

Chinmaya Smrithi



A Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the Chinmaya Mission Washington Regional Center (CMWRC)

Volume 19, Number 1 -- January 14, 2009

Happy New Year, Sankranti

HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM SUNDARAM STARS!!



- Silver Spring Sundaram II Artists: Aditya Krishnan, Ajay Shankar, Anuj Mehta, Manisha Sanil, Nishanth Carr, Priya Kulkarni, Sachi Rai, Sahil Mayekar, Sandeep Linga, Shivali Seoni, Shrivani Mattikali, Siddhartha Komaragiri, Sri Neerchal, Thara Kondun, Usha Kondun, Vishnu Dharmaraj, Yuvaraj Sharma
- Collage: Chetana Neerchal
- Silver Spring Sundaram II Teachers: Mangala Rao and Chetana Neerchal

In This Issue

Events & Library

- Events and Links
- News Briefs
- New Year Greetings – Vilasini ji

Bala Vihar Articles and Stories

- Buddhist Temple Field Trip- Payal Arora
- Book Review: Breadwinner Trilogy – Part 1 – Siri Neerchal
- Joe the Water Droplet – Siri Neerchal
- Meeting of the Mind – Nandini Kishore
- Winter Youth Camp 2008 – Vani Ravichandran
- Youth Camp Satsang – Pooja Lahori

- Hindu Rituals – Sowmya Sundararaman

Members & Friends

- Poem: Scraps and Silence – Chetana Neerchal
- Poem: Fission...Fusion – Chetana Neerchal
- Hindu in the Bible Belt – Guru Prakash
- Path to Devotion – Ram Chandran
- Series - Brief Introduction to Gita: Ch 2 – Nilkanth Bhatt
- Series - Analysis of the Mind: Ego - Sadananda ji

Next Issue

- March 2009, Articles due by February 20th 2009
- Email submissions to smrithi@chinmayadc.org. Submission instructions at www.chinmayadc.org, Smrithi link, “Information on publishing in Smrithi”
- Contact us at smrithi@chinmayadc.org with your feedback or questions.

Calendar and Upcoming Events

- January 19th, Monday, - MLK Day Youth Seva at Chinmayam “Food for the Homless”
- February 23rd, Monday, - Maha Shiva Ratri at Chinmayam
- April 3rd, Friday – Sri Rama Navami
- April 9th, Thursday – Hanuman Jayanthi

Study Groups

- Please contact Sri Vijay Kumar ji by email at vijaykumar@rocketmail.com, if you are interested in forming or learning more about study groups.

Bookstore/Library

- Please contact Mr Vijay Singh by email at publications@chinmayadc.org to order any books, CDs, DVDs, etc.. Browse online at www.chinmayadc.org; and http://www.cybermatics2.com/acb/webpage.cfm?&DID=6&WebPage_ID=2. Review list of Chinmaya Publications by downloading <http://www.cybermatics2.com/Catalog2008.pdf>
- Srimad Bhagvad Gita is online at www.myholygita.com

Useful Links:

CMWRC – Washington Regional Center

Chinmaya Mission Trust

Chinmaya Mission West

Chinmaya International Foundation, E-Vedanta Course

Washington Region – Dulles VA Chapter website

Washington Region – Frederick MD Chapter website

Washington Region – Springfield VA Chapter website

www.chinmayadc.org

www.chinmayamission.com

www.chinmayamission.org

www.chinfo.org

www.chinmayadulles.org

www.chinmayafrederick.org

www.chinmayava.org

Please Note

The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of Chinmaya Mission or CMWRC

Editorial Staff:

Raju Chidambaram, Sitaram Kowtha, Acharya Vilasiniji, Acharyas, Chapter Coordinators and Teachers. &

Bala Vibhar students - Asmi Panigrabi, Harsha Neerchal and Srikanth Kowtha

Please contact us if you are interested in joining the editorial staff!

News in Brief

Study Group to be formed in Columbia

Vijay Kumar ji had initial conversations with some CMWRC members living in the Columbia, MD area. The tentative plans are the for the study group to be formed lated February or early March, and for the group to meet Saturdays at 9AM or Sundays at 4PM, on alternate weekends.

Please contact Vijay Kumar ji at vijaykumar@rocketmail.com, if you are interested.

Chinmaya Mission West Newsletter

The January issue of the Bi-Monthly Newsletter published by Chinmaya Mission West (www.chinmayamission.org) is now available online at:
<http://www.chinmayamission.org/newsletter.php>

The following is a request for CMW articles:

Hari Om, Pranaam.

On behalf of the CMW News team, please accept our warm wishes for a wonderful new year!

This is a reminder that the submission for the March 2009 Issue of CMW News is due by February 1st.

Our Chinmaya Family stretches far and wide. Devotees worldwide have shared special satsangs and experiences together. We invite our regional centers to submit a list of "in memoriams" on devotees who passed away in 2008. To honor the support and service of our departed CM family members, centers are welcome to annually send in the respective names, dates, and brief writeups.

Thank you and Hari Om,

CMW News Team

CMWRC Events Held

- Annual Banquet was held in November 2008. Keynote speaker was Swami Prakshananda of CM-Trinidad
- Youth Camp with Acharya Vivek ji (CM-Toronto) was held in December 2008. About 20 Tapovanam (8,9 Grades) and Chinmayam (10-12 grades) BV students participated in the camp.
- Acharya Sumati Chaitanya of CM-UK conducted Yagnas on Chinmayam (Drig-Drusya Viveka) and in Virgina (Gita Ch 3), in December 2008.

New Year Greetings

Acharya Vilasini Ji

TO OUR BELOVED CMWRC BALA VIHAR TEACHERS AND SEVAKS,

Wishing you all great blessings in the New Year! A day that is called the beginning of a New Year is a day to give thanks for all we have and to make our resolves for the year ahead. You all deserve so much, having given so much to our dear children and community. The world is a better place because of all your generosity!

Here is a message from Gurudev to children and adults alike for the new year!

Some of us love only if we are also loved in return, that is, we will give love in payment for the love received!... But the sun gives and demands nothing; the earth, the moon, the rains, the spring, the flowers, the rivers—everywhere in nature, among animals and plants—everywhere the universal rhythm is to give lovingly and not to demand love from others. The former, to give love, is true freedom. The latter, to demand love, is pure slavery. It is the privilege of man to love. It is the dignity of a devotee to love all as His creatures. It is the beauty of life that we have this faculty in us to love. Only we have to cultivate and enrich it in our heart...

Repeat at once in yourself, “I am not a beggar for other’s love—I have not come into this world to beg for love—I am here to distribute, to donate, to spread, to shower, to squander love on all others.” Grow to be my children, each a dynamic lover of the world marching out for giving love and not looking out for receiving love...

Very few are rich in love in themselves. But you are a Bala Vihar member, a Chinmaya child. You must develop this capacity to love—and learn to flood life with your love by giving love, asking for nothing in return, expecting nothing, wanting nothing. Serve all—service of others is the expression of love. Service is the outer expression of the love in your inner heart. See how your mother, father, and others serve you, because they love you. We will learn to love all people and animals and plants, for all are Lord Jagadeeswara Himself.

Don’t feel cheated if others do not give you love. Lord himself serves us all every moment even when we don’t love Him in return! Let us be god-like in our love for others—always and in all ways.

Swami Chinmayananda
From I Love You Letters to Children
Uttarkasi, U.P.
5th July, 1968

Sundaram Field Trip – Buddhist Temple

Payal Arora
Frederick Chapter

On the 16th of November my Bala Vihar class went on a very exciting field trip. We went to a Buddhist Shrine (temple). It is called the Tibetan Meditation Center, located on a vast mountain in Frederick, Maryland. When I was in my teacher's van, climbing up and up the mountain it started to feel like it had been hours instead of only minutes since I was full of curiosity. How big was the shrine? How did the shrine look? Did it look like our Hindu temples? What were some prayers the Buddhists sang? These were only a few questions running through my mind at that moment. Eventually, I looked out the window. It was a glorious view of the valley from the mountain. I pried my eyes off the sight. Then, we were there! One of my questions was answered, this shrine didn't look like a Hindu one at all! It almost looked like a regular house. Before we stepped into the shrine room our teacher told us we must maintain pin drop silence. I didn't need that warning. As soon as I stepped in I felt extremely calm and quiet. So I didn't want to be the one to break the silence. The first thing I saw was the wall on the other end of the room. This wall was amazing! It contained a gold statue of Buddha and colorful rocks around the statue. This brought a peaceful feeling to my mind. Eventually, all my questions were answered:

- 1) How big was the shrine? - Well, not that big at all. It was probably no bigger than a 20 ft by 30 ft hall.
- 2) How did the shrine look? - One of its walls was like the one I described. The other four walls had huge draperies that all held different pictures.
- 3) What were some prayers the Buddhists sang? - One of them was called "The King of Noble Prayers." The real name was "Aryabhadracaryapranidhanaraja." It contained the Seven Preliminaries, Actual Aspirations, and the Benefits of the Aspirations. Also, there was A Brief Prayer to be Reborn in the Blissful Pure Land of Amitabha and a dedication both in Tibetan and English versions.

