

Fast Track

When Life in the Fast Lane Needs a Pit Stop

Monthly Newsletter

July 2021

Just as Arjuna had meticulous focus only on the bird's eye
as instructed by his preceptor Dronacharya,
so be our mind with unflinching attention on
Mahamantra and Mahamantra alone!
- Sri Sri Swamiji



On Top of The World

MADHURA SMARANAM
- My Gurn As I See Him

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

Sri Swamiji always says one thing. "One can achieve whatever he wants in his life. Nothing is impossible. One can reach the peaks of the Himalayas. One can reach the deepest point in the ocean. One can even reach and step on the Moon. One can attain the position of Indra. One can become as wealthy as Kubera. One can even live 1000 years. But, you know what is the most difficult to achieve or attain? It is very difficult to attain the service of God (Bhagawan) and all those who are always in the thought of God (Bhagavathas). One will receive that fortune only if God's grace is abundant.

The effort we take and the time we spend for Bhagawan and our Guru, is the only gain for our soul. That is one thing that stays with us forever. Once, Sri Swamiji shared a story of a happening in his childhood. In a small town, there lived a number of siblings and their children in a joint family. A woman who belonged to the family was love personified. Her life was completely about working hard for all the members of the family. Her entire world was only her family. Irrespective of whether it was a happy or a sad occasion, it never took place without the presence of that woman. In this manner, years fled. The lady also became very old. Her body did not cooperate with her to work in the house like she used to before. Slowly, the members of the family started to avoid the old lady. All the deeds she did for them when she was young was entirely forgotten. Swamiji happened to meet that old lady as a child. When they met, she cried and said, "I have worked so hard for all those in this family! I have cooked rice for every single one of them for so many years! There have been many days when someone has fallen ill and I have single-handedly stayed awake to take care of them! I have helped so many of them during their pregnancies! These hands have done all of these. But today, this has all become a lie. I live with a small stomach that is filled with hunger now. Only this seems to be the truth, doesn't it?"

Swamiji felt that Bhagawan conveyed a message through the old lady: 'Only the services we perform for Bhagawan will stay with us forever. Others are all useless.' Sri Swamiji said, "I prostrated at the feet of the old woman who taught me this wonderful lesson at a very young age."

Once, Swamiji enquired a friend who is involved in the services of Madhurapuri Ashram asking, "How are you?" The person replied with absolutely no excitement saying, "I'm living by performing services here. Once in a while I chant the Mahamantra. Life is just moving on." Sri Swamiji called him and said with sympathy, "In life, everybody is doing something to fill their stomachs. They're forced to do things just to earn money and attain fame irrespective of whether they like it or not. Every single person has their own responsibilities and duties and the worry about fulfilling them as well. Without giving you those worries, Bhagawan, who is the Ocean of Kindness has given you an opportunity to live by performing services for him and changing his divine name. Think about it and feel happy. And thank Bhagawan for the same. You could have used your body and its organs for any other work. Keep counting your blessings that you are able to do services and chant the divine name instead." Without stopping there, Swamiji asked him to jump 3 times, as far as he is capable. He was confused. In spite, he jumped thrice in front of Swamiji, obeying his words.

With a smile Sri Swamiji said, "With this excitement keep jumping and thinking how fortunate you are to be performing services to Bhagawan. Think, who is equivalent to me, who is always chanting the name of God?" and moved from there.

(Translated from original Tamil article by the team)

Work and Spirituality

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

In my speeches, I usually tend to talk more about the sorrows that we face in the world. One might ask why I do so. Only by analysing the sorrows in the world one will be able to gain Viveka (discrimination with respect to what really one wants in his life). If we analyse only the worldly pleasures and the happiness derived out of them, we will incorrectly conclude that there is substance in this world worthy of pursuing as one's life goal. Such a mind cannot turn towards God. Analysing sorrows remind us that there is no substance in this world. Such people will be able to contemplate on Bhagavan. For a spiritual seeker, sorrows and miseries are like manure added to the soil. They act like catalyst for their spiritual progress.

