

G.O.D. - Australia & New Zealand Chapter

Fast Track

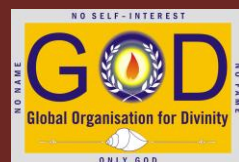
When Life in the Fast Lane Needs a Pit Stop

Monthly Newsletter

May 2021



**"God's grace always flows in abundance.
It is upto you to be ready to receive it."
- Sri Sri Swamiji**



The Real Indicator of Spiritual Progress

MADHURA SMARANAM
- My Gurn As I See Him

Dr A Bhagyanathan, Chennai
(Personal Secretary to Sri Sri Swamiji)

Few years back, one evening in Madhurapuri ashram, an elderly couple had come to have darshan of Sri Swamiji. Sri Swamiji's face was delighted on seeing them. "Why were you not seen on last Ekadashi?", On hearing this question posed by Sri Swamiji, the couple felt so blessed that Sri Swamiji had precisely noticed their absence in the midst of hundreds of devotees.

Devotee – We had been to our native place. That is why we could not come.

Sri Swamiji – What was the occasion in your native place?

Devotee – We had to attend a wedding and something exciting happened there.

Sri Swamiji – With the curiosity of a child, Sri Swamiji asked, "Is it? What was so exciting?"

Devotee – A foreteller had come to our place. He knew all our past, present and future. To everyone who had come to see him, he accurately told so many things that completely baffled them.

Sri Swamiji – Did you see him too?

Devotee – Yes Swamiji! On seeing me and my wife, he told something amazing. He said that we are actually incarnations of a particular God and that we ourselves are not aware of this. From the moment we heard it, we felt so elated. So, can we take this as an indication that we are advanced in the path of spirituality?

Sri Swamiji – Do you know what is the real progress in spirituality? True meaning of being close to divinity is to be humane. To progress in the path towards God is, to be good, loving, truthful, humble and to serve more and more. In short, every single aspect of us would have become FINER. God broadly pervades everywhere. When we go towards that which is so broad, we too must become broad-minded. Being in a narrow circle of jealousy, anger, selfishness, conceit, arrogance, one cannot attain that vast, all pervading Supreme God. Is it clear?

(Translated from original Tamil article by the team)

Between Us and God

- Mrs Vasumathi, Melbourne
(Translated from Sri Swamiji's Lectures)

The human birth is the result of punya (merits) accumulated from crores of births we have taken previously. This human birth is also to attain the Lord. Even an affluent person who enjoys all the material comforts in life comes to a sudden realization of the futility of his lifestyle and possessions and therefore goes in search of the Lord. It is that punya that he had accumulated in several births which made him turn towards spirituality. On the other hand, people who undergo immense suffering in life still continue to avoid the spiritual path.

The desire to be spiritual is due to one's own punya. Once on the spiritual path, any difficult situations that the seeker undergoes during his sadhana (spiritual practice) will only bring him closer to God. One should have unshakeable faith that any misfortune that one is subjected to is for the greater good. We should learn to become attached to God. We should learn to charge ahead with courage and patience, no matter how many obstacles come our way. Taking up any spiritual sadhana, with a doubt about the existence of God in our mind, is akin to building a house without a proper basement. Such attempts become a failure. Faith is the foundation of spirituality. If we place our faith in God or Guru and believe whole-heartedly that they are all powerful, mighty and verily the form of Brahman then we too will draw strength from them. If our faith towards God or Guru diminishes so does our strength. We can get rid of any obstacle through prayers. We should consider Guru as God and develop bhakti towards Him.

We should never consider a Mahatma like a normal human being. Even though they may speak and behave similar to us, their plane of existence is different. It is not possible to understand that. We should try to ignore anyone who pretends to know about that. Therefore, one should not waste even a bit of available time but engage oneself in spiritual activities such as reading scriptures, chanting Rama nama or in meditation. We should constantly chant nama while simultaneously performing our everyday activities. Such spiritual activities must come from the desire for deepening the spiritual orientation rather than for the purpose of demonstration.

Some children make a big deal about preparation before their examination time. They may suddenly decide to go to the library or go to their friends' home to study together. It may look like they are exerting themselves physically and mentally to prepare for their exams. However, when the results come, it will not be up to the mark. What is the reason behind this? They spent their efforts in being showy rather than concentrating their minds on the study material. On the other hand, a few children who focus on studying even a few hours end up scoring higher in their exams.

There are many who preach about dhyAna (meditation), japa (repeated chanting of a mantra), vedAnta, Bhagavan, without actually practicing it. Such people are unfortunately considered as wise men too. However, there are a few who keep their sadhana just between themselves and God, and secretly enjoy the highest benefit. The world may see and appreciate only what's visible to the naked eye, however the highest fruit of spiritual practice is based on the state of our minds.

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Vishnu Sahasranama

In the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Bheeshma pitamaha whose body is so riddled with arrows that, as he lies it seems, he is on a bed of arrows, contemplates the culmination of his life and the boon of *ichhca mrityu* (to choose one's own time of death) that was given to him by his father. Sri Bheeshma at this time conducts a *satsang*. He is surrounded by Yudhishtira, Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva and Bhagavan Sri Vishnu himself. As Bheeshma's gaze falls upon Kunti Devi, he is tearful. Kunti Devi, who has given birth to Dharmaputra (the personification of Dharma), the mighty Bheema, courageous Arjun and the intelligent Nakula and Sahadeva and above all, has Bhagavan Sri Krishna Himself stands with them. And yet, he thinks, there are few people who have suffered as much as Kunti.

