



Nachiketanjali ***...an offering***

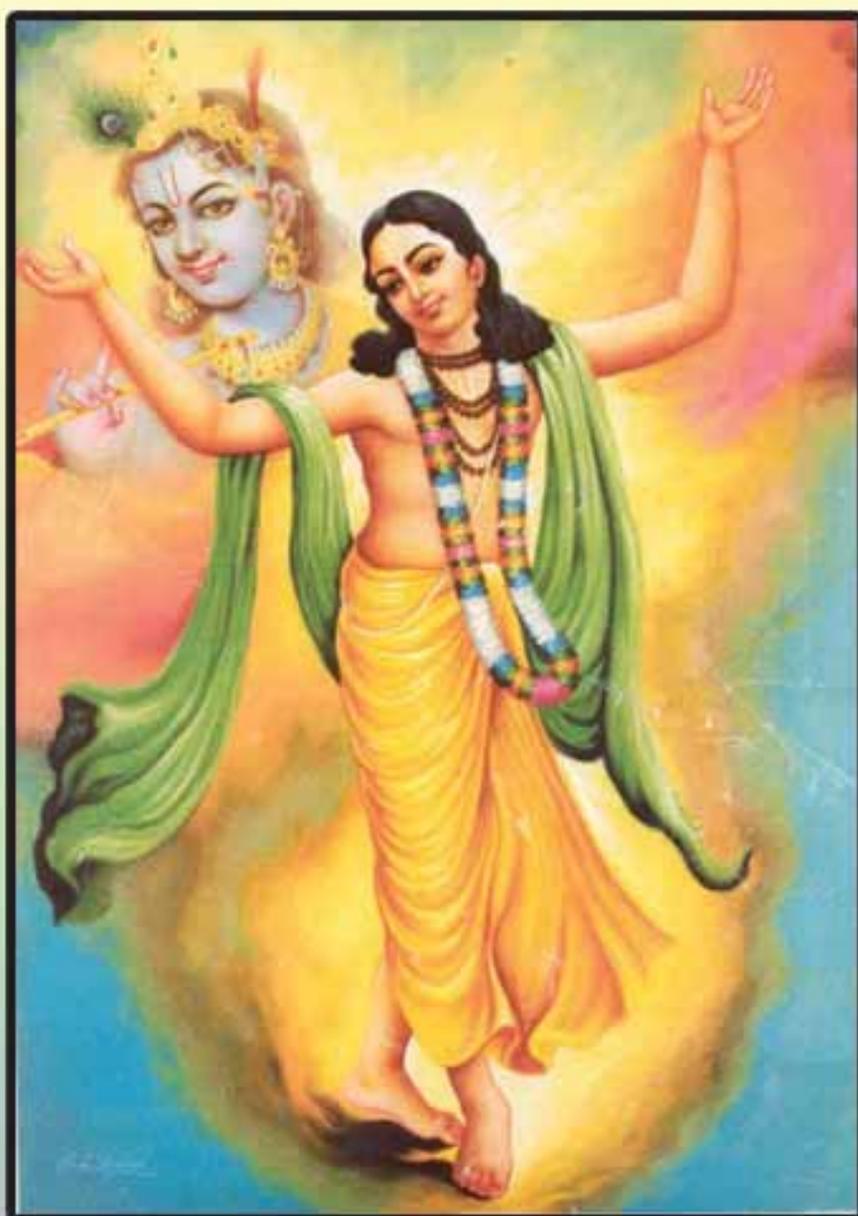
A Journey Into The Spiritual Realm!

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*Na dhanam na janam na sundarim kavitam va jagad-isha kamaye
Mama janmani janmanishvare bhavata bhaktir ahaituki twayi*

O almighty Lord, I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women nor do I want any number of followers. I only want Your causeless devotional service, birth after birth.

Sri Chaitanya Jayanti is celebrated on 19 March 2011



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Shivoham... Shivoham

As India celebrates Mahashivaratri on March 2nd 2011, we were keen on dedicating this issue of Nachiketanjali- the umbilical cord of Nachiketa Tapovan, to the Lord of the Universe, Maheshwara. The sastras and festivals of our country help us to understand Divinity. India is unique in this field. It is one composite culture composed of a variety of languages, spiritual disciplines, valuable teachings, goals and paths, to suit the various types of people and various stages of development. Each is wholesome and useful, in its place, at the proper time.

When I decided to feature one of the Shaiva kshetras, it proved to be a difficult choice, for there are numerous Shaiva kshetras, each having its own reverential significance. As I pondered, my thoughts were fixed on Nandi. Yes, it is Nandi, the so-called bovine vehicle of Shiva from mythology. It is Nandi, who has the opportunity to gaze at Him, at all times, everywhere and be with Him. We find Nandi straight in front of the Shiva idol in every Shiva temple, looking at Him with unwavering attention and devotion. So, 'Mahanandi' the famous punyakshetra near Nandyala turned out to be my choice. Let us be blessed like Nandi- at all times focused on the Lord.

Our hearts should always be filled with only one sentiment that we should be with Him forever and bask in His love. Let us install Him in our every thought, word and deed. Let us become Him. As you flip through every page of this issue, get drenched in His love... with His love... by His love. Until the Universal Absolute is attained, this adoration of the Lord has to be continued.

HARA HARA MAHADEV!!!

- Subhadra K.



Speechless Speech...

A confident and graceful young graduate was addressing the gathering. He was pouring his heart out about many people who have shaped his life. He recalls his childhood days- the teacher who nurtured and patted his soul. How sweet her words and compassionate her acts were! Then he reminisces on his schooling and the teachers who have made a tremendous impact on his life. He, with tears in his eyes looks at the audience and with a choked voice says that his was the poorest family, run by his mother's meager earnings; studying in a school called 'Moving school for underprivileged children', surviving with whatever little food mother gives or sometimes going without food... He recalls how they had no home but for construction sites. He had to sleep sometimes without his mother and sometimes without shelter, at different places.

The audience is captivated and attentive, listening to the young graduate, who topped the civil service examination and got a good offer from a big company. He says, "My early life was not easy and mother was not able to take care of but at later stages with the help of people like you I was able to manage. Struggle was the mantra and study was the sole purpose of life. Therefore, thank you for your support and before concluding let me call everyone who has shaped my life and nurtured my soul on to the stage.

The lady, who was part of the audience but not the stage, recollects her journey. How she starved and fed her child, how she made her lap a bed and used a torn sari as a cover and fan. She remembers how with great difficulty she took care of his hostel expenditure and fees... She even recollects how she used to hug him in the severe winter cold giving him the warmth of her soul. She murmurs, "He created and very well crafted his own destiny. Who am I to take credit for it? Let Mother bless his beautiful journey and give him strength to face the difficulties in life." She mumbles, "They say idol is hidden in the stone. We only have to

chisel out the excess part from the stone and the deity is right in front of us."

Just before stepping out from the auditorium, she once again looks at the stage which was filled with people greeting him, cheering him, applauding his work, giving thunderous clapping, appreciating his hard and sincere work... tears roll on her cheeks, everything becomes blurred... throat gets choked... the first time in her life without lifting anything she feels that her legs are heavy; body is trembling like a small tree in heavy wind... she feels that she is all alone... never a part of this gathering and the stage. She feels as if her world has changed forever... somewhere she feels emptiness but not silence, within. She feels darkness but not Ma Kali, within. The speechless speech within becomes so loud and strong that she hardly hears anything...

Now there is no chaos within and without... she is back to the construction site... waiting for her loving child... keeps food ready to serve... hot water and new towel for him... she feels as if she is dreaming... she sits down... waits for long hours for her child and while thinking she enters into sleep only to be woken up by the hustle in the neighborhood. She opens her eyes. It is morning; the Sun is bright in the sky... she looks around... food is as it is at the same place, water is cold, towel is not used... she gets up... gets ready to go to work... once again to lift sand, bricks, and cement bags on her head... now there is no reason to work but for herself... she realizes that now, for the first time in her life, she works for herself... no husband and no son... she is all alone...



- Swami Nachiketanda



Nitya karmas - Puja Vidhi



What is Puja and why should one do it?

Karmakanda is meant for the people of Pravrutti marga (who always dwell in the material world). Puja vidhi is one of the Nitya karmas for householders that helps in turning their senses inwards. Puja vidhi is a systematic path given by our Sages to householders to attain Self-realization. Self-realization is only possible when all the senses turn inward. It is a systematic way of realizing the Lord within and it is a bridge between Shiva and Jiva- the God and the human being. It is one of the traditional rituals introduced by our sages and seers of yore. Puja vidhi is classified into three categories Panchopachara (5 steps), Shodashopachara (16 steps) and Chatushashti upachara (64 steps). According to Sanatana Dharma, puja vidhi is not a mechanical exercise of some practices but there is a science behind each ritual. If we delve deep and try to understand the science behind it, we will certainly be astonished.



Do you really think that God wants us to perform puja to Him?

God is the creator of the universe. He created the nature and us. When He is the owner of the universe, He certainly doesn't need any puja from us. It is solely for our benefit that we do puja. Puja when performed with the right attitude is a process of evolution where the devotee will experience levels of higher consciousness.

To earn the grace and love of God, neither does one need to perform Puja in a prescribed or pompous manner nor does he need to intellectually understand the meaning of the slokas. All we need is to experience the bhava and the deeper meaning in it.

In Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna says,

*"Patram Pushpam Phalam Toyam
Yo Me Bhaktya Prayacchati;
Tadaham Bhaktyupahritam
asanami Prayatmanah"*

"Whoever offers a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even water with devotion, that I accept, offered as it is with a loving heart".

Many of us do not know why and how to perform puja in a systematic way. People of different mentalities and different temperaments follow various paths. So puja vidhi is a specific path for house holders and common man. There is a preparation for puja vidhi. We always keep our house clean and neat. So it is necessary to take care of physical and mental cleanliness. In puja vidhi we invite our beloved God into the house as well as into the abode of our heart. If we get a call saying that some guests are going to come to our house... what will we do? We try to clean the house and keep it neat and tidy. We plan to serve them delicious food. We prepare physically and mentally for the prospective guests. Similarly when we invite God, we need to take utmost care. God is not somewhere else and we need to invoke Him. He is very much residing in us but due to impurities of mind and actions, we do not realize Him. Here cleanliness means purification of physical and mental tendencies. Puja vidhi is a process of purification. When all impurities are washed away by cleansing, then the divinity emerges in us and that is going to be a wonderful event in life when we have darshan of God within ourself. This entire process of Puja vidhi is in Sanskrit. It is ideal if we have knowledge of Sanskrit, if not, try to understand the meaning of all the slokas.



