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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Hari Om,

Sooner or later, all sincere human beings come to realise that the central thread that runs through their myriad experiences in life is an incessant search for happiness. As we deepen our awareness, we also get to understand the fleeting nature of happiness derived from materialistic pursuits and yearn for lasting joy.

In view of the above, it is in the fitness of things that 'Happiness' has been chosen as the theme for the next six issues of your spiritual journal "INNER FLAME".

Swāmi Chidānanda sets the context on the issue of Happiness, which has been the central subject of enquiry in the eastern mystical traditions since time immemorial with the treatment it has received in the Bhagavadgeetā, Upanishads and other Vedāntic texts. He also touches upon the intense scientific research and scrutiny that is currently on in many academic circles in the West which has woken up to this reality.

The featured article is about the Philosopher-poetess Akka Mahādevi from Karnataka who was one of the luminaries that blazed a bold, new path of devotion in the 12th century. An intense sense of dispassion led her to renounce even the wearing of clothes at the height of youth and her longing for her beloved Chenna Mallikārjuna sprang forth as mystic poems called *Vachanas*.

One cannot but wonder at the cultural unity that prevails in this holy land when one observes the striking similarity between the lives of Akka in the South and Lal Ded of Kashmir who lived in the 14th century about whom we had carried an article recently.

Under Places that Beckon, we take you to two popular abodes of Shiva – viz. Vāranāsi and Tryambakeshwar. Both are steeped in history and evoke devotion with the stories associated with them. Both places have a sense of timelessness about them with mother Gangā and the Sahyādri range of mountains gracing the respective locations.

There is also a featured article on Mother Sitā, the original woman of substance, without whom the great epic Rāmāyana would not have had its heroine.

There is an interesting story where the Buddha mentions the qualities required in a person who wants to disseminate his teachings.

An equally engrossing article on the choiceless reality of loneliness is featured in the Guest Corner.

As usual, there are small but significant glimpses offered into the great reality in our regular features viz. Rhythms for the soul, What do we learn from Upanishads and Eternal Vibrations.

Wish you happy reading and may I say, happier tidings in your voyage into the mystery of your being.

For Swāmi Chidānanda
Cdr HC Guruprasad (IN, Retd)



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Akka Mahādevi The Mystic-Poetess

- Compiled by Dakshu Mansukhani

*I have fallen in love, O mother, with the
Beautiful One, who knows no death,
Knows no decay and has no form;
I have fallen in love, O mother with the
Beautiful One, who has no middle, has
no end, has no parts and has no features;
I have fallen in love, O mother, with the
Beautiful One, who knows no birth and
knows no fear.*

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

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

Young and beautiful as she was, Mahādevi had but eyes for the One. And like Gangā of the *Itihāsa* of another time, she accepted the offer of marriage to the Rājā on conditions that few women ever made. Blinded with passion, desperate to make the young woman his wife, the King readily accepted her conditions but his own weakness drove him to breaking his word when, without her consent, he tried to force himself on her. Her response was immediate and unhesitant; she left his presence and his life, rejecting the allure of the false world and its deceitful security of wealth, name and fame. Naked she had come into the world and now, clothed only in her long, dark tresses, with profound love for and unshaken faith in Chenna Mallikārjuna (Lord Shiva, the beautiful, pure as jasmine) Mahādevi followed her destiny to become one with the One.

It was not long after this incident that this same young woman came to be known as Akka Mahādevi, who, though born 800+ years ago, is loved, revered and respected even today. Mahādevi was born in a village called Udaadi in Karnataka around



the year 1130 and was raised in a spiritual atmosphere. Her parents, Sumati and Nirmal Shetty, were devotees of Lord Shiva and followed the Shaivite sect of the Lingāyats. They believed in the Trividhi philosophy that is comprised of *Shiv Linga*, *Jangama* and *Guru* i.e. to sacrifice one's life in service to society, aim for true knowledge and give up worldly happiness, worshipping Lord Shiva.

