

January 2019

MADHURAMURALI



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With the Blessings of
HH Maharanyam Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji

Madhura Smaranam

- Dr A Bhagyanathan

Personal Secretary to Sri Swamiji

With Guruji's krupa, satsang in USA was started in 2007 by Ramanujamji and Poornimaji. Further to this beginning, they have visited different new regions and have pioneered satsangs in many new cities. At that time, there were only 6 to 7 families who were dedicated to Guruji's service! These families realized that an organization has to be formed, in order to bring Guruji's disciples for satsangs from India. When they asked Guruji, what name can be given for this organization, Guruji beautifully replied – "Love is common to all. The path we are showing, 'Bhagavatha dharma' through Bhagavan Nama is also common for one and all. Since our organization is based on these two foundational principles, the name of our organization must be in a language that is common for everyone." This is how our organization has come to be known as "Global Organization for Divinity".

Through GOD, many satsangs were arranged in United States by these dear families. Everyone enjoyed this new experience! They have not had the chance for arranging such satsangs before. It is only because of the love they had for our Guruji, they got out of their comfort zone, met with various temple officials and other like-minded people and arranged many wonderful satsangs. What began as small satsangs, then became weekly and monthly satsangs at some places. Many new families came under the roof of our Guruji's krupa.

In 2007, Guruji mentioned a surprise note – "Houston, Texas will get the first Namadwaar in America. It will be on a 2 acre land!" There is no need to mention that the first Namadwaar happened in Houston! What is more surprising is, the first 2 acre land that they saw was sold to somebody else. That land had all the characteristics

that Guruji had mentioned, but even before they could feel for losing the opportunity that same place came back to us, only because of Guruji's krupa! Now, our satsang member Sri. Ramaswamiji is conducting various satsangs there and is bringing many families under our Guruji's love.

After Houston, next Namadwaar happened in Virginia, in a house in basement. Guruji wanted to get a 100 acre land here and build Namadwaar in that land. 100 acres in not an easy thing! We were so worried about the price and other logistics. But, we can never become tired of singing the praise of our Guruji's love and compassion; because of Sadguru's krupa, we were able to get 100 acre land in an unbelievable price. A "Krishna Theme Park" will soon be built on this land, as per our Guruji's orders. After this, a beautiful Namadwaar happened in Atlanta, last year. This is the first Namadwaar that our Sadguru has inaugurated with his hands, outside of India! After that, another Namadwaar in Dallas, Texas was inaugurated by our Guruji, remotely, this year. Our satsang has grown now.

In 2008, with Guruji's blessings, satsang families in US wanted to start satsangs exclusively for children. When we consulted Guruji to give a name for this satsang, he gave the beautiful name "Gopa Kuteeram"! Chicago, Illinois, was the first place who started Gopa Kuteeram. All our satsang members know how this Gopa Kuteeram has grown since then! Now, many satsangs are happening in US. Many corporate events are also being conducted by followers of our Guruji, where they are sharing this beautiful path shown by our Guruji. There are also many camps and retreats that are being conducted. All of this has been possible only because of our Guruji's krupa.

On Nov 7, 2018, another Namadwaar in Seattle was formed. When satsangs began in 2007, there were only 4 families, who had been devotees of our Guruji for a long time: Smt Priya Murali family, Sri. Muthu, Smt Sridevi Krishna family and Sri. Nandakumar family. But, their Guru bhakthi and enthusiasm is boundless! They came up with many innovative and creative ideas to spread Guruji's message, that could be easily understood by ordinary people and they presented the message in a way that was enjoyed by people. In the beginning, weekly satsangs began in devotees' houses. After satsang members grew in number, 'Nama Kendra' was formed in Sammamish Fire Station and satsangs were conducted there.

Each sathsang concluded with our Guruji's 'Kaliyayum bali kollum' keertan. "The Dancing Peacock Pupper Company" was formed to bring children and their parents in satsang. Deeper and profound messages given by our Puranas were conveyed to public through puppet show. "The Kolam Company" was also formed to spread our traditional and cultural values among the children who grow up in US. Not only Gopa Kuteeram, but "Sampradaya Camp" were also conducted for children. "Bhanamrutham" began here, to make children get involved in learning bhajans, Madurageethams and Bhagavatha Dharma.

