

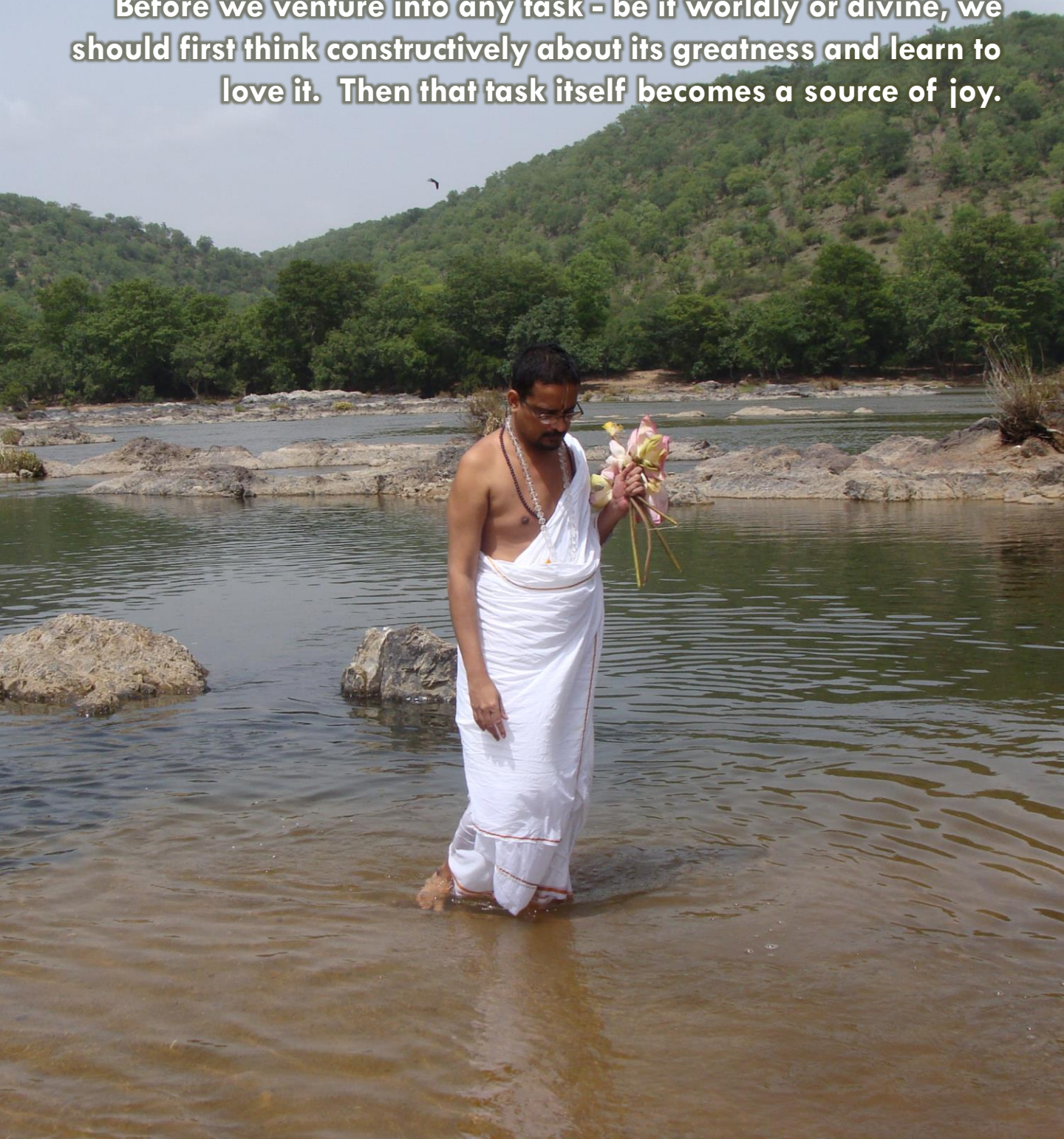
Fast Track

When Life in the Fast Lane Needs a Pit Stop

Monthly Newsletter

August 2021

Before we venture into any task - be it worldly or divine, we should first think constructively about its greatness and learn to love it. Then that task itself becomes a source of joy.



NEVER FORGET TO THANK GOD!