Panchopachara Puja vidhi involves:

Bhu shuddhi & Deha shuddhi: Purification of place and one's own body

Vignesha stuti: Praying to Lord Ganesha

Deeparadhana : Lighting the lamp (to remove external and internal darkness)

Achamanam : Purification of inner body

Pranayama : Purification of nervous system

Sankalpam : Taking oath, declaring the reason for performing puja

Kalasha puja : Kalasha is considered as Ma Lakshmi and the deity is invited into it

Then the 16 step Shodasa puja vidhi commences:

Vigneshwara puja or Isha devata puja

1. **Dhyanam:** Visualizing the beloved God in the heart
2. **Avahanam:** Inviting the Lord
3. **Asanam:** Asking God to be seated in the heart
4. **Padyam:** Washing His feet
5. **Argyam:** Washing His hands
6. **Suddha achamanam:** Offering water to Him
7. **Panchamruta snanam:** Giving Him bath with Milk, Honey, Sugar, Curd and Ghee
8. **Suddhodaka snanam:** Bathing God with plain water
9. **Vastram :** Offering Him cloth or dress
10. **Yagnopaveetam:** Offering Him the sacred thread
11. **Gandham:** Offering sandalwood paste
12. **Kumkuma :** Offering kumkum
13. **Pushpam:** Offering flower
14. **Dhupam:** Offering incense sticks
15. **Naivedyam:** Offering prasadam
16. **Neerajanam:** Offering arati



Benefits of Puja vidhi.

God does not get benefited or impressed by puja vidhi. It is only for our evolution that we perform puja vidhi. By doing puja regularly, one unconsciously acquires many attributes.

1. **Asana siddhi:** Maintaining one posture for a period of time

2. **One-pointedness of mind:** Mind has a tendency to wander, puja helps in training mind steadily

3. **Purity of thoughts:** One develops positive thoughts and the sense of gratitude

4. **Tuning with the Divine:** From childhood we always try to learn about the world outside us than within us. Puja is one tool where we try to make an attempt to know our Self.

5. **Discovering the relation between the Self and God:** The world where we reside is not a true world and all relations we have in the world are like reflections in the water. But puja is one great instrument that helps us discover the eternal relationship. There are many other benefits that are going to be discussed in the forthcoming issues. Start doing Puja to discover your eternal relationship with the almighty.

- Swami Shivanandamayi



The road to the Good is the roughest and steepest in the universe. It is a wonder that so many succeed and no wonder that so many fall. Character has to be established through a thousand stumbles.

-Swami Vivekananda



Sri Ramakrishna's Amrita Dhara

Direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna - Swami Akhandananda

Swami Akhandananda or Gangadhar Ghatak was born on 30th September, 1864 in Calcutta. Since his boyhood he was of a religious turn of mind, and had extremely orthodox habits.

He met the Master in the year 1883 at Dakshineswar, and went on to develop a deep attachment for Him. He felt the silent transforming influence of the Master's love and received practical instructions from Him on spirituality. Under His influence Gangadhar gradually dropped his over-orthodox observances, which the Master described as 'oldish'. He would often refer to Narendra who was not adhering to any rituals yet his mind would be deeply introspective. Gangadhar saw Narendra at the instance of the Master's advice and at once understood the truth of His remarks. Thus developed the intense love and abiding devotion to Swamiji, the hero of his life.



He along with his brother devotees served the Master at Cossipore and though he did not join them at Barangore Math, he kept close contact with them. He started his days as a wandering monk in February 1887, and went on a long pilgrimage to the Himalayas and Tibet and crossed over to Tibet thrice and finally returned to India in 1890.

He realized the real motive for Swami Vivekananda to depart to America in May 1893 was to find bread for the hungry masses of India. This made little impression on him. Then he fell ill and went for a change to Khetri, where he had an opportunity to interact with all the sections of the people. Then he himself felt the need for service to the poor and needy. He started his mission by opening up schools in and around Khetri. He was the first to arrive whenever there would be an outbreak of cholera and serve the people without regard for his personal safety. In 1897, he started northwards on foot and came to the district of

Mushirabad where he had his first contact with famine. He resolved not to move from the place until he had relieved the famine-stricken people, and so wrote to the Alambazaar math asking for help. Swami Vivekananda, who had returned to India, dispatched two of the monks with some money to the scene. And so on 15 May 1897, the first famine relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission was inaugurated with Mahula and Panchgaon as centres, and it lasted for a year. In the course of his work there he had to take charge of two orphans and thus the foundation of an orphanage at Sargachi was laid. The Swami, from the foundation of this institution to the last day of his life, bestowed his best attention on its improvement, and it saved a good number of orphan boys from starvation, illiteracy, and degradation.

Swami Akhandananda was made Vice president of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1922, and became the third President in March, 1934.

He had a prodigious memory, and was a keen observer of life which made him a first rate conversationalist. He had a flair for languages and was an authority in Tibetan. He was loved by all and was affectionately addressed by Swami Vivekananda as 'Ganges'.

About a year before his death he had a premonition of the approaching end and arranged a recital of the Ramayana and Mahabharata in his presence. He entered Mahasamadhi at the age of 72, at Belur Math on 7th February 1937.

To him all human beings in distress were divine beings and he found joy in serving them. In this he literally carried out Swami Vivekananda's behest: "The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted-let these be your God. Know that the service of these alone is the highest religion."

- *Compiled by Geetha K.*



I have fallen in love

*I have fallen in love, O mother with the
Beautiful One, who knows no death,
knows no decay and has no form;*

*I have fallen in love, O mother with the
Beautiful One, who has no middle, has
no end, has no parts and has no features;*

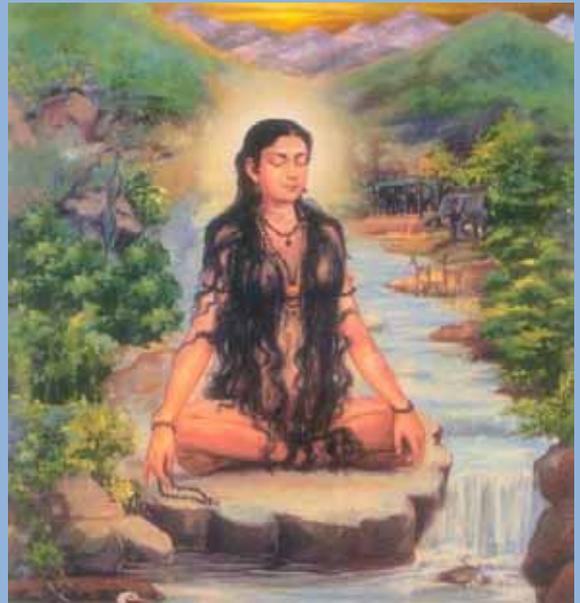
*I have fallen in love, O mother with the
Beautiful One, who knows no birth and
knows no fear.*

*I have fallen in love, O mother with the
Beautiful One, who is without any family,
without any country and
without any peer;*

*Chenna Mallikarjuna,
the Beautiful,
is my husband.*

*Fling into the fire the
husbands who are subject to
death and decay.*

Written by Akka Maha Devi
Edited by Swami Ghanananda



PARAMESHWARA – PARVATHI'S INNER VISION

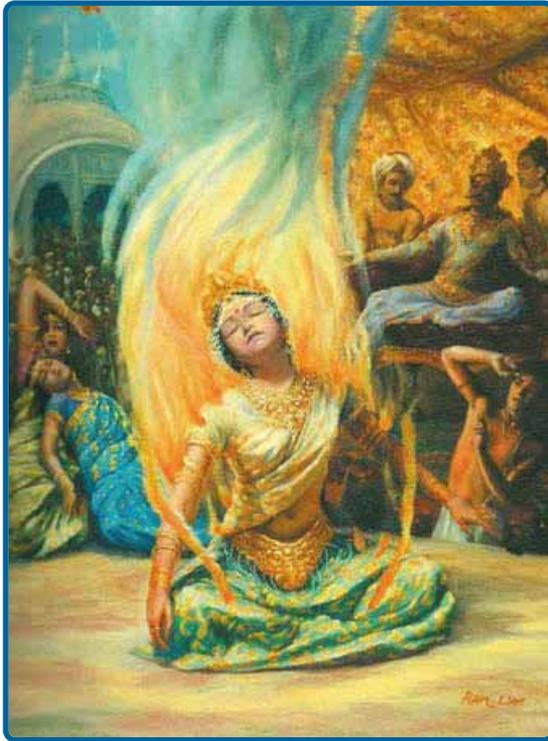
Jagatjanani Parvathi bestows auspiciousness on the entire creation. She is Sarvamangala. Mahakavi Pothana has written kavyas on the Universal Mother and Her compassion for the universe. He describes how Parvathi adored Lord Shiva. He says that though She knew that Shiva was about to swallow 'Garalam', which is nothing but poison, the all-compassionate Mother, permitted Him to do so, keeping in mind the sankshema (wellbeing) of the people. She had tremendous faith in Her husband's prowess.

In Her avatar as Sati, unable to bear the insult to Her husband by Her father Daksha, She sacrificed Herself in the Yogagni. She took rebirth as Himavanta's daughter Parvathi. She sacrificed Her life for the sake of Her husband and took rebirth to reclaim the same Shiva as Her husband. She performed severe penance to marry Lord Shiva. She took the Pasupatha diksha with Her father's permission. Initially she ate only leaves



which She later gave up. This gave Her the name Aparna which means, one who does not eat even a leaf. She discarded Her ornaments and slept on the bare ground, using Her hands as a pillow. She remained exposed to all the harsh elements of nature and in the later half of Her diksha, She stood on one leg and did severe penance. She was absorbed in Eternal trance. The heat generated, shook the whole universe. Shiva was alerted and asked to intervene

and He decided to test Her. He came in the form of a brahmin and said, He was a brahmachari and would marry Her if She willed. He even offered to give Her the fruits of His penance. When She denied His offer, He started abusing Shiva, in order to test Her further. He taunted Her about Shiva's appearance. Parvathi became furious on hearing His abuses and it was then, Shiva showed Her, His true form. He was touched by Her devotion. Through Her penance, She gained the credit of winning over Adideva.



Parvathi became the true ardhangi of Parameshwara. She had the great fortune to become the first audience to listen to all His spiritual and Yogic secrets. She was also His priya shishya. In all the puranas it is evident that apart from revealing to Her, 'SRIVIDYA', the eternal secret, Shiva also told Her about the different puja and vrata vidhis and also various Raksha and Divya kavachas. He was the orator, She was the audience.

In the true sense there is no limitation for Parvathi's love and adoration for Lord Shiva. She was the true ardhangi in every sense as is evident in the following sloka of Mahakavi Kalidasa.

VAGARDHA VIVA SAMPRUKTAU
VAGARDHA PRATIPATTAYE
JAGATAH PITARAU VANDE
PARVATHI PARAMESHWARAU

- Subhadra K.

How much can I influence?

