

Chinmaya Smrithi



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

Volume 19, Number 3 -- May 16, 2009



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Next Issue

- May 2009, Articles due by June 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

- May 23-24: Ramana Maharishi's Sat Darshanam – A weekend Spritual Camp by Sri K. Sadananda at Chinmayam, Silver Spring. Camp: Free.
- May 30 – Frederick Annual Day
- June 6/7 – Annual Days at VA-Dulles; Chinmayam
- June 13 – Annual day at VA-Springfield
- June 22-July 17 – Summer Camp at Virgina
- June 20/21 – Hamsa Gita: Weekend Spiritual Camp by Swami Ishwarananda at VA-Dulles
- June 23-26 – Mukunda Mala: Evening Spiritual Camp by Swami Ishwarananda at Chinmayam
- June 27 – Youth Camp by Swami Ishwarananda at Chinmayam
- June 28 – Satsang with Swami Iswarananda at Frederick

Study Groups

- Please contact Sri Vijay Kumar ji by email at viyakumar@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

www.chinmayadc.org

Chinmaya Mission Trust

www.chinmayamission.com

Chinmaya Mission West

www.chinmayamission.org

Chinmaya International Foundation, E-Vedanta Course

www.chinfo.org

Washington Region – Dulles VA Chapter website

www.chinmayadulles.org

Washington Region – Frederick MD Chapter website

www.chinmayafrederick.org

Washington Region – Springfield VA Chapter website

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 Vihar students - Asmi Panigrahi, Harsha Neerchal and Srikanth Kowtha

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

News in Brief

CMWRC Events Held

- Hanuman Jayanthi celebration took place at Chinmayam on April 9th at Chinmayam
- Bala Vihar Graduation Tilak Ceremony was held on April 18th at Chinmayam.
- National Youth Seva Day was held on April 25th
- Chinmaya Jayanthi was observed with Paduka Puja and Seva Day held on May 2nd at Chinmayam
- Gita Chanting Competition was held on May 3rd at Chinmayam. 190 participants! Results are posted on the website.
- Language Annual Day Held on 4/25
- Mother's Day Celebration and Tabla Annual Day held on 5/10

Swamiji's Itinerary

Swamiji will be at Chinmaya Vibhoothi, Pune, India, to attend Acharya Conference. He leaves May 15th, and returns June 3rd.

Announcements



Opportunity knocks! Open Up!

What is the logic behind logic?
What are the fundamentals of logic?
How did ancient India develop logic
as a unique tool for analyzing
philosophy and life?

Foundation Course in Indian Logic
(based on Tarka Sangraha, an ancient treatise on Logic)

Duration: 1st to 14th June 2009
Faculty: Dr. (Prof.) V.N. Jha, Former Director, Centre of Advanced Study in Sanskrit, University of Pune.
Course Eligibility: Interest alone, any individual from any knowledge background is welcome
Venue: Chinmaya International Foundation, Adi Sankara Nilayam, Veliyanad, Ernakulam, Kerala.
 Phone: 91-484-2748194, 2747104

Course Benefits
 Glimpse the Indian Intellectual Tradition. Analyze human thoughts. Insights in the field of artificial intelligence and computer programming.

Course Fee: Indian Participants: UG/PG students, Non-stipendiary research scholars, Monks: INR. 500; Stipendiary Researchers, Faculty members of schools/colleges/ universities : INR. 1,000; Others : INR. 2,000. Overseas Participants - US\$ 150
 Send your cheque/draft in favour of 'Chinmaya International Foundation' to Director, Chinmaya International Foundation.
The medium of instruction will be English. No prior knowledge of Sanskrit is required.

For further details Email: director@chinfo.org ; Phone: 91-484-2748194, 2747104

For details and online registration visit www.chinfo.org

Announcements

Are You Interested in Teaching Bala Vihar

Hari OM:

We are almost to a close of another school year.... TIME flies....but when we stop and think; and count our accomplishments - we have made significant strides in making our program the best of its kind. We are strong today because of you. With Gurudev's grace and blessings, we are strong today because of the wonderful children that come to us. Their eagerness to learn and ever inquisitive minds give us the motivation and energy to teach. **We would like to CONTINUE to make our program strong and vibrant.**

Nourishing our children with our rich culture and heritage comes with a lot of joy for our teachers, but to keep the momentum, we need your help. ANY help from you is a blessing and with additional help we can continue to not only grow but also be one of the best....

OUR NEW TEACHERS TRAINING SESSION WILL BE HELD LAST WEEKEND IN AUGUST AT CHINMAYAM - 46 NORWOOD ROAD, SILVER SPRING. WATCH OUT FOR THE DETAILS.

Please email chinmayam@chinmayadc.org if you are interested so that we can put you on our list for final announcements

Anil Kishore
Director, Bala Vihar - Chinmayam

Purchase of Property in Virginia

Hari OM:

We are happy to inform everyone that we have signed a contract (with contingencies) for the purchase of a land for the Virginia Center. This land has high recommendations from our architect and will meet our requirements.

The 9.8 acre site is located in Chantilly, VA.

Settlement date for the property is expected to be on or before December 31, 2009.

All these endeavors are possible for us only with your continued support and participation.

Hari Om!
VA Property purchase group

Announcements

Kalamandapam Dance program

Chinmaya Mission is happy to post the following announcement of Kalamandapam who have performed programs many times for the Mission in the past:

“Kalamandapam’s presents, “Buddham Sharanam Gachaami” at the Kennedy Center on June 27th Saturday at 8:00 PM.

Kalamandapam specializes in Kuchipudi dance ballets and has been actively performing in the area for more than a decade. For more information, please visit www.kalamandapam.org or use the following links.

- 1) Buddham Sharanam Gachaami brochure: <http://www.kalamandapam.org/docs/BuddhamFlyer.pdf>
- 2) About the Ballet: http://www.kalamandapam.org/docs/About_Buddham.pdf
- 3) Kalamandapam information: <http://www.kalamandapam.org/docs/Kalamandapam.pdf>
- 4) Director's profile: <http://www.kalamandapam.org/docs/MrinaSada.pdf>

We hope to see you with your family and friends on June 27th at Kennedy Center, to share the excitement. Also, please note that Kalamandapam welcomes individual and corporate sponsors, and your support is greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Kalamandapam Team


16TH CHINMAYA MAHASAMADHI FAMILY CAMP 2009
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— SWAMI TEJOMAYANANDA, SPIRITUAL HEAD
CHINMAYA MISSION WORLDWIDE

VENUE:

Delta Meadowvale Resort and Conference Centre
6750 Mississauga Rd,
Mississauga, ON L5N 2L3
(15 min from Toronto Pearson Airport)

UNIQUE PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & ADULTS:

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- Discussion Forums
- Sports & Recreation
- Cultural Programs
- Children's Activities
- Banquet Celebration
- Mahasamadhi Puja



REGISTRATION: Day and full-week registration available.

For complete info, pricing and to register, please visit:

CHINMAYAtoronto.org | CHINMAYAniagara.org

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Chicago



Swamini Shivapriyananda
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Brahmacharini
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Dallas



Swami Prakashananda
Trinidad



Brahmachari
Prabhat Chaitanya
Toronto



Acharya
Vilasini Balakrishnan
Washington



Brahmacharini
Bhamati Chaitanya
Boston



Srimati Lakshmi Sukumar
San Diego



Acharya Vivek Gupta
Niagara Falls



Camp Programs

Adult Programs

Free yourself from the ordinary by immersing yourself in the extraordinary! Our diverse schedule is designed to encourage learning and not compromise on enjoying. From morning to evening, being in the company of our Acharyas will make a lasting impression.

General Program from 6am to 10pm including:

- Meditation
- Discussions & Workshops
- Satsang w/ Acharyas
- Bhajans & Chanting
- Srimad Bhagavatam: Discourses by Guruji
- Aarti
- Sports & Recreation
- Social Time
- Rest
- Cultural Programs

Young Adults Programs (18-30 years)

Unleash your true potential by interacting with like minded teachers and friends. The many different activities planned will intrigue you and keep you coming back for more. For a young adult to have the opportunity to learn from an ardent Spiritual Master such as Swami Tejomayananda is indeed rare.

General program from 6am to 10pm similar to the adult program shown above.

Children and Youth Programs (4-17 years)

Friends, fiction and field trips what better way to uncover the glories of Srimad Bhagavatam. From meditation to movies every moment of every day will be filled with fun! Acharyas from all over the world have been invited to teach and inspire children and parents alike.

General Program from 7am to 10pm including:

- Meditation
- Sports & Recreation
- Yoga
- Arts and Crafts
- Workshops
- Drama
- Family Time
- Games and Movies
- Field Trip
- Cultural Programs

AUGUST 3RD

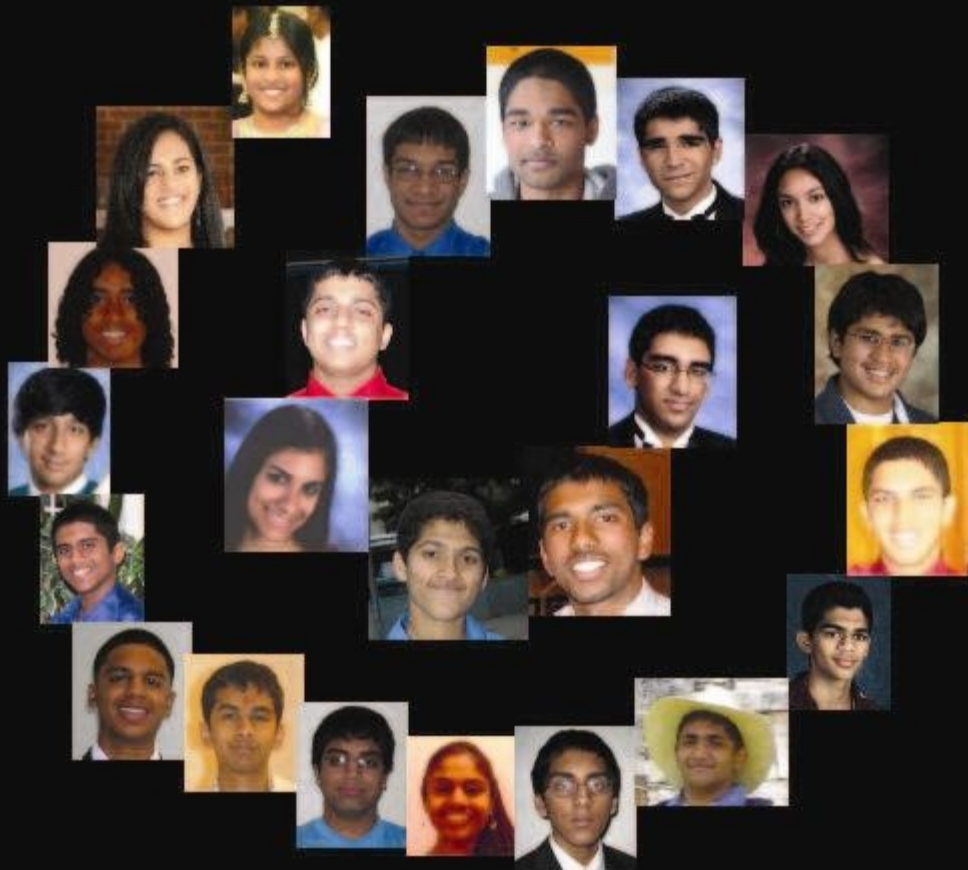
Chinmaya Mahasamadhi Day Program

Would you like to sponsor any part of this event?