Finally, we went to a Buddhist Stupa. It was next to the temple in the middle of the woods. This stupa was tall and clothed in marble. Around the edge there were many rare assorted stones. This stupa contained hundreds of Buddha's teachings inscribed on it.

To conclude, I would just like to say that Buddhist religion is probably one of the most interesting religions I've learned about this year.

Book Review – 1 of 3: Breadwinner Trilogy

Siri Neerchal

Silver Spring Chapter

The Breadwinner Trilogy is written by Deborah Ellis. It is about two Afghan girls. The trilogy reflects the situation in Afghanistan when the Taliban was in power. I love the way the books are written because the readers feel like they are one of the characters witnessing the scene. These books reflect courage and perseverance. The two main characters show courage because they dress up as boys to support their families. Also, the two girls persevere to reach the goals that they set for themselves. The qualities of these girls remind me of all of the saints I learned about in my Sundaram class, such as Swami Chinmayananda, Adi Sankaracharya and Guru Nanak. The Breadwinner, the first book in the trilogy, is reviewed in this issue.

The Breadwinner

Eleven-year-old Parvana is an Afghan girl who lives in Kabul with her parents, her older sister Nooria, her younger sister Maryam and her baby brother Ali. Although the Taliban has closed down schools for girls, she is the only child in her family who gets to go outside. She goes to the marketplace to help her father, a letter writer, walk because he lost one of his legs in a bombing. One day, her father is arrested. To support her family, she takes her father's place, masquerading as a boy. While at work one day, one of the tea boys in the marketplace trips and falls down near her and drops his tray. When she goes to help him reset his things, she realizes that the tea boy is a girl from her class, whose name is Shauzia. Parvana and Shauzia save enough money to buy trays. They sell things like gum and fruit from their trays. Shauzia wants to leave Afghanistan and get to France. What has become of Parvana's father? Will Shauzia make it to France? Read *The Breadwinner* and its sequels *Parvana's Journey* and *Mud City* to find out!



Joe the Water Droplet

Siri Neerchal

Silver Spring Chapter

This story, written for a curriculum extension class in my school called Treasure the Chesapeake, reminds me of my Sundaram class prayer:

*aakaashaat patitam toyam
yatha gacchati sagaram | |
sarva deva namaskarah
keshavam prati gacchati | |*

Just like all raindrops end up in the ocean,
Prayers to any god will reach Keshava.

Hi! I'm Joe. I am a water droplet. Since there are millions of water droplets in a cloud, I have lots of friends. Some of the water droplets I know have been around for a long time. Did you know that the amount of water on Earth hasn't changed for billions of years? Right now, I'm heading down the Susquehanna River which feeds into Chesapeake Bay. Even though I've been to the Bay before, I'm excited to be going there again. Did you know that the Bay is the largest estuary in the US? It was formed 10,000 years ago when glaciers melted after an ice age. The Bay is 21ft deep on average and 200 miles long. When you want to go somewhere, you might go in a car or fly in a plane. The way I get from place to place involves something called the water cycle. The three steps in the water cycle are precipitation, evaporation and condensation. Precipitation is when it rains. Then all the water evaporates and floats up into the atmosphere. There, the water condenses and forms clouds. Then the cycle happens all over again. You might think that clouds are light, fluffy things but clouds can weigh twice as much as a blue whale! Every organism needs water. I've been through the digestive systems of lots of animals. I've been in a bucket of water for a human to use me to take a bath. That was not a fun experience (neither was going through an animal's digestive system). Back to the Bay, the Bay's watershed covers 64,000 sq.miles. If you live in the Bay's watershed, any trash you drop in the street will eventually get to the Bay. This is because the trash is going to get to streams and rivers that feed into the Bay. When I visited the Bay in 1479, before the Europeans even knew about the New World, the fish and oysters that I met were living happy and carefree lives. When I came back in 1594, there wasn't really any change. There wasn't any change that I saw in my 1682 visit. But when I came to the Bay in 1875, boy, the water was so stinky I could hardly breathe. I asked a fish what was going on and he said that humans were using horse carriages to get around. Horse manure was washing into the Bay. All the excess nutrients were causing algae blooms. As a result, sunlight couldn't penetrate through the water and lots of sea grasses were dying. In my 1963 visit, the problem was even worse because people were using lots of cars and polluting the air. This made the oxygen level in the water decrease and the carbon dioxide level increase. My most recent visit was in 1999. The Bay's condition was a little better because people were finally starting to care about the Bay. Though I've heard that fish and oyster populations are declining because of over-harvesting and loss of habitat, I'm still looking forward to my 2029 visit because people may have cleaned up the Bay by then. So long for now!

Meeting of the Mind

Nandini Kishore

This past winter break, Acharya Vivekji, held a spiritual camp, at Chinmaya Mission, Washington Regional Center, themed *Meeting of the Mind*. This camp was full of, fun activities, which included mind games and movies that related to watching the mind.

The camp started with the teenagers saying what they could hear. All of us stated sounds that can be heard from the ears, such as breathing and the clock ticking. We then realized that thoughts are also heard through our mind, not through our ears, but. We defined thoughts as ideas that can be good or bad. We then defined the mind as a flow of ideas.

In addition, we listed all the diseases of the mind and their cures. One disease we discussed was jealousy, when you want to be like someone else. A cure was to realize that everybody is the same and we are all special in our own way. Another disease was anger, an emotion that causes you to be mad at somebody. We discussed the cure as deep breathing or listening to music. After discussing all these diseases, we put a piece of paper in our pocket where we wrote the disease that we struggled with the most. On the last day of camp, we gave up our weaknesses to our Guru, Swami Chinmayananda, in hope that we could eliminate these weaknesses.

In order for us to understand that the mind isn't always bad, we also listed the good qualities of it. We listed that we had the ability to forgive and understand. These qualities would help us live a better life. We saw that by watching our thoughts we could live a better life.

Everyday of the camp we saw adventurous movies. These movies were, The Matrix, Peaceful Warrior, and The Dark Knight. The first thought, after hearing these movies are, "What's educational about violent movies?" By watching these movies we learned many useful things.

One well discussed quote from the The Matrix was, "I can only show you the door, you have to walk through it." This portrays the relationship between a Guru and their disciple. It showed that a Guru can only show you how to do something, but the disciple has to choose to do it. We related this quote to camp. Vivekji, can show us how to watch the mind and become peaceful, but we have to choose to do them. The same topic was in Peaceful Warrior.

The Dark Knight however had a different theme. It showed us good versus evil. This movie portrayed Batman as good and the Joker as evil. For example batman set funds for Harvey Dent, he gave, where as the Joker, burned his money because he wanted more than he had.

Everyday of the camp, we learned a new letter or two for an acronym. By the last day, the acronym we formed was AWARE. A stood for acknowledge, we should acknowledge the mind. W stood for watch, as in to watch the mind to support good thoughts. The next A and R stood for appreciate returns, understand the full significance of the good and bad thoughts going through your mind. The final letter, E for excel in what you do.

Winter Youth Camp 2008

Vani Ravichandran

Silver Spring Chapter

The theme of the Winter Youth Camp 2008 was 'Meeting of the Mind' and 'Spirituality in Society.' The first activity was to study our minds, through a 'Mouna walk' -- walk in complete solitude with a quote provided by Vivekji; then come inside and write down all of our thoughts. Later take an inventory of the thoughts and figure out which ones should be discarded. The second assignment was 'Likitha Japa' where in one had to indicate any thought that disrupted the 'japa' with a dash (-). This helped one to realize the amount of thoughts that needed to be controlled during that activity. The intention of both the assignments was to control the number of thoughts that disrupted the focus. These activities became a great tool in becoming AWARE of one's mind.

A - Acknowledge the mind

W - Watch the mind

A - Appreciate the

R - Returns

E - Excel

For word game such as Taboo, a word was described within the allotted time and without using the words listed on the card. To conclude each day, we each presented extempore speeches on topics of Vivekji's choice. This was useful in eliminating our fear of public speaking, and increasing our confidence in presenting the knowledge we gained throughout the camp. We got to watch three movies -- Peaceful Warrior, The Matrix, and Dark Knight. Watching the movies was really an exercise in extracting Vedantic thoughts or making connections to Vedanta from the movies.

