

Sthita Prajna



Guru Vandana

*yadanugrahamatrena shokamohau vinasyatau
tasmai shri desisikendraya namostu paramatmane
yasmadanugraham labdhva mahadajnanmutsrijet
tasmai shri desisikendraya namacabhishta siddhaye*

“I bow to the Guru who is the very embodiment of the supreme spirit by whose blessings one is released from sadness and desires.

I bow to the Guru, by just bowing to whom and by getting whose blessings great ignorance is lifted.”

CONTENTS

VOLUME 13

ISSUE 4

Sub	Page No.
• GURU VANDANA	3
• EDITORIAL	5
• MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER	6
• PRAJNANAVANI	9
• BRAHMAN IN WOODEN FORM	14
• TEACHINGS OF THE MASTERS	19
• PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY – THE IMPORTANCE OF SATSANG	20
• MOTHER AND MOTHERHOOD	23
• LIVING IN THE PRESENT	24
• PRAGMATIC HINDU	27
• MYTHS AND METAPHORS – RAMA GITA	31
• PATANJALI YOGA SUTRAS	36
• VALUABLE VOLUMES AKSHARA TATTVA	39
• STORIES TO LIVE BY – THE BEAUTIFUL HEART OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN	43
• ATMA-VIDYA--PURSUING SELF KNOWLEDGE	44
• IMAGES OF THE BALASHRAM	46
• 108TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF PUJYA...	48
• BIRTHDAY MESSAGE	50
• AROUND THE WORLD	51

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FROM THE EDITORS :

In this issue of Sthita Prajna, “The Message of the Master” deals with self-realization and the concept of Lord Jagannath.

Prajnanavani elaborates on controlling the mind through surrendering the ego.

Practical Spirituality discusses the importance of satsang in pursuing the spiritual path.

Also in this issue, we introduce a youth perspective on finding one’s spiritual identity, Pragmatic Hindu.

Rama Gita gives a detailed description of Sri Rama’s wise counsel to Lakshmana on the ways to control anger.

Our excerpts from some of Paramahansa Prajnanananda’s seminal works continue. We bring you a metaphorical and mythological introduction to the inner principles of akshara from his book Akshara Tattva.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali clarify that meditation is the effort to keep the mind steady, still, and focused on the atom point.

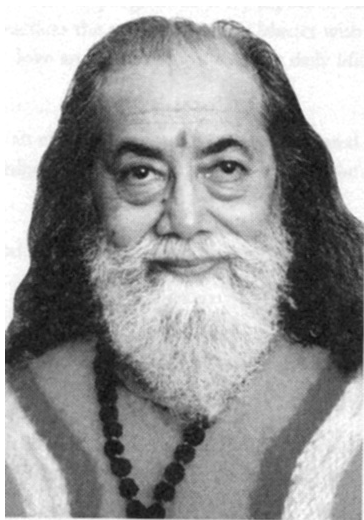
The article on self-knowledge elaborates on the nature of consciousness as subtler than the subtle, and greater than the great.

As Puri celebrates the Nabakalebara of Lord Jagannath this year, we bring you an article on the significance of Daru Brahma the new wooden images of the Lord and our Gurukulam continues to participate in many seva activities for the comfort of countless pilgrims and monks.

We bring you many other inspiring articles, messages, dates to remember, upcoming events, and the ashram news at home and abroad.

MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER

SELF REALIZATION



Concept of Jagannath

God is one, absolute, and non-dual. Before creation, God existed as Absolute Brahman or Impersonal Soul. God wished to be manifested in various forms of existence. Thus, from absolute Brahman, He transformed into relative existence and became the manifest universe. Therefore whatever we perceive and recognize and whatever exists as matter or life is God's manifestation. According to Katha Upanishad, the indwelling Self in all creatures is the one Brahman manifesting itself in different forms. This

transformation into the ever – changing manifest universe is the conception of Jagannatha, the Lord of the world. The word Jagannatha is composed of two words – *jagat*, the ever changing world, and *natha*, the Lord. Hindus worship this conception of God in the Jagannath Temple at Puri, Orissa, India.

Of all creatures, only human beings are rational and have the faculty of discrimination. Therefore only human beings can realize God, who exists as the all pervading spirit in the human body, as well as in all existence. Man can realize that he is the living God and that the whole cosmos is but a manifestation of God. In practice however we do not have such a realization as part of our direct experience. But still nothing exists anywhere except the presence of God.

Why do we not experience the Truth? According to the will of God, man is acted upon by two forces – one centripetal and the other centrifugal. The centrifugal

force is extrovert by nature and, therefore, draws man towards the external world, thus dissipating all his energy and engrossing him in delusion, illusion and error. But this centrifugal force is merely a different manifestation of the centripetal force, the atma (Self). It is a misconception to think that the centrifugal force is a separate entity. The indwelling Self in the body is the ruler of the person. The Self is ever pure, full of bliss, eternal and immutable, as it is nothing other than Brahman.

God and Self

The Self is like a mirror that reflects the entire universe. Although a mirror reflects the images of thousand objects; it does not retain any of them: in fact, it remains detached and indifferent to objects it reflects. Similarly although man is absorbed in love, lust, anger, pride, arrogance, avarice and illusion, the Self remains detached, pure, luminous, untarnished and incorruptible. Among all beings man alone can avert the power of the centrifugal force by meditation. Through sincere efforts he can realize that the whole existence including himself – is God.

As the whole universe is the manifestation of God, the ultimate goal of life is the realization of the Self in the body, mind, and spirit. Due to illusion, delusion and attachment to external objects, we are unable to realize that God exists in us as the Self and every person is a living God. God exists in the body as the Self and the Self, in its all pervading, omnipotent nature, is God. God rules the gross human body by means of the seven cerebro - spinal centers and blood vessels, all of which act as defensive forces to preserve and sustain it. Though the Self is invisible and impersonal, it provides a taste of divine bliss by its innumerable manifestations. But people are so bound up in passion, anger, illusion, and sensory stimulant that they ignore the bliss.

The Rig Veda declares that the Truth is one, though the wise call it by different names. The Truth is the Supreme Being, the purusha whom we perceive through past, present and future as the all pervading existence. The Yajur Veda says that He is the soul of the universe and it is through this knowledge alone that man attains immortality. He is Brahma, the Supreme One

independent, imperishable, indivisible, Self-luminous, self sustained and indescribable. He is the basis of all names and forms, the support of all creation. He pervades all creation and yet transcends it. All creation is in Him but He is detached from it.

He is the silent witness of the three states of waking, dream and seep sleep. The atma is the immortal part of a person and beyond body and mind and beyond time, space and causation. It is without beginning, without end and without cause. It is Knowledge Absolute, Existence Absolute and Bliss Absolute. The realization of this

spiritual knowledge, or Brahma jnana , frees one from the cycle of births and deaths.

Behind this world, behind all physical phenomena, behind all names and forms, behind feeling thought, emotion and sentiments, lies the Truth. The Truth is eternal: only illusion makes the unreal appear real. The Truth is the Self, the silent witness and ruler, which is the only thing that will provide bliss and make a person absolutely free. Self Realization is not for the weak or the cowardly: it is for strong and courageous who can face all storms and sacrifice their ego on the altar of Truth.



PRAJNANAVANI - THE VOICE OF WISDOM

PURIFYING THE MIND THROUGH SURRENDER



Mind in Sanskrit is *mana*. The word has two syllables *ma* and *na*. If you reverse these two syllables it becomes *na* and *ma*. *Nama* has two meanings – to surrender or to bow. It symbolizes humility. Remember, our mind is nothing but the playground of ego, in the form of individuality, activity and possession. Hence we become humble by surrendering this mind, this ego, and saying, “O God, whatever I think is mine is not really mine. Everything is yours.” What really belongs to you? Everything you have will one day be left behind. Where did

you get the talent and intelligence to achieve things in your life? Are you the one who created those skills? Are they not gifts that were given to you?

A monk visited us during the inaugural ceremony of Gurudev’s Centenary. He gave a very inspiring and powerful, yet very simple, talk. He told us, “When I first saw this beautiful temple of the gurus, I thought “Since this temple is so beautiful, the one who created this temple must be even more beautiful.” Then he said, “Each day, while looking at this world – the stars, planets, flowers, fruits, trees – I think, “It is all

so beautiful. Undoubtedly, the one who created it must be even more beautiful.” This was the attitude of the humble monk, and this is the attitude we need. Let us never forget that the Creator is greater than his creation. Imagine how skillful, how beautiful, how loving, how creative this big Being is. Hence becoming humble is the best way to clean our mind. When we become humble, we bow and say,

“Oh Beloved, all that I see is You. If breath stops where am I? Let me not be foolish and cherish this little ego and all these fleeting emotions. I am yours and you are mine. Help me to manifest your goodness and beauty. My Lord, my life is in your hands.” Sometimes those who take the path of devotion surrender so completely to god they think of nothing else. Such great Souls become beacons of light for the entire humanity.