Please contact Mukesh Tanna at 416-520-7031 or visit chinmayatoronto.org for details.
To Give is Love. To Give is Life.

For complete info, pricing and to register, please visit:
CHINMAYatoronto.org | CHINMAYAniagara.org

BALA VIHAR TILAK CEREMONY APRIL 18 2009



From in to out: Vivek, Girish, Pramod, Raakhee, Ajay, Shawn, Sumuk, Samir, Ramita, Vinoo, Vinay, Dheeraj, Rohan, Niranjana, Neha, Karthik, Chinmay, Barguv, Adwait, Abhishek, Adith, Aditi, Alekhya

CONGRATULATIONS, DEAR GRADUATES!

ALL THE BEST WISHES!

Handwritten signature in blue ink.

Bala Vihar Visit to The Vedanta Center (Sri Ramakrishna Mission)

Submitted by Sundaram Class, Silver Spring

Mrs. Mangala Rao and Mrs. Chetana Neerchal, Teachers

We, the Sundaram Class students, visited Vedanta Center in Maryland on February 8th. The Vedanta Center is almost a 15 minute drive from Chinmaya Mission.

In Vedanta Center, I found it peaceful. There were pictures of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Sharadadevi in the temple, along with a few other Gods. We met three Swamijis and were surprised to see that two were Americans. They had traveled to India to study and become acharyas. We learned about Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda in Chinmaya Mission. Swamiji at the Vedanta Center asked many questions and we learned more about Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda traveled to Chicago with the blessings of Mother Sharada Devi, and addressed the Conference with “Brothers and Sisters of America.”

I liked meeting new Swamijis and enjoyed learning more. I also liked the Brownies as Prasadam.

--Shivani Mattikallu

* * * * *

During the time we were at the Vedanta Center, the swamis were talking about Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. Some of what they talked about was a review of what I already knew, but at the center they went into greater detail on the subject. For example, I thought that after Swami Vivekananda had the vision of Sri Ramakrishna telling him to go to the Parliament of Religions, he immediately went. I found out that he first went to Sri Sharada Devi before going. The swamis were discussing Sri Ramakrishna's life and how he conveyed Advaita philosophy. I had a great time at the Vedanta Center and hope to go back soon.

Priya Kulkarni

* * * * *

I think that the field trip was fun. It seemed like a home at first, but when we went inside it was like Chinmaya Mission with an altar and the chairs. This was my first time there, so it was nice meeting Swami A. My favorite part was when we were identifying the different shrines. Also, I liked answering the questions. It helped me remember part of Sri Ramakrishna's life. I knew more about Swami Vivekananda's life. Swami Vivekananda created the Vedanta center in honor of Sri Ramakrishna, his guru. That is why another name for it is the Ramakrishna Math. These are the things I learned and liked.

Anuj Mehta

The Bala Vihar field trip was a lot of fun. We went to the Ramakrishna Paramahansa Vedanta Center. First we went to the main entrance and there was a big library of books. There were books on Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi.

Then we went into the main room. We were asked about the different idols and pictures on the altar. We learned about different instances in Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life. One time was when he went to a Kali idol and when he didn't see God he said he would kill himself and at that moment he saw an ocean of light. He had seen God. He felt extreme happiness.

Then we learned about what Ramakrishna Paramahansa believed in. He believed that all religions all lead to the same thing: God. That is what we learned.

Manisha Sunil

* * * * *

My Sundaram class went to the Vedanta Center on Bel Pre Road for a field trip on February 8. First, Swami Mahayogananda talked to us. He told us about the different pictures and idols on the altar. Apart from the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi, there was an idol of Buddha, a picture of Jesus and Mary and a picture of the Holy Mother. Then Swami Atmajnanananda talked to us about Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Mission. I felt that Ramakrishna Mission is very similar to Chinmaya Mission in many ways including the fact that they study the same books as we do; like the Gita and the Upanishads, only they also study additional books that talk about the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and the gospel of Swami Vivekananda. I loved the field trip because the swamis explained things very clearly. Also, I learned quite a few things I had not learned in Bala Vihar class.

Siri Neerchal

* * * * *

Today our Sundaram Bala Vihar class went to the Vedanta Center at the Ramakrishna Mission on a field trip. The Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Ramakrishna's most devoted disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda represented Hinduism in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893.

When we got to the Mission it just looked like a regular house but when we went inside it was a miracle! We went into a big room with an altar in the middle, in which they normally had classes. Swami Mahayogananda came and joked that when we got older we would start going to the Ramakrishna mission instead of Chinmaya mission because the Ramakrishna mission was for older kids and Chinmaya mission is for the younger kids. After that he showed us idols of Hindu gods like Lord Ganesha, Lord Rama and Goddess Kali around the altar. He also showed us idols of Jesus and Buddha. He said "All religions are equal. So we have more than one type of God here." Ramakrishna saw God in everyone. He saw God as Mother Kali but also experienced God as Allah and Jesus. This proves that all religions lead to God. Then he introduced Swami Atmajnanananda who told us that the Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda. Since some students wanted to see Swami Brahmarupananda, Swami Atmajnanananda called him to say "Hi". After Swami Brahmarupananda met with us, it was time to go.

On the walk back to the car, I noticed something I didn't notice on the way! There were two ponds to the right of me and when I looked inside there were goldfish! The really cool thing was since it was cold there was a thin layer of ice on the tops of the ponds so the fish were swimming under the ice! I really enjoyed that trip and I hope to go again.

Adhitya Krishnan

Book Review – 3 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. Mud City is the third book in the trilogy. The first book, *The Breadwinner*, was reviewed in the January issue and the second book, *Parvana's Journey*, was reviewed in the March issue.

Mud City

Parvana's best friend, Shauzia, is now fourteen and has gotten away from Afghanistan but has ended up in a refugee camp in Peshawar, Pakistan. Even worse, the camp is run by Mrs. Weera, the bossy physical education teacher from Shauzia's school in Kabul. She hates it in the camp and yearns to get away from it. One night, she changes into her boy's clothes, gathers up her things and sneaks out of the camp with her faithful dog Jasper by her side. Shauzia goes to the city and works for a number of different people. She starts saving money to buy a train ticket to Karachi so that she can take a boat to France from there. What will happen to Shauzia? Will she get to France? Will she get arrested? Or will she end up where she started, at the refugee camp? Read *Mud City* to find out!

Journey to the West

A Spring Break Adventure

By: Vamsi Manne (Sundaram, VA Dulles Chapter)

As part of our Sundaram class curriculum at Dulles chapter, I learned about saints of India, who taught the world, the message of “oneness” through their teachings and experiences. One of my favorite saints, Swami Vivekananda, traveled to the West, and spread the universal message of “oneness” when the previous speakers talked about the merits of their own religion at the Parliament of World Religions, Chicago in 1893. Swamiji’s journey to the West inspired me to travel through the West, when my parents decided to visit my cousin at St Louis, the Gateway to the West. This article is a 2-part series and I sincerely invite you to explore the first part of my journey to the West, an adventure I took during my spring break. I thank my dad for helping me organizing the article and my mom for providing right pictures.

Steel City

After a tedious 4-hour drive from South Riding, VA to Pittsburgh, PA, I hopped out of the car and gazed at the gorgeous SV temple at Penn Hills. This was the first stop of the great “journey west”. We walked inside and prayed to Lord Balaji for a successful expedition to the West. An hour later, we got back in our midsize car and passed right through downtown of the city made of steel (Pittsburgh). We saw lofty skyscrapers that seemed to touch the clear blue sky.



The Palace of Gold

Around 7:30 in the evening, our family arrived at New Vrindavan, a temple dedicated to Lord Sri Krishna. My dad found a letter and got the key for Room # 9 unknowingly. I had the most sacred night of my life. When I woke up the next morning, I wondered why it was still dark outside. I took a look at the clock and practically had a heart attack. It was 3:30 in the morning! I would have slept for another 3 hours, but my mom came in and said it was Aarti time. I had no choice but to sing sacred songs for the next 4 hours. That was the quality of time I spent at The Palace of Gold.

A Scary Encounter with Columbus

By the time we entered Columbus, OH, it was raining so hard. I couldn't stand the shattering wind and the freezing rain because I wore shorts on that day. We toured around downtown and made our way out of the freezing city. I totally lost my legs and began draping cozy blankets around my feet. When I felt my legs warm, it felt like I was in heaven. Ahhh! That's how I spent the rest of the afternoon sleeping for good.

The Birth of Aviation

We reached our destination at the Wright Brothers Museum in Dayton, OH. We spent our evening roaming in the life of Wilbur and Orville Wright and their scientific experiments to build a perfect plane. They made many attempts, until they finally got their new plane to fly for about a half hour. We then decided to leave the museum and drove to our booked hotel in Middletown, OH, there, we slept in peace.

A Snowy CinCity

The next morning, we came to a stop at Cincinnati. As we gaped at the dark gray sky, I wondered if it was going to freeze today. My dad told me that we were going to climb the amazing 49-Story Carew Tower, which was no big deal to me. Our family climbed to the top, and stared at the gigantic Paul Brown stadium (Home of the Bengals), which made my view a bit more interesting. We got down to the bottom floor and started walking towards the Underground Railroad Museum. I couldn't believe the sight of falling snow in the beginning of April! When we went inside the museum, at first sight, it was spectacular! The information the tour guides gave us was so exhaustive that they even showed 3 short videos called The Midnight Decision, Battle Between the Ohio River, and Journey of the Underground Railroad. The museum tour ended with an exhibit on 'The Struggle Continues' based on Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence principle and displayed Gandhiji's picture with his famous quotation "You must be the change you want to see in the world". The museum's two floors were filled with colorful pictures of people who have contributed freedom to the world. I really enjoyed my time at the Cincinnati Museum even though it was cold and snowing!



Entering the Blue Zone

Next stop, Indianapolis, IN! That's where my favorite football team is located, the Indianapolis Colts. It took an hour to get there. When we were just about to get inside the Indianapolis downtown, we saw a big sign that said "You've entered the Blue Zone. Believe in the Colts." We looked inside of the Lucas Oil Stadium and had a glimpse of the giant field. It was a spectacular view! Then, we got back in the car and rolled into the wide plains.



The Sea of Grass

When our family entered Illinois, we saw vast lands with rich fertilizer and irrigation systems bringing water to dry cornfields. As 3 monotonous hours passed by while we were driving through Illinois, I just sat and glanced at the large prairies. I described it with quotes "As far as the eye can see". I was just wandering off in space when I caught a glimpse of a tall, round structure. When I saw it again, I took a better look. It was the Gateway Arch.