Bheeshma says "sarvam kAla-krtam manyE" - time alone, is the reason for these inevitable incidents that happen in peoples' lives (Time which is controlled by the Lord). Therefore, if one does not suffer if does not mean they are good and if one undergoes much suffering does not mean they are bad people.

Dharmaputra who always traveled the path of dharma (righteousness), then asks Bheeshma, "You have appraised us on many kinds of Dharma - Raja dharma, Moksha Dharma, Stree Dharma etc. Is there any Dharma that we still need to know about?" Raja dharma is for kings, Stree dharma is for women, Sanyasa dharma is for renunciates, and so on. 'kO dharmam sarva dharmAnAm' - What is the universal Dharma for all humanity to follow? What is that one thing we can do with which we can receive the goodness that will come from perfectly performing all the Dharmas together?

"kimEkam deivatam lOkE" – who is that one Omnipotent God? Within the count of 100 we have 10s, within the 10000 we have 1000s, within 100000 we have 10000s. So when we have 1000s of Gods, there is one God within whom all of the Gods resides.

"kim japamuchyate jantuhu" - there must be one japam within which the chanting of all japas are immersed. Which one is that? All living beings are considered jantus. So, what is that dharma in which even an animal can attain moksha?

To answer Sri Yudhishtira's question Sri Bheeshma says, "For all your questions there is only one answer; only one japa; only one Dharma – that will bestow the highest fruit – the Vishnu Sahasranama". This japa is like an ocean. The Rig-Yajur-Atharvana-Sama Vedas have been churned like an ocean by rishis and during this churning has emanated divine sounds. These sounds are the essence of all the four Vedas – these are the Divine Names of Bhagavan. They are names that have originated from the Vedas. And then. Bheeshma chants all of the Divine Names.

Dharmaputra is very pleased that a universal dharma for humanity has been conveyed. Sri Bheeshma looks at Dharmaputra and exclaims a rhetoric, "To whom do you think these names belong to? It is that Divine Child of Devaki". On hearing this Bhagavan Sri Krishna shyly looks away and bows his head during that blissful moment as He Himself stood and listened to His sacred names being chanted by Bheeshma whilst lying in his bed of arrows at the auspicious end of his life.

How did Bheeshma think of these names? Where did it come from into his mind at that moment? The names flowed because Bheeshma had prepared for this moment. During the war whilst he released an arrow towards Sri Krishna, with each and every arrow he released one nama. But he waited to chant it as a japam in its entirety, at the right time, in the presence of all, and also in the auspicious presence of Bhagavan. This is the greatness of the japa of Sri Vishnu Nama.

Many Mahatmas have given commentaries and discourses on Vishnu Sahasranama, which tell us about the glory and benefits of this japa. To organize or be a part of a Vishnu Sahasranama *satsang* for well-being of all is a great blessing. The thought that another should be prosperous and happy, will itself bring good to the person who has such a thought. Therefore, the thought of holding such a *satsang* itself will bring good to all.

The great Kanchi Sri Mahaperiava would say, "If we think of someone with compassion, mercy or grace, automatically the merciful thought will manifest a power to heal and improve things in another's life. I pray to Bhagavan that the Koti Vishnu Sahasranama *satsang* bestows wellbeing, good health, prosperity and happiness to all in the world.

- Mrs Leena Mani, Auckland

(Transcript of the blessing message
given by Sri Swamiji for the
Koti Vishnu Sahasranama *satsang*
conducted by Auckland bhaktas
in April 2021)



MadhuraGeetham

- MR SHYAM EASWAR, MELBOURNE

This delightful MadhuraGeetham set to melodious Hindolam ragam, talks about yearning for Lord Krishna's precious glance. Sri Swamiji in his state of communion with Bhakti (Love and devotion) pleads to Kanna to shower his grace in this simple yet profound kirtan.

O beloved Kanna(Krishna), I am very conscious of you, even so, I fear are you aware of my miniscule existence because within the multitude of universes and beings within your creation, am just a lonely suffering helpless soul.

O beloved Kanna (Krishna), Wish at the earliest moment you may come near me, turn your slightest of glances towards me from the corner of your eyes.

O most beautiful Kanna (young Krishna) with curly curly hair, This meaningless life of mine is futile without your grace, even after hearing my sincere meaningful prayers why may you be delaying showering your grace.

Sri Swamiji starts the Kirtan picturing how miniscule is our existence in front of vast creation and universal lord, and then elaborates how our life is lonely and worthless without God's glance and ends this kirtan by invoking the loving form of Lord Krishna as a young boy with curly hair asking him to bestow us with His Grace and make our life meaningful.