The other day, my 9 year old son asked me some questions about some scenes in Star Wars and it got me thinking about all the different influences he has in his life right now. I am starting to realize that these years (ages 6 to about 20) now are probably the most formative ones for him in terms of building his character. I also realized that the time he spent with us (his parents) has just about begun to grow lesser and lesser. Quantitatively thinking, here is how the 24 hours of his day break down:

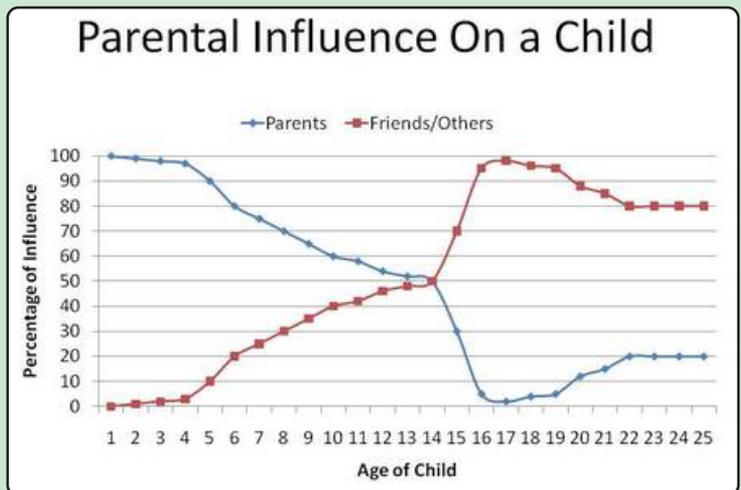
1. Wake up and get ready to school – 1 hr (6 to 7)
2. School time – 9 hrs (7 – 4)
3. Homework, relax, activities, family time– 5 hrs (4 to 9)
4. Sleep – 9 hrs (9 to 6)

Now, if you add some activities, school projects into number 3, the 5 hours are cut down even further. Just for fun, I googled 'Parental influence on kids' and found the this graph which is somewhat true I think, but not all that motivating for parents like us. There are research studies being done and have some conflicting reports... saying parental influence is very strong vs. not much. I wonder what the ideal graph would look like where we have all the right percentage of influences from the right sources.

Anyway, I like to believe that it can be as strong as we can make it to be. Many a time when I am faced with a tough situation, I think about how my parents would react to it and somehow carve my reaction based on it. I don't think they built this influence by spending hours and



hours with us during our growing up years. I think it's more from their actions that they gained our trust and respect... it's "Teaching By Example". They just lived their life and showed us what was right vs. wrong and helped us develop our own views and morals. So, to all the parents out there and to myself, let's just live our lives the way we want our kids to and that alone will teach them much more than they can learn from hours and hours of studying or lecturing.



- Vasantha Gullapalli

Yuvanjali

Shiva Puja



It is in love that religion exists and not in ceremony, in the pure and sincere love in the heart. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has

served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.

He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children — must serve all creatures in this world first. It is said in the Shastra that those who serve the servants of God are His greatest servants. So you will bear this in mind. Let me tell you again that you must be pure and help anyone who comes to you, as much as lies in your power. And this is good *Karma*. By the power of this, the heart becomes pure (Chitta-shuddhi), and then Shiva who is residing in every one will become manifest. He is always in the heart of every one.

If there is dirt and dust on a mirror, we cannot see our image. So ignorance and wickedness are the dirt and dust that are on the mirror of our hearts. Selfishness is the chief sin, thinking of ourselves first. He who thinks, "I will eat first, I will have more money than others, and I will possess everything", he who thinks, "I will get to heaven before others, I will get Mukti before others" is the selfish man. The unselfish man says, "I will be last, I do not care to go to heaven, I will even go to hell if by doing so I can help my brothers." This unselfishness is the test of religion. He who has more of this unselfishness is more spiritual and nearer to Shiva. Whether he is learned or ignorant, he is nearer to Shiva than anybody else, whether he knows it or not.

- Swami Vivekananda

SHIVA'S ABHAYA HASTHA

A young boy staying in a remote village, near Varanasi, once set out on a task. He went in one direction and while returning he took a different path. The river Ganga was in full flow and there was no way he could cross the river. He had to return home but was helpless. He prayed to God to help him cross the river. He was happy when he saw a Yogi with matted hair coming in his direction. With his eyes filled with compassion, the Yogi asked the little boy "Son, are you thinking of crossing this river? It is very wide. How can you cross it without the help of a boat?" The little boy looked at his face waiting for him to give a solution.

The Yogi asked him to place both his hands near him and wrote 'SHI' on the boy's right palm and 'VA' on his left palm. "Now you can cross the river. Just keep looking at the letters on your palms and keep moving." The boy did as he was told and started crossing the river. He felt it was as easy as walking on the ground. Just as he was nearing the other bank, he lost concentration on his hands. His thoughts went berserk. 'How can the mere 'SHI', 'VA' letters help me cross the river? What is there in this name? Definitely the Yogi is playing some tricks on me...' The moment these thoughts came to his mind, the boy started drowning. He called out to the Lord to come and help him.

The Yogi who was on the other bank heard him and shouted back, "Why are you calling another Shiva when He is there with you on your palms. Ask Him for help by meditating on Him." Hearing this, the boy regained his faith and crossed the river. Suddenly it dawned on him that the Yogi was none other than Shiva. With tears flowing down his cheeks and his body shivering with excitement, he looked back in the other direction, but the Yogi had disappeared. The boy ran home to reveal all that had happened to his parents. Faith can make us cross this ocean of samsara.

- Subhadra K.



MAA TUJHE SALAAM

I have been told by Swamiji time and again to write something for Nachiketanjali, but being a below-average writer, I couldn't bring myself to do any writing. I guess it was the lack of inspiration more than anything else.

However, last week, I witnessed an act of true patriotism that moved me so much that I now find myself with a pen and paper despite my writing phobia. This instance showed me that the battlefield is not the only place to prove one's love for the motherland. There is an opportunity that presents itself every day, without any forewarning or premonition. And that is what the true test is.

This short story is about a very dear lady who works tirelessly and smilingly, helping every person in our very own Tapovan Ashram. On this Republic Day, 26th January 2011, the highlight of the Annual Day Program was a small child with a shaven head, clad in a single dhoti and wielding a stick. He was playing the role of Mahatma Gandhi and gave a small speech on stage. Later, when I asked him his mother's name, I came to know he was Lata amma's son. I went and asked Lata amma the reason for his

shaved head and her answer left me dumbstruck.

Lata amma had shaved off her son's hair just a day before, for a 60 second appearance on stage. I couldn't hide my surprise from her and asked her why she needed to do such a thing, when Gandhi wigs were available in plenty. To this, she replied, "Who knows when my son will ever get a chance to play Gandhiji again?" Her eyes filled with tears of love and pride and I stood there looking in her direction long after she had turned and gone away. Her simple words and innocent answer had won me over.

I salute this mother and bow down to her patriotism. It was the spirit of selflessness and pure love for her motherland that she could think of making such a sacrifice without hesitation. Later, I also came to know that Lata amma's daughter was playing the role of Mother India that day. Really, a proud mother of two great children!

As I was leaving Tapovan that day, my last memory was that of all the child-Gandhiji's friends clamoring around him to get their photos clicked with their very own 'Bapu'! And beside the young Bapu, smiling proudly was his mother, with a trace of a tear still sparkling in her eye.

Oh, how I enjoyed the whole program with the Nachiketa Tapovan children that day!

To all the participants of that wonderful Annual Day Celebration, to the child Gandhiji, and especially to the mother of the 'Gandhi', I say, JAI HIND! May this spirit of love and patriotism blossom in every child's heart.

- A volunteer



Om Namah Shivaya



Shiva Panchakshara is a Maha Mantra which is composed of five letters Na-Mah-Si-Va-Ya. Aum is the moola mantra from where all other mantras evolve. The five letters denote the five actions or Pancha kityam of the Lord viz, Srishti (creation), Stithi (preservation), Samhara (destruction), Tirodhana (veiling) and Anugraha (blessing), the five elements and all creations through the combination of the five elements.

Panchakshara is the best among seven crores of Mantras. There are seven skandhas in Yajurveda. There is Rudradhyayi in the centre of the middle skandha. In this Rudradhyayi there are one thousand Rudra Mantras. Shiva Panchakshari Mantra shines in the centre of these one thousand Rudra Mantras. He who does Japa of this Panchakshara is freed from births and deaths and attains eternal bliss. This is the emphatic declaration of the Vedas.

SHIVA PANCHAKSHARI STOTRAM

Nagendraraya Trilochanaya

Bhasmangaragaya Maheshvaraya

Nityaya Shuddhaya Digambaraya

Tasmai Nakaraya Namah Shivaya

Meaning:

Salutations to Lord Shiva, who wears the king of snakes as a garland, the three-eyed God, whose body is smeared with ashes, the great Lord, the eternal and pure one, who wears the directions as His garment and who is represented by the syllable 'Na'.

Mandakini Salila Chandana Charchitaya

Nandishvara Pramathanatha Maheshvaraya

Mandarapushpa Bahupushpa Supujitaya

Tasmai Makaraya Namah Shivaya

Meaning:

I bow to Shiva, who has been worshipped with water from the Ganga (Mandakini) and anointed with sandalwood paste, the lord of Nandi, the great lord, who is worshipped with Mandara and many other kinds of flowers and who is represented by the syllable 'Ma'.

Shivaya Gauri Vadanabjavrunda

Suryaya Dakshadhvara Nashakaya

Srinilakantaya Vrushadhvajaya

Tasmai Shikaraya Namah Shivaya

Meaning:

Salutations to Shiva, who is all-auspiciousness, who is the sun that causes the lotus face of Gauri (Parvati) to blossom, who is the destroyer of the yajna of Daksha, whose throat is blue (nilakanta), whose flag bears the emblem of the bull and who is represented by the syllable 'Shi'.

*Vasishtha kumbodbhava Gautamarya
Munindra Devarchita Shekaraya
Chandrarka Vaishvanara lochanaya
Tasmai Vakaraya Namah Shivaya*



Meaning:

Vasishtha, Agastya, Gautama and other venerable sages and Indra and other Gods have worshipped the head of Shiva's Linga. I bow down to that Shiva whose three eyes are the moon, sun and fire and who is represented by the syllable 'Va'.

*Yakshasvarupaya Jatadaraya
Pinakahastaya Sanatanaya
Divyaya Devaya Digambaraya
Tasmai Yakaraya Namah Shivaya*

Meaning:

Salutations to Shiva, who bears the form of a yaksha, who has matted hair on His head, who bears the Pinaka bow in His hand, the primeval Lord, the brilliant God, who is digambara (naked) and who is represented by the syllable 'Ya'.



Phalastuti:

*Panchaksharamidam Punyam
Yahpateth Shivasannidhau
Shivalokamavapnoti
Shivena Sahamodate*

Meaning:

Anyone reciting this sacred moola mantra, sitting in a sacred place or in a Shiva temple merges back into the Shiva (Sat Chit Ananda).



Do you know who 'God' is? God is not Vishnu or Shiva or Brahma; not the wind, the sun nor the moon; nor the brahmana or the king; not I or you; not Lakshmi or the mind. God is without form and undivided (not in the objects); that splendor which is not made and which has neither beginning nor end is known as God, or Lord Shiva, which is pure consciousness. That alone is fit to be worshipped; that alone is all.



