of this that we feel safe with the Lord and do not see any need to resort to hypocrisy or pretension. Thus, *pūjā* provides an ambience wherein the devotee in us gets invoked. By means of *pūjā*, we can build a beautiful and healthy relationship with the Lord. To invoke devotion from our heart and to express that devotion, it is necessary to have a relationship with the Lord. The devotee can look upon the Lord as his mother, father, master, friend, son, or even as beloved.

Pūjā is an action and it brings the grace of *īśvara*. If *pūjā* is done with the intention of fulfilling some desire, then by the grace of *īśvara*, that desire will get fulfilled. And if it is performed just to please the Lord without any personal agenda, it purifies the heart and liberates it from the impulses of attachment and aversion. In course of time, devotion becomes firm and unswerving in the heart that is thus purified. The main obstacles in the arising of devotion in the heart are attachments and aver-

sions. As attachments and aversions begin to recede by *īśvara*'s grace, devotion for *īśvara* becomes firm.

Anurāga for doing *pūjā* is called devotion. *Anurāga* means total and loving absorption with the object of love. Performing *pūjā* can become an act of interest only with such an affection, which is always fresh and new. Without the love for it, doing the same *pūjā* every day can become mechanical. Therefore, if the seeker can make each *upacāra* (step of the *pūjā*) interesting according to his/her liking and expertise, then *anurāga* for *pūjā* can be sustained and even enhanced.

Kathā (Śravaṇam)

Prose or metrical composition that narrates or describes the Lord's form, beauty, qualities, nature, his sports, his character, and even his true nature is called *kathā*. Great saints have highly emphasized the glory of singing and listening to the *kathā* of the Lord. In Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, King Parikṣit says that there are three kinds of human beings in the world: a *mukta* (one who is liberated), a *mumukṣu* (seeker of truth), and a *viṣāyī* (sensualist). None of these three ever gets satiated with the *kathā* of the Lord. The liberated are those who are happy in the self by the knowledge of the self and whose craving per se has ceased forever. Even they go on lovingly singing and listening to the glories of the Lord and still remain dissatisfied, as it were. Even though they are free from duties and compulsions, they forever wish to sing and listen to the glories of the Lord. The Lord's glories are so captivating that even sages, who are free from all bondage and who revel in the self, wish to worship him without any agenda. For *mumukṣus*, the *kathā* of the Lord is verily the remedy or cure for the ailment called *bhava-roga*, meaning the repeated cycle of birth and death. For *viṣāyīs* too, the Lord's *kathā* is something that enthralls their ears and the mind. That being the case, who could not be attracted or interested in the enchanting, pleasing, and savory narration of the Lord's glories?

In Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, King Parikṣit requests Śrī Śukadeva to describe Śrī Krishna and his life in great detail and says, "I have given up food and water, and yet hunger and thirst do not bother me at all because I am totally satiated by drinking the nectar in the form of the description of Lord Krishna's *līlā* (amorous or playful sports) flowing from your lotus-like mouth." Pleased with what Parikṣit said, Śrī Śukadeva says, "You have developed a natural affinity and love for the *kathā* of Lord Vāsudeva. Just as the water of the Gaṅgā

or the *carāṇa-amṛta* (water in which Lord's feet are washed) of the *śaligrāma* (stone which symbolizes Lord Viṣṇu) sanctifies everything, so too, queries regarding the *kathā* of the Lord sanctify all the three, namely, the narrator, the enquirer, and the listener.

Moreover, in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Gopīs (cowherd women of Vrindāvana who were the ardent devotees of Śrī Krishna) say, "O, Śyāma-sundara! Your *kathā* is indeed the nectar for the beings who are afflicted and scorched by life. Eminent sages too sing your *kathā* because it destroys all sins. Merely listening to your *kathā* brings happiness and auspiciousness. It is filled with limitless grandeur. Those who narrate and sing your *kathā* are the most munificent in the world."

Kathā forcibly draws the mind and brings it to the Lord. In Bhramara-gītā, the Gopīs state that one who enjoys even a particle of the nectar in the form of listening to the acts of Śrī Krishna becomes free of all the pairs of opposites, such as attachment, aversion, happiness, unhappiness, etc. The effect of listening to the *kathā* is such that some people even give up their house and all belongings and become beggars. They do not keep any possessions with them and fill their stomach merely by begging. But even in such conditions, they are so addicted to listening to the *kathā* of Śrī Krishna that they cannot just give it up. Rukmiṇi (consort of Lord Krishna) says, "O Tribhuvana-sundara! Your glories entering the heart through the gates of the ears pacify the distress of each and every limb and the agony of countless births of the one who listens to your *kathā*. In Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Śrī Krishna himself tells Uddhava, "Just as by applying collyrium, the defects of the eyes get removed and the capacity of the eyes to see even the minute things is gained, so too, O Uddhava, by listening and singing of my most sacred sports and acts, the dirt of the mind gets washed and the true nature of the subtle truth becomes evident."

In the same manner, singing the glory of the *kathā* of Lord Rāma, Śrī Tulasīdāsa says that the *kathā* of Rāma is akin to the boat for crossing the river of *saṃsāra* (life of becoming). It gives repose to the learned and delights the mind of all human beings. It is the eradicator of the sins of Kali-yuga (the iron age). In Kali-yuga it is like the milch cow, the impartor of all the desired results. For noble people, it is the best life-saving elixir. It is the destroyer of the fear of birth and death. With reference to the character of Śrī Rāma, Tulasīdāsaji says that the whole host of Lord's qualities and virtues, when sung or listened to, are greatly benefi-

cial to the world. They serve as the imparters of prosperity, *dharma*, and freedom. These virtues are comparable to those of the preceptors for knowledge, detachment, and *yoga*. They are like the *Aśvinikumāras*, the physicians of the gods for the destruction of the terrible disease of *saṃsāra*. They destroy and bring to cessation all sins, mental affliction, and sorrow. They destroy the disorders of passion and anger. They eliminate the darkness of ignorance.

Listening to the Bhagavad Gita, the Upaniṣads, and other Vedantic texts from a teacher is also *śravaṇam*. During *śravaṇam*, the mind of the listener is contemplating on *īśvara*. In the *śravaṇam* of the *kathās* of Purāṇas, thinking or contemplation is primarily on *saguṇa-brahman* (*brahman* with attributes) and in the *śravaṇam* of Vedānta, contemplation is primarily on *nirguṇa-brahman* (*brahman* without attributes).

Kīrtanam (Singing)

The word *kīrtanam* is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *kṛt*, which has several meanings, such as pronouncing, narrating, chanting with the discipline of *svaras*, singing *īśvara*'s name, praising, eulogizing, etc. Thus, *kīrtanam* includes describing or singing the actions and play of the Lord, chanting his name, singing hymns and eulogies pertaining to the Lord, in words that are pleasing to ears and in melodious voice. Speech is prominent in *kīrtanam*. Chaitanya Mahāprabhu (a great devotee of Śrī Krishna) and his followers interpret *kīrtanam* as singing the Lord's name loudly with drums, etc., or singing melodiously with instruments such as *vīṇā*, flute, *sītār*, etc. *Pūjā* is the propitiation of *īśvara* at the level of the organs of action. It uses all three levels—body, speech and mind—whereas *kīrtanam* is worshipping *īśvara* at the level of speech. Speech is also an organ of action, but in *kīrtanam*, the role of organs of action other than speech is nil or minor. In *kīrtanam*, primarily speech and the mind come into play. *Kīrtanam* is an excellent means to invoke devotion, or to strengthen or firm up the already existent devotion for the Lord. Singing the glories of *kīrtanam*, Śrī Śukadeva tells King Parikṣit in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, “O Parikṣit, Kali-yuga is the repository of a whole host of defects, but it is possessed of one great quality, which is that it liberates the devotee from all attachments and enables him to attain *paramātmā* if he resorts to *saṃkīrtanam* of Śrī Krishna.” If *saṃkīrtanam* of Śrī Krishna's name, his sports and actions, his qualities, etc., is performed, or if his glories, grandeur, etc. are heard, the Lord himself enters and abides in the heart of the devotee. With his

presence he destroys all the grief and unhappiness of the seeker, just as the sun removes darkness, a storm of dust, etc. That speech which is centered on the majestic qualities of the Lord is indeed the most sacred, auspicious, and true. Words that sing the supremely sacred glories of the Lord alone are the most charming, pleasing, and fresh. It is that which gives the greatest happiness to the mind.

In Rāmācaritamānasa, Tulasīdāsaji has sung the great glory of the name of Lord Rāma. Goswāmiji says that usually, the name and the one who is named (form) are one. It would be an offence to consider either one of them as primary or subservient. But it is seen that the form (named) is dependent upon the name. The form cannot be known without the name. Without knowing the name, the form is not identified even if we come across it, whereas even without the knowledge of the form, mere remembrance of the name can beget great devotion in the heart. Tulasīdāsaji very beautifully says that if you wish to have light within and without, then place the jewel of the name of Rāma on the threshold of the door of the tongue. *Yogīs* who are detached from the world are always on their guard by constantly doing *japa* of the sacred name of Rāma, and they experience unsurpassable happiness. Even those who are desirous of knowing the secret truth do the *japa* of the name and attain knowledge. Devotees in despair also do the *japa* of *īśvara*'s name and thereby become free from great obstacles. Name has power and impact in all the four *yugas* (ages), but all the more so in Kali-yuga. It is so because other than *saṃkīrtanam*, there is no other means of emancipation or removal of pain in Kali-yuga. *Nirguṇa* (without attributes) and *saguṇa* (with attributes) are the two forms of *brahman*. Tulasīdāsaji says, ‘in my opinion, name is greater than both the forms, for it subdues both the forms with its power.’ *Brahman* in both the forms is difficult to attain or access, but name facilitates both. Repetition of the name dries up the sea of *saṃsāra*. The devotee who lovingly repeats *īśvara*'s name gains victory over the army of delusion without any effort and, immersed in love, dwells in the happiness of the self. With the grace of the name, he becomes free from worries and anxieties even in dream.