Over the summer of 2008, I attended the Mahasamadhi Camp which took place in Cumberland, MD. Swami Sharanananda from Chicago, IL led our lectures. Both camps were fun, but the Mahasamadhi Camp focused more on lectures and one-way discussions, and there was more knowledge to be gained. However, the Youth Camp focused more on putting the concepts into practice. Vivekji repeatedly told us that he was not teaching us anything new, and everything we were learning, we already knew. The Mahasamadhi Camp served as a classroom lecture where we absorb the knowledge and the Youth Camp served more as a laboratory experiment to understand the concepts. But naturally a lab takes more time, so we felt the Youth Camp should have been longer.

The majority of the people wanted the camp to continue to be over Christmas break, and last longer. We felt there should be more small group discussions, and music jams. The youth seemed to enjoy the peaceful Mouna walks, learning to watch the mind, and at the same time putting it into practice. Some wanted a recreational period where Chinmayam would provide food, and both Chinmaya Yuvakendras (CHYKS) and youth could socialize with each other and acharyas. The Parents unanimously agreed that they would like a session where they could participate in the discussions with the acharyas, and they would like to see youth and CHYKs debate on epics and Vedantic topics. They would like the camp to happen more frequently as a way for the youth and CHYKs to practice what they have learned, and utilize it to their advantage in their daily lives. Vivekji is a person who easily relates to us, and gives us hypothetical situations to prove his points, and he shares stories from his own personal experience as it pertains to the topic discussed, and it makes more sense to everyone how every concept can be applied to real life. Vivekji boosted our awareness of the spirituality that surrounds us. He has allowed us to see a deeper meaning and importance in everything around us and how it relates to what we learn at Chinmaya Mission and the real world. Winter Youth Camp 2008 has really been a great eye-opener for us in many ways.

YOUTH CAMP

Pooja Lahori

CHYK, Chinmaya Mission Washington Regional center

During this past Winter Break, we were blessed to have Acharya Vivekji (Niagara Falls) lead the youth camp for Tapovanam and Chinmayam students. The theme of the camp was “Meeting of the Mind.” For 3.5 days, the students were engaged continuously in activities stimulating their minds through various discussions, activities, and interactions amongst their peers. Acharya Vivekji’s goal was simple—to keep the mind always alert and begin watching our mind.

During the morning discussions, students were able to openly discuss the negative and positive aspects of our mind: What are the diseases of our mind that feed the negative thoughts? What are the positive qualities of our mind that cultivate the positive thoughts? Activities such as mona (keeping silence), likitha japa, meditation & reflection of our mind through 20 minutes of continuous writing allowed the students to begin to focus their attention on their mind and its flow of thoughts.

By late afternoon, such activities as 1 minute extempore speeches, which in the beginning the students dreaded, allowed for an awareness of how their mind played a role in the effectiveness of the speeches. By the last day, it was apparent the students were able to detach their negative thoughts which were inhibiting them from speaking in front of their peers.

As I mentioned, one of Vivekji’s goal was to keep the mind always alert, he did so through activities, such as playing taboo & movie time. In taboo, the students had to creatively think of different ways to describe a word without already using specified words written on a drawn card. The students also enjoyed watching movies, while discussing its themes in regards to the teachings that they are learning in Bala Vihar.

Overall, the youth camp was a grand success. With Vivekji’s effortless dedication, each student enjoyed the camp, beginning to understand the affect one’s own mind has on one’s actions and reactions. Having the camp’s structure fit the needs of the students; I personally feel each student gained far more than what they had expected from the camp.

CHYK SATSANGS

After a long day of camp, Acharya Vivekji graciously conducted CHYK satsangs during the evenings. The theme of the CHYK get-together was “Spirituality in Society.” As young adults, we rarely see the relevance of our Vedantic philosophies in our lives today. Yet, through his innovative approach, Vivekji strives to make our Vedantic teachings relevant and understandable to the youth today.

One satsang that all the CHYKs and parents enjoyed was the Spiritual Music Jam. Purpose of this satsang was for the CHYKs to become more aware of Vedanta and spirituality that surrounds them. We asked each CHYK to bring or play a song which had a significant importance to them. After doing so, they were asked to explain how their particular song relates to Vedantic teachings they have learned. A few songs that student's chose, even Vivekji's choices, were surprising to all when first heard. However, looking over the lyrics and our discussion of the song, CHYKs and parents were able to view the song in a new light. Each person was able to get a better understanding of the songs significance and begin to listen to the songs rather than just hearing them. Just like we discussed the chosen songs, we used the same approach when discussing the movie we watched.

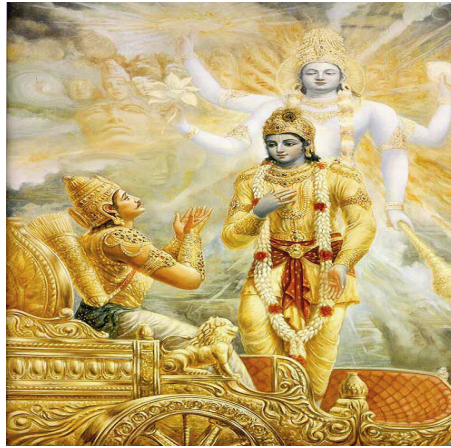
During our three evenings of satsangs, Vivekji made us begin to become more aware of the spirituality that surrounds us. We can slowly begin to see and understand the significance that everything has in our lives and its relevance to our Vedantic teachings, unraveling its importance in the world we live in. With the positive feedback I have received, slowly and surely, this will foster more and more CHYK activities in our area.

With the support of Swami Dheerananda, Acharya Vivekji, parents and all the students, the youth camp and the CHYK satsangs were a great success.



Hindu Rituals and Routines - Why Do We Follow Them?

Submitted by Sowmya Sundararaman



Introduction

Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life. Unlike other religions, Hindu dharma has many specialties. This is not known as a religion, it is known as the dharma; Sanaathana Dharma. Sanaathana means, according to Bhagavath Geetha, which cannot be destroyed by fire, weapons, water, air, and which is present in all living and non living being. Dharma means, the way of life which is the 'total of all aachaaraas or customs and rituals'.

Sanaathana Dharma has its foundation on scientific spirituality. In the entire ancient Hindu literature we can see that science and spirituality are integrated. It is mentioned in the 40th chapter of the Yajurveda known as Eesaavaasya Upanishad that use scientific knowledge for solving problems in our life and use the spiritual knowledge for attaining immortality through philosophical outlook.

Remember that in each and every aachaaraa there will be a component of spirituality in it. Without spirituality, nothing exists in Sanaathana dharma. Generally everyone bear a wrong impression that this spirituality is religion. Spirituality is different in Hindu dharma. Here the question of religion does not exist at all, because Hindu dharma was not created by an individual, prophet or an incarnation. Spirituality is a part of every Hindu custom in the normal life of a Hindu.

Aachaaraas are to be followed based on their merits available from the self experience; you need not blindly follow a teacher or someone who gives advice without reasoning. All these aachaaraas are mentioned for the prosperity of the human beings and it should be the prime focus for practicing the Hindu aachaaraas.

Achaaryaath paadam aadatthe
paadam sishya swamedhayaa
paadam sa brahmachaaribhya
sesham kaala kramena cha

This is an important advice given in smruthies. It means a person can get only one quarter of knowledge from Achaarya - the teacher, another quarter by analyzing self, one quarter by discussing with others and the last quarter during the process of living by method addition, deletion, correction, and modification of already known aacharaas or new aacharaas.

Aachaaraath labhathe hi ayu:
aachaaraath dhanamakshayam
aachaaraath labhathe suprajaa:
aachaaro ahanthya lakshanam

Aacharaas are followed for the psychological and physiological health and long life; Aacharaas are followed for prosperity and wealth; Aacharaas are followed for strong family and social bondage and following the Aacharaas give a fine personality, dharmic outlook and vision, says our dharmastra.