Sage Vasishtha

SHIVANANDA LAHARI

Gabheeram kaasare vimsathi vijane ghora vapine
Vishale shaile cha brahmathi kusumartha jadamathi
Samarpaikam chetha sarasijamumanatha bhavathe
Sukhenawasthathum jana iha na janathi kimaho

Meaning:

Searches and hunts the dim witted one

In the deep dark lake

In the lonely dangerous forest

And in the broad high mountains

For a flower to worship thee

It is a wonder

That these people do not know

To offer to you the single lotus

From the lake of one's own mind

Oh God! Who is the consort of Uma

And be happy at one's own place

*A sloka from Sankaracharya virachita
Shivananda Lahari*

Source: Vedanta Spiritual Library



Spiritual Purity - Shiva

According to Hindu mythology the Holy Trinity viz. Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva guide the entire universe. Lord Brahma is for creation and He is the Lord who writes our fate. Lord Vishnu looks after the well being of human kind. Lord Shiva is for liberation wherein the seeker has no rebirth and would find place in the abode of the almighty ever after. Lord Brahma though not worshipped in the form of idol in Temples, is remembered the most during times of adversity and hardships when day-to-day life becomes tough. Lord Vishnu is the most sought after, across this world, as He is the caretaker of this universe and the one who worships Him is blessed with prosperity. Lord Shiva is the personification of severe austerity. He is the Lord in the form of a simple human and most of the times is mistaken for an ascetic with no spiritual powers. It was proved time and again that Lord Shiva is worshipped by both, the virtuous (suras) and the vice (asuras). He is the most liberal God among the Trinity who showers His grace on His devotees in no time. Thus He is called as Bhola Shankar (innocent). There are instances of Bhasmasura and Ravana Brahma wherein He gave boons as sought by them and landed Himself in trouble. It is quite astonishing to learn about the Lord getting entangled in such a situation where the others' intervention was inevitable for Him to come out unscathed. We would be awestruck to know that all this is nothing but Daiva Leela i.e. Act of God, not to correct Himself but us, the human beings who err in distinguishing good and bad. The generosity He shows in gracing His devotees is unfathomable. He knows the trouble of penance. Living in this world and renouncing the same, both physically and spiritually is not that easy. Thus, He is gracious enough to bless His devotees. The appearance of Lord Shiva wearing snakes around His neck, ash all over His body and poison in His

throat does send a message of divine power for those who wish to progress spiritually. Lord Shiva is the embodiment of Spirituality and through His stature preaches everything a Spiritual Sadhaka requires. Simplicity is the first step in the line of spiritual path. Wearing snakes is nothing but controlling the evil thoughts that are bound to come in our lives. Ash spread all over the body symbolizes the maya of this world and tells us how important it is to be awake always. Poison in his throat signifies to hold on to the toughest moments and not to swallow them. The presence of the third eye is for the wisdom to feel better and assimilate the circumstances that escaped from the purview of normal eyes. Roaming in graveyard symbolizes the final place where the mortal body reaches and soul gets liberated. For a Spiritual Seeker Lord Shiva had bestowed what is required and what not is required. In the spiritual path the bondage is always a hindrance and hampers one's growth. The austerities play a significant role in realizing the true self. Shivoham i.e., I am Shiva which means 'I am pure' can be attained through spiritual progress. It is the grace of Lord that is permanent and not the material world that is like an artificial flower with no fragrance of its own. For a Spiritual Sadhaka, the Lord appears more attractive than the worldly matters. Though He is the Lord, why does He appear so simple and ordinary among different forms? In simplicity lies the real contentment. The stage of liberation is the final stage where every material appears immaterial and certainty lies at the lotus feet of the Lord. Even life looks most uncertain. He is therefore considered as the Lord who provides liberation to the human beings. The incarnation of Shiva depicts and conveys the importance of keeping the most complicated, as simple. Lord Shiva has taken the present form not for Himself but for the

Lord Shiva

Trident represents the three powers of knowledge, desire and implementation

Drum symbolizes sound which represents the words of the Vedas, the holy scriptures given by the Lord to guide us through life.

Serpents on neck signify the ego which once mastered can be worn as an ornament

Rudraksha beads denote purity. The mala or rosary in the right hand symbolizes concentration.

Face on head represents the Ganges, the holy river, signifying the flow of scriptural teachings passing wisdom from one generation to the next.

Moon on forehead symbolizes that the Lord is the master of time and is himself timeless.

Large oval dot on forehead is the third eye of knowledge which, if opened, reduces to ashes the person in its vision. It is a symbol of the Destroyer of evil and ignorance.

Wearing a tiger skin Shiva is said to be fearless.

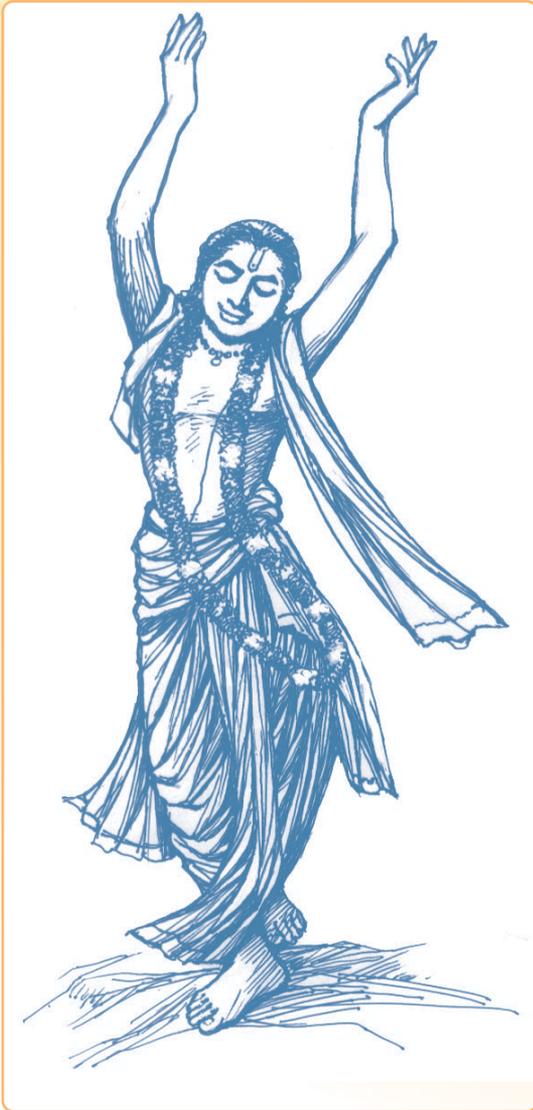
humans who in the name of happiness and liberation are getting bonded to material objects that fetch nothing but repentance. The world of maya envelopes our lives so strongly that reality is veiled. As Swami Vivekananda had said, "Happiness presents itself wearing the crown of sorrow on its head, one who accepts happiness has to accept sorrow also." Similarly in the quest of joy we are erasing the distinction between real and unreal. For a Spiritual Soul the goal is to attain liberty from bondage and to reach the abode of the almighty which is possible only through perseverance, patience and deep faith.

- M. Koti Rajasekhar

Sri Chaitanya

One night as his wife lay sleeping, a very handsome, golden hued Nimai, in the prime of his youth renouncing his householder's life left home. He approached a monk named Kesava Bharati of Dasanami tradition in Katwa and prayed to him to initiate him into the order. Not knowing much about Nimai other than his renown as a great scholar of Sanskrit, Kesava Bharati wanted to test his fitness to embrace the life of renunciation as a sannyasi. Kesava's test was very unique. It is said that one who can control his palate can control other

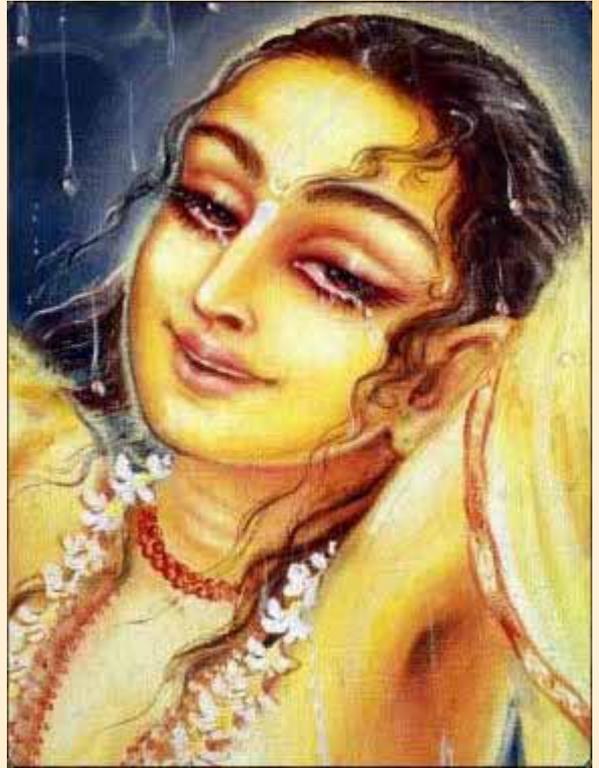
cravings more easily. So Kesava Bharati put some grains of sugar on his tongue. For someone who has no control over his senses the sugar would immediately melt and he would enjoy the sweetness. In Nimai's case, the granules of sugar did not dissolve at all, showing complete control over this sense. Kesava Bharati initiated him as Sri Krishna Chaitanya.



Just around the time when real spirituality had nearly been lost; religion had been replaced by ritualism, when caste discrimination was rampant in society and when under Muslim rule there was a lot of religious persecution, answering the prayers of His sincere devotees and fulfilling many prophecies, the Lord incarnated as Sri Chaitanya to demonstrate how devotional service should be performed. He was born on February 27, 1486 in Navadvipa on the bank of the Ganga in Bengal to Jagannath Mishra and Sachi Devi, into a very pious family. His mother called him Nimai since he was born under a *nima* tree. He is also referred to as Sri Gauranga derived from *Gaur* which was another name for Bengal.

Nimai, from his childhood, demonstrated great mental brilliance and devotion to Vishnu. On growing up he became a great scholar of Sanskrit and opened a Sanskrit school where he taught. Nimai would often invite Sanskrit scholars of the area to engage in scriptural arguments and defeat them. After he came in contact with a reputed Vaishnava saint, Ishvara Puri, his devotion to Vishnu and Krishna became thousand-fold. Nimai's time was spent in either teaching at his school or in singing or chanting the name of Krishna. Nimai not only sang alone, he also loved singing and chanting and dancing in the name of Krishna in the company of growing numbers of devotees accompanied by instruments.

The Muslim ruler of the area, who did not like this group singing found it as a disturbance. He ordered a ban against such public singing declaring, it disturbed the public peace. When this news reached Nimai's ears he said he would not obey such an order. He organized a Kirtan party of hundreds of devotees joining in public singing, chanting and dancing and approached the residence of that Muslim ruler who became very fearful. Rather than come out and confront the crowd, he stayed hidden within. Nimai persisted till the ruler gathered the courage to meet with him. Nimai said that they were chanting the name of God and there shouldn't be a ban against that. The ruler understood and lifted the ban.



