

Ammaji's Message



Shakti

The Sanskrit word Shakti is derived from the parasmaipada verbal root "shak" which means "to be able", "to do", "to act". Shakti thus means "power" or "energy".

This power is witnessed in the various aspects of life. It is the force responsible for the growth of vegetation, animals and human beings. It is what is responsible for the movement of all things. The planets revolve around the sun as a result of Shakti. It is Shakti that makes the winds blow and the oceans churn. Shakti is manifest as the very ability of all the forces of nature to function. She is the heat of fire, the brilliance of the sun, the very life force of all living beings. In human beings, she is seen as the power of intelligence (buddhi), compassion (daya) and divine love (bhakti).

More significantly, Shakti is the feminine principle of the Universe and is worshipped as Mahadevi, the Universal Mother. Shakti refers not to the power of aggression that divides and causes conflict, but to the power of integration that unites and brings peace to one and all. She is the force of wisdom and enlightenment which holds the Universe in Her embrace.

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Purna Vidya family

Lord Rāma and Kṛṣṇa

Continued from Volume 14



Lord Viṣṇu is also worshipped in the form of his incarnations, such as Lord Rāma and Lord Kṛṣṇa. People in the Vedic culture look upon them as avatāras, incarnations of Īśvara. Īśvara does not exist apart from the creation and has the capacity to manifest in the creation in any particular form. It is believed that this manifestation happens as a result of people's prayers during the times when unrighteousness prevails. An avatāra re-establishes dharma, thus blessing humanity.

As Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Bhagavad Gītā (4.7):

**यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥**

*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata ।
abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham ॥*

"O Arjuna, whenever there is a decline in right living, and an increase in wrong living everywhere, I bring myself into being (assume a physical body)."

Invoking and worshiping Īśvara in various forms, animate and inanimate, is unique to the Vedic culture. These symbolism's are abstract and are based upon an understanding and vision of the Lord.

Pārvatī, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī

Goddess Pārvatī, Goddess Lakṣmī and Goddess Sarasvatī are worshipped during Navarātri or Dasara which is celebrated in the month of Āśvina (September - October). This festival lasts for nine days. Pārvatī, in the form of Durgā, is worshipped during the first three days. In this form she is said to have destroyed the demon Mahiṣāsura. During the next three days Goddess Lakṣmī is worshiped by those who seek prosperity and wealth. Lakṣmī is also worshipped during Dīpāvali festival. During the last three days of Navarātri Goddess Sarasvatī is worshiped. On the ninth day an altar is made of books, instruments of fine and performing arts and implements of various professions, all of which represent knowledge and skill. At this altar Goddess Sarasvatī is invoked and worshipped.

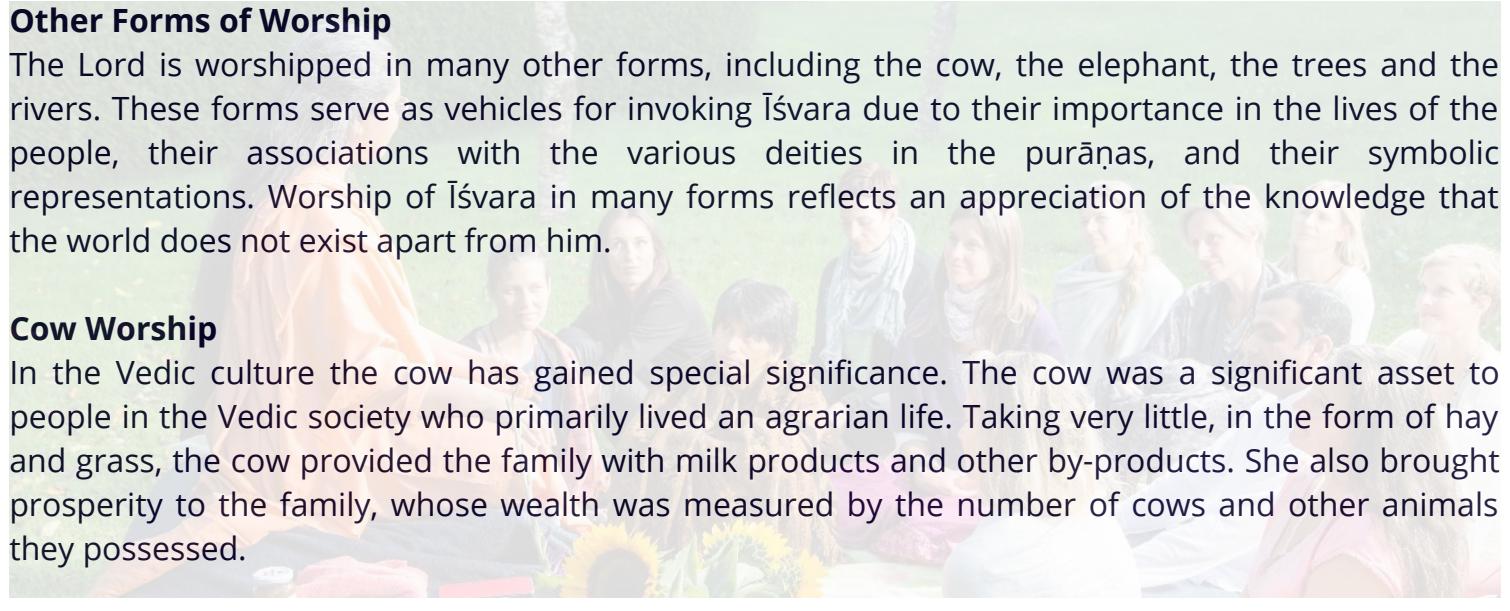
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Other Forms of Worship