Gateway to the West

"Mom, Dad! We are close to St. Louis! I just saw the Gateway Arch!" I shouted. My dad pointed to a large sign. It said, "Welcome to Missouri, the Show Me State". I looked out of my car window and gazed at the Mighty Mississippi. I couldn't believe my own eyes. We were crossing the Mississippi River! We finally made it to the West. This journey was more like an adventure to me than just a normal trip. This was the best vacation trip I have ever been on! When we finally arrived at my cousin's house, we slept for a long period of time.

The next morning, I woke up very late. We were about to go to the Gateway Arch! I was so excited to take a tram up to the top of the arch at an elevation of 630 ft. When we got inside of the Westward Expansion Museum, we watched 'Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West' in Imax theater. After the movie, we took a tram ride to the top of the arch. The view was splendid! I spotted the New Busch Stadium (Home of the Cardinals), The Old Courthouse (where Dred Scott, a slave who sued unsuccessfully for his freedom), Edward Jones Dome (Home of the Rams), and the Mississippi River. We took a tram ride down to the base of the arch and saw the rest of the Westward Expansion Museum. We even took a riverboat ride to experience the Mighty Mississippi. The next day, we visited the Museum of Transportation and watched different kinds of trains that were built during the early 1900s. When we came back home, my parents took the toughest decision of their life: to explore further or not.



The expedition from the west to the City of Five Seasons, the Windy City, and the Return to the Eternal East will be continued.....

A blue handwritten signature or scribble at the bottom left of the page.

A Paper Bag

Harsha Neerchal
Tapovanam, Silver Spring



This paper bag was designed for a 9th grade Humanities Arts class project in Centennial High School. The purpose of the bag is to make a personal statement.

Photograph and collage by Chetana Neerchal

Language Annual Day April 25, 2009

Anil Kishore
Bala Vihar Director & Teacher, Silver Spring

Our Language Annual Day was held on Saturday, April 25, 2009. It was apparent from the initial gathering at Kailas Niwas that the children were going to put their best performance.

India is a land of diversity. Our linguistically rich nation recognizes 22 languages, a wealth of rich literature and vocabulary. At Chinmayam, we strive to bring the languages to our children to enrich their spiritual development. Learning our scriptures and appreciating the richness in their mother tongues is an added value for our children.

Last year, we offered Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. With an enrollment of about 55 children of all age groups and a variety of linguistic backgrounds we completed another successful year of our Language Program. The linguistic growth of our children can be felt only with programs like ours. The way our students performed on stage, with confidence, with pride and motivation is highly appreciated and the evening said it all. Our evening started with a gourmet dinner prepared by the student and teacher's families. It was a social get together but the menu itself could boast of the richness of our heritage.

Our excited group of parents, teachers and students promptly started the dinner at 6 PM and the program at 7 PM with an invocation to Lord Ganesh (Tamil). *O Lord Ganesha, I will offer you milk, honey, sugar syrup and daal, which you like very much. In return please give us the knowledge of Tamil.*

Tamil Valar Koodam, the Tamil class meets on Saturday mornings. They showcased their class activities. They recited a poem called *Maampazham* or Mango. It talks about the sweet golden delicious fruit from the town of Salem which is famous for its mangoes, and then invites all children to share and enjoy it.

The next poem was *Odi Vilayadu Paapa*, which means Run and Play Little Child. It was written by Subramania Bharati, who was one of the most famous Tamil poets and was prominent in the freedom struggle. It talks about all the healthy habits children should learn like working hard, playing and learning an art.

They also presented a poem that helps children learn the days of the week. The children had placards with pictures for each day of the week to illustrate the poem. The translation is:

On Sunday the jewelry was missing

On Monday they found the thief

On Tuesday he went to jail

On Wednesday he saw the light and realized his mistake

On Thursday he was released from jail

On Friday he went home

On Saturday he ate a big dinner and slept

Guess what happened after that??

The last item is a short skit which illustrates the importance of respect for elders and good manners. Mekala, a little girl, has a pet parrot Samyuktha, which can talk. They receive visitors when the parents are not home. The skit shows how to welcome and greet guests, and how to use language of respect when addressing elders. By the time the guests leave, the parrot has learnt to be polite. Thanks to Anugraha Palan for her contribution to this write up.

Telugu Bala Siksha – presented a beautiful enactment of an episode from Kingdom of Sri Krishnadeva Raya. Tenali Ramakishna was a minister and adviser to King Sri Krishnadeva Raya. King took advice of Minister Ramakrishna to many hard-to-solve problems in his kingdom. One such problem that is written in the literature for children was to find a pumpkin thief among the gardeners of the palace orchard. Ramakrishna solved the mystery by using simple human psychology that the guilty would exhibit irrational behavior out of fear of being caught. He gave all the gardeners small sticks and told them that those sticks were magical and the one given to guilty would grow by an inch by next day. Obviously, the guilty gardener was scared and broke the stick by an inch thinking that it would grow by an inch next day and he would not be caught. Of course, there was nothing magical about the stick and it did not grow and the thief was caught. The play has one queen (instead of the king), 3 gardeners, one spy, Minister Ramakrishna. Thanks to Emani Reddy for his contribution to this write-up.

Hindi Paathshala also had some poems, two songs and two dramas. The youngest stars of Hindi class presented three poems from the textbook - *Koyal*, *Rail* and *Jhanda*. These are the budding youngsters of Bala Vihar who have only been in the curriculum for 2 years or less. The first year students are already reading, writing and reciting!! The next group presented a humorous skit *Bandar Baat* also from our textbook. This skit also sent a message that conveys the importance of good friendship, sharing and caring. It is based on an old Hindi folk tale of two cats that fought for food and could not resolve their dispute. The cats sought the help of a monkey to be the judge. The monkey tricked them into giving up a sizeable portion of the entire food to himself. It was too late before the cats realized their mistake and were left with only little left over bread. The message of the story also enforced that peace and harmony can resolve most of our differences. When we are disturbed and we cannot get along, we lose our sense of discretion.

Session III Hindi class presented *Kabir Dohay*. The most precious duets from Kabir were sung to music. When the dedication to the guru was recited, the children dedicated their presentation to Swami Dheeranandaji our spiritual mentor and sought his attention first and then recited the famous doha.

*Guru Gobind dou khade
Kake lage panv
Balihari Guru apno
jin Gobind diyo batai.*

If Guru and Govinda [the Supreme Consciousness] appear simultaneously, you have to pay your obeisance to Guru only, because it is only the Guru who made you realize Govinda.

Hindi class from Sunday AM presented an old song written by and sung by Jagjit and Chitra Singh – *Yeh Daulat Bhi Le Lo*. The poet stresses here, that you can take all my wealth and my youth but do not take away the memories I have of my childhood. The memories of playing in the monsoon rain, listening to stories and playing with friends are a reminder of my childhood. This class also presented a skit on Harry Potter. The cast prepared their own costumes and dialogs.

They represented the characters from the book and the dialogs were also composed by the children themselves. The dialogs provided an example of the types of characters portrayed. Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Professor Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall, Rubeus Hagrid, Voldemort, each had a conversation or a dialog that represented their character. Voldemort was the villain, truth always wins over evil and even in the world of witchcraft, good deeds prevailed. This class also did a write up on the Language day as a class activity, it is attached below.

For the grand finale, the Hindi Paathshala sang the theme song – *Hum bonge kaamyab*, a translation of the popular song “We shall overcome”. May there be peace everyone, may everyone walk hand in hand.

Ramita Dewan our youth Hindi teacher was the MC for the Annual Day. She transitioned from program to program with quotable quotes from Gurudev, jokes and commentaries. As she graduates this year, we wish her all the best in all her endeavors. We do hope that she returns to Chinmayam to take the lead in many of our Bala Vihar activities. Good Luck Ramita.

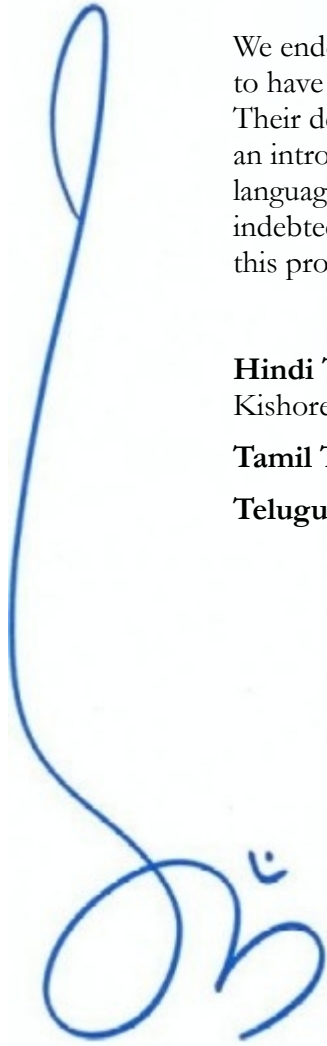
Three of our students also helped with their own presentations. Harsha and Siri Neerchal gave laughs to the audience with their “Ajit” jokes from the Bollywood movies. The youngest star was Karan Luthria who recited the famous song *Lakdi ki kaathi kaathi pe ghoda* from the movie *Masoom*, all by himself. The audience enjoyed the lyrics and the rhythm of the song.

We ended with a Vote of Thanks, Swamiji’s message and the Indian National Anthem. We are fortunate to have a team of dedicated, caring teachers who help us promote this beautiful value to our children. Their dedication and selfless service can never be thanked enough. A 50 minute weekly class can only be an introduction to the language. We look forward to continued support from parents in continuing their language skills at home so that we can enhance the linguistic knowledge of our children. We are also indebted to respected Swamiji and Acharya Vilasini for being so instrumental in motivating us to keep this program strong and vibrant.

Hindi Teachers: Anil Darbari, Kamal Dewan, Ramita Dewan, Rajiv Gopal, Reena Gopal, Anil Kishore, Nalini Kumar, Geeta Luthria, Rajiv Mahajan, Malinda Mallick,

Tamil Teachers: Anugraha Palan, Jayanthi Babu

Telugu Teachers: Indira Rao, Rema Piratla, Emani Reddy.



हिंदी पाठशाला का २००९ वार्षिक दिवस

इस साल हमने भारतीय भाषाओं का वार्षिक दिवस २५ अप्रैल को मनाया था । तीन भाषाओं में विद्यार्थियों ने कार्यक्रम प्रस्तुत किये बच्चों ने गाने गए, नाटक खेले और चुटकुले सुनाये । सब बच्चों ने रंग बिरंगे कपड़े पहने । हमारी कक्षा ने एक नाटक किया और गाना गाया । हमारा नाटक हैरी पॉटर के बारे में था । हमने दो गाने गाए । गानों के नाम थे "होंगे कामयाब" और "यह दौलत भी लेलो", हम सबको मज़ा आया । स्वामीजी ने भी कार्यक्रम देखा और उन्हें भी बहुत अच्छा लगा ।

नंदिनी, सम्ब्रम, हर्षा, ईशा सीरी व गौरव

2nd in the Series
Hindu Rituals and Routines -
Why Do We Follow Them?