Sri Chaitanya went to Puri in the state of Orissa where he passed his days visiting the temple and praying and chanting to the Lord. The pang of anguish and separation from the Lord he felt, would generate such heat that the leaves of the tree under which he sat would smolder. After an interlude of travel to South, Benares and Vrindavan, he returned to Puri and passed his last days there. Some say that he entered into the shrine and merged into the image of Jagannath while others say that in a state of Divine ecstasy, he drowned in the Bay of Bengal in 1533.

The three primary teachings of Sri Chaitanya's teaching were to grow love for the Lord, be compassionate to creatures and lead a moral life. Growing pure, ecstatic love for Sri Krishna can be done by continuous chanting and remembrance of God. Sri Chaitanya emphasized on *Sankirtana*, group chanting by doing which firstly, the heart is purified and then love for God grows. Besides, a holy vibration is created in the environment.

*Hare, Krishna, Hare, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare
Hare, Rama, Hare, Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare.*

Adapted from The Life and Teachings of Sri Chaitanya Deva, A Talk by Swami Medhasananda.



Whatever is done lovingly, with righteous purity and with peace of mind, is a good action. Everything which is done with the stain of desire and with agitation filling the mind is classified as a bad action.



Sri Ramana Maharshi



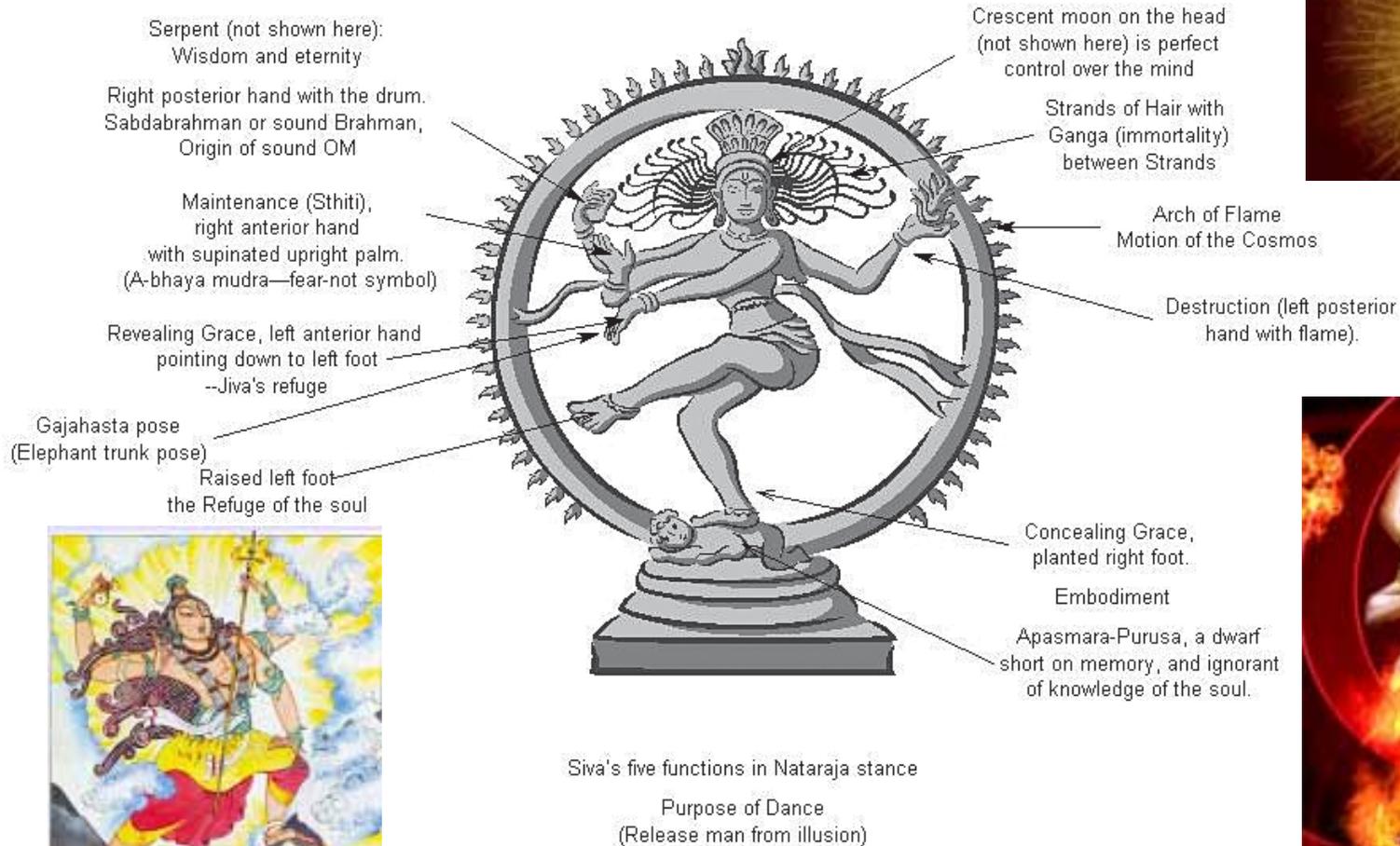
Nataraja-The Cosmic Dancer

“Angikam bhuvanam yasya
Vachikam sarva vangmayam
Aharyam chandra taradi
Tam vande satvikam shivam.”

We bow to Him the benevolent One, Whose limbs are the world, Whose song and poetry are the essence of all language, Whose costume is the moon and the stars...

As the Lord of Dance, Nataraja, Shiva performs the tandava, the dance in which the universe is created, maintained and resolved. The **snake** swirling around His waist is **Kundalini- Cosmic Energy inherent in all matter**.

Creation- Nataraja dances with a small drum called **damarukam** in one of His right hands. Eshvara is nada brahman. He is the origin of all sounds. This is the seed from which the tree of the Universe emanated. The **surrounding flames** represent the **manifest universe**.



Protection- (Operation) - In another of the right hands, He has the **Abhaya** mudra, symbolizing the **blessing** the Lord bestows on people, so that they can **discern good from evil**. The foot which is planted shows the act of hiding. The **raised foot** shows the act of **bestowing**. The **stoic face** of Shiva represents His **neutrality**, thus being in balance.

Destruction- He has fire in one of His left hands, symbolizing **destruction**. The **other left hand** is **lifted above** to symbolize **upliftment or salvation**. When everything is destroyed by fire, only the ash will remain which the Lord has

smeared on His body. Shiva's **long, matted tresses**, usually piled up in a knot, loosen during the dance and crash into the heavenly bodies, knocking them off course or **destroying** them utterly. The Lord dances on the **demon Apasmara**, symbolizing the **victory over ignorance and evil nature**.

Nataraja Stotram

Krupasamudhram, Sumukham , Trinethram,
Jatha dharma, Parvathi vama bhagam,
Sada shivam, Rudram anantha roopam,
Chidambaresam hrudhi bhavayami.



I salute with all my heart, to the Lord of Chidambara, Who is the ocean of mercy, Who is always pleasant, Who has three eyes, Who wears a tuft of hair, Who has Parvathi as His left half, Who is always peaceful, Who is full of anger and Who has an endless form.



Shiva, the Human



In a country which is the birthplace of Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religions, we are a people who 'believe' in 330,000,000 deities. Then there is the Supreme Trinity- Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Protector and Shiva the Destroyer. And we have grown up listening to epic tales of battle, of good vs. evil, of omnipotent Gods commanding supreme power.

But think about this. These stories, characters and battles have been passed down for centuries, by word of mouth, on parchments of papyrus and through rendering of Sanskrit chants. Whether these incidents really happened, whether these 'Gods' actually walked the earth in flesh and blood, and whether there is a figment of truth in these words is a different matter altogether, but one fact remains indisputable- the power of faith, belief and the invisible living force running this world.

I recently read a book titled 'The Immortals of Meluha' and can truthfully say that it was one of the most gripping, life-transforming books I've ever gotten my hands on. This story is based on the fundamental concept that *all Gods were once human beings*. It was their deeds and karmas in their human life that immortalized them as living Gods. It is the story of Shiva, the Human.

Bestowed with the sobriquet 'Mahadev', long hair about His shoulders, the powerfully muscular physique of a Yogi, clad in a tiger skin, clasping a *trishul* and a *kamandal*, radiating with a magnetic attraction, Shiva the Human is the very embodiment of power. And that power lies latent inside us, waiting to be invoked. It is the power to be a God.

Have you ever thought why those childhood stories, rendered dramatically by Grandma before tucking us into bed every night, left such a deep impression on our souls?

That timeless, epic story is the absolute Truth- the past, the present and the future. Light and darkness, angel and demon, good and evil- this is a battle raging inside us right now, and has been fought ever since we gained conscious awareness. These two sides are cryptic symbols of our own Self, of a battle we can choose to fight or not to.

Shiva was one such man who lived in flesh and blood, walked the earth on His bare feet and touched the very air that you and I breathe now. I do not know when, where or how. But it happened.

Shiva was a mortal who, just like us, faced insurmountable challenges every day, uncertainty and doubt about every fight He would fight and saw an impenetrable darkness just like we do today. He had the same two eyes, ears, nose, mouth, mind, heart and soul that we do. He had the same potential. But He made His choice. He fought. He won. And He became a Mahadev.

So it doesn't really matter if the story is truth or fiction, if you visit a temple or a mosque, if you live in 2011 AD or 200 BC. The battle horn has sounded. The weapons are ready. And the war chant is echoing all around- '*Har Har Mahadev! Har ek hai Mahadev!*' -'Victory be to the God Almighty! Each one of us IS the God Almighty!'

Your very life, every day of it, is the symbol of this eternal battle. And knowingly or unknowingly, you make a choice every moment. You can put down your weapons and run away. Or you can fight, win and be a Mahadev. What do you choose?



Avinash Agarwal is a student of St. Xaviers College, Mumbai and has a deep flair for writing. He has written many thought provoking essays.





Smile To Be Happy



Till sometime ago, each day that I started, I started with a smile and in course of day, situations changed the mood and the smile grew narrower with time. Eventually, I thought, if this continued every day, it is possible that I can transform into one of those depression-affected people. I decided that I should not let situations take over me. So, I started thinking about how not to get depressed and realized that it is easy to be depressed than to keep myself away from depression. The great white north looked very pleasant when I was in India. However, gradually I found the snow and the whiteness everywhere really difficult to stand because no colours in life make it all melancholic. My loneliness added to the cold and bleak environment drawing the depression closer. Through all this, I realized it is all in my choice, whether to be sad and depressed or to be happy and content. The ball was in the court of my mind.

Then, when I looked through the city sitting on the bench near the central LRT station, I saw something new that I could hardly see before. To my surprise, the white north which seemed to have lost glamour for me, once again seemed fascinating. That moment I realized that the view was in my eyes and it was my eyes that deceived me all this time but not the place itself. Therefore, did my mind deceive me of my status? I realized that depression was in my mind and not in my life. It was me who chose to be sad. If my mind wished to deceive me, I wasn't willing to be deceived anymore. I decided to look at my life sitting on the positive bench like I looked at the city from the city bench. The positive bench changed



things. Days are the same and so are the situations. However, the view I looked at it from changed and so did my perception. Now, I start my day with a smile, smile through it and end the day with a smile.