What little is known about the incidents of her life has been the subject of hagiographic and mythological claims, sourced both from her lyrics as well as oral traditions which show that she was noted for her beauty enhanced by her long tresses. Even as a young child, barely 10 years of age, she considered herself betrothed to Lord Shiva and spent her adolescence in His worship, her longing spilling over in the poems (or *vachanas*) she composed to her beloved,

Lord Chenna Mallikārjuna:

*"I look at the road for his coming,
If he isn't coming, I pine and waste away,
If he is late, I grow lean,
O mother, if he is away for a night,
I'm like the lovebird with nothing in her
embrace."*

One occurrence in her life is mentioned universally (though there are different versions), an incident that amounted to the seminal choice she made as a young person. On seeing a beautiful young maid and falling in love with her instantly, Kaushika, the Jain King of that part of Karnataka, sent a proposal for Mahādevi's hand in marriage. Initially she refused but a persistent Kaushika threatened her family with grave consequences until she relented. She agreed to marry him but laid down conditions: that she would have complete control over the choice to spend her time in devotion to Lord Shiva or in conversations with other scholars and religious figures as opposed to with the King and that the King would never force himself on her without her consent. But getting impatient, he failed to keep his promise; Mahādevi walked out on him. As she departed from the palace, a wrathful Kaushika demanded the return of all the jewels and extravagant clothes he had presented to his wife. Defiant, Mahādevi stripped herself bare and stepped out onto the streets as a *digambara*—a naked saint. Another version claims that Kaushika, on falling in love with Mahadevi's beauty, sent proposals of marriage which she refused outright. On being persistently pursued by him and finally, forced by her extended family, Mahādevi not only rejected the proposal but also renounced her family; she

discarded her clothes and left the village covered only in her long tresses. Where did she get the courage to walk away, naked, empty-handed and unsupported? Her faith in her loved One was all she needed. She wrote:

"People, male and female, blush when a cloth covering their shame comes loose. When the Lord lives drowned without a face in the world, how can you be modest? When the entire world is the eye of the Lord, on looking everywhere, what can you cover and conceal?"

Leaving familiar surroundings, young Mahādevi walked on foot, alone and unafraid, to *Anubhava Mantapa* or "Abode of Experience," a centre for philosophical and spiritual discussions, in Kalyana, the then capital of the western Chalukya dynasty in the Bidar district of Karnataka. It was presided over by Allamā Prabhu, a renowned philosopher, noted poet and patron saint of Lingāyats in the 12th century. Among the congregation, other Virasaiva philosopher-poets like Basavanna and his nephew Guru Chennabasavanna were in regular attendance. (Historically, Lingāyats were known as Virasaivas or "ardent, heroic worshippers of Shiva." According to Blake Michael, the term Veerashaivism refers both to a "philosophical or theological system as well as to the historical, social and religious movement which originated from that system"). At *Anubhava Mantapa*, Mahādevi became part of the discussions centered on spiritual, social and philosophical questions but her acceptance in the movement did not come easily. She was questioned for her nakedness that exemplified a deliberate rejection of womanly modesty. It was

impudent for a woman to abandon her clothes, even though for male saints, it was a natural practice. Allamā Prabhu, uncertain of her spiritual competence, challenged, “Why come you hither, O woman in the budding blossom of youth? If you can tell your husband’s identity, come, sit. Else, pray, be gone!” Boldly she proclaimed:

*Chenna Mallikārjuna is my husband,
O brother,
No one else can be my man.*

In another *vachana* she had said:

*All of mankind are my parents. It is they
who made this matchless match of mine
with Chenna Mallikārjuna.
While all the stars and planets looked on
my guru gave my hand into His;
the Linga became the groom,
And I the bride.
Therefore is Chenna Mallikārjuna
my husband
And I have no truck with
any other of this world.*

Allamā Prabhu interrogated her for a long time, and at the end of it, all the Virasaivas recognized Mahādevi’s worth. Allamā Prabhu acknowledged: “Your body is female in appearance, but your mind is merged with God!” Thus, Mahādevi came to be accepted in their inner circles, and out of respect and affection, she came to be called Akka or elder sister. Akka Mahādevi continued her *tapas* in Kalyani under the guidance of Allamā Prabhu, her *vachanas* composed at this stage reflecting her progress.

