

THE VOICE from BEYOND THE VOID



Message from Guruji

This is the fifth issue of our newsletter. Number five has a special significance. There are four motif forces for life namely Dharma [virtue], Artha [wealth], Kama [enjoyment of worldly pleasures] and moksha [a thorough liberation from the limitations of the worldly life]. The votaries of Bhakti have now introduced Bhakti as the fifth motive power. In common place language Bhakti is love. But this is a love where the beloved and the lover want to become one, i.e. where the one becomes zero and the other party alone exists. This is the case of union of the individual soul with the universal totality. Even in one of the modern subjects called “transactional analysis”, the way of love and treating the other member with all real kindness and love is advocated. We should try to love and treat all alike. Remember, that love is the main driving force which can cement all relationships in the world which would redound to the smooth running and prosperity of our business, office, domestic life, etc. Love is God.

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We may make a thousand plans. Ultimately the entire plan depends on the Lord. That is the Supreme program and you can never avoid that program. Ultimately we should always reconcile and never feel disappointed. In due course a time will come that what you think starts happening and He surrenders to your will.

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The views expressed in the various articles in this newsletter do not necessarily represent Swamiji's views. The views are authors' own.

Our very own Narasimha Avatar - Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj

Abir and Anisha Bordoloi

Bhakta Prahlada's fearlessness came from his innocent love for the Lord beyond the concept of devotion, karma, destiny, or faith. When all the universes trembled at the first thunderous roar from Lord Narasimha, little Prahlada stood there with a heart singing with unspeakable joy. None other than his father was the Lord's prey; divine claws verily pulled out the roots of evil from the middle of a man who once assumed he was the power of all the planets. Every fibre of Prahlada's being was absorbed in the majesty of the Lord; he did not have the slightest burden of attachment. For those of us who haven't this rare intensity for the Lord, the Lord has come as a gentler version in the form of our most precious Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj.

Now, frogs totally secure in the darkness right under the lotus could never describe the beauty and perfection of the lotus. Man in his ignorance fools himself with words of hypocrisy and loud displays of devotion; a part of the Divine Drama perhaps. Why then are we here with this page? The Divine Lotus has instructed a pair of lazy frogs to make an attempt. We are humbled.

Even aliens from the most distant galaxies know that our Guruji mollycoddles his disciples, devotees and every passing stranger. Guruji has words of praise for every single one who claims to be an aspirant. He feeds the ego in the fashion most comfortable to us. He gives us our fifteen minutes of fame and watches our pride swell to the skies. However, the most stubborn of us are strangely drawn to the Lord's fierce side. Whilst Guruji, as the doting Mother, visibly works on most of us, some of us have somehow secretly begged for his Narasimha Avatar to shake us out of our deep delusions. Every prayer, however half-hearted, is answered. So, we are happy to share an experience.

Right at the very start, Guruji had gently warned us, "Be yourself. Be natural. Do not try to imitate other disciples. Be spontaneous." Time went by but also time drew us closer to the unconditional Love that Guruji is. There was a very personal lesson hidden in every story or joke. There was a direct instruction in the middle of peals of laughter. Until one day when we were blessed with the earth-shattering roar from Guruji – his unmistakable Lord Narasimha form – to tear apart our demonic latent tendencies. "Stop your hypocrisy. Your empty words of praise will not get you moksha. You cannot cover up your vasanas behind regular visits to Masters and pilgrimages. Who are you trying to fool? You cannot fool God. Stop your travels in the name of Darshans. Go back to Chennai immediately." A half hour rich blessing! And again another half hour the following day. Full-throated and angry. "Such hypocrites! You cannot flatter God."

After these two phone sessions, we felt enormous gratitude. If this is not Love, what is? What is it that we are looking for? Had we set out to look like the greatest devotees in the eyes of the world?