Thus, life is all about where you look at it from; the city bench or from the closed streets. Is it easy to be depressed? Yes, it is easy to be depressed. Hard is to be happy through hardships. Like a candle spreads light even as it melts, coffee beans add their flavour to water while fading themselves and the sun adds beauty to the horizon when he is about to set, live with the smile that never fades and that is true to you. Smiling to be happy is better than smiling when happy. Smiling when happy is what everybody does but smiling to be happy is what the brave do. Are you brave? It is but natural to cry when in pain but let me remind you, pain comes not from suffering but from your mind. If you can, stay calm and take things in stride even when adversity hits you. If you can do so, then it is hard for you to be depressed. I have tried being depressed after being happy but the happiness in me does not allow me to be depressed anymore. Depression and happiness are both in my mind but truth is in my life.



I love writing poems, stories and songs; compose them and sing. All I can write is about life because that is all I can experience.

Ramya Manasa Kandala, 1st Year Undergraduate Student
University of Alberta Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Ardhanareeshvara

Half Male and Half Female Aspect of Creation

A very broad classification of Gods into Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer and Shiva the Destroyer is of common knowledge. At a closer look these functional attributes mean more than that. According to Hindu philosophy, creation is not linear but is cyclical, there is no final destruction or total annihilation; there is only change of forms from gross to subtle. Shiva, represented as the God who is into deep meditation, changes the gross universe into the subtle universe. The whole creation was manifested from the primordial sound Om, the Naada Brahman generated by the beat of the dhamaru in Shiva's hand. Anandatandava, the dance of bliss in His Nataraja form is a pictorial allegory of the five principle manifestations of eternal energy- creation, preservation, illusion, destruction, and liberation. Thus He is the universal creative force. The concept of creation has two components- material factor and the intelligence factor which go together. That is, creation is not a random event. Some intelligence is guiding the matter. Shiva represents the intelligence factor and Shakti represents the material factor. Only when these two come together creation takes place. The Ardhanareeshvara form of Shiva depicts this union of Shiva (male) and Shakti (female), sharing one body causing the phenomenon of eternal creation.

This is not restricted to only Shiva and Shakti. This applies to the entire creation. Each one of us has Shiva and Shakti within us. When a man likes a woman, he actually sees his own female image reflected in her and the same way when a woman likes a man, she also finds an expression to the man's image hidden within her. Each one of us has both the aspects- the masculine and feminine aspects in several ways. Intellect is the male aspect and emotion is the feminine aspect. Prose is the male aspect while poetry is feminine. Introvert nature is feminine and extrovert nature

is masculine. Organization skill is male and going into minute details is feminine. Depending on the physiology, need and context, each aspect is manifested- one may be a man but sometimes he may have feminine aspect dominant and the same way a woman may have male aspect dominant in their personality. Ardhanareeshvara represents a deep inner balance, respect and harmony between these two aspects within an individual and among individuals, which is a part of the spiritual journey.

Ardhanareeshvara form is the representation of the inseparable Shiva-Shakti in one way and a perfect communion of Shiva and Shakti in the other that gives a very sacred perspective of creation. According to this, a couple is considered as a sacred whole, split into two halves bound by deep mutual respect. What needs to be noted here is that there is difference but no ranking. They are two halves, so there is no question of inequality. Proper understanding and application of this concept would help in erasing the so called notions- 'man's work' and 'woman's work'. A man can take as much dignity in doing detailed household work as does a woman in accomplishing the organizational office work. Expressing the aspect needed demonstrates that one is rising to the occasion but not stooping below dignity.

This is another way of transcending the limitations of physical attributes and reach for that which is beyond gender, mind and body.

**chAMpeyagaurArdha sharIraKAYai
karpUragaurArdha sharIraKAYa |
dhammillakAYai cha jaTAdharAYa namaH
shivAYai cha namaH shivAYa ||**

(Sloka1 of Ardhanareesvara ashtakam by Sri Sankaracharya)

One half shines like the golden yellow champeya flower; the other shines bright white like karpuram.

One side of the head is ornate with braided hair; the other sports the unkempt crest.

I bow to this ShivaParvati and Shiva, in the form of ArdhanarIshvara.

-Annapurna R.

Living with a Divine Soul



Nachiketa Tapovan reverberates with the mantra of 'Om Namah Shivaya' on every Shivaratri. Each Shivaratri spent in the Divine presence of Swamiji was a memorable one for me. Devotees and children of Vidya mandir from higher classes assemble in the

Dhyana mandir at 10pm. The Dhyana mandir is beautifully decorated with flowers and diyas. We place the Shivalinga covered with an orange cloth in the midst of the hall. It's a wonderful sight to behold as the Shiva linga surrounded by diyas is indescribable. The programme starts with bhajan and satsang followed by lingodbhava at 12pm. Later pooja and abhishekam to Lord shiva is performed by Ma Shivanandamayi.

The Shivaratri which I am narrating was a special and significant one. Whoever witnessed the happenings on that eventful night was blessed indeed! After the bhajans, Swamiji spoke about the significance of Shivaratri and towards the end He made a declaration that Mataji would henceforth be the Adhyatmik Praneta of our organization. He called Mataji and removed the rudrakshamala around His neck and placed it around hers and blessed her. Mataji then prostrated before Him and went on to perform the abhishekam to Lord Shiva. In the dim diya lit hall, we all witnessed the intensity of her devotion while performing the abhishekam. She was totally absorbed and tears were flowing down her cheeks like the Ganga. We all felt that she was experiencing Lord Shiva. We also offered abhishekam and offered bhilva leaves and performed arati to the Lord.

Mataji explained about Lord shiva and few devotees asked her questions and she answered them. Again the bhajan session started and while singing Mataji entered into a trance. Initially none of us noticed her until Swamiji gestured towards her and made us aware of her state. Her face was slightly tilted to her right and from her nose and mouth there was a continuous discharge. Her garments were wet with her saliva. She was in a deep trance. This was the first time we all were in direct contact

with someone who was in a trance. We had only read about it but never were witness to this phenomenal event. We were thrilled and everyone was rushing to capture the moment by photographing or video graphing her. All of us in our excitement were badgering Swamiji with questions and He was patiently answering them. All this did not disturb her concentration. She was in bliss and experiencing Lord Shiva in all His glory. After she came back from her state, Mataji explained what she experienced in trance.



I returned at dawn from Tapovan with my heart filled with joy because God had given me the opportunity to witness something so unique. I will cherish it in my heart throughout my life and wish to experience it before I leave this earth.

- Vasundhara P.

Trance

"Bhajan is a feast for the soul, while chanting bhajans I entered into bhava, as if there is no one else other than God... After having a delicious sweet, it is impossible to express the taste of it. Similarly, it is very hard to describe the state of trance but I will try to make an attempt to explain.

In the process, the energy rises like a snake in different psychic centers and goes to the crown. Everything gets ceased and body loses its external consciousness; all the senses turn inward and mind becomes calm and one pointed. Here you experience the perfect awareness. The trance is a magnificent journey which makes you to drop whatever is false and takes you to the true abode of the self. In this splendid state you are beyond this material world and experience the eternal relationship of the self with the supreme self. The state of trance is such a wonderful state where you find Divine nectar and true world of bliss. The ultimate experience of this state is that you merge with God and you become one with Him. Here I experienced the mahavakya of Sri Adi Shankaracharya of Aham Brahmasmi, and then there is no separation between you and God. You experience only supreme consciousness".

- Swami Shivanandamayi

Travelling to Kedarnath and Badrinath

We had had the good fortune of visiting Kedarnath and Badrinath during the Pujas. When we had planned our trip, most of the people I met, said that such places of pilgrimage should be visited at old age and not at a young age. This kind of comment really surprises me. To me such beautiful places are the abode of Gods and anyone who loves nature will find the Lord in these heavenly places. It does not have to be necessarily a pilgrimage but any noble quest with a truly seeking eye will eventually find God. It is not possible to admire something as beautiful as the Himalayas without thinking about God.

We had commenced our journey from Kolkata to our destination, Hardwar. On our way to Hardwar, we halted at Hrishikesh where we spent a couple of days. On reaching Hrishikesh we saw that, on all sides of the Ganges whose waters were flowing by as calm as ever, were the river banks surrounded by the foothills of the Himalayas. Disciples and little children of Parmarth Ashram were singing songs in praise of the Lord at Ram Jhula Ghat. The whole ambience was beyond words to describe. All the people who had gathered at the Ghat including many foreigners were singing with them. I experienced the feeling of oneness pervade the whole place. All worries and thoughts had disappeared. What mattered was the present.



From Hrishikesh we had left for Gaurikund via Chamba, as the road through Rudraprayag was closed due to continuous landslides. We reached Gaurikund quite late at around 10.00 pm. To our surprise we found the Swamiji of Bharat Sevashram waiting for us and he was quite worried as we were late. He welcomed us and urged us to have a hot dinner which was being served to all the guests. We were so tired and hungry and the simple hot food gave us so much of warmth and happiness. The hospitality at the Ashram to so many hungry and exhausted tourists was really very touching. Even the drinking water was hot and suitable to drink in that cold climate.

The next day we left for Kedarnath. The climb was steep but the scenery was serene and wonderful. While climbing up, I remembered the journey of the five Pandavas to Heaven. When we nearly reached Kedarnath, we could see the temple from a distance and the very sight brought tears of happiness to my eyes. The pain of walking eased out, on seeing Shivji. We conducted Puja and prayed for all. But what was beautiful was the evening Aarti. So high up, in the cold weather, the Aarti to the Lord was astounding. So many people had huddled to watch the Aarti and seek blessings from Shivji. Here, one more time, we had the good fortune of witnessing the hospitality of Bharat Sevashram. I was truly grateful to and appreciative of the humanitarian service that they were



rendering relentlessly to so many tourists. They were indeed doing a great deed.

The next day, early in the morning, we left for Ukhimath. At Ukhimath the temple where Aniruddha and Usha got married is worth seeing. One can see the construction of the pyre around which they were married and also the throne of Shivji, when He leaves Kedarnath and stays at Ukhimath for nearly six winter months. From Ukhimath we left for Badrinath.

We reached Badrinath in the late afternoon and found it to be bitterly cold. We visited the Mandir and watched the Aarti. After Aarti we came back to Bharat Sevashram where they had started their evening prayer and songs. At so high up in the hills and so cold a climate, if people could sing and praise the Lord, I felt that if God is anywhere, He was certainly here. I felt there has never been such a perfect, happy moment in my life. I was truly lost in that atmosphere. The next day, we left for Rudraprayag. At Rudraprayag, I met a Mataji who stays at the temple of Lord Rudra and has dedicated her life for serving the Lord. She did not speak as she was chanting mantra continuously. But she asked me to pray to the Lord with all my heart. Her bright face still lingers in front of my eyes. The trip has made me so happy that I have left my heart behind. I shall again plan to have a similar trip as soon as possible.

