

AMMAJI'S MESSAGE



The New Year has begun and at the outset let me wish you all a great life journey in 2019!

Every life journey has a path on which the vehicle drives the master to his destination. May that vehicle, your body-chariot, be navigated such that you are guided to your destination - Inner peace and Eternal happiness.

God is your best friend and your companion. Trust him as the navigator who holds your life's master plan in his hands. He will not fail to bring you to your destination once you trust him to guide you.

As you ride this sacred life journey, learn to listen to the voice of the Divine, as opposed to the voice of your little ego, and achieve success in all that you say and do!

Love and blessings,
Ammaji

[Click Here to Catch up on
Purna Vidya's 2018 Highlights!](#)

INSPIRATIONS....

QUOTES FROM AMMAJI



"Forgiveness is a gift to yourself for when practised, you experience the peace of non-judgemental attitude in everyday life. Respect others and their ways as you did not arrive here to judge and correct them!"



UPCOMING EVENTS

VEDĀNTA COURSE (ONE MONTH)

3rd February– 6th March, 2019

(Purna Vidya Foundation)

This programme serves as an introduction to the vision of the Vedas, providing participants an insight into the reality expounded by the sages of India.

Ammaji will teach certain chapters of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, an important scripture that contains the essence of the *Upaniṣads*. To complement the Vedāntic teachings of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, there will be 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.

Course Details and Registration

Start the New Year by gifting yourself this period of intense learning and inner growth!

PAST EVENTS

RESPIRE FROM THE COLD

6th December, 2018

The end of the year spells a weather change in the areas around the Koothadi Hills where Purna Vidya Foundation is located. The nippy cold weather blessed Purna Vidya an opportunity to bring relief to the *Adivasi* families, who lacked basic amenities for this cold. Warm blankets and solar lights were distributed to the families and this was warmly welcomed and deeply appreciated by them.





VISIT BY ANOOPAM MISSION

7th December, 2018

Purna Vidya Foundation was extremely delighted to host guests from the Anoopam Mission, led by their spiritual leader, Shri Jashbhai Saheb.

Originally based in Gujarat, Anoopam Mission is a *Swaminarayan* Socio-spiritual and charitable organisation, led by “*Vratdhari Sadhaks*” or modern day monks who live and work within the society dressed unconventionally in plain clothes. Led by Shri Sahebji, their work is committed to spreading *Swaminarayan's* message of unity, harmony, tolerance and mutual respect.

Shri Sahebji and his disciples were warmly welcomed by Swamiji, Ammaji and Arulji, and given a tour of Purna Vidya Foundation and briefed on Purna Vidya's programmes. Ammaji also gifted Shri Sahebji a set of Purna Vidya's Vedic Heritage books.

Anoopam Mission reciprocated Purna Vidya's warm welcome by inviting Swamiji, Ammaji and Arulji to a Gujarati Samaj (in Coimbatore) where Shri Sahebji was honoured. Overall, it was a heart-warming coming together of two spiritual organisations deeply committed to protecting and transmitting on our rich Vedic heritage to posterity.



VEDĀNTA COURSE

20th November- 19th December, 2018

The third *Vedānta* course was a successful run for Purna Vidya with students arriving from all over the world. These *sadhakas* were treated to soul-stirring *Bhagavad Gītā* classes by Ammaji, analytically precise *Samṣkṛtam* Grammar classes by Swamiji, and devotionally powerful Vedic mantra chanting classes by Arulji. To complement the classes were daily temple prayers, Vedāntic meditations, personal reflection time, *satsangs* with Swamiji and Ammaji, yoga sessions, visit to local temples and calming walks in the lush nature embracing the ashram. The reflection time in the afternoons was imperative in making the students critically analyse and integrate the Vedāntic teachings with one's life experience.



To make this integration more complete were the daily evening satsangs with Swamiji and Ammaji, where students received crucial advice and inspirations to stay committed to the tough but fulfilling path to discover and abide in one's True Self.

Overall, the course was intensely transformational, inspiring and life-changing for all the students, who reiterated constantly during the course the desire to return for more *Vedānta* courses by Purna Vidya!



GĪTA JAYANTI

18th December, 2018

The sacred *Gītā Jayanti* was celebrated at Purna Vidya Foundation with approximately 300 devotees, and many more around the world via Facebook's live streaming.



Following a *pūjā* for *Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, was a *pārāyanam* of all 18 chapters of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, led by Swamiji, Ammaji and Arulji. The completion of each chapter was marked by an *ārati* for the Lord.

The 3 hours of non-stop chanting, was energising rather than tiring! It was undeniable that the synchronised chanting of the Lord's sacred wisdom about the Self invoked much devotion and gratitude in us all.



