

VEDIC WISDOM FESTIVAL 2020

VEDIC VISION FOR A COMPLETE LIFE



Aarsha Vidya Foundation

www.vedicwisdom.in

From top to bottom:

Bhagavān Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Lord Śiva as the guru)

Bhagavān Veda Vyāsa

Adi Śankarācārya Bhagavatpāda

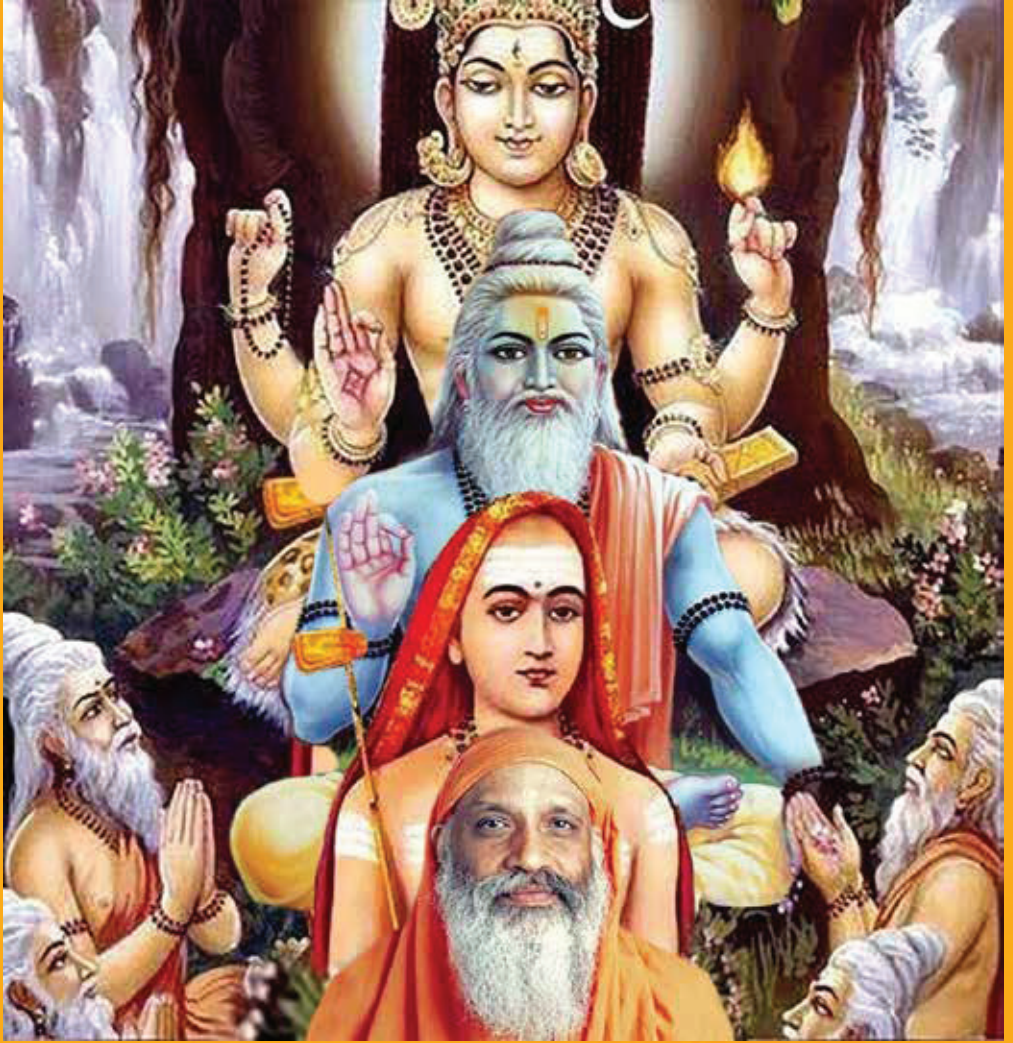
Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati ji

॥ सदा शिवसमारम्भाम् शङ्कराचार्य मध्यमां
अस्मदाचार्य पर्यन्तां वन्दे गुरु परम्परां ॥

I salute the lineage of teachers beginning with the ever auspicious
Lord Shiva (linked by) Adi Shankaracarya in the middle and extending
upto my own teacher.

Aarsha Vidya Foundation is a registered trust in
Mumbai dedicated to sharing the teachings of Vedanta.

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Guru- śiṣya paramparā

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

On the occasion of the third edition of the Vedic Wisdom Festival we are pleased to offer this prasada in the form of this ebook to you.

The theme of the booklet is 'Vedic vision for a complete life' Keeping this in mind we have contributions from all the speakers of the festival. The authors are both traditional and contemporary, Indian and international and include a dynamic mix of some eminent Gurus, traditional practitioners, artists and authors

Our tradition recognizes that the greatest contribution one can make is the gift of Vidya, knowledge as that is the only thing that grows by giving. Precisely the reason, we have put together this booklet for you to read and reflect.

Much like prasada that is received, eaten, digested and assimilated do read these articles and allow your life to be enriched.

With love and prayers,

Brahmavidananda &
Brahmaprajnananda



THE MAGIC OF COMMITMENT

by Swamini Brahmajnanananda

When some people hear the word commitment they want to run away. Hence, it is no wonder that fear of commitment as a phrase has found a place of pride in Wikipedia. Although Fear of commitment is spoken of more in the context of a romantic relationship. I want to expand the scope of commitment as it should be because our every day life is a sign of the commitments we have made.

Most magical things have happened in my life because of my commitment to certain things and people, no, not my passion, not my skills, not my hard work, not my education, not my parentage, not my intelligence, not my meditation and prayers. Just commitment – a certain dedication, devotion, a loyalty and a love for something.

The funny thing about commitment is that people want to commit only when they discover that they are good at something. But you can't be good at that something unless you are committed.