It actually seemed that we were heading in that direction. For whose transformation did Guruji spend such valuable time? Guruji is Pure Love. We called Guruji on the third day. Greatly amused by our audacity, He laughed. "Have you no shame? I shouted at you so much. You are still calling?" "Guruji, didn't You tell us the story that Ramakrishna Paramahansa would tell his disciples? Be like the dog that runs to its master even if it gets kicked a million times. It is too late to leave You. You cannot hide the Love that You are in a mock display of anger! You are transforming us and You know how much we love this harsh, seemingly unapproachable aspect of Yours? Thank You, Guruji!" Guruji laughed endearingly and before another week passed, the next thunderstorm boomed through our phone. And so, it continues. Guruji remains our very own Lord Narasimha (the gentler version of course compared to His first manifestation!) but never for a moment do we forget that the Divine Mother plays many roles in our lives. She gives sweets to those who are gentle-hearted and to the annoying ones, she does not spare the rod.

We do know that two of Guruji's disciples were in His presence one day when they both were shocked to see Lord Narasimha instead of Guruji. Two disciples from two different parts of the country were granted this Darshan! When they looked around to see if others could see Guruji as Lord Narasimha, they realised that they were just the two of them.

Guruji, we have done nothing to earn Your Mercy. We could not have done anything of significance in previous lifetimes too. Please grant us young Prahlada's integrity and sincere devotion. Our deeds and thoughts do not match our words. Your Mercy defines us. Your Compassion heals us. You are the living and loving cosmic energy in us and everywhere; we are happy and blessed to be a part of YOU. YOU ARE LOVE DIVINE. Thank You, Guruji.

We dedicate this prayer to You, Guruji.

FREE ME, LORD

Lord, free me
 Free me from prejudice
 In its subtlest form
 Free me from judgement
 In its faintest voice
 Free me from arrogance
 In its slightest trace
 Free me from doubt
 In its vaguest presence
 Free me from desire
 In its most cunning garb
 Free me from untruth
 In its most harmless version

Free me from attachment
 In its most concealed state
 Free me from time
 In its illusory aspects - past and future
 Free me from fear
 In its most credible shade
 Free me from "me" -
 Its false self-portrait
 Free me from the need for freedom
 Its twin whose name is bondage
 Free me, Lord
 Free me
 So there is ONLY YOU
 Here and everywhere
 ONLY YOU

Vyasa's eminent women

By Geetha Ravichandran, Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Bangalore

Vyasa's eminent women

Vyasa held women in high esteem. This is evident from his portrayal of three eminent women in the First Skanda of the Bhagavatam. These women characters symbolise ideals worthy of emulation. In the midst of their suffering they displayed tremendous strength and wisdom. They are the very embodiments of the Bhagavata Dharma.

Draupadi

In the story of Draupadi, Vyasa anticipated the very words Jesus Christ would speak many millenia later. Christ while being crucified upon the cross called upon his Father in Heaven to forgive his tormentors "for they know not what they do". This same attitude was shown by Draupadi. After the end of the Mahabharata war Draupadi's five children were sleeping in the camp at night when the Pandavas and Krishna were away. Aswathama wanted to avenge the death of his father Dronacharya and the defeat of the Kauravas. Seizing the moment as opportune he brutally murdered the innocent children even as they slept. Draupadi was distraught. As she wailed in grief Arjuna set off to capture the culprit. Aswathama was dragged tethered and bound like a captive animal and brought in front of Draupadi.

Any woman at the sight of the murderer of her children whose hands are still crimson with blood would have broken down and at least cursed him and spat upon him as he was so heartless that he did not spare even one of the children. However Draupadi ran towards Aswathama and fell at his feet her eyes pouring compassion. She demanded of the Pandavas that they release him as he was their Guru. The onlookers were aghast. Arjuna thought she had lost her mind. Draupadi quoted the Vedas and said that it is the father himself who is born as the son and the son of the guru is virtually the guru himself. Seeing her clansmen unmoved, Draupadi then appealed to their compassion. She pleaded with them that Gautami the wife of Drona too should not suffer the loss of her only son. Another mother should not be made to weep. As no one responded to her Draupadi warned them telling them that if they harmed a hair of Aswathama's head they would perish along with the entire clan as Aswathama was a great soul who had performed rigorous penance. Hearing this Yudhishtira applauded her. He said her words were righteous, logical, compassionate and balanced.

Krishna had all along been exhorting Arjuna to slay Aswathama. However Draupadi's pleas could not be ignored. The Pandavas cut off Aswathama's tuft of hair as an act of revenge and snatched the

jewel he wore on his head as a mark of punishment and set him free. His release was the triumph of Draupadi's immense compassion. It is also laid in our scriptures that to shave off the head of a Brahmin is equal to his murder. Thus Arjuna's vow to kill Aswathama was also fulfilled and Draupadi's entreaty not to kill him and to spare his life.