While delineating the greatness and significance of name and *saṃkīrtanam*, we have mentioned just two names, namely, Rāma and Krishna. But the greatness of name applies equally to any other name of *īśvara*. In addition to the singing of name, *kīrtanam* includes the narration of the Lord's attributes or character, the singing of hymns, *bhajans* (devotional songs), etc. When

kīrtanam is done with great devotion, it brings the Lord's grace, which leads to the attainment of the Lord.

It is said that there are nine different types of devotion: they are *śravaṇam* (listening), *kīrtanam* (singing), *smaraṇam* (remembering), *pāda-sevanam* (serving the feet), *arcanam* (offering flowers), *vandanam* (bowing down), *dāsyam* (becoming the servant of the Lord), *sakhyam* (having the relationship of friendship with the Lord), and lastly, *ātma-nivedanam* (offering oneself). *Śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam* have been discussed at length. *Arcanam* and *vandanam* are the limbs of *pūjā*, and are therefore included in *pūjā*. *Smaraṇam* is included in *dhyānam* (meditation). *Ātma-nivedanam* is involved in all the nine types. In this manner, all these nine types of devotion get included in the devotion at the level of body, speech, and mind.

Offering the Mind (Meditation, Mental Worship)

Pūjā, which is primarily worship at the level of the body, also involves thinking or meditating upon *īśvara* at the level of the mind. But in *pūjā* the mind gets a wide field to wander about. In *kīrtanam*, the range or the scope of the mind to wander gets restricted. Therefore, *kīrtanam* requires a greater concentration than *pūjā*. And in mental worship or meditation, the scope of the mind to wander is extremely restricted, and thus the focus of the mind is extremely deep and centered. Here we shall discuss mental worship.

A devotee who has listened (*śravaṇam*) to the form, attributes, grandeur, glories, truth, etc. of the Lord through *kathās* and who has also sung the Lord's name, hymns, etc., With devotion (*saṁkīrtanam*) now mentally worships the Lord by meditating on those very attributes, glories, etc. Maintaining a flow of thoughts whose subject matter is *īśvara* is called meditation. *Mānasa-pūjā* or mental worship is one type of meditation. Without any external form or materials of worship, the devotee worships *īśvara* in the mind itself, performing the same *upacāras*, steps. If a hymn is sung mentally, that also gets included in meditation. The Lord's magnificent and benign attributes can be meditated upon with great love and affection. Mental *japa* or repetition of Lord's name or a *mantra* is also an exalted type of meditation.

Concentration of the mind can be cultivated with the help of mental *japa* or repetition. For *japa*, a name or a *mantra* of the personal deity is selected. One need not look upon any given name or *mantra* as superior

or inferior to any other name or *mantra*. The important thing is that the *japa* is done with devotion. Therefore, the name or the *mantra* which invokes devotion from the heart should be considered best for oneself because devotion or love plays a pivotal role in purification of the heart and ultimately getting absorbed in the Lord.

In the *yoga-śāstra*, scripture pertaining to *yoga*, and even in the Bhagavad Gita, repetition and dispassion are recommended as the means for cultivating concentration of the mind on the object of meditation, which may be the form or name or *mantra* of the Lord. Attachment and aversion for the objects of the world distract the mind from its focus or the object of meditation, and connect it with the objects of the world. If attachment for something causes the mind to dwell upon it, the mind should be freed from that attachment by seeing the defects obtaining in that object. Conversely, if hatred or aversion is the cause for the mind to dwell upon an object, then the mind must be freed from it by seeing the virtues of that object. Applying this process or method is called dispassion. Through dispassion, the mind should be freed from the objects of the world, brought back to the object of meditation, and centered there. Repeating this practice of disengaging the mind from the objects of the world and bringing it to the object of meditation is called *abhyāsa*, repetition. With *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, dispassion, the mind can be focused on the object of meditation, which can be a name of the Lord, a *mantra*, a form, etc.

By maintaining the flow of thoughts with the Lord as its center, the mind gradually takes the form of the Lord; as the mind, so the man. Therefore the qualities of the Lord slowly begin to manifest in the devotee's personality. Ultimately, he gets identified with the Lord. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says, "O Pārtha, by constant meditation, a *yogī* whose mind does not stray into objects because of repeated practice of *yoga* attains the divine *puruṣa* (*īśvara*), who is beginningless, who is the supreme ordainer, who is subtler than the subtle, who is the substratum of the entire creation, who is inconceivable and effulgent like sun, and who is beyond the darkness of ignorance." The *yogī*'s mind takes the form of this divine being. In short, he becomes one with the Lord.

Describing the method of meditation, Lord Krishna says, closing the gates of the sense organs and steadying the mind, which is ever vacillating, holding the breath in the head and chanting *om*, the single-syllabled

name, and meditating upon me (who is the meaning of *om*), the *yogī* attains the divine and most exalted end. The devotee who single-pointedly meditates upon me easily gains me. He attains me and does not have to take another birth.

This discussion pertains to meditation upon *saguṇa-brahman*. Attaining the Lord therefore means identification with the Lord or reaching the abode of the Lord, which is Brahma-loka (abode of Brahmā). At the end of the cycle of creation, when even the world of Brahmā is dissolved, this devotee gets liberated, meaning he attains *krama-mukti*, liberation in stages. That which is known as Brahma-loka in the Vedas is described in Purāṇas as Vaikuṇṭha (the abode of Viṣṇu), Kailāsa (the abode of Śiva), Sāketa (the abode of Rāma), Goloka (the abode of Krishna), etc. By meditation or the pursuit of *saguṇa-brahman*, the ego continues to exist, albeit in the subtlest form. Therefore, the devotee attains *krama-mukti*, but not *jīvan-mukti*, liberation which is here and now, or in other words liberation while living.

Devotion Characterized by Knowledge

The last stage or phase of devotion is knowledge. Here, the devotee meditates upon the Lord as his own self, thereby negating even the slightest duality that exists between *jīva* and *īśvara*. Earlier in the discussion of *īśvara* and *jīva*, it has already been stated that *īśvara* looks upon himself to be a *jīva* because of ignorance. It is ignorance that makes him entertain the notion that *īśvara* is different from himself. Therefore, knowledge alone can bridge the false distance between *jīva* and *īśvara*. Beginning from the offering of the *karma-phala*, the result of action, to *īśvara* up to the offering of the *citta*, mind, which is meditation upon the Lord, this is all nothing but the worship of *saguṇa-brahman*.

Now is the meditation upon *brahman* that is *nirguṇa* (free from attributes) and *nirviśeṣa* (free from qualifications), and which is the substratum of both the *jīva* and the *saguṇa-brahman*. The result of this contemplation or meditation culminates in knowledge of the identity between *jīva* and *brahman*.

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says in the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi that a discriminating person, giving up the desires for seeking pleasures from sense objects, should surrender unto the teacher, who is an ocean of compassion and the most exalted among the knowers of *brahman*, and should seek to know the truth of *ātmā*, the self. The

wise have prescribed four qualifications to be eligible for self-knowledge. They are: *nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka*, discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral; *vairāgya*, dispassion for the pleasures of the worldly objects; *śamādi-ṣaṭka-sampatti*—the group of six virtues, which are *śama* (control or mastery over the mind), *dama* (control over the organs of action and the organs of knowledge), *uparati* (doing one's duty), *titikṣā* (forbearance), *śraddhā* (faith), and *samādhāna* (single-pointedness of mind); and lastly, *mumukṣutvam*, intense yearning for freedom. Knowledge can take place if these qualifications are present, and cannot take place in their absence. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya further says in the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi that of all the qualifications or the means required for freedom, devotion is the most exalted. Here, devotion means contemplating upon the nature of the self.

Thus, the nature of devotion now undergoes a change. Now the seeker even offers the subtle *ahaṅkāra*, ego. This offering takes place in the wake of the knowledge that the ego is false. Lack of discrimination between *ātmā*, self, and *anātmā*, non-self, has given rise to *ahaṅkāra*. Through discrimination of the self and the non-self, and through devotion characterized by contemplation upon the real nature of the self, the apparent nature of the *ahaṅkāra* becomes evident and, through the knowledge of the true nature of the self, the *ahaṅkāra* is offered unto *īśvara*.

Ātmā or the self, which is of the nature of knowledge or consciousness, is the witness of the three states of the mind (waking, dream, and deep sleep) and is different from the *pañca-kōśas* (the five sheaths, beginning from the sheath made of food to the sheath of bliss). The self sees everything, but is not seen by anybody. Blessed by its presence, the body, sense organs, mind, and intellect carry out their functions. The indwelling self is ever of the nature of unbroken happiness, is homogenous, and is of the nature of consciousness. It is not subject to birth and death. It is eternal, changeless, and ever free.

The world that is experienced is in reality nothing but *brahman*. Just as the pot born of clay is not different from clay, so too the world born of *brahman* is not in any way different from it. Just as silver is superimposed upon the mother-of-pearl, similarly, the world is superimposed upon *brahman* due to a false notion. Therefore, what we call the world is in reality merely a name. What is, is *brahman*. The limitless *brahman* is

sat, existence, non-dual, extremely pure, of the nature of knowledge, taintless, serene, free from beginning and end, actionless, and of the nature of joy. It is free from all the modifications and duality superimposed by *māyā*, the limiting adjunct of *īśvara*. It is eternal, partless, free of all the attributes, and ever indestructible. It is self-effulgent, homogenous consciousness, free from the triad of the knower, known, and knowledge. Human beings can gain freedom from bondage only by the knowledge of the identity of *brahman* and *jīva*.