While washing clothes, the clothes are scrubbed and handled roughly to remove the dirt and not to tear them, isn't it? Similarly, a spiritual seeker should view any difficulties in life as opportunities to bring him closer to his spiritual goal. In heavily crowded cities like Chennai and Mumbai, even hale and healthy people find it very difficult to navigate their daily lives be it taking a short walk or commuting by vehicles. However, we do see many blind or vision impaired people survive in these cities. Similarly, we see so many disabled people achieving great success in life. This shows their self-confidence and perseverance of effort when it comes to navigating difficult situations. A spiritual seeker should have the same attitude towards their goals.

So many people work as labourers in road laying and building construction just for a petty salary. In addition to doing strenuous work, they also need to carry out their day-to-day household chores. For them, life is hard but they never sit and grieve over it. They live happily. Even after seeing such people in this world, it is a great sin if we waste our precious time. We must contribute by helping people whenever we can. Every day, before having our food, we must ask ourselves how we spent our time, how much japa did we do? how long did we meditate? If we had wasted our time by sleeping or gossiping then we should feel ashamed of having food. Especially if we have dedicated ourselves to spiritual life, we should never indulge in activities that don't contribute anything positive to ourselves or others.

Karma yoga means striving to achieve one's goals no matter how many obstacles come. A karma yogi never fears opposition, has a mindset to give his best, never loses confidence, is never timid and never procrastinates. He keeps his mind focused on the goal. He avoids any task that will distract him from it.

If we truly desire something, then we can definitely attain it. Then a question comes, is it enough if we have self-confidence and perseverance alone? don't we need the grace of Guru or God? If we do every action with love and gratitude without ego then grace of guru or lord will automatically lead us to our goal. This is certain.



MadhuraGeetham

- Mrs Remya Muraleedhara Pai, Melbourne

This beautiful madhuraGeetham that describes causeless Gurukrupa is set to Raagam Simhendramadhyamam. Sri Muralidhara Swamiji elaborates on the heartening truth that no matter what kind of a person one is, Guru is his only refuge.

rAgam: sihmEndramadhyamam

thALam: Adi

tvamEva gathir mama hE gurunAtha

iha lOkE paralOkE cha || tva ||

1. sumukhOham vA vimukhOham Va

puNyOham vA pApOham vA

paNDithOham vA

mUDhOham vA

dhanikOham vA [

daridrOham vA || tva ||

02. shakthOham vA ashakthOham vA

susheelOham vA dushsheelOham vA AshrithOham

vA anAshrithOham vA niraparAdhOham vA

sAparAdhOham vA || tva ||

03. vignOham vA agnOham vA

virakthOham vA rakthOham vA

vaidikOham vA laukikOham vA

bhAgavathOham vA muraIdharOham vA || tva

||

Gurunatha! You are my only refuge in the worldly life and in the life beyond. Irrespective of whether I am conducive or disinclined, regardless of my merits or sins, of whether I am a scholar or I'm ignorant, whether I am rich or poor, You are my only refuge.

Regardless of whether I am strong or weak, whether my character is excellent or tainted, or whether I have surrendered to you or not, irrespective of whether I have done any अपराध (offense) or not, You are my sole refuge.

Irrespective of whether I am endowed with spiritual knowledge or not, whether I am unattached to the worldly objects or completely ravelling in the worldly objects, whether I am a Vaideeka (one who follows the path prescribed in the Vedas) or a materialistic, whether I am a Bhagavata (devotee of Bhagavantha) or Muraleedhara, You are my only refuge.

The sweet essence of this madhuraGeetham is that whichever state one is in, Guru is the only gati (refuge) for him. This is a constant prayer for Guru Krupa requesting Guru not to forsake one and not relying on anything else.

