



NEWSLETTER

February 2019, Volume 5

AMMAJI'S MESSAGE



I trust that the New Year has started off good and prayerful for all of you. I believe what makes life good, is not mere outcomes aligned with your likes and dislikes, but it is living in the moment and finding your peace within.

For many however, the mind needs to grow to see life as a school, full of beautiful lessons being taught by the Divine everyday. Instead of seeing the Lord as the 'punisher' who doles out cosmic justice based on your past actions, see the Lord as your friend and as your life companion. He is the only companion who stays with you unflinchingly, unconditionally and permanently throughout your life.

This Mahāśivarātri, spend the time strengthening the relationship with your best friend, the Lord. Commune with Him, asking Him to bless you with the inner peace you seek in life. Converse from your heart with the Sacred One, who resides in your heart!

Love and blessings,
Ammaji

INSPIRATIONS....

QUOTES FROM AMMAJI



"Himalayas and Gaṅgā revealed to our sages the Oneness, Harmony and Interconnectedness of the universe. Let us imbibe this sacred message and return home to the Divine!"

ONGOING AND UPCOMING EVENTS

VEDĀNTA COURSE (ONE MONTH)

3rd February- 6th March, 2019

(Purna Vidya Foundation)

This programme is an introduction to the vision of the Vedās, providing participants an insight into the reality expounded by the sages of India.

Ammaji is teaching chapters 1-6 of the Bhagavad Gīta, an important scripture that contains the essence of the Upaniṣads. To complement the Vedāntic teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā, are Sanskrit grammar and chanting classes helmed by Swamiji and Arulji, respectively. Added benefits of this programme include meditations, yoga, temple pūjās, quiet time for personal reflections, evening satsangs and visits to local temples.

Click on the link below if you are interested in joining this course. It is never too late to start the journey in Self Awakening!

[Course Details and Registration](#)

MAHĀŚIVARĀTRI

4th March, 2019

Mahāśivarātri, the great night of Lord Śiva, is one of the holiest days in the Hindu calendar. It is a festival of great spiritual significance as it is a powerful time for prayers, spiritual awakening and Self-realisation. Lord Śiva is also known as Āśutoṣa, the one who is easily pleased. Whether one yearns for worldly success or mokṣa, Lord Śiva will answer all prayers dedicated to him with utmost devotion.

On this special day, we welcome all of you to come join us at Purna Vidya Foundation for a special darśan and to receive the blessings of Lord Śri Vanalingesvara.

[Mahāśivarātri Event Details and Registration](#)



PAST EVENTS



Ammaji and students chanting the Rudram



Ammaji offers the Dipam to Sage Agastya



Session participants



Brahmaji from U.K. guides a group discussion

RUDRAM CHANTING AT ANUBHAVI TEMPLE

26th December, 2018

Purna Vidya was recently blessed with an invitation to chant the Rudram at the Anubhavi Subramanyam Temple's (Coimbatore) Sage Agastya Sankha (Conch) Abhishekam prayer and ritual. The twenty-member, all ladies team led by Ammaji, chanting the Rudram with confidence and devotion certainly left many of the devotees present in awe!

A COMING-TOGETHER OF GITA GLOBAL STUDY GROUPS

3rd January, 2019

Purna Vidya Foundation had the pleasure of hosting some of its Bhagavad Gita Group Study students from Dubai, Singapore and U.K. This coming-together of Purna Vidya's global students fructified in an afternoon of group reflections with students of Coimbatore's study groups.



Intense discussions!



In front of Tiruvannamalai Temple

IT IS YĀTRA SEASON!

20th-22nd December, 2018 (Tiruvannāmalai);

3rd-5th January, 2019 (Maharashtra)

With the completion of 2018's last Vedanta Course, Swamiji and Ammaji took some students on a yātra (pilgrimage) to Tiruvannāmalai. This ancient and sacred temple town, a key pilgrimage centre especially for seekers of mokṣa, is an abode of Lord Śiva. It is believed that the Lord first appeared here as a column of light eons back. It is also here that the saint Sri Ramana Mahārishi attained mokṣa.