The Upaniṣads declare “That thou art.” Listening to this statement of the Upaniṣads from the teacher, a doubt arises in the student’s mind: I am limited in every way—in knowledge, power, pervasiveness etc.—whereas *brahman* is omniscient, omnipotent, and all-pervasive. So how can I be *brahman*? Replying to this doubt, the teacher explains that the difference or the gap which appears to you between the *jīva* (the individual) and *īśvara* is from the standpoint of the *upādhi*, the limiting adjunct of the body-mind complex. With the help of *māyā*, the projecting power, *brahman* appearing in the guise of the *upādhi* of the totality is called *īśvara*. And the same *brahman*, appearing in the guise of the *upādhi* of the individual in the form of the *pañca-kōśas*, five sheaths, is called the *jīva*.

Just as an actor takes the two roles of beggar and king, similarly, one *brahman* appears, as it were, in the two roles of *jīva* and *īśvara*. In reality, *brahman* is the absolute truth, of the nature of knowledge, happiness, and purity. It is self-effulgent consciousness. Moreover, O disciple, it is your true nature. Thus, knowing the identity of *brahman* as the self, and abiding as *brahman*, the one undivided homogenous truth, is *mokṣa*, liberation.

In this manner, through the instruction of the teacher based on the scriptures, the disciple realizes the truth with his own understanding and experience and, withdrawing the sense organs and focusing the mind, remains steady in the self. Describing the experience of the disciple, the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi says:

Oh! Having known that *brahman* and *ātmā* are one, my intellect and its thoughts have suddenly disappeared, as it were. Just as the hailstones dropping from the sky in the rainy season fall into the ocean and, having melted, become one with the water, so too my mind, drowning in the nectarine and blissful ocean of *brahman*, is absorbed in it. It has become of the nature of happiness, and has at-

tained total peace. It is impossible to describe the glory of *brahman*, which is all happiness; much less is it possible to conceive of it through the mind. I am blessed indeed. I am totally satisfied. By the grace of my teacher, I am freed from the prison of *saṃsāra*. I have become eternal happiness, and am full and adequate. I am Nārāyaṇa, the destroyer of the demon Narakāśura. I am also Śaṅkara, the destroyer of the demon Tripurāśura. I am the supreme *puruṣa* (*īśvara*). I am the indivisible consciousness, witness of all, independent and free from the sense of I and mine.

Lord Krishna also describes the wise person in more than one place in the Bhagavad Gita. Having gained the knowledge of the self, the human being becomes intelligent in the true sense of the word and becomes one who has done what needs to be done. Giving up all desires and becoming totally free from cravings, he moves about in the world. Having become free from the sense of I and mine, he gains peace or liberation while living. Freed from the sense of doership and attachment for the result of action, he is ever content and free from all dependence. In spite of appearing ever engaged in action, in reality he is not doing anything. He is the one who is happy with what he gets by chance, is above all the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold, has no animosity towards anyone, and is the same in benefit or deprivation. In spite of performing actions, he is not bound by them. His intellect is steeped in *brahman*, his self is *brahman*, he abides in *brahman*, his one and only goal is *brahman*, and his *puṇyas* (meritorious deeds) and *pāpas* (unbecoming deeds) are burnt by the fire of knowledge. He does not have to take rebirth. He is the same toward a *brāhmaṇa* endowed with knowledge and humility, toward a cow, an elephant, a dog, and even a dog-eater. His mind abides in the sameness that is *brahman* and he has conquered the cycle of birth and death that is *saṃsāra*, even while living in the body.

Thus, the culmination of *bhakti* is in knowledge, in *mokṣa*, liberation, and in *jīvan-mukti*, liberation even while living. This is the goal of life and it can be achieved right here.

The Greatness of Devotion

Devotion characterized by *samarpaṇa*, offering unto *īśvara*, brings *īśvara*’s grace and is the sole refuge or shelter of the devotee. It is the meritorious deeds of the past births which give rise to *śraddhā*, faith, and devotion to *īśvara*. It is this which makes the devotee

take refuge in *īśvara*. In the beginning, *īśvara* may be remembered only in the midst of pain or adversity. Thereafter, he may be remembered when a desire is to be fulfilled. Then the devotion of this *ārta*, person in distress, and *arthārthī*, person in need, gets converted into *jijñāsā*, meaning the desire to know the truth of *īśvara*. Ultimately, it reaches the climax or fulfillment in the knowledge of *īśvara*. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that all my devotees are great, but a wise man is the best among all, for he knows me as his self and he is my self too. I am the one whom he loves the most and he is the one whom I love the most.

Do you mean to say, O Lord, that you too have likes and dislikes? No! All are equal to me. I have no partiality for anyone, nor do I have hatred for anyone. But yes, those who worship me with devotion are in me and I am in them. This means it is devotion that makes an impartial and neutral Lord also partial. The Lord is partial toward a devotee. The unbounded devotion of a devotee controls even the Lord, as it were. The Lord says in Ādipurāṇa, “I am ever free, and yet devotees have tied me by the rope of their love. I am ever unconquered, and yet conquered by the devotees. Helplessly I am under their sway.” It is stated in the Padmapurāṇa that those whose hearts are inhabited by devotion for none other than Hari (Lord Viṣṇu) may appear to be poor or humble, but in reality they are the most blessed beings in the whole world. Hari too, being tied by their devotion, relinquishing his abode, abides in the hearts of the devotees. How devotion taps the grace of *īśvara* is stated thus by the Lord in the Bhagavad Gita:

Those whose minds abide in me, whose sense organs are also focused in me, who teach and expound my *tattva*, truth, to each other and also narrate my life stories to each other, attain the utmost contentment and unsurpassable happiness. To those devotees who always dwell upon me and worship me prompted by pure love, I impart the knowledge of my true nature by which they attain me as their very self. With the desire to bless them, abiding in their hearts, I illumine the bright lamp of knowledge in their hearts and remove the darkness born of ignorance.

Bh.G. 10.9-11

Elsewhere in the Gita, Lord Krishna says:

To my devotees who, offering all their actions unto me and considering me as their only end in

life, worship me as the sole object of their meditation, and whose minds totally abide in me, I uplift them from the ocean of *saṃsāra*, which is ever engulfed by death.

Bh.G. 12.6-7

Showing the greatness of devotion, The Lord says:

Even if an extremely vicious and immoral person worships me with a mind that has no sense of separation from me, he should be considered a righteous person, for he has the right conviction. Before long, he becomes a *dharmātmā*, one who is in conformity with the order, and he gains eternal peace. O Kaunteya, may you undoubtedly declare that my devotee is never destroyed.

Bh.G. 9.30-31

With reference to how devotion taps *īśvara*'s grace and thereby enables one to attain the goal of life, the Lord says in the Bhagavad Gita:

O Arjuna, one who performs all actions, having taken my refuge, attains the eternal and imperishable end due to my grace. Mentally offering all actions unto me, accepting me as the only goal, and with your discerning intellect always offer your mind to me. Having your mind fixed on me, you will cross all the difficulties with my grace. O Arjuna, with your entire being, surrender unto *īśvara* alone. With his grace you will attain absolute peace and my eternal abode. Giving up all actions, take refuge in me alone. I will liberate you from all sins.

Bh.G. 18.62, 65-66

Praying for devotion, a devotee says:

O my master, I do not covet liberation and I have no desire for any accomplishments and wealth of the *saṃsāra*. But bringing my two palms together, I repeatedly beseech you, my Lord, that whether sleeping or awake, whether motionless or in motion, in happiness or in adversity, at home or in the deep forest, during daytime or at night, may I always be devoted to you.

May we too pray for this sacred and purifying devotion, and with its attainment, reach the ultimate goal.

Om tat sat

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WORSHIP OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

– Its Significance and Importance

By Swami Tattvavidananda

Significance of Dīpāvali

Dīpāvali message: “*Dīpāvali is a festival of lights. It is observed in commemoration of the triumph of the Divine Power over the force of darkness. Dīpāvali must be for us a transmutation of a life under the thrall of the senses to a life liberated from all bondage born of ignorance*” (Swami Ramdas).

Symbolically we light the lamps on this occasion. It is a festival, so people want to do something. They want to have something to do because people have a lot more enthusiasm to do than to know. They are not very keen to know much, but they are keen to do a lot. And therefore they go on lighting the lamps, which is fine. *Āvali* means ‘series.’ *Dīpāvali* therefore means ‘an array of lamps.’ A lamp stands for knowledge. Even when they keep a lamp inside the temple to dispel darkness, it is symbolic of knowledge dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

‘Universal Mother’ and the ‘Ultimate Reality’

On this day, Mahā Lakṣmī, the Universal Mother, is worshipped. In the context of the Upaniṣads, or what we call Vedānta, the Reality that is the origin of this entire universe is called *Brahman*. This *Brahman* is understood to be Absolute Existence and It is entirely free from attributes or particularities. It is *nirguṇa*, without attributes, and also *nirākāra*, entirely formless. Even a mental form is not allowed in *Brahman*, and therefore it is *nirūpa*. It doesn’t have any particular features. People look for certain features because features define a thing; they keep a thing in contrast to other things. The Supreme Reality, *Brahman*, being one without a second, does not admit any features, that is why it is called *nirviśeṣa*. It is also free from any modification, and therefore it is *avikriya*. It is also free from any movement or action, and therefore it is *niṣkriya*. Being *avikriya*, It does not undergo any modification whatsoever in Itself; that is how *Brahman* is understood. It is not possible to describe *Brahman*. You can only

make an effort by way of negation of what *Brahman* is not, as in “this is not (in) *Brahman*,” etc. All the above terms are of negation only. If I have to give an example, I would say that it is like the shoreless ocean. The middle of the ocean is shoreless and waveless, there are no features. In whichever direction you look, it is just the same. That is how *Brahman* is.

