

What is Grace?

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We use the word "Grace" very frequently.

But what does it really mean and how do we know its existence? Can we actually perceive it? And more importantly, how can we be so sure that we are not imagining it?



We hear that grace is God or Guru's blessing in an imperceptible form that protects or bestows us with goodness. For example, a miraculous escape from an accident may lead us to think that it was only the Lord's Divine Grace that saved. But then it could also be pure luck or some may even think that we deserved it due to our good 'karma' of the past. So what is the truth? Was it grace that saved us or karma?

It is only the Guru who gives clarity to this mystery. It's important to understand the nature of a Guru to decipher this. An *uttama* (pure) Guru doesn't perform miracles. He doesn't give us a million injunctions to follow. He never says a negative word. And despite being hounded by thousands of us, with numerous queries and problems, He still has time for each and every one of us.

He works day and night to transform us - our thoughts, passions, actions and reactions, our indulgences away from the world and towards the Lord. Yet He doesn't lay any claim to that at all.

But why does He do all this?

It's simply because He genuinely cares. He genuinely cares about each and every one of us. 'But why?', continues our mind which has never seen or heard someone like this out in the world.

There's no mystery here. The answer is that that's just the nature of the Guru. With that there can be no more questions, for do we question why a flower is

fragrant or a snake poisonous? A Guru's love is truly unconditional, even superior to a million mothers, for a mother needs the connection of 'her' child to express the love.

When such a Guru comes into our lives, can we ascertain this to any karma? It is not possible for us to 'do' anything to earn this unconditional love on us. So there certainly has to be something else that's establishing the circle of influence.

So long as we think we 'deserve' and 'control' our destinies, the system will not interfere. So, in the past, it would have been true enough that we were meant to be saved in that car accident.

But when a Guru comes into our life, His unconditional care makes us automatically thankful. With gratitude, flowers a new kind of perspective that we are in His care and control and whatever happens is through His protection. The feeling of gratitude ripening over time results in complete surrender. Fleeting moments of gratitude leads to fleeting moments of acceptance of His Grace. As mahans would say, "Grace is always there. Are you ready for it, is the question."

Now what happens is that whether we are saved in the accident or not, we will still deem it Grace. And just that simple change in approach will make us very positive. While in the past, all 'negative' endings would have made us sad and depressed, being under the umbrella of a Guru, even a 'negative' result (from the outside world's perspective) would have no bearing on the disciple.

For His ways would mean that this sequence of events is the best for us at this point. Perhaps it is to wash off some karma; perhaps it was in lieu of saving us from an even worse incident; perhaps it will open new horizons of opportunities. But the truth is, it actually doesn't matter why! It only matters that it was the Guru's will.

When such surrender ripens, we get a great comfort that "there is someone to care for me and I don't need to worry."

This change in thought process is in fact the standing proof of the presence of "Grace", because we did nothing to invoke this. It happened because of gratitude to unconditional love.

The beauty in this is that, even this realization credits only the disciple and not the Guru, for without gratitude and surrender (disciple's attributes), the love of a Guru will not reflect in the disciple's eyes as Grace. But this is only because they (the Gurus) simply don't want any credit.

However, let us realize that it is indeed only His compassion that makes us the vessel for receiving His Grace.

Sriram Ramanujam, Houston TX

Sri Poornima Kumarasami



Sri Poornimaji, a disciple of Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji, is an excellent speaker who is adept at presenting

philosophical, spiritual, devotional and inspirational subjects in a wonderful and interesting manner. She will be in the USA between March and June 2015. She will conduct spiritual discourses and satsangs, Vasanta Utsavs, Bhagavata Retreat programs and more in various cities across the USA. Please visit www.godivinity.org for schedule.

Inside this Issue

Cherished Memoirs - 22	Pg 2
Kids' Story - The Greatness of Rama	Pg 2
Madhura Geetam - 22	Pg 3
Quiz - Different versions of Ramayana	Pg 3
News and Events	Pg 4



Cherished Memoirs 22

This series chronicles interesting experiences recounted by the devotees of HH Maharanyam Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji. These articles are translations from the series, "Madhuramaana Mahaneeyar" that is published every month in Madhuramurali Tamil monthly magazine.

Sins and Merits - Are They True?

Once, a few people came to visit Sri Swamiji. Sri Swamiji received them with love and conversed with them. At that time, the conversation turned towards the topic of *Sanatana Dharma* (Hinduism) and its holy scriptures. The visitors remarked that the holy scriptures (*shastras*) were written only to guide the human race in the right path

and to establish discipline and righteousness in society; and that beyond that, there was nothing in them. With a smile on his face, Sri Swamiji listened to everything they said. Later in the conversation, the visitors mentioned their trip to Gaya (a holy place in India where sacrificial offerings/rites to dead ancestors are performed) where they had performed rites for their dead ancestors. Sri Swamiji then asked them, "Why did you perform these rites?"