Uttara

Uttara the mother of Parikshit faced great tribulations. She had suffered the loss of her husband Abhimanyu. Her unborn child was attacked even while in the womb. Aswathama after being set free by the Pandavas although he had slaughtered the five sons of Draupadi launched the Brahmastra against Uttara's unborn child as he wanted to wipe out the entire clan. Uttara felt the weapon searing her womb and threatening the child. She realized that something had to be done to save the child from the imminent danger.

The elders of her family who were great and successful warriors were all present. But Uttara intuitively knew that only Krishna the Mahayogin who could save her child. It is only the Lord who is capable of protecting those in danger and not men however powerful. She therefore fell at his feet and pleaded for protection. Her surrender to Krishna was with the complete conviction that he would prevent the calamity which seemed inevitable. *Rakshishye Iti Viswasaha*, i.e. a staunch faith that the Lord will protect is the cardinal principle of Saranagathi or surrender. To surrender completely requires clarity of mind. Uttara who possessed the vision to see clearly was thus an embodiment of instinctual wisdom which is a feminine virtue. It is only because of this unique womanly trait, the faith she had and the complete surrender to the Lord that the child Parikshit growing inside her was saved from harm.

Kunti

Kunti is popularly perceived as a symbol of suffering. She faced many troubles throughout her life. As a girl she served the sage Durvasa who taught her mantras which she could use to produce children. As a curious young girl she used it thoughtlessly and bore a son Karna whom she abandoned fearing social censure. She was married to the King Pandu who was cursed to die if he ever enjoyed nuptial relations with his wife. But Pandu required sons to keep his royal lineage alive. Kunti therefore used the mantras and the five Pandavas were born.

Vyasa has given a unique place to Kunti in the Bhagavatam. Her prayers reflect her wisdom, grace and

faith. She acknowledges that the controller of the universe is also the material cause of the universe. The Supreme Being is both the cause of all creation and pervades all creation. It is illusion or maya, that veils all creation and prevents this reality from being known. Human beings are like actors in a drama. People feel helpless when confronted with troubles without realizing this. Kunti remembered the occasions when the Pandavas faced humiliation and danger but found themselves being miraculously rescued. She expresses gratitude to the Lord, "There but for the grace of God where should I go". Kunti also asked for the boon to be constantly visited with calamities as it would keep her mind unswervingly fixed on the Supreme Being who is both the cause of sorrow and the redemption from sorrow. Every calamity in the past brought the Lord to her door and she had His 'darshan'. Kunti also realized that attachment is the source of grief and the greatest obstruction to liberation. So finally Kunti the mother who was so involved in the lives of her children prayed that her attachment to the clan of the Vrishnis and the Pandus may be destroyed.

Kunti's prayers offer insights into a great mind. She solicited calamities knowing fully well that human beings are ultimately programmed to survive. Ralph Waldo Emerson the 19th century thinker echoes the same views in one of his essays. "There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here at least we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene painting and counterfeit. The only thing that grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is. That like all the rest plays about the surface and never introduces me into reality, for contact with which we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers."



Kunti's prayers are considered effective spiritual practices by themselves. Recalling crises when help arrives mysteriously is itself an act of prayer. Kunti is thus portrayed by Vyasa as a symbol of fortitude, faith and total dependence on the Supreme Lord.

Compassionate Gurudev

An anecdote on Swami Purushottamananda Maharaj

Once a Brigadier's wife came to live at Delhi along with her brother in law as her husband was in the forward area. She had a daughter 6/7 years named Narayani. The Brigadier's brother in law with whom she was living never liked any monk or sanyasi to come to his house. He had allergy for such category of people. One day, her daughter was seriously ill and had a very high temperature. A doctor was called in who gave some medicines for 2-3 days but her fever continued to rage high. At that time, my Gurudev [he was that lady's Gurudev also] was very much in Delhi but the Brigadier's wife [Udeshkumari] was afraid to phone him up for fear of displeasing her brother in law. Her brother in law had already told her that in case she calls her Gurudev to that house, he should come alone and bring no escorts.