Manifest and the Unmanifest

But when the same *Brahman* is viewed from a different standpoint, viz. the standpoint of this universe, such as when we say, “This universe has originated from *Brahman*, it is sustained by *Brahman*, as and when it ends, which is called annihilation, the universe will resolve in *Brahman*,” then you are looking at *Brahman* as the creator, sustainer, and annihilator. Also, now you have given multiple attributes to *Brahman*—that It is the Originator, It is what sustains this universe, and It is that into which the universe resolves. Therefore, when you view the same *Brahman* from the standpoint of the universe, it is called *Saguṇa Brahman*. Now It has acquired some attributes. The term *guṇas* could also be used in the technical sense: Creation is *rajo-guṇa* because a lot of activity is involved. Sustaining or maintaining is *sattva-guṇa*. For example, even to maintain a family you need a lot of understanding and skill, and you have to work hard. Then the annihilation is *tamo-guṇa*. Now *Brahman* is *sattva-rajas-tamo-guṇātmaka*, or *Saguṇa Brahman*. *Brahman* in Itself is called the Absolute Existence, *Nirguṇa Brahman*. But from the standpoint of this universe, the same *Brahman* is called *Saguṇa Brahman*.

Brahman Alone Appears as the Śakti

There is another name for that *Saguṇa Brahman*, namely ‘*Śakti*.’ It is wrong to suppose that *Śakti* is something other than *Brahman*. First you divide and then you struggle to unify. It is not some other *Brahman*. *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Śakti* is not some other entity. It is the same *Brahman*.

which, when viewed from the standpoint of the universe, apparently acquires the *guṇas* in order to create and maintain the universe. Therefore the same *Brahman* that we called *Nirguṇa Brahman* is now called *Saguṇa Brahman*. Recall the example of the shoreless ocean. Suppose an iceberg suddenly appears in the ocean. Now the ocean has acquired a feature; now you can say that the iceberg is in this direction but not in that direction. Already you are able to create a feature, an attribute, a particularity in the ocean. Between the earlier ocean, utterly featureless and totally free from any particularity, and the present ocean that is connected with the iceberg—what is the difference between that ocean and this ocean? It is the same ocean, it is not a different ocean. Therefore it is the same *Brahman* which is called *Śakti*. You should not be under the impression that *Brahman* is sitting on the right side and *Śakti* is sitting on the left side, that is merely a symbolic representation. *Brahman* alone is *Śakti*. This is how Sri Ramakrishna used to explain it in a unique way. The Purāṇic stories could be misleading at times if the symbolism is not properly understood.

Īśvara the Father is also the Mother

As the originator of this universe, *Brahman* is called the Father. The Father idea is there in the Middle East, but even before it came to the Middle East, it was present in India. *Brahman* is called the Father of the entire universe. That is why in the Vedic *mantras* you see “*Prajāpate na tvadetānyanyo viśvā jātāni pari tā babhūva.*” *O Prajāpatī*, the father of all life forms; *na tvad anyah*, other than You there are none else, You alone are; *etāni viśvā jātāni pari tā*, all these and those (unseen) life forms which are everywhere in the universe, all have arisen from You and they merge into You. You alone are.

This is how the Vedic *mantras* describe God as the Father (Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda Samhitā, 1-8-14-2). But God is also described as the Mother. We should not think that Father is different from Mother. The same *Īśvara* who is described as the Father is also described as the Mother because the human mind wants to look at the originator of this universe as the Father and also as the Mother.

Worshipping Īśvara as the Mother

All of us know we go to the mother with a lot more confidence and love than to the father. When it comes to the father, we are a bit cautious and keep some safe distance. Whereas with the mother you can be free because a mother’s love is a forgiving love. A father’s love is a commanding love. There is a difference, but it is the same love. So now we talk of Mother: *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu mātṛrūpeṇa saṁsthitā* (Devī Māhātmyam, 5-71, p. 75, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras). Therefore in every devotee’s heart, *Īśvara* is worshipped as the Father and the same *Īśvara* is worshipped as the Mother also. That is the specialty of Vedic *dharma*. The specialty of Hindu *dharma* is that *Īśvara* is worshipped not only as the Father, but also as the Mother. You don’t see much of that character in other faiths. In other faiths, *Īśvara* is worshipped predominantly as the Father. Of course, in Christianity there is the worship of the Mother Mary. It was not there to begin with, but became popular later. It became a cult within Christianity and it has its own followers. I am not sure if the Vatican approves it entirely. In Hinduism there is a full range of worship in the form of the Mother. That is how on the occasion of *Dīpāvali* we worship *Īśvara* as the Mother.

Devī Stuti: Adoring the Glory of the Universal Mother

Devī Māhātmyam (the glory of Mother) is from the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. In the context of performing a ritual using those verses, it is also known as *Caṇḍi Saptasatī*, meaning 700 *mantras* of the Universal Mother. There are in fact fewer than 600 verses, but some verses get divided into two or more *mantras*, thus making 700. For example, *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu mātṛrūpeṇa saṁsthitā namastasyai* is one *mantra*, *namastasyai* is the second *mantra*, and *namastasyai namo namaḥ* is the third *mantra*. So one verse splits into three *mantras*.

Mostly Mother is very loving. But occasionally Mother punishes too, hence the name *Caṇḍi*. *Caṇḍa* means anger, therefore *Caṇḍi* is the goddess of anger in the annihilation aspect. These *mantras* are used in *Caṇḍi-yāga*. In the *Saptasatī* there is one section where all the *devas* like *Agni*,

Vāyu, Varuṇa, Indra, etc. worship the Universal Mother. As part of that worship they recite these verses. This is how they praised the glory of the Mother. That is why this is called *Devī Stuti*. In the beginning you find the phrase *devā ucuḥ*, “the *devas* spoke this way”; they are praising the Mother saying, *namo devyai mahādevyai* (5-9, p. 69).

No Division Between the Father and the Mother

Father and Mother are not two separate entities; otherwise it becomes duality. Between the Father and the Mother there is no division. The Father is the Mother, and the Mother is the Father: *tvameva mātā ca pitā tvameva*, “You alone are the Mother, You alone are the Father.” The word *Devī* means ‘brilliant one.’ Generally people worship a photo or a *mūrti*, and they make it brilliant by decorating it with electric bulbs. But then you should not take that literally. You should always look for the significance of the word ‘brilliance.’ Suppose you say a young student is brilliant; what does it mean? It doesn’t mean some glow is coming from him. The brilliance is knowledge. Knowledge is always brilliance. *Īśvara* whom we worship is an embodiment of knowledge. Though you are worshipping a piece of stone, you are not worshipping an insentient *Īśvara*. The piece of stone stands for a sentient *Īśvara* who is all-knowledge, *sarvajña*; that is why He is called *Deva*. In feminine form the same *Īśvara* is called *Devī*.

Everything Belongs to the Mother Alone

Namaḥ, my prostration, unto the *Devī*. *Namaḥ* means ‘na me’ or ‘na mama,’ i.e. ‘not mine,’ that is the etymology. When you offer flowers and say *namaḥ*, you mean, “O Mother, these flowers are not mine.” Maybe the hand is mine? How can it be? What is the power that makes the hand move? Is that life-force yours? No, it is Mother’s life force only: *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu vṛttirūpeṇa saṁsthitā* (5-59, p.74). *Vṛtti* is activity. Suppose you take a flower and offer; it requires the life force in the hand. And not just the hand, but the mind also, because all actions originate in the mind. Thought is also energy, power. Thought resolves to offer a flower and then the power of thought is conveyed to the life force in the hand, which

comes to operation and the flower is picked up and offered. The flower belongs to the Mother. The power, the life-force that offers the flower also belongs to the Mother.

Mother is Śakti, the Universal Power

What about the knowledge which appears in the form of thought? That also belongs to Mother: *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu śaktirūpeṇa saṁsthitā* (5-32, p.72). Within us, *śakti* is manifesting in two forms. One is *prāṇa-śakti*, the power of the vital force, also called *kriyā-śakti*. The other is the power of knowledge, called *viññāna-śakti*. Therefore, the *śakti* which makes this offering possible is also the Mother.

Namaḥ—Surrendering Everything to the Mother

The flower belongs to the Mother. Mother created this entire *brahmāṇḍa*. We did not create the flowers. We make paper flowers, poor imitations of the real flowers. Suppose we put a real flower and paper flower next to each other; the paper will remain as paper without changing for a week, but the real flower withers away. Still, the real flower is supreme because it is a real one. The fake or imitation is not valuable, the original is important. Therefore it is the flower created by the Mother that you offer. In this creation and in this worship, everything is the Mother’s. *Na mama*, nothing is mine. Even children are not our children, they are the Mother’s children. In this way, everything is surrendered to the Mother. That is the meaning of *namaḥ*.

‘Not Mine, O Mother, but Thine’

The human mind wants to own and possess. It wants to say ‘my house’, etc. In the entire house, there is not one thing we created. Wood, steel, cement, water, everything is created by the Mother. In fact, we don’t even have the right to say ‘my body.’ The human mind always tries to say ‘my, my, my.’ The word ‘my’ in English is translated as ‘me’ in Sanskrit. ‘Me me me’—who says ‘me me me’? The sheep bleats like that. The sheep here stands for ignorance, which is why the sheep has to be herded. The one who herds the sheep is called a shepherd. Śiva is called *Paśupati*, the Lord of Animals. Who are the animals? The *jīvas*

are the animals: *catuṣpadām uta ca dvipadām*, four-legged and two-legged. *Īśvara* is the *Paśupati*, the Lord of Animals. He lords over two kinds of *paśus*, those with four legs and those with two legs. The same ideas prevalent in the Middle East have come from the shores of India via the silk route. This human weakness of saying ‘*me, me, me*’ is always there. Thus, at the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita (1-1), Dhṛtarāṣṭra says *māmakāḥ*, ‘*my people*.’

