

nāma vāṇar

A monthly journal glorifying Sanatana Dharma from the portals of Bhakti

Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare , Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Oct-Nov 2008, Issue 3

Infinite Ways to Infinite Bliss

In this section, we present excerpts from the discourses of His Holiness Sri Muralidhara Swamiji of Chennai, India.** In commemoration of Sri Swamiji's *jayanthi*, which falls on 29 October 2008, in this issue we present his philosophy and message to the world.

The Easiest Way to Spiritual

If we take a look at the world around us, we have a million reasons to be proud about. Have we not landed on the Moon? Have we not sent Pathfinder to Mars? There has been exponential progress in the realm of science.

Nevertheless, if we contemplate for a moment on the question 'Have all these advancements made life happier and more peaceful than before? The answer is a quick and unambiguous 'NO!' If we were to assume that intellectual, cultural and scientific backwardness were the reasons for conflicts of cavemen and barbaric tribes, how do we explain the situation today?

In an age when we claim to be at the peak of intellectual and cultural refinement, violence and war are on the rise globally. We expect intellectual developments to nullify differences, wipe out boundaries and take us to universal brotherhood. On the contrary, more and more boundaries are being demarcated today. Instead of integration into one powerful, peaceful society, there is disintegration in the name of race, religion and language.

But how can we achieve integration? Down the ages, numerous thinkers, revolutionaries, leaders and organizations who have worked towards that goal have failed because they tried to bring about unity through changes in the external world and society. External transformation is not durable. Universal brotherhood and peace can never be brought about by power, force or scientific advancement.

The only solution is the inner transformation of every single person, and the only way to achieve this is through spirituality. To achieve this (spirituality), we need not change our lifestyle, travel elsewhere or renounce anything; we can go to work or school, live our usual life and yet bring about Universal Brotherhood. How is that possible?

Indian culture is one of the most ancient cultures of the world and it is globally acknowledged that our scriptures and great sages have accurately predicted the course of the world and future. Thousands of years ago, foreseeing the troubled times ahead, they have shown



the remedy which is tailor-made for Kali yuga – *Hari Nāma Sankirtan* (Chanting the Names of the Lord). Why *Hari Nāma*? Because people of the Kali yuga are all in a hurry and lack time. So, *Hari Nāma*! This is a way shown by *Mahāns*

(Saints) and not one sketched by our mind. The Divine Names of God are verily Mantra.

What is a *Mahāmantra*? *Mahāmantra* means one that will bestow *moksha* (salvation) and also all the trivial things of life, i.e., that which bestows everything – from employment, wealth, health, trouble-free life, peace of mind to *moksha*. *Mahāmantra* has been spoken of in the *Kali Santarana Upanishad*, one of the 108 Upanishads:

Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare |

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare | |

One need not chant the *Mahāmantra* deeming it to be the name of Rama or Krishna.

Contd. On Page 3

Sri Muralidhara Swamiji was born on Diwali day in 1961 under the *Swāthi* star. This year his *jayanthi* falls on 29 October.

Sri Swamiji preaches the significance of *Nāma Kirtan* (chanting the Divine Names of the Lord) as the easiest and the most powerful path to establish divinity and peace in this world. He advocates chanting of the 'Hare Rama...' *Mahāmantra* as the simplest means to liberation in the Kali Yuga. Sri Swamiji also strives for the perpetuation of the *Vaideeka Dharma* by running Veda/Shashtra Patashalas and by supporting Vedic scholars. In addition, Sri Swamiji also spends his energy in the renovation and maintenance of ancient Hindu temples, especially those sung by Saints.

Inside this issue

Maya, Rebirth and the Elephant God	Pg 2
Kids' Corner— Why we celebrate Diwali	Pg 3
Kids' Quiz— Diwali trivia	Pg 3
Satsang News	Pg 4
Upcoming Events	Pg 4

**There may appear to be variations in the 'tense' of the language. This is due to the fact that great effort has been taken to maintain the original style of the lecture. Any discrepancy/lapse in the translated version is the sole responsibility of the person/s who translated the work from Tamil into English.