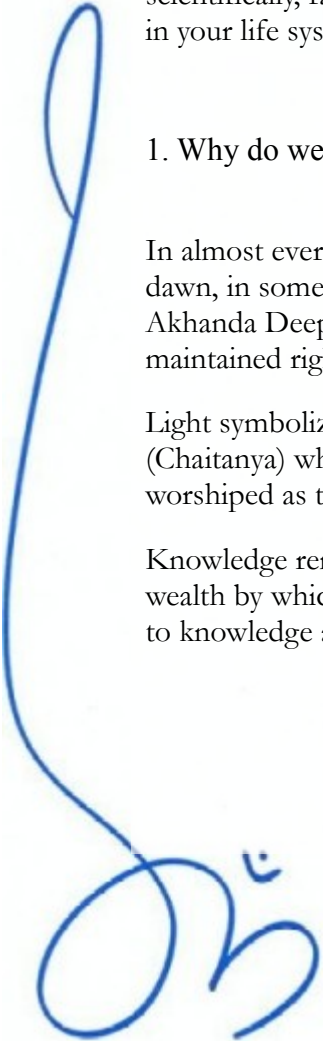
In India everyone followed Aacharaas for the above mentioned psychological, physiological, family relation, social benefits and national integration based benefits. It is your right and duty to understand scientifically, rationally and logically the meaning of each and every Aacharaas and follow the same in your life systematically

1. Why do we light a lamp?

In almost every Indian home a lamp is lit daily before the altar of the Lord. In some houses it is lit at dawn, in some, twice a day – at dawn and dusk – and in a few it is maintained continuously - Akhanda Deepa. All auspicious functions commence with the lighting of the lamp, which is often maintained right through the occasion.

Light symbolizes knowledge, and darkness - ignorance. The Lord is the "Knowledge Principle" (Chaitanya) who is the source, the enlivener and the illuminator of all knowledge. Hence light is worshiped as the Lord himself.

Knowledge removes ignorance just as light removes darkness. Also knowledge is a lasting inner wealth by which all outer achievement can be accomplished. Hence we light the lamp to bow down to knowledge as the greatest of all forms of wealth.



Why not light a bulb or tube light? That too would remove darkness. But the traditional oil lamp has a further spiritual significance. The oil or ghee in the lamp symbolizes our vaasanas or negative tendencies and the wick, the ego. When lit by spiritual knowledge, the vaasanas get slowly exhausted and the ego too finally perishes. The flame of a lamp always burns upwards. Similarly we should acquire such knowledge as to take us towards higher ideals.

Whilst lighting the lamp we thus pray:

Deepajyothi parabrahma
Deepa sarva tamopahaha
Deepena saadhyate saram
Sandhyaa deepo namostute

I prostrate to the dawn/dusk lamp; whose light is the Knowledge Principle (the Supreme Lord), which removes the darkness of ignorance and by which all can be achieved in life.

2. Why do we have a prayer room?

Most Indian homes have a prayer room or altar. A lamp is lit and the Lord worshipped each day. Other spiritual practices like japa - repetition of the Lord's name, meditation, paaraayana - reading of the scriptures, prayers, and devotional singing etc are also done here. Special worship is done on auspicious occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, festivals and the like. Each member of the family - young or old - communes with and worships the Divine here.

The Lord is the entire creation. He is therefore the true owner of the house we live in too. The prayer room is the Master room of the house. We are the earthly occupants of His property. This notion rids us of false pride and possessiveness.

The ideal attitude to take is to regard the Lord as the true owner of our homes and us as caretakers of His home. But if that is rather difficult, we could at least think of Him as a very welcome guest. Just as we would house an important guest in the best comfort, so too we felicitate the Lord's presence in our homes by having a prayer room or altar, which is, at all times, kept clean and well-decorated.

Also the Lord is all pervading. To remind us that He resides in our homes with us, we have prayer rooms. Without the grace of the Lord, no task can be successfully or easily accomplished. We invoke His grace by communing with Him in the prayer room each day and on special occasions.

Each room in a house is dedicated to a specific function like the bedroom for resting, the drawing room to receive guests, the kitchen for cooking etc. The furniture, decor and the atmosphere of each room are made conducive to the purpose it serves. So too for the purpose of meditation, worship and prayer, we should have a conducive atmosphere - hence the need for a prayer room.

Sacred thoughts and sound vibrations pervade the place and influence the minds of those who spend time there. Spiritual thoughts and vibrations accumulated through regular meditation, worship and chanting done there pervade the prayer room. Even when we are tired or agitated, by just sitting in the prayer room for a while, we feel calm, rejuvenated and spiritually uplifted.

Scrapes and Silence

Chetana Neerchal

(Silver Spring Bala Vihar Teacher & Bala Vihar Graduation Coordinator)

Silence,
quiet, silent Silence.

Scrape, scrape,
pencil against paper;
little hands
struggle with
big letters.

Scrape, scrape,
peeler, knife
against vegetable.

Scrape, scrape,
thought against thought;
calm struggles to come
through....

Scrape, scrape,
feet against ground,
rushing, running,
seeking escape....

Defying words
to describe their
struggle to find safety
from

bullets within
bullets without!

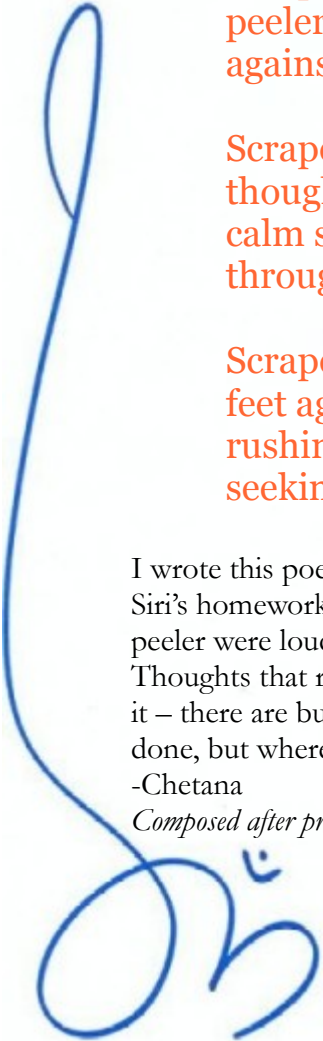
Scrape, scrape,
little letters
struggle against
big hands;
words have finally come
through....

Scrapes have ended...
....Or have they?
Silence,
quiet, peaceful, calm,
silent Silence;
where are you?

I wrote this poem on a Saturday morning, when it was quiet in the kitchen, except for the sounds of Siri's homework and my cooking preparations; the scraping sounds of her pencil and my knife and peeler were loud in the silence and seemed to echo the scraping sounds of my restless thoughts. Thoughts that run seeking quietude, run like those civilians seeking shelter, but know not where to find it – there are bullets within and bullets without! The war has ended, but where is the peace? The poem is done, but where is the silence for thoughts?

-Chetana

Composed after proclamation of initial victory in Iraq by the United States in 2003



Fission.....Fusion

(March 15, 2007)

Chetana Neerchal

(Silver Spring Bala Vihar Teacher & Bala Vihar Graduation Coordinator)

Fission...

...Crimson
Scarlet
Purple

landscaped
in
contemplation

meditate
on
flame of focus.

Violet
Prussian
Indigo

Black...

...Fusion.



Hindu in The Bible Belt

Guru Prakash,

Chinmaya Mission – Georgia South

Dothan is a city of fifty thousand in southeast Alabama very close to the Florida and Georgia State-lines. In 1984 I joined another physician in the practice of Kidney Diseases and moved my family to Dothan. If the Southeast is considered as the 'Bible Belt,' Dothan really is the epicenter, may be because the Holy Bible says, 'Let us go to Dothan.' An incident at my job propelled me to explore Christianity.

In the very first week of my practice, I was asked by a family physician to consult on 35 year-old woman who had dangerously low level of potassium in the blood. After talking with her, the cause of her problem became clear. Two months ago she was instructed by God to fast a day and for some reason she did not abide by it. As a punishment God told her to fast for a month. So the woman had eaten nothing and drank only water and grapefruit juice for nearly 20 days. Her potassium was low because she was not getting any potassium in her diet. But, I thought her problem was bigger than just low potassium; she needed psychiatric help. She has been talking with God! To my surprise, the family doctor or the nurses that were taking care of her, did not find anything strange in this. I found out many people 'talk' with God on a regular basis and they are perfectly sane.

As I showed some interest in religion, I got scores of invitations to go to churches and there are many in Dothan. I had weekly discussions with a doctor who is a member of a conservative Church, Mormons came to our house regularly for more than a year and I had innumerable curbside discussions at work with doctors and nurses. I feel knowing about other religions, strengthened my own religion. I want to write some of the things that I learnt from Christianity.

Study of Scriptures: Christians have the convenience of concise materials that have been put together in a single book called Bible. Our Scriptures are innumerable and nobody can possibly read all of them, so we don't read any of them. I felt Bhagavadgita was relatively short and believed to be coming directly from the mouth of the Lord. So, I picked Gita as my Scripture and started studying. I can easily say this has been the most rewarding experience in my life.