*The leaves on the apple tree,
in shapes as countless as their number,
show many shades of green,
none quite like the other.
On the rose bush next to it
leaves and petals do just the same
and so do blades of grass,
lobelias and daisies,
each shade of color unique.
Akka Mahādevi longed
to find your face
and found it everywhere,
O Chenna Mallikārjuna!*

After a few years of *sādhana*, Akka Mahādevi went from Karnataka to the famous Siva temple at Sri Sailam in Andhra Pradesh. It is said that she spent the last months of her life in various caves, completing her process of enlightenment, and attained Mahāsamādhi, divine union with her Lord. Unverifiable historical records indicate that she died in her mid-twenties. Legend tells us that she was consumed in a flash of light, leaving only her poems behind as a chronicle of a spiritual journey that still evokes awe and respect in the hearts of all. Revered till today, many thousands visit the shrine to Mahādevi at Udathadi, her birthplace in Karnataka, as a pilgrimage to invoke her blessings.

As one who gave up her social position and domestic security, her life was a testimony to the power of love for the divine, based as it was, on her immeasurable faith in Shiva. She fought to prove that every soul, irrespective of gender, has a right to explore and reach the Divine. She was a revolutionary, social reformer, ardent devotee and great poet. Her similes stun the

reader with their simplicity and appropriateness. She wrote: "Like treasure hidden in the ground, like flavour in the fruit, like gold in the rock and oil in the seed, the Absolute is hidden in the heart." "Like the peacock that dances on a hill, like the swan that splashes around a lake, like the cuckoo that sings when the mango tree bursts into bloom, like the bee that enjoys only the fragrant flower, I will enjoy only my Lord Chenna Mallikārjuna." Her advice to a devotee is simple but intense – "Shoot the arrow so forcefully that while penetrating the target, even the feathers go in. Hug the body of the Lord so tightly that the bones crumble..."

One has to read but a few of her poems (*vachanas*) to acknowledge her consummate longing for the only one who mattered to her:

"You are the forest; You are all the great trees in the forest; You are bird and beast playing in and out of the trees. O Lord, White as Jasmine, filling and filled by all, why don't You show me Your face?"

"When I didn't know myself, where were You? Like the colour in the gold, You were in me. I saw in You, Lord White as Jasmine, the paradox of Your being in me without showing a limb."

"Locks of shining red hair, a crown of diamonds, small beautiful teeth and eyes in a laughing face that light up fourteen worlds—I saw His glory, and seeing, I quell today the famine in my eyes."

"I saw the haughty Master for whom men, all men, are but women, wives. I saw the Great One who plays at love with Shakti,

original to the world. I saw His stance and began to live."

Describing her own condition, she says:

"The bee, engaged all along in drinking the nectar from the White Jasmine, is consumed totally in that very process. Not even the Symbol remains!"

"It was like a stream running into the dry bed of a lake, like rain pouring on plants parched to sticks. It was like this world's pleasure and the way to the other, both walking towards me. Seeing the feet of the master, O Lord, White as Jasmine, I was made worthwhile."

Her devotion did not need a particular time and place:

"Listen, sister, listen. I had a dream. I saw rice, betel, palm leaf and coconut. I saw an ascetic come to beg, white teeth and small matted curls. I followed on his heels and held his hand, He who goes breaking all bounds and beyond. I saw the Lord, White as Jasmine, and woke wide open.

Sunlight made visible the whole length of a sky, movement of wind, leaf, flower, all six colours on tree, bush and creeper: all this is the day's worship. The light of moon, star and fire, lightning and all things that go by the name of light are the night's worship. Night and day in your worship, I forget myself, O Lord, White as Jasmine."

'Chenna Mallikārjuna' or 'Lord, White as Jasmine' is her *ankita* or signature in her *vachana*-s. *Vachana*-s hold a unique place in the long and checkered history of Kannada literature. Simple in diction, these are the rich, spontaneous outpourings of the socio-religious Virasaivas of medieval Karnataka

during which time, there stirred a great spiritual awakening in a large section of the general public, and a monumental effort was made to disseminate the principles of spiritual essence in the language of the common man — to, in fact, demystify God. The Virasaivas discouraged the blind acceptance of traditional scriptures and customs, and placed great emphasis on personal experience and inquiry into truth. They tried to realize these truths in their own concrete life-situations and expressed them in their own distinct idiolects. They came from all walks of life — cobblers and town-criers, street performers and prostitutes, washermen and potters, cowherds and tavern keepers. Thus, there are *vachana*-s by minister-poets like Basavanna and Kondugodi Keshiraja, cobbler-saints like Madara Chennayya, and untouchables like Haralayya and Kalyanamma.