च्युतं वचनामृतम् Chyutham Vachanāmrutham

Dr Ashwin Bhaskaran, Sydney

After the battle of Kurukshetra, Bhīshmāchāryā lies on the ground with his body pierced with the countless arrows sustained during the war. Yudhishtira Maharāja brings Bhagavān Sri Krishna to the resting place of Bhīshmāchāryā for a final dharshan. Being the epitome of dharma, Yudhishtira asks Bhīshma of the greatest dharma to follow in life, to which he responds with the thousand names of Bhagavān – the Vishnu Sahasranāmā. Moreover, we are gifted with a beautiful sthuthi sung by Bhīshmā to Bhagavān, capturing the spirit of his bhakthi.

On hearing this, Shaunaka maharishi asks Suta Pauranika (SB 1-10-1):

hatvā svariktha-sprdhā ātatāyino
yudhishtiro dharma-bhrtām varishta:
sahānujai: pratyavaruddha-bhojana:
katham pravṛtta: kim akārashīt tata:

On referring to Yudhishtira Maharājā, they describe him as dharma-bhrtām, one who strictly follows the essence of dharma without compromise. Since this principle lies at the very heart of a true king and ruler, they go on to ask Suta of the characteristics of his kingdom. Suta says that Yudhishtira Maharājā specifically followed the guidance given to him by Bhīshmāchāryā and Bhagavān Sri Krishna. It was because of this guidance that his rule and kingdom was so venerable. So much so that it was not only the people that were immensely satisfied and happy, but the even the animals, nature and elements were content and pure, with all beings free from disturbances of the body and mind. Sage Shaunaka goes on to ask Sūta about King Parikshit – the one who was targeted by the dreaded brahmāstra sent by Ashvatthāmā while he was still in the womb of his mother, Uthhara. In doing so, he refers to Parikshit as a “mahātmā” – a great soul, asking about Parikshit’s life and the events towards the end of his life. He also refers to Parikshit as mahā-buddheh” – a man of great intelligence. The reason for this was that King Parikshit had intelligence and foresight when dealing with Kali purusha. Rather than simply eliminating Kali from this world, he allowed it to remain in very specific places, knowing that despite all of its negative qualities and influences, there was a silver lining to its presence.

Kalau khalu bhavishyanthi nārayāyana-parayānah (SB 11-5-38).

It is said, in Srimadh Bhāgavatham, that many devotees of Bhagavān will be born in this age of Kali. So much so, that the people of previous ages, which we often perceive as purer from our perspective, will yearn to be born in Kali Yuga because of the sheer bhāgyam (fortune) of being able to associate with such bhakthās. Furthermore, a unique aspect of Kali Yuga is that negative thoughts alone, without negative actions, will not attract the associated negative karma that will weigh down our spiritual progress. However, even positive and sātvic thoughts alone will attract positive karma (punya) that will contribute to our spiritual progress. Thus, we can appreciate the intelligence of King Parikshit in dealing with Kali purusha.

tadh idham shrothum icchāmō
gadhitum yadhi manyasē
brūhi na: shraddhadhānānām
yasya gnānam adach-chuka:
SB 1-12-3

Sage Shaunaka goes on to implore Sūta to share with them the gnānam that was passed on by Sukha. In doing so, he emphasizes the earnest nature (shraddha) with which they are listening to his answers, whilst also respectfully asking Sūta specifically to share whatever he is willing to narrate. Thereafter, Sūta retells the life story of King Parikshit, beginning from his time in his mother’s womb all the way through to his final days in satsang with Sukha.

suryavamsam

Mr Nidheesh, Sydney



Adithi gave birth to 12 sons including Lord Vishnu's avatara of Vamana. The 12 children's names are as follows - Vivasva, Aryama, Pusha, Tvashta, Savita, Bhaga, Dhatha, Vidhatha, Varuna, Mitra, Satru and Urukrama (Vamana)