Offer Everything to the Mother, Saying Namaḥ

People believe they own and possess things. They not only own physical things, they possess and dominate other people also. Parents try to dominate the children for a few years. Then the equation will be reversed, and now the children will start dominating the parents. “Father, I asked you to sit there; why did you move from there?” the boy tells the father. Father keeps quiet; what can he say? He can see the anomaly, yet he keeps quiet. Therefore this possessive attitude, acquisitive spirit, is wrong. In Vedanta we always say that as long as you retain this possessive spirit, you will not come to know the truth. You will remain as an egoic entity because any possession belongs to an ego, it is the ego’s possession. You are that ego, and it is ignorance. Therefore we have to work on this ignorance. How to work? Sit before the Mother with devotion, take a flower, and offer it, saying *namaḥ*.

Neutralizing the Sense of Possessiveness

How many times should you say *namaḥ*? You can say it any number of times, because it is required to neutralize the sense of possessiveness. Some of you may have wondered why there is the repetition *namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namaḥ*. The idea is you have to stay with the vision. You can use this Devī Stuti in daily *pūjā*, daily chant or even daily contemplation. You can take one of these lines of Devī Stuti and contemplate.

Mother is in the Form of Consciousness

Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu cetanetyabhidhīyate (5-17, p.71). *Cetanā* is the waking consciousness. Before you wake up, you do not know anything. But the moment you wake up, the waking consciousness

is in place and therefore you become conscious of the body: “I am here in the bedroom, in the house. Now it is early morning and time to get up.” You become conscious of other members of the family, of society, of the jobs you have to perform, etc. So what you call the world is indeed shining in your consciousness. That consciousness, *cetanā*, where has it come from? It has originated from the Mother. In fact, the Mother alone is in the form of the waking consciousness in every life form. This is a meditation. You can contemplate. You can sit upright, close the eyes and say, “*yā devī sarvabhūteṣu cetanetyabhidhīyate*.” The Universal Mother is present in this body and mind as *cetanā*, because of which the eyes are able to see forms and colors, the ears are able to hear the sounds, taste buds are able to taste different tastes, the skin is able to feel heat, cold, and the sense of touch, and the mind is able to contemplate, think. This is the power of consciousness. This power has originated from the Universal Mother. I offer the power, *cetanā*, waking consciousness, unto the Mother. I say this three or four times because what is repeated becomes well established in the heart: *namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namaḥ*.

Doing with Love, with a Sense of Surrender, not Mechanically

You should chant the Devī Stuti with a sense of love, while contemplating upon the vision of the seer presented in the verses. The verses are not meant for hurriedly reciting one after the other and be done with it. You have to stay with each verse, thus converting the recitation into contemplation or meditation. The ṛṣi repeats the line *namastasyai* again and again for this purpose alone. Otherwise, he would have put it as *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu viṣṇumaya-cetanā-buddhi-nidrā-kṣudhā-ityādirūpeṇa saṁsthitā tasyai namaḥ*. You have to abide in the vision. You are surrendering yourself to the Mother. You have to abide in that love and stay with that idea of self-surrender. A *homa*, fire ritual, is also done with these verses as *namastasyai svāhā, namastasyai svāhā, namo namaḥ svāhā*, etc. Worship, recitation, or fire worship should be done with a sense of love, with a sense of surrender, not mechanically. Then the ritual acquires

a transformative power. It will transform you; the inner transmutation will happen. That is the idea behind the chanting of all these prayers.

Divine Qualities Reflect the Divine Attainment

People say ‘God, God, God’ so many times every day. You have to understand a very special principle of Vedanta. God is not only in the form of a *mūrti*. God is the very spiritual qualities within you: *sadguṇa-prāptiḥ eva Īśvara-prāptiḥ*. Suppose you travel to a famous temple, such as *Kāśī*. You feel that you arrived at the abode of the Lord; that is fine. But then the Lord abides in the heart too. Suppose there is *śraddhā*, earnestness, in you. It is a *sadguṇa*, a divine quality. The Lord alone is in the form of *śraddhā*. Therefore there are two types of focus. In one kind of focus, you worship the Mother with flowers in a ritual. Then there is another focus. You look within, you observe your interior. In that interior, you see an earnestness called *śraddhā*. You see an earnestness to know the truth, to worship the Mother and to surrender to Her. That earnestness is another form of the Mother, *śraddhārūpeṇa saṁsthitā* (5-50, p. 73). Bhagavān Buddha was once asked to talk about God. He said, “You first practice *sat-caritram*, the good conduct,” and he gave *aṣṭa-vidha-caritram*, the eight divine qualities. “You practice them first, get established in these qualities. Then I will talk to you about God,” he is reported to have said. Suppose he said, “God is in this form.” Then people would worship that form and ignore the divine qualities. Therefore God is not only in the form of a *mūrti*, but also in the form of some of these great qualities that we should cultivate in our hearts, such as *śraddhā*, earnestness, and *śānti*, quietude (5-47, p. 73).

Divine Mother in the Form of *Śānti*, Inner Quietude and Cheerfulness

Śānti includes not only inner quietude, but also cheerfulness. Cheerfulness doesn’t mean jumping and shouting, it means being naturally joyous. You should not be bogged down by the burdens of *saṁsāra*. The burdens of *saṁsāra* are all your imagination, they are not real. You should not get bogged down by them. You should keep them aside. When the mind stops thinking, *saṁsāra* will end. *Saṁsāra* will be there only when the mind is working feverishly. When the mind be-

comes quiet, there is no burden of *saṁsāra*. The natural joy wells up; that is *śānti*.

Divine Mother in the Form of *Kṣudha*, Hunger

Another interesting thing—I am sure we are all hungry and sumptuous food is waiting for us. There is *kṣudha*, hunger, in us. Now, did you create this hunger? No. What does the hunger signify? Hunger signifies the power of life, which is the Mother, the *prāṇaśakti*: *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu kṣudharūpeṇa saṁsthitā* (5-26, p. 72).

Divine Mother in the Form of the Faculty of Thinking

Not only good qualities are given to us, but also faculties, such as the faculty of thinking: *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu buddhirūpeṇa saṁsthitā* (5-20, p. 71). The power of thinking is given to us. In fact, it is not someone sitting above giving to us; the Mother has manifested that way. For example, this light before us is given by the electricity. Now, how did electricity give it? Is electricity sitting in the power house and from there by a miracle did it give? No, electricity has arrived here, entered the bulb, and made it glow. The Universal Mother has entered this body-mind and is reflecting in it in the form of the faculty of thinking.

‘O Mother, I Surrender my Mistakes Also Unto You’

Sometimes people commit errors. Suppose you look at a rope and assume it to be a snake. How did you manage that? You could not see the rope due to the inadequate light. But how did you project this snake? Firstly, the rope is ‘covered up’ and you cannot see it clearly—that is *tamoguṇa*. But you do see something thick and long. If it is pitch-dark you won’t see a snake. You should be able to see something—that is *sattvaguṇa*. Then you project a snake—that is *rajoguṇa*. So the three *guṇas* should come together for you to mistake a rope for a snake. You should see something (*sattvaguṇa*), fail to see the rope as a rope because of the darkness (*tamoguṇa*), and then project a snake (*rajoguṇa*). Thus Mother is the cause of *bhrānti*, mistake, in every person’s head: *yā devī sarvabhūteṣu bhrāntirūpeṇa saṁsthitā* (5-74, p. 75). Even to make a mistake you need the blessing of the Mother. So many errors and mistakes we have committed, so many false notions we have

entertained. That is why we are where we are. Even the mistakes are because of the Mother's power. All our intellectual accomplishments are also because of Her grace. Therefore I surrender both the mistakes and the accomplishments unto the Mother: *namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namaḥ*.

The three *guṇas* are manifesting at the macro level also. Creation is *rajas*, sustenance is *sat-tva*, and annihilation is *tamas*. The three *guṇas* together constitute the fundamental principle of the universe. Therefore Mother is the Originator, Sustainer, and Annihilator of creation.

Mother in the Form of Tṛpti, Satiation

Suppose we enjoy some nice food. At the end of it, how do we feel? You may not say it because of politeness, but how do you feel? You feel a sense of satiation, called *tṛpti*. You get that sense of satiation—"I had a good dinner"—because of the Mother. You must be hale and healthy to eat well and feel satiated. That health, that hunger,

that food, that feeling of *tṛpti*, satiation, that you experience—all are the manifestations of the Universal Mother's power.

See God, the Divine Mother, Everywhere

We should see God everywhere, not just among human beings. The text says: *bhūtānām cākhileṣu yā*, she who abides in all life forms (5-77, p. 75). The Mother is not sitting at one place, she is *vyāptidevī*, all-pervading light of awareness (5-77, p. 75). She is like this electric light, which is not merely confined to the bulb; it is spreading everywhere. *Devī* means the power of effulgence. Look all around: a dog, a cat, a mosquito, a fly, an elephant, a tiger, a deer, a bird, a fish—in all these life forms, even in plants, the power of life and power of sentience is the Mother alone. Therefore you should see God, the Mother, everywhere. It is all the one Universal Mother, no different from the Father. That is the spirit with which you should worship the Universal Mother: *namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namaḥ*.