Maya, Rebirth and the Elephant

- Bala Subramanian, Seattle, WA

As I stood in my first American wedding engagement party during my graduate student-years, I heard a cordial "Hi" behind me. The first thing I noticed as I turned was a Coke in this person's hand and I felt instant camaraderie, as we were the only two in the entire party with Coke cans. I then looked up to see that he wore a priest collar, which puzzled me. My friend John (the fiancé) came over and quickly introduced the priest as Daniel, his childhood friend. In a flash, John was gone and the two Coke sippers were left alone in a sea of champagne sippers.

Daniel asked, "So you are Hindu?"

Taken aback, I nodded yes.

He then asked, "What do you think about Maya?"

"I do not know her," I quickly answered, and to prevent any affront to my charisma added, "yet".

He said, "No I mean Maya in your religion. That piano over there, isn't it Maya?"

Before I could say anything, he asked, "Why do you believe in rebirth and have so many gods? How can you worship a god with an elephant head?..."

As he started to rattle off these questions, I began looking for a window to jump out of. Thank God (not sure which one I thanked at that time), John came over with Emily (his fiancée) and I was rescued!

That night, while returning to my dorm room, I asked myself a fundamental question – What does Hinduism stand

for and how can I explain it to skeptics like Daniel in a simple way?

It has been more than a decade since my encounter with Daniel and I am still trying to find an answer to this question. I have found that I cannot define our religion in the format laid out by Western paradigms. Rather, I can start with contrasting some of the unique qualities of our *Sanātana Dharma* with other faiths and thus attempt to paint a picture.

Way of Life than Way of Worship

It is simply impossible to categorize *Sanātana Dharma* as just a religion. How can you categorize something that has monotheism, polytheism, panentheism, pantheism and atheism as part of its practice, as a 'religion'? It is simply a way of life. To quote Rig Veda, "*Ekam sat, viprah bahudha vadanti*" (Truth is one but men describe it differently). Our dharma allows for every aspect of belief and concept of god. This is truly a way of life – how people in the Indian subcontinent lived and evolved since thousands of years before Christ.

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive

Sanātana Dharma is highly descriptive. It is akin to having a AAA map trying to find the route from Detroit to Chicago. There are many ways to enlightenment and it is up to the follower to figure out which way to go. This is a fundamental aspect of our Dharma and a key difference from other religions of the world. Other faiths generally prescribe what needs to be done and specify a particular way, rather than allowing one to

choose a suitable path.

Samsāra or the Cycle of Rebirth

While this concept is central to our Dharma, most other mainstream religions do not agree with it. Interestingly, earlier versions of Christianity and Judaism are supposed to have believed in rebirth. The logic is simple. If you owe (as your karma), you pay (as being re-born again). If you do not owe, you get to go home (Moksha). Furthermore, the mere existence of pestilence, poverty, evil that afflicts newborns, cannot be simply explained as suffering given by a loving God. It can only be explained by *Samsāra*.

Maya

My acquaintance Daniel's favorite subject. Maya is neither untrue nor true in our philosophy. One of *Sanātana Dharma's* teachings is that of the Brahman which is all permeating and all encompassing. It is beyond name and form, and yet is the source of all things we see. Maya shows the dualistic aspect of *Brāhman*. Maya is not about being an illusion (as in a mirage). Rather it is the engagement in the pursuit of temporal pleasures as opposed to Bliss (realizing the Brahman). A glass of milk takes a shape of the glass, while a carton of milk takes the shape of the carton. Maya provides the perspective of milk having the shape of its container and prevents us from realizing that milk itself is shapeless regardless of what container it is in. Thus the perception of visible truth as opposed to the Ultimate Truth is the central concept of Maya and very own to our Dharma.