Jagannath Temple – Some Incidents in Puri

I read a story about a sadhu who went to Puri (in India) for the first time during the Chariot Festival. When he arrived in the city, there was already a huge crowd. One of

the people in that crowd was a renowned holy man from Brindavan who was concerned that he might not get the darshan of Lord Jagannath because there were so many people. Thus he asked the sadhu for some advice. “Do not worry,” the sadhu told him, “The one who brought you here will take care of you. He will arrange everything.” What a wonderful way to go through life. Imagine how carefree and happy you would be if you entrusted your life to God.

A few years ago, I flew back from Europe to India during the Chariot Festival. As soon as I arrived went to the hospital to visit two people who were critically ill and at death’s door. After I left I received a phone call from someone letting me know that I should come quickly as the temple would be closed and I would not be able to see Lord Jagannath. Thus on my way to the temple I said to the person accompanying me, “If Lord Jagannath does not want to feed us today, and then I will not eat today.” What happened after we arrived at the temple that day was really amazing. When we entered the temple campus, we discovered

that the temple was indeed closed. The campus was filled with thousands of police officers, because it was estimated that close to a million people were there. I bowed down outside the main temple and I thought, may be today Lord Jagannath does not want us to eat food.

In India there is a traditional belief that if somebody that if somebody offers you food from the temple, you are never to refuse it. They respect the food from the temple even more than the deity. A few minutes later as we were standing in an inconspicuous corner of the campus, a stranger with dark complexion approached me and said, "Hey, Babaji, you want to go inside? He said it in a very playful way-not neither with respect, nor with disrespect-but in a friendly manner."Hey Babaji , you want to go inside?"I told him I could not go because the temple was closed. He laughed and said, "It is closed for others not for you."

I thought "Why is he saying this? I am an insignificant person."

The man said "Wait here. You will have darshan. He went

inside the temple and brought back some really hot food. He put the cooked, spicy, delicious food in my hand and said, "Eat".

Now I was faced with an inner conflict, because I promised I would see Lord Jagannath before eating any food. How could I eat this food and then go into the temple? I silently stood there as the man repeated, "Yes, yes."For me, breaking my promise was next to impossible: but then I knew if I did not eat I would be disrespecting the Mahaprasad-sanctified food in my hands, which is also not good to do. Finally the man said, "Eat! What are you thinking? Eat!" So I ate. He came three to four times bringing handfuls of food and telling us to eat. Then he brought us some water to wash our mouths and hands. When we were done, he told us, "You stand here. Soon three painters who paint the deities will go inside, and when they go in you follow them. We said there for a few minutes. Just as he said, three painters came with a priest. These men took our hands and pushed us through the crowd. When we got to the entrance, they told us to go

inside. Some of the people were objecting, but the priest just looked at them and said, "No!" Suddenly there was pin drop silence. We were now inside the temple with the three painters. Usually nobody is allowed to be there while the painters are painting. As we stood there I thought, "O God, everything is You. If You want to do something, You do it. You can make the impossible possible- which we later think is easy. We like to make a lot of plans: however, whatever is not Your will does not happen. Out of ego we say many things, and for this reason You wanted to play with me. It was out of ego that I did not want to take food before seeing Lord Jagannath, but You wanted to change my will to Your will. "First you eat and then you will see Me."

Surrender Is Easy For Those Who Love God

It is not difficult to change our will to God's will when we love god. Often people say since they do not know god they cannot love him. But I tell you, it does not matter. One does not have to know god to love God. Did you know

your great- great grandfather? Not likely, and yet when you see a photo of him, you love him, and you are happy to tell others who he is. You love him because you believe he is your great - great grandfather.

After his master's mahasamadhi, Swami Vivekananda, who was just a young monk at the time traveled far and wide in India, and often was invited by kings to stay in their places. Once he visited a king, who did not believe in god in the forms that Hindus usually do. Through his own experience and the teachings of the Masters, Swami Vivekananda realized that form and formless are one, like ice and vapor – there is no difference. However this king often ridiculed people who worshipped deities. One day Swami Vivekananda stood inside the palace and pointed to a huge portrait of the king's father adorned in all his royal attire. The young monk addressed the king's minister and said, "Sir, Take down this picture."

"What?"

"Spit on it," said Swami Vivekananda.

"Are you mad?"

“It is just a piece of canvas with some paint on it. Why don’t you obey me?” Swami Vivekananda replied.

By then the king was completely enraged. Swami Vivekananda asked him why he was so angry.

The king said, “Do you not realize that because you are disrespecting my father, you are also disrespecting me?”

“The monk said, “Who is your father? Do you think your father is this painting? It is nothing more than a piece of canvas and some paint.”

“Do you take me to be a fool?” said the king. I know the painting is not my father. Nevertheless, it reminds me of his presence. When I look at it I remember how much I love him.”

The wise monk then said, “O King, in the same manner , there are people who look at a

tree or a star or a flower or even a statue, and feel the presence of god. While looking at those objects they feel much love and reverence for the One they represent. These people are no different than you; therefore you should not criticize them.” That day the king got a big lesson.

Why should it be difficult to love god? You owe your very existence to Him. He brought you into this world, and breathed in your nostrils the breath of life. It was God who fed you in your mother’s womb. And when you were born god gave you food from your mother’s breast. Like a loving mother and father he cared for you through your entire life. Should we not be filled with gratitude to be the children of such a loving Mother and father?”

“Unless and until one humbles oneself it is not possible to enter the spiritual realm.”

Lahiri Mahashaya

SHRI JAGANNATH

THE BRAHMAN IN WOODEN FORM

It is erroneous to dismiss Hindu worship of idols as mere superstition. Hindu religious symbology invites the devotee to realize the immortal Self in the idol. It attaches significance to the *sadhana* that is required for such Self-realization. The eternal way of life, known as Sanatana Dharma, or in modern parlance Hinduism, is not confined to idol worship. Rather, it puts emphasis on the realization of the true essence of the Self and the theological principle of unity in diversity that underlies all the beautiful idols and deities.

Although the deities are worshiped in many names and forms, they are special and unique. The one divinity is expressed in many forms and names in this creation. Hinduism has an elaborate and intricate system of rituals called *jivanyasa*: through this, the life force of the Divine is ritually infused into the icons.

Truth and mantra consciousness are established in

the idols. These rituals are followed when an icon is installed in a place of worship. In consequence of such rituals, it becomes possible for seekers to experience the divine, immortal indwelling Self not only in the deities, but also in the entire creation. God is not only formless and attributeless, but also found immanent in forms and attributes.

To realize divinity, which is already within and everywhere, is the true aim of human life. The human body has a form and attributes, but the soul within the body is formless and attributeless. The Kularnava Tantra (6:72) says: *sadhkanam hitarthaya brahmano rupakalpna*.

“For the benefit of *sadhakas* or seekers of Truth, the projection of the form of the formless has been conceived.”

Usually people worship the Divine in visual forms such as pictures and paintings. However, the idols are typically

made of stone, metals, mud, sand, and cow dung. The four deities in the main temple of Shri Jagannath are made of wood. So Lord Jagannath is called Brahman in the wooden form (*darubrahma*). This carries an immanent truth. Shri Jagannath, made of wood, carries a hidden, subtle precept of Self-realization. This world is always changing. The definition of the word “world” in Sanskrit is *gamyate gachhati iti jagat*, that is, “That which is always moving and changing is the world or the universe.” In every moment, changes take place in the world. Behind these changes is an unchangeable, immutable, unmoved, still, and detached existence. Change is the nature of this universe. The unchangeable is Lord Jagannath, the sole cause of all changes. The real body of Lord Jagannath is not made of wood; whereas, the body made of wood is changeable. But within this wooden body, Brahman, the unchangeable Absolute, exists.

Wood is the symbol of fire. This is depicted in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad (1:15):

*tilessu
tailam, dadhiniva sarpirapah
srotrah sva ranishucaagnih
evamatmatmani grihvate
sausatyenainamtapasayonupasyati*

“As oil in sesame seeds, as butter in cream, as water in river beds, as fire in firewood, so is the Self seized in one’s own soul if one looks for Him with truthfulness and austerity.”

