

The Whole Trouble is for the Book-Worms

Many people begin their spiritual journeys with a book. Spiritual books generally fall into two categories. The first is about direct experiences from the lives of saints and the stories of seekers and great devotees. They light in us a desire to unravel the true purpose of life, inspire us to move forward in our spiritual lives, to seek and pray for a Master to guide us.

The second category of books is about gaining knowledge, which in fact deter our spiritual progress. Some examples are books that discuss different philosophies, trying to prove that one is better than the other; commentaries on various scriptures which are usually confusing to the lay reader (even though he may not admit it); books on the abstract concepts of our religion (like the Vedanta) that abound and are often written by those who have no experience themselves of the Supreme Truth. Such books make us believe that we know much more than we really do, and as a result, nourish the ego.

Sri Muralidhara Swamiji says that when a house is on fire, the smartest thing to do would be to find the fastest escape route out of the house instead of analyzing the cause for the fire. The hard but plain truth is that if we are truly set on attaining Realization, we surely cannot find it in a book. On the spiritual path, book knowledge is useful only for the sake of fruitless discussion and debate, and perhaps for some, to demonstrate their 'intellectuality'. This is in direct contra-

diction to the ultimate spiritual goal, which is to annihilate the mind and the ego.

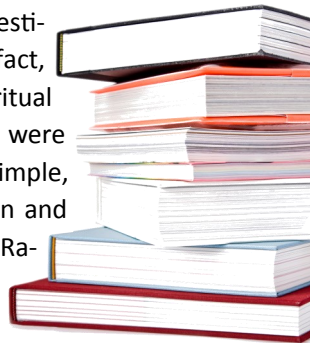
Mahans have time and again emphasized that reading books do not help the seeker.

And to stand testimony to that fact, many great spiritual giants of India were in fact simple, 'unlearned' men and women – Sri Ramakrishna

Paramahansa, Sri Sarada Devi, Anandamayi Ma, Sant Kabir, Sant Janabai, to name a few. True saints always speak out of pure experience and not through knowledge acquired from external sources.

Sri Ramana Maharshi, who advocated the path of self enquiry, once said to a well-learned visitor, "If I ask one who has not struggled through books like you to chant 'Rama Rama...', he will do it and stick to it. If I say so to one like you who have read much and are investigating matters, you will not do it for long, because you will think, 'Why should I do it? Above all, who am I that should be repeating the mantra? Let me find who I am before I proceed further'; and so you will stop japa and begin investigation."

The Maharshi later commented, "A simple man, not learned, is satisfied with japa or worship. A Jnani is of course satisfied at all times. The whole trouble is



for the book-worms."

Yogi Ramsuratkumar has said, "For the simple and clear minded, the Guru's Name and his Lotus Feet will do. It is only for the others that reading books like Bhagavad Gita is necessary."

Sant Kabir says in one of his couplets,

Pothi Padh Padh Kar Jag Mua, Pandit Bhayo Na Koye

Dhai Aakhar Prem Ke, Jo Padhe so Pandit Hoye

(Reading books and scriptures everyone died, No one became a Pandit

Two and a half words of Love, Whoever reads, Pandit he becomes)

Books do not hold the key to Liberation. The key lies with Bhagavan and the Sadguru. If we are truly intelligent, we will appeal to Him directly to show us the path, instead of wallowing in the egoistic delusion that we are capable of finding our own way through life's most complicated maze.

Nisha Giri, Houston, TX

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"In the case of Vedanta, one has to bring into practice all that has been said in it. None has said that just reading the Gita (for example) will bring Moksha. However, Srimad Bhagavatam is the only scripture, the mere reading or listening of which bestows Liberation."

—HH Sri Muralidhara Swamiji

Bhishma the Bhakta

(The auspicious day of Bhishma Ekadasi—when Bhishmacharya praised Lord Krishna with 1000 names, thus giving the world the Vishnu Sahasranama—was on Feb 6, 2009.)

Bhishmacharya is one of the central characters of the epic, Mahabharata. He was a great warrior known for his strength and adherence to dharma by upholding his lifelong vow of celibacy and royal service. He is well-known as a great Yogi, with the ability to die at will. However, what is not very apparent about the grand old man's character as projected in the Mahabharata, is his pure and one pointed devotion and love towards Lord Krishna.

The Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana emphasizes this sensitive, loving side of Bhishmacharya and portrays him as a great Bhagavata (devotee). It relates the story of how Lord Krishna Himself arrives to see his great devotee, along with the Pandavas as Bhishma lay on his bed of arrows awaiting the right time to give up his body.

At this juncture, being questioned by Yudhishthira on various dharmas, Bhishmacharya expounds on all of them. When Yudhishthira asks about the best

of all dharmas, Bhishmacharya extolls the Lord with 1000 names (Vishnu Sahasranama) and mentions that chanting the Name of the Lord is the highest dharma one can follow.

The *uttarayana punya kaala* (an auspicious time to die) approaches and Bhishmacharya frees his mind from all attachments and sings a hymn on the Lord, extolling His beauty and compassion, and prays to Him to grant him love like that of the Gopis.

The Bhishma stuti (hymn) in Srimad Bhagavatam is comprised of 11 verses representing the eleven senses (5 *karma indriyas*, 5 *jnana indriyas* and the *manas*), and is full of love and devotion to the Lord. In every verse Bhishmacharya prays for motiveless love towards the Lord. He meditates on the Lord's beautiful form in great detail. He remembers everything that the Lord did for the Pandavas and also collects with gratitude the instance when the Lord broke His own vow to uphold the vow of His devotee, Bhishma. (Lord Krishna had vowed that he would not take up any arms during the Mahabharata



war. Later Bhishmacharya took an oath that he would make Lord Krishna lift a weapon. Unable to tackle the fierce Bhishmacharya, Arjuna was about to succumb in the fight. It was then that the Lord appeared

to be enraged and apparently forgetting his vow picked up a chariot wheel and rushed forward to combat Bhishma disregarding Arjuna's pleas.) In his stuti, Bhishmacharya gratefully remembers this incident and lovingly describes Lord Krishna's countenance at that time as that of an enraged lion, with His upper garment falling and the earth trembling.

Bhishmacharya finally meditates upon the Gopis who, after having seen the charming gait, smiles and playful glances of the Lord, imitated the divine plays of the Lord in ecstasy and identified themselves with Him when he disappeared in the middle of Rasa. Bhishmacharya wishes to have devotion like the Gopis and shows that that pure love is what even a great Yogi like himself wishes for.

Sujatha Sankar, San Jose, CA

Illustration: Sripriya Sarathy, Charlotte, NC

What is the Color of God?

Our Shastras tell us that God, in His complete manifestation as Lord Krishna, is of a dark blue complexion. Every reference, from Srimad Bhagavatam to Amar Chitra Katha, pictures Sri Krishna in blue. Ask any Indian kid to color Him, and blue would be the automatic choice. Our faith in our scriptures is deep, and that, Mahans say, is sufficient to make progress.

In his book, *The Color of Water*, writer James McBride asked his mother what the color of God was. She replied metaphorically, in a very simple yet powerful manner – that He is the color of water. The answer was a great one, because haven't we all been taught that water is

colorless?

But this begs the question: What if water has a color? What would it be? A recent report by a University of Houston professor, John Lienhard, shed some light on a scientific study that helped unearth the mystery. According to the report, Walthère Victor Spring, a 19th century Belgian scientist built an apparatus with an 85-foot-long tube filled with almost 100% pure water. Then when he shone white light along it, he found (as the long red wavelengths were absorbed) that water is a "pure cerulean blue similar to that of the sky at its zenith when seen from a high mountain."

In the latter part of 19th century, in another part of the world, an interesting incident happened which explained the

original question in a logical way. Statesman, lawyer and poet Sri Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), was a student in Madras Law College. Swami Vivekananda was then in Chennai on a tour and happened to walk around the hostel where Rajaji resided. He entered Rajaji's room and saw a picture of Lord Krishna on the wall. He asked, "Why is Lord Sri Krishna blue in hue?" Rajaji answered, "Sir, the sea is limitless. So is the sky. And both are blue. God is also boundless. And so His hue is also blue."

Whether we are convinced by simple faith, empirical research or relational logic is up to our intellectual make-up, but is not the first surely the easiest and smartest way?

Sriram Ramanujam, Houston, TX



Answers and beyond...
Spiritual questions answered by
Sri Muralidhara Swamiji

Q: What is the foremost hurdle in attaining God?

A: Lack of Faith.

Q: I enjoy my family and this world. But I fear that I would lose these once I gain (spiritual) Knowledge!