Pearls of Wisdom

In his work Shata sloki (100 verses), Adi Sankara says that in the vasanta ruthu (spring season) a cool breeze blows and fragrant flowers bloom in abundance, bringing joy to all. But neither the season nor the flowers are aware of the joy bestowed on the world by their very presence. Likewise, Mahātmās (Great souls/Saints) wander about in the world without any will of their own. They spread joy and do good to the world by their very presence. Their presence in this world is only for welfare of the world. Bhagavan (the Lord) sends Mahātmās only for this reason.

Why we celebrate Diwali

Diwali is the most popular and most spectacular festival in India. It marks the victory of good over evil, and the lifting of spiritual darkness. There are different legends associated with the celebration of Diwali. Here we present some of more popular versions.

♦ Return of Rama

Diwali celebrates the return of Lord Rama with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana to Ayodhya after a 14 year exile, during which he defeated the demon king Ravana. Since Lord Rama traveled from southern India to his kingdom in northern India, he passed through the south first. This is the reason the festival is celebrated a day earlier in South India. Symbolically, Diwali also marks the homecoming of goodwill and faith after an absence.

♦ Krishna Slaying Narakasura

Another well-known Diwali legend is the killing of the demon Narakasura by Lord Krishna and his wife Satyabhama. Narakasura, by virtue of an earlier boon, could only be killed by his mother Bhoodevi. So Lord

Krishna, by feigning injury, incited his wife Satyabhama (an incarnation of Bhoodevi) to kill Narakasura. Before dying, Narakasura requested



that his demise be celebrated by people around the world.

♦ Lakshmi Puja and Harvest Festival

In many parts of India, Diwali marks the end of the harvest season. Farmers pray to Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, in gratitude for the season past and for favor in the forthcoming season. Diwali is also considered to be the day when Goddess Lakshmi emerged from the Ocean of Milk when it was churned during the Lord's *Kurma Avatar*.

♦ Shakti's Austerities

According to the *Skanda Purāna*, the goddess Shakti observed 21 days of austerities to obtain half of the body of Lord Shiva. Diwali marks the final day of this austerity, when Lord Shiva accepted Shakti into his left half and appeared as *Ardhanārīshvara* (Lord who is half-woman).

♦ Bali's Annual Visit to the Earth

The demon-king Bali was banished to the nether world after he was made to offer up superiority over the three worlds to Lord Vishnu who was in the form of the dwarf brahmin *Vāmana*. But pleased with the king's humility, the Lord allowed him to return to the earth once a year. Diwali is a celebration of that annual return.



Kids' Quiz—Diwali Trivia

1. What does the word 'Diwali' mean?
 - A. Festival of Colors
 - B. Festival Of Lights
 - C. Festival of Music
2. Which three religious groups celebrate Diwali?
 - A. Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism
 - B. Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism
 - C. Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism
3. In which Hindu month is Diwali celebrated?
 - A. Margasirsa (Margazhi)
 - B. Karthika
 - C. Sravana
4. For how many days do Diwali celebrations generally last?
 - A. Three
 - B. Five
 - C. One
5. What do Diwali lamps signify?
 - A. Triumph of good over evil
 - B. Hope
 - C. Thanksgiving to God

Answers:

1-B, 2-A, 3-B, 4-B, 5-A

The Easiest Way...

Contd. From Page 1

The mantra in itself is highly potent. What is the testimony for this? The chanting of the Mahāmantra has been going on in India and other parts of the world every day. The participants are verily the testimony for the potency of the Mahāmantra.