Ordinarily, people feel love more for a form because it is not easy to perceive the formless initially. Most people do not understand this philosophy at first. But through *sadhana* the realization of the Self in the body is possible. Wood is the symbol not only of fire, but also of the other basic elements: earth, water, air, and ether. This body is wood, so the Shvetashvatara Upanishad (1:14) says, *svadeham aranim kritva*: “Make your body like a log of firewood.” The supreme end of human life is to realize the Self in the body before the body is destroyed. Indian culture teaches to realize the omnipresent God everywhere and in all. To realize His manifestation everywhere — in earth, water, fire, air, ether, sky, stars, plants, trees, flowers, and

all living beings — is a sign of spiritual growth. Although His presence is everywhere, in some places or objects, we feel it more easily. In India, some of the trees are considered special in this sense. Such trees — the holy basil, peepal, banyan, neem (*azadirachta indica*), wood apple (*aegle marmelos*), ashoka (*janesia asoka*), Spanish cherry or bakul (*mimusops elengi*), amla (*emblic myrobalan*), and rudraksha — invariably have medicinal properties, and have a strong positive impact on the environment. There is a convention in Hinduism to plant five of these sacred trees known as *panchavati* — the banyan, peepal, neem (sometimes ashoka), amla, and bel (bilva) — in close proximity to each other. The place beneath these trees is considered particularly auspicious for the practice of prayers and meditations. The Bhagavad Gita (15:1) says, *urdhva mulam adhah shakham ashvattha*: “The peepal tree has its roots above and the trunk and branches below.” The metaphorical meaning of *ashvattha* (peepal

tree) — *a + shva + tha* — is special. *A* means *na* or “not,” *shva* means “tomorrow,” and *tha* means “existent or existence.” Thus, these three words together as *ashvattha* mean “that which is not existent tomorrow.” The body-tree is transient and there is no guarantee of existence tomorrow. The roots of the body-tree are on the top and the branches, flowers, and fruits are at the bottom near the ground. Radhu Das, the great devotee, sang in Odia: *olata vrikshe kheluchhi lotani para athakathe pinjarare na pada dhare* “The dove of the soul is playfully doing somersaults in an inverted tree. It cannot be caught or trapped in a glue stick or a cage.” Both body and wood carry the same meaning: combustible and destructible. That is why the idol of Lord Jagannath is made of wood. But this wood is not an ordinary wood. It is made from the neem tree. Among all the trees, neem is particularly special. From a medicinal point of view, its leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, roots, and bark are valuable. This medicinal tree keeps the environment clean and pure.

Scientists say it gives more oxygen to the atmosphere and consumes more carbon dioxide than other trees. Thus, it purifies the atmosphere and protects humanity against pollution. It is also an insecticidal tree as it is never subject to the bite of insects. For this reason, of late, there has been a worldwide appreciation of the value of the neem tree. Major projects are being undertaken in many developed countries that aim at largescale planting of neem trees. The idol of Lord Jagannath is made of neem wood. The *Navakalevara*, or the renewal ceremony, is celebrated in a year in which two full moons appear in the month of *Ashadha*. All four idols are replaced by a new set of idols. The old idols are buried in the northwest corner of the temple precincts. The last renewal ceremony was celebrated in the month of July, 1996. Now again in 2015 there will be a similar celebration of the renewal of the divine forms of the deities. Not just any neem tree can be used to fashion the idols. It needs to have specific material features. These sacred features are first searched for

and identified in a neem tree. Then, with the performance of prescribed ceremonial rituals and prayers, the neem logs are collected. Innumerable devotees in India and abroad are very eager to know where the trees will be located. All their anxieties and waiting will come to an end with the identification and collection of neem trees. It is very propitious to join in the *Navakalevara* ceremony.

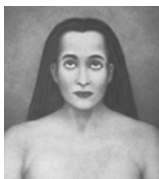
But also, you must first learn to compare the body to wood, and realize that the body is like an inverted tree with its roots at the top. You must first eradicate all evil and demonic propensities by the weapon of detachment. Then only, there will be a divine transformation in your life. Without these preparations, you will not benefit from a *darshan* of the *Navakalevara* ceremony. Like the idols made of neem wood, human beings can rebuild their lives and make their human birth useful. Rebuilding life means the destruction of animal bondage, liberation from evil propensities, and adherence to a life full of love and devotion to Lord Jagannath.

Human beings have to relinquish their old errors and infirmities. As the saying goes, time and tide wait for no one. If we perform our work resting every moment in God consciousness, there will be a continuous flow of immense peace, love, and devotion in our lives. The physical body will wear out and one day will perish. So, O my friend! Be careful! Pray to Brahman. Just like the fire immanent in the wooden idol of Shri Jagannath, there is the presence of the Divine in each one of us. Remember the mantra from the Isha Upanishad (18), *agne naya supatha raye asman, vishvani deva vayunani vidvan*: “O fire, my soul as the divine manifestation! Kindly lead me on a royal divine path.” Our prayer should be, “O Lord, help me overcome all the obstacles due to errors, delusion, and ego so that I will reach the ultimate destination. O Jagannath! I will be able to realize You. I will see You in my every breath, disposition, and thought.” The

Kena Upanishad (2:4) says: *prati bodhaviditam matamaritatvam hi vindate atmana vindate veeryam vidyaya vindate amritam* “Knowing Him in every breath and disposition will lead one to immortality and divinity. Attainment of the ultimate is possible only through one’s efforts. Through the knowledge of the Self, one ascends to that state of immortality.” Taking refuge in Shri Jagannath will make life intoxicated with love for Lord Jagannath. Lord Jagannath is seen in everything. Lord Jagannath is realized in every thought. That is life’s perfection. So it is said in the *Shri Jagannathashtakam* of Acharya Shankara: *jagannatha swami nayanapathagamibhavatume*.

“O Lord Jagannath! May I always find You in the path of my vision.” However, it should not be only through the eyes; may we all be able to perceive divinity through all our sense organs.

Teachings of the Masters

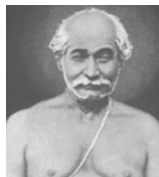


Patience, ceaseless efforts and strong determination make everything possible."

Mahavatara Babaji

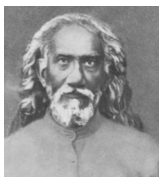
"While perceiving Brahman, try to always have the conviction that "I am Brahman."

Lahiri Mahasaya



"Like removing one nail with the help of another nail, the evil propensities can be weeded out by good samskaras."

Swami Shriyukteshwar



"Keep your mind always in tune with the scriptures and the teachings of the Masters."

Sanyal Mahasaya



"Of greatest help in your development is the habit of mental whispering to God. You will see a change in yourself that you will like very much."

Paramahansa Yogananda



"Scholarship of the scriptures is of little significance. Was Ramakrishna Paramahansa a great scholar? Yet every word from his mouth was a scripture."

Swami Satyananda



"Watch Him day and night in your every thought, word and action. Constant alertness is necessary, if you do this you will have positive and quick results."

Paramahansa Hariharananda

"When there is only constant perception of unity, Love will not only manifest towards God, the ocean, but towards all the other waves."

Paramahansa Prajnanananda



PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

DISCOVERING THE GITA :

THE IMPORTANCE OF SATSANG

Jyothi Bathina

Self-knowledge or knowledge of truth is not had by resorting to a guru (preceptor) nor by the study of scripture, nor by good works: it is attained only by means of inquiry inspired by the company of wise and holy men. One's inner light alone is the means, naught else. When this inner light is kept alive, it is not affected by the darkness of inertia.

Sage Vasishtha

Recently, I had the opportunity to spend time with my parents on their spring visit to our home. It is always a privilege to be surrounded by elders and learn from their wisdom. My mother's book *The Road Less Traveled*, which was published this year and is now selling on Amazon, was the culmination of three years of mother daughter collaboration and shared experience, and it was a journey that taught me much about both my parents and their spiritual journey from childhood to the present. But

just as I thought I had learned everything there was to learn from my parents, I was given a gift that will never expire, a treasure that will never run out, an endless supply of wisdom and hope and inspiration that I can hardly believe I was unaware of till now.

In the very last week of their stay with us, I was busy in the kitchen when I happened to overhear my parents reading the Gita together in the living room. They were using the large hardbound English copy they had given me, that had been sitting on the bookshelf for the past year, untouched. As I passed back and forth, occupied with my chores, I was drawn in by their conversation and asked a question. My father answered without hesitation, citing a passage, and so began a week of intense Gita study and discussion between the three of us.

In her book, my mother talks about the moment when she first discovered the riches

of the Gita and how she wondered why she had not known about it sooner. Well here I was, a full twenty years older than she was when she had that moment, and as I sat there bemoaning my ignorance, my parents assured me that there was still plenty of time.

Each evening, we would sit together and my mother would read aloud from one chapter. After each verse, we would discuss the significance of what was being said, and as I eagerly asked question after question, my parents pointed me to the answers sitting in plain sight on the pages of the Gita for all to see. As each verse hit home, its full significance dawning on me with tremendous impact, I was dumbfounded that this knowledge was so openly available and yet unused by so many, including me. To think that over 5000 years ago, on both a literal and spiritual battlefield, Lord Krishna spelled out in clear, simple, step by step instructions how to live, how to work, how to love, and how to find liberation. Yet here we were five millennia later, still struggling in the dark, still seeking some respite, still unaware and oblivious to the path.

I wasn't sure what to make of it. There they were, all the answers to all the questions anyone could possibly think of, with Arjuna serving as mouthpiece for all the millions who would follow. In black and white and bound in a colorful hardcover, sitting on a shelf next to travel guides to Vienna and Paris, sat the guidebook to the most adventurous trip I would ever take, the trip to Liberation via Life.