The visitors replied, "We performed the rites in order for our parents to attain salvation." Sri Swamiji enquired, "Who

told you that your parents will attain salvation if you perform last rites at Gaya?" The visitors didn't have an answer and were perplexed. Further, Sri Swamiji looked at them and said, "People doing a wrongful act often claim that they do it because they do not believe in sins. However the same people believe in various meritorious acts and perform them. It is indeed ironical that people who do not believe in sins believe in merits!"



HH Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji

*Original Tamil article by Dr. A Bhagyanathan,
Sep 2005 issue of Madhuramurali
Translated by Viji Ramakrishnan, Dallas TX*

The Greatness of Rama

Prince Rama was the 7th avatar of Vishnu. He was born to Dasharatha and Kausalya in the Ikshvaku Dynasty. Rama is the best example of a man who had all the virtues and followed dharma. All through his life he showed many examples of good virtues.

When Sage Viswamitra came to ask King Dasharatha for Rama and Lakshmana's help to protect his *yajna*, the king first refused. Then when the Raja Guru explained the facts, he sent the young princes with the sage. Here Rama *respected* his father's and Guru's orders.

Queen Kaikeyi used her two boons from Dasharatha to send Rama to the forest and to make Bharata the king. Dasharatha was devastated. When she commanded Rama to go to the forest for 14 years after her mind was poisoned by Mantara, Rama happily accepted and embraced the fact as it was a way for him to fulfil the promise his father made to her. He obeyed her without questioning though he could have easily refused. He did *pithruvakya paripalana* (fulfilled his father's promise). Hence he displayed *obedience* to parents without protest. Following Kaikeyi's word and fulfilling his father's promise showed *dharma* as well.

While going to the forest he met his



childhood friend Guha. Guha was shocked on hearing the state of his beloved friend, so he opened up his home to Rama and was ready to serve him happily. Rama loved him so much even though he was a mere boatman. He embraced him and introduced him to Lakshmana saying he was one of the brothers in their family. He came down so much for Guha and maintained a great *friendship* with him.

After Sita Devi was kidnapped by the evil king Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana went around searching for Sita ma. On the way they met Sabari, who had been chanting the Rama Nama for years. Before, Sabari had been a hunter without any culture. After meeting her Guru, she was transformed into a great Bhakta. When her guru was leaving to Vaikunta, Sabari was shattered. Her guru asked her what boon she wanted; she said she wanted to be with him (guru). Her guru gave her the *taraka mantra*, and she had been chanting it ever since. Every day she eagerly awaited Rama's arrival. Though she didn't know who he was, she picked berries every day for him. One day, Rama amazed by her devotion, came to her hut and gave her, his darshan. While he was there she had some berries ready for him. To make sure it was sweet she tasted every one before giving it to him out of her pure innocent love. She gave him the sweet ones

and threw away the bad ones. *Without thinking it had her spit on it he ate it, because of her true devotion.*

As time went on they reached Kishkinda. There the Vanara king Sugriva was living in fear of death. When Hanuman introduced him to Rama, Sugriva took refuge in him. Prince Rama *protected* the frightened, helpless Sugriva, and killed Vali for him. Once again, Sugriva was made the king of Kishkinda.

Once the Vanaras and Hanuman found that Sita lived in Lanka in the Palace of Ravana, they immediately started preparing for a war with Ravana. Ravana's brother Vibheeshana disagreed with him and set out to take refuge in Rama. When Vibheeshana came there, everyone except Hanuman suspected him and didn't trust him as he was from the enemy's side. Though everyone was against him, Rama took pity on him, embraced him and not only gave him *refuge* but also accepted this Bhagavatha as another brother.

When Ravana was losing the war, Rama was ready to forgive him and leave him alone if he gave Sita back. Rama was *kind* enough to even *forgive* the mean king who kidnapped and tortured his own wife, though Ravana refused his kindness out of his arrogance.

After winning the war against Ravana and getting Sita back, though the kingdom was now technically his, he made Vibheeshana the king and returned to Ayodhya.

Kishori Prakash, 11 yrs, Dallas TX

Story Time



Madhura Geetam - Bharata Pradakshina 22

In this series, we will go on a pradakshina of Bharata desha as we present, each month, a kirtan composed by His Holiness Maharanyam Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji on a particular kshetra, starting from south India and then going north and back.

Tiruvidanthai

There is a beautiful temple for Lord Varaha in Tiruvidanthai, a town which is about 38 km from Chennai. The Lord here has taken the form of boar and is found standing on Adi Sessa, holding the conch and the holy discus in his hands and embracing his consort Lakshmi Devi with his left hand. It is this posture of the Lord that gives the place its name (Tiru - Lakshmi, Idanthai - Left).

The Lord here is also known as Nithya Kalyana Perumal. The legend says, there was once a sage called Kavala who had 360 daughters. He prayed to Lord Vishnu to help him get his daughters married. The Lord answered the sage's prayer. He himself came down as a

bachelor every day for 360 days and married all the daughters. Since the Lord had a wedding celebration everyday for 360 days, he got the name Nithya Kalyana Perumal and the place is known as Nithya Kalyanapuri.