Let's talk about a romantic commitment. Whether you are living in or married the partnership is about both team work and intimacy. On a regular basis you show up and are there for each other, through thick and thin, good times and bad . On a regular basis you contribute your time, resources, effort and generosity in a loving way and you also seek the same. Generations have lived like this. Without doing this work on regular basis, people want guarantees. Most young women I meet don't want to marry either because they have seen their parents fight like cats and dogs no sorry dogs or they have been too scarred by previous relationships or they want a guarantee that their marriage will work. Unless they commit they won't know if the partnership works. And the partnership won't work unless they commit. You don't want to have egg on your face. But it is still a chicken and egg situation!

We yearn for consistency and certainty.

But the only certainty and guarantee available is death.
Bhagavan Krsna reminds us –
jaatasya hi dhruvo mrtyuh dhruvam janma mrtasya cha
Tasmaad aparahaaryerthe na tvam shochitum arhasi.

For what which is born – (venture, relationship, day, a tree, a person, corona virus) death is certain and for that which is dead, birth is certain. Therefore you better not grieve over that which cannot be altered.

Yes it is true that besides death, your job, your youth, your relationship, your health, your finances everything is subject to fluctuation and uncertain.

What is also true is that you can bring certainty into your life, you can bring consistency in your life. How? By your commitment.

Karmani eva adhikaara te – you have a choice only wrt to your actions not the results. With your choices and actions you contribute to the results never control it. Commitment does not come magically by drinking some magical potion or chanting some secret mantra or saying abracadabra. You create magic by your commitment.

Here we have to be careful to not confuse commitment with an obligation for an activity. You may be doing a job but surely the job is a means to an end. Is the end or priority for you - sustaining a lifestyle or contributing to sustainability for the company and your family?

You commit to something long term when you see the value of that priority in your life. The commitment could be to your marriage, to your health, to building a secure financial portfolio or to making a positive change in the world with your contribution or anything else.

Something magical happens when you commit to something. There is more enthusiasm in your spirit and a spring in your walk. You are focused on possibility and trying to make things happen.

You show up every day to honor your commitment irrespective of your moods. Of course you are entitled to be a drama king or a drama queen, as the case may be. Muttering under your breath and cursing away as you move the cursor across your screen, you still show up.

Yes you are afraid, yes you are uncertain. You acknowledge it. You neither deny nor

hide behind what you feel.

Despite what you feel which is fleeting anyway, you bring certainty into your life by your thoughtful, deliberate and committed actions.

You wanted to control everything, right? so let's just start with you. One thing trying to control yourself will do, either you will become competent and compassionate or a nervous wreck.

You are committed to the all rounded development of your children. And yes, bringing up children can also be frustrating and yes, why can't they just shut up? But, because you are committed to their growth, what are you not willing to do? From cleaning them up to securing their admissions to helping with homework to enrolling them in hobby classes, to spying on them and sometimes their phone chats, to helping them marry and 'settle down' as is often said in India. You do all this because of your commitment.

Did you always have the skills and knowledge to be a parent or an entrepreneur or a singer or a writer or a speaker? Possibly not but you learn. You grow into the role only because of your commitment.

Do you consistently feel like doing it ? No. Would you not like a break? Sure. Is it not exhausting? It is. But you do it. You do it because you are committed to it.

There is no room for Ifs and Buts – If I am in the mood I will clean my child's teeth. If I feel like it I will change the diaper. My son threw a temper tantrum,. That's it. It's over – we don't say that.

A couple of decades ago when I experimented with Tai chi for a year, I learnt an important lesson about commitment. Tai chi is a beautiful martial art form, The movements are slow and deliberate. My teacher, Dr Shashi Menon would say, make a committed step. A committed step was placing the foot on the ground in the right way such that it is not too inward nor too outward. The foot had to be placed such that your next move could be smooth and not jarring, a potential position. And groaning through the pain of holding my foot in mid air for minutes, I would say – No I can't commit. What if I do something wrong? And he would say – We 'll deal with that later.

Right now commit. It was an important lesson that translated to all areas of my life.

For all the commitments we have, there is never enough time, enough resources, enough attention to commit and yet we honor the commitment –not in our heads but in our actions.

Passion is far too over rated. So is goal setting. So is inspiration. So is motivation. But commitment can include all this and much more.

Commitment is real, the situation in front of you requires your response, be it a person or the emergency health situation. Commitment is not opposed to freedom but out of freedom. You grow in your freedom and possibility

When you are committed you are willing to learn. You become a life long learner. Your learning did not stop with school. Still, we spend way too much time learning skills and teaching skills. Honestly learning a skill whether it is video editing, soccer or baking or python is easy. What is not easy is sticking with it. What is not easy is cutting through your excuses and dealing with the frustration to serve the end result, day after day, week after week, month after month.

Will you always be 100% committed? Possibly. 100% consistent?
No one in the world is.

The cruise ship that is sailing to Sitka in Alaska is committed. Yet, there is no one straight line from Seattle to Sitka. The ship stays on course sailing. The waters may be choppy. There is a possibility of a storm. But the ship stays on course generally.

The same thing with our commitment. As long as you stay the course it is fine. You may go off a little bit here and there. There will be days that you want to quit, days when you just don't have the energy but you keep at it in the cruise of your life. Sure things are uncertain as they will always be. Your commitment helps you to get over rages, cravings and dveshas, aversions. Your commitment to dharma – doing what is appropriate in different situations at different times serves you well. Then you don't get entangled in the specifics of the 'he said- she said'.

Even if you take the pursuit of Vedanta, it cannot be a casual affair. Vedanta is about you and you are the most important person in your life. For a Vedanta student, moksha and hence the course is a commitment. The course includes a series of actions

– attending Vedanta classes, meditation, puja, chanting, some asana and praanayama practice, going through your notes, discussing with your friends and most importantly living the vision of oneness in your life. When you are committed, things may be easy or difficult, things may take time or be instant, it does not matter. You stay the course.

If Vedanta has the same level of importance as your other pursuits only then it can grow as a commitment. When you discover the joy of commitment, you learn. You grow.