AWAKEN TO YOUR TRUTH!

ĪŚVARA



Introduction to *Īśvara*

When one looks at oneself, one sees oneself to be an individual living in this world, responding to various objects, situations and people. One also sees an intelligent design throughout the entire creation. There are stars, planets and satellites that function in an orderly manner. The Earth moves in its own orbit as even the other planets do.

The sun never fails to rise, the oceans never dry up and all the elements function within the framework of physical laws. The various forms of life live in a complex interdependent relationship. A human body, like other life-forms, is made of many components, each having a distinct function. Every organ and cell in the body seems to have a definite purpose. There is nothing that is redundant in this vast creation. The exquisite order and beauty of the creation indicates the presence of a cause which is intelligent.

Who is *Īśvara*

The creator of any object, such as a pot, involves a twofold cause. One is a creator, the pot-maker, who has the knowledge and the skill to make the pot. The other is the material from which the pot is made, for example, clay. In Sanskrit, the intelligent cause is called *nimitta-kāraṇa* and the material cause is called *upādāna-kāraṇa*.

The creation, being intelligently put together, must also have an intelligent cause. Just as the creator of an object must have knowledge of his creation, so too, the creator of the world must have knowledge of his entire creation. Therefore, the omniscience, all knowledge, must reside with the creator. The creation must also have a material cause, from which it is made. Here the question arises as to whether the material exists apart from the pot-maker who uses the clay in order to create a pot. In the case of the creation, however, one is unable to assume that the material cause is separate from the intelligent cause. If the intelligent cause were separate from the material cause, the intelligent cause would have to cease to exist outside the creation. Since outside and inside are concepts used in reference to space, and space itself is part of creation, nothing can exist apart from the creation. Thus, the intelligent cause can only be non-separate from the creation.

Furthermore, if the intelligent cause were separate from the creation, another question would arise as to where the material cause for the creation came from. If one presumed the existence of another material cause for the creation, the question would arise as to the source of that material. This would lead to the fallacy of infinite regression, because the source of the first material cause would rest in another material cause whose source would rest in another material cause, and so on, leading to an indefiniteness in conclusion. There is a finality of perception, however, because one does not see a creation. Seeing the creation, one must account for its material cause. Therefore, one can only infer that the material cause of the creation cannot be separate from the intelligent cause.

Examples of both the intelligent and material causes resting in one entity are not unknown in one's experience. When one dreams, for example, one creates an entire dream world. The dreamer is the intelligent cause of the dream. The material cause from which the various objects in the dream are made is not separate from the dreamer. It is the thoughts and memories of the dreamer which make up the dream. Another example is a spider who spins a web. The spider has the knowledge of how to make the web and finds the material to do so within himself.

The one who is thus both the intelligent and material cause for the whole creation is known as *Īśvara*, the Lord.

To be continued...

VEDIC WOMEN



The *smṛitis*, such as *Yājñavalkya* and *Viṣṇu*, qualify the widow to inherit the family property at the demise of her husband, when there is no male progeny. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, too, sage *Yājñavalkya* equally divides his entire wealth and property between his two wives when he takes to a life of *sannyāsa*.

Among the eight systems of marriage as recognised by the *smṛtis*, the '*Brāhma*' marriage is considered to be the most exalted. In this marriage, the elders in the bridegroom's family visit the bride's parents and seek their daughter in marriage. The fact that the girls were always sought after by the boys' parents reveal that woman had a respectable place in the society and money transactions had no role in the marriage settlement.

The second stage of life, known as *gṛhastha-āśrama*, is marked by marriage, wherein a man commits himself to living a life of dharma with his wife. The word '*patni*' meaning wife, etymologically refers to that woman who is married to a man through or for the sake of *yajña*, Vedic ritual- *patyurno-yajñasamyoge*. It therefore means that she is the one who will qualify the man for performing the rituals. The Vedas say, "*patnīvatasya agnihotraṃ bhavati*"- one who has a wife alone performs the *agnihotra-karma*.

The wife is related to the husband through the vedic ritual and entitled to participate in and share the fruits of the rituals performed by her husband. Just as *pūja* materials are purified by special mantras before use, the oblations, such as ghee, are said to be purified by the mere glance of the wife, *patynāḥ ājya-vīkṣaṇam*.

Dear Vedic Women,

You are the driving force that keeps a family strong, loving and prosperous.

Enable the potency of prayers by joining and supporting your husbands in the family's prayer rituals and ceremonies!

Be the Śakti who teaches and empowers her children in all Vedic rituals and customs for generations to come!

Love,
Ammaji

CHILDREN'S CORNER



CUSTOMS AND MANNERS

Customs and manners are expressions of the ethics and social conduct of a given society. They include forms such as greeting and the style of conversation. The following section briefly discusses some of the conventions of greetings in India.