The Lord is worshipped in many other forms, including the cow, the elephant, the trees and the rivers. These forms serve as vehicles for invoking Īśvara due to their importance in the lives of the people, their associations with the various deities in the purāṇas, and their symbolic representations. Worship of Īśvara in many forms reflects an appreciation of the knowledge that the world does not exist apart from him.

Cow Worship

In the Vedic culture the cow has gained special significance. The cow was a significant asset to people in the Vedic society who primarily lived an agrarian life. Taking very little, in the form of hay and grass, the cow provided the family with milk products and other by-products. She also brought prosperity to the family, whose wealth was measured by the number of cows and other animals they possessed.



The cow is associated with the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who grew up as a cowherd. There are stories in the purāṇas about Kāmadhenu, the wish-fulfilling celestial cow. Giving away cows in charity is an important step in many Vedic rituals. On the day after the Pongal festival, which falls in the month of January, the cow is worshipped and thanked for her role in the lives of the people.

Elephant Worship

The elephant brings to mind the form of Lord Gaṇeśa. The elephant is also a great worker in the South India, where it is utilised in the timber and lumber industries. The purāṇas tell the story of Gajendra-mokṣa, the release of elephant Gajendra who was a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. Various other animals are associated with deities. For example, the bull with Lord Śiva; the peacock with Lord Subrahmaṇya; and the tiger with Goddess Durgā.

Tulasī Worship

The tulasī plant is seen as the manifestation of Goddess Lakṣmī. It is known for its medicinal and healing qualities. There are many stories associated with tulasī in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and in the Devī Bhāgavata. In many Indian households there is a tulasī plant in the backyard which is worshipped every morning.

Yantra and Tantra Worship

Yantra and tantra are highly symbolic and esoteric forms of invoking the Lord. Yantras are instruments and visual symbols representing the various deities and other aspects of creation. The Śrī-yantra, also known as the Śrī-cakra, is looked upon as symbolic of the whole creation.

Tantra is a particular system of worship involving elaborate esoteric rituals based on the tantric philosophy. There are two main forms of tantra worship seen in India. Vāmatantra is practised in Kashmir and Bengal; and a variation of it, called Dakṣiṇamārga, is observed in Kerala.

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Form & Spirit of Vedic Culture

Customs and Manners

Continued from Volume 14



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 nonseparate from oneself. Any further interaction evokes care and understanding. Monks express this vision of oneness by touching each others' feet when they meet, uttering the words, "om namo nārāyaṇaya" - salutations unto Lord Nārāyaṇa.