You see that life is magical because you make magic.

(This is from Swamini B's podcast episode – Vedanta – the river of wisdom)
www.discoveratma.com



CHOICES, RESPONSIBILITY AND LIVING IN COURAGE

Swami Brahmavidananda Saraswati

Very often people not being able to move forward in their lives put the blame on family history, personal history, lack of talents, situations and circumstances. Though all of these have a role to play in your life, you are not defined only by your talents or your history. The choices that you make, make you what you are. There may be people of talent but if they choose not to use the talent and focus elsewhere, then the talent is wasted. Someone with a lesser talent who chooses to work hard and struggle, definitely achieves more. History is full of examples where people with limited talents were ready to choose and do what it takes. They achieved far greater things than people of great talent who were afraid to make choices and accept their consequences. To make a choice also means to decide a course of action and accept the consequences of that action. Life rewards action not your talents or your heritage.

It is accepted that in the arts like singing etc some talent is a blessing. Fate may also play a part. But if you are willing to make a choice, every moment of your life that is guided by Dharma, universal ethics then minimum, you become a person of character. You become a person who is willing to do what it takes, a person to reckon with, in society. At the end of the day, what matters is what you have become not what you have achieved. And who knows, the success you seek may well be within your grasp. We are not guaranteeing success here. But we are definitely saying that you are going to grow into a person of character, as someone more likely to succeed than someone who is not making those choices. Those of us who are below 35 years will remember the words of a great philosopher who said – "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities. The philosopher I am referring to is Professor Dumbledore from Harry Potter.

We can happily make choices when we understand what responsibility is. It is true that some people in positions of power enjoy power without responsibility. But, have we really looked at what responsibility is? In my classes on the Gita, I always present responsibility not as blame or burden as it is usually used. Like we often say, 'Who is responsible for this?', in short, 'Who is to be blamed for this?'. A middle aged parent tells his teenage son, "Go ahead. Enjoy life. You will understand what responsibility is

when you come to my age.’ Here, the word responsibility is being used as a burden. I say that, ‘responsibility is your ability to respond to a given situation’.

Responsibility is nothing but exercising your freedom of choice in any given situation. However bad a situation it is, there is always a choice of what you can do about it. Not doing is also a choice. When we say that we did not have a choice what does it mean? The consequences of every choice we see is so problematic that I don’t want to take any of those choices. But really speaking, it is only proactive, creative responses to a situation that really ensure my freedom. Exercising that choice itself is freedom. Our situation of two months of lockdown is not a great situation. The lockdown is not an answer to the problem. It is only managing a problem, buying us time to upgrade our health infrastructure. So, if we have proactively and creatively upgraded it then we are in a better position to handle this health crisis. By exercising our freedom of choice, we have created a greater freedom for us, so that we can lift the lockdown sooner and get the economy back on track. But if that is not done, then we are in a soup. Therefore it is healthy to look upon responsibility as freedom of choice that you enjoy as a human being. An animal cannot choose what to have for breakfast – whether a cutlet or an omelet. But the human being, can!. In exercising the choice lies a lot of human freedom.

People are living in so much of fear these days. All fear comes from a perception of loss. It may be name, fame, money, job, employment, business or loved ones. It sounds rational though very often we are not talking about a rational appreciation of a probability, but only a possibility. The second thought that follows this, is what causes the fear, ‘I cannot handle that loss’. One becomes fearful, not only due to the loss but my inability at present to handle that. Therefore, all it requires to overcome this fear is to convert ‘I cannot handle it’ to ‘I can handle it’. In fact, when we say I cannot handle it, the maximum truth it contains is that ‘I cannot handle it as I am, of now’, what we really mean is ‘ I don’t think I can handle it’. Therefore what is necessary is courage. When someone faces a problem it is easy for anyone else to say, ‘Be courageous’.

What does it take to be courageous? I have to use whatever resources I have, whether it is psychological insights, my personal competency, my spiritual moorings, my self esteem, the help I can get from family and friends, whatever I can do to ‘I cannot handle the loss’ to ‘I am capable of handling it’. I may not be happy but I am capable of handling that loss. It is this change of thinking from ‘I cannot handle it’ to ‘I can handle it’ that helps me live a life in courage. If there was no fear, there is no need for

courage either. Courage is there because fear is there. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is doing what is right, doing what is expected of me, in spite of the fear. I am willing to accept my fear and my thinking of I cannot handle it and use whatever resources I have for the right conversion in my thinking. This helps me deal with some losses that are inevitable. Focusing on the above helps me to handle different situations. I live in courage.

(These articles have appeared in the 'Guiding light column' of the Free press journal)
www.vedicwsidom.in



THE NEED TO REWRITE THE HISTORY OF INDIA

by **Padmashri David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri)**

*Adapted from **Hinduism and the Clash of Civilizations** by*

David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri)

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History is Always Being Rewritten

In recent years, the government of India and several state governments have decided to revise history books, particularly relative to the ancient period, bringing up recent data that calls into question the Aryan invasion and the many theories that have arisen from it. Over the past few decades numerous archaeological finds have been made throughout North India, considerably widening the civilization of the region and uncovering its continuity through time, rendering the Aryan Invasion idea obsolete. Quite predictably, leftists in India raised a cry of tampering with history, as if history is a fixed science that cannot be adjusted. The fact is that history books in India still largely teach the British view of India from the colonial era and have not changed much since the independence of the country over fifty years ago. The only exception is history books in Marxist states like Bengal that have been rewritten in a communist slant, which is even more against the traditions of the country than the British view.

History books are always being rewritten and they should be, as new information comes in and our understanding of culture widens. This does not mean that history should carelessly be rewritten to suit an ideology, as in communist Russia or in Nazi Germany, but that we must not turn old accounts of history into an unalterable dogma. History is not a material science like physics that deals with hard facts and even physics textbooks are continually being updated. The West has often tried to give its version of history the finality of science, but political changes since the end of the colonial era have revealed the biases behind its accounts, particularly of Africa and Asia. The western account of history cannot be given the finality of the physical sciences and should be expected to change radically over time.