300-odd *vachanas* are credited to Mahādevi, *vachanas* which are intense and of great lyrical depth; they sparkle with the magic and music of words, with brevity and bold imagery. In them, the core principles of spirituality are captured in a poignant tone of one intoxicated with divine love:

*I have seen Him in His divine form,
Him with the matted locks,
Him with the jewelled crown,
Him with the gleaming teeth,
Him with the smiling face,
Him who illumines the fourteen worlds with
the light of His eyes.
I have seen Him and the thirst of my eyes
is quenched.
I have seen the great Lord whom the men
among men serve but as wives.
I have seen the Supreme Guru Chenna*

*Mallikārjuna
sporting with the
Primeval Sakti,
And saved am I.*

The quest for God, her favourite Chenna Mallikārjuna, rekindled the emotional exuberance of her early poetic genius and compelled her inwards to explore the infinite depths of the soul in which the central principle of creation or God is reflected. She measured the heights of philosophical imagination, yet she did not remain content with the mere intellectual

curiosity, she sought more and more a centre of reference in God whom she approached through ardent love and devotion. She instinctively felt that man can never be fully and wholly fulfilled through self-discipline and knowledge, though self-discipline is arduous and knowledge superior. A more human approach to God lies through pure and unselfish love which withdraws most of the obstacles that the ego interposes between the divine and the devotee.

For Mahādevi, Chenna Mallikārjuna is a divine personality in whom she finds the fulfilment of her spiritual endeavour. Mahādevi emphasizes the individual and personal sides of experience and in harmony with this, she holds that our ethical and religious value judgements must help to determine our idea of God as the ultimate



ground of Reality. She thus discovers the path to the deeper nature of things in what ought to be, rather than in what is.

*With thy sweet soul this soul of mine,
Hath mixed as water doth with wine
Who can the wine and water part
Or me and Thee when we combine?
Thou art become my greater self
Small bonds no more can confine
Thou hast my being taken on*

*And shall not I now take on Thine?
Me Thou forever hast affirmed
That I may ever know Thee mine
Thy love has pierced me through and
through
Its thrill with bone and nerve entwine
I rest, a flute laid on Thy lips.
A flute, I on Thy breast recline
Breathe deep in me that I may sigh
Yet strike my strings and tears shall shine.*

Sources:

Excerpts from 'Virashaiva Philosophy and Mysticism, by H.H.Mahatapasvi Shri Kumarswami.

Poems are excerpted from the book 'Speaking of Siva', translated by A. K. Rāmānujan.

www.pragyata.com/mag/akka-mahadevis-complete-surrender-318



The one who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life.

- Rabindranath Tagore



- Swāmi Chidānanda

The attainment of 'supreme happiness' (*paramānanda-prāpti*) is stated to be the very purpose (*prayojana*) of the wisdom of the Vedānta, along with the 'cessation of sorrow (once for all)' (*ātyantika-dukkha-nivṛtti*).

Then the Vedānta makes an astonishing claim that this supreme happiness is our own true nature. Nothing else takes it away from us except our ignorance, and therefore, it really is never away from us!

In erroneous seeing, there appear two factors – the limited self and the world outside. Time and space are parts of this appearance, and therefore, it is incorrect to think of this appearance as happening at some point of time or occurring at some point in space. Erroneous seeing, space, time and causation are together. In error-free seeing, all these disappear and the duality between the world (universe) and the self also vanishes!

Happiness

When we see ourselves as limited, there is sorrow. The absence of limitations is at once happiness. The well-known statement¹ of the Upanishads thus reveals, "Existence, Awareness and Being Unlimited is the Ultimate Reality!" Many a time, we think 'not having adequate funds' is the cause of our sorrow. It is true enough, on the surface. If we take a deeper look, the real cause of sorrow is the psychological conclusion in us that we are 'limited' in relation to what we want to



achieve. We want Rupees 10 crores, let us say, for a project and we are unable to collect more than 5. It is the thought, "We are short by 5 crores," that makes us miserable.