Submitted by Sowmya Sundararaman



8. Why do we apply the holy ash?

The ash of any burnt object is not regarded as holy ash. Bhasma (the holy ash) is the ash from the homa (sacrificial fire) where special wood along with ghee and other herbs is offered as worship of the Lord. Or the deity is worshipped by pouring ash as abhisheka and is then distributed as bhasma.

Bhasma is generally applied on the forehead. Some apply it on certain parts of the body like the upper arms, chest etc. Some ascetics rub it all over the body. Many consume a pinch of it each time they receive it.

The word bhasma means, "that by which our sins are destroyed and the Lord is remembered." Bha implied bhartsanam ("to destroy") and sma implies smaranam ("to remember"). The application of bhasma therefore signifies destruction of the evil and remembrance of the divine. Bhasma is called vibhuti (which means "glory") as it gives glory to one who applies it and raksha (which means a source of protection) as it protects the wearer from ill health and evil, by purifying him or her.

Bala Vihar

Homa (offering of oblations into the fire with sacred chants) signifies the offering or surrender of the ego and egocentric desires into the flame of knowledge or a noble and selfless cause. The consequent ash signifies the purity of the mind, which results from such actions.

Also the fire of knowledge burns the oblation and wood signifying ignorance and inertia respectively. The ash we apply indicates that we should burn false identification with the body and become free of the limitations of birth and death. This is not to be misconstrued as a morose reminder of death but as a powerful pointer towards the fact that time and tide wait for none.

Bhasma is specially associated with Lord Shiva who applies it all over His body. Shiva devotes apply bhasma as a tripundra. When applied with a red spot at the center, the mark symbolizes Shiva-Shakti (the unity of energy and matter that creates the entire seen and unseen universe).

Tryambakam yajamahe
Sugandhim pushtivardhanam
Urvaa rukamiva bhandhanaan
Mrytyor muksheeyamaa amrutaat

"We worship the three-eyed Lord Shiva who nourishes and spread fragrance in our lives. May He free us from the shackles of sorrow, change and death – effortlessly, like the fall of a rip brinjal from its stem."

9. ***Why Do We Offer Food to the Lord Before Eating It?***

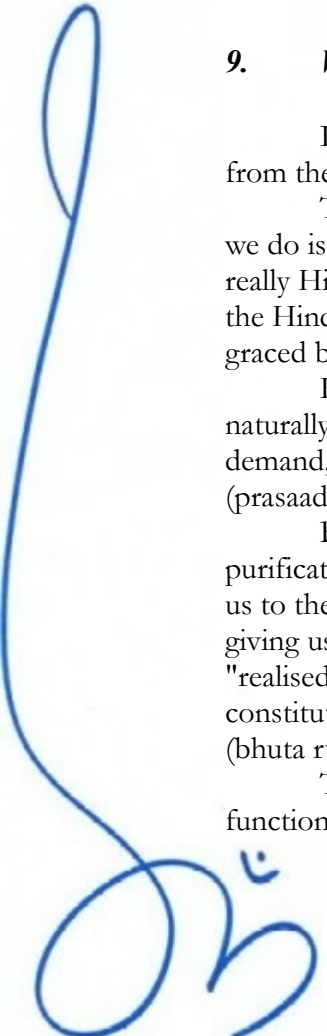
Indians make an offering of food to the Lord and later partake of it as prasaada - a holy gift from the Lord. In our daily ritualistic worship (pooja) too we offer naivedyam (food) to the Lord.

The Lord is omnipotent and omniscient. Man is a part, while the Lord is the totality. All that we do is by His strength and knowledge alone. Hence what we receive in life as a result of our actions is really His alone. We acknowledge this through the act of offering food to Him. This is exemplified by the Hindi words "tera tujko arpan" – I offer what is Yours to You. Thereafter it is akin to His gift to us, graced by His divine touch.

Knowing this, our entire attitude to food and the act of eating changes. The food offered will naturally be pure and the best. We share what we get with others before consuming it. We do not demand, complain or criticise the quality of the food we get. We eat it with cheerful acceptance (prasaada buddhi).

Before we partake of our daily meals we first sprinkle water around the plate as an act of purification. Five morsels of food are placed on the side of the plate acknowledging the debt owed by us to the Divine forces (devta runa) for their benign grace and protection, our ancestors (pitru runa) for giving us their lineage and a family culture, the sages (rishi runa) as our religion and culture have been "realised", attained and handed down to us by them, our fellow beings (manushya runa) who constitute society without the support of which we could not live as we do and other living beings (bhuta runa) for serving us selflessly.

Thereafter the Lord, the life force, who is also within us as the five life-giving physiological functions, is offered the food. This is done with the chant



praanaaya swaahaa,
apaanaaya swaahaa,
vyaanaaya swaahaa,
udaanaaya swaahaa,
samaanaaya swaahaa,
brahmane swaahaa

After offering the food thus, it is eaten as prasaada - blessed food.

10. Why do we fast?

Most devout Indians fast regularly or on special occasions like festivals. On such days they do not eat at all, eat once or make do with fruits or a special diet of simple food.

Fasting in Sanskrit is called upavaasa. Upa means "near" + vaasa means "to stay". Upavaasa therefore means staying near (the Lord), meaning the attainment of close mental proximity with the Lord. Then what has upavaasa to do with food?

A lot of our time and energy is spent in procuring food items, preparing, cooking, eating and digesting food. Certain food types make our minds dull and agitated. Hence on certain days man decides to save time and conserve his energy by eating either simple, light food or totally abstaining from eating so that his mind becomes alert and pure. The mind, otherwise pre-occupied by the thought of food, now entertains noble thoughts and stays with the Lord. Since it is a self-imposed form of discipline it is usually adhered to with joy

Also every system needs a break and an overhaul to work at its best. Rest and a change of diet during fasting is very good for the digestive system and the entire body.

The more you indulge the senses, the more they make their demands. Fasting helps us to cultivate control over our senses, sublimate our desires and guide our minds to be poised and at peace.

Fasting should not make us weak, irritable or create an urge to indulge later. This happens when there is no noble goal behind fasting.

The Bhagavad-Gita urges us to eat appropriately - neither too less nor too much - yukta-aahaara and to eat simple, pure and healthy food (a saattvik diet) even when not fasting.

It is Not time yet

A story by Syama published in 1960s in Ananda Vikatan

Contributed by Ravi Ravichandran

(This was a story that attracted my attention when I was reading a collection of the famous Tamil Weekly called Ananda Vikatan. I have made an attempt to translate the story as close to the original text as possible)

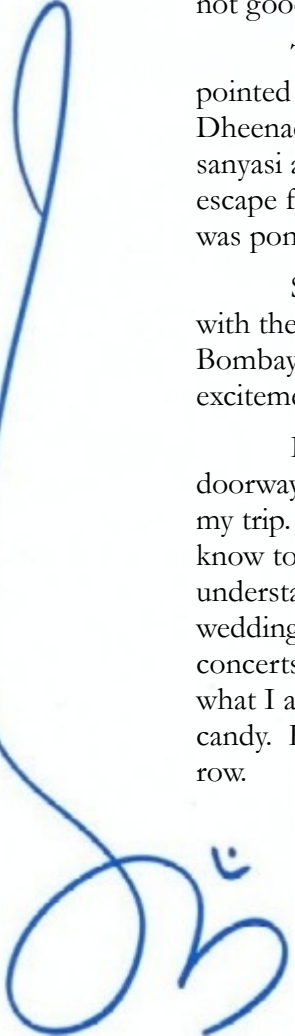
As Dheenadhayalu was leaving his home to board the awaiting car he bumped himself in the doorway. His wife was immediately agitated. It all happened in a split second. “I am really scared. Do you really have to go today? That too you are flying”, asked his wife Shenbagam. Her questions did not stop. More came out like a stream of arrows and her agitation did not subside.

Dheendhayalu came back inside the home and sat on the sofa. He drank the water his wife had brought. He slowly started speaking. “If I don’t go, I will lose Rs. 100,000. I have been holding these oil stocks for so long. One agent has found an interested buyer. If I don’t go, I may lose the buyer.” Shenbagam asked in a weak voice, “You used to say that those oil stocks are not even worth a penny. Is it fair to dump them on someone else?” Dheenadhayalu went out without answering his wife’s question and got into the waiting car. As the car started rolling down the street, he did not care to stop to answer his old mother’s question, “Dheena where are you going?” Shenbagam now startled by her mother-in-law’s question started praying, “Oh God, please make sure that he returns home safely. The omens are not good.”

The flight was in the crystal blue sky. Swamiji offered his pranams to the Tirupathi temple pointed out by the stewardess. Swamiji was in his mid 30s and had a very pleasant and smiling face. Dheenadhayalu who was sitting behind Swamiji wondering as to why Swamiji had chosen to become a sanyasi at such a young age- perhaps, he was not courageous enough to face the life and wanted to escape from the realities of life? Another elderly woman who was sitting in the same row as Swamiji was pondering over the same question. “Perhaps he failed in his love life,” she sighed.

Swamiji absolutely unaware of the two fellow passengers’ thoughts and was engrossed in playing with the two children who were seated in the front row. Those children were traveling from Chennai to Bombay to join their parents. The boy was perhaps 6 years old and the girl was barely 4 years old. In the excitement of flying, they did not even feel the natural fear.

Dheenadayalu suddenly started rubbing his head which was still hurting from the impact on the doorway. His thoughts were running like a stream “For such a silly incident she wanted me to cancel my trip. She called my attempt a sin! If I worry about that, how can I earn wealth? These women only know to spend. They have no idea where the money is coming from. They have no inclination to understand it either. Did she question last year’s expense of Rs. 50,000 to celebrate our daughter’s wedding with such pomp? -- 5 days of wedding including 3 days of feasting, not to mention two music concerts a day. She never even bothered to ask me where the money came from. Now she is telling me what I am doing is wrong!” He called the stewardess who just then stopped by his row to offer him candy. He asked in a very soft voice “Who is that lady?” pointing to the old lady sitting in Swamiji’s row.



“Oh she is Ms. Randhi Devi” answered the stewardess without any hesitation. She continued on to say, “Ms. Randhi Devi has dedicated her life to public service. She is not only involved in service projects in Tamilnadu, but she is connected with service organizations in Bombay as well. She often flies between Chennai and Bombay.” Dheendayalu’s face showed some contempt reflecting his thought “What a waste of life doing public service!”

When the stewardess reached Randhi Devi’s row, she asked the stewardess out of curiosity what the conversation with Dheenadayalu was about. Stewardess simply responded saying “He was asking about you.” Randhi Devi wore a contemptuous smile on her face thinking “Dheenadayalu is busy making money, who is he going to know?,” as if it was a crime not to know who she was.