Colonial Distortions of History East and West

Up to two decades ago, the history of America was taught as the wanton aggression of the Native Americans, the so-called Red Indians, on the gentle white settlers who simply wanted to farm and raise their families in a wide land that had room for many people. This was the predominant view of Christians and of educated Europeans in America. The real history was one of the genocide of native peoples and their cultures in a greed for land and power. The so-called savages honored all treaties. The so-called civilized white man didn't honor any.

The European history of Africa followed similar prejudices, with the native blacks as uncivilized barbarians that had to be civilized by the white Europeans. That the blacks did have venerable and rich old cultures and were really the target of exploitation and genocide was covered over. The same phenomenon occurred throughout the colonial world, including Asia, where native peoples were subjugated and their cultures denigrated. Like the blacks, some Asians were turned into slaves or serfs, uprooted from their land and taken to foreign countries and commercially exploited. This was also done in the name of civilizational advancement through Christianity and European culture. That is how over a million Indians ended up in the Caribbean in Trinidad and Guyana.

The European treatment of India was the same as that of America and Africa, starting with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, who brought the cruel ways of the Inquisition to India. The Indian mutiny of 1857 occurred because the British brought in aggressive and intolerant missionaries and had the country in the grip of a cruel economic exploitation. Yet such oppression has been left out of the history of India as told by the Europeans and independent India has not rewritten the record adequately. Similarly, the destruction wrought during the Islamic period, which was worse than the British period in terms of religious and economic exploitation as well as genocide, has been similarly ignored or downplayed so as not to offend minority communities.

Yet can one seriously imagine—given all the colonial distortions of history worldwide which are only slowly being removed today—that no real revision of the history of India needs to be made? Can we believe that somehow by luck, in spite of their prejudices, that colonial and European scholars got the history of India right and wrote it without any distortion or bias in their favor, though they failed everywhere else?

Liberals and leftists in America sympathize with the native cultures of Africa and

America and their need not only for correcting historical accounts but also for restoration for historical wrongs. But, strangely, leftists in India still vaunt the colonial view that India was uncivilized before the British and denigrate their own native traditions!

When ancient historical finds are made in China, as with the uncovering of the tomb of the first emperor dating to the third century BCE, there is great national pride even among the communists. But all the massive finds of the Harappan/Sarasvati culture, as well as the retracing of the once great Sarasvati River, bring no pride to the leftist-secular intellectuals of India. They would ignore these, dismiss them as an invention of Hindu communalists, or imagine that they represent an unknown civilization that vanished mysteriously with no real connection to the later traditions of the region!

Though the Vedic literature is the largest of the ancient world by all accounts, Indian leftists will have no pride in it and seek to denigrate it as best they can. Though the Mahabharata at over two thousand years old is the world's oldest and longest national epic, Indian leftists don't even want it taught in the schools (even when the common people find great pride in watching the Mahabharata on television).

In this regard, we should remember that Marxism and communism in India are largely anti-national movements. Marxists in India sided with China against India during the Indo-Chinese war of 1962 and raised no criticism of China for its attack. They sided with the British during the independence movement. This is a stark contrast to communism in Russia, China and Vietnam in which were part of larger nationalistic movements. This is because Indian Marxists came mainly from a British Marxist background and did not participate in anti-colonial struggles, as did the followers of Mao and Ho-chi-minh. They were largely intellectuals from wealthy families, educated in England, not workers in the field, much less freedom fighters.

Actually the distortion of history has been done intentionally by many modern Indian historians, particularly covering over historical wrongs against Hindus. They believe that by correcting history that the present can be changed. They pretend that the generally cruel Muslim rule in India was benign and secular so that this account will serve to make modern Hindus and Muslims more benign and secular and help them bury the past. But the opposite is true. If a nation does not face its true history, it has no future and its present remains confused. This would be like American historians pretending that Native Americans (Red Indians) were treated well through history

and that accounts of their oppression and genocide were false or exaggerated, so as to bring harmony to the two communities today. This would only allow old prejudices to continue.

India has not faced its past in order not to offend minorities in the country, who may not resonate with the older Hindu and Buddhist cultures of the country. It has also been intentionally done in order to prevent the majority community from awakening from its colonial and religious oppression, fearing this would increase communal disharmony, even though distortions caused by this, like the image of Hindus as backward idolaters, continue in the world media today. The result is that the country lacks a genuine national pride and a sense of its continuity to ancient times.

History and National Pride

One of the main purposes of history books, as taught in different countries in the world, is to instill a sense of national pride and honor. Whether it is the United States, Great Britain, Russia, Germany or China, this is certainly the case today and has been so as long as these countries have existed as modern nations. The lives of great leaders, particularly the founders of the country are highlighted, the continuity of the nation's history is emphasized, and the importance of the nation in the history of the world and the greatness of the national culture are stressed. Students are expected to come away from reading accounts of their history with a sense of national greatness and purpose, not only for the past but also for the future.

However, India is a strange and unique country in which history books are often anti-national in nature. India has largely kept in tact the British approach to Indian history devised in the colonial era. Students of such textbooks come away apologetic or confused about their country and its traditions. Textbooks in Marxist ruled states of India like Bengal and Kerala leave their students with a sense of the greatness of communism and communist countries like China or even Russia which is no longer communist, rather than any real regard for India and its great traditions.

History books in India try to ignore the dominant Hindu ethos of the country and its history before the Islamic period. India's greatest historical and cultural document, the Mahabharata, is hardly given any attention in the schools. So too, the Vedas, Ramayana, Puranas, Buddhist Jatakas and other prime historical and cultural

documents of the country are ignored because of their religious overtones. If they do address India as a nation, it is only India of the independence movement that they acknowledge, as if prior to 1947 India did not really exist. While Nehru is made important, older kings from the Rig Vedic Bharatas to Yudishthira of the Mahabharata period to the Marathas of the eighteenth century are hardly mentioned. There is no real sense of any historical continuity to the culture, much less to the country. While Mahatma Gandhi is emphasized, the greater spiritual traditions of India and its great teachers from the Vedic rishis, Vedantic, Buddhist and Jain sages to modern savants like Sri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi is not given much attention.