MADHURA SMARANAM
- My Gurn As I See Him

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

The ones who know Sri Swamiji really well are aware of one thing. That, if we ever inform him or pray for anything to him he never forgets it. It is often mesmerising when Sri Swamiji precisely remembers what we had conveyed or prayed to him, even after a couple of years.

Once a devotee came to our Ashram along with family to have darshan of Sri Swamiji. The devotee, who was seen to be delighted, came in the queue along with his wife and children and they all prostrated in front of Sri Swamiji. Before he could begin speaking, Sri Swamiji asked, "The last time you came, you said that one of your relatives was in grave danger, right? Has that been solved?" When Sri Swamiji asked such a question, it looked like this devotee informed Sri Swamiji only a week or 10 days back.

The moment Sri Swamiji asked the question, the devotee's face became dull and he had tears in his eyes. He prostrated in front of Swamiji yet again and said that 4 years back when he had come to Swamiji to this very same place with this problem, Sri Swamiji had said, "Go to the shrine of Sri Madhurasakhi Sametha Sri Premika Varadhan and chant nama for sometime. Bhagawan will surely take care of your problems and he will never let you down."

As Sri Swamiji ordained, I chanted nama and left for my hometown. A month after I returned back to my place, my relative was cured of his problem. He folded his arms and said, "I do not know how to thank you."

Sri Swamiji said, "Very good and happy," with a smile on his face. Without stopping there, Sri Swamiji said, "Go to the shrine of Premika Varadhan, tell him that your prayers have been answered, and chant nama for sometime."

After the devotee left, Sri Swamiji spoke to the students of the Veda Patasala at Ashram.

Sri Swamiji: The eagerness we have to tell Bhagawan about a prayer or problem in our life, is not there when the prayers are answered. We are not eager enough to go and thank Bhagawan for the same, right?

A Student: I am seeking clarification for a doubt rising in my mind. You have to give me a clarification. Sri Premikavaradhan will know when the prayers are answered, right? Do we have to come to his shrine to convey this? Isn't it enough if we convey the same from wherever we are?

Sri Swamiji: What you're saying is correct. There is nothing that Bhagawan is unaware of. But, you have to think of one thing. When there is a problem in life, when there is prayer to make, the devotee does not feel that way, right? He doesn't think that, "Do I have to tell him for him to know? Bhagawan knows everything." We wish to come in person and pray to him. Which is reasonable. When we come to Bhagawan in person for a prayer or to convey a problem, then it is only correct to come in person and convey to Bhagwan when our prayers have been answered.

A Student: I have understood completely.

Sri Swamiji: When we come to Bhagawan with a problem or a prayer, it is also our duty to come to Bhagwan to thank him for answering our prayers. Let that remain on one side. God has created and is taking care of such a big universe. He has given all of us a beautiful world. The Sun rises on time, every single day, without the need for a remainder. Similarly, the wind never forgets to blow. How many different flowers, plants, creepers, trees, birds, animals and colourful insects around us! If we take the human body into consideration, there are no words to describe the unique ways in which it functions. The list goes on. There is no end to it. Be honest and tell me, how many of us actually thank god every day for all of these?

Nobody gave a response to that question. In unison they all agreed that they do not do so.

Sri Swamiji: We should never forget to thank God. It is very easy to thank him. There is no cost or expense for that. No big efforts are also required. Our tongue alone is enough. The one which is the best way to convey our prayers to him, is the same way to convey our gratitude as well. You know what way that is? To chant his names whenever possible and at all times.

(Translated from original Tamil article by the team)

Perspectives

- **Mrs Geetha Narayanaswamy, Sydney**
(Translated from Sri Swamiji's Lectures)

In a railway station in a big city, one rich man got down with his luggages from a recently arrived train. He carried his luggages himself. Some people who were watching this said "Look, in spite of being a rich and well known person, he is carrying his own luggages." After a few days the same rich person returned from another place in the same train. This time he gave his luggages to a porter and asked him to carry it. Some people who were watching this said "He did the right thing. Porters depend on people like him."

One person was in prison with a life sentence. He was released after 20 years. After his release he ran very fast from the prison. Some who were watching this said "As he was locked up all these days he is running like this." After a week another life sentenced prisoner from the same prison was released. But he walked calmly after the release as if nothing had happened. Some who were watching this said "He is used to being in prison. So going out is not at all in his thoughts."