It was nearly noon time. The flight was flying at 10,000 ft. It was a very beautiful sight to see Thungabadhra river from the flight which resembled a broken pearl necklace. Meanwhile in the cockpit, radio officer Amarnath was thinking about his new life, the tearful eyes of his wife as she bade good-bye that morning. The sky was still clear and the weather was fine.

As the flight approached Pune, the sky started getting dark and it started to rain. The pilot started to climb to gain higher altitude. As the flight was approaching Bombay, the rain got severe. When the foreigner asked the stewardess about the status, she said that the visibility is very poor due to heavy rain and dark clouds. “In that case...” dragged the foreigner. The stewardess said, “perhaps if we stay up in the air a little longer, the rain may break and we can safely land,” with the idea of calming him down.

“What do you mean clouds may break up? What if the situation does not improve?” asked Dheenadayalu very angrily. Knowing that the stewardess cannot answer the angry passenger, Swamiji said, “we are always in God’s hands. What is the use of anxiety and worry?” His voice was very calm, soothing and very encouraging. The plane started struggling in mid air due to sever turbulence. The little boy was crying with fear and the stewardess was trying to calm him by hugging him. The little girl was oblivious to the anxiety and thoroughly enjoying the bumpy ride.

Only radio officer Amarnath knew about the gravity of the situation. He never believed in horoscope and fortune telling. That is how he was raised. He recalled his wife saying, “My father was absolutely against our marriage this year. According to your horoscope, this year you are going to face a life-threatening danger. So he begged to postpone our wedding.” Amarnath thought that was a joke. Now at this moment, he watched the pilot whose face was totally drenched in sweat. Just then he received a message on the radio saying that the weather was bad at all the nearby airports and so the plane cannot land anywhere. Amarnanth started to think, “Could the horoscope prediction be true?” He broke into sweat with fear and anxiety.

Dheendayalu started to wonder about the possibility running out of fuel. After all they had been in the air hovering around Bombay airport for over an hour. He started to curse himself, “Why didn’t I listen to Shenbagam and cancel my trip? Can there be truth Shenbagam’s statement? Am I committing a sin? What if the buyer becomes bankrupt as a result of this transaction. What if his whole family will curse me and my family. What will be the effect of such a curse?” Even at that perilous moment, the selfish business mind said, “No, No. What a weakness. What stupidity! If one’s tears are going to destroy another what can be accomplished in this world?” His chain of thought was broken when he heard Swamiji’s conversation with Randhi Devi.

Swamiji was telling Randhi Devi “Whoever has his home and affairs clean need not fear death.” Randhi Devi interrupted, “ what do you mean by clean? If one works true to his conscience, isn't that clean enough?” Swamiji replied, “My answer depends on what you call conscience. Man often thinks what is easy and convenient as his conscience. Can you say that you have lived your life true to your conscience?” Randhi Devi started to recount, “My father was a doctor and I was the only child. I was enjoying all the perks and privileges of being the only child of a rich family. My parents got me married to a man who they selected. My mother-in-law was living with us. I simply could not get along with her. My husband did not want to do anything about the situation. So, one day, I left my husband and went back to my parents. My husband tried to contact me several times. He even came to my parents’ home once. I refused to go with him because of my ego and arrogance. He decided to remarry. Since then, I have dedicated myself to social service. It feels like it was just yesterday although this happened 25 years ago.” Swamiji was still listening. Randhi Devi continued, “I have a wish. I understand that my husband lives with his wife and daughter somewhere in Matunga. If I escape from this peril, I am going to visit him.”

Swamiji sat with the children and started to talk with the stewardess. He asked her, “Are you afraid now?” She answered, “I am afraid for the children. As for my self, I am not at all afraid of death. My fiancé returned from the India Pakistan war and as planned we were about to be married. The night before the wedding, my fiancé became severely dehydrated due to vomiting and diarrhea and he died. I lost myself that day. My father tried to get me married after sometime but was unsuccessful in finding a suitable husband! The moment the prospective groom came to know of the mishap in my life, they branded me as an unfortunate soul and unlucky person. Swamiji, I don't understand this. Since my fiancé's death, I have been expecting my death and today that is quite likely. However, I am not ready now to die because I feel responsible for these children.” Swamiji muttered again, “We cannot forget that we under the watch of that Supreme Power.”

Clouds did not break up and the fuel gauge was showing the rapid consumption of the fuel. The pilot knew he could not even fly 200 km with the fuel reserve. The pilot started the descent with the hope of safely landing the plane in spite of the bad weather and poor visibility. He trusted his ability and training.

Dheenadayalu realized that he was close to death for the first time. Swamiji consoled him and Dheenadayalu broke down into tears and started saying, “ Swamiji, I did not understand life's purpose. I spent my time worrying about wealth accumulation. If I escape from this peril, I will spend the rest of my life praising the Lord and serving the poor. Swamiji, will you pray for that? I am not sure if God will listen to my prayers as I have been very deceitful all my life.”

It was late afternoon when the flight landed in Bombay. Fire engines, Red Cross ambulances and other emergency services were ready on the tarmac to handle any crisis. Everyone congratulated the pilot for his bravery and talent in landing the plane in dreadful weather.

Dheenadayalu's agent was anxiously waiting for his boss. He started saying, “I was getting worried as the buyer had told me that he was leaving Bombay tonight. Let us first meet him to sign the papers and then we will do the rest.” Dheenadayalu silently followed him into the waiting taxi and went to meet the buyer!

A social worker in uniform greeted Randhi Devi. Hesitantly she asked the social worker, “Can we go to Matunga before going to the hotel.” Social worker replied, “Matunga and Dadar areas are flooded due to heavy rains. We have to take a detour to go to the hotel. So, we should not even think about going to Matunga.” Randi Devi followed her greeter quietly. Amarnath gave a telegram to his wife informing her of his safe arrival.

Stewardess handed the children to their father and returned to notice that Swamiji was still in his seat with his eyes closed. Stewardess quietly told him that the plane had landed and he should be leaving the plane. Swamiji got up slowly and heard the stewardess say “Swamiji the time has not come yet.”

Swamiji was immediately reminded of Mundaka Upanishad sloka:

Bhidhyate hrdaya granthi chidyante sarva-samśayāha
Kshīyante cāsya karmānī tasmin drushte parāvare

भिध्यते ह्रिदय ग्रन्थिहि छिद्यन्ते सर्व-सम्शयाः

क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् द्रुष्टे परावरे

When He is seen both in the higher and the lower, the knots of his heart becomes untied; all doubts are dispelled; and all his Karma-s is consumed.

Really the time had not come for any of the passengers as their hearts still had several knots!



Science, Spirituality and Religion – A Vedantic Point of View

by Raju Chidambaram

(Editor's Note: Raju ji is presenting this paper at 3rd SSEARS Conference, Bali, Indonesia, in June 2009)

The title of this paper is “Science, Spirituality, and Religion”. There is a reason why I chose to put spirituality in the middle of the title between science and religion. Spirituality has been associated with religions ever since the dawn of civilization; it is still customary to speak of the two as though they are one and the same. However, I believe it is possible to make the case that spirituality is equally close to science. That in fact is one of the main objectives of this paper and the reason for wedging spirituality between science and religion. We will begin the discourse by addressing an age old problem.

Science vs. Religion

Much has been said and written about the constrained relationship between our scientific and religious institutions. Both are great, vital institutions that have served mankind well, though it is not difficult to find numerous instances where both have also been a source of suffering. Science has been generally a constructive force bringing with it many blessings to the modern man. But it has also been misused quite frequently as a destructive power. Similarly, there is no doubt that the great religions of the world have succeeded in providing peace and comfort to their faithful followers from the stress and strain of worldly life; but they have also been misused to incite intense animosities between groups of people resulting in much suffering. These are well documented facts of history.

Well documented too are the many instances where science and religion have clashed. No doubt, both science and religion seek to be on the side of truth. Confrontation occurs when what religion holds as true is not acceptable to science, or *vice versa*. The approach taken by science to seek and assert truth is quite different from that used by religions. Science accepts as truth only that which can be verified by any observer at anytime by appropriate objective observations. Consistent with this view, science generally preoccupies itself with questions that can be verified through human observation. Religions, on the other hand, deal with many questions which, by their very nature, are beyond the capability of direct observation. They rely on scriptural authority to assert their views on these questions. To the extent the issues of respective interest to science and religion are not overlapping, confrontation between the two can be avoided.

There is some overlap, however, and clashes do occur. For example, religions do have views on origin of the universe and the genesis of human beings which also happen to be areas of great interest to modern science. Here the traditional religious views tend to be at odds with the results of scientific observations. Similarly, some personal and social customs mandated by religions (dietary restrictions, for example) may be contraindicated by scientific principles. Religious dogmatism is often blamed by scientists for the continuation of the controversy in the face of what they consider as objective evidence. But science itself has been blamed as being dogmatic for its view that basic questions of concern to religion,

such as God or life after death, are not worthy of discussion since anything we say regarding these cannot be verified by direct observation.

One may rightly despair whether this stand-off between Science and Religion can ever get resolved. The resolution, I believe, is possible provided we have a right understanding of science and religion and also of the mediating role of spirituality.

Spirituality vs. Religion

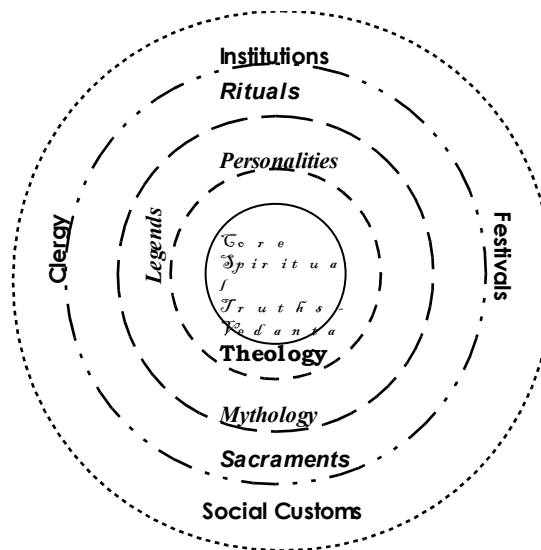
Spirituality does not conflict with religion; on the other hand, as mentioned earlier, it is often considered inseparable from religion. This does not mean that the two are the same. It is true that for a religion to be effective it must include core spiritual truths. The spiritual nature and spiritual development are same in all individuals regardless of time, space, gender, race, nationality etc. Therefore, the various religions that have come into vogue at different epochs in different cultures, even though looking very different, must necessarily incorporate many similar, if not identical, core beliefs about spirituality. Thus, all religions

- 1) Place greatest emphasis on controlling the tumultuous mind and living a disciplined, virtuous life,
- 2) Believe in the existence of a higher power whose Will dictates the events of the world and experiences of the individuals,
- 3) Preach love and self-less service and require surrender of personal will to the higher Will,
- 4) Discount the importance of the perishable body in deference to the imperishable indwelling “soul” within each individual,
- 5) Hold that spiritual practices bring peace and happiness to daily life, and
- 6) Recognize the potential of all souls to reach Perfection, though some religions suggest that this potential is realized only for own believers.