Swāmi Chinmayānandaji gave us the equation for happiness. $H = P / Q$, where H is the extent of our happiness, Q is the number of desires entertained and P is the number of desires fulfilled. A man whose 70 desires are fulfilled is less happy than another person, in whose case only 9 desires are fulfilled, if the former had 100 desires while the latter had only 10! The rare soul that has zero desires is the happiest. Desires, when fulfilled, leave us with a sense of being complete and unlimited. Desires, not fulfilled, leave us with the sense of being incomplete and limited. The latter condition is sorrow.

Geetā on Happiness

"The man who gives up his emphasis on the outcome of his actions attains lasting peace," says² Lord Shri Krishna, "and the man who insists on particular results lives in endless bondage." The problem is not about

aiming at an outcome. Without keeping in mind some clear benefit, none of us would engage in any work! “Begin with end in mind,” advises Stephen Covey³, the well-known management guru from Utah. It would otherwise be ridiculous for a man to work hard and not expect a good salary. The problem is when we get anxious over the outcome and spend a lot of our mental energy on questions like, “Will I win or lose? Will he praise me or put me down once more? Will she like this gesture of mine or reject it?” Those of us who can focus on ‘what we can do’ towards a meaningful goal or result, and get busy doing it well, are sure to be happy.

Less, if not zero dependence on the outcome of our sincere effort is the key to happiness as per Geetā. The outcome includes material rewards, recognition of our work by others and benefits that our society may give us. The famous statement⁴ of John Kennedy, “Ask not what your country can do for you! Ask what you can do for the country,” echoes the spirit of karma-yoga, where the focus is on what we can do, and not on what we would get.

Happiness Studies in Universities

The subject of happiness has become an attractive elective subject in universities around the world. Dr Srikumar Rao, known for his courses and workshops on Creativity and Personal Mastery (CPM), has been talking to international audiences on subjects like Plug into Your Hard-wired Happiness. He has offered courses on CPM and on Happiness at illustrious places like Columbia University, London School of Business, etc. Echoing the principle of Geetā, he says⁵ we need to get nothing, do

nothing to experience happiness!

Dr Rao’s treatment of the topic is in line with the wisdom of the Upanishads, which say that happiness is our innate nature. Dr Rao asks for dismantling the “If... then...” mental model, which perennially keeps us unhappy. Someone says, “If I get a bigger house, then I will be happy,” while another is



convinced, “If my boss is transferred, I will be happy.” In a significant remark, the scholar says, “When we accept everything as it is, happiness is experienced in its pure form!” [For example, when we see sunrise, we are happy and we accept the sun as it is; we don’t say the sun should have been a little to the left or to the right!]

Upanishads on our true nature

“The Self is of the nature of happiness,” declares the Taittiriya Upanishad⁶, and goes further to say, “who would have breathed in, who would have breathed out, if we were not of the nature of happiness (deep within us)?” We love ourselves the most. This self-love is explained in the Vedānta by saying the true Self, of which our ego (the self) is an extremely poor representation, is blissful. No wonder our love is turned towards ourselves but the problem is that we do not really know who we are! Therefore, we must conduct self-inquiry, “Who am I?”, which removes the contradiction in our self-love.

Whenever we love anything or anybody, it is actually self-love that is reflected in that object or person. Sage Yājñavalkya⁷ does not mince words when he says to his wife Maitreyi, “Everything becomes dear to us when it is aligned with the happiness of the self!” The little self (the ego) is agitated over something; for example, when a desired object is obtained, it seems the object brings happiness but the truth is otherwise. Obtaining the object removes the agitation, and the happiness we experience is our own, which is now as though unobstructed!

Therefore, our becoming happy through an object, a person or a position is a round-about way of finding peace. To give up desires through Self-knowledge is the direct way, where we stay in our true nature!

Happy man's shirt

A king once had a strange back pain, which could not be cured by any medicine. Finally, the king's wise doctor advised him, “This pain will go only if you wear the shirt of a truly happy man!” The king's soldiers went in the eight directions to find a happy man, and it was an unbelievably hard task.

Finally they found a ‘truly happy man’ in the jungle. He was indeed free of any sorrow or worry. Finding him was great victory for the

soldiers but alas, this man had no shirt! [However, the king's ailment ended the moment his men had found the happy man. The story has a happy end here.]