When people meet, they greet each other with the palms joined together in front of the chest and say, '*namaste*', meaning 'salutations unto you'. This hand gesture symbolises the essential oneness of people. Just as two hands, though different from one another, belong to the same person, two individuals, though different, belong to the same source, the Lord. When one greets another person this way, one naturally looks upon that person as non-separate from oneself. Any further interaction evokes care and understanding. Monks express this vision of oneness by touching each other's feet when they meet, uttering the words, "*om namo nārāyaṇāya*" – salutations unto Lord *Nārāyaṇa*.

Namaskāra

Life is considered a gift of the Lord, rich with opportunities for growth and learning. Since life's experiences bring about maturity, older people are respected for their age. This respect is expressed in the form of *namaskāra*, prostration, which is offered to older siblings, parents and elders. Since knowledge is also highly regarded, reverence is expressed towards teachers, monks and other learned people with *namaskāra*.

The word '*namaḥ*' derives from the root '*nam*' meaning 'to bend down'. To bend down in the front of another is a sign of humility as well as respect. As the ego causes isolation from others, bending down is also a gesture that suggests resolution of isolation from the other person.

Sāṣṭāṅga-namaskāra

Lying down flat on one's stomach, with the eight parts of the body touching the ground, is known as *sāṣṭāṅga-namaskāra*, salutation with eight parts.

The following verse defines sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra:

Urasā śirasā caiva manasā vapuṣā girā
padbhyām jānubhyām karābhyām namaskāro'ṣṭāṅga ucyate

“A salutation is said to be eight-limbed when it is performed with one’s chest, head, mind, body, speech, feet, knees and hands.”

Abhivādana-namaskāra

In this form of salutation, one touches the earlobes with one’s fingers and with head bowed, introduces oneself to elders. In this introduction, one gives one’s name and gotra, family lineage, sūtra tradition and the branch of Vedic learning to which one belongs. One then does sāṣṭāṅga-namaskāra.

Other Forms of Respect

Respect is expressed by remaining in standing position in the presence of elders, teachers and monks. Also, while conversing with them, one covers one’s mouth with the fingers of the right hand. Other expressions of respect are sitting at a level lower than people to whom one shows respect; not pointing one’s feet towards them; not speaking unless spoken to; and speaking politely. A commonly observed symbol of respect in North India is to cover one’s head with a scarf or sari when going to meet elders and monks, or to visit a temple.

One customarily carries an offering when having an audience with a teacher. The offering may be in the form of fruits and flowers. One of the smṛtis says:

Riktapānirṇa paśyeta rājānam daivataṃ gurum

May one not visit a king, a temple, or one’s teacher empty-handed.

One may also offer clothes or money. In approaching and taking leave of one’s teacher, one offers salutations by bowing one’s head, touching the feet of the teacher, or by doing sāṣṭāṅga-namaskāra.

There are many other customs and manners that have evolved through the ages which carry the spirit of the religious life of the Hindus. They provide the necessary structure for a way of life in keeping with the Vedic vision.

Something to think about...

What are some of the customs your relatives observe and what do they signify?

In what ways do you show respect to your teachers, your parents and your siblings?

STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS



My Little Tapasya Kutir



View From My Cottage

TASTING THE SWEET NECTAR OF SILENCE: REFLECTIONS FROM A 40 DAY SILENT RETREAT IN THE HIMALAYAS

"In 2012, I read a book that stirred me deeply: 'Cave in the Snow' by Tenzin Palmo. It describes the life of a young English woman who went to India, became a Buddhist nun and spent twelve years living alone in a Himalayan cave to meditate. Her descriptions of the depth of her spiritual practice brought forth a strong longing in me to retreat into these sacred mountains, too. At around the same time, a friend told me about a forty day silent retreat she'd completed in South America, and how healing this experience had been for her. As my spiritual practices intensified in the last two years, I resolved to find the time to do the same in the Himalayas, a place I have a strong connection with. What interested me particularly about this retreat was the solitude. I'd done ten day silent Vipassana courses before, and though they are very strong, one is never alone. There is always the safety net of the teachers and the other students; one sometimes even shares a bedroom. I wanted to know what would happen if I'd spend a good amount of time in silence and solitude in an energetically strong place.