But religions do not stop with just acknowledging and promoting these spiritual truths. They have found it necessary and useful to surround the core truths with several layers of additional theories and practices. The relevance of these additional layers is not universal since they are the product of the particular time, space, and culture in which they are created. As such they do not have the same absolute validity as the core spiritual truths do.

The anatomy of a religion can be represented as rings surrounding a central core of spiritual truths (Fig 1.) The outmost ring consists of the institutions, the temples and churches, the clergy officiating in various positions, the social customs, dress and dietary habits, its festivals etc. This is the external face the religion presents to the world. In the next layer inside are the various rituals and sacraments that the followers are expected to observe. Usually, this facet of a religion is not open to everyone, but only to its adherents. The third layer is perhaps the most significant of all. It includes the legends and mythologies associated with the various prophets, saints, and deities of the religion. The personalities, ideals and beliefs introduced in this layer often are the factors determining the character of the religion. In the next inner layer immediately surrounding the core, is Theology dealing with its beliefs regarding God, origin of the world, soul, death, life after death etc. Typically, theology involves abstract concepts and theories which the average follower may not totally relate to, but is expected to accept on faith.

Fig 1 **ANATOMY OF A RELIGION:** *The layers surrounding core spiritual truths define a religion*



In Fig 1, Vedanta has been identified with the core spiritual truths. This is because it is the core spiritual truths that are the sole concern of Vedanta. Vedanta has had many admirers around the world at all times since, as one of them puts it, “Vedanta is the essence of religion, the truth embedded in the heart of every religion. Vedanta is the Godhead that makes every religion Divine.” This Vedanta, as taught in the Upanishads and lived by the Hindu Sages, is remarkably simple, honest, and devoid of any worldly embellishments. It recognizes no institutions, no rituals, stipulates no personality other than own Self, as absolutely necessary for salvation.

As mentioned earlier, the outer layers that distinguish one religion from others are very much the product of the cultural milieu in which that religion was founded. But the spiritual truths at the core of every religion are invariant over time and space and have no cultural or historic connotations. In this respect they are similar to scientific truths which also must be invariant over time, space and culture.

Much of the difficulty science has with religions has also to do with the theology, mythology, personalities and rituals found in the outer layers and less so with the core spiritual truths. We will return to discuss this important point at length later.

Religion vs. Religion

Conflict among religions is an unfortunate fact of history, a fact that has repeated itself far too many times. What is the source of this conflict? At some risk of over simplification, we may say it is just plain “competition”.

Religions do subscribe to the same core truths but frame them in the context of the theology, personalities, institutions, etc that set them apart from other competing religions. In this process,

he universal nature of the core truths is significantly de-emphasized. What is common and unifying is sacrificed in the interest of promoting own brand image.

In this respect, religions may be likened to competing pharmaceutical companies packaging the same generic drug using different formulations and delivery systems. The formulation can include several ingredients other than the key active agent. The method of delivering the drug could also differ: it could be administered orally, intra-muscularly, by a patch worn on the skin etc. The basic efficacy of the treatment depends of course on the pharmacology of the drug and not on the packaging. But when marketing their product, the companies would like to emphasize the benefits of their superior formulation. This is of course done in order to maximize their market share. No doubt each formulation and delivery method often has its individual advantages and disadvantages in terms of side effects, cost etc. A patient may therefore have a good reason to prefer one brand over others.

A similar situation prevails in the religious scene. There can be no denial of the comfort and support religion provides in one's day to day life. It is something to which many believers in every religion can bear testimony based on direct personal experience. Social scientists and psychologists also agree on the role of religion in facing the problems of life. The positive effect of religion and spirituality on health, and on ability to cope with life, has been documented in scientific studies in recent years. However, as far as this author knows, there has been no "head-to-head" unbiased, scientific study in the literature whose results could support a claim of uniform superior efficacy of any one religion over another. As long as the "key active ingredient" in all major religions is the same spiritual truth, such evidence is not likely to emerge from future studies either. The conclusion to be drawn here is that the scientifically demonstrable successes of religion are attributable to the spiritual content and not to the packaging.

Science vs. Spirituality

It can be surmised from what has been said so far that science should have fewer problems with spirituality than with religion. A good deal of spirituality is concerned with practices to ensure happiness here and now in this world rather than in some distant heaven after death. Yoga and meditation, to name two of these practices, have gained acceptance by scientists as having demonstrable salutary benefits on the physical and mental well being of the practitioners. Of the six core spiritual truths listed earlier, the first, third, and fifth have to do with our mental or "inner" life. Scientists do not refute the existence of mind or the importance of inner happiness, even if they do not have a consensus among themselves as to what mind really is. As such, they will not have much to dispute with these three points.

The second, fourth, and sixth points in the list do refer to concepts of "higher Will" and "imperishable soul" which are not observable entities. Scientists can raise objections as to their validity but close examination will show that these objections themselves are not totally scientific. For example, we note that modern science has come to accept uncertainty as an inescapable and insurmountable feature of the universe, affecting the very fundamental particles of which matter and energy are constituted. Uncertainty is also inherent in human decisions and affects our daily lives even more directly and profoundly. It can be argued that acknowledging this basic uncertainty

is tantamount to postulating a higher Will dictating the actual course of events in the universe. Science may not talk of God, but it does accept that there is a “something else” that affects the affairs of things and beings of the universe.

Similarly, while science does not talk of “soul”, there are many scientists who believe that not everything about a human being can be explained in terms of its material body. Of particular relevance to this discussion are the advances being made in neurosciences and artificial intelligence. It is true that modern brain imaging techniques are revolutionizing our understanding of the structure and processes of the brain and how they relate to our mental and physical functions. However, science is not anywhere close to answering a fundamental question: A human being experiences the world and is *aware* of its experiences. *How do all the neuronal activities and processes inside the brain add up to a knowledge and vivid experience of a world outside?* Neuroscientists have no answer.

Computer scientists making great strides in artificial intelligence have also no insight to offer regarding this question. Computers play games and music, predict weather, and solve mathematical problems with great speed and versatility. But when playing chess, does the computer *know* it is playing chess? When solving a mathematical problem does it know *what* problem it is solving or its significance? It does not. No computer scientist can categorically assert that computers “know” or experience anything they are doing. Robots built by future computer scientists may look and behave so very much like human beings that it may be difficult to distinguish one from the other. But even then, the hardware and software of which robots are made, cannot vest them with the quality of knowing and experiencing. This is because *knowing and experiencing are not attributes of physical matter, but of “something else”*.

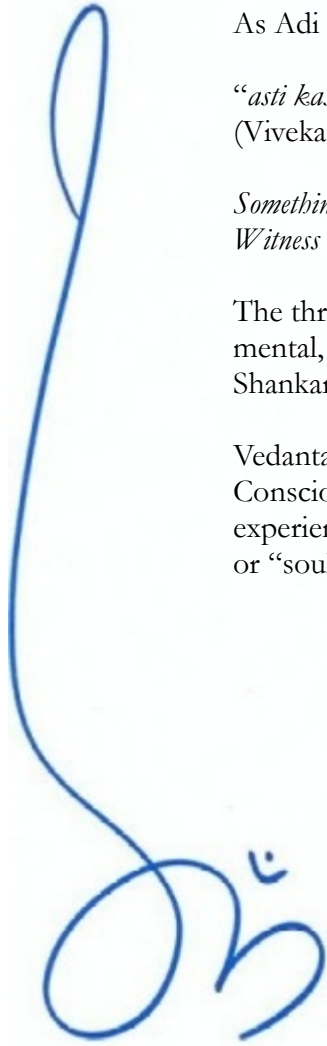
As Adi Sankara, the great Advaita Vedanta philosopher of the 12th Century AD, says:

“asti kascit swayam nityam abam pratyayalambana:, avasthaa traya saakshi san panca kosa vilakshana:”
(Vivekachudamani, Verse 125).

Something there is, which is the Absolute Entity, the Eternal Substratum for the very awareness of the Ego. It is the Witness of the three states and it is distinct from all the five sheaths. (Translation by Swami Chinmayanandaji)

The three states refer to the awake, dream and sleep states; the five sheaths to the physical, physiological, mental, intellectual, and sub-conscious components of the personality. That “eternal something”, asserts Shankara, is the knower of all three states but is not part of any of the five sheaths.

Vedanta holds that it is the *conscious* mind which experiences and knows the world and that Consciousness is an entity distinct from the brain or any other part of the physical body. This experiencer, called *jeeva*, dwells in the body but does not die when the physical body dies. It is the *jeeva*, or “soul”, which can possess knowledge and not the physical body.



The Spiritual Evolution: From Ignorance to Perfect Knowledge through Experiences

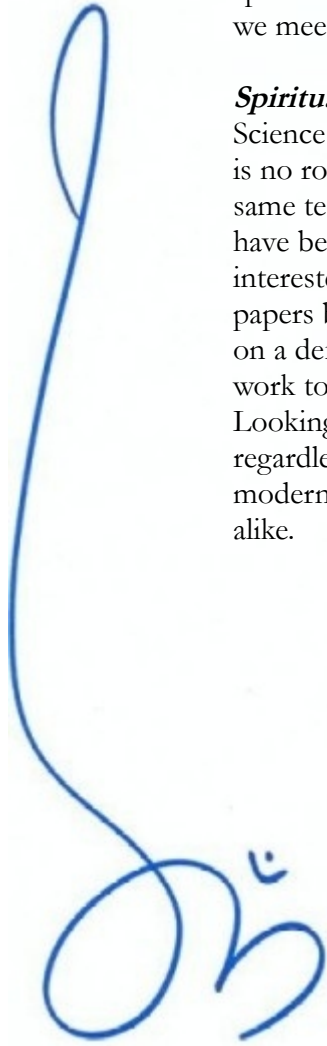
This brings us to a key distinction we may make between Science and Spirituality. The basic “natural sciences”, such as Physics, Chemistry and Biology, deal with matter and energy and they seek to explain all natural phenomena in terms of the known laws affecting matter and energy. But matter and energy is not all there is to this universe. There is also knowledge *Existence of the body of knowledge known as science is itself the proof that not everything in this creation is matter and energy.*

While science is focused on matter and energy, spirituality is concerned with Knowledge. One may ask “Knowledge of *what?*” The spiritual aspirant does gain knowledge of how mind interacts with the world to produce experiences and how that mind could be disciplined and made pure enough to acquire the most sublime knowledge. Vedanta makes one of the highest statements in metaphysics when it says that the spiritual aspirant finally seeks not knowledge *of* anything, but Knowledge itself. That is, spirituality is ultimately concerned with knowing the “knower” and “experiencer”, now parading as *jeevas*.