A: There is absolutely no need to entertain any such fear! Only on the attainment of true Knowledge can a person really enjoy everyone and everything. This is the very reason that *Srimad Bhagavatam*, which describes Sri Krishna as *Brahma Jnani*, also describes him as *Rasika Sikhamani* (one who enjoys and appreciates everything around him).

Q: Why should we chant the Lord's name repeatedly if it is true that the utterance of His Name just once shall burn up the sins?

A: Some chant the Lord's Name for extricating their sins. Some do it for the sheer joy experienced by the mere chanting. There is absolutely no doubt that chanting the Lord's Name shall remove sins. But however high the quality of the seeds be, its growth depends on the quality of the soil it has been sown in. Likewise, the greatness of the Nama is unique indeed but the result depends on the maturity of the one who chants it. Yet, the truth is that anyone who chants Bhagavan Nama (the Name of the Lord) does not do so in vain.

Q: I love Krishna and everything to do with him. When I listen to some songs, I can visualize myself being there. But when it comes to accepting a Guru or Godhead, I become critical and start to question. How do you explain this? Is there anything wrong in my thinking? This makes me wonder if I am sincere or not in my intention or love for Krishna.

A: There is nothing wrong in your approach. Don't compel your mind to accept anything. Shower more and more love on Krishna. He will show you a true Guru by Himself.

For more such answers by Sri Swamiji, or to ask a question of your own, please visit the Nama Dwaar website at www.namadwaar.org.

Holi Legends

The festival of Holi is celebrated on the day after the full moon in early March every year. It celebrates spring commemorating various events in Hindu mythology. Let us see a few important myths and stories associated with Holi.

Radha and Krishna

Lord Krishna was dark-hued while his spiritual love-mate Radha had a fair-complexion.

So child Krishna often used to complain to his mother Yasoda about the nature's injustice towards him.



One day, Yasoda suggested that Krishna could apply color on Radha's face and change her complexion to any color he desired. The naughty Krishna immediately set off on a mission to play the prank on Radha. Paintings and murals depict Krishna throwing colors on Radha and other Gopis. This lovable prank of throwing colored powder and water jets called *pichkaris* soon gained popularity and evolved into the tradition of Holi. This is the reason that people carry images of Krishna and Radha through the streets on Holi. Holi in Mathura region, where Krishna was born, is celebrated with pomp and splendor.

Holika and Prahalad

The demon-king Hiranyakashipu won over all three worlds and considered himself to be God. He forced everyone to worship him instead of the Almighty Lord. However, his little son Prahalad refused to do so. An-

Kids' Corner

gered by his son's devotion to Lord Vishnu, Hiranyakashipu tried to kill Prahalad by various means. Hiranyakashipu's sister named Holika had powers to walk through fire unscathed. He ordered her to take Prahalad through the fire hoping that the fire would reduce him to ashes. However, Lord Vishnu's grace saved Prahalad while Holika perished. She was not aware that her powers worked only if she entered the fire alone.

Even today, bonfires are lit on the night of Holi in memory of the burning of the wicked aunt Holika.

Story Of Kamadeva

Lord Shiva went into a deep meditation after his consort Sati immolated herself at her father Daksha's yagna. Lord Shiva's state caused repercussions in the world. The gods conspired to bring him out of his trance with the help of Goddess Parvati and Kamadeva, the god of love. Mindful of the consequences, Kamadeva shot one of his love arrows on the great Lord who was beyond desires. Though successful in his efforts, Kamadeva incurred the wrath of Lord Shiva and was burned on the spot by the Lord's third eye. However, later Lord Shiva bestowed immortality on Kamadeva. It is believed that Lord Shiva burned Kamadeva on the day of Holi. Many people worship Kamadeva for his sacrifice by offering him mango blossoms that he loved and sandalwood paste to cool the burns.