I was excited, giddy, thrilled and confused. Why wouldn't everyone want this? My parents explained that not everyone is ready, not everyone is ripe for an awakening, just as I had not been for so many decades. The time has to come, the teachers have to arrive, and most importantly the seeker has to be ready to learn. There are so many steps and so many lessons we have to learn along the way. But what I found most beautiful about the Gita was that it does not exclude anyone. No one is shut out from the journey, there is eternal hope for every soul, and we will all return inevitably to our true Self. From sinner to saint, from those drunk with worldly pleasures to those

who renounce everything, everyone is welcome and everyone is destined for success. It may come after endless cycles of learning, or it may come in an instant, but it will come.

My time with my parents, which I spent drinking in the wisdom of the Gita filtered through their experience and knowledge, was truly intoxicating. What it taught me was that not only is it important to have a Guru, to have knowledge, and to read the holy books, but to also have satsang or good company. If not for their discussion in my presence and their willingness to include me in it, the Gita would have sat on my shelf gathering dust for who knows how long. I never understood fully why the importance of satsang was always stressed in spiritual teachings, interpreting it as having friends who were virtuous. It didn't seem to apply to me, since I hardly had criminals or drunks as my companions. But real satsang is far, far more than merely having virtuous friends. As we go through life, busy with daily responsibilities, household

chores, workplace stress and everything else, it takes the presence of others who are equally interested in finding ultimate peace and spiritual enlightenment, to keep that focus.

To my great good fortune, I was born and lived my life in a pious household, and fortunately I met Baba twenty years ago, so I was provided with both knowledge of God and a loving teacher who took on the role of guiding me. But while God awaits and the Guru urges us forward, I've realized that as Sage Vasishta said, to successfully cross that worldly path in between, it is only the satsang of fellow travelers with the same destination in mind, who can keep us from being mired down by distractions. I intend now to actively seek out such travelers because it means having the kind of company that allows for study and discussion, one with a common goal that helps us forward, and which keeps us from faltering on the path we all tread, a path that from this day forward will be lit for me by the radiance of the Bhagavad Gita.

MOTHER AND MOTHERHOOD

Mother is the epitome of love. Her love is boundless. Motherhood is not only seen in human beings, but is clearly seen in other beings. In childhood, I observed mother's love in birds, monkeys, cats, dogs, and cows. How beautiful to see their love for their offspring.

We are human beings. We are not to be guided by instinct nor greed, but by love, kindness, compassion, and a vision of better living for all. In the Vedic culture of India, we are taught to love God as the Mother, including the scriptures, mantras, the earth, nature, rivers, and even cows. It is an expression of gratitude for their contribution to healthy and happy living.

If we consider the modern lifestyle and way of thinking, we see we are becoming more self-centered, and we are exploiting nature to the greatest extent. We can see the wrath of nature in natural disasters. Nature is killing

humans, and human beings are killing humans in wars, terrorism, and violence. Human beings destroy out of greed, anger, ego, and ignorance. Their actions hurt the heart of the Mother in many ways. If we love the Mother and want to express our love and gratitude to her, we should understand her heart and her love in this creation. No mother wants to see destruction. A mother's heart is the heart of love.

On this Mother's Day, I pray to the Divine Mother to give us hearts that can feel pure love for all living beings so that our lives are comprised of pure love, compassion, and kindness. Let our love for the mother, Mother Earth, and even the entire creation be sincere and our lives be simple and practical, loving nature and all creation.

Let this Mother's Day be a day of gratitude for our earthly mother and motherhood in general.

(An excerpt from guruji's Mother's Day Message)

LIVING IN PRESENT

Swami Atmavidyananda Giri

I remember an incident from the year 2005, when I was at the Balighai ashram. About forty of us residents assembled in the 2nd floor class room for a meeting with Baba. Baba came in and after prayer, started the discussion with a question. He asked us “Did any of you see the fallen green leaf of nearby coconut tree on the staircase while coming up to the class”? Most of us answered in the negative, I vaguely remembered that I have seen it while coming up, but I did not pay attention or bothered to move it out of the way. Baba remarked, “Is this how we are living in ashram, not conscious of what is happening around us?”

In later years when I was guiding meditation, I have observed many times that when the instruction was to turn to right many of the students turned to left. We do not really listen to others. We do not really see the things as they are. Our mind is so scattered that we behave like blind and deaf. This

is due to a conditioned mind. This conditioning starts right from our birth. We see a note on the door of meditation hall “Please do not slam the door”. Despite the note, we hear the door slam each time as people enter because we do not pay attention.

Meditation is all about de conditioning our mind and making it empty from all our stored memories of past. We have a habit of remaining a lot of time in the past or future. We keep on visiting our memory about what was in the past, how it could have been different or we spend more and more time projecting into the future wondering what may happen. However the only important moment is the present moment. The present moment is the only moment available to us, and it is the door to all moments. One who lives in present moment lives a conscious life.

In the battlefield of *Dharmakshtra Kurukshetra* Arjun became dejected and

confused. If we analyze his intellectual questions like, “Is it not better to beg and live as a renunciate instead of killing my own relatives? If this battle takes place, then with the growth of impiety if the women of the family become corrupt, will the the age old traditions of races be ruined?” All these questions came to Arjuna when he thought of future. Instead of thinking about the result of battle at that time, his duty was to fight the enemies and help Lord Krishna in establishing righteousness. Similarly we become confused when we think about the result of our actions instead of focusing on the present work at hand. In our daily life we also spend most of our precious time and energy thinking of whether what we are doing would bring favorable result or not. Mind has a tremendous power of making us project into the future.

There is beautiful saying,
 “Yesterday is history,
 tomorrow is a mystery.

Today is a gift that is why
 it is called present”.

How can we live in the
 present moment and enjoy this

beautiful gift of god? The simplest way is to live consciously, conscious life. One who lives in present is free from the worries of future and the miseries of the past and this opens the door to happiness. Gurudev said, “Watch your breath”. When we are conscious of breath we become the *sakshi* or *drashta* (the observer or the witness). A *sakshi* or *drashta* is not a *karta* (doer). And if you are not the doer then the any action being performed is *kriya* not *karma*. Therefore you will not be bound to its result. When ‘I’ the doer is associated with *kriya* it becomes *karma*. *Kriya* has a natural function, not a future result. When you are conscious of breath you can watch every thought, all feelings of likes and dislikes and all emotions like a movie being played on the screen. You do not swing between high and low tides (*vruttis*) of your mind. You will be neutral, balanced and at peace.

Yoga sutra (1:3) says,
*tada drishtuh svarupe
 avasthanam*

Then the seer is
 established in *svarupa* (the real Self).

What is my *svarupa* (own form)? *Sva* means self or soul. The definition of self is *sat - chit- ananda*, (eternity, consciousness, and supreme bliss). When I see my real form, how can I be in falsehood or illusion? How can I be in ignorance? How can I be in sorrow? These are not my form. If I am angry, in ego or jealousy, I am not in my real form. We feel sad when we are associated with past experiences. We feel anxious when we think of future and sometimes imagine and create

unknown fear. Only present moment gives us real joy and happiness. We cannot live in the past or future, we have to live in present. Then why would there be any conflict?

I can see my real form only when I live consciously being in the present moment.

Like Guruji says, let us live from moment to moment in breath consciousness and make our life a divine life. Living in present is a great *sadhana* (spiritual practice).



Mid West Retreat at Joliet Ashram

PRAGMATIC HINDU

A SECOND GENERATION PERSPECTIVE

Abhinav Veerina

At 21 years of age, as a college-student and second generation Indian-American, I believe my spiritual identity is arguably in its maximum state of flux. However, as of late, I'm finding it easier to grasp and accept my spiritual identity and a large part is due to the Bhagavad-Gita.

As a Religious Studies major in school, I am frequently presented with the question, "so, what is *your* religion?" Yes, I was born a Hindu and in most cases I call myself a Hindu, but Hinduism is more than a religious tradition in many respects. In fact the term "denotes the religions of the majority of people in India and Nepal, and of some communities in other continents, who refer to themselves as 'Hindus'".¹ In this respect, Hinduism also describes a cultural context and

ethnicity not just a religious tradition.

Growing up, I pushed back against learning about Hinduism, dreaded attending bal vihar, bhajans and pujas at the temple. I failed to see how growing up far outside of this cultural context and having it thrust upon me, made me Hindu all of a sudden. In all honesty, in my youth, I attributed my Hindu identity to Indian culture rather than my personal beliefs; I just went with the motions of what was expected of me in a religious sense. Growing up with such mixed feelings for a religion I still self-identified with rendered me constantly at odds with what I *actually did* believe in. I couldn't even tell you what I believed – I guess the best way to describe it was "apathetically agnostic".

This is not to say that I did not appreciate my heritage, but rather that I had difficulty accepting the religious aspects of it. How could I reconcile my favorite tales about Krishna and truly believe in them while

¹ Gavid D. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (1995), 5.

learning about empirical evidence about world history, evolution and science in school? Was being religious or identifying with a religion a detriment to my scientific understanding of the world? Did it make me lose credibility or rationality in the eyes of others? Those were the basic questions I used to struggle with when my religious identity suddenly became more salient to me as college began.