One of the sobering facts about science is that, while it acknowledges the world and the myriad of experiences it offers, it cannot comprehend the purpose behind any of these. One must turn to spirituality to find the purpose of life. It is by learning the intelligent way to meet all experiences, that a *jeeva* gradually gains knowledge, just as it is by observation that scientists slowly build the edifice of science. To repeat what was stated earlier, the knowledge of importance in spirituality is not any knowledge relating to matter and energy, but the knowledge of the Knower that possesses all knowledge- in other words, Knowledge of the Self. Attainment of this “Supreme Knowledge” is what is called in spiritual traditions variously as “Salvation” or “Nirvaana” or “Enlightenment”. Echoing this spiritual principle, all religions give less importance to *what* we experience in life, pointing out that *how* we meet those experiences is the key to a successful life leading to salvation.

Spirituality As A Science

Science and spirituality, as discussed above deal with two different aspects of reality and therefore there is no room for conflict between the two. What is more to the point, spirituality is itself a science. The same techniques used in science, including controlled experiments and mathematical analysis, can be and have been used in understanding spirituality also. We will not delve into this topic in this paper, but interested readers are referred to the website www.mathematicsofspirituality.com where a series of papers by this author are posted. When Spirituality is approached as it has been in these papers, it takes on a definitely science-like look, capable of providing insights into our spiritual nature. Based on the work to-date in this area, it is my belief that spirituality can be studied as a distinct scientific discipline. Looking further down the road, it should be possible to teach spirituality as a science to young adults regardless of their cultural or religious background. This may be one way to cure the woes that beset the modern world due to a general lack of spiritual maturity among both the young and older generations alike.



Religion: Spiritual Food Cooked to Cultural Taste

Before concluding this paper, it is important that we clarify a question: One does not need the support of a religion to practice spirituality and enjoy all its benefits. Such being the case, what value can a religion add to spirituality?

Religions do have a very practical value. Spirituality without religion is too abstract or “cerebral” for many of us. Consequently, it is a hard path to follow. In Bhagavad Gita, the Lord explains thus:

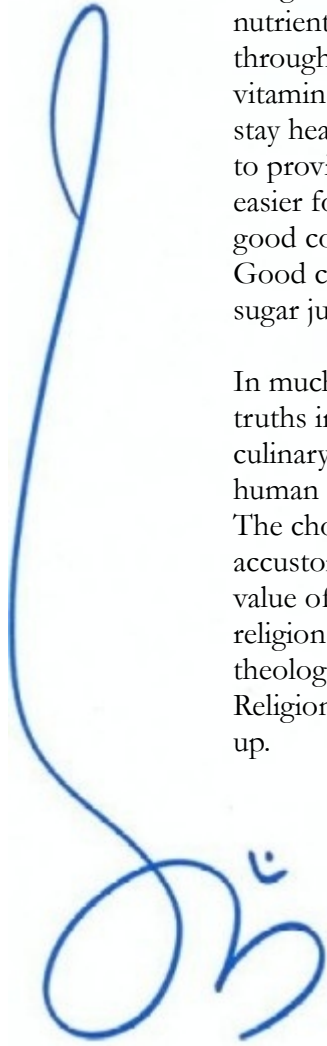
kleso adhikataras tesam anyaktasaktacetasam; anyakta hi gatir duhkham dehavadbhir avapyate Bhagavad Gita, Chapter XII, v.5

“Greater is their trouble whose minds are set on the Unmanifested; for the goal, the Unmanifested, is very hard for the embodied to reach.” (Translation by Swami Chinmayananda)

Spiritual advancement through contemplation of the Unmanifest is certainly possible for those who have learnt not to identify themselves with their own body and mind. But for the rest of us, who are “embodied”, it is hard to even conceptualize an Unmanifest Reality, let alone meditate on It. The Lord therefore goes on to suggest that, for most of us, devotion to a concrete representation of that Reality is the easier path to follow. This in fact is what religions do. The rich symbolism behind the personalities, legends and mythologies introduced by religions- the third ring in our Fig. 1- makes the abstract more understandable and the spiritual practices more enjoyable to everyone.

Religion, in this respect, is not unlike the food we eat. To stay healthy one must partake the necessary nutrients, the proteins, carbohydrate, vitamins etc. Now, it is certainly possible to provide these nutrients through a daily regimen of raw vegetables, grains, fruits and nuts, etc and supplemented by a handful of vitamin pills. Indeed a few well-disciplined souls may actually stick to such a Spartan diet and manage to stay healthy and happy. Future space travelers may also learn to survive on pre-packaged food designed to provide just the right amount of nutrients, but very little by way of variety and taste. But it is far easier for most of us if the nutrients are made available in the form of an appetizing meal. That is what good cooking does. It adds flavor and appeal to the food while preserving the nutrients the body needs. Good cooks also are careful not to lose nutritional value by overcooking or by adding too much fat and sugar just to make the food taste better.

In much the same way each religion has its own style of adding sugar and spices and serving spiritual truths in an appetizing way to satisfy the spiritual hunger that is in all of us. Just as many different culinary styles have evolved around the world, each capable of providing the nutrition necessary for the human body, so too many religions have developed to cater to the nutrition the spiritual body needs. The choice of food we eat is a matter of personal preference, largely determined by what we are accustomed to since childhood. As long as the method of cooking does not diminish the nutritional value of the ingredients, one cuisine is as good as another for nourishing the body. Similarly, as long as religions preserve the basic spiritual values while dressing them up with the outer layers of their theology, rituals etc, they will be equally efficient in providing the necessary spiritual nourishment. Religion, like food, is thus also a matter of choice largely determined by the culture in which we grow up.



In the modern “global village”, especially in cities, we see young people enjoying “ethnic” food from different parts of the world. It is dinner in a Chinese restaurant one day, lunch from an Italian carry-out stand the next day and snacking on falafel at a Middle East café yet another day. Their bodies tolerate all food equally well and are nourished equally well too. How wonderful it will be if our understanding and tolerance of religions grow to the extent that we can attend service in a church one day, pray in a mosque on the next, and worship at a temple on the following day! Lest you think this is just idle talk, the Indian mystic, Sri Ramakrishna, proved that this can be done with all due sincerity and respect towards all religions. The distinctions made between religions are mostly superficial and not meaningful from a spiritual point of view. Like the infamous Berlin Wall, the barriers that exist between religions are artificial and unjustly divide people from people. Spirituality, on the contrary, unites us all.

Conclusion

This paper sets forth the view that Science, Spirituality and Religion have each a complementary role to play in our lives and are by no means intrinsically incompatible. The material science, with its focus on matter and energy, blesses us by making our material life more comfortable. Spirituality, the science of life and knowledge, blesses us individually with inner happiness and collectively with communal harmony. Religions serve the mankind by rendering spirituality more readily comprehensible and accessible to the common man.

About the Author:

Dr. Raju Chidambaram is a mathematician by training who was introduced to Vedanta by Swami Chinmayananda, the founder of the Chinmaya Mission, and further educated in its philosophy by Swami Tejomayananda, Swami Dheerananda and other teachers of the Chinmaya Mission. To them all the author owes his most sincere gratitude. He is currently a trustee of the Chinmaya Mission Washington Regional Center. The author is solely responsible for the views expressed in this article however and they do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mission. Please visit www.mathematicsofspirituality.com.

Series – Summary of the Gita Ch. 4 (Karma Sanyasa Yoga) - The Renunciation of Action

Nilkanth Bhatt, Richmond Chapter

After explaining the art of Karma-Yoga for the purification of Mind and Intellect, Krishna told Arjuna that he would now teach him the Supreme Yoga of How to Renounce Actions, while still working in this world. Krishna said this is not a new experimental Yoga. He had taught the same yoga in the past to Vivaswan. Vivaswan taught it to Manu, who then taught it to Ishvaku, thus it is tried and proven true by many generations of sages. Arjuna could not comprehend how Krishna, his cousin, could have taught it to previous generations of sages, so Krishna revealed this profound secret.

“Arjuna you and I have taken many births. I know them all but you do not. Whenever there is decay of righteousness and rise of wickedness, I manifest myself in every age to protect the good, destroy the evil and to re-establish the righteousness.”

This is the greatest promise in Gita to the mankind. The lord of this universe will never let the evil rule the world. It may seem for a while that wicked and unrighteous are getting away with their sins but it is not the ultimate reality. It is somewhat like how we treat our front yard. If there are few random weeds, we may ignore them for a while but when the weeds start taking over the yard, we put our yard-work attire and remove the weeds to protect the grass and reestablish the beauty of the front lawn.

We do not recognize this divine presence among us due to our attachments, fear and anger. Krishna says in past many have attained oneness with this ultimate divine reality by freeing themselves from these attachments, fear and anger. In whatever manner people approach him, he rewards them accordingly. Those who are seeking success in their work, they approach him (by their efforts) with that expectation only and they only receive, what they desired; but those who desire complete freedom from this limited existence, they identify with his true divine nature and become one with him.

Bhagavan says that there are four types of people created by him based on their Guna (Tendencies) and Karma (Actions). He is the author of them all but he remains untainted by their Guna and Karma because he does not identify with them. In a similar manner, if we do not identify with our tendencies and do not take authorship of our actions; we will not be bound by their results.

What is binding action and what is non-binding action is not always clear to even the wise people, so Krishna explains that one who is not anxious about the result of his actions, ever content with what he gets and depends on nothing for his happiness, such a person even though working constantly, does not get bound by his actions. Such a person sees the Brahman (ultimate reality) in all actions. He knows that Brahman manifests as various objects to perform actions, Brahman is the performer of all actions, all actions are offered to him and Brahman is the enjoyer of all actions. We in our ignorance start thinking that we are the doers and we are the enjoyers.

Depending on our understanding we offer our sacrifices. Some of us offer wealth, others their control over senses (discipline) to attain siddhis (accomplishments); whereas some others offer sacrifices of their actions to satisfy the senses.

We put lots of efforts to go on a trip to distant lands to see beautiful sights, listen to beautiful sounds or enjoy luxurious baths. These are our sacrifices to the lords of our senses but the rewards of such sacrifices are limited and temporary. Others offer sacrifice of their ego (identification with the limited self) in the fire of the knowledge that our own self is Brahman and attains permanent bliss.

Bhagavan says here that Knowledge-Sacrifice is superior to sacrifice with objects. All actions culminate in knowledge, and therefore one must acquire the knowledge of the self from a worthy teacher by surrendering to him and inquiring about the nature of the self.

Knowing the self, one will never get deluded again by the identification and attachment to the limited ego. He will see all beings in his own self, the all-pervading Lord of all beings. This knowledge is the greatest purifier in this world; it burns all actions in ashes and liberates one from the bondage of actions. But only the people with faith gain this knowledge by developing devotion and control over senses. Having gained this knowledge they attain supreme bliss.

Doubters attain no success or peace in this world or the other. If we do not have faith, we would not be able to function even in our daily life. We have faith that every day the sun will rise in the morning, all our gadgets will be working normally, the other people will be doing their jobs, so that we will be able to do ours and therefore we can live a normal life.