**rAgam: hindOLam
thALam: Adi**

unnai nAn aRivEn, ennai nI aRivAyO – kaNNA

**pala aNDa charAcharangal
aDangiya un paDaippil
engO oru mULaiyil thanimaiyil
thavitthiDum jIvan nAn**

**saTrE en arugil vandu kaDaikkaNNAI enai nI
thirumbi pArththiDuvAyE – kaNNA**

**poruLillAdadu inda vAzhkkai – idil
Nin aruL illAViDil vINE!**

**poruL podinda en vArththaiyai kETTum
aruL seyya thAmadam seyvadEnO?
suruL suruLAna kESamuDaiya sundara bAlakanE**



**MADHURAGEETHAM
DOODLES**

Ms Bhuvaneshwari TC,
Melbourne

KRISHNA IS PLEASED WITH...Chanting of Vedas

च्युतं वचनामृतम् Chyutham Vachanāmrutham

Dr Ashwin Bhaskaran, Sydney

The unique nature of Srimadh Bhāgavatham is that it is not only a collection of stories, but that there is always a question that precedes every story, and the purpose of each story is to answer a specific question. In last month's article, we saw means by which questions and answers led to Sage Nārada's recount of his charitra as he attempts to inspire Vyāsa to write Srimadh Bhāgavatham. Sūta pauranika describes this to Shaunaka and the maharishis, at which point they ask him:

nirgatē naradē sūta bhagavān bādarāyana:
śrutavān tad-abhipretam tata: kim akarod vibhuh

Shaunaka asks Sūta, "After Sage Nārada took leave, what did Vyāsa Bhagavān do?". Did his mind dwell on the story recounted to him by Nārada? Or did he think to himself that the suggestion by Nārada was simply because he was a devotee of Nārāyaṇa? Sūta says that it was at this point that Vyāsa sat on the banks of the river Saraswati, meditated on the plight of the people of Kali Yuga and wrote the chapters of Srimadh Bhāgavatham. On completing this, he then passes on his composition to his son, Śukha muni.

sa samhitām bhāgavatīm krtavānukramya chātma-jam
śukam adhyāpayām āsa nivrīthi niratam munih

Why did Vyāsa pass on this work to his son? Was it in the same way that a king would pass on his kingdom to his own son? Or how a father would pass on all of his wealth to his son as an inheritance? No, it was not only for the reason of ancestry or lineage. It was because Śukha had a very specific quality within him – nivrīthi niratam munih – because he was very much a realised and enlightened soul who was constantly in that meditation of Brahman. On hearing this, Shaunaka immediately asks Sūta another question:

sa vai nivrīthi-nirata: sarvatropēkshako munih
kasya vā brhatīm etām ātmārāma: samabhyasat

"Why would one who is already in that state of pure bliss, meditating on the formless Brahman, take up this grantha? Indeed, such a person who is always contemplating on that nirguṇam form of Bhagavān will always take no interest in anything other than that meditation. This Srimadh Bhāgavatham was not simply a collection of a few slokas, but a composition of 18,000 slokas." In fact, the process through which Vyāsa imparted Bhāgavatham to Śukha was "adhyāpayām" – it was not simply a recital of a story. Every single sloka was repeated multiple times to the point where that Bhāgavatham was fully absorbed by Śukha – a process which would have surely taken many years. The nature of their question to Sūta was just, as Śukha was verily one who did not stay in a single place for a prolonged period of time. Sūta gives a beautiful response to this:

ātmārāmās ca munaya: nirgranthā apy urukrame
kurvanty ahaitukīm bhaktim ittham-bhūta-guṇō hariḥ

We must first appreciate that Srimadh Bhāgavatham is a grantha that has a pure and singular purpose – to grant mōksha those that read it. Here, Sūta refers to ātmārāmās as those beings that are interested only in self realisation nothing else. Whilst such beings have no interest or attachment to anything, they will always have a pure desire to affiliate with anything that pertains to bhakthi and Bhagavān. Just as Śukha Muni had such a quality, we can draw parallels to the likes of Sri Ādi Shankarāchāryā – despite being a strong proponent of advaitam, he composed Bhaja Govindham to glorify the greatness of bhakthi. Similarly, there are many such brahma-gnanis whose lives were intertwined with bhakthi – Sadhāshiva Brahmēndhrāl, Madhusūdhana Saraswathī, Nārāyaṇa Theerthar. Sūta goes on to say that the reason for this inevitable magnetism between munis and Bhagavān is the sheer beauty of Bhagavān's qualities (guṇās), such that even those who focus on His formless nature are unable to resist being drawn to His beauty.