I guess I lost this sense of “apathetic agnosticism” when I left for college. I don’t have a sense of the exact moment it happened, it was a gradual transition into this sort of understanding. However, I attribute this shift to a different shift in mindset, which emerged in my newfound independence. I found myself very unhappy for a large part of the beginning of college - to this day I cannot pin point why. Maybe it was unfamiliarity, maybe it was loneliness, maybe it was failure, and maybe it was the toll of a stressful environment. Whatever it was, this depression catalyzed self-reflection, something I had never really indulged in prior to this point. The consequence of this was a

new aspiration in life: to be happy. Sounds simple, but I felt like it was a big transition in how I approached every aspect of every day. An implication of this shift in mindset was further reflection about the point of life, which naturally progressed into contemplation over my personal religious beliefs.

All of a sudden, religion meant something to me. I still did not know what I believed, but developing a belief or faith became meaningful and important to me. It was at this point that I began to study religion in college, specifically Buddhism. Viewing it as more of a philosophy than a religion, I felt that I was able to reconcile the gap between science and religion. “There are plenty of brilliant, modern thinkers and scientists who are Buddhists”, I thought. I would not say that I ever identified with Buddhism as my religious identity, but rather that I found it comforting.

However, my issue with Buddhism regarded the doctrine of *anatman*, or “no-self”. In Buddhism, there is no conception of a separate self; everyone is interdependent with everything else around them.

Initially, I thought this was an engaging aspect of the tradition - it seemed almost scientific in thinking about interdependence on a biological, atomic basis. However, the thought of being so radically inconsequential, that my existence and self meant nothing, a belief that was purely scientific just did not feel right to me either. I wanted to feel smaller in the wider scope of the world, but I could not loosen my grip on the importance of myself and my own identity. The Bhagavad Gita, however, reassured me by saying:

“These bodies have an end; but they are said to belong to the eternal embodied self – that which is never lost and cannot be measured...

The self is not born nor does it ever die.

Once it has been, this self will never cease to be again.

Unborn, eternal, continuing from the old, the self is not killed when the body is killed”.²

² Laurie L. Patton, *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Laurie L. Patton, USA: Penguin Books Limited (2008), 21.

Lo and behold, I found myself back where I had started. The Bhagavad Gita's conception of the self was very much in line with what I was searching for. Looking at my current sense of self as a mere blip on the cosmic canvas of time gives me comfort. My problems, my failures, my fights, my sorrow, my anger are utterly inconsequential in the moment – I have to focus on the here and now, making myself happy as I can be, optimizing my personal relationships and pursuing my passions. This realization is absolutely liberating. However, the maintenance of my sense of identity and selfhood, my sense of *atman*, is essential to me. My “self is not killed when the body is killed”.

If I have learned anything about my process of spiritual discovery, it is that the labels of Hindu and Buddhist are simply labels – one Hindu's beliefs could be radically different than another's. In the same vein, I am choosing to believe in this philosophy of self without feeling the need to believe in mythology or the need to follow the various *yogas* of Hinduism. I guess

that's my reconciliation of a spiritual and scientific understanding of the world in this context. The way I will put it is that I have transitioned from being an "apathetic agnostic" into being a "pragmatic Hindu".

As I had mentioned initially, my current stage of life is prone to unpredictable bouts of existential crisis. Oftentimes I lose sight of my realization of "feeling small" with exams, papers, stress and emotions looming over my head and have to remind myself of my aspiration to find happiness

through understanding what my "self" really is in a cosmic context. Yes, I call myself a "pragmatic Hindu" at the moment, but I called myself an "apathetic agnostic" only just a year ago, and perhaps that is reason enough to simply focus on the present. For now, I find a sense of stability even in this state of flux by referring to the Gita, which promises that despite the ever changing circumstances around me that, "the self... it is eternal, all pervading and fixed – unmoving from the beginning".³

"Being a sthita prajna (established in wisdom) is the true state of spiritual growth."

"Every work is an opportunity to worship the Divine"

Swami Satyananda

³ Ibid., 22.

MYTHS AND METAPHORS

RAMA GITA



*Sriraghavamdasaradhatmajamaprameyam
sítapatimraghukulanvaya ratna dípam.
ajanu bahum aravindadalayataksham
ramam nishacara vinashakaram namami*

Salutations to Sri Rama, the son of Dasaratha, the jewel of the Raghu lineage, of long arms and beautiful eyes like the lotus petals, the husband of Sita, and the destroyer of the rakshasas

Lord Rama is believed to be the human incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The Lord incarnates as the son of King Dasaratha to kill Ravana and the other *rakshasas* who were

afflicting *devas* and *rishis*.

Rama Gita - literally means “song of Rama”. In the great epic Ramayana - the story of Lord Rama, there are beautiful teachings of Lord Rama to his brother Lakshmana in different sections of the epic which can be grouped under Rama Gita. This section is Lord Rama’s advice to Lakshmana on how to control anger.

Rama's Counsel – Controlling Anger

Lord Rama starts out by saying that anger is the worst enemy of man and the biggest hurdle on the path of a spiritual aspirant. So he advises Laksmana to abandon the anger and reasons out with him in the following statements.

1. If our bodies were permanent and true then your wishes would have a meaning .But these enjoyments are like flashes of lightening which are momentary. Life itself is evanescent like a drop of water which instantly becomes vapor when dropped on a heated iron.
2. A frog, even while being swallowed by a serpent tries to catch insects. Similarly a person even when he is being swallowed by the serpent of death still craves for impermanent pleasures of the senses.
3. For the pleasures of the body, one works day and night bearing great difficulties. If one perceives that his real self

is different from the body how can he indulge in such activities for happiness of body?

4. The association with father, mother, sons, brothers, wife, relatives and others is just like people traveling on different paths coming together where water supply is available and then go their ways after quenching their thirst or like pieces of wood coming together while flowing down a river and separating out again. Relationships are short lived and separation is inevitable.
5. It is quite evident that fortune is fleeting like a shadow. (*Lakshmi stotrayastarangabhanga Chapala*) Youth is unsteady like a wave. Sex-enjoyment is brief and illusory like a dream. Life is short. Still people think these are permanent and Even then, man is frantically attached to the bodily pleasures and works for them day and night.

6. Worldly life resembles a dream. Body is the abode of many diseases. It is like building a castle in the air and only fools who are attached to the body take it to be real. For a wise man this samsara is like a dream.
7. As each day passes into night and the night into day again, the life of a man is getting shorter. Even on witnessing the old age and death of others one is not realizing it.
8. Not perceiving his life passing away with the passing of days and nights, the foolish man is indulging in sensory pleasures day and night without realizing that time is flying and so is his life with it .
9. Like water that leaks away from an unbaked earthen pot, life is wasted away. Diseases like enemies afflict the body.
10. Old age is threatening like a tigress standing in front and death is accompanying it waiting for the right time.
11. The body, identifying with which, one thinks with ego that he is a famous king, that body also becomes nothing but a few living organisms dust and ashes.
12. O Lakshmana! By attachment to which you want to destroy the whole world in your anger is only a composition of skin, bones, flesh, urine and feces and is subject to six types of modification. Tell me how such a body can be atman?
13. All evils spring up for him who identifies himself with the body.
14. That intellect which identifies the self with the body is known as ignorance or avidya and the intellect that recognizes the Self as pure consciousness and not the body is referred to as vidya (knowledge).
15. Ignorance is the cause of the cycle of births and deaths- samsara). Knowledge puts an end to it. Therefore, those who are on the spiritual path and working

- towards liberation from the cycle of samsara should work hard for the acquisition of knowledge. O slayer of foes! Lust, anger and the like are enemies causing obstacles on the spiritual path.
16. In fact Anger alone is sufficient to obstruct the attainment of liberation. One who is under the spell of anger may not hesitate even to kill one's parents, relatives and friends.
 17. Anger is the source of sorrow for the mind. Anger binds one to Samsara. Anger destroys righteousness, abandon anger.
 18. Anger is our greatest enemy. Greed (covetousness) is the Vaitarani River. (Vaitarani Nadi is a river through which sinners will be marched into hell. Its waters are said to consist of boiling blood and pus). Contentment is the celestial Garden. Peace is the wish fulfilling celestial cow.
 19. Hence attain peace. Then you will have no enemies.
 20. Atman is distinct from body, senses, mind, life-breath, intellect etc. The Atman is pure, self-effulgent, immutable (changeless) and formless.
 21. As long as men do not recognize that the Self is different than the body, senses and Prana, they are subject to death and suffer from unending sorrows and suffering of samsara.
 22. Therefore, constantly experience this atma or self to be different from the intellect etc and identify yourself with that self. Discharge all your worldly duties without worry.
 23. While working out your Prarabdha (fruits of past actions) irrespective of it being painful or pleasurable, do not be sorrowful. Carryout all actions, that come your way, without any expectation of results. You will not be bound by such actions.

24. O Raghava, though externally you take up the doer ship of your actions, if your inner nature is pure, you will not be bound by your actions. Listening to this advice of Sri Rama, Lakshmana gives up his anger and seeks Lord Rama's permission to follow him to Dandakaranya to serve him during his exile.
25. Always meditate upon all that I have said. You will never be afflicted by the ills of *samsara*. (Source - Adhyatma Ramyana – Gita Press and Rama Gita of Swami Shivananda)



Gurudev's Birthday at Miami Ashram

THE YOGA SUTRA OF PATANJALI

Sutra 13

WHAT IS PRACTICE?