Implicit belief: 'If you prove one thing to be wrong in the Bible then the whole religion of Christianity will fall apart.' Many make this claim. I studied Gita to see if I can apply that standard. I ran into difficulties, from simple things like moon being called a nakshatra (star)(1) to more serious social issues like the caste system(2,3) and sexism(4). I got answers to my questions by reading the writings on Gita of several Masters including Swami Chinmayananda. Now I can say I have the same belief in Gita that Christians have in their Bible.



Power of Prayer: Many doctors pray at the bedside with their patients. Some do it when a patient asks, others go ahead do it even when not asked. I could imagine the scare a Hindu will have when he sees his doctors start praying. One surgeon told me, “I pray before I do any surgical procedures. Especially when I do procedures that I am extremely confident of doing and done it hundreds of times, I make it point to pray, because in these situations I am afraid I may have become arrogant and I know full well everything is in God’s hands.” I cannot claim to have seen cures because of prayers, but I have personally found prayers almost always give comfort.

Spreading our belief: We get annoyed at Christians trying to convert others. But, they genuinely feel that they are helping us. “If you found Fountain of Eternal Life, isn’t it selfish to keep it to yourself and not tell others?” If we have found something great in our belief system should we not inform at least to our families and friends? As a matter of fact Lord Krishna commands us to do the same when He says, “Do you proclaim boldly, O son of Kunti, no devotee of Mine gets ruined.” (5,6)

All religions are not the same: We Hindus are told again and again, ‘All religions are the same.’ To me It is like saying, all types of food are the same. Yes, the main purpose of food is to nourish us and satisfy hunger. But we cannot say gulab jamoon and masala dosa are the same. Judeo-Christian goal is to go to heaven, ours is to go beyond heavens. We believe in reincarnation, they don’t. They abhor worshipping idols, ritualistic worship goes on in thousands of temples and millions of homes every day. We believe in taking the name of the Lord (Namasmaraṇa) and they have a Commandment against it. Their concept of ‘God of Jews’ collides with our concept of God of everybody including animals and plants. I think every religion is unique, and I am proud to be a Hindu.

After 25 years of living in Dothan, I have realized that I don’t get many invitations to go Churches now. Most don’t engage in religious discussions anymore and I cannot recall when the last time a patient asked me to pray. Come to think of it, the number of people talking to God has also dwindled. I have to say, I do miss it. Mahatma Gandhi is known to have told Christians who wanted to convert to Hinduism, not to convert but become a better Christian. My friends’ and colleagues’ attempts to convert me, I feel have made me a better Hindu.

References:

- 1 Bhagavadgita 10:21
- 2 Bhagavadgita 4:13
- 3 Bhagavadgita 18:45
- 4 Bhagavadgita 9:32
- 5 Bhagavadgita 9:31 Some translators translate the word, ‘*pratijanehi*,’ to mean ‘know’ and others to ‘proclaim.’ This translation is from Gudhartha Dipika of Madhusudan Sarasvathi.
- 6 Bhagavadgita 9:31 Sri Shankaracharya in Shakara Bhashya seems to say the same, *Nishchitaam pratijnaam kuru, na may mama bhaktahpranshyathi iti*. Be absolutely assured and proclaim that My devotee.... will never perish.

The Path of Devotion (Summary of Bhagvad Gita Chapter 12)

Ram Chandran

The path of devotion communicated during the conversation between Sri Arjuna and Lord Krishna is highlighted by providing answer to the following key questions:

- (1) Should One Worship a Personal or an Impersonal God?
- (2) What are the four Paths to God Realization explained in this chapter?
- (3) Why Karma-Yoga is recommended to be the Best Starting Point for God Realization?
- (4) What are the Key Attributes of a Devotee that we can gather from this Chapter?
- (5) Finally why One Should Sincerely Strive to Develop Divine Qualities?

Arjuna asked: Which of these has the best knowledge of yoga ³/₄ those ever-steadfast devotees who worship personal aspect, or impersonal aspect (the formless Absolute)? Lord Krishna said – “I consider the best yogis to be those ever steadfast devotees who worship with supreme faith by fixing their mind on Me as their personal God.” This is a restatement of what He said in chapter 6, verse 47. True devotion is defined as the highest order of love for God. True devotion is motiveless intense love of God to attain Him. It is seeking God’s grace and serving with love and dedication to please Him. Thus, devotion is doing one’s duty as an offering to the Lord with love of God in one’s heart.

It should be also understood that devotion is granted by the grace of God. A loving relationship with God is easily developed through a personal God. The faithful followers of Rama, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad are considered the steadfast devotees. All spiritual practices in the absence of steadfast devotion will become useless. The pearl of Self-knowledge is born on the nucleus of faith and devotion only.

What Lord Krishna has said with respect to those who worship the impersonal God? He assures that they also attain Me who worship the unchangeable, the inexplicable, the invisible, the omnipresent, the inconceivable, the unchanging, the immovable, and the formless. Their worship of the impersonal God come in the form of change in their attitude to life by restraining all the senses, even-minded behavior under all circumstances by engaging in the welfare of all creatures. A person who is competent to worship the formless aspect of God must have a complete mastery over the senses, be tranquil under all circumstances, and be engaged in the welfare of all creatures.

Lord Krishna implicitly points out that worshipping the personal God is relatively easier than worshipping the impersonal God. One must be free from body-feeling and be established in the feeling of the existence of the Self alone, if one wants to succeed in worship of formless Absolute. One becomes free from the bodily conception of life when one is fully purified and acts solely for the Supreme Lord. Attainment of such a state is not possible for the average human being, but only for advanced souls. Therefore, the natural course for the ordinary seeker is to worship God with a form. Thus the method of worship depends on the individual. One should find out for oneself which method suits one best. It

is quite fruitless to ask a child to worship a formless God, whereas a sage sees God in every form and does not need a statue or even a picture of God for worship.

At the starting point there are likely differences between these two approaches to the worship of God. But those practice with steadfast devotion the differences get melted away. Then there will be no real difference between the two paths. - the path of devotion to a personal God and the path of Self-knowledge of the impersonal God - as they attain full spiritual maturity. In the highest stage of realization they merge and become one. The personal and the impersonal, the physical form and the transcendental form, are the two sides of the coin of ultimate Reality. A person must learn to focus the mind with the one and only thought on a personal God with a form. After succeeding therein by fixing their mind, their mind get purified and they are able to transcend all attachments to names and forms. The highest liberation is possible only by realization of God as the very Self in all beings, and it comes only through maturity of devotion to the personal God and by His grace.

Four Paths to God

First is the path of meditation (See Chapter 6 for greater details) for the contemplative mind. Thinking of a chosen form of God all the time is different from worshipping that form, but both practices are the same in quality and effect. In other words, contemplation is also a form of worship. If you are unable to focus your mind steadily on Me then long to attain Me by practice of any other spiritual discipline; such as a ritual, or deity worship that suits you. (12.09).

Second is the path of ritual, prayer, and devotional worship recommended for people who are emotional, have more faith but less reasoning and intellect (See also 9.32). Constantly contemplate and concentrate your mind on God, using symbols or mental pictures of a personal God as an aid to develop devotion. If you are unable even to do any spiritual discipline, then dedicate all your work to Me, or do your duty just for Me. You shall attain perfection by doing your prescribed duty for Me - without any selfish motive - just as an instrument to serve and please Me. (12.10)

Third is the path of transcendental knowledge or renunciation, acquired through contemplation and scriptural study for people who have realized the truth that we are only divine instruments. Lord Himself guides every endeavor of the person who works for the good of humanity, and success comes to a person who dedicates his or her life to the service of God. If you are unable to dedicate your work to Me, then just surrender unto My will and renounce the attachment to, and the anxiety for, the fruits of all work by learning to accept all results with equanimity as God's grace. (12.11).

The fourth is the path of KarmaYoga, the selfless service to humanity, discussed in Chapter 3, for householders who cannot renounce worldly activity and work full-time for God, as discussed in verse 12.10, above. The main thrust of verses 12.08-11 is that one must establish some relationship with the Lord ³/₄ such as the progenitor, father, mother, beloved, child, savior, guru, master, helper, guest, friend, and even an enemy. KarmaYoga, or the renunciation of the selfish attachment to fruits of work, is not a method of last resort ³/₄ as it may appear from verse 12.11.