It was for this reason that Śukha incessantly recited Srimadh Bhāgavatham, the text that was beloved by bhāgavathās. In turn, Sukha is considered to be very dear to those same bhāgavathās.

suryauamsam



Mr Nidheesh, Sydney

Upavedas such as:

- o **Ayurveda** (medicine) – associated with **Rig Veda**
- o **Dhanur veda** (archery/war/military) – associated with **Yajur Veda**
- o **Gandharva veda** (music, dance, etc.) – associated with **Sama Veda**
- o **Sthapathyam veda** (such as sculptures/architectures)
- o **Arthasashtra** (such as economics) – associated with **Adharvana Veda**

Itihasas and Puranas which are considered as fifth Vedas

4 sacrifices (velvi) from each face as follows:

- o **Shodasi and Ukthyam** from **East face**
- o **Chayanam and Agnishtomam** from **South face**
- o **Apthoryamam and Athiratharam** from **West face**
- o **Vajapeyam and Gosavam** from **North face**

4 varnas (vocations)

Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras

4 duties of Brahmachari:

- o After 3 days of **Upanayana** (initiation into Vedic education), perform thread ceremony (**Savithram**) for twice-born varnas (**Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas**) and do **jaapams** (chanting)/rituals such as **Gayathri manthra** and **Sandhyavandhana**
- o Execute **Prajapathyam vritham** (vow) for one year
- o Execute **Brahma vritham** – learn **Vedam**
- o Follow **Brahata vritham** – abstinence from sensual pleasures

4 duties of Grihasta:

- o **Varta** – Vocation as per scriptures
- o **Sanjayam** – performing household duties and ceremonies
- o **Salinam** – livelihood without seeking from others (subsist)
- o **Siloncha vrithi** - picking up leftover grains after harvest

4 duties (divisions) of Vanaprashtan:

- o **Vaikanasar** – live with whatever available in nature (such as bamboo rice (moongil arisi), rye (pullarisi))
- o **Valakilyar** – if a fresh grain/food is received, then donate the previously saved grain/food
- o **Audambarar** – live with fruit/grains from the direction at which they wake up
- o **Phenapargal** – live with fruits that naturally fall from the trees

suryauamsam



4 duties (divisions) of Sannyasi:

- o Kutichakan – Follow Sannyasa dharmam from his/her residence (fixed place)
- o Bahuthakan/Bahvodhan – Prefer gnanam (knowledge) over karma (activities)
- o Hamsan – engaged in attaining transcendental knowledge
- o Nishkriyan / paramahamsan – Attained enlightenment and refrain from any activities

4 vidhyas (correct knowledge):

- o Anvikshiki – spiritual knowledge leading to mukthi (liberation) or knowledge to separate aathma from others
- o Thrayi – knowledge of rituals leading to higher worlds (such as heaven)
- o Varthai – knowledge about vocation such as agriculture, business, etc.
- o Dantanithi – knowledge about political science or law and order – such as giving verdict, punishment, etc.

4 vyahruthi (the celebrated hymns):

- o Bhuzhu
- o Bhuvaha
- o Suvaha
- o Mahaha

Other items manifested from Brahma are:

- o Ohm (Pranava manthram) – from heart
(below are the meters for poetry)
- o Ushnik – from the hairs on the body
- o Gayathri – from skin
- o Thrushtup – from flesh
- o Anushtup – from vein (naadi)
- o Jagathi – Bone
- o Pankthi – Bone Marrow (majjai)
- o Brahathi – Breath (pranan)
- o Consonants (letters from Ka to Ma) – Soul
- o Vowels (letters such as a,e, etc.) – Body
- o Ushma letters Sha, Shsha, sa, ha - Senses
- o Andhastha letters ya, ra, la, va – strength
- o Saptha (seven) swaranga sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni – sensual activities (inner joy)

As Saptabrahmam (manifestation of Vedas itself as Brahma), Brahma is both manifested sounds such as consonants and vowels, as well as unmanifested sounds such as Ohm (Pranava manthram)

As an Absolute energy, he manifested as other energies such as Indran

(Source SMB - Canto 3, Chapter 12)

(to be contd...)

To meditate on the Master, that is the goal.

- Ms Mythrei Krishna, Sydney

To meditate on the Master, that is the goal.

How much easier it is to have a personification of God in the form of Guru; to be able to talk with your Master, see with your own eyes your Master and in the most fortunate of instances to laugh with your Master.

How easy it is to love God in the form of Guru than a formless concept and idea.

How easy He makes it for us.

He joins the dots so minutely close together for us.

We have such little effort to make, how can we not make small gestures of love to Him each day, grand gestures when we are so inspired. And these acts we make or undertake, are they even of our own accord or is it His Grace alone that compels us to do such?

A very, very wise person once said to me, you only think of Guru Maharaj because He thinks of you.

Dear Lord, how blessed we are. How it might melt your heart to even think of this being the case.

Over time we may be so fortunate enough to come to realise just how much His Love has transformed us.

There comes a time where we may encounter a moment where we might know that Love truly has no bias. That it isn't just reserved for our family and friends, but we come to meet it in every soul that we may pass, for who is that person but a mirror of ourselves looking right back at us.

Our love then knows no barrier, no threshold. It is truly so boundless in its nature, ever present and ever flowing.

Guru Maharaj has shown me this on many an occasion. He has put me in situations with people, many of whom I do not know whereby a love and compassion just pours out. Where I feel a unity and concern for them just as I would for a member of my family.

Effectively he has taught me that there is more to my purpose than just myself. That the perimeter just gets wider and wider as he teaches me that in truth, there is no other.

This is how his Love teaches and transforms me.

The very least I can do in gratitude to Him is to take that Love out into the world and give of what he has so boundlessly given me.

Not everyone can know and meet Guru Maharaj, but maybe they have the Grace to feel Him if I can make a little effort to transmit that to my wider circle wherever I may go.