One person will say openly all the things he does. Whereas another person will not say at all. For example, one person will keep saying that he is going to observe Ekadasi austerities, which is his goal. If you ask him why he is saying this openly, he will say "Only when I say this will all the people ask me. Observing the austerities will become necessary because of their questioning. Otherwise I am unable to observe Ekadasi austerities." Another person will observe Ekadasi austerities. But he will not mention it outside. If you ask him why, he will say "In case, if I miss the austerities, I will be subject to others' mockery. As it is shameful, I will not mention it."

One significant, wise, realised and pure person(hereafter referred as Mahātmā) lives a life bound by the austerities and duties according to his lifestyle and tendencies(Varnasrama Dharma), as mentioned in the scriptures (sastrās). People in his divine presence will praise him a lot and say "In all situations he conducts himself according to the scriptural advice. He is really a great person!" Another mahātmā will mix with all the people without looking at any difference of their religion or their classification according to their caste. He will be one with them without implying any difference. People in his divine presence will say "Oh! What great compassion! How simple he is! Only he can be like this!"

So always there are two angles for one matter.

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Team Photographer:

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MadhuraGeetham

- Mrs Mallika Ramaswamy, Sydney

In this divine composition, Sri Swamiji shows us how to pray. Even if Bhagavan comes, and stands in front of us, we do not know how to pray and what to pray for. What do we ask him? How do we know what to ask for? Even if we do ask him for something, do we know if it is the best for us? In this kirtan set to ragam Bimblas, Sri Swamiji beautifully prays to Radha rani, asking her to show him how to pray to Lord Krishna?

He says, how do I ask such that Krishna will surely bestow his grace upon me? Oh! Radhe, please bestow your grace on me, so I may ask him so.

You know the secret of divine love (Prema), and you are the heart of Krishna (Premika), please bless me, so I know the way to seek Krishna's blessing.

Please discreetly teach me the divine secret, and I will not ask you anything else. Oh! Madhushri, the dweller of Madhurapuri, you are the divine beauty devoid of any deceit (unblemished).

In Brindavan, all the devotees chant "Radhe Radhe"! They approach Krishna through the mercy of Radha Rani. Many Mahans also pray to Radha Devi to grace them, such that Lord Krishna showers his grace onto them.

The secret to obtaining that grace is to simply chant Bhagavan Nama. Even in Srimad Bhagavatham, it is said that the speculative process of understanding Bhagavan is very difficult. However, he can be attained by Bhakti and Prema, that is, by simply chanting his divine names.

Ragam: Bimblas Talam: Adi

Pallavi

eppaDik kETTAI kaNNan aruLvAnO

appaDik kETka endanukku aruLvAy rAdhE ||

Anupallavi

prEmaiyin rahasiyam aRindavaL nlyanDrO

prEmikanin hridayamum nlyE anDrO || e ||

CharaNam

kAdum kAdum vaiithArpOI sollit tharuvAyE

vEReduvum unai nAn kETkavE mATTEn

madhurapurivAsini mAdhushrlyE

sUduvAdu onDraRiyA sundari nlyE || e ||

च्युतं वचनामृतम् केषुपुष्कलं रक्तेक्ष्णं लघुपुष्कलं

Dr Ashwin Bhaskaran, Sydney

After the Pāṇḍavās had left this Earth for the higher worlds (swarga-ārōhanam), their last descendant, Parikshit, took up his position on the throne. As ordained by his forefathers, and in the true spirit of a bhāgavathā, he ruled the world in line with the scriptures and the path of dharma. He fathered four children with his wife, Irāvati, and completed three ashva-mēdha yāgās full of such immense benevolence and charity that the very dhēvās themselves were visible to the people of world. Following this, he embarks on a dhig-vijayam – a journey to conquer Kali and its negative influence on the world. In his travels, he comes across a scene where a dark and evil figure was mercilessly kicking and beating a cow and bull. On seeing this, Parikshit immediately stops that evil being, which is none other than Kali purusha (the manifestation of Kali yuga) and begins to punish him. Indeed, it is said in our shastras that to allow one's feet to even touch the body of a cow is considered to be one of the most abhorred acts possible.

pādhābhyām na sprushēdh-agnim gurum brāhmanamēva cha
naiva gām cha kumārīm cha na vrudham na shishum thathā

This sloka from our shastras goes on further to emphasise that one's feet should never touch fire (agni), the Guru, a woman (kumārī), the elderly (vrudham) or a child (shishum).