Therefore, we must reflect on the way we live. We must train our senses and our mind. By understanding the spiritual secrets of life, we gain Self-knowledge. Our desires then vanish, and the natural happiness shines forth!

Notes:

1. *satyam jñānam anantam – brahma –* Taittiriya 2.1
2. *yuktah karma-phalam tyaktvā.. –* Geetā 5.12
3. This is one of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People that he taught.
4. Inaugural address, January 1961, when he took over as the President of USA.
5. See YouTube for a 9-minute video by Srikumar Rao on Plug into your hard-wired happiness.
6. *rasovaisah, rasam hi eva ayam labdhvā ānandeebhavati..* 2.7-Taittiriya Upanishad
7. *ātmanas-tu kāmāya sarvam priyam bhavati –* Brihadāranyaka Upanishad 2.4.5



Subhuti was one of the chief disciples of the Buddha. He had been waiting to propagate the Buddha's principles to society. On one occasion he prostrated before the Buddha, to seek His permission to spread His message.

"Get up, Subhuti," the Buddha said. "Unless one experiences Me within, he is not eligible to speak. Hence it is not easy to become a speaker. Even when you speak beautiful words, there will be many to criticize you and condemn you."

Subhuti replied, "With Your blessings, I am experiencing Your presence within and by Your grace, I am sure I can deliver Your ideals to the people to make them happy. Please give me Your permission."

The Buddha remained silent and made no comments. Subhuti sat there with his head bowed. The Buddha went away to give a talk to devotees and other monks as they required some clarity on His teachings.

The Buddha returned after a long time and said, "Subhuti, you are still here? I thought you got your answer from My silence."

Subhuti said, "I am not wise enough to know the master's silence. No one is."

The Buddha smiled and assumed His lotus posture and asked, "What if you go to a village to speak and people choose not to listen to you? What will you do?"

"I will not mind, Lord, for I will remind myself that at least they are not calling me names or accusing me," said Subhuti.

"What if they do that?" further queried the Buddha.

Pat came the reply, "I will still smile, Lord, for I will remind myself that this is a small price to pay for spreading Your message and that they may be doing much worse by abusing me physically."

Unrelentingly, the Buddha asked, "And what if they do that also and hurl stones at you?"

"It will be ok with Master's grace. I will remind myself that at least they have not pinned me down and stabbed me."

"Well, what if they do that finally?"

"I will take heart thinking that they have not killed me."

"And what if, Subhuti," the Buddha asked in His usual detached demeanour, "they kill you?"

"I will be most happy, Tathāgata (supreme master)," Subhuti replied, raising his head for the first time.

Beholding the beautiful form of the Buddha, with tearful eyes he continued, "Other than dying by Tathāgata's feet, I cannot think of better Nirvana than dying spreading Tathāgata's message."

"Subhuti," said the Buddha, rising from

His seat and embracing him, "You are fit to be a speaker. What I told you in the morning was merely to test your patience. You have the spiritual attitude required to take on a great cause."

In chapter 18 of Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna declares: He who, having devotion to Me, explains this supreme knowledge to My devotees, will reach Me alone, no doubt.

And compared to that person, no one else among humans performs actions which are dear to Me. Nor will there be anyone else on this earth dearer to Me than that person.

Thus, those who engage in disseminating the message of the Lord perform the greatest act of love. What they earn in return is unmatched. They gain a special place in the heart of the Lord.



The relationship you have with others
are a reflection of the vibration you offer.
There aren't actually any 'others',
it's actually all about the relationship
you have with yourself.
They are projections of that.
You can change the people, and new ones will
appear with
the same dynamics.
But it's changing your emotions (vibration)
that changes the dynamics - whether with the same
people, or new people.
- ABRAHAM HICKS



- Richard Carlson

There's an alarming trend taking place: People who have had some degree of good fortune and success tend to lose their humility and become at least slightly arrogant. This is very unfortunate for many reasons. First, and most obviously, no one really wants to be around someone who is arrogant or self-absorbed. It's boring, and it's annoying! Arrogance implies a lack of gratitude. The assumption is, "I did this all by myself; it's all about me." Factors such as fortuitous timing, good luck, breaks, and so on are forgotten or disregarded.