Most humble pranams to the Lotus feet of my most beloved Guru, who has given me everything and then some, much of which I am probably not even aware of.

May I endeavour to make good of your boundless Grace. Jai Gurunath.

Śrīya - Prosperity is a condition of being consistently successful in life. Prosperity in life can either be material or spiritual. When it is material prosperity, it is called economic well-being (pravrutthi) and when it is spiritual prosperity (nivrutthi) it is called spiritual well-being. According to Vidura, the definition of prosperity includes 4 factors. He says,

*śrīr maṅgalāt prabhavati prāgalbhyāt sampravardhate |
dākṣyāt tu kurute mūlaṁ pratiṣṭhati | |*

Prosperity arises from auspicious (Maṅgala) works that bring happiness to others and is characterised by dignity and purity. These works grow as a result of good acts driven by strong skills. Finally, with the help of good management skills, prosperity is maintained.

Vidura also mentions various factors which can lead one to lose all their prosperity. He says,

*ekaḥ sampannam aśnāti vaste vāsaśca śobhanam |
yo'saṁvibhajya bhṛtyebhyaḥ ko nṛsaṁsataras tataḥ | |*

Those who are heartless or don't show any consideration towards others. Those who have enough wealth, comfortable lives with all basic needs covered in excess not ready to give to those struggling to meet their needs. Prosperity will not last long for these people of selfish traits.

A very profound statement Vidura says here about our own actions,

*ekaḥ pāpāni kurute phalaṁ bhuṅkte mahājanaḥ |
bhoktāro vipra mucyante kartā doṣeṇa lipyate | |*

When a person commits sins, let's say in accumulating wealth, many reap the advantage resulting out of it. But ultimately when it comes down to the result of the karma (sin), it is the doer who alone experiences it, while those who enjoyed the fruits escape unaffected. Therefore, if we do more dharmic karma (righteous actions), that will enable us to have a prosperous life.

An ideal person who wants to have a prosperous life, should be ready to support those who are in need. Vidura says,

*catvāri te tāta gr̥he vasantu śrīyābhi-juṣṭasya gr̥hastha-dharme |
vṛddho jñātir-avasannaḥ kulīnaḥ sakhā daridro bhaginī cānapatyā | |*

Being a prosperous householder, you should let these four types of people dwell with you. The aged blood relatives, prominent persons fallen into adversity, poor friends, and unmarried or widowed sisters. Showing empathy towards others and having an attitude of giving or sharing what you have is the key to a prosperous life. Prosperity automatically happens to one who has these 7 qualities,

*dhṛtiḥ śamo damaḥ śaucaṁ kāruṇyaṁ vāg anīṣṭhurā |
mitrāṇāṁ cānabhidrohaḥ saptaitāḥ samidhaḥ śriyaḥ | |*

A self-confident person with a tranquil and disciplined mind, who is pure by thoughts and compassionate to others, who abstains from harsh words and has the willingness to do anything agreeable to his friends.

We can witness these 7 qualities in a Bhakta (devotee of the Lord) very easily. They will have great self-confidence because they know everything is owned by the Lord and they are just a representative of it. This attitude automatically makes their mind tranquil, disciplined and pure leading them to act with more compassion towards others who are in need.

How can we develop this attitude within ourselves? In Srimad Bagavatham, Sun is one among 24 gurus of Avadhuta. He says,

gunair-gunaanu padhatte yatha kaalam vimunchathi |
na theshu yujyathe yogi gobhirgha iva gopathi: ||

The Sun evaporates water from the ocean and saves it as cloud. Then at an appropriate time, it gives back to the world. The value learnt from the sun by the Avadhuta is to share everything with the world and not hold on to things eternally. Take from the world and give back to the world. Things must be continuously in motion. Nothing should be in stagnation. Generally speaking in the act of giving, especially to someone not very dear to us, we ensure we don't give what is dear to us. This is because we can't handle the pain due to the loss of that thing. Therefore this attachment brings the feeling of ownership over that thing. Therefore we try to protect everything, especially wealth. Let's say for example, we are staying in a rental property, which we are so attached to and after many years one day the owner of the property asks us to vacate. In that situation will we think twice? No, because we know that we don't own it. This is the perspective we should have in the act of giving.

The entire creation is owned by the Lord, and we are just given the representative position of few things. When we have this attitude towards everything in life it is called spiritual prosperity. Where there is spiritual prosperity, material prosperity will automatically follow.

(to be contd...)

Shree Shakti

SRI GAURI MA

Gauri Ma (February, 1857 – 1 March 1938), born Mridani, was a prominent Indian disciple of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa, companion of Holy Mother Sarada Devi and founder of Kolkata's Saradeswari Ashram.

Gauri Ma lived as a companion to Holy Mother Sarada Devi, whenever she was at Dakshineswar. Gauri Ma also sometimes cooked for her Guru Ramakrishna, and sang to him. Sri Ramakrishna had a very high opinion of her, declaring, "Gauri is a perfect soul – a gopi of Vrindavan."