Krishna advises us here in the end of this chapter that we must destroy the doubt about our eternal self with the sword of knowledge; establish ourselves in the Yoga of seeing *inaction* in action and work in this world joyfully.



On Karma Yoga, Part I of VI

*Dr. K. Sadananda
Disciple of Swami Chinmayananda*

[Editor's Note: This is 1st in the series – On Karma Yoga]

The chapter on karma yoga starts with Arjuna's question; what yoga is good for him; should he do jnaana yoga or karma yoga?. Krishna glorified, at the end of the second chapter, the Jnaana yoga with the discussions on sthitaprajna lakshaNa. At the same time, Arjuna feels that he is being pushed to perform Karma yoga which in his case involves fighting the terrible war. He wants Krishna to decide what is the most appropriate for Arjuna's case. Implication of Arjuna's question is that a seeker has a choice to do Karma Yoga or Jnaana Yoga. Since Jnaana Yoga leads to Jnaana, which is the means for liberation, then why one should do karma yoga? This forms the basis for this chapter.

Krishna essentially answers that there is no choice between karma yoga and jnaana yoga. Everyone has to do karma yoga since that is prerequisite for jnaana yoga. Karma yoga prepares the mind for jnaana yoga. Jnaana yoga only liberates the person.

na karmaNaamanaarambhaat naiskarmyam purusho2shnute |
na ca sanyaasanaat eva siddhim samadhi gacchati |

Essentially without karmayoga one cannot gain the requisite qualifications for jnaana yoga. By just giving up karma one cannot attain the equanimity of the mind. In addition, no one can ever remain a moment without performing an action – He will be propelled to act because of his vaasana-s.

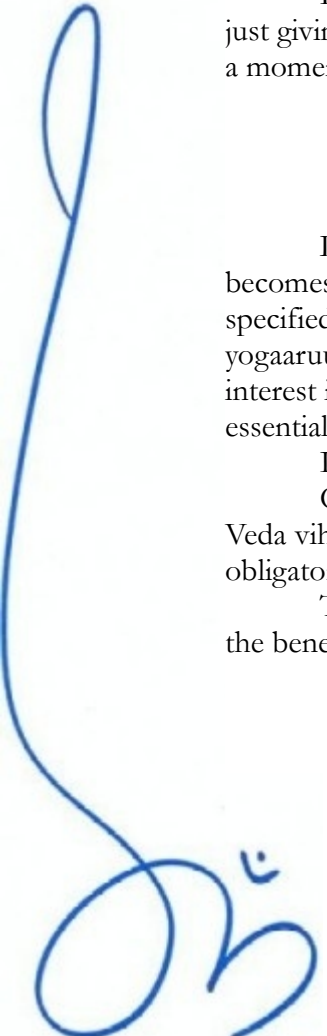
Na hi kaschit kshaNamapi jaatu tushhTasya karma kRit |
kaaryate hyavashhaH karma sarvaH prakRitijaiH guNaiH | |

Later in the 6th Chapter Krishna tells us when to give up Karma yoga – that is when one becomes yogaarudhaH – that is when one is able to contemplate single pointedly in the direction specified by the scriptures. yogaaruuDhasya tasyaiva shamaH kaaraNamuchyate | and who is yogaaruuDhaH? – sarva sankalpa sanyaasi yogaaruuDhaH stadocyate | | - the one who has no more interest in the sense pleasures, or in performing any action, and who likes to withdraw from all non-essential activities, he is said to be yogaaruuDhaH |

If so, then what constitutes Karma yoga? This is discussed in slokas 8-20 of the Chapter.

One who performs the vidita karma-s; that is obligatory duties - these can be shaastra vidita or Veda vihita and some desha kaala aashrama vidita – Those actions specified by the scriptures. Some obligatory duties depend on time, place as well as on ones vocation or position in the family and society.

The essential ingredient of the obligatory actions or niyata karma are they are all intended for the benefit of the others and not for one own sake.



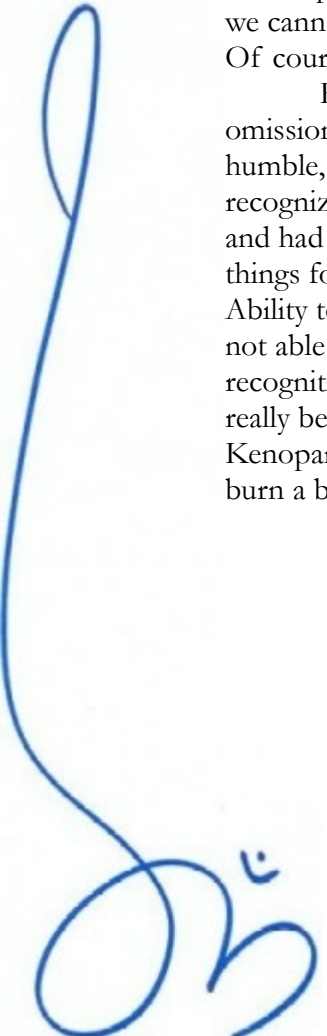
The purpose of doing these niyata karma-s is they expand the mind or purgates the selfishness in the saadhak and purifies him. According to Vedas there are 5 important vidita karma-s which are considered as yagna-s – and grouped as panca mahaa yagna-s.

1. deva yagna
2. pitRi yagna
3. Rishi yagna
4. manushya yagna
5. bhuuta yagna

1. Deva yagna – also called deva RiNa – is obligation to the Gods. Gods are the phenomenal forces that give results for the actions. Whatever is given to us is due to blessings of the Deva-s. Deva yagna involves a recognition of the fact that you are getting benefit from the Nature and it is your duty to return back (with interest) to the nature. Swami Chinmayanandaji puts in a beautiful form: What I have is His gift to me and what I do with what I have is my gift to Him.

Yagna means worship. Deva yagna involves worship of the Gods recognizing that you are the beneficiary of the natural forces. It starts with prayer as the first thing in the morning, and ends with a prayer as the last thing before one sleeps. One benefits from nature immensely - air to breath, water to drink, food to eat and so on. Krishna says in the 15th chapter – aham vishvaanaro bhuutvaa praaNinaam dehamaashritaH | praaNaapaana samaayuktaH pachaamyannam caturvidham || I am the one in all beings who is propelling all the essential physiological functions – praNa to apaana, vyaana, udaana, samaana – contributing to the digestion of the four types of food that one takes. So while we are sleeping, Krishna is awake working whole night digesting the food that we eat. Without his presence we cannot even breathe for a second. A recognition of this fact with a reverential attitude is deva yagna. Of course, it also includes other obligatory duties including sandhyaa vandanam, puuja, etc.

For obligatory duties, it is said that by commission one does not gain any merits but by omission, one gains demerits or paapam. Fact of the matter is, it purifies the mind and makes one humble, since one recognizes that every thing is gift from Gods, and nothing is taken for granted. I recognized how lucky I am, when I visited a cousin of mine few months ago, who lost both his kidneys and had to undergo painful dialysis everyday. God has given us a double gift to be safe, but we take things for granted. Only when they do not function we recognize how lucky we were up to that point. Ability to breathe without a problem is a God-given gift, and we can recognize that only when we are not able to breathe and had to use a machine to force the air in. Deva RiNa or obligation to gods is the recognition that we cannot even lift a blade of a grass without their help, and that there is nothing that really belongs to us and everything that we have is only a gift from the Gods. In the last chapter of Kenopanishad there is a story of how Gods, vaayu, varuNa, agni learn that they cannot even lift, wet or burn a blade of grass without the help of that life-principle.



Shankara says in VivekachuuDaamani – manushyatvam, mumukshutvam, mahaapurushha samsrayam, daivaanugaha hetukam – being born as a human being, intensive desire for liberation and association with great souls are only due to the blessings of the God. Since God is the giver of the fruits of actions, karma yoga starts by recognizing this fact and performing all actions in the attitude of prayer to the Gods and accepting the results as prasaada. Iswaraarpana buddhi and prasaada budhhi are two essential ingredients of Karma yoga.

2. PitRi yagna: worship of our forefathers – It is recognition that how blessed I am for having parents who could take care of me when I was in pitiable condition and educate me with proper values. Particularly the Indian parents sacrifice everything they have for the benefit of their children. It is blessing to be born to such parents. It is the recognition that everything that I have is the result of their sacrifice. Vedic instructions maatRi devo bhava, pitRi devo bhava recognizes that these two are the first Gods that need to be worshiped. Formally, pitRi yagna includes all the vedic rituals that need to be performed, tarpanas, shraadh-s, etc, where three generation of fore fathers are prayed. Incidentally, tarpana is also done not only for ones parents, but for those whose children are failing to do their duties.

3. Rishi yagna: Rishi stands for both the Veda-s and also guru parampara starting from Veda Vyaasa all the way to ones own teacher. This yagna is done by daily study of the scriptures and by passing on the knowledge to others what one has gained from his teacher. Thus, guru parampara is established and veda-s are handed down from generation to generation to come. We are blessed indeed by such unparalleled treasure of knowledge left behind by our forefathers and it becomes our duty study them and pass it on to the next generation. The daily study of the scriptures is Rishi yagna.

4. Manushya yagna: This is service to humanity. ‘Maanava sevaye maadhava seva’ is well know proverb. One ends all prayers with – sarve janaaH sukhino bhavantu. Samasta san mangalaani santu | kaale varshhatu parjanyaH, pRithiviH sasyashaalinii, deshoyam shoba rahitaH, brahmanaas santu nirbhayaaH – go braahmanebhyam shubamastu nityam lokas samastaa sukhino bhavantu – are the prayers to be done with devoted mind. Here BrahmanaaH stands for wise people who are the backbone of the society preserving and passing on the knowledge and wisdom to the next generation. Self-less service to humanity at large is emphasized in all religions.

5. Bhuuta yagna: This is service to the other living beings with appropriate attitude. – ‘sarva bhuuta hite rataaH’ – one has to be well wishers to the whole jivas – without disturbing the ecology. Polluting the rivers and oceans destroy the ecology. Unnecessarily hurting any animal in the name of sport is very bad – This include fishing and hunting as sports. Bhuta yagna as daily prayer includes feeding the animals before one partakes his food and being kind to them. This makes one to become sensitive to the needs of other beings. Taking more than what one needs from the Nature is a sin. Animals take what they need. It is only humans that take more than what they need – that essentially is due to Greed.

These panca mahaa yagnaas are considered as obligatory duties and help in recognizing ones role and responsibilities in the whole creation. We are not the only travelers in this earth and have no right to destroy other co-travelers in our pursuit for happiness. Hence Krishna says niyatam kuru karma tvam|. Niyatam includes nitya and naimittika – the daily obligatory and occasional obligatory duties. Kuru means one has to do – it is vidhi vaakyam – therefore not doing or omission results in sin. Hence Krishna declares – karma jyaayo hyakarmaNaH – It is better to do the actions than omitting them. Hence, karma yoga is not a choice that one has.