At this point, Shaunaka Rishi asks Sūta, “please elaborate on what happened during this encounter between Parikshit and Kali, especially if it relates to Bhagavān Sri Krishna”. He goes on to say:

athavāśya padāmbhoja-makaranda-lihām satām
kim anyair asad-ālāpair āyusho yad asad-vyayaḥ
(SB 1:16:6)

Here, Shaunaka acknowledges the limited and precious time that they have in their lives which should be spent listening to stories relating to Bhagavān Sri Krishna or those devotees who relish the nectar of His Lotus Feet (padāmbhoja makaranda-lihām) – that is, His bhāgavathās. Shaunaka says this because he knows that the lifespan of humans in Kali yuga is far more limited than in previous ages. In light of this, he says that we, as humans, should not be wasting our time on other unnecessary matters (asad-ālāpaiḥ).

For example, we would not want to be spending large amounts of money if we only have limited savings. Instead, we would focus on ensuring that every dollar that we did spend was for a very good purpose. That very principle is echoed here, only that Shaunaka rishi acknowledges that it is not money that is the issue, but time. Indeed, the most valuable way to spend our limited time is to pursue the path to liberation.

na kascin mriyate tāvad yāvad āsta ihāntakaḥ etad-artham hi bhagavān
āhūtaḥ paramarṣibhiḥ aho nṛ-loke pīyeta hari-līlāmrtam vacaḥ
(SB 1:16:8)

Shaunaka reaffirms that this was the very reason that they had come to Naimishāranya kshēthra and performed the yagna – to listen to the stories of Bhagavān Sri Krishna. So much so that they had even invited Yama, the Lord of death, to participate in the yagna. In doing so, he highlights how bhakthas do not fear death since they are forever immersed in relishing the pastimes and gunās of Bhagavān. Indeed, Yama had come to relish that very same nectar himself. This notion is captured in the lines of Sri Oothukādu Venkatakavi, a contemporary Tamil composer and ardent devotee of Bhagavān Sri Krishna, when he sings:

andha kālan vandhāl enna nēril avan kaiyil thālathai kondu pōi pōdu
(Gōvindha Gōvindha Rādhā Mukundhā)

When singing the divine names of Hari, His devotees would not fear death himself (kālan). If he were to appear, then they would simply hand over the khartāl to him and continue singing the names of Bhagavān. Indeed, we are truly blessed to be part of satsang and to have this most precious of sādhanās (spiritual practices) – nāma sankirthan.

Lessons from Vidura Neethi

TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE

- Mr Shabarinath Vaitheeswaran, Melbourne

Two types of people who get the high benefit of heaven

*dvaavimau purushau raajan swargasyopari thishtatha: |
prabhushcha kshamayaa yuktho daridrashcha pradhaanavaan | |*

The person who though powerful is forgiving and the one who is benevolent although himself not a man of means, ascends to heaven.

It is not uncommon for a powerful man to use his position, wealth and status to achieve his desires and punish or cause harm to those who come his way. Similarly, a person who is poor can use his position to create sympathy and get alms and money.

However, if a powerful person is forgiving and a poor person is benevolent then they don't abuse their position to get what they want. In fact, these 2 types of people do the opposite of what is expected of them and that is why Vidura says they earn a high benefit, heaven. Story of Ranthideva from Bhagavatham is a great example of a poor man who is benevolent. Even though Ranthideva was extremely poor and his family was starving, he gave away all his food for deserving people.

Two types of people need to be hailed and appreciated:

*dve karmanee nara: kurvannasmimlloke virochathe |
abruvan parusham kinchidhasatho-anarchayamsthathaa | |*

A person who is always polite and who does not honour and befriend evil persons, deserves special consideration in this world.

By being polite, one follows the highest value of Ahimsa (non-violence). It is through speech that most "Himsa" (violence) is inflicted on others. When speech is regulated, Himsa is regulated to a great degree. Words are like sharp weapons, if they are not used properly it can lead to sorrow to others. Some may think "After all, I am only speaking truth or fact, so I can tell as it is without filtering". However, some truth can hurt someone when told as is. Therefore, it should be told in a gentle manner. In the case of a doctor, depending on the patient's mental state, he would choose an appropriate time and words to inform about the disease.