It is true that history should not be a mere instrument of a destructive nationalism and should avoid instilling aggression against other lands and peoples, even when upholding what is valuable in a nation's history. But this does not require that the national value of historical studies is negated altogether.

The question, therefore, is how the history accounts in India can be made to reflect and instill a genuine nationalism and sense of the country's history and destiny. India, after all, is one of the great civilizations of the world, with cultural traditions that have much value for humanity. Such historical accounts must reflect the richness and diversity of Indic civilization, but they cannot ignore its unity and continuity either.

The fact is that you cannot build a nation without creating history books that instill a positive nationalism, particularly in the youth. The real danger in India is not the arising of a chauvinistic nationalism like that of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy—which are foreign to the mentality and ethos of the country—but a lack of national spirit and historical consciousness that keeps people alienated from their roots and the country divided.

India needs a real national spirit and for this a national sense of history, pride and purpose is required. A true Indian nationalism will be rooted in an Indian ethos of dharma, spirituality and pluralism, but this does not mean there can be no national or historical pride without encouraging communalism in the country. On the contrary, a greater sense of national identity would be the best thing to counter the disintegrating influence of religious, castist and regional interests that are bringing the country down.

Therefore we must ask: Why can't Indians connect India's traditional ancient literature, the Vedas, with its archaeology through Harappa and the many Sarasvati river sites? Why can't Indians find national pride in their own history both on literary and archaeological levels? Why should history in India be used for national shame, rather than national pride? Why should the history of India place Indic civilization out of India? These are questions that must be answered.

Western and Indic Views of History

The subject of history in the western context is a very different than in the Indian context. In the western view, history is mainly an account of political events and economic progress, a purely outward affair. In the Hindu view, history is a means of teaching detachment, showing how great kings and kingdoms come and go in the course of time. It has an inner value as a spiritual teaching about the nature of human life and the need for liberation from worldly concerns. In the western view, history is progressive from the crude beginnings of agriculture and village life moving forward to the present day urban culture. In the Hindu view, history is cyclical, with various cultures coming and going over time as the soul seeks liberation from the phenomenal world.

The western progressive account of history is quite flawed. For example, the first civilizations of the ancient world that we can document—including Egypt, Sumeria, India and China—did not regard themselves as the first but were aware of many cultures and kingdoms before them, particularly prior to a great flood. The civilizations that we regard as the first saw themselves as very old with many antecedents! Yet we pretend that there was nothing before them! In addition, the civilizations of the Third Millennium BCE, like those of Egypt and Harappan/Sarasvati India, had better urban and architectural achievements than those that followed for many centuries. Even Europe had its Dark Ages after the Roman period in which much knowledge was lost. This idea of history as linear progress is clearly not the case. While humanity has progressed scientifically, this is mainly over the past five hundred years. On the other hand, we see a spiritual decline since ancient times, and over the last century we can note a decline in culture, art, music and philosophy in Europe itself, coinciding or even caused by great advances in science.

As India is the only civilization of antiquity to survive the onslaught of time, it is the

special responsibility of Indians to discover not only their history but also that of the entire ancient world. Just as there are unquestioned distortions of ancient India, similar distortions of other ancient cultures also exist. For example, the religion of ancient Egypt, which like that of the Vedas demonstrates much occult and spiritual significance, is similarly dismissed as polytheism, idolatry or henotheism (worshipping different Gods as the supreme God), exactly like the Vedas. Revamping the way history is taught in Indian schools would be a major step in the direction of a more authentic and spiritual sensitive history of the world. It is a scientific and spiritual imperative, not only for India but for all countries



FROM FORM TO THE FORMLESS

by Ishwarya Chaitanya

(Bharatnatyam dancer and yoga teacher)

It is a normal course of proceedings for temples in India to be closed following morning worship, re-opened again during the late afternoon and locked once more at night. Devotees plan their visit according to temple timings to ensure proper darshan of the Lord.

Following the morning ritual worship at the Gangadhareshwara temple in Rishikesh, a routine action sparked my curiosity. After the morning puja, I would often sit for meditation. One morning, as the pujari locked the door to the garbagraha, a slew of doubts struck me: is the all-powerful Lord Shiva now trapped behind the door? Why is he locked up and kept separate from his devotees who wish to see him? Why is he in a dark little room we cannot enter? Does he function only from that space? When we crowd in front of the garbagraha, stand on our tip toes, elbow each other for a glimpse, who are we really looking at? What is this idea of an all-powerful God-hood that we have superimposed onto a piece of rock that is stuck inside a tiny room?

If Shiva is all-pervasive, the cause of creation, if he is there in every rock, every tree, if he is the content of the air we breathe, why don't we bow down and do namaskara to everything? Why do we often walk by without giving the tree or pebble in front of us a second glance? Is the lone tree less powerful than the mantra-fied linga? What is the significance of this type of worship?

I recalled a workshop by Sri S. Jayachandran, noted danceuse and scholar who picked apart our notions of Chidambaram and the dancing lord Nataraja.

Shiva in Chidambaram has three aspects: aroopa: formless, rooparoopa: formless form and roopa: form. The formless is worshipped as akasha lingam, or space. Rooraroopa is the spatika lingam, to which abhishekam is done daily. This linga is a form which represents all forms. The famed Chidambaram Nataraja in the Ananda Tandava pose with the left leg lifted is the roopa: anthropomorphized form. Worship starting with the relatable anthropomorphized form of Shiva can eventually lead the devotee to the worship of Shiva as the formless, boundless, reality of existence.