Namaskāra

Life is considered to be 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 'namah' derives from the root 'nam' meaning 'to bend down'. To bend down in 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 the sāṣṭāṅga-namaskāra:

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Form & Spirit of Vedic Culture

उरसा शिरसा चैव मनसा वपुषा गिरा ।
पद्म्यां जानुभ्यां करान्यां नमस्कारोऽष्टाङ्ग उच्यते ॥

*urasā śirasā caiva manasā vapuṣā girā |
padbhyaṁ jānubhyaṁ karābhyaṁ 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. An example of this introductory address is as follows:

**अभिवादये आङ्गिरस-गार्ग्य-सैन्हिक त्र्यार्षेयप्रवरान्वित-गर्गगोत्र-
आपस्तम्बसूत्र-यजुरशार्खाध्यायी वेङ्कटरामशर्मनामाहम् अस्मि भोः ॥**

*abhivādaye āṅgirasa-gārgya-sainhika trayārṣeyapravarānvita-gargagotra-
āpastambasūtra-yajusssākhādhyāyī veṅkatarāmaśarmānāmāham asmi bhoh ||*

"O Sir, I, named Venkataraman, born in the lineage of Garga, which has ancestry in three Ṛṣis, namely Aṅgiras, Garga and Sini, belonging to the tradition of āpastamba-dharma-sūtra and the recension of Yajur-veda, offer my salutation."

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:

रिक्तपाणिन् पश्येत राजानं दैवतं गुरुम् ।

riktapāṇirna paśyeta rājānam daivatam 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.

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Attitude towards food



Food is a basic need of living organisms, essential for health and survival. Human beings spend hours acquiring, preparing and eating food. Besides being a physiological necessity, for human beings food also fulfills an important emotional need.

For a child, being fed means having a basic emotional need met. When one's basic needs are not met adequately and appropriately, one loses trust in one's environment. As one grows, food becomes a vehicle for sharing and for social interaction. Most societies have an elaborate etiquette related to sharing food. These customs express each society's attitudes and values towards food. In the Vedic society, the attitude towards food and the customs associated with it emphasise inner maturity and an appreciation of the Lord. As is true for everything, food is looked upon as sacred.

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad says, "oṣadhībhyaḥ annam, annāt puruṣah" - food is derived from plants and from food the human being is born. Plants are the ultimate source of food. Even for non-vegetarians, plants are the source of food for the animals they eat. From the essence of food, the human being is born. Our generative capacity, cells and growth are all due to the energy supplied by food. The body, in essence, is a product of food, and is thus called annamaya, the modification of food. Without food, one's physical and mental capacities malfunction. Even after death, the body again becomes part of the food cycle and functions as food for other forms of life.

The third chapter of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, sections seven to ten, contains verses in praise of food. The verses teach attitudes towards food to be practiced as a discipline. A discipline implies understanding a value and deliberately practicing it in order to assimilate it.

Food as Prasāda

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad says, "annam na nindyāt" - do not look down upon or find fault with food. Food is to be respected as the source of life and the means of one's sustenance. In practising this discipline, one should refrain from finding fault with the food that one is given.

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In the Vedic culture, food is looked upon as prasāda, that which comes from the Lord. In most homes in India, after the food is cooked it is offered to the Lord. In traditional homes, the preparation of the food is carried out with a cheerful and prayerful attitude, keeping in mind that it will be offered to the Lord. Before cooking, the lady of the house takes a bath and sanctifies the hearth. The food is not tasted until it is offered to the Lord with a prayer. This prayer may be done at an altar or mentally. Once it is offered to the Lord, the food is looked upon as prasāda. With this understanding, it is accepted with gratitude.

The Ritual of Eating

Before eating, one chants the following prayer:

ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्महविः ब्रह्मग्रौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् । *brahmārpaṇam brahmahavih brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam |*
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥ *brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarma-samādhinā ||*

"Any means of offering is Brahman, the oblation is Brahman, the fire in which the offering is made is Brahman and the one who offers is also Brahman. Indeed, Brahman is gained by such a person who abides in Brahman."

Traditionally, one performs the following steps before eating. While chanting the prayer, one pours a small amount of water in one's right palm and sprinkles it on and around the plate. As water is looked upon as a purifying agent, this action sanctifies the food. One then takes a sip of water which is an offering to prāṇa, the life force within. Following this, six small portions of food are eaten symbolically in the form of an offering to the Lord within as prāṇa, the physiological system. With each portion, one chants one mantra: om̄ prāṇāya svāhā, om̄ apānāya svāhā, om̄ vyānāya svāhā, om̄ udānāya svāhā, om̄ samānāya svāhā, om̄ brahmaṇe svāhā. Then one eats the meal. At the end of the meal, again one takes a sip of water as an offering to prāṇa. Everyone need not follow all these steps. It is sufficient to chant the prayer and be aware that the food is being offered to the Lord.