Vidhura then says we should appreciate those who don't support evil-minded people, in other words those who follow adharmā. It takes courage to condemn a wrong action ex: corruption. Some of us may not have courage to fight adharmā however when we do see someone voicing what is correct then we should appreciate and hail such people.

Dharshan

- MS MYTHREI KRISHNA
SYDNEY

Aashada Ekadashi
2nd July 2012

The life changing event of my first dharshan of Guru Maharaj seems like it could have bounced off the set of a major motion picture.

It was my first time in India and even though I had travelled the globe as a curious and thirsty tourist like the world was going to end, my feet had not yet touched Indian soil until late evening of 1st July 2012.

It was a trip I embarked upon with a lot of excitement, anticipation and most notably, without expectation.

Weeks earlier I had made the conscious decision (after an initial rebuff) to book a flight to Chennai to have dharshan of a Guru who I had but seen a very small photo of.

Past experiences with so called spiritual masters had left me dubious and cautious but inevitably it was the will and Grace of God that beckoned me to book a flight, albeit for three days so that I had an exit route in the event things didn't work out so well.

There was a group of about six of us and prior to the trip Jayanthi Mami took us to an Indian store in Pendle Hill where we bought sarees and blouses.

I picked two. One was a forest green bordered with a red band and sequinned peacocks. The second was of a more drapery fabrication marrying large polka dots and stripes. It was the former that I wore on the first day. There was no time to get blouses made so I bought some ready made ones to match.

On the flight to Chennai which I took with one of the young ladies from the group named Kate, we made a stop at Singapore. It was the Singapore to Chennai flight that was my first taste of India. Kate was annoyed with me as I marched swiftly through the airport to get to the connecting flight leaving her idle pace to have to get a crack on. In hindsight I take it as what was my uncontainable enthusiasm to get this show on the road and to come to the feet of the Master.

We landed in Chennai late in the evening and even later arrived at the hotel. I was sharing a room with Lynelle who had reached a day earlier. Even though it was close to midnight I excitedly asked her about the events of what I had missed. She mirrored the same excitement as she recollected the day's events to me.

I don't even know how I slept that night, I was that excited.

The energy had been building for weeks now. There had been so much chanting, intense chanting and now I was at the doorstep of something. I didn't know what it was, but my soul was thirsty, my spirit hopeful. Who knew I was on the precipice of what my whole life had been waiting for.

To be continued...

Sustainability

- Mrs Keerthana Muthu, Sydney

Sustainability, what is it and what does it mean? We often hear about sustainability, but we may not always understand the extent of the meaning. Google defines sustainability as meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability encompasses how natural systems work and yield everything required for the environment to remain in balance in present and in the future.

There are three core pillars of sustainability which are:

1. Economic development refers to giving people what they wish for without negotiating the quality of life and reducing the financial weight of doing what is right.
2. Social development is about the mindfulness and legal protection of human health from pollution and toxic activities of businesses and organizations, as well as upholding access to basic natural resources without compromising the quality of life.
3. Environmental protection focuses on how ecosystems should be both studied and protected, and how technology can help ensure a greener future.

The three pillars outline how it is important for everyone to live a simple life without increasing their material wants. This is also what our scriptures in Hinduism teach us, to learn to enjoy spiritual happiness that provides satisfaction and fulfilment without the need to run after material pleasure which may disturb nature's balances. We should not be using anything belonging to nature such as oil, coal, or forest at a greater rate than we can replenish it. In our everyday life knowingly or unknowingly we may destroy, animals or even bacteria which play vital ecological roles. When we disrupt the nature's balance, we face repercussions such as climate change, pollution and many more issues. We may not see the impact of us not being sustainable now, but it will slowly catch up to us and our future generations will be greatly affected by this.

We should think of the environment as our home and all its members as our family, where we should be conserving nature with devotion, love, giving and serving. So, what can we do to preserve our beautiful mother nature? The answer is simple, we all need to be more sustainable.

What can we do to be more sustainable? There are little things that each of us can do that can make a positive impact on our environment. The first step is to educate ourselves, others, and future generations. We should start teaching children about sustainability and how they can help protect our environment. Simple things such as learning to reuse items, recycle, conserve energy, and show compassion for our mother nature and the earth we live in.