Karma-Yoga is the Best Way

The transcendental knowledge of scriptures is better than mere ritualistic practice; meditation is better than scriptural knowledge; renunciation of selfish attachment to the fruits of work (KarmaYoga) is better than meditation; because peace immediately follows renunciation of selfish motives. (See more on

renunciation in 18.02, and 18.09) When one's knowledge of God increases, all Karma is gradually eliminated because one who is situated in knowledge thinks he or she is not the doer but an instrument working at the pleasure of the creator. Such an action in God-consciousness becomes devotion $\frac{3}{4}$ free from any Karmic bondage. Thus, there is no sharp demarcation between the paths of selfless service, spiritual knowledge, and devotion.

What are the Key Attributes of a Devotee?

One is dear to Me who does not hate any creature, who is friendly and compassionate, free from the notion of "I" and "my", even-minded in pain and pleasure, forgiving; and who is ever content, who has subdued the mind, whose resolve is firm, whose mind and intellect are engaged in dwelling upon Me, and who is devoted to Me. (12.13-14) To attain oneness with God, one has to become perfect like Him by cultivating moral virtues. Virtues and discipline are two sure means of devotion. A list of forty virtues and values are provided through verses 12.13 to 12.19 by describing the qualities of an ideal devotee, or a Self-realized person. The true devotee is fully committed to these forty noble qualities. It should be pointed out the true devotion implies "COMMITMENT" without "ATTACHMENT."

One is also dear to Me who is free from joy, envy, fear and anxiety and does not agitate others and also not agitated by them. (12.15). One who is desireless, pure, wise, impartial, and free from anxiety; who has renounced the doership in all undertakings - such a devotee is dear to Me. (12.16). One who neither rejoices nor grieves, neither likes nor dislikes, who has renounced both the good and the evil, and is full of devotion $\frac{3}{4}$ is also dear to Me. (12.17). One who remains the same towards friend or foe, in honor or disgrace, in heat or cold, in pleasure or pain; who is free from attachment; who is indifferent to censure or praise; who is quiet, and content with whatever one has, unattached to a place, a country, or a house; who is tranquil, and full of devotion $\frac{3}{4}$ that person is dear to Me. (12.18-19)

It is said that divine Controllers with their exalted qualities, such as the knowledge of God, wisdom, renunciation, detachment, and equanimity, always reside in the inner psyche of a pure devotee. Thus, perfect devotees who have renounced affinity for the world and its objects and have love for God are rewarded by the Lord with divine qualities. They are dear to the Lord. What about those who are imperfect, but trying sincerely for perfection? Lord Krishna answers this question in the very the next verse suggesting that One Should Sincerely Strive to Develop Divine Qualities: But those faithful devotees are very dear to Me who set Me as their supreme goal and follow — or just sincerely strive to develop — the above mentioned nectar of (forty) moral values. (12.20)

One may not have all the virtues, but a sincere effort to develop virtues is most appreciated by the Lord. Thus the striver is very dear to the Lord. The upper-class devotees do not desire anything, including salvation from the Lord, except for the boon to permanently at the lotus feet of a personal God, birth after birth. Lower class devotees use God as a servant to fulfill their material demands and desires. The development of unswerving love and devotion to the lotus feet of the Lord is the ultimate aim of all spiritual discipline and meritorious deeds as well as the goal of human birth. A true devotee considers oneself the servant, the Lord as the master, and the entire creation as His body.



From what is presented in Chapter 12, it is clear that the method of worship depends on the nature of the individual. The person or the person's guru should find out which path will be most suitable for the individual, depending on the person's temperament. To force his or her own method of worship on other people is the greatest disservice a guru can do to disciples. The most important thing is to develop faith in and love of God. God has the power to manifest before a devotee in any form, regardless of the devotee's chosen form of worship. What has worked for one may not work for all, so what makes you think your method is universal? There was no need for the Lord to discuss different paths of yoga if there was one path for all. If the chosen path of spiritual discipline does not give one peace or God-realization, then it must be understood that one is not practicing correctly or the path is not right for the individual. It should be kept in mind that a drop of water, no matter what route it takes, will eventually reach the ocean.

Note: It should be pointed out that the recipes presented in this chapter are quite useful for all cooks who want to prepare tasty meals with the flavors of Dwaita or Visistadwaita or Advaita! That may explain why this chapter is wholeheartedly liked by the followers of all schools of thought.



Ch. 2 (Sankhya Yoga) Yoga of Knowledge Part 3 of 3 – Man of Wisdom

Nilkanth Bhatt, Richmond Chapter

[Editor's Note: This is a series on the message of the Gita]

Arjuna heard from Krishna that Equanimity of mind is the highest yoga. One who achieves this equanimity of mind develops steady intellect and gains wisdom. He achieves self-realization.

Arjuna finds this state of equanimity to be very difficult to achieve while working in this world, so he asks Krishna, “O Keshava, what is the description of a man of steady wisdom, who is established in self knowledge? How does he speak, how does he sit and how does he walk?”

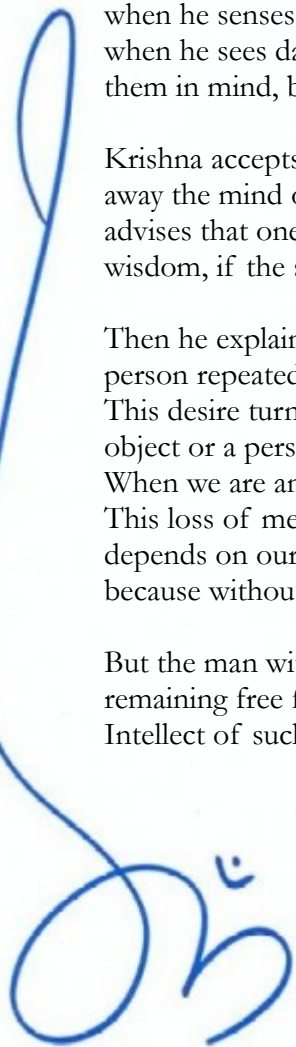
Krishna realizing the lack of self-confidence in the student explains. A person who has sublimated all his desires of mind and remains satisfied in the Self by the Self, is said to be the man of steady wisdom. Realizing the temporary nature of all pleasures and pains in life, he remains unaffected by them. His mind neither gets shaken by the adversity nor does it hanker after pleasures. Thus he becomes free from attachment, fear and anger.

He moves around in this world like a tortoise, which retracts its limbs under the protection of its shield when he senses danger. The man of steady wisdom also withdraws his senses from the sense of objects, when he sees danger of attachment. The sense objects turn away from such a person leaving longing for them in mind, but this longing also goes away after a while.

Krishna accepts the power of the turbulent senses. Which are like powerful wild horses and can carry away the mind of a wise person, even though he is trying to control it by his knowledge. Therefore, he advises that one must control the senses and focus the mind on the Self. One can only become a man of wisdom, if the senses are in control.

Then he explains how uncontrolled senses can create disaster. When someone thinks of an object or a person repeatedly, he becomes attached to that object or a person. This attachment creates desire for it. This desire turns into anger, when the person feels that others are preventing him for acquiring the object or a person. This anger creates delusion in mind. When mind gets deluded it loses all memories. When we are angry with somebody, we forget all the good things that person has done in the past for us. This loss of memory destroys discrimination because our discrimination of what is right and wrong depends on our memories of the past experiences. When discrimination is lost, it creates disaster because without discrimination the person will act irrationally and will suffer its consequences.

But the man with self-control moves around in this world of objects with his senses restrained and remaining free from attractions and repulsion, thus achieving peace. In this peace all pains are destroyed. Intellect of such a tranquil minded person soon becomes steady.



In a night of ignorance (of their true nature) for all other beings, a self controlled man stays awake with his knowledge of the self, but when all other beings are awake and aware of the objects (of their likes and dislikes), he sees such awareness as darkness of ignorance.

A man of steady wisdom attains such a peace that all desires enter his mind, but cannot disturb its tranquility, just as waters of all rivers enter the ocean but cannot make the ocean overflow. A desirer of desires can never come to this perfect peace; only the person who has developed detachment can remain peaceful in all situations.

Here Krishna advises us that all sufferings in the world are caused by our self-centered misconceptions and arrogance, characterized by our ever multiplying demands for wealth and our endless desires. Only by abandoning all desires one can move around in this world without attachment, longing, I-ness and my-ness.

Bhagavan confirms in the end that this is the state of realization, being one with the ever present, all pervading and all knowing Brahman, our own Self.