The purpose of the temple dancer was to invoke the lord through her dance just as the lord is invoked through mantra. For the sake of worship and building a relationship, the lord is made to be relatable in form. As one delves deeper into the meaning behind worship, the meaning behind mantra and the significance of the temple structure, all the external forms of worship then become internalized as they are representing one's own body, one's own life experience. The idea of the existence of a conscious being is made clearer through the relentless pursuit of truth in the form of knowledge and all forms of expression, be it dance, music, sculpture or Veda are representatives of the same concept of 'Godhood,' or reality. The practice of art helps to attain a subtle mind fit for this contemplation.

The seeming movement from formless to form and dissolution of form is nothing but the work of the greatest choreographer of our lives whose abode is in our lotus-heart, ever-available, ever-shining.

The five sabhas of the Chidambaram temple are akin to the panchakoshas. The innermost, chit sabha represents the anandamaya kosha, the kanakasabha: the vijñanamaya kosha, the nrttasabha: the manomaya kosha, the devasabha: the pranamaya kosha and the rajasabha represents the annamayakosha. There are 21,600 golden plates on the top of the hall. These represent the number of breaths taken in a day. There are 72,000 planks in the floor, representing the nadis through which the prana flows. Every nail used to fasten the planks is akin to the hairs on the body. 64 rafters represent the 64 kalarupas or systems of knowledge. This shows that Shiva exists in the entire temple complex, not just in the garbagrha.

As the dancer dances to lilting music, at times bursting into vigorous nrtta, at other times engaged in a grandiose display of deep-seated emotion, it is form reaching to go past the limitations of form, for that experience where dancer and dance merge into one. While worship begins with the anthropomorphized Nataraja, it moves onto a subtler form of the spatika linga and then to the Chidambara Rahasyam, the akasha linga. This akasha linga is nothing but the chidakasha, residing in oneself of which the conscious being is the witness.

The greatness of Indian art is that Rasananda, the time where this witness is brought forth, is the sought-after goal for each and every performance and practice session.

The artist becomes fine-tuned and meditative over time and is akin to the pujari of the temple who is privileged to enter the garbagrha. The artist has the capacity to invoke the lord in the garbagrha of not only his own mind, but in the mind of the on-looker as well. This extension of worship from temple to stage can permeate all aspects of life making the life of the devotee and artist harmonious and steadfast.

<https://beneathabanyan.wordpress.com>



WHY DO WE INSIST SO MUCH ON LOST CAUSES?

Acharya Jonas Masetti (Vishvanatha)

Why am I always interested in people who are not worth it? Why can't I stop bad habits? Why does it seem that I am at the mercy of my desires? Why am I so stupid? Why does my life look like a soap opera? Why keep on having so many false hopes? All these questions and many more are part of our daily lives and make us believe that the mind has some kind of defect. But it is precisely this "defect" that makes us humans and moves the wheel of life - saṃsāra.

Wanting to be happy, we are constantly planning our actions to choose the best option and make the most of our lives. These actions have two components: the desire for the result of the action, which can be an object or a situation; and the knowledge of how to perform the action with the benefits associated with its results. Stimulated by desires, we use knowledge to make the best decision.

When knowledge and desire are in the same direction, one feels confident. For as much as the person knows the result depends on several uncontrollable factors, one tries and trusts in the decision and awaits the outcome. In this case, there is no real conflict other than that arising from the frustration of failure and new lessons from more information. The conflict appears when there is a desire for an object, but knowledge leaves no room for the confidence that the expected result can be reached.

This conflict is also gradual and is intensified at each failed attempt, when plans are reformulated and there is another try. Gradually, the firm confidence becomes vague – with that “there is something wrong” discomfort – then it turns into frustration, with ironic expressions that culminate in rage; and, finally, confidence becomes a depressive collapse, a feeling of helplessness that is expressed through all those questions mentioned earlier.

Depending on the strength of our desire and capacity of discernment, it is possible to interrupt this process and redirect life in another direction; but we may feel powerless regarding some subjects, situations or people. We feel weak to move on at each step. The desire seems to have an inexplicable strength in denying even the most logical

evidences that the expected result may not be achieved.

The Vedic tradition explains this phenomenon by saying that the power of an object that makes someone happy does not reside in its intrinsic property: happiness is the nature of the subject being projected on the object. As it is the nature of the subject, the search for happiness cannot be ruled out and, while it is projected onto the object, there will be a desire, no matter how illogical this projection can be. Categorically, we call this desire “hope.” And according to the popular saying, it is “the last one to die”, for no one is able to drop the pursuit of happiness.

And how to deal with hope and this kind of situation or desire? We can express in three steps what can be done in this situation:

1. Production of antibodies

We are facing a situation that is like a mirage. There is a desire for something or situation which has been repeatedly proven as unable to make us happy for a number of reasons. If these reasons are brought to the forefront when we imagine ourselves happy with the object, such reasons function as antibodies for our desire for that object.

In Bhagavadgītā, the Lord Kṛṣṇa explains that desire is part of a mental chain, which starts with meditation on the object. Just like an advertisement, we make a mental picture of the use of the object and we see ourselves happy with it. After a while, this meditation turns into attachment, which, at some point, appears in the mind as a wish: “I want that object.” To fight desire in its origin, it is necessary to realize how much “I am happy with this object” meditation is false. For this purpose, we must bring to light all the reasons to get away from the object and, finally, visualize the same situation with the frustrations and sorrows associated with it

2. Use of preventive measures

Our “antibodies” are not always sufficient; sometimes we stay in the same vicious circle for years, and if there is any direct action to minimize the damage of that action, it must be taken. Although sometimes considered a sign of weakness, these preventive measures are actually the noble and humble recognition of our own limitations. When we are moved by desire, our mind seems smoky. Before the hit of this dangerous “smoke”, the wise individual performs the preventive actions, like a turtle that pulls in

the head at the sight of danger before entering uncharted territory.

Each situation demands a particular preventive action, such as turning off the cell phone, locking the refrigerator, do not taking the wallet to the shopping mall, do not communicating when nervous, among many others.