I had a strong guidance to do this retreat in the Uttarkashi area, though I had not been there before, and set out to find a small, secluded cottage. As I live in the Himalayan foothills for much of the year, this was not too difficult – Swami friends gave me a couple of phone numbers and I found the perfect cottage in virtually no time at all. It was part of Tapasyalayam, a small ashram that is run by beautiful Ammaji, who was very supportive of what I was trying to do. She availed a small cottage to me that was right at the banks of the Ganga and also had a covered terrace which allowed me to perform fire ceremonies even when it rained. The cottage was set amidst a beautiful garden full of flowers and trees and had an exquisite view of the mountains and forests. The roar of Ganga below was so loud that this was all I could hear, apart from the occasional bird song. As I thought it would be too distracting to buy and cook my own food in this retreat, I arranged to partake in ashram meals, however in solitude in my cottage. For this purpose, I gave the ashram cook, Vinitha, a tiffin container into which she filled my food at meal times, which I then collected.

As I had decided to perform two havans (Vedic fire ceremonies) a day, I arrived at the cottage in late May with about ten kg of dried cow dung, five kg of home made ghee, bags of samagree and other paraphernalia in tow. High maintenance sadhana for sure! After settling in for a couple of days, I went to the famous Kashi Vishwanath temple in Uttarkashi to ask for Lord Siva's blessings, and was promptly invited by the priest to help him wash and decorate the 4000 year old Siva lingam – a wonderful blessing indeed!

My sadhana began on the same evening at 6pm with a blessing from the Swamini and my first silent fire ceremony. I felt that it would be important to have a fixed daily schedule of spiritual disciplines in the retreat, a routine that I committed to for those forty days. For me, this was a mix of meditation, japa, pranayama, havan, asanas, contemplation, yoga nidra, baths in Ganga and at times a meditative walk. Mainly, I wanted to focus on my meditation and make systematic progress in it, and many of the other practices served to support this intention.

My days started at 3.30am and ended at 9.30pm, and during this time, I did around ten hours of practice per day. I had some free time in the mornings, during which I cleaned my cottage, did laundry and so on, and after lunch, when it was very hot. In the afternoons, I practiced the Pawanmuktasana series 1 from Bihar School of Yoga. These are joint-freeing exercises that focus on making the ankles, knees, hips etc more flexible. Though arguably the most tedious exercises in the world, they aided my ability to sit still in a meditation posture greatly.

So what was the retreat like? At first, it was mainly blissful. I felt immersed in the lap of the Divine Mother, Ma Ganga, who was rushing by with great speed just below my cottage. I loved being so close to nature, with the stars sparkling like diamonds in the black sky above me and the many birds, animals and creatures that lived around and inside my cottage. A bird family had made its nest under my roof, and I watched the baby birds hatch and take their first flight. My Being slowed down, and it felt like such a gift to have forty whole days to concentrate on my sadhana without distractions of any kind.

But the most difficult thing of the retreat was my mind, or rather, realizing how little control I have over my mind. My mind was constantly chattering, distracting and throwing up memories, and all I could do was try to learn to observe it and focus on my mantra or my breath throughout. With time, though, my mind became calmer, stiller and more focused. I spent a lot of time watching the beauty of nature and feeling immense gratitude. When we allow ourselves to surrender to silence, everything becomes clear, and we open in the process. Our inner wisdom can unfold. I became acutely aware that everything around me is alive, singing, playing, celebrating life: the birds, the plants, the rocks, the soil, the flowers, the leaves, the river. In particular, I entered into deep communion with Ganga, often hearing music and songs coming from her waves, at other times mantras, sometimes even voices. I spent much of my time simply listening to her, and became very intimately connected to her.

In conclusion, a 40 day silent retreat can be challenging at times but at the same time it's incredibly rewarding. The spiritual path is a tough one, one of constant deaths and rebirths, full of thorns and dangers, and yet there is this light that guides us on – the light of love and freedom. We have to die to who we are to become our true Selves again, and immersing in such a sadhana can greatly aid this process. I really recommend it, whether you do it alone or as part of a group. Because, as Albert Camus already said, 'In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion.'

Hari Om Tat Sat." - *Srila Devi, Germany*

Note:

The above is an excerpt of Srila's original blog article- <https://nachiketasquest.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/tasting-the-sweet-nectar-of-silence-reflections-from-a-40-day-silent-retreat-in-the-himalayas/>

The Editorial Team thanks Srila for kindly allowing us to reproduce part of her article in this Newsletter.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

Namaste Dear Friends!

With the advent of this New Year, why not remind ourselves of the sacredness of our lives? At no moment are we separate from Divinity. Instead of embarking on the common practice of New Year resolutions, perhaps we can all slow down and reconnect mentally with that Divinity manifest in all of us and the universe.

Let us start this year by grounding ourselves in this Truth and trusting all that unfolds as part of the master plan of growth in our sacred lives. And constantly staying with this Trust and Truth will help us grow into the permanent recognition of the Complete, Sacred and Loving Beings that we actually are. This Truth can inspire our decisions and actions in this year and for the rest of our lives!

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 very Joyous and Sacred New Year!