Analysis of the Mind – Fundamental Human Problem

Dr. K. Sadananda

[Editor's Note: This is 6thth in the series – Analysis of the Mind. The first five appeared in the 2008 issues of Chinmaya Smrithi]

We have discussed two aspects, the mind and the subtle body. Of the mind, the important component is Ego, involving 'I am this', which is the essence of the individual 'I' with which I do all the transactions. It involves the conscious-existent entity, 'I am' identifying with inert entities, body, mind and/or intellect to facilitate all transactions in the world. Ego, although a necessary vehicle without which I cannot transact in the world, it became the essence of myself, since I do not know what my true nature is. Thus a false guy, ego, has become a real guy, since real guy is not known. When I take my self as 'this', the limitations of 'this' becomes my limitations. 'This' is always limited by 'that', while freedom is to **BE** beyond all limitations, absolute infiniteness, Brahman (the word Brahman itself means infiniteness). Any limitation causes unhappiness, and no one wants to be unhappy. Unlike other infinities that we are familiar in mathematics, such as pi or e or parallel lines meeting at infinity, etc., which are conditionally infinite or qualified infinite (for example pi cannot be more than and less than some numbers or parallel lines are separated by some finite distance, etc), Brahman is absolutely infinite or unconditionally infinite or unqualifiedly infinite and therefore unconditionally limitless which is the same as absolute happiness. Limitless that I am, take myself to be limited notional 'I am = this'. This leaves me with three fundamental limitations which can be expressed as a) I am a mortal b) I am unhappy and c) I am ignorant. I do not like the presumed limitations that I have. Hence, I struggle hard to gain my true nature. If we examine our lives we find that all our struggles in life can be reduced to two broad categories, a) trying to gain something (pravRitti) and b) trying to get rid of something (nivRitti). All these struggles are to overcome these three fundamental limitations stated above. Thus from birth to death or from womb to the tomb, every living being is trying to solve these three fundamental limitations by way of trying to gain something or trying to get rid of something, pravRitti and/or nivRitti. This is true across the board and from the time immemorial. The tragedy of life is, no one will be able to solve these problems of limitations, now or ever. Let us look at each one carefully and see where the problem lies.

When I take myself as I am the body, then body problems become my problems. The body, by its nature, undergoes six modifications; existence in the womb (asti) for seven to nine months, birth as a baby(jaayate), growing pains as a child to an adulthood (vardhate), modifications of the body (vipariNamati, i.e. problems of the grownups), slow disintegration with all the health problems in the world (apakshiiyate) and ultimately kicking the bucket (vinasyati). That which is born has to die or that which has a beginning has to have an end, (jaatasya hi dhruvo mRituH) says Krishna. That is the Law of Nature. No body or nobody is permanent here. Civilizations have come and civilizations have gone. The world is always in a continuous flux, never in a static condition. Hence the Sanskrit word for the world is 'jagat' and etymologically it means 'jaayante gacchate iti jagat' that which is continuously coming and going; that is the nature of the world.

In a dialogue between a celestial being (yaksha) and the King YudhiShTara in Mahabharat, yaksha asked the king, 'What is the greatest wonder in the world?'. Obviously, the King had no idea of our seven wonders of the world. He responded, "We see people being born and people dying everyday, yet everyone acts as though he is going to be permanent in this world; and that is the greatest wonder of the world". By the by, related to the mind there was a question too. Yakshaa asked the king, "What moves the fastest in the world?". The king replied without knowing that the velocity of the light is the fastest we can reach, "mind moves the fastest in the world".

Coming back to the topic, body cannot but be mortal. When I identify with the body as I am this, I feel I am going to die one day. The fear of death is the greatest fear that a human being faces. No one wants to die. Even those who want to commit suicide also do not want to die, but they think that by ending their life they would solve their problems. They do not want to die if the problems of their mind can be solved without dying. Those problems arise because of the ego or identification with the body, mind and intellect. Therefore the problem of mortality, we can never solve, whatever pills or medication we take or however much we try to hide our age by coloring or making up the deficiencies, etc. Man's longing to live eternally is inherent, where as finite life seems to be the fact of life. To solve this problem some turn to religion. Some religions promise eternal life, not now, but after death; of course only if you believe in them. After your death, no one would know if you lived happily ever after. There is a day of judgment when you will be taken to eternal heaven or pushed to eternal hell – either way eternity is guaranteed. All these beliefs sprung up since there is inherent desire to live eternally. No animal wants to die. Preservation of one's life at any cost is instinctive. Hence mortality is a problem, since I identify myself with the body. It has become not anymore body's mortality but my mortality. But whatever we do, we can never solve or escape the jaws of the death. I want to be eternal, but with the body I can never be. Hence all attempts to live happily ever after with the body will be futile.

The second problem arises with the notion that I am unhappy. This arises fundamentally with the identification with the mind as I am the mind. Mind is never happy with what it has and therefore it always wants to make itself more full by acquiring this or that. Life becomes a rat race and twenty-four hours is not sufficient. However much we accumulate, the inadequacy that I feel that I am not full still remains. Only way to solve this problem of inadequacy is to be fully adequate. That means have everything in the world, possessing limitless entities. One can never reach limitless by adding limited things. Addition of finites cannot accumulate to infinite. Hence problem of inadequacy of the mind or unhappiness of the mind remains as an unsolved problem.

The third problem is based on the identification that I am the intellect, which is always limited. We cannot stand this limitation either. Hence the longing or curiosity to know remains. Unfortunately, the more we learn, we find that there is lot more things to learn, which we did not know before that they even existed. However much we learn, we are left with an uncomfortable feeling that what we know is very little compared to what we do not know. Our ignorance grows exponentially with our knowledge. Hence even the ignorance problem also we cannot solve. Man becomes desperate. In one of the Upanishad, the student goes to a teacher and asks, "Sir, please teach me knowing which I know everything". Upanishads recognized that there is an intrinsic desire to learn everything.

Vedanta says there is a fundamental problem in our understanding about ourselves. Since I am a self conscious entity, not knowing who I am, I take my self to be what I am not – that is I am the limited body, limited mind and limited intellect. Equipments, body, mind and intellect remain limited irrespective of who I am. As a result of this identification, I take myself I am mortal, I am unhappy and I am ignorant. All struggles in life are to solve these fundamental problems. The analysis shows that all our attempts to solve these three fundamental limitations miserably fail. For majority of us these struggles temporarily end one day, when we die. This seems to be autobiography of everybody, the billions of people that live on this planet earth; only the details of how they failed in trying to solve these fundamental problems vary.

Vedanta says, everybody fails only because everyone is trying to solve a problem where there is no problem to solve. Why should anyone solve a problem when there is no problem to solve? According to Vedanta, the problems are not real but imaginary, since we started with a wrong assumption about ourselves. Imaginary problems can never be solved. Since we do not know who we are, we take ourselves to be something other than who we are. Intrinsically there is a natural drive to be who we really are. Hence longing to be immortal, absolutely happy and having infinite knowledge are inherent drives to become what we are. Hence according to Vedanta there is really no problem to solve, but to recognize our true nature. We are ignorant of our selves and solution to this problem is to know who we are. Who are we then? According to Vedanta, we are sat-chit-ananda swaruupa; that is we are of the nature of existence-knowledge and limitless or happiness. Hence Vedanta is considered as mirror that shows who we really are compared to what we think we are. 'I think, I am' – was the statement of Descartes. Vedanta says, I am – hence I think. That is I am existent and conscious entity. Existence has to be infinite. Finite would make the existence bounded. A question then will arise in terms of what is there beyond the boundaries of finiteness that is different from existence. Different from existence is only non-existence; and we cannot say non-existence exists on the other side of the existence. That is a self-contradictory statement. Therefore existence has to be infinite. I am not only an existent entity but also a conscious entity. Consciousness has to be existent, since we cannot talk about non-existent consciousness. Hence existence and consciousness are not two separate entities but one and the same entity viewed from two different perspectives. I cannot qualify myself – since any qualification belongs to an object which is inert. Hence Vedanta says – I am unqualified absolute infinite existence-consciousness – which bible says – I am that I am, since I cannot add anything else to I am to qualify myself.

There are two things that are unqualifiable. One is Brahman, since it is absolutely infinite. The reason is simple. Only finite things can be qualified since a qualification is that which distinguishes the qualified object from the rest of the objects in the world. The absolute infinite has to be only one, since if they are two, each limits the other and neither one will be Brahman. Hence, there cannot be anything else besides Brahman, in order for it to have qualifications to distinguish it from anything else. Hence whatever descriptive words that are used are only indicative of Brahman (lakshyaartha) and not literal descriptions (vaachyaartha), similar to the word infinite, to indicate that anything finite cannot be Brahman. The other thing that cannot be described is the subject I, since I am a subject and not an object, and objects alone have qualifications. Hence when I state my qualifications using my bio-data, I am only describing all 'this' that I identify with, which are qualifications of 'this' and not 'I'.