*Tatra sthitau yatno
bhyasaha*

Word meaning

tatra – there; *sthitau* – for steadiness, for being firmly established; *yatna* – effort, sincere endeavor; *abhyasah* – practice

Translation

Practice is sincere effort to be established there.

Commentary by Shri Lahiri Mahashaya

What is practice? It is the effort (*abhyasa*) to keep the mind steady and still, and to keep the mind in the *kutastha* (atom point).

Metaphorical Explanation

In the previous sutra, the sage declared that there are two ways to liberation. *Abhyasa* (practice) and *vairagya* (non-attachment). In this sutra he explains the first approach, *abhyasa*, in greater detail.

To understand this sutra better, it is necessary to know these four words: *tatra* (there), *sthitau* (to be settled) *yatna* (sincere effort), and *abhyasa* (practice). *Tatra* means to be at goal and *sthitau* implies steady and firm establishment in the goal. It is through sincere repetition of the practical instructions given by the guru preceptor with love and sincere effort by *abhyasa* and *yatna*. In this sutra the sage describes the necessity of spiritual discipline in a very systematic way.

The sage explains the importance of being established in one's own self. The body, the mind, and the soul comprise human life. The body is inert but is active because of the soul, and it becomes the play ground of the mind. A restless mind is the cause of bondage, and a peaceful and tranquil mind is the gateway to emancipation. When the mind is in *kutastha* (the atom point inside the head), it is in the state of liberation.

The Triple Qualities of The Mind –

The mind can be lazy, lethargic, and idle, which in yogic language is called *tamasic* (dull, doubting, and dwelling). The mind can also be active, restless, and tense, which is called *rajasic* (activity, restlessness, ego and temptation). These two states cause suffering but the spiritual mind is called *satvic*, the state of complete calmness and bliss. The spiritual mind is calmly active and actively calm throughout all activities because it is absorbed in the Self. Thus, the primary objective of practice is to slowly eliminate the *tamasic* and *rajasic* states. Achieving this *satvic* state of mind will bring success in life.

Practice is the First Step, The Art of Self – Discipline

Of the two ways to liberation (practice and non attachment) described by the sage, practice is the primary step. Practice creates the foundation that leads to non attachment. Practice is a conscious effort to train the mind to be steady and always directed towards the goal. Now what is to be practiced?

Employing self discipline is the key to finding moderation in meditative practice. There should not be extremes which will eventually create inner imbalance. Keeping track of the mind is extremely important, because being unaware of your thoughts creates conflict both inside and outside. Practice also entails the moderation of food and activities, along with prayer and meditation. It requires focusing constantly on the breath in every activity. This is the key to success in material as well as spiritual life.

Repeated effort to achieve a goal is called practice. To do something haphazardly once in a while is not practice. With irregular effect success is far away. With sincere practice, success is at hand.

Tatra sthitau yatnah means “Repeat the endeavor with sincerity and love” Let the mind always be absorbed in self. Even when the doors of the body’s senses are wide open. Through practice the mind becomes saturated by experience of spiritual wisdom and love and more readily beholds the presence of the Divine. By constantly staying in

kutastha (the atom point of concentration) through every activity (*kri*) one can experience the Self (*ya*).

O Seeker! Practice, Practice, Practice. It will give you perfection. It has been emphasized by the Masters since time immemorial. Even in perfecting any worldly skills, for example, singing, dancing,

cooking, and other such activities, one can easily see how repeated practice brings mastery and success. However mechanical practice is not enough. There is need for joyful practice. So practice the instructions of the guru preceptor with love and faith. It helps to be steadier in your evolution.

DATES TO REMEMBER

July - September, 2015

July 18	: Ratha Yatra
July 31	: Gurupurnima
August 2	: Mahasamadhi of Swami Satyanandaji
August 10	: Birthday of Paramahansa Prajnananandaji
September 5	: Sri Krishna Janmashtami
September 17	: Ganesh Chaturthi
September 22	: Miami Ashram Foundation Day
September 26	: Mahasamadhi of Lahiri Mahashaya
September 30	: Birthday of Lahiri Mahashaya

VALUABLE VOLUMES



IN THIS ISSUE WE HAVE EXCERPTS FROM
THE UNIVERSE WITHIN AND *THE CHANGING
NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS* BY
PARAMAHAMSA PRAJNANANANDA

The book gives a metaphorical and mythological introduction to the inner principles of Akshara (Sanskrit letters), and at the same time gives deep insight to the scientific language itself and its spiritual heritage.

(From *THE UNIVERSE WITHIN*)

Akshara Tattva

Creation is a song, the song of life and love. All of creation sings. The birds and animals chirp and purr and roar. The insects hum in an enchanting way. The flowers sing through their beauty and fragrance. The stars and planets sing through their glittering swirls. The cool morning breeze, the stormy ocean, the flowing creek and the flooded river all sing loudly of God's glory. We speak, laugh and sing. Man, being the image of God, excels in song, speech and expression. Although in the beginning of creation there was only one language, now we can find many languages, many scripts, many words, many

sounds, many instruments, and many imitations. All these are only for the manifestation of inner experiences, for expression of feelings and overflow of emotion, love and intellect.

Mother Tongue

Before going into the subject matter let us see what language means. If you ask a child "In what language do you speak?" the child would answer "In my mother tongue."

What is the mother tongue and why is it called so? Why it is not called a father's tongue? We have all been born into human form. Each body is a product of a union between the father and the mother, *purusha* and *prakriti*.

Purusha is the indwelling self, hiding in each person. *Prakriti* is the energy dancing through the sense organs and externally through all the elements. We all speak our mother tongue. In Indian culture and spirituality, the *Vedas*, the *Gita* and all the scriptures are considered of feminine gender. *Sruti* is considered *sruti Bhagavati* - the Divine Mother. The *Bhagavad Gita* is worshipped as the mother.

*A m b a t v a m
anusandadhāmi bhagavad
gite bhavadveshinim*

- *The Gita Dhyana*

Meaning, “O Divine Mother, Gita, I am trying to love you. Remove all my difficulties and negative qualities of this worldly life.”

Body and soul are both needed for life to manifest. Without soul the body is useless and without body the soul cannot manifest. Unless the bulb and the electricity are both there, there cannot be any light. Mother *prakriti* and father *purusha* are present in each one of us. The scripture is the mother. Child speaks the language of the mother by imitating and repeating after the

mother. The Divine Mother is described as *bhasha rupa*- the form of language. Mother’s language is the language of Love, Purity and Truth; the language of the scripture in any language and any alphabet is the mother tongue. Why do we read scriptures? Scripture teaches us discipline, which is needed to be successful in life. This discipline is self-discipline. Your inner self has to discipline you.

*Shasanat shastram
uchyate.*

Just like the mother wakes a child to get up and get ready in the outside world, the scripture wakes each one of us from our sleep of ignorance and reminds us of the duties we have to fulfill, and the goal of life. Scriptures feed us truth and knowledge. Scripture disciplines us as the mother disciplines the child, teaching us how to discipline the senses.

Now let us come to the *Bhagavad Gita*. Gita is the Mother’s song. When the mother sings to the child the child enjoys the song and becomes calm and quiet. It is a particular type of song, and therefore we should listen to it in a special way..

The Alphabet

We speak many languages. Each language uses a certain number of letters, written and spoken in a particular way. The English alphabet has 26 letters. Sanskrit has 50 letters. Any thought or word is a product of combination of letters. If we understand each letter, then we can understand the thought, the word, and the sentence. In Sanskrit the letter is known as *akshara*, *varna*, *matruka* and *lipi*.

Akshara

Let us understand what *akshara* means. One meaning of *akshara* is letter. Letters are introduced in elementary school. This is known as *akshara parichaya*, introduction of letters and studying the letters. But *akshara* is not just a letter.

To go into the scripture and truth of life one should have the knowledge of *akshara*. *Aksha* is made up of *a*, *ksha* and *ra*. In Sanskrit *A* is the first letter of the alphabet and *ksha* is the last like the A and Z in English language. *Aksha* means axis through which a wheel revolves. The earth has an axis also. Our life is centered on an axis and that axis is the spine.

Another meaning of *aksha* is the eye, the organ of vision, not just the external eye but the third or the spiritual eye. The last letter in the word *akshara* is *ra*. *Ra* is the root word for fire. Every word that comes from the mouth is like fire. Fire has the quality to burn and illuminate. It burns the ignorance and removes the darkness. Fire can also burn and cause pain if not used properly. If you ask the fire why it burns, it will say that is its nature. Similarly words when not used properly can cause pain. Each letter (*akshara*) or word can also bring knowledge and illumination, but must be weighed carefully.

The Lord speaks:

*A k s h a r a m
brahmaparamam*

(Gita V111- 3)

*Avyaktokshara ityuktah
tamahuh paramam gatim*

(Gita V111-21)

Akshara is *Brahman* and one who knows it, gets the supreme state.