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श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥४-३९॥



One who has faith (in the sastra and in the words of the teacher),
who is committed to that (knowledge, and) who is master of one's
senses gains the knowledge. Having gained the knowledge, one
immediately gains absolute peace. Bhagavad Gita 4-39

Our humble Pranams and gratitude to our teachers at
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati
Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati
Swami Pratyagbodhananda Saraswati

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न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।

तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥

Therefore, in this world, there is no purifier equivalent to Knowledge. One who has attained preparedness through *Karma-Yoga* gains in time that (Knowledge) naturally in the mind.

Bhagavad Gita 4-38

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।

अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

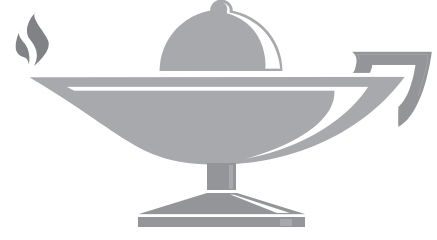
Giving up all karmas, take refuge in me alone. I will release you from all karma; do not grieve.

Bhagavad Gita 18-66

Humble Pranams to Pujya Swamiji
and Best Wishes to everyone at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Dr. G. Harish, Vijaya Harish, Dr. Aasha Harish, Dr. Amitha Harish, Dr. Lorenzo Klein,
Chi. Kiran, Chi. Arjun

Williamsville, New York



कटाक्षकिरणाचान्तनमन्मोहाब्ध्ये नमः ।

अनन्तानन्दकृष्णाय जगन्मङ्गलमूर्तये ॥ १ ॥

Prostration unto *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* who is the embodiment of infinite bliss and the auspiciousness of the universe. May He dry up the ocean of delusion of the prostrating devotee with the rays of His side-long glances.

अहमस्मि सदा भामि कदाचिन्नाहमप्रियः ।

ब्रह्मैवाऽहमतः सिद्धं सच्चिदानन्दलक्षणम् ॥ २ ॥

I am and I shine always. I am never unworthy of love. Therefore, it is established that I am Brahman, the Existence-Awareness-Bliss Absolute.

Our Pranams to Pujya Swamiji

*Prem, Urmilla, Aruna, Ajay, Elora, Vijay
and Parul Khilanani*





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MISSION: To introduce, promote and establish study of Vedanta for students and seekers in the San Francisco Bay Area in a traditional way through an unbroken sampradaya that began with Lord Dakshinamurti, uplifted and maintained by Veda Vyasa and Adi Sankara, and now handed directly to us by Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati.



सदाशिवसमारम्भां शङ्कराचार्यमध्यमाम्।
अस्मदाचार्यपर्यन्तां वन्दे गुरुपरम्पराम्॥

*sadāśivasamārambhāṃ śaṅkarācāryamadhyamām।
asmadācāryaparyantāṃ vande guruparamparām॥*

I salute the lineage of teachers, beginning with the ever auspicious Lord Śiva, (linked by) Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in the middle and extending up to my own teacher.

Our deep and sincere namaskar to Pujya Swamiji, all the teachers and the wonderful staff of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. We are very grateful to you for your teaching, guidance and support to the San Francisco Bay Area. Without you, our attempts at gaining Brahma Vidyā would not be successful. Please accept our deepest gratitude.

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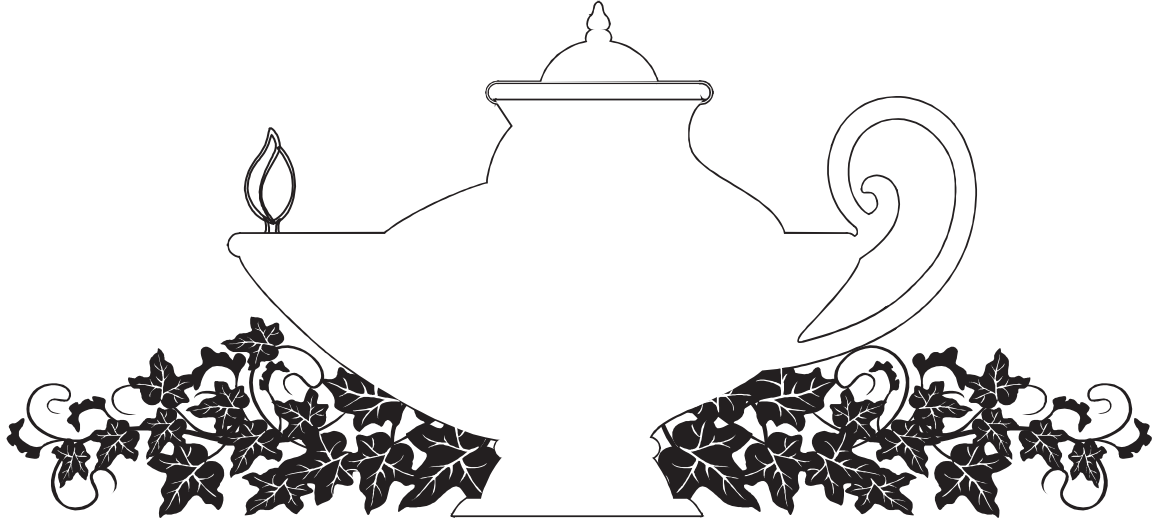
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यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।

तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥ ३-९ ॥

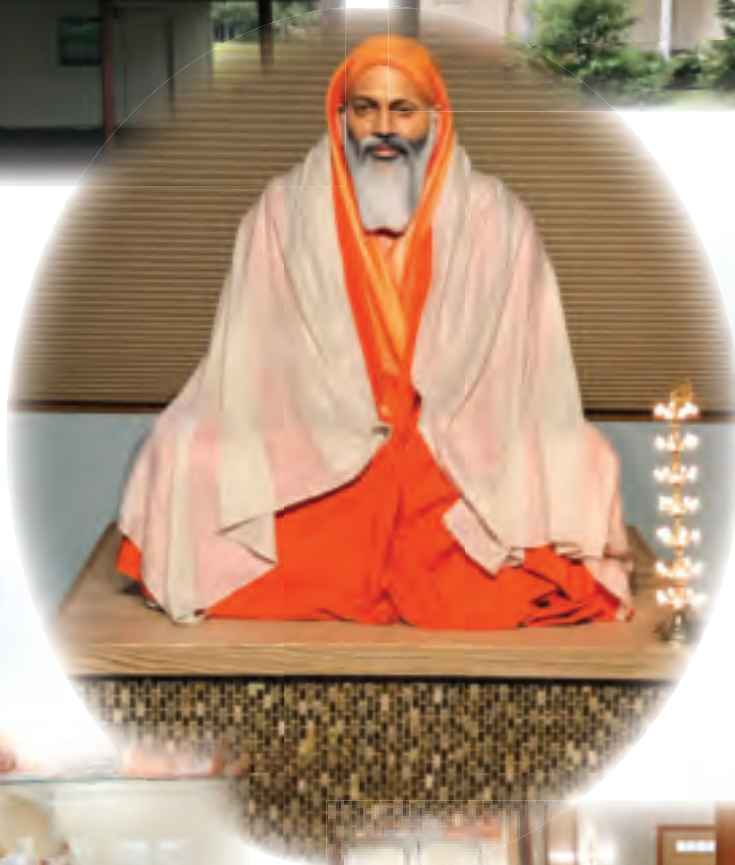
yajñārthātkarmaṇo'nyatra loko'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ ।
tadartham karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara ॥ 3-9॥

Actions should be performed as yagnyas (sacrifices),
otherwise they bind one to this material world (samsara).
Therefore Kaunteya (son of Kunti), perform all actions without
attachment and in that way you will be free from bondage.

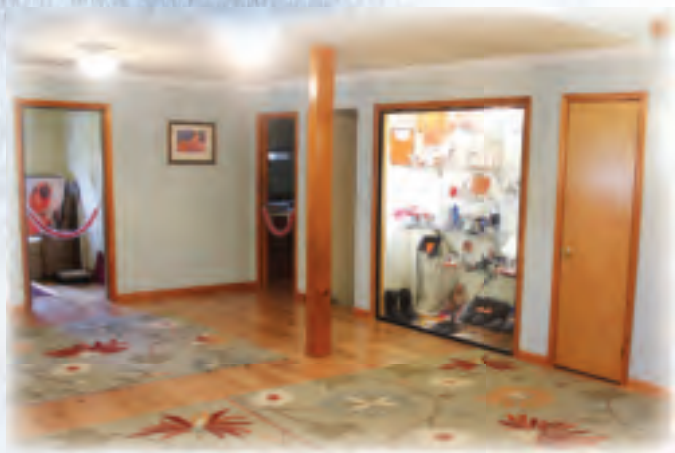
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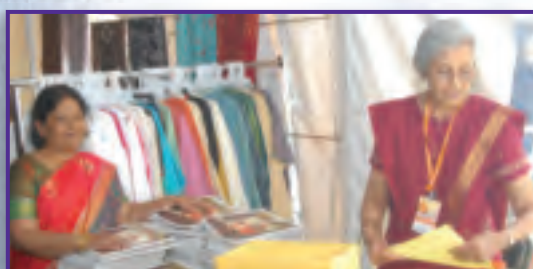


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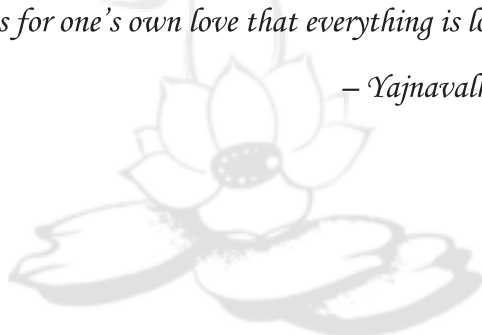
*It is not for the husband's love that he is loved,
but for one's own love, the husband is loved.*

*It is not for the wife's love that she is loved,
but for the one's own love, the wife is loved...*

*It is not for the wealth's love that it is loved,
but for one's own love, wealth is loved...*

It is for one's own love that everything is loved.