The following method was employed by Ulysses to hear the sirens song: “Thanks to the advice of the enchantress Circe, Ulysses and his crew escaped the spell of the sirens while returning to Ithaca. The sailors put wax in the ears and Ulysses was tied to the mast of the ship, recommending the sailors not to release him, as he wanted to hear the song of the Sirens and beat them. So the Argonauts passed unharmed...”

3. Using the Supertherapist

Even preventive actions have a limit; it is impossible to avoid all situations and people. It is fine if the problem allows a direct solution or if it does not cause harm to ourselves and others around us; but this is not always possible and there are still vices and desires – some of them from other lives – for which solution is not feasible. The search for the perfect mind is an impossible task. Even if the mind were perfect, it would still be made up from partial pressures of changeable objects and situations, so it would be constantly lagging.

The acceptance of the psychological order pervading the mind and the objects of desire is where lies the secret to dealing with the mind and its nature which seems “defective”. We do not have to know the reason of all desires and reactions of the mind, but we must understand that the mind is part of an order; it has a function (which is also studied by psychology); and it necessary to consider any form of thinking as inappropriate thinking or without cause – even if unknown. It is from this viewpoint that the traditional thinking shows how even our thoughts are part of a larger order, the order of karma, which gives the results of our past actions. Both psychological and karmic orders are not separated from the rest of the universe: the universe is a big “living being”, who is our Supertherapist, the creator himself.

Finally, we turn to Him in reverence, as the order which brings the desires; we find the adaptation that transcends the imperfections of our mind, also by prayer, with which we can act directly on the karmic order for us to have strength to overcome our obstacles. The use of prayer as a way of dealing with the universe is “being objective”

and is the culminating point of the appreciation of God from the practical point of view of life. This objectivity is called religious maturity, which is part of the self-awareness process, but not its goal.

In order to know that we are in “good company” and that emotions are part of life, let us remember some interesting facts:

- When Rāma lost Sītā, he got so desperate that even the stones along the way were asked for her whereabouts.
- The wise man Viśvāmitra, professor of Rāma, whose name means “friend to all” because everyone was afraid of him, was simply the record holder of the curses among scholars of the time, for which he was widely known

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SANKALPA AND SAMYAM

Pujyasri Swami Omkarananda Swamigal

Sankalp and *Samyam* (Resolve and restraint)– the traits advocated today to keep safe. I’m sure everybody is well equipped to practice these values by now. And surprisingly the mind is convinced to follow these...

Mana eva manushyanaam karannam bandha moksha yoho –

As the mind, so the man; bondage or liberation are in one’s own mind.

Whatever one enjoys in this world

-is mixed with sorrow - *Dukha miśritatvaṃ*

-does not give satisfaction or contentment - *Atr̥ptikaratvaṃ*

-is addictive - *Bandhakatvaṃ*

-is impermanent - *Anityatvaṃ*

Impermanent pleasures weigh nothing against the coveted life. The *Śāstras* say that, ‘This opportunity of a human birth is rare and will not knock on your door again. Make the best of it.’ What is the purpose of life and how do we achieve it?

The starting point is to make the choice of eternal happiness (*Śreyas*) over impermanent short-lived pleasures (*Preyas*).

- Distinguish the permanent from the impermanent. This is *Viveka*.
- Depart from attachment to sense pleasures - *Vairāgya*, that is, the dispassion born out of the *viveka* that the joys of this world and the other, are impermanent, addictive and mixed with sorrow.
- Acquire a ‘quality’ mind, the inner qualification for Vedantic study called *Śamādi ṣatka sampatti* (the six qualities).
 - *Śamā*-Thought control- control over the quality, quantity and direction of thought, making the thoughts strong, healthy and independent
 - *Damā*- Mastery over the senses
 - *Uparama*-This is also called *Sanyāsa*, renunciation
 - Maintaining *Śamā*, *Damā*
 - Giving up religious rituals and social duties
 - Dedicating one’s maximum time for the study of Vedānta
 - *Titikṣa* - endurance of all the physical and psychological disturbances, without lamentation
 - *Śraddhā*-Total acceptance with complete trust in the words of the scriptures and the teachings of the Guru, as the means of knowledge of the Absolute

Truth. Accepting *Advaita jñāna* as the only means to Ultimate *mokṣa*

- *Samādhānā* - Single-pointedness of the mind, concentration.

- Maintain the strong quest for *mokṣa* or relief from all bondage-*Mumukṣutvaṃ*. *Mumukṣu* is one who attempts to give up the ignorance of perceiving the body as the self, or the individual soul as the self, for understanding one's real nature.

Viveka, Vairāgya, Shamādi ṣaṭka saṃpatti and Mumukṣutvaṃ are together called Sādhana Catuṣṭaya Sampatti. In other words, one needs the four 'D's- **D**iscrimination of the permanent from the impermanent, **D**ispassion towards the impermanent, **D**isciplining the mind and **D**esire for liberation.

One should willingly give up desire. Otherwise even when restricted, one will find a way to reach the desired object. There are different types of *Vairāgya* mentioned in the scriptures – *Ajñāna janya vairāgya*, *Abhāva vairāgya*, *Purāṇa śravaṇa vairāgya*, *Śmaśāna vairāgya*, *Viveka janya vairāgya*.

- *Ajñāna janya vairāgya* is dispassion born out of ignorance. A child chooses a toy rather than money, as the child values the toy more than money. A few years later, as an adult priorities change, and the toy loses its value against money.
- *Abhāva vairāgya* is a case of sour grapes. Remember the story of the fox and the grapes, where the fox decides that the grapes that it cannot reach are sour. Similarly, giving up desire, when it is beyond our reach is *Abhāva vairāgya*.
- *Purāṇa śravaṇa vairāgya* is the short-term inspiration to be dispassionate, on hearing good discourses, which loses intensity with time.
- *Śmaśāna vairāgya* is to renounce in the cremation yard on the demise of a close associate. However, *Vasanās* (impressions) do not leave. A few days later, the attitude changes and one reverts to one's old ways.