Sri Ramakrishna encouraged Gauri Ma to work for the betterment of women in India. The women of India's plight was great, and Ramakrishna wished her to work to improve their education and development, both intellectually and spiritually. Gauri Ma protested, that she had neither the proper training nor education for such a feat. Ramakrishna replied, "I am pouring the water. You knead the clay."

Swami Vivekananda echoed Ramakrishna's praise for Gauri Ma stating, "Where is Gauri Ma? We want a thousand such mothers with that noble stirring spirit." Gauri Ma was gently reminded by Sarada Devi, "The Master (Ramakrishna) said that your life was meant for serving women – the living goddess."

Education, to Gauri Ma, was a national duty. She taught that if the training of women is neglected, the whole nation suffers. A mother's intelligence, love and insight nurture the child. The Saradeswari Ashram, therefore, pursued programs of education that strived for the regeneration of womankind. Gauri Ma carefully selected teachers for the ashram who lived ideal lives of simplicity and purity, of high thinking, and who dedicated themselves to the cause of women.



Saying no. It is definitely a word which is viewed in a negative light, yet it can have uplifting connotations. It's common in nature for humans to want to keep positive and friendly relationships with others because ultimately, we want to feel socially welcome and embraced in the social groups that we are in. However, the line becomes blurred when many of us feel the need to do anything in our power to please others in order to protect our relationships. Always saying yes to others, is an example of an action this kind of mindset encourages. The importance of saying no, allows us to consciously ensure that we can keep up with our own commitments and avoid overloading ourselves.

As human beings, we all tend to have breaking points where our abilities of bouncing back and being resilient is hindered due to overwhelming stressors. For some of us, this point hits when the stress becomes too much, whether it be work, social or personal. Our world of emotions is turned upside down and we're not able to regulate ourselves in a healthy manner. If we continue to keep saying yes for the satisfaction of others rather than ourselves, we may not recognise the significant cost at stake.

Peer pressure is a common evil for individuals when they try to stick to their own and stay firm in their values. In an attempt to "fit in" with the group, it is common to sometimes do everything in our capacity to make them think we are similar to them and that we have similar views and values. But again, this can often lead us to compromising our integrity. Let us put this concept into action. Imagine that you attend a social event with your work friends and you're talking with your colleagues and the discussion starts to funnel into talking ill of another co-worker that you are friends with. You immediately recognise how they are making hurtful comments but you are the only one in the conversation who seems uncomfortable with what is being said. But, you don't want to feel left out so you don't say no. You say yes to the opportunity to speak bad of someone who values your friendship and you find yourself disappointed in your distasteful actions. But hey, at least your other co-workers like you. This is where the

importance of saying no, comes in. It may not be a comfortable action, to deny the status quo of that situation and stay quiet



- **MS ADITHI & MS NEHA**
MELBOURNE

It is important to be able to say no, so you feel empowered and in control whilst maintaining relationships and friendships with others. Saying no helps you establish healthy boundaries and enables others to have clarity about what they can expect from you. Some people question what to do when they don't have an immediate answer to an inquiry. It's okay to take a little time to think about your response. To keep yourself from avoiding situations altogether, provide yourself a deadline internally which you know that you need to decide what your answer will be. This deadline keeps you accountable and ensures

that you respect both your relationship with the person and most importantly, yourself.

Having said that, saying no should be carefully considered before proceeding. Because sometimes as humans with our inner desire to please people, we end up saying yes to events or agendas that are beyond our schedule or have tight time restrictions. But, if you have said yes, you should be able to deliver properly on the commitments you have made to people especially since you have responsibility to keep up with it now. This ties in with the quote that we must always think twice before we speak. We must never make decisions in moments of haste and excitement, nor anger or sadness - because our reasoning is blurred by our emotion. Hence, when we respond "no" or "yes" to others - it is in both parties' interests to be calculated and rational in that decision.

Next time, you are faced with a "yes" or "no" moment - think wisely before you answer because ultimately, the ball is in your court.

Meaningful Conversations

(Interesting discussions between Gopa Kuteeram teachers and students)

- Mr Bala Subramanian, Faculty, Gopa Kuteeram Sydney

Sydney students celebrate Rama Navami with Rama Dhyanam

On the 18th April'21, the L2 and L3 students of Sydney Gopa Kuteeram took the stage at Namadwaar and presented a heart-touching program titled "Rama Dhyanam" where they reminisced on what they learnt in the Ramayana classes from the previous year. Apart from the brief narration of the katha, they had so much to share on the deeper aspects of the epic – life lessons, values, critical thinking and managing the Rama and Ravana within us. The 90-minute program was very gripping and thought provoking.

There was a presentation of Ramayana as an overview after which the other students took turns to walk through each kanda of the epic to provide their perspective. We will cover these in a few editions of our newsletter to provide an insight into what was taught in the classes aside of the story per se.

Considering that Rama was born in Treta yuga, the question is often asked why he is celebrated even today, after many many years. It is an elaborate topic in itself and has several answers.

The primary reason is that Rama's life is a practical demonstration of dharma, an operation manual that lists one's duties, rights and responsibilities. The sanathana dharma specifies different types of dharma – samaanya dharma, visesha dharma, varnaasrama dharma and aapath dharma. Of these, the saamanya dharma is a set of responsibilities, values, attitudes and actions which is compulsory and applies to everyone, everywhere and all the time. Rama lived in accordance with this dharma and because of its universal and time-tested relevance, his birthday is celebrated all around the world and is marked with a prayer for us to imbibe those values.