The meaning of *Akshara* is explained elaborately in the 8th chapter of the *Gita*, which is known as *Akshara Brahma Yoga* (The Imperishable Brahman)

A means negation and *kshara* means changing as well as secretion. In our body what is changing is *kshara* and what does not change is *akshara*. Anything that declines is within time and is subject to the six-fold modification like birth, existence, growth, maturity, degeneration and death. The body is changing every minute. The child's body becomes young and then old. If we look at the mind, the mind also changes in every situation. But there is something that is not subject to any change and is the truth of everything. This is the *param brahma* or the *sat-cit-ananda atma* i.e. existence, consciousness and bliss, the real quality of the soul. "I am that." What is in you and me that does not change? That is the imperishable truth, which one should experience directly.

The unmanifest, which is not perceived by the gross eye and is indestructible, is the highest gain, the most exalted end. This can be achieved only through discrimination. To experience the unmanifest, indestructible, pure existence of one's own spiritual nature, i.e. the soul, one should come up to the cave of the cranium, through

meditation by introverting the senses.

Kutasthokshara ucyate

(Gita XV-16)

The *Gita* teaches us: *Kutastha* is also known as *akshara*. *Kutastha* has two meanings. In the first case, when it is taken as *kuta* and *stha* together, *kuta* is the anvil on which the goldsmith or the blacksmith makes the ornaments or iron instruments. *Stha* means to exist. *Kutavat tishthati iti kutasthah*. One who is strong, changeless and unaffected like the anvil is *kutastha*

The yogic meaning for *kutastha* is the third eye; the eye of wisdom or knowledge, which is hidden and covered. The two eyes of ours are open to the outside world. One who goes into the third eye through meditation and calmness experiences the imperishable *akshara* as awareness. This is not the letter *akshara* but the language of the scripture, of love, truth and simplicity. *Akshara* is the state of inner experience of divinity expressed through sounds that emanate from the source.

STORIES TO LIVE BY

THE BEAUTIFUL HEART OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

One day while Abraham Lincoln was on his way to give a speech at an important meeting, he saw a little piglet that had fallen into a muddy ditch and was desperately struggling to get out. Although he was dressed in his best suit, he did not think twice about going into the mud to help the poor animal. After rescuing the piglet and making sure it was safe, he had no time to change his very dirty clothes, so he continued on his way to the meeting. Upon arriving at his destination and walking into the room, people began to ask him what had happened. He simply told them "Joy".

Since Abraham Lincoln was on his way to make an important speech, he could so easily have ignored the little pig's situation, or expected someone else to rescue it. Yet he felt the pain that it was suffering, and he felt the joy of

giving service to the little pig. Do we feel this when we see someone in misery and suffering? Are we able to feel their pain in our hearts? Do we feel the joy of serving others? Let us think and reflect upon this for a while. Let us also take positive steps in our life towards transforming ourselves and living in this world with a compassionate heart. Where ever we are in this world, instead of having a heart of stone, let us resolve to expand our hearts so that we can think of others and help them. We should strive to make our hearts as tender and beautiful as a rose blossoms. However in order to do so, we must overcome the stubbornness and selfishness that are ever present stumbling blocks preventing our transformation. Remember, if we are really determined to change ourselves, no one can stop us.

ATMA-VIDYA

PURSuing SELF-KNOWLEDGE

KAIVALYOPANISHAD

Mantra 20

*anoranīyam ahameva tadvat
mahanaham visvamaham vicitram
puratanoham purushohamisho
hiranmayoham shivarupa masmi*

Meanings

anuh- atom or subtle,
aniyam-subtler or smaller than,
aham-I, eva-indeed, *tadvat* –

likewise, *mahan*-great,
aham- I, *vishvam* – universe,
aham-I, vicitram- colorful,
puratana-ancient, *aham-I,*
purushah-the indwelling self,
aham- I ,*isha*-Lord,
hiranmaya-golden or self
effulgent, *aham-I, shiva-*
Shiva ,rupam-form, *asmi*-am

Substance

I am subtler than the
subtle, and greater than the
great. I am the colorful world,
I am ancient, I am the *purusha*,
the lord, I am self effulgent , I
am the form of Shiva

Commentary

The universal
consciousness is further
elaborated upon. *Anu* means
atom or subtle and *aniyan*

means subtler than the atom.
“I am subtler than the atom.”
Thousands of years ago, the
rishis contemplating, discussing,
debating or meditating upon
brahman said this. How old is
the modern science? The
concept of atom is a few
hundred years old. But the
rishis knew about the pure
energy or pure consciousness
that is subtler and more
powerful than the atom and
declared it. Gita says,

a n o r a n i y a n
samanusmaredya - I am also
the great beyond comparison

In spiritual life you can
think of it as the ego. Compared
to the size of the universe- what
is the size of the earth?
Compared to that what is the
size of the country, the state, or
the city or our ashram? Our
existence and our ego are so
insignificant.

One can also expand the ego to cosmic consciousness which has no comparison and then also there is no individual ego.

Then the mantra says, I am the universe that is beautiful, manifold and colorful. I am that substratum because of which the universe exists and so I am also the universe.

Puratanam aham – I am the ancient one. Ancient because I existed before creation, I exist in creation and I will exist beyond creation. I existed before the body was born, I exist here with this body, and when the body will die also I exist, so how old am I? Once I asked a little child “How old are you?” and the child answered spontaneously, “I am as old as God.” So I am ancient.

Purusham aham – I am *purusha*. *Purusha* is ordinarily translated as a male or man. *Purusha* comes from *puram sete iti* – one who is sleeping in the body house or the consciousness present in the whole universe is the indwelling self or the *purusha*.

Then *aham isah* -I am the Lord.

hiranmayam –golden or bright, self effulgent .

sivarupam asmi- I am the form of Siva. Siva here is the one who is sleeping under the feet of Kali-this concept shows the *prakriti* and *purusha*. *Prakriti* is the manifestation and can be very pleasant and very ferocious. The *purusa* or Siva is the silent source and support remaining hidden and one has to experience it.

*“Before knowing God, know your Self.
Self -realization is God realization.”*

Lahiri Mahashaya

IMAGES OF THE BALASHRAM

Irma Botero



A few months after returning from India, I still see pictures in my head of the Balashram and I find myself smiling at the memory of the little ones washing their teeth without water or showing me their tiny beds, where they curled to sleep. I loved to help the caretakers put them to bed.

How cute and tidy they were as they folded their uniform for the next school day and put away the toothbrush in a little cupboard above their bed. Some actually had to jump and climb to reach it!

How simple and uncomplicated is their upbringing...a little like their diet...Healthy, balanced and fresh from the adjoining fields. Their milk comes from well groomed cows in a stable bathed in golden light

I see the kind faces that inhabit their world. The patience of their teachers and caregivers, the tranquil gaze of the Principal as he surveys every aspect of the school, day after day, the sweetness of the Vice Principal, as she gives her input, the diligence of the monks,



bhramacharis and brahmacharinis, the people who prepare their food, who clean and cook and clean again.

How lucky they are to grow up in this safe environment, among such well meaning and earnest teachers, who patiently strive, through science and music, sport and dance, language, art and math to awaken the spark that will help make their way later on in life.

In my mind's eye, I see flashes of lovely long haired girls dancing and the serious concentration and discipline of a karate display. I hear the interest of the older students in world affairs and

I remember being moved as the students folded their hands and closed their eyes with complete sincerity during Morning Prayer.

India with its red sun has always held a timeless essence for me. I felt it again at the Balashram.

Here time lies still...waiting for every little grinning child to mature into a well rounded young adult. Every one of us wants these boys and girls to succeed but none more than Guruji Prajnananandaji, whose dream imbues all who live here. Every child and every stone of every building is in place because of him and I felt his smile mirrored in every face.

108TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF PUJYA GURUDEV CELEBRATED

Prajnana Mission celebrated 108th Birth Anniversary of Pujya Gurudev Paramahansa Hariharanandaji with great joy and delight on 27th May 2015. The celebrations were held on May 26 and 27 at Hariharananda Gurukulam, Balighai, Puri. On the 26th there were initiations into First Kriya and 24 people got initiated. Special classes were given for teaching the technique. Follow up guided meditations were conducted for all the participants.

As is the practice during celebrations, the day started



with *prabhat sankirtan* followed by guided meditation. On 27th, special worship was performed in Shri Guru Mandir which included *Guru Paduka Puja* and fire ceremony followed by *bhajans*, book release, and short guided meditation. During the celebrations five new books were released. They were: (i)





Who Are You? Talks on *Dasha Shloki* of Acharya Shankara, by Paramahansa Prajnananandaji (ii) Lord Jagannath: Through the Eyes of a Yogi, by Paramahansa Prajnananandaji (iii) Dimensions of Kriya Yoga, by Paramahansa Hariharanandaji (iv) *Ritambhara*: The Philosophy of Living in Truth, by Shri Shri Bijoy Krishna Chattopadhyaya; Translated by Bhaskar Nath Chatterjee (v) Dancing with Death, by Paramahansa Prajnananandaji (vi) DVD of the talk on the Bhagavat Geeta delivered by Sri Guruji at Puri, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack in March 2015. About 100 people participated

in the celebrations in Shri Guru Mandir.