This trip was followed by another short yātra with Swami Brahmaparanandato Alandi, Pandarpur, Shirdi and Tryambakeshwar in Maharashtra state.



Doing the Girivalam in Tiruvannamalai at Night!



At Pandarpur



With a Charming Maharashtran Couple in Alandi



Ammaji takes great delight showing her love to the cows



Arulji leads the cooking of the Pongal



Purna Vidya staff with the pongal pot



Sri Prakash (in purple) managing the Purna Vidya Booth at the HSS fair with volunteers



Sri N. Balasubramaniam (middle) with volunteers

PURNA VIDYA CELEBRATES PONGAL

15th January, 2019

Purna Vidya celebrated Pongal - the advent of the harvest season and Makara Sankranti, with the traditional cooking of pongal (sweetened dish of rice boiled with lentils) in sunlight and offering it as prasadam to the Sun God, Surya Deva. Prayers were also offered to Surya Deva and Lord Sri Vanalingesvara seeking their blessings for a prosperous and bountiful year ahead for the Purna Vidya family.

PURNA VIDYA COMMUNITY CLASSES FOR CHILDREN EXPAND IN CHENNAI

15th January, 2019

Pujya Swami Sri Dayananda Saraswati's vision of seeing Purna Vidya's 23 books set on the 'Sacred Culture of India' reaching every Indian home is firmly taking shape.

Purna Vidya's community centres in Chennai were launched on the auspicious day of Pongal in Thiruvanmayur, Pallikaranai, Nanganallur, Perungudi, Velacheri, Mugalivakkam, K K Nagar, Ashok Nagar, T Nagar, Nungambakkam, Mylapore, Triplicane and Alwarpet. These community centres will enable children, youth, married couples and homemakers to learn more about India's cultural heritage through its weekly classes.



Mannargudijeeyar Swamiji giving his blessings for Purna Vidya's work.

Following the launch of these centres, there have been teacher training sessions to train interested volunteers to start up more Purna Vidya community centres at their localities. The classes were also promoted at a HSS fair to generate more awareness about Purna Vidya's community classes. The launch of these classes has been enabled chiefly by Purna Vidya's State Program Coordinator, Sri Prakash, Chennai Coordinator, Sri N. Balasubramaniam, and Core committee member, Mrs LalitaRajan.

If you are inspired to start a Purna Vidya community centre in your area, we warmly welcome you to attend the teacher training workshops at Purna Vidya Foundation. Starting a centre of your own or volunteering as a teacher in the launched centres is an excellent way to serve our rishi parampara and ensure the continuation of our sacred teachings!



Participants listen keenly as the training proceeds



Teacher training session



Our enthusiastic students with their teachers



AWAKEN TO YOUR TRUTH!

ĪŚVARA

Continued from Volume 4



Īśvara - He or She?

One generally uses the pronoun He for Īśvara. This is only a convention and does not imply that Īśvara has a gender. In the creation one sees both the masculine and the feminine genders. A gender indicates functional and anatomical differences between living organisms. Gender differences do not extend beyond these differences. There is no male eye, female hunger, or neuter sadness.

Looking at the world comprising all three genders one cannot attribute only one gender to Īśvara. One can only say that Īśvara is male, female and neuter, being the cause of everything. The intelligent aspect of Īśvara is called puruṣa, which is masculine and the material aspect is called prakṛti or māyā which is feminine. This combination of the male and female aspects in Īśvara is represented in the form of the deity called Ardhanārīśvara, which is half male and half female.

Where is Īśvara?

One does not encounter Īśvara as a resident of any particular place. Were he a resident of a particular place in the creation a question would arise as to where he was before the creation of the universe. Let one assume that Īśvara is an individual entity living in a particular place that is not available for one's immediate perception, for example, heaven. If this were so, where was he before he created heaven? Saying that he lived in another heaven or hell leads to the same problem of infinite regression.