- Vivasva (Sun God) married Samjñā and had Vaivasvatha Manu, Yama and Yami as children
- Samjñā also took form as a mare (female horse) and gave birth to Ashvini Kumaras on earth
- Vivasva married Chaya Devi and had Sani, Savarni Manu, Thapathi (who married Samvaranan)
- Aryama married Mathruka and gave birth to sons who were learned scholars. Lord Brahma created human species from them. Aryama took charge of Yama's post when Yama had to be born as a sudra (Vidura) due to Manduka Muni's curse [SB 1.13.15].
- Pusha had no sons. He lost his teeth after he laughed at Lord Siva showing his teeth during a yaga organised by Dhaksha, where Dhaksha was insulting Lord Siva. Hence Pusha can have only ground flours.
- Tvashta married Rachana, who is the daughter of asuras (demons), and gave birth to two powerful sons by names Sannivesa and Vishwarupa. Devas accepted Vishwarupan as their priest despite being born to their enemy daughter (demons), while Devas' spiritual master Brihaspathi abandoned them for showing disrespect.
- In Vamana Avatar, Lord Vishnu took Trivikrama form and retrieved the 3 worlds from King Maha Bali for Devas [SMB 8.18-23]
- Dithi is the mother of Asuras and Maruts

Dithi gave birth to demons such as Hiranyakasibu and Hiranyakshan, despite advise from Sage Kasyapa about the inauspicious time to beget children [SMB 3.14]

- Hiranyaksha was killed by Lord Vishnu in His Varaha Avatar [SMB 3.17-19]
- Hiranyakasibu was killed by Lord Vishnu in His Narasimha Avatar to protect Prahlada [SMB 7.2-9]
- Hiranyakasibu and Hiranyaksha were dwarapalakhas (gatekeepers) of Vaikunta known as Jaya and Vijaya but were cursed by Sanakati Rishis to be born as demons [SMB 3.16]
- Dithi wanted to take revenge on Indra on whose behalf Lord Vishnu had killed Hiranyakasibu and Hiranyaksha. She begot Maruts but Indra cut the embryo into 49 parts and they all became devas [SMB 6.18]

- From Kashyapa, Vivasvan (Sun God) was born through Aditi.
- Vivasvan (Sun God) married Samjñā and had Vaivasvatha Manu, and Ikshwaku was born from Vaivasvatha Manu.
- After Ikshwaku, the dynasty is famously referred as Ikshwaku dynasty. In his mahakavyam (epic poem) Raghuvamsham, poet Kalidasa describes the line of kings from Ikshwaku. From next month onwards, let us learn about Ikshwaku dynasty from Kalidasa's perspective.

(...to be contd.)

Two types of people who don't deserve respect and recognition

*dvaaveva na viraajethe vipareethena karmanaa |
grhashthasha niraarambha: kaaryavaamshaiva bhikshuka: ||*

A grhashtha (householder) who shuns his duties and never gets going and a sannyasi (renunciate) busy without business, neither of them deserves respect and recognition due to the wrong attitude.

Our scriptures say that among the 4 ashramas, grhashtha (householder) is the one who has 2 unique duties. One is the duty to earn and accumulate wealth and the other is to give back to the society to support the other 3 ashramas apart from maintaining their household. Therefore, the nature of the grhashtha is constant performance of action with efficiency. In contrast, a sanyasi, who is supposed to be living a life of recluse or nivrthi dharma. They are supposed to have renounced everything so that they can focus on contemplating on the highest truth told in sastras. Therefore, it is important for a sanyasi to not indulge in worldly affairs.

In short, this sloka is saying that a person should do the duties assigned to them with diligence. What happens when people don't do their duty? It only ends in disharmony. For example, if a person who is leading a team fails to appropriately delegate work and does all the work himself then he not only overburdens himself and makes his life stressful but also creates trust issues in his team by denying the opportunity for others to learn and flourish. Having said that, when the same person comes home, he should responsibly take on the duties as a father, husband, son etc. He shouldn't be delegating his work there. Therefore, it is very important that we have full awareness of our duties. This awareness helps us live a harmonious life in all the roles we play in our lives.