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad also says, "annam̄ na paricakṣīta" - do not discard food. Most forms of life take from their environment only as much as is needed for their sustenance. Human beings choose to take more than they need and discard what cannot be consumed. If one looks upon food as prasāda, one cannot discard it. Throwing away food indicates lack of respect for the food and the Lord who provides it.

Sharing Food with Others

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad also advises, "annam̄ bahu kurvīta" - may one produce plenty of food. This does not mean that everyone should take to a life of agriculture. But one can develop a capacity to provide plenty of food, so that one can share it with others. Anna-dāna, giving food in charity, is considered a noble act. When one gives food in charity, one does so with humility and prayerfulness, thanking the Lord for giving one the capacity to share one's resources with others.

to be continued ...

Past Events

Purna Vidya Utsav



Purna Vidya Foundation held its annual Utsav on 2nd November, an event dedicated to Pujya Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati. This festive event conducted for the India's cultural awakening through educational institutions in and around Coimbatore attracted many parents, teachers and educationalists. Children from many schools participated and returned home jubilant with prizes for their talent in Bhajan singing, Sloka chanting, essay writing, painting, drama, music and dance presentations. It was a day filled with laughter, energy, happiness and joy for all present at the peaceful lush-green ashram. Ammaji spoke to the children the importance of cultural identity and self identity, which was very well received. V. Sundari, Ramadevi R were the team leaders who conceived and facilitated this vibrant successful annual event.

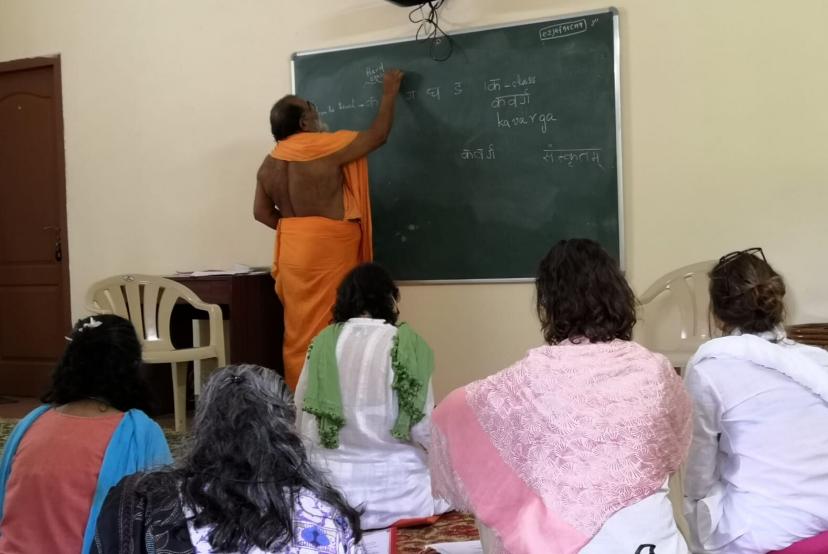


Past Events



Past Events

Vedānta - Spiritual Learning Programme



A Vedanta Course in Purna Vidya Foundation which started in November, has brought many special moments for students in the lush green valley of Koothadi Hills. The Vedanta, Sanskrit and Chanting classes as well as the Meditations, Yoga and Satsang sessions have been quite intense and fulfilling for all. The evening devotional time, with prayers at the temple brings each day to a beautiful completion. Treks to the forest nearby with the teachers have been memorable for everyone. The study course continues with deep reflections and learning everyday.



Past Events





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Purna Vidya Family Reunion

24th December, 2019 - 1st January, 2020

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Message from Editorial Team

Namaste Dear Friends!

In traditional societies, the role of women has been centered on nurturing a home and raising a family. Today women are entering into the work force, assuming a variety of occupations. With changing times, the role of the woman is being redefined accordingly. But in and through all changes of balancing family, education and career, nurturing her feminine virtues is her path to inner tranquillity and wisdom.

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

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