The word Ayana means "path" and Ramayana refers to the path Rama treaded as he moved from Ayodhya, through the forests past Kishkinda into Srilanka returning eventually to Ayodhya. Ayodhya means a place of no war and the journey commenced from that peaceful place through to the rough and dangerous terrain with challenges all the time and high emotions of sorrow, separation and an eventual war against a formidable army. By his steadfast adherence to dharma through all these, Rama successfully returned to his state of peace and happiness back in Ayodhya. This gripping journey studded with lessons to learn is in itself a compulsive reason to celebrate his birthday and revisit the journey through katha shravanam (listening to his stories).

More than anything else, Rama's very personality draws our reverence, love and admiration at the very mention of his name. His leadership in getting everyone around him to follow dharma and his extraordinary compassion even to his enemies make him the most loved that he is and the celebration of his birth is as much a joyous festival as it is a lesson to emulate.

Srimad Bhagavad Gita

**- Mrs Latha Karthik,
Faculty, Gopa Kuteeram, Melbourne**

What changed Arjuna's state of mind from before the battle from being confident and strong to despondency and despair just before the battle began?

Soon after Duryodhana's conversation with Dronacharya, Bhishma blew his conch as a sign of reassurance to Duryodhana. Immediately many conches, kettledrums, and trumpets were sounded together by all the leaders of the battle as a sign of preparedness for the battle. Arjuna requested Krishna to drive the chariot in between the two armies - the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Arjuna wanted to inspect the warriors that had turned up to fight against the Pandavas. He wanted to assess the strengths and the weaknesses of the warring parties. Krishna heeded to Arjuna's request and drove the chariot in between the armies and perhaps deliberately addressed the gathered men as grandfathers, gurus, maternal and paternal uncles, fathers-in-law, brothers, cousins, sons, friends, nephews, and other well wishers as "Kurus" in an attempt to understand Arjuna's mindset. Leading up to the war, Arjuna was longing to fight. He knew what he had to do and why. Suddenly looking at his kith and kin on the battlefield, Arjuna was overcome with compassion and his stance shifted from confidence to despondency with moments of despair. His body was trembling, his mouth was drying up and his mind was confused. Arjuna had conflicting thoughts - to fight or not to fight.

According to modern psychology, humans have multiple types of conflicts. One obvious type is external (material) - this refers to disagreements and quarrels amongst various relationships; and the other type is internal - when we have trouble making a decision. How we act largely depends on our states of minds - what we think defines what we do as after all, thoughts lead to actions. And what we think is largely driven by our value systems. When we are faced with a conflict, this often causes the release of adrenaline and cortisol and initiates the "fight or flight" response. Up until the start of the war, Arjuna's mind was clear - he knew his duties as a warrior and wanted to fight in the war for the right cause. Upon seeing all his relatives in the battlefield, his rational thinking processes started clogging with conflicting perspectives regarding the purpose of the war which probably led him into the "flight" mode. He suddenly felt the urge to run away from immediate action and become a monk! Besides, looking at all of his relatives, triggered an "identity conflict" within him as his multiple roles as a student, warrior, brother, cousin etc. meant that he could be in either of the two armies that were going to fight with each other. His easiest option was to quit as he could justify his decision to leave the battle on the grounds of family traditions and acts of irreligion.

The ways in which Sri Krishna convinces Arjuna to understand his purpose and face the situation is definitely a big lesson for us to learn, to make sure we confront situations with courage; win over our internal conflicts with clarity of mind; and make a choice to stand up for our identity than run away giving excuses.

Sri Krishna's message to Arjuna will be dealt with in detail in the subsequent editions.



GROWTH MINDSET!

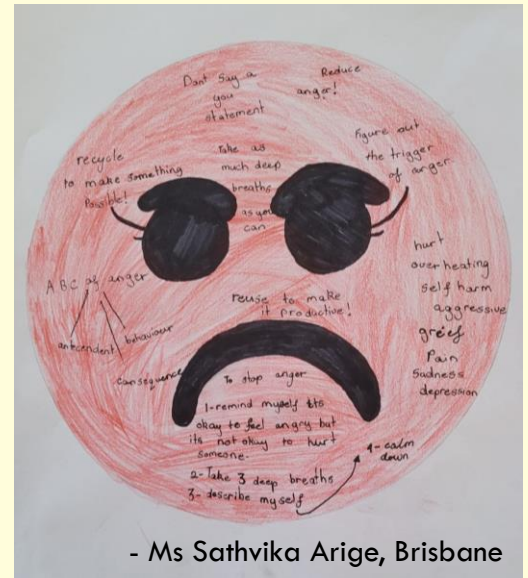
WHY IS A GROWTH MINDSET IMPORTANT?