Two types of people who mishandle their wealth

*nyaayaagathasya drvyasya bodhdhavyau dvaavathikrmau |
apaathre prathipaththishcha paathre chaaprathipaadhanam ||*

The wealth earned through fair means can be mishandled in two ways: giving it to the undeserving and denying to the deserving.

Vidura says that it is not only sufficient that we fulfill our desires through fair means, but that any wealth that is earned through fair means should be given in charity. However, before giving, it is important to know whether the receiver deserves it. Even if it is just one person, the person should deserve help, example: educating a poor child. Similarly, it is equally important to refuse giving money to the undeserving, for example: to a friend who is addicted to gambling. In both cases, Vidura says one will be misusing what one has rightfully earned.

Two types of people whose attitude needs to be condemned

*dvaambhasi niveshtavyau gale badhvaa dhrdaam shilaam |
dhanavanthamadhaathaaram dharidhram chaathapasvinam | |*

The affluent who do not give to charity and the poor who cannot patiently bear their circumstances, deserve to be drowned in water with a heavy stone tied to their neck.

A wealthy man should consider himself as a trustee of the society and he should give as much as he can conveniently afford, to relieve the needy. There are many ways to give. One who has too much money in his hands can donate to good causes ranging from maintenance of ancient temples to supporting homeless people. Similarly, one who has too much time can donate his time for the benefit of others, example: actively listening to a friend in sorrow.

On the other hand, if a unwealthy man is unable to accept his situation and is impatient with fulfilling his desires then he will resort to using his situation to create sympathy to get money or alms. If he has dharmic desires, then he should work hard to overcome his difficulties, instead of wallowing in self-pity.

This sloka does not imply such people should be punished. However, such language is used so that we condemn such attitudes as they don't contribute anything to the society.

Two types of people whose attitudes lead to self-deterioration

*dvaavimau kankakau theekshnau shareeparishoshinau |
yashchaadhana: kaamayathe yashcha kupyatyaneeshwara: | |*

There are two sharp thorns that tend to wither the body. The poor man who desires far beyond his means and one who feels angry at another over whom he is no master.

If we feel angry towards someone, we should know if that anger is warranted based on our situation and the relationship we have with the other person. We may have felt that our boundaries were crossed or that when we sensed danger. Example: A service vendor in your company routinely fails to deliver projects on time even after repeated communications and reminders. This is warranted. You decide to speak with the manager and resolve the issue because you know there is a service agreement that got breached and you are not getting the quality you expected. However, if the same service vendor has given a clear timeframe within which he intends to correct the issue, then any anger that arises due to impatience is unwarranted. This anger is not valid.

A poor man has desires which he has no means to fulfill. Desiring something beyond our capacity is generally due to Kama (binding desire). This is the sharp thorn that can eventually make a person lose clarity of thoughts and lead them to their downfall. A person who cannot afford to get angry (krodha) at others because he is unable to defend himself.

(to be contd...)

OUR TEAM

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Dr A Bhagyanathan, Chennai

Senior Advisory Faculty

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Senior Co-Ordinators

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Brahmasri Ravi Teja Janardanan, Sydney

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Team Photographer:

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Eating Stale, Eating Fresh

- MR DEEPAK VINOD
SYDNEY

It is indeed a great blessing to take birth in a family where Bhagavat Dharma is a common practice.

Radhika was born in a pious family who were always immersed in Satsang. When she was of age, she got married to a very wealthy and well-known business family in the town. It does not matter where one goes, there is one thing which we take with us is our Samskara. We may become dispossessed of all our worldly possessions; however, one cannot take away our Samskara – akin to taking the colours out of the rainbow.

As Radhika started to settle in her new family, she realised that there was something that she could not adjust to no matter how hard she tried. No, it wasn't the house or the food. It wasn't her freedom or even the fact that she was missing her parents. No, it wasn't her neighbours and friends. Such was her samskara that the biggest vacuum Radhika felt in her new life was the lack of Satsang.