Looking at the example of the dream, if one were to ask where in the dream world the dreamer is located, one would see that, with respect to the dream world, the dreamer is everywhere in it. The dream mountains, dream rivers, dream animals and dream people are not separate from the dreamer. The dreamer pervades the dream. In other words, the dreamer is immanent in the dream. Similarly, if Īśvara is the intelligent and material cause of the creation, he is immanent in the creation; there is nothing in the creation that is apart from Īśvara. This is what is meant when one says that Īśvara is all pervasive or omnipresent.

Even though the dreamer pervades the dream, the dreamer is not the dream. It is the dream world that resolves in the dreamer. In other words, the dreamer is the one who pervades the dream and at the same time transcends it. In the same manner, Īśvara pervades the creation and transcends it. Therefore, to find Īśvara one does not need to look for a distinct individual being because the creation does not exist apart from Īśvara. In fact, the creation is nothing but Īśvara.

To be continued

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FORM AND SPIRIT OF THE VEDIC CULTURE

Introduction

The Vedic vision and way of life have sustained the Indian culture through the ages. The Vedas have ruled hearts of generations of people and inspired them to live a life of Dharma. The society has provided forms by which an individual is initiated into the Vedic culture. Forms such as worship, festivals, drama, poetry, language and arts have carried great significance in providing for the individual's inner growth and in establishing a link between the past and contemporary society. For any society to remain dynamic in the fast changing world, its forms must change to keep pace with the changing times. As forms change, there may be conflicts between the current demands of the society and traditions from the past. Often conflicts may arise as to which aspects of the forms should be retained and which should be given up.

One needs to appreciate the role of *sāmānya-dharma*, universal codes of conduct, as well as *viśeṣa-dharma*, specific codes of conduct, in order to adapt forms relevant to one's society. While *sāmānya-dharma* is universal in nature, its expression can vary from culture to culture and within a culture, from time to time. This variance in the culture expression of a universal value is known as *viśeṣa-dharma*. Over time, some cultural forms remain recognisable while others do not. In all these changes, however, the universal dharma behind the forms is retained, giving meaning to the changing forms.

For example, in ancient times, there was a tradition of *deva-dāsīs*, female temple dancers, who dedicated their lives to the Lord. They lived a spiritual life in the temple, where they sang and danced in praise of the temple deity. Today, even though this tradition of *deva-dāsīs* attached to temples is not found anywhere, every dance concert begins and concludes with a prayer to the teacher and to the Lord. The artists create an altar in a corner of the stage, and the dance itself becomes an offering, as it was with the *deva-dāsīs*. Thus, even though the expression of this custom has changed over time, the spirit of devotion continues.

When the spirit of a tradition is not understood, it is essential that its forms be retained. Even though forms devoid of spirit may appear to be meaningless expressions, one cannot eliminate forms from one's life. Cultural forms provide one with an infrastructure for the expressions of all aspects of human life. Only by retaining the forms and attempting to re-establish meaning into them is there any possibility of discovering the spirit that enlivens the forms. For example, a ritual of a prayer performed daily out of will should eventually help the person discover real devotion. Devotion and prayer are connected as cause and effect. When there is a lack of devotion, one can discover it as one keeps the form of prayer going.

Children of Indian immigrants in various parts of the world are often told by their parents to touch the feet of elders as a mark of respect. This cultural form is often resented by a child because he or she does not appreciate the spirit behind it. But, if a child continues to practise the form, without being pressured to do so by his parents, he may eventually appreciate the spirit of reverence. Understanding the significance of cultural forms is essential for preserving the identity of one's culture in a foreign land.

If the spirit of one's own tradition is not understood, one will naturally be drawn to forms that are available in other cultures. Where alternatives are available, one is naturally inclined to choose forms based on one's likes and dislikes which may compromise one's values. For example, the Hindu culture subscribes to vegetarian foods primarily because of the value of non-injury. But if one grows up without an understanding of this value, one is likely to choose a non-vegetarian diet.

Today, Indian diaspora have invested tremendous energy and resources in building temples all over the world. These temples provide the forms essential to preserve the Vedic tradition. However, if the spirit behind these forms is not properly understood, the temples will become obsolete. It is only through education of the religious and cultural traditions that the spirit can be kept alive, and blesses the future generations.