— Yajnavalkya



Best Wishes,

Dr. Damothara & Indrani Thiruppathi
Canton, Ohio

We extend sincere appreciation to

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to our photographers Kartik Patel and

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गुरुब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुरेव परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

*gururbrahmā gururviṣṇuḥ gururdevo maheśvaraḥ
gurureva paraṁ brahma tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ
(śrīgurustotram)*

Salutations to that guru, who is the Creator, Sustainer,
and Destroyer and who indeed is the limitless Brahman.
(Gurustotram, Verse 3)

***Pranams to Pujya Swamiji
and Best Wishes to
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
from the New Jersey
Ganga Gita Vichara Group***



Sridhar and Maya Murthy
Sridhar and Uma Dharapuram
A. Narasimha Rao
Parameshwar and Vibha Jha
Sunita and Ravi Wadhwani
Gita and Thangavelu



*sadāśiva-samārambhāṃ śaṅkarācārya-madhyamām |
asmad-ācārya-paryantāṃ vande guru-paramparām ||*

Thanks to all members of the gurukulam staff.

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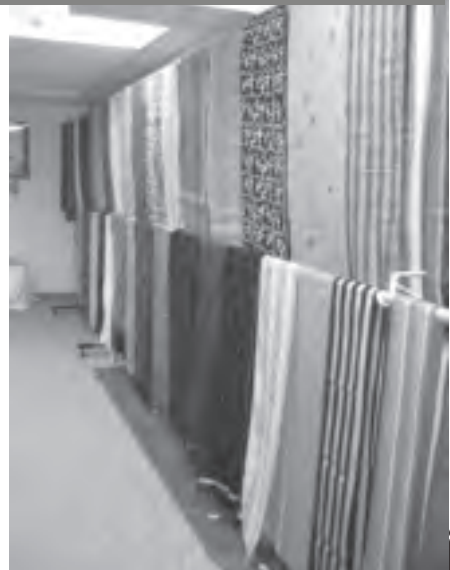
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गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुरेव परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

gururbrahmā gururviṣṇuḥ gururdevo maheśvaraḥ
gurureva paraṁ brahma tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ

Salutations to that guru, who is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer
and who indeed is the limitless Brahman.

स्थावरं जङ्गमं व्याप्तं यत्किञ्चित्सचराचरम् ।

तत्पदं दर्शितं येन तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

sthāvaraṁ jaṅgamaṁ vyāptaṁ yatkiñcitsacarācaram
tatpadaṁ darśitaṁ yena tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ

Salutations to that teacher who showed me the one to be known, who permeates whatever
that is movable and immovable, sentient and insentient.

Our special namaste and thanks to Pujya Swamiji.

**Hearty Congratulations and Our Very Best Wishes and Prayers on
Our Gurukulam's 31st Anniversary!**

Vijaya and T.R. Raman
And Family



शोषणं भवदिन्धोश्च ज्ञापनं सारसम्पदः ।
गुरोः पादोदकं सम्यक् तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः ॥

*śosanaṃ bhavasindhośca jñāpanaṃ sārāsampadaḥ ।
guroḥ pādodakaṃ samyak tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ ॥*

The water that has washed the feet of the Guru dries up the ocean of *saṃsāra* (bondage) and reveals the truth of everything, without any doubt. To that Guru, my prostrations.

Our Humble Pranams and Gratitude to Pujya Swamiji

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उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥

tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ ॥

Understand that (which is to be known) by
prostrating, by asking proper questions, (and)
by service. Those who are wise, who have the
vision of the truth, will teach you (this) knowledge.

Bhagavad Gita 4-34

With our eternal gratitude

Vijayalakshmi and G. Veeraswamy

Ramesh and Renuka Adiraju
Shreya, Suhaas



सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

Giving up all karmas, take refuge in me alone. I will release you from all karma; do not grieve.
Bhagavad Gita 18-60



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from*

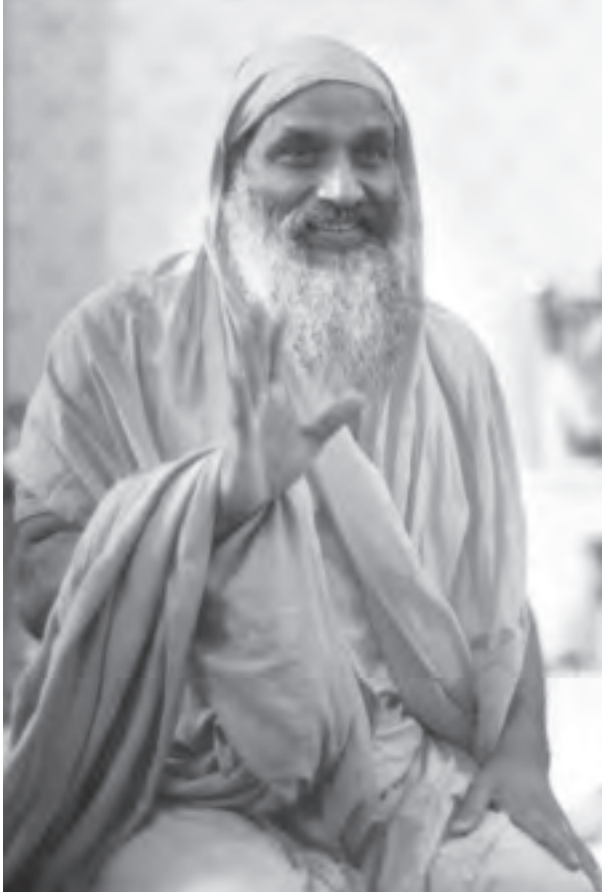
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Tejas, Pracheta, Anand & Xavier
Bina, Rahul, Sajan & Radha Shelt
Love, Gosai's Family



In Loving Memory of
Srinivasa Murthy, Vimalamba and Seshagiri Rao

*Let Lord Dakshinamurthy's Blessings
be with One and all*

Jayashankar, Sreelakshmi, Rajat, Sri Gowri
and family



our pranams to
Swami Viditatmanandaji
Swami Tatvavidhanandaji
Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji

अज्ञानतमिरिन्धस्य ज्ञानाञ्जनशालाकया ।

चक्षुर्नमीलति येन तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥३॥

Ajnyaana-Timira-Andhasya Jnyaana-[Aa]n.jana-Shaalaakayaa |

Cakssur-Unmiilitam Yena Tasmai Shrii-Gurave Namah ||3||

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॥ श्री सद्गुरुभ्यो नमः ॥
|| śrī Sadgurubhyo Namaḥ ||



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Karpagavalli & Krishnan

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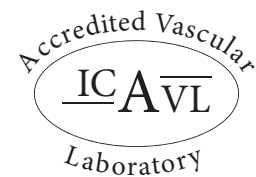
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Umaa Sutham Soka Vinaasa Kaaranam
Namaami Vigneswara Paadha Pankajam*

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to Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**

**Dr. Pragnesh & Kinnari
Amar & Shivani Desai**

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गुरुरेव परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ।

Salutations to that guru, who is the Creator, Sustainer,
and Destroyer and who indeed is the limitless Brahman.
(Gurustotram, Verse 3)



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Shilpa and Divya Mankikar

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om namo bhagavate dakṣiṇāmūrtaye
mahyaṁ medhāṁ prajñāṁ prayaccha svāhā ॥
Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti mūlamantra

Om. Salutations to Bhagavān Dakṣiṇāmūrti.
Please bless me with *medhā*, memory and
prajñā, wisdom.



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*With gratitude to Pujya Swamiji
and all our acharyas*

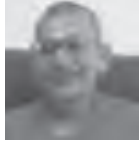


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❧ Terry Coe & Jaya Kannan ❧*

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Read in between the lines,
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*gururbrahmā gururviṣṇuḥ gururdevo maheśvaraḥ
gurureva paraṁ brahma tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ
(śrīgurustotram)*

Pranams to Pujya Swamiji

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ॐ श्रीमत्परमहंस-परिव्राजकाचार्य-वर्य-
श्री दयानन्द-सद्गुरुभ्यो नमः ।



with Best Wishes

Prasad, Meena, Adarsh, Anand, Santhi, Anjali, Ishaan, Avinash,
Manasa, Adhya, Aarya and Medha Mantravadi



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Best Wishes to Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Saylorsburg, PA on their 31st Anniversary!!

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problem when I come under its spell.*
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Quiz

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Answer: I am not the body - I am pure consciousness.