What began with 4 families, has grown to many families now and we have a Namadwaar there now. This has been possible, only because of the hard work and guru bhakthi of Smt Priya Murali & family, Smt Vaishnavi Muthu & family, Smt Sridevi Krishna & family, Smt Sandhya Anandh & family, Smt Priya Guha, Smt Lakshmi Ishwarya, Smt Ramya Shankar & family, Smt Bhavani Ram. Initially there were only 6 to 7 families, but, now 100s of families have come under the shadow of our Guruji. Ramuji, Poornimaji, Ramaswamyji and Gayathriji have conducted satsangs in many cities of US. Atleast 1 satsang has happened in 26 regions of America! Of which, 43 cities in 15 regions have regular satsangs and Gopakuteeram. All these have been possible only because of our Sadhgurunathar's compassion!

Even though, our satsang has grown this much, we do not have any memberships. When this was posed as a question to our Guruji, he gave a beautiful reply: "Whoever is chanting the Mahamantra, all of them belong to our organization. Families doing Nama keertan are all our relations, and belong to us." When there is much growth in satsang, some people may try to take advantage of this and pose themselves as Swamiji's close associate and try to get personal favors. They might request for a place to stay, or request to arrange for a satsang. When this was asked to Swamiji, he replied, "Even if some people come asking for favors like this, satsang families will not take their own decision. They will consult with the organization and act upon as per the advice given by our organization members." Swamiji shared the faith he had, in his devotees: their devotion, clarity and alignment with the organization.

ANSWERS AND BEYOND

How to control the mind?

Many feel that in spite of several years of continuous japa and tapas there has not been any progress. Why? Mind is not different from thoughts. It is verily collection of thoughts. Thoughts keep rising continuously. To control it through our effort is not simple. Let us say that in a room smoke keeps rising up. Is it possible to catch that smoke with our hand? Would the smoke subside if the doors were closed? On the contrary suffocation inside the room would only worsen, would it not? Controlling thoughts is akin to this. To forcefully control the senses is akin to shutting the doors. How then can the mind be controlled? Sans a Mahan's blessing or a Sadguru's grace mind will never be controlled. Guru's grace is the only way.

Even when they come to satsang some do not show
any involvement. Why is this?

Attainment of satsang comes about due to two reasons. One is due to vasanas (imprint of thoughts) and the other as a result of merits (punya) earned. One may come to satsang due to the strength of vasanas over several births. Such people have natural involvement in the satsang. This is due to the strength of their vasanas. They will never move away from satsang for any reason. The second reason is the result of merits earned (punya phala). They attain to satsang as a result of merits earned. They would not yet have earned satsang vasana. It is only such people who do not feel involvement in stasang. We should understand one thing. Vasana is verily the cause of birth. Merits (punya) and sins (papa) are the cause for pleasure and pain that come about.



BHAVAGRAHI BHAGAVAN



If we ask, “What is the characteristic of a bhakta?”, different people will give different answers. Some people may say, “One who recites many slokas from memory is a bhakta.” Others may say that only those who go on pilgrimages to holy temples and rivers are bhaktas. Those who wear vibhuti, gopichandan or other religious marks on their foreheads, or wear the rudraksha, tulasi or spatika mala around their necks are immediately identified by many as bhaktas. Neither can we deny that such people are bhaktas. However, outer appearances alone cannot determine a person’s devotion or spiritual inclination. In her kirtan Sadhana karna chahiye manva, Sant Meera Bai sings, “Nith naagan se Hari mile to jal jantu hoi!”- if one can attain mukti simply by bathing frequently and keeping clean and untainted, then would not fishes attain that lofty goal first?

Generally, people will give a lot of importance to outward appearances. But what does Bhagavan look at? Who does He consider as His bhakta?