Satsang was organized in the afternoon in which Swami Arupanandaji, Swami Gurukrupanandaji, Swami Nityapremanandaji, Yogacharyas Siddheshwar Sahu and Kishore Chandra Mahapatra participated. They spoke about their experiences with Sri Gurudev. Shri Guruji in his message asked everybody not to waste precious time in procrastination and that time will not wait for anyone. Shri Guruji also asked everybody to meditate more and more and make this world beautiful by minimizing our needs and helping others.

BIRTHDAY MESSAGE

Loving and Divine Soul,

Let the choicest blessings of God and the masters be upon you all. I take the opportunity to pray for you as we celebrate the 108th birth anniversary of our beloved Gurudev.

While I think about writing you on this occasion, thoughts of Gurudev are vibrant in my mind. His love and compassion, his teachings and guidance flash through my mind. Although time is a flow and his physical presence is no longer possible, his life and message are a good guide for sincere seekers. In reality, the masters are eternally present.

When I reflect upon him, a verse from the *Guru Gita* (334) comes to my mind:

“I bow to the guru-preceptor who is supreme bliss and the personification of joy; in his presence alone, does the mind assume the form of pure consciousness and bliss.”

I had the chance to spend a lot of time over two decades with Gurudev. During those days, the above verse was quite true. The physical presence of great masters

elevates us to the soul. It is good fortune to spend time with living masters. Often people spend time in worldly activities instead of focusing on inner transformation. It is a great loss for them.

The master or guru-preceptor should not be considered a person or a personality, but a principle and precept. Gurudev often emphasized that our breath is the real guru. We should be conscious of every breath with deep love and devotion. We should be active, not reactive. We should be calmly active and actively calm. Calmness and activity can co-exist, but many seekers forget to practice. They run only toward the physical presence and forget the spiritual goal.

On this special occasion I sincerely request that you don't waste precious time in procrastination. Be useful during every breath and every moment. Time will not wait for anyone.

Let the blessings of the masters be upon all of us.

With Love,
Prajananananda

AROUND THE WORLD

INDIA

Ashrams in India were busy with many programs with Guruji in residence during the months of Jan through June

Foundation day of Matru Ashram –Arua

Matru Ashram celebrated its 6th Foundation day on the 30th with special worship and havan and the release of its annual journal. The evening program started with devotional singing. Pramahansa prajnananandaji, Swami Shuddhanandaji, Swami Samarpananandaji, Swami Gurukrupanandaji along with Swami Mangalanandaji from our Vienna Ashram, and Swami Gurupriyanandaji from Miami ashram were present. The program started with the lighting of the lamp by Sri guruji and the other guests. The guest speakers included two popular mothers – Sushama Mishra, a famous writer, poet and orator of Odisha and Tualsi Ma. Sushama Mishra spoke on the importance of preserving our culture in spite of the changing modern times where imitating the West, and neglecting our own culture and customs has

become the fashion. Tualsi Ma, a dedicated social reformer and a Gandhian who though not a literary person herself has dedicated her life to the education and upliftment of tribal children, spoke of literacy, social status and safety for women. Baba Prajnananandaji gave the concluding talk blessing all with love and encouragement to grow in knowledge, love and sacrifice. Over 2000 people of neighboring villages attended the event. A colorful cultural program was presented in which five schools of the villages participated. The program ended with Prasad.

Saraswati Puja at Balasharm

The worship of Mother Saraswati, the goddess of learning was a grand celebration at the well decorated meditation hall in the Girl's hostel of Balashram. The huge hall filled up in no time with students dressed in new clothes for the occasion. Staff along with the Principal Mr.P.P. Singh, and ashram residents assembled in front of the altar of the beautiful statue of the divine Mother Saraswati.

It was a unique celebration with Baba Prajnananandaji assisted by two young students of Balashram seated on either side, conducting the ceremony with Vairagyanandaji assisting. The hall resounded and vibrated with the chanting of the mantras as Baba led the whole assembled group chanting after him. The atmosphere was one of total focus and devotion under the guidance of the guru and the blessings of the Divine Mother could be felt. After the completion of the worship and havan (fire ceremony) and pushpanjali (offering of flowers at the altar) all had a chance to bow to the guru and take part in the prasad.

Holi at Balashram

It has been a tradition for the last few years for Baba to celebrate Holi – the color festival at Balashram with the children. On 6th March, the day of Holi this year, Baba was greeted at the entrance of Balashram by a sankirtan group singing devotional songs and little children dressed as Radha, Krishna and gopis. Later Children lined up to receive the holi colour on their forehead from Baba's hands.

Then followed group dancing and Baba danced with each group of children. The campus looked like a mini Brindavan, filled with melodious music and Krishna dancing with the gopis. The staff also joined in and it was a day of great joy. Sweets were distributed before lunch.

A New Temple at Bandhapada-April 21-22

Baba Prajnananandaji was present at the Inauguration of a new temple and participated in the Fire ceremony on the 21st of April. On the 22nd the fire ceremony concluded and the deities were installed as per Baba's directions and a Purnahuti (final oblation of the fire ceremony) concluded the program. The temple is dedicated to the village deity Ma Jaguli.

108th Birthday of Gurudev Matru Ashram

On 4th May, the day of Buddha Purnima, MatruAshram celebrated the birth day of Gurudev according to Indian Calender.

The two day event started with meditation, worship of Gomata (holy cow) and initiations and guided

meditations on the 3rd. On the 4th of May there was nagara sankirtan (going round the village with devotional singing) by the mothers of Matru Ashram, followed by Guru Paduka Puja and a fire ceremony at the ashram.

The evening satsang was at 4.30 pm. Baba Prajnananandaji was present along with Swami Shuddhanandaji, Swami Gurukrupanandaji and Swami Arupanandaji.

Guest speakers were Pujya Bipin Bihari Das Babaji of the Kalpataru Ashram and Bhavani Prasad Dash, editor of Gokalyan Magazine.

Bipin Bihari Dash Baba spoke on the compassion of gurus and how they protect the disciples even undergoing many difficulties. Bhavani Shankar Dash talked of Guruji's example of serving the teachers and setting an example for the Balashram children. Through the love and dedication of Guruji , he expressed his hope that more good people would emerge in society

More than 20000 people attended the program, following which Prasad was served.

Hariharananda Gurukulam

Gurudev's 108th Jayanti was celebrated at the Gurukulam on the 27th of May, with Guru Paduka Puja and havan and meditation at the Guru Mandir.

Few hundred people attended the program to pay their homage and get Gurudev's blessings.

May 17 - Foundation Day of Cuttack Ashram- Prajnana Mission

Foundation day of Jagatpur ashram was celebrated on an elaborate scale with satsang, special worship, meditation and cultural program. A large audience of disciples and devotees participated in the event and paid their homage to God and Gurus.

Other Programs in Orissa

Baba Prajnananandaji had several Lecture programs in various districts of Odisha. He toured many villages extensively along with some senior monks and brahmacharis of the mission holding Gita Jnana yajnas and discoursing on Go seva.

Upcoming Events

Nabakalebara, the periodical renewal of the

wooden images of Lord, Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan is going to happen in 2015. This Ratha Yatra named as Nabakalebara Rath Yatra is of special significance as the deities will be in their new forms. This event happens every 12 to 19 years when the lunar month of ashadha is followed by an extra lunar month of *ashadha*.

July 18 Nabakalebara Ratha Yatra

July 26 Bahuda Yatra

July 31 Guru Purnima

AMERICAS

April -1-5 Higher Kriya Retreat

Mother Center USA had the annual Higher Kriya Retreat with Swami Atmavidyananda Giri and Yogacharya John Thomas Baba, assisted by other monks and Brahmacharis of the ashram.

April 30- May 03 Midwest Retreat

The annual Midwest Retreat was held at our Kriya Vedanta Gurukulam – Temple of Harmony at Joliet. Swami Atmavidyananda Giri and yogacharya Durga Ma

conducted the retreat along with other monks. Atmavidyanandaji's talks on "the Science of Mantra" were very interesting and informative.

May 23- 28- 108th Birthday of Gurudev

Mother Center was blessed with the Divine presence of Guruji, Baba Prajnananandaji, during the 108th Birthday celebrations of our beloved Baba Gurudev Baba Hariharanandaji. The 5 day Birthday Seminar, had ashram residents and monks from both the Mother center and Kriya Vedanta Gurukulam – our Joliet Ashram, and several yogacharyas participating in the event. Special worship with Guru paduka puja and fire ceremony was held on the 27th morning and a satsang and cultural program in the evening.

EUROPE

April 10-16 Retreat at Krakow Poland

April 29 – May 10 Retreat and Higher Kriya Intensive

May 27 – Gurudev's Birthday Celebration

June 5- 12 – Retreat at Mt Assisi