Some examples of sustainability

Here are some examples of how we can all become sustainable in the simplest ways.

- 1.Reduce, reuse, recycle
2. Catch public transport
3. Grow our own food
4. Shop sustainably

By making thoughtful decisions about what we purchase in our everyday lives, we can all adopt more sustainable lifestyles. We often do not think of things like the chemicals we may use to clean our home with. Alternative ecofriendly products would go a long way in reducing the chemicals we use at homes which contribute to an unsustainable lifestyle. Even using products at home such as vinegar, lemon juice and baking soda can be great alternatives to chemicals.

These simple ways can help all of us become sustainable is the easiest way and help contribute to a safer and healthier environment. As mentioned, previously, we should all start seeing the environment as our home, showing it with love and devotion rather than misusing the luxuries we have been given. This will go a long way in making our environment sustainable and making Earth a safer and healthier place to live in for us and for our future generations.

SATHVIK KITCHEN

Radish Chow Chow Sambhar

Mr Deepak Nanjundan, Melbourne

Ingredients

- Toor dhal - 1 cup (150gms) cooked in pressure cooker for 1 or 2 whistles until fully cooked.
- Sambhar powder - 2 tbsp
- Chow chow - 1
- Chilli powder - 2tsp
- Turmeric - 1/2 tsp
- Mustard seeds - 1tsp
- Fenugreek seeds - 1tsp
- Oil - 3 tbsp
- Radish - 1 small size
- Hing/asafetida - 1/2 tsp
- Tomato 1
- Few curry leaves
- 1 small lemon size tamarind (soaked in 300ml water for juice. Filter the dust and extract the juice)



Method:

- heat oil in a kadai
 - add mustard seeds. Once they splatter, add fenugreek seeds
 - add turmeric and chopped tomatoes. Cook in low flame with lid covered.
 - add 1tbsp salt so the mixture cooks faster
 - once oil oozes out of tomato add chopped chow chow and radish. Sprinkle water but don't add too much as the vegetables themselves will sweat some water.
 - cook the vegetables with lid covered for 3 to 4 min in medium or flame
 - then add tamarind extract
 - add hing, sambhar powder, chilli powder and bring it to a boil.
 - add cooked toor dhal.
 - add 1 cup water and stir this mixture well.
 - at this stage the vegetables would have nearly cooked.
 - allow it to boil in high flame for further 5min.
 - add salt to taste
 - check if vegetables are cooked.
 - add more water to adjust consistency of sambhar.
 - finally add chopped coriander to garnish and turn off the flame.
- Serve with rice and enjoy!!

Srimad Bhagavad Gita

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

It is important for all of us to understand the graph of Arjuna's emotions leading up to the Geethopadesam.

1. Arjuna was initially suffering from samsara - caused by Raaga (attachment), Shoka (unhappiness) and Moha (illusion).
2. Then, he became aware that he was suffering.
3. Arjuna was then longing to get a solution. He tried his best to reason it out to not to fight.
4. Slowly he became aware that he was getting confused. He realised that his intellect was not functioning well. He exhausted all his options and acknowledged his own helplessness (Karpanya Dosha).
5. This led to him surrendering (Sharangathi) to Krishna. We can relate to Arjuna's state of mind. But for most of us we do not go beyond stage 4.

Krishna, did not start the Geethopadesam until after Arjuna asked for help (Verse 2.7). There are reasons for this as elucidated in many interpretations of the Gita including Adi Shankaracharya's -

1. After seeing his kith and kin in the battlefield, Arjuna refused to fight the Dharmayudda. He gave reasons to Krishna as to why he should not fight (Verses 2.4, 2.5 & 2.6). His mind was filled with preconceived notions and biases. When we are convinced about something, it is hard to change perspectives. Krishna was fully aware of this human tendency! When we are constantly justifying ourselves for certain actions or inactions, then, nothing logical will make sense. Krishna figured it was pointless to start His teachings.
2. Besides, Arjuna was emotionally charged. He was angry, sad, confused, stressed, anxious all at the same time. Again, when we are highly emotional, we are in no predisposition to listen let alone comprehend profound teachings.