In Srimad Bhagavatam, while advising his asura friends, Prahlada Swami says:

na dAnam na tapo nejyA na shoucham na vratAni cha |
prIyate amalayA bhaktyA harih anyad viḍambanam || [7-7-52]

What attracts Bhagavan? What does Bhagavan fall for? We cannot attract Bhagavan by our wealth, beauty, talent, by tapas, by charity or by leading a dharmic life, by fasting or ablutions, by holy pilgrimages. It is Bhakti alone that attracts Bhagavan. Everything else is only an outward show, says Prahlada Swami.

Bhagavan Himself tells Uddhava:

na sAdhayati mAm yogo na sAnkhyam dharma uddhava |
na svAdhyAyah tapah tyAgah yathA bhaktih mamorjitA || [11-14-20]

He says, “Neither yoga nor philosophy, piety, study of Vedas, penance or sacrifice can ever attract me like bhakti does!”

If Bhagavan cares for ritualistic cleanliness or propriety (acharam), what rites or rituals did the hunter Guha perform? If He cares for learning or scholarship, what patasala did the elephant Gajendra attend? If He is concerned about caste, was Vidura born in a high caste? If He looks for beauty, what beauty did Kubja have? If wealth matters to Him, what money did Kuchela have? Bhagavan does not care for any of this. He only sees the bhAva (inner feeling towards Him)!

The great devotee of Vittala, Chokhamela, sings of this beautifully in his abhang:

‘us dongA pari ras nAhi dongA
kAya bhulalAsi varaliyA rangA’.

A man went to a sugarcane field to find a juicy sugarcane to eat. The sugarcanes he saw there were all bent. Since they were bent, he thought that their taste would not be good and went away without eating any sugarcane! In this abhang, Chokhamela asks, “The sugarcane may be crooked, but its sweet juice is not. Its form does not affect its sweet taste. Why are you deceived by the outer form?”

nadi dongi pari theer nOhe dongA
kAya bhulalAsi varaliyA rangA..’

Similarly even if the river bends as it flows, the taste of its water is not affected by that. So Chokhamela asks, “A river may be crooked but not its bank or its water. Why are you deceived by the outer form?”

‘chokhA dongA pari bhAv nOhe dongA
kAya bhulalAsi varaliyA rangA..’

A Pandharpur bhakta called Kurmadasa was deformed. No one respected or cared for him. He fervently wanted to have darshan of Panduranga on Ekadasi day. With that earnest desire, he dragged his body towards Pandharpur. Panduranga did not see his deformed body. Instead, seeing his love and earnestness, He lifted him and took him to Pandharpur. The entire town cursed Chokhamela because of his caste. But Vittala went to his house and ate with him.

People felt disgusted at a leprosy-ridden devotee called ‘Vasudeva the leper’, and would not go anywhere near him. But sensing his supreme, incomparable devotion, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu embraced him and said that he (Mahaprabhu) felt blessed!

This is what Chokhamela refers to in the above verse when he asks, “Chokha may be crooked but not his bhAva. Why are you misled by the outer form?

mandO vadati vishNAya dheero vadati vishNavE
ubhayOh balam tulyam bhAvagrAhi janArdhanA

As it is said in this sloka, Bhagavan appreciates and is attracted only by the inner bhAva of a devotee.

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“Aalaya kainkaryam seidhiduvai
Nilayana bhakthiyudan irundhiduvai”

Taking a dip in holy rivers and visiting the sacred temples of Sri Hari constitute the first two steps in the stairway to devotion. Sri.Swamiji sings that serving the Lord in the temples, where He has taken a form only to bless us, is the next step.

The Tamil word ‘Aalayam’ itself means the place where everything is merged and offered to the Lord, the place where we offer in gratitude whatever is bestowed on us by the Lord. Sri Swamiji says, “Is it gratitude if we simply say that I am grateful to the Lord for all that he has blessed me with. Should we not show it in our actions also?

STAIRWAY TO DEVOTION

- **M.K. Ramanujam**

How then do we show our gratitude to the Lord? It is not just sufficient if we say, “Oh Lord ! You have blessed me with a healthy body with all organs functioning normally. I am able to see well, hear well, speak well and my limbs are also without any defect. I am grateful to you for all this”. Since our eyes are healthy we wish to show our gratitude with our eyes. We wish to show our gratitude with our ears, which are healthy.