Yes, it is indeed the immense grace of our Lord when we find ourselves in Satsang. However, can we comprehend the grace on that soul who longs, pines for Satsang in its absence? A heart in which Krishna resides will be able to relate to this plight of Radhika in the context of the current times of Covid19. In times where we are subjected to lockdowns, isolation and highly limited movements many aspects of our lives have been impacted.

Bhakti is not about just relishing and revelling the Satsang we get blessed with. It is also and more so about the pain, one feels in the absence of it. Isn't COVID the perfect situation for us to test or cultivate that Viraha Bhava (mood of separation) from Satsang and our beloved guru? If we are unable to be in the presence of our beloved Spiritual master and have that intense longing for his association— which will certainly attain the state which Srimad Bhagavatam speaks of; i.e. -'Yena Kena Prakarena Manah Krishna Niveshayat' (Someway or other, fix your mind on Krishna). Isn't that the state which the Gopis were in which took them to the highest state of Prema? Anyway, that is the topic for another day, but very much an apt message for the current times.

Radhika quickly realised that her new family did not have a place for Satsang (Namasankirtan, Sadhu Seva and Katha Shravanam). She did her best to keep herself engaged and immersed in Smarana of the Divine names of the Lord and His pastimes. She also was persistent with her prayers and petition Bhagavan to provide Satsang not just to her but to her family. And whenever she implored her husband and parents-in-law to host or even attend Satsang, it was met with cold-blooded refusal.

One fine day when Radhika's husband and father in law went to their office, a beggar seeking alms knocked on their door. Upon answering the door and hearing the petition of the beggar, Radhika quickly packed some food and handed it to the beggar while apologising that in this house everyone eats stale food.

The mother-in-law, who was keenly watching events unfolding was taken aback by the unfounded declaration of Radhika, and that too to a mere stranger. She waited till her husband and son arrived in the afternoon to request an explanation from her daughter in law. When questioned about the false words, Radhika advised that as far as she was concerned, everyone in the house was partaking in only stale foods. The family knew that Radhika was trying to make a point as she wasn't of a character to speak lightly.

Upon seeing the sheer inquisitiveness of her family, Radhika explained that wealth, fame, progeny, education, health etc are all the result of our Prarabdha karma (predetermined due to our action of the past lives). If our lives are only centred around these fruits of the action of the previous lives, then it is akin to not cooking fresh food but eating stale food. Compelled by her love for her family, she further pleaded to everyone, that having attained this rare human birth, should we not be performing pious deeds/action (likened to cooking fresh) which will allow us to pave the path for the next life? She stated that, out of all the pious action/karma, living a life as per Bhagavat Dharma (regular participation in Namasankirtan and hearing the glories of the Lordships) is closest to Bhagavan's heart.

A message which is shared with purity and good intent from one who has the Lord residing in their heart certainly has a deep impact on the listeners. This was certainly the case as Radhika's message had struck a chord and resonated deeply for her family members, who realised their follies. They all thanked Bhagavan for bringing Radhika into their life and requested her to guide them by showing them the path of Bhagavat Dharma.

Ingredients

Thickened cream 600ml

Almond flour 500ml (2 cups)

Sugar 2 cups

Ghee 3tbl

Steps

Mix all the above ingredients

Cook in a medium heat till it thickens to dough consistency and add two tablespoon ghee to make it come together.

Crease a pan with ghee and place the dough. Spread it evenly.

Slice it and it's ready to eat.

SATHVIK KITCHEN

Almond Burfi

Mrs Usha Iyer, Sydney



Meaningful Conversations

(Interesting discussions between Gopa Kuteeram teachers and students)

“Rama Dhyanam” by Gopa Kuteeram Sydney students: Bala Kanda

- Mr Bala Subramaniam, Faculty, Gopa Kuteeram Sydney

A presentation of the learnings from the Ramayana classes was done on the 18th April'21 by the L2 and L3 students of Gopa Kuteeram Sydney at the “Rama Dhyanam” event. The first part of this presentation was brought out in an earlier issue of this Newsletter in May'21 and provided an overview of the greatness of the Ramayana epic. In this issue, we report on the presentation of Bala Kanda by the children.