It is well documented even in modern day research that emotions play an important role in how learning happens in the brain. It impacts on attention, focus, memory, decision making, problem solving and higher order cognitive functions. Let us assume that Krishna had started the Gita before Arjuna's surrender. Then, human psyche dictates that Arjuna would have been argumentative and looking to find faults with Krishna. In that case maybe Mahabharata would have had a different ending! Who knows! That's why Krishna had already stirred Arjuna up by chastising him (verses 2.2 & 2.3) and leading him to empty his emotional bank thus prompting Arjuna to surrender for guidance. Now Arjuna has become a receptive and a qualified student.

For any kind of learning to happen we must-

1. first acknowledge our ignorance. If we feel emotionally hurt, or are faced with any negative emotion, then we must realize that we are the problem and the unhappiness we experience is because of us. We fall prey to the intuitive way of us believing that something or someone else is responsible.
2. acknowledge helplessness. This creates motivation for us to seek knowledge.
3. seek/ look for a higher, reliable source of knowledge.
4. commit ourselves to understand and apply the knowledge.

Krishna's approach to the Gita is in 3 stages -

1. Philosophical – Adhyatmika
2. Ethical – Dharmic
3. Worldly – Laukika

Krishna wanted Arjuna to pick up the weapons and start fighting. Krishna knew that Arjuna was trained in scriptures and understood what Dharma and Adharama are and their subsequent consequences. Hence, Krishna started off with the highest teaching (core of the Upanishads) - the Atmajnanam (verse 2.11) using the Philosophical - Adhyatmika approach. But Arjuna like most of us was confused and kept asking clarifying questions. Everything else that follows until chapter 18.66th verse are explanations and ways to attain the highest knowledge.

So, there are a couple of life lessons we can learn from Arjuna's surrender:

1. Always acknowledge our ignorance and learn with humility as this drives us to seek to learn even more.
2. Never take any decisions when our mind is clogged with emotions, as our intellect becomes inaccessible.

So, let us all first acknowledge with humility our ignorance to the highest possible knowledge and listen to Krishna with Shraddha to help us wriggle out of this seemingly eternal samsara.

Meaningful Conversations

(Interesting discussions between Gopa Kuteeram teachers and students)

Nature Worship in Sanathana Dharma

- Mrs Harini Karthikeyan, Faculty, Gopa Kuteeram Melbourne

We had an interesting discussion in our Gopakuteeram class about Nature worship in our Sanathana Dharma. Our religion projects nature as a manifestation of the supreme being one who permeates all beings equally. The entire worship is intrinsically associated with one form of nature or other.

Kids were asked to come up with their thoughts on how nature was being worshipped and there were brilliant answers.

“What about Ganesha, who has the elephant face, Hayagriva who has horse face, and Narasimha who manifested as a fierce half lion and half man?”

“Brilliant, animals were revered as god forms. No doubt “

“What about the Dashavatara, like the fish, turtle?”

“Interestingly ,Dashavatara is the theory of evolution, let’s have it as a separate discussion”

Another kid said “Snakes , eagles, peacock, mice, tiger, swan are all considered auspicious as they were all vahanas (Vehicles) of different gods.”

“Yes, isn’t that why all these animals were protected and not killed or threatened to extinction by humans “

“My mom uses the most fragrant and beautiful flowers plucked with care and used for pooja “

“Yes also, way before air fresheners were invented , we used natural flowers to freshen up the air”

“Juicy fruits are offered to God during worships and consumed as Prasad”

“That’s such a brilliant way to increase our consumption of the most healthy fruits”

“I know about trees like banyan tree, pipal tree, neem tree etc are worshiped with sanctity and revered”

“Yes, if you go to India, even today you can see so many deities placed under these trees and worshipped in many places”

“Did you know that a lot of these leaves and fruits and flowers have wonderful medicinal properties”

“Yes, my mom gives me tulasi water when I get cold and cough”

“Not just that, when you go around the tree in a pradakshina 108 times, you inhale the fresh oxygen under the tree and benefit from that “

One another said “Mountains & Hills –Didn’t the gopis and gopas of Vrindavan worship Govardhana Hill as form of Krishna “

“Yes, In Bhagavatham Krishna clearly explains why nature should be worshipped “

“and what better reason we have to go hiking and trekking!”