All these are temporary as the element of ignorance subsists.

- *Viveka janya vairāgya* is born out of discrimination. One understands the self as a *Jīvātmā* and yearns for *mokṣa*. Perceiving these defects of worldly materialistic sense pleasures (*Viśaya sukha doṣa Darśanam*), is what we call 'Viveka'. One should know the extent to which one is enmeshed with objects.

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says in *Sādhana Pañcakam*, '*Bhava sukhe doṣa: anusandhīyatām*'. '*Bhava sukhe doṣa:*' means the joys that one experiences in life are subject to shortcomings. A spiritual aspirant does not give much weightage to this. Those without discrimination keep complaining about everything in life. Such a mind is polluted. Everything is bound to change with time and will never be perfect. One

should be able to understand that nothing is permanent and keep needs to the minimum.

Minimum Needs and Maximum Time for contemplation guided by the Guru and the scriptures makes life purposeful.

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ARE FRUITS GOOD FOR HEALTH? THE SWEET TRUTH

Dr.Parthasarathy & Dr Saraniya Parthasarathy

I am sure all of us have heard repeatedly this most common of recommendations for healthy living: “**Eat More Fruits**”.

How can Ayurveda contradict the goodness of fruits! Undoubtedly, Ayurveda also celebrates fruits for its wonderful properties and benefits. Fruits are one of the most easily digested foods, providing good nourishment and at the same time, satiating and refreshing.

Unfortunately, we usually miss out on some nuances about fruits we end up getting compromised benefits or at times even get some negative effects and then blame the excessive sugar content in the fruits. Let’s get the concepts straight!

Nature Directs You Better.

As I usually mention “ Everything available & not available in a particular season is for a reason” There is an amazing synergy between what is required for us & what is produced in nature. If you can hear these whispers of nature & tweak your life, then you are already practising Ayurveda! Before going deep, I want you to reflect on the questions below.

Did our ancestors import Fruits when nature didn’t produce them?

Three-four decades ago, did we get to eat our favourite fruit all round the year?

Are Fruits available in Nature in cold & snowy winter?

Do we get good varieties of fruit in cold countries like in warm countries?

Almost all your answers being “NO”, do you realize that something is seriously wrong & we should look deeper into this?

Let’s take Summer as a classical example to understand better. As explained in the previous blog of “seasons”, summer is the period where the digestive power of a person is very weak and one is deprived of energy as the scorching sun sucks the energy off. It’s so important to give nutritious food to replenish the energy but this

nutritious food cannot be digested because of weak digestive power & can lead to serious digestive complications if one overloads the system. This is a Catch-22 situation & we should find a way to escape from this trap.

Ayurveda gives a beautiful solution — to take food that is *sweet, easy to digest, nourishing, "cold in potency" and closer to liquid in nature.*

The solution sounds good, but to find the food that satisfies all the criteria is a herculean task because things that are sweet, nourishing & cold in potency are difficult to digest. But MOTHER NATURE is ready with enormous varieties of Fruits which satisfy all the requirements. Just take Watermelon as an example and compare the 5 criteria. You will be amazed.

In a modern language, it can be understood that Fructose, a variety of sugar that slowly undergoes digestion, supplies gradual but effective nourishment, unlike Sucrose, the regular sugar. Isn't it amazing?! But unfortunately, today we see Watermelons available in Supermarkets all round the year and that too in cold countries in the coldest season as well. No wonder, people are suffering from Flu and Common Cold in the Winters and Spring of cold countries.

Which fruit does nature produce in Russian Winters?? Hear the whispers of nature and stay away from these aisles. If you import fruits from the tropical & temperate countries and relish them because "fruits are good, rich in fibres, boosts immunity" and so on, you are completely off track. Instead, if you have preserved the fruits into Jams with extra sugars and consume them, you are on track as the Ayurvedic understanding of cold weather recommends a sweet-dominant, heavy for digestion food, that too early in the morning, which is the culture of cold countries.

Fruit Fundamentals in Ayurveda

While there is nothing like good fruits & bad fruits, as it depends on the context., Ayurveda does mention a few superior fruits "Phala uthamaa" in Sanskrit — which are Grapes, Gooseberry, Pomegranate, Citron, Silver Date palm & Mimulus. They are the most beneficial in nutrition.

The general rule for eating fruits: Avoid unseasonal, worm-infested, overripe, unripe fruits, with the only exception of Bilwa fruit where Young & Unripe is preferred.

Bad Combinations: We should not mix milk with any fruits that are not completely sweet. Especially if the fruit is sour, adding milk can be a disaster. Rethink your Mango milkshakes. Bananas with milk are fine but Bananas with Yogurt or Buttermilk can be highly problematic.

When to Eat: Ayurveda strongly recommends not to mix cooked & uncooked food in the same meal — by that we mean to eat fruits individually, when hungry, & not with other foods. However, there are exceptions for very sweet fruits like Mangoes, Jackfruit etc which can be taken at the beginning of the meal.

Dried fruits: Dried fruits are also good. Ayurveda recommends dried & preserved fruits in the rainy season.

Cooking Fruits: In principle, the Sun has already “cooked” the fruits & as a result, they are ripe and sweet and hence they are ready to eat but there are some fruits like a few Banana varieties, apples etc which are little heavy for digestion & can be cooked before eating for easy digestibility, especially for kids.

Fruits in Diabetes: Parallel to Ayurveda, even modern researches have shown that Fructose is not harmful in Diabetes even if the fruits are too sweet but when taken appropriately considering the above pointers.

Bottom Line

Fruits are generally good but only when we consume appropriately. The most important factors to consider are eating naturally-ripened, seasonal fruits & logically understand that there is no mandate to eat fruits daily. Eat them only when hungry & not for the sake of eating fruits. Be watchful about what is mixed with the fruits.

<https://medium.com/@ayushkrama>