Chitra V, San Jose, CA



Krishna
by Nikitha Ballari
5th Grade
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Mahashivaratri

1. When is Mahasivaratri celebrated?

- A. 13th night of Shravana
- B. 12th night of Chaitra
- C. 14th night of Phalgun

2. Mahasivaratri marks which of the following?

- A. Marriage of Shiva with Parvati
- B. The day when Shiva danced the Tandava
- C. Manifestation of Lord Shiva in the form of a Linga
- D. A and C only
- E. All of the above

3. It is believed that Shiva's body consists of five mantras. They are called

- A. Panchabrahman
- B. Panchabhutha
- C. Panchendriya

4. Shiva was given the name 'Neelakantha' because

- A. He killed a blue demon called Neelasura
- B. His throat is blue in color because he drank the poison Halahala
- C. He has a blue complexion

Compiled by
Ramya Srinivasan, San Jose, CA
Answers:

1-C, 2-E, 3-A, 4-B



Satsang News and Events



California Bay Area

Apart from the regular weekly Nama satsangs at the Fremont Temple, Bhagavatam Study Circle sessions were held on Feb 7 and 21 at the residences of Ramya and Srini G Balakrishnan, and Shalini and Prabhakar. Students learned *Kunti Stuti* parayana and discussed the meaning of the Dhyana slokas and the important slokas in Canto 1, Chapter 2 and 3 of Srimalad Bhagavatam. *Sri Bhishma stuti* was also chanted on the occasion of Bhishma ekadasi. A pop quiz was conducted at the end of the second session with enthusiastic participation from everyone present.

Future Bhagavatam study circle sessions will be held on March 7 and 21. For more information please contact Srini G Balakrishnan at (408) 420-8486 or Sankar Venkatramani at (408) 507-0241.

Orlando

Akhanda Mahamantra Nama Sankirtan was conducted from 9 AM to 6 PM on Feb 14 at the residence of Geetha and Aravind Thathachari.

Akhanda Nama will again be conducted on Feb 28 from 6 AM to 6 PM. For more information please call (321) 214-3424.

Seattle

The primary focus for Seattle Satsangs in February, besides the usual Mahamantra chanting, was *Vishnu Sahasranamam* recitation. Devotees also share their anubhavas pertaining to Guru Smaranai, Krishna Bhakti, Power of Mahamantra, etc. Sri Swamiji's '*Vasudeva Vasudeva*' bhajan is very popular among adults and little ones alike! Bala Gurukulam is also conducted for children with themes such as Guru, Lord Subramanya and Lord Krishna. On February 22, a special Mahashivaratri satsang was held. Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai and other Shiva related stutis were recited. The satsangs conclude with chanting of Mahamantra rendered along with *Kaliyaiyum bali kollum* and *Maithreem Bhajatha* for universal peace.

Chicago

By the divine grace of Sri Swamiji, a wonderful satsang was held on Feb 22 at the residence of Yaamini and Zivanprakash. Vinodji, a devotee of Sri Swamiji from Chennai who is visiting Chicago, participated enthusiastically and sang a number of kirtans on Sri Swamiji and Sri Krishna. The satsang started with Mahamantra Nama sankirtan, followed by bhajans and a talk by Yaaminiji on the importance of satsang.

Satsangs with Vinodji's participation are also planned for the weekend of Feb 28-Mar 1 and Mar 7-8. For more information please call Yaminiji at (630) 747-6249.



Houston

On Jan 31, Houston satsang invited Sri Bankim Gosaiji, a reputed Ramayan kathakar, to do a sangeetha upanyas on Sundarkand of *Ramcharitmanas*. The satsang started with *Kaliyaiyum bali kollum* and about 15 mins of Mahamantra chanting. This was followed by the katha. More than 40 people attended the event. Srimalad Bhagavatam study circle sessions were conducted on Feb 1 and 15. Future sessions will be conducted every other week. The next session will be held on Mar 1.

Akhanda Mahamantra Nama kirtan will be performed from 6 AM to 6 PM on Feb 28 at the residence of Nisha and Sriram Ramanujam. For more information, please call (832) 515-1251.



Dallas

With Sri Swamiji's and Lord Krishna's blessing, participation in the weekly Dallas satsangs has increased in the last few weeks. The satsangs include Mahamantra chanting and slokas and stories from the Bhagavatam for kids.

A special Mahashivaratri telecon satsang was held on Feb 22 with participation from seven families. Each family chanted Nama for 10 mins, and everyone felt fortunate to attend satsang on an auspicious day.

Weekly satsangs are held regularly in the following cities:

Bay Area, CA ; Boston, MA ; Chicago, IL; Cortlandt Manor, NY; Dallas, TX; Houston, TX ; Los Angeles, CA; Orlando, FL; Seattle, WA

A weekly national telecon satsang is also held every Friday evening at 8:30 PM CST.

GOD-organized Srimalad Bhagavatam study circles are conducted in different cities.

Email newsletter@godivinity.org for more information.



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