“ I think I saw in tv aarti being performed for River Ganga”

“Yes, Yes -Rivers – Perineal rivers flowing throughout India are worshipped with much respect and reverence and treated as a form of mother. Ganga, Yamuna, kaveri to name a few”

Have we ever thought why did our Sanatana dharma emphasize a lot on nature? Apart from the spiritual significance, if we look at it from an environment perspective, Hinduism is a very environment friendly religion. The philosophy is designed to inculcate strong environmental conscience and places importance on human co existing with other form of nature and discourages us from being dominant and destructive to nature. This helps with the ecosystem balance and flow of cyclic energy.

However, over time a lot of these principles were sadly forgotten and as a result we can see the impact done to our environment. Today, humans have created a havoc on the ecosystem balance. Rivers are polluted with waste, Forests are destroyed. Animals are becoming extinct and as a result the whole ecosystem is out of balance. This has sadly caused a wide variety of issues including global warming, pollution, diseases and what not.

What can we do? I asked the kids.

“Today, we can help by protecting the environment following simple everyday practices on 3 Rs. ‘Recycle, Reduce, Reuse’.”

“We can use less plastic as plastic can end up in oceans and kill aquatic life. They might become extinct soon. We can be mindful of food waste. Take only what you want on the plate. Reuse things, If you have a old unwanted dress use it as a face mask or a cleaning cloth. Or reuse cereal boxes to make some thing useful out of it. Use less energy and electricity. Switch off the lights when not in the room, use warm clothes rather than running heater the whole day. Plant your own veggies in garden so you don’t have to eat pesticide filled fruits and veggies.

I was so impressed with the breadth of knowledge the young kids had about the environment. They had many more brilliant responses and rest assured that our environment would be in safe hands if we practice a lot of these ideas.

The AI/Coding Educational Workshop

- **Mr Vishnu Easwar**
Melbourne

Hello I am Vishnu Easwar, a Year 6 student at Southmoor Primary. Most of my free time I read chapter books concerning fantasy and adventure. I enjoy watching dinosaur videos as I want to know more about these majestic creatures.

Recently me and a group of kids from Grade 1 to Grade 9 attended the coding and problem solving workshop conducted by the Monash University where we had to choose a real life problem not only to solve, but also to understand how an AI robot can be of great help, to assist humans but not replace us.

My inspiration for building and coding robots came from a documentary series which me and my dad once watched. It was about how a person had lost his hand in a car crash and got a prosthetic hand specially designed with sensors with which he could feel and interact with the real world.

During the workshop we were split into 4 different groups, based on our age with 3 kids in each group. I had 2 others in my team. We chose to create a robot that travels to a given destination avoiding all obstacles such as railways, pedestrian crossings, and all high traffic zones. Our robot's design was like a self-driving car.

Our group made a path for the robot to follow using our code. One of the challenges that we faced was the familiarity with the app as it was our first time using LEGO Wedo. Another hurdle was that we could not crack the code that allowed the robot to turn right or left.

Everyone shared what they had made group by group and described what the robot was supposed to do and how all of us could improve our robot. We all saw each other's work and exchanged feedback with other groups and teachers.

A few ways I thought we could improve our robot was to allow it to have sensors to stop if it senses something in front of it. Our group thought that the robot could also be improved by attaching more levers to turn the wheels so that our robot could turn right or left.

We all learnt how to work in a team and problem solve. We also learnt how to code robots to do day to day activities. As a group all of us learnt how to collaborate with each other and be inclusive and take any ideas on board.

All of us had a lot of fun trying to solve our set task and figuring out solutions for any challenges we faced during the time which we had to build our robot. This was a great experience while working with robots that we designed. I hope to create my own robot which will play two square with me one day!!!

Creativity Corner

Mrs Uma Muralidharan, Melbourne

The Tree of Values is an attempt to illustrate the importance of good character in our current value-conflicted society. Through simple language and presentation, it inspires children and adults alike. So let's delve in and discover The Tree of Values.

Items needed:

1. Cardboard A5 , A3 or A4 size
2. A3 or A4 white paper
3. Glue
4. Scissors
5. Brown A4 paper or colour pencil brown.
6. Green A4 paper or colour pencil Green

Step.1 Draw a tree like the below in an A4 paper cut it and paste it on a paper like the picture.

Step.2 Draw leaves of different shapes or even use dried real leaves and stick it on the branches of the tree.

Step.3 On each leaf write the value of life that matter to you, that you want to practice every day. Examples: pray, punctuality, humanity, kindness, patience, forgiveness, love, care, yoga, meditate, self-love, chant.