A brief narration of the Bala Kanda was made tracing the story from the birth of Rama to his marriage with Sita at Mithila. Importantly, the values learnt from this part of the story was presented as follows.

The importance of seeking expert help and sparing no effort in implementing such advice is seen in the instance of Rishi Rishyashringa being located and brought in at considerable effort by King Dasharatha. The Rishi was the only person known to have the ability to conduct the putra-kameshti yagna that Sage Vasishta asked the king to arrange when he went without children for a long time. The value of being such an expert who is sought out well is also seen as a life lesson.

When Sage Vishwamitra asked King Dasharatha to send Rama with him to protect his yagna from the asuras, there was an initial thought in the King's mind that he would offer to go himself instead to shield his son Rama from the tough assignment. But he quickly put the emotion behind and did as requested as an act of respect to not only Sage Viswamitra but also Sage Vasishta, his own Guru who agreed with Sage Vishwamitra's suggestion. The lesson here is that as much as we value our own decision, we must heed the advice of elders and wise people who visualise things that we often miss. In this instance, the Sages weighed their decision in favour of the long-term benefits for Rama (and Lakshmana) against the short-term emotional gain for King Dasharatha.

During the yagna proceedings at Siddashrama, Rama and Lakshmana encountered an assault by the demoness Tataka and Rama hesitated to fight with a woman and cause a danger to her life. However, he obeyed Sage Vishwamitra's instruction to fight and kill her. Herein lies an important aspect that dharma is sometimes very subtle and often there is an apparent conflict of one dharma with another. The best approach is to go by the explicit advice of Guru.

In a critical analysis of Bala Kanda, the students even picked up a rare instance of procrastination on the part of Lord Rama when he missed out on killing Mareecha who escaped from the fight. This led to the major event of Mareecha becoming an accomplice of Ravana and showing up in disguise as a deer later on to veer Rama away from Sita.

A key aspect in the teaching of Ramayana was to demonstrate that it was not just a figment of fiction by providing live examples of historic places, geographical features, recorded constellations in the galaxy that tally with the mention in Maharishi Vyasa's narration. Queen Kaikeyi's wedding gift to Rama and Sita was a palace in Ayodhya by name Kanak Bhavan that stands even to date.

Our Guru, Our Guide

**- Ms Adhithi and Ms Neha
Melbourne**

A Guru. It's the Sanskrit term for "guide", quite literally meaning a "dispeller of darkness". Their presence, whether it be physically right in front of you, or even spiritually across the seas, immediately eases doubt and anxiety. But why is this? How does a single person have the emotional strength, vulnerability and the teachings of God to influence thousands of people to live like themselves and spread positivity?

But, before we proceed, it's important to note that in order to become proficient in a skill, or even close to it, we need a teacher who is willing to help us. A Guru has been on this spiritual path before. Hence, now they're helping guide us on the path of a spiritual journey. Having a Guru to learn from is a blessing. When you have the guidance from someone, learning becomes more manageable and attaining information is made easier.

Have you ever thought of the way mothers take such immense care of their babies, ensuring they are well-fed and comfortable? Have you seen a mother's senses perk up instantly when they hear their baby cry and do everything, they can to soothe their suffering? Most often than not, the father comes along and gets the opportunities of playing with the baby and enjoying those cute moments. Undoubtedly, these moments the father experiences are incredibly rewarding, but only possible with the hard work of the mothers. Out of love, mothers do all the dirty work of cleaning and refining their children so they can look, feel and be their best. Moreover, the mother acts with no hesitation and complaints. Similarly, this reflects the dynamic of Guru and Bhagavan. From the moment that the Guru enters our lives, he chips away at the tough exterior of negative traits that envelop us, leading us onto the path of love and devotion. The Guru works tirelessly to remove our impurities and polish us so that Bhagavan can enjoy the best versions of us and revel in the joy that his devotees are of such sweet nature.