My whole purpose of writing this itinerary is to convey that God exists in all things and beings- animate and inanimate. Life is a journey and should be lived to the fullest. I have often met people who believe that they are too ill to travel or too old to travel to such remote destinations. But I can assure you that if you take one step towards it, the journey will lead you one step at a time. It is only in human birth that by utilizing our senses the way they should be, we can witness what we can. Life has no rigid boundary that we have to limit ourselves within. It is an open space where we can travel as much as we can, realize much and treasure most. Life is a gift from the Almighty and should be lived to the fullest.

- Sukanya Ghosh

SRISAILA SHIKHARA



How many of us know that Srisaila Shikhara is decorated with a cloth turban on the festive occasion of Shivaratri? But this is true. This is an important ritual that is being performed since ages. In Prakasam district there are a few weaver families who are given this golden opportunity. Everyday these weavers keep aside a yard of woven cloth. In this way each member collects 365 yards of woven fabric which they carry with them to Srisailam. On the day of Shivaratri, one among the weavers has to climb to the top of the shikhara of the Garbha gruha and decorate the shikhara with the fabric. As he has to perform this ritual naked, the lights on the shikhara are dimmed so that he is not visible. In the morning when you look at the shikhara it appears as though Sri Mallikarjuna swamy is wearing a turban.

- A Devotee



CHILD MARRIAGE – A SOCIAL EVIL

“Rita was married off by her family at age 12, became a mother at age 14, and was divorced at age 16. Although hardly cognizant of her first marriage, Rita is considered undesirable and will most likely remain alone and unmarried, having to raise her child completely on her own.”

This is a part of the newspaper report titled ‘Child Marriages Persist in Rural India’ which appeared on the 29th of August, 2006 in the Asian Tribune.

Marriage is the basis of social organization and the foundation of important legal rights and obligations. It is responsible for fostering the important institution in society, family. Family is the first institution an individual is closely associated with. Under Hindu law, marriage is seen as a sacrament or a holy sanskar. The importance attached to this institution is very high in the life of a Hindu as it is important for fulfilling spiritual goals apart from biological needs. The age that law has fixed for marriage is eighteen years for girls and twenty one years for boys. Yet the law is defied.

The National Family Health Survey of 1998-1999 found that 65% of girls are married by the time they are eighteen.¹ Child marriages are solemnized during times of festivals such as *Akshaya Tritiya*, *Akha Teej*, *Ram Navami*, *Basant Panchami* and *Karma Jayanti*. Despite commonly held views, it is not easy to find references in Indian literature to child marriage. The most popular form of marriage in Indian literature is Swayamvara, where the bride selected her spouse from grooms assembled in her home. Examples of Swayamvara can be found in the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*. The *Rigveda* argues that a girl can be married only when she is fully mature, both physically and mentally. The Manusmriti, Mahabharata and the Vishnu Purana decreed that the man should be three times older than the girl, thus a man marrying a ten year old

should be thirty, an eight year old girl should marry a man of twenty-four and so on.²

The present legislation regarding child marriages is the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 which prescribes higher punishments than the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. A child marriage solemnized in contravention of the former Act is avoidable at the option of the party who was a minor at the time of marriage.



“I am one of those unfortunate Hindu women whose hard lot is to suffer the unnamable miseries entailed by the custom of early marriage. This wicked practice of child marriage has destroyed the happiness of my life. It comes between me and the things which I prize above all others - study and mental cultivation. Without the least fault of mine I am doomed to seclusion; every aspiration of mine to rise above my ignorant sisters is

looked down upon with suspicion and is interpreted in the most uncharitable manner.”

This is an extract of the letter that Rukhmabai, a victim of child marriage had written to the Times of India on June 26, 1885. She opposed the practice and later on became the first woman doctor of the nation. What we need is more Rukhmabais in our society. This is possible with education and seeing all as children of God, whom He created with equal love. May all be given or at least allowed to explore a platform for individual growth, without any discrimination.

¹ *Child Marriages and the Law in India, Human Rights Law Network, June 2005.*

² *Sharma, Mani Ram, (1993). Marriage in Ancient India, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan*



Neetika Gogula, 3rd year B.A. L.L.B. student has passion for writing articles on social issues.

MAHANANDI

Mahanandi is one of the swayambhu kshetras of Lord Shiva. The high mountain peaks surrounding the temple, add to its pristine beauty. Sri Mahanandishwara in the sanctum sanctorum is a swayambhu Linga. Adjacent to this temple, there is another temple of Goddess Kameshwari, Lord Shiva's consort. This punyakshetra is situated close to Nandyala in Kurnool district.



Historical facts reveal that this temple came into existence during the rule of King Nandana. The present Gopavaram village was earlier called 'Gopithavaram'. A cowherd from this village noticed that one of his cows was letting her milk flow into an anthill. One day when he was watching, to his amazement, he saw a boy coming out of the anthill and drinking the milk shed by the cow. The news spread like wild fire among the villagers and was brought to the King's notice. He personally went to supervise along with his bodyguard. He was surprised to see the cow feeding the boy with milk and went forward to have a closer look. The cow heard the sound and stepped on the anthill in fright. The boy disappeared and the perplexed king returned to his palace, wondering who that boy was. The same night, King Nandana had a dream in which Lord Shiva appeared and said, "It was Me, who was drinking the cow's milk. Perform puja near the anthill and construct a temple in that place. I will come in the form of Linga. I will take the name of Mahanandishwara with Navanandis established in the surrounding area. Goddess Ganga will serve me in this kshetra. You will gain name and fame." The king was very happy with the dream.

He went with his troop to the specified place, the next day and was astonished to see the anthill had already transformed into a Shivalinga. He constructed a temple according to the

instructions he had received in the dream and named the Linga, Mahanandishwara. The place where the cow's hoof left its mark is visible even today on the swayambhu linga. Ganga flows at the base of the Shivalinga in the Rudrakunda. A peculiarity of the water is that it has a constant flow irrespective of the change of seasons. The water is so crystal clear that even a needle dropped into the water is clearly visible. Outside the main temple, two more kundas are built and named Vishnukunda and Brahmakunda and the Ganga water from Rudrakunda is diverted into these kundas.

Behind the main shrine there are three small shrines with a Shivalinga in each shrine. It is stated that if these are worshipped they will take one beyond the sthoola, sukshma and karana shariras to the turiya stage. The nine nandis are, Prathamnandi, Mahanandi, Vinayakanandi, Vishnunandi, Rudranandi, Naganandi, Garudanandi, Suryanandi, Krishnanandi and Somanandi. Pilgrims visit all the navanandis and complete their tour of this Mahanandi punyakshetra.

- *Subhadra K.*



Greenouncement!



"She is three, possibly four. Her gentle eyes dilate somewhat as the doctor benumbs her with anesthesia. He then makes a small incision on her back, cuts open her stomach to pull out a 50 paise coin, a rubber balloon, a metal Ganesha, a rubber stamp, a couple of iron nails, a



bottle cork and plastic — reams and reams of plastic. At the end of the operation which lasts nearly an hour and a half, seven doctors have, between them, pulled out 55 kgs of plastic from the cow's stomach."-a piece of news from 2007 news paper. But things have only gotten worse since.



The ever enthusiastic students of Vidya Mandir, Nachiketa Tapovan teamed with some volunteers and teachers and are getting ready to start an Environmental Awareness Club. The club's agenda is simple to begin with-



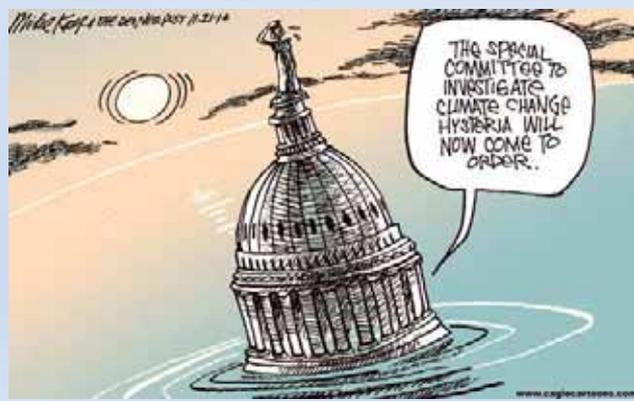
practicing and campaigning on cutting down waste especially plastic.

Reduce Reuse and Recycle!

Ideas, participation, information, involvement, expert consultation, alternate methods to reduce waste are invited eagerly.

E-mail: nachiketanjali1@gmail.com

LET'S ACT BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE...



Natural pesticide for plants

Ingredients: Fresh neem leaves- 250 gms; Camphor tablets- 2 pieces; Water- 4 liters

Method: Boil neem leaves with camphor tablets until half the quantity of water remains and then strain. Sprinkle the neem water on the leaves of the plants. Water the plants well that day and also for the next 2-3 days. Put the leaves in the soil. This can be done every 20 days to keep the plants healthy and away from pests, ants etc.

- Mamta Agarwal

Vignana Vikasini 2011

Tapovan's Maiden Science Fair

The students, volunteers and teachers at Nachiketa Tapovan, demonstrated the best of their zeal, diligence, creativity and improvisation in putting together a display of working models, drawings and experiments in their first ever Science Fair on the 25th January 2011. The Chief Guests, Retd. Scientist, Sri Nagabhushan Rao garu and Dr Rohini, US returned Oncologist lighted the lamp and graced the occasion. Sri Nagabhushan Rao garu advised the students to take this opportunity of scholarship 'to read, read and read' and question and learn. Dr Rohini reminded the young girls and boys to pay attention to what they eat and to take care of their body because 'Health is wealth'.

The exhibits were simple, low or even no cost models, very eagerly and clearly explained by the students. The Janata Fridge, a working model of practically no cost and requires no power as an alternative for refrigerator was of perfect timing when the hot weather is just around the corner. Each and every exhibit echoed the efforts



of the zealous spirits, the curious minds and the naive little hands that carved it making it difficult for the judges- Dr Rohini and Annapurna R. to choose. To name a few that deserve mention were Rain Water Harvesting model, self-sufficient Nachiketa Tapovan's model, Water cycle and Tejaswini's presentation of Holy Basil. Last but not least the prize winning model of Traffic Signals prepared and presented by Sravani of 6th class was unequivocally the impeccable of all.



Annual Day - Republic Day Celebrations



Every year we get to enjoy a double scoop of fun at Nachiketa Tapovan on the 26th January and this year was no different. After the flag was hoisted by the Chief guest Dr Shivananda Reddy garu, U.S. returned Radiologist, and salutation to Ma Bharathi was proudly rendered, the gathering proceeded to Dhyana Mandir to continue with the celebrations. Children presented dances and skits and songs to the delight of audience taking them on a roller coaster of emotions. The fisherman's dance cheered up the audience with rhythm and gaiety while the skit on national leaders evoked inspiration and patriotism.

The students were awarded cash prizes for academic proficiency in the year 2009-10 in Math, Science, English and Arts and Crafts. The cash prizes would go into the proficient student's fixed deposit account to mature after 5 years.