Why is growth mindset important in our daily lives? Well today I will be answering that question. A growth mindset is believing in the power of yourself and your brain. We all know our intellect and abilities develop when we try different and difficult things. Always use the right strategies and never give up! If you have a growth mindset, you can always think positively and achieve your goals. If you have a fixed mindset or a pessimistic personality you may never succeed in your dreams. When people adopt a growth mindset they view challenges as ways of progressing to their outcome. A growth mindset helps your brain grow and your personality grow. Persevere in the face of failures, effort is required to build new skills and stand up for yourself and never give up!

SUCCESS
⇒ go get it ⇒

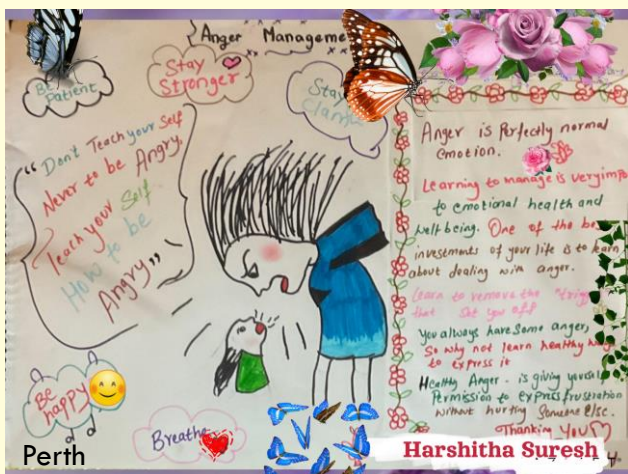
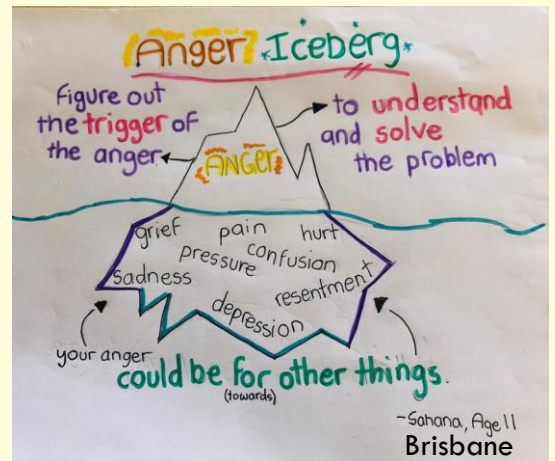
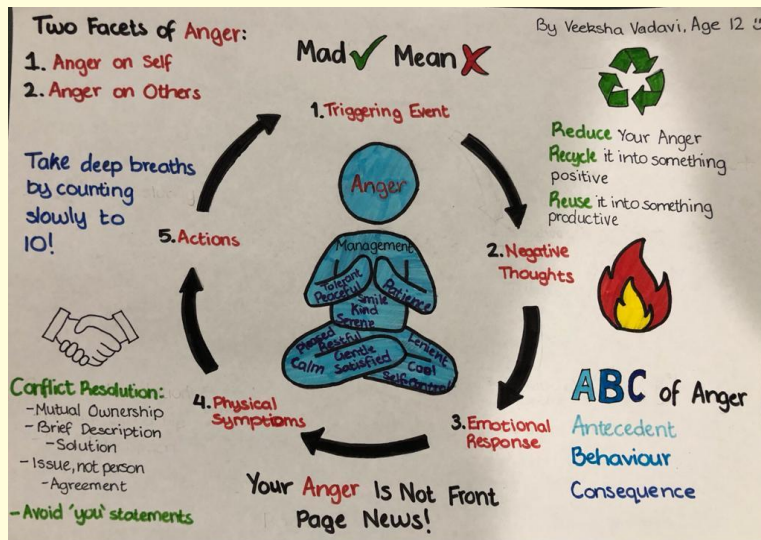
REMEMBER HARDWORK
=
SUCCESS!

Be Happy



- Ms Sathvika Arige, Brisbane

- Mr Akshith Prasanna, Sydney



Workshop Summaries

Madhubani folk art painting has its origins in Mithila in Bihar, India. Instead of contemporary brushes painting is done with fingers, twigs, brushes, nib-pens and even matchsticks! It is characterized by eye-catching geometrical patterns that come to life using natural dyes and pigments.



Fish is a very auspicious theme of Mithila Painting. From time immemorial, fish has been associated with proliferation of life due to its fertile nature. The designs and paintings are full of life. They exhibit bright colours focusing on the themes of animals, fishes and birds that are believed to bring good luck in Mithila culture

Materials required

- Cardboard (Cereal box or any carton box)
- 2 plain white papers
- Sketch pens (Colours required – black, Yellow, red, Blue or colours of your choice)
- Glue (Liquid glue preferred)
- Scissors
- Fine liners – Optional
- Scale
- Cling wrap/plastic sheets

Steps

1. Cut the cardboard box into a 10*10 cm square or a circle with 5 cm radius
2. Cut the white paper using the measurements used for your cardboard
3. Paste the white paper on the cardboard on both sides making a background for the art
4. Using pencils, draw 1cm borders on all 4 corners of the cardboard
5. Within the border, draw mathubani art.
6. Thicken pencil marks using fine liners
7. Use sketch pens to colour your art
8. Waterproof your artwork by wrapping it in cling wrap or plastic sheet and use it as a tea coaster