Our ancestors have constructed all these temples as a place where can show all this gratitude. It is a place where the entire mankind can offer their gratefulness to the Lord. Hence, should we not with cheer and enthusiasm look for any service that can be offered to the Lord in the temple and offer all our services?

Having the darshan of the Lord in the temple is the service that can be offered with the eyes. Taking part in the puja in the temple and listening to the discourses that are taking place in the temple is the service that can be offered with the ears. Similarly prostrating to the Lord with all eight organs of the body touching the ground is the service that can be offered with the body.

Not satisfied with the above, we also wish to offer a share of our earnings from whatever vocation or employment that we perform. We make offerings in the form of flowers or fruits or any other items that may be needed in the temples. We say, “Oh Lord! You have kept me without any necessity. As a token of gratitude, I offer to you a very small share of my wealth”. Hence a temple is a place where we show our gratitude in all forms and we can surely get involved in this, isn’t it?

Hence, this is the sentiment which our Guru Maharaj expresses as “Serve the Lord in the temple”. The eagerness and enthusiasm as to “what service can I offer to the Lord?” and doing that service with love is what is known as ‘Kainkarya’. If we look for a benefit from what we do, that does not become complete service. To desire to do some service thinking, “God has kept me without any necessity, I should do some service to express my gratitude” is what constitutes ‘kainkarya’.

There is a major difference between an ordinary activity which we do for others and ‘kainkarya’. When we help others in some way, we normally tend to expect a favour in return, or at least some gratitude from them. When we do some service in the temples, to think that it is our gratitude to the Lord, is service at its best; To expect some religious merit is mediocre and to do service for name and fame is just service at its infancy.

The word ‘kainkarya’ immediately reminds us of Adishesha who is the umbrella for the Lord when He walks, the seat of the Lord when He sits and His bedding when He reclines. Adishesha incarnated as Lakshmana during Ramavatar and did loving service to Lord Rama. Adishesha again incarnated as Ramanujacharya and showed to us that service to the Lord in the temples is our goal in life. Great saints like Ananthazhwar who came in the lineage of Ramanujacharya, dedicated their entire lives in the service of the Lord in the temples. Even to think of such great souls gives us the enthusiasm to do cheerful service to the Lord in the temple. We’ll explore the service done by these saints in the next issue.

Hence Guru Maharaj nicely sings “Serve the Lord in the temples” as the third step in the stairway to devotion. It is not right that we start a service enthusiastically but lose our enthusiasm over a period of time and dilute our service. Our service, devotion, respect and love for God should be steady and hence Guru Maharaj adds, “Remain steady in devotion”. We can even say that that acquiring devotion is easy but to stay permanently in devotion and make it grow is very difficult. Hence Guru Maharaj nicely adds, “Remain steady in devotion”. (...to be contd)



துளசி பூஜையால் கண்ணன் மகிழ்கின்றான்

- பூர்ணிமா குமாரஸ்வாமி

The rich cultural heritage of our holy Bharata desa dates back to thousands of years and is very meaningful. Many of the customs and traditions followed has a definite reason and purpose behind it. One such custom is protection of GOMATA or Cow and nurturing of a Thulasi Plant in each household. Another old custom followed till date by many households is feeding crows before having lunch and feeding dogs after lunch. Ever thought about the reason behind this custom?? If you notice carefully you can see that when we offer food to the crow, it immediately cries out to its kith and kin “caw,caw” and calls them all to share the food offered. One should observe and imbibe this quality of sharing with fellow humans. This is the reason why food is offered to a crow before we eat. Similarly, we should never turn down a request from a hungry person for food. Many great saints and sadhus of Bharat desa have been sanyasis who sacrifice all comforts and observe the austerity of begging. In fact the Bhikshu Gitam of Srimad Bhagavatham is narrated by a mendicant roaming around.