*Many Pranams to Swamiji
for all these years
of great teaching*

The Nair Family

Ramachandran, Suprabha,
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Keshav, Kedar, Tarun, Meena,
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***Best Wishes for your
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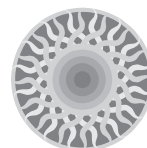
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न हि कल्याणकृत्कश्चिद् दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति ॥

भगवद्गीता ॥६०४०॥

Best Wishes from

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Nishita and Nikhil Trivedi
Shamik and Adrienne Trivedi
Pracheta and Tejas Gosai
Chinmayee and Amit Pal
Aanand and Xavier Gosai
Celine Trivedi



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Pranams
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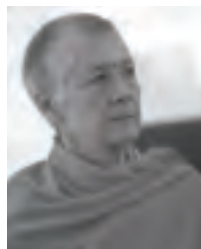
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Pujya Swami Dayanandaji
and to Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Staff on the 31st Anniversary*

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ ५-२२

*Those people who (see themselves as)
non-separate from Me, recognizing Me,
gain Me. For those who are always one
with Me, I take care of what they want
to acquire and protect.
(BG9-22)*

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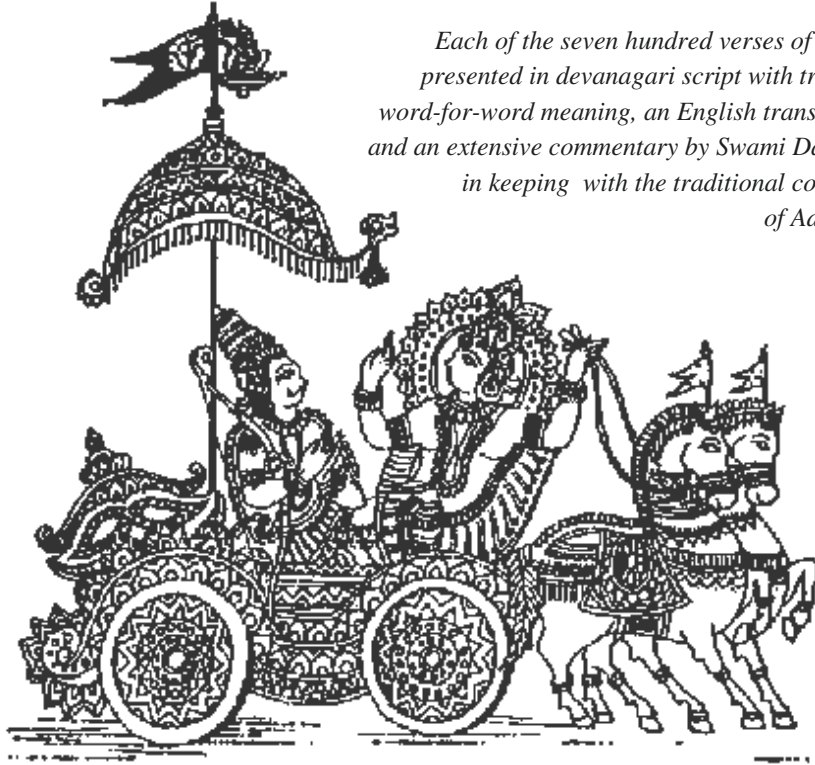
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*That which separates you from GOD is the Mind.
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- Chandogya Upanishad

*You are what your deep, driving desire is.
As your desire is, so is your will.
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As your deed is, so is your destiny.*

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गुरवे सर्वलोकानां दक्षिणामूर्तये नमः ॥

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न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥

*Weapons do not cut It,
Fire does not burn It,
Neither does water wet It,
nor does the wind dry It.*

Gita II, 23



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PA	ALLENTOWN	GITA HOME STUDY GROUP	DIPAK CHOUDHURI	484-597-0981	CHOUDHURIDIPAK@YAHOO.COM
PA	STROUDSBURG	GITA STUDY	RAJESH BHAGAT	570-421-8122	RGBHAGAT@HOTMAIL.COM
TX	AUSTIN	GITA GROUP OF AUSTIN	MADHU GODSAY	512-258-7829	MPGODSAY@YAHOO.COM
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TX	DALLAS	GITA HOME STUDY GROUP	REMA & VENKAT	817-812-3038	VENKATREMA@GMAIL.COM
TX	HOUSTON	ARSHA VIDYA BHARTI	HEMA & CHANDRASEKHAR RAGHU	832-677-5714, 281-606-5607	AVB.HOUSTON@GMAIL.COM
TX	SAN ANTONIO	GITA HOME STUDY GROUP OF SAN ANTONIO	K.P. GANESHAPPA, SUNITA NAYAK	210-496-7225	KPGANESHAPPA@HOTMAIL.COM
UT	SALT LAKE CITY	GITA HOME STUDY	PADMANABHAN IYER	801-558-8132	PADDU.IYER@GMAIL.COM
VA	HAMPTON	VEDANTA CLASSES/ GITA VICHARA	MEERA RAO	757-868-7804	KMRAO74@GMAIL.COM
WA	MERCER ISLAND	GITA VICHARA GROUP	SHOBA KRISHNAMURTHY	206-505-1300	

WA	SEATTLE	VEDANTA CLASSES	JAMES McKINLAY	206-325-0329	JMCKINLAY1@AOL.COM
WA	EDMONDS	GITA HOME STUDY GROUP	LEANN RAYFUSE	206-861-1813	HEALTHCOACH@GMAIL.COM
WI	MORGANTOWN	GITA HOME STUDY GROUP	SUBRAMANYAM NATARAJAN	304-319-1306	KUMARSUBRA@HOTMAIL.COM
WA	KENMORE	VEDANTA CLASSES	DR. K.V. RAMANATHAN	425-481-8703	KVRAMANATH@GMAIL.COM

GITA HOME STUDY AND VEDANTA CLASSES AROUND THE WORLD

<u>COUNTRY</u>	<u>CITY</u>	<u>GROUP NAME</u>	<u>CONTACT PERSON</u>	<u>PHONE</u>	<u>EMAIL</u>
ARGENTINA	BUENOS AIRES	VEDANTA CLASSES	ANTONIO PERRONE	5411-4374-2323	
ARGENTINA	BUENOS AIRES	VEDANTA CLASSES	VILMA ULLA	5411-4583-2765	
ARGENTINA	BUENOS AIRES	VEDANTA CLASSES	ADRIANA CALLIPURI	5411-4827-9052	
AUSTRALIA	DARLING POINT	GITA VICHARA GROUP	MICHAEL COMANS	02-9331-1994	MVASUACHARYA@NETSCAPE.NET
AUSTRALIA	SYDNEY	GITA HOME STUDY	JENNI COVER	02-9997-8724	JENNI.COVER@URSYS.COM.AU
AUSTRALIA	SYDNEY	GITA VICHARA GROUP	SWAMI BUDDHANANDA	02-9823-9798	
AUSTRALIA	SYDEY/ MELBOURNE/ PERTH	GITA HOME STUDY	SUDHA IYER	02-9428-2314	IYERSUDHA@HOTMAIL.COM
BRAZIL	RIO DE JANEIRO	VIDYA MANDIR STUDY CENTER	GLORIA ARIERA	21-267-6324	VIDYAMANDIR33@HOTMAIL.COM
CANADA	B.C. - VICTORIA	VEDANTA CLASSES	PETER STRAUSS	250-388-0730	APAROKSA@CHAW.CA
CANADA	ON-RICHMOND HILL	GITA STUDY GROUP	NEELA JAIRATH	905-737-4326	NEEJAI@HOTMAIL.COM
CANADA	TORONTO	GITA HOME STUDY	DR. HEMA SINGH	416-987-1012	EHSINGH@MSN.COM
HAWAII	OAHU ISLAND	VEDANTA CLASSES	SWAMINI SARALANANDA	808-235-6109	SWAMINISARALANANDA@GMAIL.COM
U.K.	MANCHESTER	GITA HOME STUDY	DR. PARESH PAREKH	79689-71113	

Yoga at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam



***Saturdays:** 8:00 - 9:30 am

***Sundays:** 8:00 - 9:30 am

Mondays: 5:00 - 6:30 pm

Tuesdays: 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Thursdays: 6:30 - 8:00 pm

**First and Third Weekends only*

(All classes are General Level, suitable for beginners as well as continuing students.)

Yoga practice is intended to awaken the intelligence of the practitioner so that the mind sees its own partiality and recognizes what IS without any escape from that. There are many physical and psychological benefits along the way to this underlying goal.

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, located in the serene Pocono Mountains, Saylorsburg, PA, is an institute for the teaching and study of Advaita Vedanta, Yoga, Sanskrit, Ayurveda, Jyotish, and other classical Indian disciplines.

The Yoga Studio at the Gurukulam is a world-class facility, designed to accommodate as many as 60 students, fully equipped with props and central heat and air conditioning.

Workshops are held at the Gurukulam several times each year, with the resident teacher and touring teachers. Topics may include therapeutic issues, teacher training, and how to structure and maintain a yoga practice.

For More Information please see <http://www.arshavidya.org/about-us.html> or **contact Lance Daniels at the Gurukulam**. Email lancedaniels@hotmail.com or phone 570.992.2339 Ext. 216.

Donations from those who value the Gurukulam's offerings ensure the continuing existence of the institution. For Yoga classes, suggested donation is \$12 per class for drop-ins and \$10 per class for those who attend regularly.

Our Three Gurukulam Locations in India

Gurukulam Name

Telephone Number

E-mail ID & Website

Swami Dayananda Ashram
Rishikesh, Uttaranchal 249137
India

011-91-135-243-0769

dayas1088@gmail.com
www.Dayananda.org

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Anaikatti, Coimbatore
Tamil Nadu, 641108
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011-91-422-265-7001

office@arshavidya.in
arshavidya.in

Arsha Vijnana Gurukulam
Nagpur, Maharashtra, 410033
India

011-91-712-252-3768

brahmapra@gmail.com
arshavidya.nagur.org

Arsha Vidya Outreach Program

There are many people who value the teachings at the Gurukulam but are not able to attend as many classes as they would like due to distance and/or time constraints. In order to make the teachings offered at the Gurukulam more accessible to these people, the teachers at the Gurukulam travel to various places. They offer regular classes in the surrounding community within commuting distance of the Gurukulam. In addition, these teachers visit more distant regions in North America for short periods to give classes and to set up ongoing programs of study.

Pujya Swami Dayananda, Swami Vidadatmananda, Swami Tattvavidananda, Swami Pratyagbodhananda, and Suddhatma, are available for some or all of the following:

Introductory public talks on Vedanta

Vedanta classes

Initiation of Vedic Heritage classes for children and teens

Initiation of new Gita Home Study groups

Private or group instructions in Vedic chanting

Sanskrit classes

Sessions on stress management and perspective on one's emotional life

Classes on *avāntara-sādhana*s: *pūjā*, prayer, meditation, yoga and values

Bhajans and Satsang

If you are interested in the Arsha Vidya Outreach program, please call Suddhatma at 570.992.2339 ext. 234.

Thank You



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