The next day morning, Udeshkumari was surprised when Gurudev himself came all alone in an auto to their house and told Udeshkumari to take the temperature of her daughter. The temperature was more than 104 degrees centigrade and her daughter was unable to open her eyes even. Suddenly Gurudev extended his hand towards the child and held the latter's hand for a few minutes. He then told Udeshkumari, "The child has no fever what are you talking? Take the temperature again." When she took the temperature, it was one point below normal. He left without a word and the child was cured. Thus the compassion of my Gurudev always was considerate also about the others' circumstances and accordingly he used to extend help within the circumstances in which the patient lived. Otherwise normally in Delhi wherever my Gurudev used to go, some three or more carloads of people used to accompany him. Even though Udeshkumari did not inform him even about her presence at Delhi or about her daughter's plight, it was really a miracle how my Gurudev came all alone and cured the girl without any fuss.

His compassion knew no bounds. When I was in Tanzania, East Africa and when my only son just born after about 11 years was seriously ill with a fatal disease called ABO incompatibility, Gurudev's voice was heard by me suddenly directing that the child's mother should write the name of Ram [Ram naam] daily and that the child will be out of danger. That was a time when in the entire 4.5 years of my stay in East Africa, I had forgotten my Guru, the Supreme God and my japa or meditation completely due to the heavy pressure of my official, social and domestic commitments. There were so many other disciples who are extremely devoted to him and had been daily doing their sadhana without any break but I have never heard that at anytime they had any communication with my Guru who had left his body about ten years earlier in 1961 February. Even though I had forgotten him, he was remembering me with love. When I returned from Tanzania to India, he again inspired a Gurubhai of mine Swami Nirvedananda to write to me and thus my relationship with my Guru's place, i.e. Vashishta Guha was renewed and began to have the full effect of satsang with all my colleague Mahatmas. Thus the silent love and compassion of my Gurudev can never be forgotten by me.

Days with Guruji at the Hospital

By Kalpagam Sarma and Deepti Ahuja

During the first week of April 2014, Swamiji started having a swelling on his right hand. His right hand was twice the normal size and was extremely painful. On an immediate basis Swamiji was taken to East Coast Hospitals in Pondicherry. Swamiji was diagnosed initially with Cellulitis and very soon it turned into Septicemia, a serious, life-threatening infection that gets worse very quickly. The devotees attending to him were informed that this illness was very serious and his life was in danger. The entire body including intestines, kidneys, liver, hands, etc. were all infected badly. The infection was severe and difficult for redemption.

Although his original plan was to be there for one day, he ended up spending three long weeks at the hospital. Dr. Murugesan was the Chief Doctor and several specialists and hospital staff and nurses attended on him night and day.

Both of us had us separately had a chance to observe him closely during his illness and this was a period of tremendous learning for us. Considering the size, a compilation of notes made by us during the days spent with Guruji while he was in the hospital is being included as a **Special Article** to this newsletter.



Memories with Gurudev - At Pondicherry and Tiruvannamalai



Advaita through an earthworm

Swami Shantananda Puri

Somewhere a contractor had just finished building a house for a rich man. In that ground, an earthworm had been living since a very long time. The earthworm one day called the contractor and requested him, "Sir, this is also my house. But I cannot live inside it. Would you kindly build for me a small cosy house in this ground where there will be cross ventilation by keeping one door in the west and one door at the east?"

The contractor complied with the wish of the earthworm within about ten minutes and invited the earthworm to inspect it. The earthworm entered through the eastern gate, went to the western gate and peeped through. The scenery was very delightful and it was happily enjoying it. Suddenly to its horror, it found, another earthworm jutting its head out of the eastern gate and enjoying the scenery. In a vexed manner, the earthworm ordered the other one, "Hey, what are you doing in my house? Get out pronto."

The other one replied in a very humble manner, "Sir, I cannot." Again the earthworm retorted, "Do you mean to say you won't or you can't?" Again the other worm replied, "Sir, I am not different. I am only your very own tail end, even though we look as two separate beings." This is advaita. Except the highest reality, nothing else exists. Through an imagination of the mind, it looks as if there are multiple beings. All the multiplicity is a product of imagination. Non-duality is the Ultimate truth.



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