In subsequent Newsletters, some cultural forms including dress, food and language, and the underlying spirit of these forms will be presented.

To be continued

CHILDREN'S CORNER



LORD GAṆEŚĀ AND KUBERA

Kubera was a very rich king. He was very proud of his wealth. Once he invited Lord Śiva and Pārvati to his palace for lunch. He ordered his cooks to prepare a grand feast to show off his wealth. Lord Śiva came with Pārvati and their son Gaṇeśa. Gaṇeśa asked Kubera, "Where is your dining hall? I am very hungry, please serve me food". Kubera was surprised at Gaṇeśa's behaviour. He felt it was ill-mannered of him to ask for food as if he had not eaten for many days. Gaṇeśa understood what Kubera was thinking and decided to teach him a lesson.

Gaṇeśa started eating and soon finished all the cooked food in the palace. He then asked for all the uncooked food items like rice, dhal and vegetables and ate them too. Next, he asked for the firewood. He finished eating that and said that he was still hungry. The cooks got worried. They ran to Kubera to explain what had happened. Kubera, the proud king, was not disturbed by this.

He ordered his servants to buy more food. The cooks returned empty handed. All the food items were out of stock. Kubera was shocked. "How is this possible? Is Gaṇeśa playing a trick on me?", he thought. Suddenly he realised that all his wealth was nothing in front of Gaṇeśa's power.

Kubera fell at Lord Śiva's feet and begged for forgiveness. He said, "Oh! Lord, I was wrong in being proud. I wanted to show off my greatness to you. Lord Gaṇeśa has taught me a good lesson. Please ask him to stop eating". Lord Śiva replied, "Go to Gaṇeśa and seek his pardon".

Kubera knelt at Lord Gaṇeśa's feet and said, "Please forgive me, Lord. You have shown me that any amount of wealth or food offered to you without devotion is not liked by you". Lord Gaṇeśa replied, "You are right. You cannot win me over with wealth. I am pleased with a simple offering as long as it is given with devotion and humility". Kubera had learnt his lesson. Let us remember that true devotion is more important than the quantity when we make any offering to God.

Moral



We should not be proud of our wealth, intelligence or anything else. It is God who blesses us with riches or cleverness or physical strength. We have to use these for the good of others. God is pleased with simple offerings. He does not like a show of wealth. You can offer bananas or dried grapes as naivedyam. God will be pleased.

Something to think about...

Why did Kubera want to show off his wealth?

What is 'ill manners'? Was Gaṇeśa ill-mannered?

Is it wrong to be proud?



STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS



VEDANTA COURSE

20th November-19th December, 2018

I am thankful for the opportunity to be able to participate in the Vedanta Retreat. It was a wonderful experience which gave me some high level detailed insights into our scriptures and Dharma. I am inclined to further pursue in-depth studies so as to imbibe and inculcate the teachings in my life. During the retreat, I could see that the teachings are very profound, that they help one to arrive at good decisions amidst the contemplations in life. It is inspiring to walk the path of Dharma as expounded by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.

I am very grateful to Swamiji, Ammaji and Purna Vidya for reaching out to the society with these teachings which are essential for harmony and peace. I submit my pranams to my teachers for dedicating their lives to spread the Vedanta teachings for the greater good of the society.

-Prasanna, Singapore

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

Namaste Dear Friends!

As said by Ammaji, this Mahāśivarātri is a beautiful opportunity for us to deepen the bond with our best friend, the Lord. It is not the elaborateness in the rituals which will win the heart of this Compassionate One, but the attitude underlying the prayers dedicated onto Him this special night.

And what attitude is that? It is only Love for Him that should prevail. So go on.... Connect with him this Mahāśivarātri in the ways that your heart tells you to! And remember that the Lord is immanent in this universe which includes all beings around you. Showing Love to Him includes being Loving and forgiving to one and ALL!

We hope that you have enjoyed this volume of our newsletter. We warmly welcome your feedback and contributions through purnavidyaprograms@gmail.com

Our team wishes you all, a wonderful love-filled Mahāśivarātri.

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