Now we arrive at the famous equation what Vedanta calls as mahaa vaakhyas (great aphorisms). Since Brahman is one without a second, absolutely infinite, existent and conscious entity and I am also unqualifiable existent-conscious entity, we are left with no other possibility other than the identity relation, I am = Brahman (aham brahmaasmi). Our problems started with our presumed identity equation I am = this, where as Vedanta says the correct equation is I am = Brahman. The first equation is invalid, since I am equating a conscious entity with unconscious entity. On the other hand, in the second equation I am equating two conscious entities, only with clear understanding that there cannot be any divisions in consciousness or in existence.

Looking at our struggles to solve the three fundamental problems stated above, Vedanta declares that we are solving a problem where there is no problem; and that has become a fundamental human problem. All attempts to solve this problem fail. Only way to solve this problem is to recognize that I am not a limited entity that I think I am. The limitations are the result of my superimposing qualities that do not belong to me – the qualities of the body, or the mind or the intellect or all of the three. Hence Vedanta says– YOU ARE THAT (tat tvam asi). I am referring to unqualified existence-consciousness that I am and Brahman is absolutely infinite existence-conscious which cannot be away from me – in fact it is me. This teaching is direct and immediate like seeing apple in my own hand, which is by direct and immediate perception. I do not have to think, I do not have to run to Himalayas to sit and meditate or contemplate for me to see the apple in my hand. As soon as I open my eyes, I cannot but see. Similarly I do not have to think or contemplate or meditate or analyze to find out if I am existent or not, conscious or not. I do not have to prove myself that I am. I am self-conscious and self-existent entity. I might even say I am the only one that is self-conscious and self-existent entity. As for as I am concerned, I have to be there to establish any other's existence. That I am conscious-existent entity is direct and immediate and so is Brahman, since it is absolutely infinite. Whether I can accept this equation or teaching immediately or not depends on my faith in the teaching as well how closely I am seriously I am interested in finding my true nature. It is logical yet the truth is beyond logic. I am an existent-conscious entity is not logic – it is a fact. Brahman is infinite existent-conscious entity is what Vedanta declares. The identity of the two is pointed out by Vedanta and that is logical too, since it is illogical to divide existence; it will be like dividing space. Just as space cannot be cut, made wet or dry or burnt by fire, Krishna starts teaching in Bhagavat Gita to Arjuna, a confused soul, that existence-conscious that you are cannot be cut, made wet or dry, or burnt to death by fire – you are indestructible and immortality is your very nature. It is amazing that we accept readily that we are the inert body, mind or intellect but are not ready to accept we are existent-consciousness-limitless, says Shankara, the one who formulated this advaita philosophy on firm grounds using Vedanta as the means of knowledge.

The question that remains then is, why is that I do not know who I am, since I am taking myself what I am not as I am. Essentially when did this ignorance of myself started. The related questions are what this world is, if Brahman is everything, or why did Brahman become this world, since unlike Brahman it appears to be an unconscious entity.

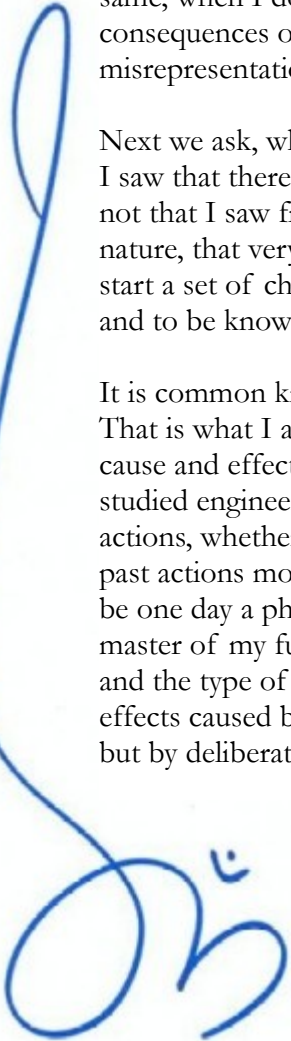
In addressing these issues, we are going beyond the boundaries of logic. Hence Vedanta alone becomes a means of knowledge for these things, even though the answers that Vedanta provides are not illogical. The reason logic fails is that the answer is not in the domain of the intellect with the cause-effect relationships. Cause and effects are in the realms of time. We are asking questions that transcend the time concepts and hence intellect cannot find the answer by itself. This is the same reason why science also will fail to address these issues, since science is logical and objective while the truth is beyond logic and deals with subject, I.

When did I become ignorant of myself? Vedanta says ignorance has no beginning. If I can ask myself, since I do not know Anthropology, when did my ignorance of Anthropology start? I must say from the beginning I did not know Anthropology. However, even though my ignorance of Anthropology is beginningless, that ignorance can end once I learn that science. Similarly the self-ignorance has no beginning but can end once I learn my true nature that I am existent-consciousness-limitless entity. This beginningless self-ignorance which is root cause for all human suffering is called the primordial sin by some religions.

My ignorance or lack of knowledge is only one aspect. The related aspect is projecting myself as something other than myself. Classical example is when I do not know that the long thin soft one that is lying on the semi dark road is a rope, I project it to be a snake. Because of that projection, I sweat, my blood pressure goes up, and I may even faint. The innocent rope may not have anything to do with all these secondary reactions that arise from my misunderstanding. Vedanta says the problem is exactly the same, when I do not know myself, I project myself to be something other than myself and suffer the consequences of that false projection. Ego that we discussed is the starting point of that misrepresentation of myself.

Next we ask, when did the ego start? When did I start seeing the snake where the rope is? The moment I saw that there is a thing on the road and since I do not know that it is a rope, I saw it as a snake only, not that I saw first rope and then the snake. The moment I know I am there and not knowing my true nature, that very moment I take myself as 'this', which is different from I. Taking myself as this will start a set of chain reactions involving the three fundamental pursuits in life – to be immortal, to be full and to be knowledgeable – discussed above.

It is common knowledge that what I do now will affect what I will have or what I want to be in future. That is what I am now must be the result of my past actions. Within the transactional reality, the laws of cause and effect are perfectly valid. If I am engineer today, it is only because in the past I went and studied engineering. Similarly, all the effects that I am experiencing now is the product of my past actions, whether I remember them or not. Likewise, the future that I experience will be the result of my past actions modified by my present action. Having become an engineer, if I now study medicine, I will be one day a physician but with engineering background. Thus I am the prisoner of my past, and also master of my future. If this is perfectly logical, then Vedanta says, where I am born, to whom I am born and the type of body with which I am born – all the results - can not be by random choice but must be effects caused by my previous actions. I do not accept that randomly I become an engineer or a doctor, but by deliberate or willful action in the present or in the past I am what I am today. Just as a



background, randomness does not operate at an individual level. All the statistics that we apply is only for a group behavior and not to predict the behavior of individual entity. We can not use statistics to predict the behavior of an individual. At an individual level statistics can only tell about probability of my becoming this or that. In technical language, the deterministic behavior of an individual cannot be predicted by a statistical randomness of a group.

This means my birth in this life is dictated by the actions that I must have done in the past and the birth in the last life must have been dictated by the actions that were done in the life before, etc. Then how is my first birth determined? Since ignorance is beginningless, my misunderstanding that I am this is also beginningless in the sense that it is also beyond the concept of time. As stated above, intellect itself is the product of the birth, which is due to ignorance; one cannot provide an intellectual answer to the very first birth. Vedanta says birth-sustenance-death is a cycle with no beginning. It can have an end once we have knowledge of who I am, since there are no more struggles related to taking myself who I am not. Knowledge of who I am can end the ignorance of myself.

Then who is that, that takes rebirth life after life? We discussed before that we have gross physical body consisting of gross matter – called food-sheath – that which is born of food, sustained by food and goes back to become food. We have a subtle body consisting of total mind that has four components; 1) emotional center, mind, 2) rational intellect 3) memory 4) ego, + Five physiological functions + Five senses + five faculties of organs of action – together 19 entities. In addition to these two bodies that we discussed before, there is still subtler one called causal body (kaaraNa shariira). It is called causal body since it is the cause for all the other two bodies. Since we just mentioned that it is the primordial ignorance that is the cause for our birth – that ignorance constitutes the essence of causal body. We need to discuss now the contents of this causal body since it is the cause for the divergence for different types of births and also accounts for why I am born with such and such body, in particular place, for particular parents and environment, ... the whole nine yards.

Hari Om!