Another beautiful tradition being followed even now is planting and nurturing a Thulasi plant in each household. Saint Meerabai in one of her bhajans, sings about how in each house in Brindavan, Thulasi is worshipped, in the verse below

“Ghar ghar Thulasi Thakur pooja darshan Govindji ko,
AAli Mori Lagi Brindavan nee Ko”

In one of the Madhurageetam's of our Pujya Guruji we sing Lord Krishna is pleased by worship of Thulasi. We can also attain Lord Krishna by worshipping Thulasi. In Srimad Bhagavatam when Krishna does Raasam with the Gopikas, Lord Krishna suddenly disappears from their midst. Then Gopikas pray to Thulsi devi by singing “Kachit Thulasi Kalyani Govinda Sarana Priye” and request her to show Lord Krishna to them. This verse encompasses two meanings, one who is fond of Bhagavan's lotus feet and one whom Bhagvan's feet is fond of. The garland made of Thulasi leaves is very dear to Lord Krishna. When the Gopis describe Lord Krishna they say “Ramanuja: Thulasikaalikulair Madhandhaai: Thulasi is most auspicious for doing archana to Lord Krishna. Worship done without Thulasi is not accepted by Bhagawan. It is said that the famous Oppiliyappan temple at Kumbhakhonam was once a forest of Thulasi.

Goddess Lakshmi resides in Lotus, rear side of a cow, Neck of an elephant, Sumangali's hair parting and the back side of a Bhilva leaf. In the Lakshmi Ashtotra Namavali there is one Namavali “Bhilva Nilayayai Namaha”. Similarly it is believed that wherever Thulasi grows easily and in abundance, there is Lord Vishnu's strong presence in that place.

Thulasi plant is also known for its many medicinal values. Inhaling Thulasi fragrance and part taking Thulasi in form of Kashaya is very good for health. Even today in Maharashtra when the Warakari Devotees walk to Pandharpur on their annual pilgrimage, they carry Thulasi shrine on their heads. It is also believed that Thulasi worship begets a good husband and helps to achieve harmony at home. Thulasi vivah (marriage) is done every year on Brindavan Dwadesi day. Nelli

(Gooseberry) tree is worshipped as Krishna and Thulasi plant is decorated with all auspicious signs like new clothes, bangles, mangal sutra etc . The marriage is then celebrated by singing hymns , Ashtapadi and Pooja is performed.

In olden times Thulasi Vivah was celebrated in an elaborate manner where different delicacies would be prepared and taken outdoors and the ceremony would continue throughout the night. The dinner would then be served in the moonlight and the celebrations would continue overnight. Thus worshipping Tulasi, especially on Brindavan Dwadashi day pleases Bhgawan.



SANSKRIT WORD OF THE MONTH

- Sri Vishnupriya

The word 'Varnam' in Sanskrit denotes the same word that is known as 'Vannam' in tamil. "Varnam' means color.

Sri Bhishmacharya in Bhishma Stuthi describes Krishna as त्रिभुवनकमनं तमालवर्ण, the most beautiful one in the three worlds with the dark hue of thamala Vruksha. (तमालवर्ण)

The word ' Varnashrama' is well known to all. In this, 'Varnam' refers to 'Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and the rest, while Ashrama refers to the four stages, Brahmachari, Gruhastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa.

In Bhagavad Gita, Sri Bhagavan says, "चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं", meaning, "it is by me that these Varnas were created".

And, Srimad Bhagavatam says,
"एते वर्णाः स्वदर्मेण भजन्ति स्वगुरुं एरिम्",
which means, by adhering to the prescribed
rules of each dharma, one pleases his Guru,
SriHari.

‘वर्ण’
varNa

Next, the word 'Varnam' in sanskrit also means 'Aksharam'. It is what we call as alphabets. Vowels are known as 'Swaras' and the consonants are known as 'Vyanjanas' and together they are known as 'Varnam'. The term "Shiksha" refers to the study of phonetics in the Sastras. Here, the term "Varnam" is used to describe the placement and the pronunciation of a syllable.

Also, we discussed that Varnam refers to color. It is from this, gold acquired the name 'Suvarnam', which means beautiful color. Gold is referred to as स्वर्ण because of its lustrous golden color.

Likewise, 'Vivarnam' refers to the one which has lost its glow or color. The term 'Mukhavivarnam' is used to refer to the face that has turned pale. Mukhavivarnam might happen due to Viraha or worry or fear.

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