In light of the Guru Purnima celebrations, it invites the perfect opportunity for us to offer our gratitude to the Guru. But, how do we offer gratitude to the Guru? It is quite simple.

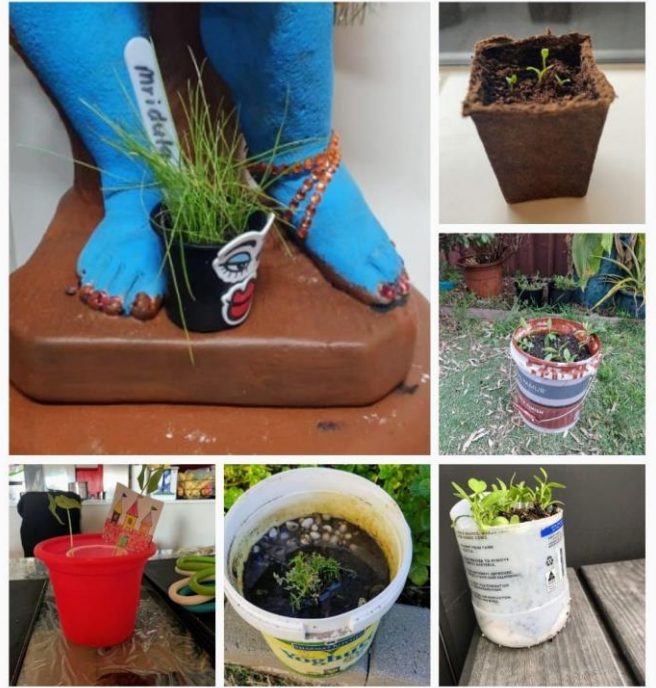
The best way to express our gratitude is to follow the Guru's guidance. Our Guru Maharaj so lovingly only requests of us one thing and that is, to chant Nama. That too, with no rules attached so that anyone can chant anywhere and anytime. How is this the best way to offer our gratitude to the Guru, you ask? Well, nama chanting sparks the long process of inner spiritual transformation that our Guru so lovingly is helping us attain inner peace and liberation.

Being grateful towards someone, whether it be a Guru, a friend or a family member shouldn't be something that is sought after or taught. There should be a natural desire to express gratitude, and not just due to moral obligation. Consciousness in our thoughts and actions should be present from a young age - the notion of deliberate doings that enhance our community. Having said that, one should also be grateful to themselves, by being kind and showing no self-degradation. Indeed, this would be the most efficient way to offer our gratitude to our Guru.

Chanting Nama helps us find that inner peace and opens the space for us to be kind to ourselves. This simultaneously also helps us give gratitude to our Guru, thanking and acknowledging them for their teachings and constant presence.

World Environment Day

This year in our Sydney Gopa Kuteeram L1 classes, we spoke about the importance of the environment, and using sustainable products for the future. We are following the 'Three R's' - Reduce, Reuse & Recycle! On June 5th, we celebrated World Environment Day. In line with this, here are some pictures of herbs and plants grown by our young students over the last two terms, showing how they can reuse everyday items found at home!



Creativity Corner

Mrs Harini Karthik, Melbourne

Mandala which means 'Circle' in Sanskrit is a geometric representation of symbols. It's a very ancient Indian art which originated during Vedic times. References of Mandala can be found in Rig Veda. Mandala forms are often geometric symbols with circles and squares arranged in a symmetrical pattern. Mandalas have been long used for spiritual practices such as meditation, prayers and as a symbol of prosperity. Simple patterns of nature such as flowers, petals, leaves, dew drops etc. are used to compose a mandala. Apart from its various spiritual uses, Mandala art is an extremely therapeutic form of relaxing the mind. Kids were taught how to do a simple mandala art with the use of geometric patterns