The temple itself was built during the Pallava period and is more than 1000 years old. Among the Azhwars, Tirumangai Azhwar has sung beautiful compositions on this Lord. Sri Swamiji too has sung a beautiful song on Lord Varaha of Tiruvidanthai set in Sindhubhairavi Raga. The lyrics and its meaning are presented here.



Lakshmi Varaha Perumal

Raga: Sindhu Bharavi

lakshmi varAham bhajare—mAnasa
angushtarUpAt kshaNamAtreNa druta -
mohana virATsvarUpam yoga sharIram

hiraNyAksha haraNam sruti samrakshakam
yagna svarUpam bhU varAham

kshIrAbdi putrIm Alingana karam
kshArAbdi bhanjanam tatvopadesha
kAtaram
kunjita pAdam sanchita pApa vinAshakam
muraLidhara hrudaya tApatraya haraNam

Meaning:

O! Ye! Sing the glories of (Lord) Lakshmi Varaha

From a thumb-sized form, he transformed in a second (to)

A Yogic body with a captivating majestic form.

He killed HiranyAksha and protected the Vedas (sruti)

He is the form of holy fire sacrifice, the Boar bearing Mother Earth

His hand embraces the daughter of the Ocean of Milk (Lakshmi)

He divided the ocean (as Rama) and is the essence of all philosophical teachings

He stands with curved feet and destroys obstacles

He destroys the three types of troubles in Muralidhara's heart

Sowmya Balasubramanian, Fremont CA

Quiz Time - Different Versions of Ramayana

March 28 is Rama Navami this year. Did you know Ramayana is the most popular Hindu story that has been presented in numerous different languages and versions by so many saints? Take this quiz to learn about some of them:



- Who was the great saint who wrote the Ramayana which is recognized to be the oldest and first version?
A. Sage Valmiki
B. Sage Tulasidas
C. Sage Veda Vyasa
- Name the Tamil poet who is the author of Ramavataram, the Tamil version of Ramayana
A. Subramanya Bharathi
B. Kambar
C. Thiruvalluvar
- Name the great Saint who wrote 'Bhavartha Ramayana' in Marathi

- Sant Eknath
- Sant Tukaram
- Sant Jnaneshwar
- This version of Ramayana written by Goswami Tulasidas is very popular in North India
A. Adhyatma Ramayana
B. Pothi Ramayana
C. Ramacharitmanas
- This great saint wrote a series of kirtans depicting the entire Ramayana
A. Sri Purandaradasa
B. Sant Meera Bai
C. Sri Thyagaraja
- These are two of many Asian countries in which Ramayana is part of the culture:
A. Iraq and Iran
B. Indonesia and Thailand
C. Russia and Turkey
- 'Chaupai' is a quatrain verse in Indian poetry that uses a metre of four syllables. Hanuman Chalisa is based on this meter. Name the version of Ramayana that is set

- Sant Eknath
- Sant Tukaram
- Sant Jnaneshwar
- _____ Ramayana is found in Brahmanda Purana which is authored by Vyasa
A. Mahabharata
B. Bhagavad Gita
C. Adhyatma
- Name the scripture in which Sage Shuka narrated a concise version of Ramayana:
A. Mahabharata
B. Srimad Bhagavatam
C. Srimad Bhagavad Gita
- In which Parva in Mahabharata is Ramayana narrated?
A. Drona Parva
B. Bheeshma Parva
C. Vana Parva

**Compiled by
Ramya Srinivasan, San Jose CA**

Answers:

1-A, 2-B, 3-B, 4-C, 5-C, 6-B, 7-B, 8-C, 9-B, 10-C



News & Events

SPECIAL SATSANG AT WATAUGA, TX



NAMA RELAY IN ATLANTA, GA



SPRING CLEAN-UP AT FORGOTTEN ANGELS, HOUSTON TX



NAMADWAAR'S 5TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION, HOUSTON TX



BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION WITH AKANDANAMA, ORLANDO, FL



Upcoming Events!

Raleigh:

- * Mar 14 - 27, Akanda Nama Saptaham
- * Mar 28, Gopa Kuteeram Kid's performance at Sri Shridi SaiBaba Mandir of North Carolina.

For more details contact

gopakuteeram.carync@gmail.com

Sri Poornima ji's satsangs:

Atlanta - Mar 20 - 28, Sri Ram Navami celebration at Hanuman Temple, Alpharetta.

Orlando - April 2 - 5, Discourse on Srimad Ramayan at Hindu Temple, Casselberry.

Minneapolis - April 10 - 12, Madhura Vasanta Utsav.

Boston - April 14 - 23, Srimad Bhagavatha Saptaham

For more info visit www.godivinity.org

Apart from weekly satsangs in numerous cities across the USA, a Telecon satsang is held every Fri evening and Tele-Bhagavatam discourse is telecast every Tue evening, both at 8:30 PM CST. Anyone is welcome to attend.
Ph: 605-475-4000, Passcode: 131581

Gopa Kuteeram (kids' programs) & Srimad Bhagavatam study circles are conducted in various cities.

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