All Mahāns, right from Azhwars and Nayanmars have advocated Nāma sankirtan. Papa Ramdas, Yogi Ramsuratkumar, Tukaram, Namdev, Jnaneshwar, Swami Jnanananda, have all spoken about the

glory of the Divine Name. Even Ramana Maharishi speaks of Nāma *mahima* in his Tamil composition *Aksharamanamālai* with the glory of the name 'Arunachala'. Human birth is a rare and wonderful birth. Should we not be grateful to the Lord for this? So, do Nāma sankirtan. If you are a person practicing yoga or Vedanta *vichara* or any other path, continue to do it but along with it also do Nāma sankirtan. All Mahāns have repeatedly cried out Nāma sankirtan's glory. I do not ask any of you to give up anything to do this. You can remain in life and do Nāma sankirtan. This is verily our way.

The street hawker goes all around the town carrying his pots of good curd and milk screaming at the top of his voice, but nobody comes forward to buy his goods. Illicit liquor is sold away from the public eye, in seclusion and hiding. But everyone from the town manages to locate that place and queues up to buy it. Likewise, when we ask everybody to chant the blissful Divine Names, nobody comes forward. On the other hand, people run after vices like gambling, drinking and the like. It is a weird world indeed!

- Sant Kabirdas



Satsangs News and

Poornima Kumarasami, an expert speaker and disciple of Sri Muralidhara Swamiji, is currently visiting the US with the purpose of spreading the glory of the Lord.



Iowa

Poornimaji spent 4-5 Oct at Des Moines, Iowa, where she spoke at the Iowa Hindu Temple on Practical Spirituality. She also conducted a kids' program in Iowa. The kids participated with enthusiasm and enjoyed the activities which included enacting a play, learning and reciting *slokas* and chanting the Mahāmantra. At the end of the session all the kids were given a small portrait of Premika Varadan/Madhuri Sakhi and a



Mahāmantra sticker.



Chicago

Poornimaji spoke at several homes in the Chicago area between 27 Sep and 3 Oct on subjects such as the Importance of Satsang, Attaining the Grace of the Lord and Peace in Life, and Meera Bai's Bhakti, among others. The highlight of her Chicago visit was her talk at the home of a Christian family, where she spoke about the one Supreme God and how different faiths are only different paths to the same Supreme Power.



Poornimaji's Upcoming Schedule

City	Date/Venue	Contact
Raleigh, NC	23- 27 Oct	Girija Murali; (919) 439-7163
Houston, TX	28 Oct - 4 Nov, 13-28 Nov	Narayan Dave; (832) 243-6036
Dallas, TX	5-12 Nov	Booma V; (972) 821-2012

Seattle

Poornimaji's visit to Seattle this year coincided with the "anniversary" of the Seattle Namadwaar group, which was started soon after her visit last year. What started with a handful of Sri Swamiji's devotees with a heart full of desire to do Nāma kirtan has grown to around 30 members who relish the sweetness of satsang and the Divine Name. This year, Poornimaji's schedule – from 7-12 October – included a workshop at Microsoft on 'Facing Challenges in the Corporate Environment' and a talk on 'Bhakta Vijayam' at the Bothell Hindu Temple & Cultural Center, apart from several other home satsangs.

You are invited to attend...

A grand **Srimad Bhagavata Saptaha discourse** (in Hindi) by Poornimaji during Thanksgiving week, 22-28 November at **Shri Radha Krishna Temple in Houston, TX**.
For more information, please call Narayan Dave (832) 243-6036.
 Accommodation will be provided for out-of-town attendees.

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; Seattle, WA

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

Email newsletter@godivinity.org for more information about the telecon satsang or regular satsangs in your area.



Published by:
Global Organization for Divinity
 3363 Bel Mira Way
 San Jose, CA 95135
 Phone: (408) 420-8486

Feedback email: newsletter@godivinity.org

Visit our websites:

www.namadwaar.org and www.godivinity.org

Newsletter team:

Content—Aravind TRA, Bala Subramanian, Chitra Venkatramani, Latha Kumanan, Narayanan Sathiamoorthy, Nisha Giri, Ramya Srinivasan, Sriram Ramanujam, Yaamini ZivanPrakash.

Illustrations—Nithya Balasubramanian, Sripriya Gomatam.