Shiva of class VII stole the limelight by winning most of the prizes in his class. The winners are:

Jyothi	- Class II
Sunitha	- Class III
Gurubrahmayya	- Class IV
Anand	- Class VI
Nagamani	- Class VI
Shiva	- Class VII

We congratulate them all for their hardwork and perseverance.

Parents who were also invited to the celebration were very elated to witness their children's achievements, talents, confidence and well-rounded development. They were also thrilled to know that their Nachiketa Tapovan Daily Banking Account Savings have accumulated to Rs 84,000.



SPONSOR OPTIONS

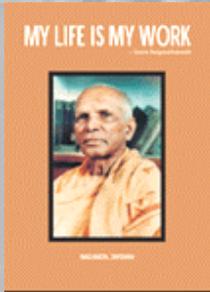
Anna daanam maha daanam; vidya daanam mahattaram.

Annena kshanika trupthihi yaavajjeevanthu vidyaya.

Vidya Mandir at Nachiketa Tapovan is currently able to accommodate a family of about 170 children who receive all-round nourishment from man-making education to milk-n-meals and basic health-aid in an atmosphere of genuine love. Kind-hearted Well wishers have been the unseen force behind this offering to God. We thank you for your continued support.

Vidya Daanam (Education)	4500/year/child
Anna Daanam (Mid-day Meals)	3500/day
Ksheera Daanam (Morning Milk)	700/day
Alpa Aharam (Snacks)	500/day
Vastra Daanam (Uniforms)	600/2 pairs
Dinnerware (Steel Plates & Glasses)	5000/ 50 sets
Stationery Supplies (Copier Paper)	5000/term
Festivals Celebration	1500/festival
Oushadhi (Medical Supplies)	5000/month

Celebrate your Special Days with the Children at Nachiketa Tapovan!



PUBLICATION

"My life is my work" is a pictorial biography that leads the reader through different dimensions of Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj's life providing a glimpse of his oneness with the nature through His teachings. First edition of this book was released on 1st March 2006 followed by the second edition on 11th July 2006 and 3rd edition on 22nd November 2007. The Books are available at Nachiketa Tapovan at Kavuri Hills and Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad for a subsidized price of Rs. 250/-.

Sanskrita Bharati

4-2-72, Badi Chowdi, Sultan Bazar, Hyderabad – 500 195

Phones: 040-2475 0111, 2475 0333, samskritabharatihyd@gmail.com

At this time, we have the following Sanskrit learning centres in the Twin Cities (Hyderabad / Secunderabad), which are planned to be run on a steady basis for the coming one year.

1. **Padmaraonagar** – Kowtha Swarajya Vihar, Near Park/Gharoanda Super Bazar
Gita Sikshana Kendram – Tue, Wed and Thu – 6:30pm to 8:30pm
2. **Madhapur** – Nachiketa Tapovan, # 70, Phase I, Kavuri Hills, Madhapur, Hyderabad
Balakendram – Thu only – 2.00pm to 3.00pm
Saptahikam – Thu only – 3.00pm to 4:30pm
Saptahikam – Sat & Sun – 10am to 12noon & 1.00pm to 3.00pm (Gita Sikshana)
3. **Yousufguda** – Vivekananda Kendra, Near Sarathi Studios
Saptahikam – Thu only – 11.00am to 1.00pm
4. **AS Rao Nagar** – Tentatively at Sri VS Raju's House, Near Poulomi Hospital
Saptahikam – Thu only – 6:30am to 8:30am

Learn Sanskrit

AN APPEAL



Dear Atman

"When a person really desires something, all the universe conspires to help that person to realize his dream." This is truer when a selfless desire is pursued by a group of ardent seekers. This was proven by the multifarious growth of Nachiketa Tapovan from a humble hut into a 3-storeyed building in Kavuri Hills and onto a 40 acre spiritual haven in Gairan Tanda in Jadcherla with His blessings and your good wishes. The small group has now multiplied into a big joint family of Karma yogis.

Imparting literacy, combined with love, care and cultural values to children from impoverished families was in the fore front ever since the inception of Nachiketa Tapovan. Whether this objective has been accomplished or not, can be well illustrated by the progress being made by the children of Vidya Mandir who are winning accolades in all areas from academics to vocational skills to arts to yoga and chanting Vedas. The Vidya Mandir at Nachiketa Tapovan, Hyderabad is not satisfied with giving just breadwinning education but is striving to create a learning platform for each child to receive a man-making education. Thanks to the donors, well wishers, volunteers and teachers who are making this endeavor successful.

Nachiketa Tapovan's efforts to extend the same education to children from the rural areas of Gairan Tanda in Jadcherla, Mahaboobnagar are in full swing, with plans to start classes from June 2011. If Nachiketa Tapovan, located in the heart of HiTec city known for its sprawling growth, is benefiting 170 children, it is needless to mention how many will be benefited by another such Vidya Mandir in the rural areas far placed from technology, comfort and convenience.

The Vidya Mandir being constructed is planned to cover an area of **50,000 sq.ft.** around an extensive central play ground. The building will have two floors, the ground floor consisting of spacious classrooms (750 sq ft) and the entire top floor rooms devoted to laboratories like math Lab, Science lab, language lab etc. and a library. The two floors will enclose a copious 10 ft. verandah. The facility has been planned to provide character building education up to X class (progressively) under the S.S.C. board. However, materialization of this progressive project into a reality requires additional monetary and human resources.

Estimated cost of this project is ` 3.8 crores

In this time and age when people are far removed from truth and true spiritual values, the way to build a happy and healthy society lies in strengthening the spiritual base of the country and Nachiketa Tapovan has been trying to achieve this by exposing the children of Vidya Mandir to our great heritage contained in Upanishads, Epics and Puranas. We hereby fervently appeal for generous donations. Please participate in this Vidya Dana Yaga being performed to benefit the underprivileged children and thereby strengthen the cultural and spiritual values of our nation.

It may kindly be noted that donations to Nachiketa Tapovan are exempted from IncomeTax U/S 80 G of IT Act, 1961 of Govt. of India. Donations in the form of Cheques/Demand drafts may please be drawn in favour of Nachiketa Tapovan. We acknowledge the generous contributions made by donors.

Yours in the service of Motherland

Swami Nachiketananda

Invitation



Shivaratri



Date: 2nd March 2011
Time: 10.00 p.m. onwards



Venue:
NACHIKETA TAPOVAN



Holi

Date: 20th March 2011
Time: 4.00 pm



You are not in the body, the body is in you!



A NOTE TO WRITERS:

- a) You can send articles by email to nachiketanjali1@gmail.com or by post to Nachiketanjali, Nachiketa Tapovan, Plot No.70, Phase I, Kavuri Hills, Madhapur, Guttlabegumpet, Serilingampally, Ranga Reddy District. A.P., with your full name, address and contact details.
- b) Unpublished articles are not returned.
- c) Your article should be reader friendly with a positive view point.
- d) No controversial or political issues are published.
- e) Word limit for an article varies from 300 (one column) to 600 words (two columns). Writers can contact the editorial team for further details.
- f) The styles of references should be as per the 'Documentation of Sources' given at the end of the *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.
- g) Editor reserves the right to accept/ reject articles and edit the selected articles.
- h) Unsolicited articles are not acknowledged.
- i) The Editor does not accept responsibility for the author's views.
- j) Articles received will be published in one of the forthcoming issues.

BOOK REVIEW

We request Publishers to send two copies of their Spiritual, Philosophical and Religious books for publishing a Book Review in our "Nachiketanjali" - monthly Magazine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Nachiketa Tapovan is indebted to all the well-wishers, donors, patrons and advisors whose immense help and cooperation in multiple ways has helped us accomplish our goals.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS	INDIA	GIFT
Single copy	₹ 10	₹ 10
1 year	₹ 100	₹ 100
3 years	₹ 280	₹ 280
5 years	₹ 450	₹ 450

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Ashraydatas are encouraged to become patrons of the magazine by joining Nachiketanjali's Patron's Scheme. You can become patrons by donating ₹ 5000/- which will be deposited in the magazine's corpus fund. We express our thanks by announcing their names in the following issue of the Magazine and the patron will also receive a 5 year subscription of the same.

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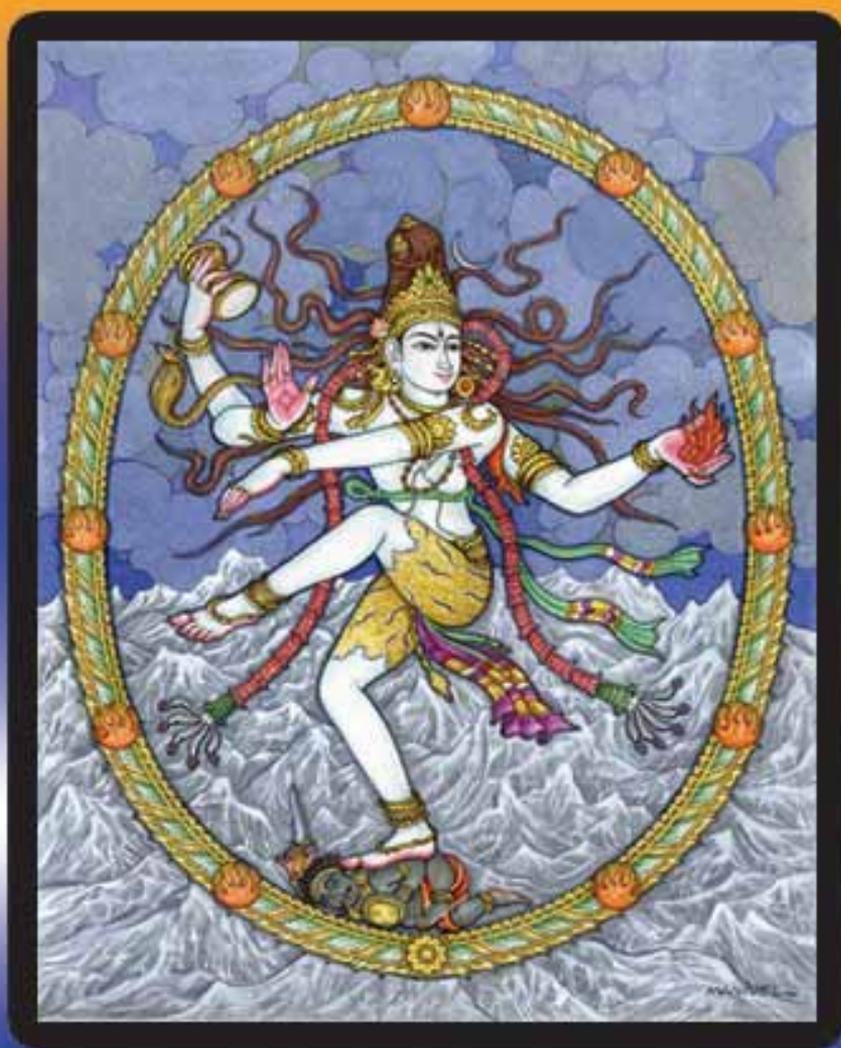
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To know yourself, be yourself.



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Om Namah Shivaya