In addition, when you allow success to go to your head, your stress levels skyrocket and your quality of life gradually disappears. People will stop liking you, and eventually, you'll stop liking yourself.

How often have you either known or heard about someone who "used to be" a really nice person? He or she was hardworking, ethical, compassionate, thoughtful, concerned about others, and blessed with a good sense of humour. Yet shortly after being promoted, making a great deal of money, acquiring stock, or succeeding at something, the person became a real jerk. He became self-absorbed, overwhelmed, greedy, hard to please, and demanding.

In a way, it's ironic. Someone finally gets what he or she has always wanted --- success--- yet now he is rarely satisfied. In fact, he often becomes difficult and paranoid.

People are constantly letting him down and nothing is good enough anymore: the house is too small, the car needs to be fancier, his temper fuse is shortened, perspective is lost, greed sets in, and more is always better. People who used to love to be around him can't stand him anymore. In fact, people start to hope that his good fortune will fail. Friendships slip away, obsessive busyness and a lack of time take over. Someone who was happy and relatively easy to please is now impossible to satisfy. I was once sitting next to a very wealthy man in his \$100,000 car. He was so used to being perfectly comfortable that he became practically hysterical, complaining to the driver that the temperature in the car wasn't cool enough ! I am totally serious.

I've read articles about celebrities, athletes, and business people who have done really well---their talent, timing, hard work, luck, and all the rest of it kicked in at just the right time. And good for them. Yet, rather than being grateful and keeping a sense of perspective, they act put out, as if life isn't fair, or as if they are somehow better or more important than others simply because they're good at something and have enjoyed some success. It's exactly the opposite of the way it should be!

It's amazing, yet there are teachers in my own field----teachers of happiness --- who are hard to please, who regularly send food back at restaurants, complain constantly about service, act rude to drivers and

waitresses, and so forth.

The question is, "Why would anyone want to be like that?" To be so constantly disappointed and bothered by things is just another way of saying you are always sweating the small stuff---even the tiny stuff.

So, whether you've already made your fortune or are still working on it, try to see the absurdity and humor behind letting any type of success go to your head. Even if you've slipped in that direction, it's never too late to turn yourself around. You can have it all---tremendous success, good fortune, and

a lifetime of abundance----and still be a thoughtful, kind, generous person. If you can do this, then you'll really have something because not only will you be successful, you'll be happy as well!

Richard Carlson, Ph.D., is the author of the bestselling book-series 'Don't sweat the small stuff'. He is a frequent guest on many lectures to many enthusiastic audiences around the country and internationally. Recently he was featured on PBS in a special about his Don't Sweat philosophy.



- Compiled by Ratna Viswanath

(Continued from the previous Issue)

9. Kāshi Vishwanātha Jyotirlinga

The Kāshi Vishwanātha Temple, revered as the most sacred of Hindu shrines, is in Vārānasi/ Banāras/ Kāshi in the state of Uttar Pradesh and is home to the Vishwanātha Jyotirlinga. Vishwanātha or Vishweshwara means 'the ruler of the universe'. The Manikarnikā Ghāt on the banks of the Gangā near the Kāshi Vishwanātha Temple is considered as a *Shaktipeetha*.

The city of Kāshi

Kāshi derives its name from the Sanskrit root 'kāsh', which means 'to shine'. It is believed that when the earth was created, the first ray of light fell on Kāshi. Lord Shiva is believed to be the guardian of the city and its people. The city and the temple have been mentioned in the *Purāna-s*, including the Kāshi-Kānda (section) of *Skanda Purāna*.

Kāshi is considered the oldest living city in the world, with 3500 years of documented history. It is one of the seven cities, considered as *mokshadāyikās* (the places leading to salvation). A darshan of the Vishwanātha Jyotirlinga and a bath in the Gangā are believed to lead one on a path to *moksha* (liberation). Thus, Hindus try to visit Kāshi at least once in their lifetime. There is a tradition that one should give up at least one desire after a pilgrimage to the temple. It is also a custom to pour the ashes of cremated ancestors into the Gangā.

Kāshi is also one of the *pādal petra*

sthalam-s of *vada-nādu*- places in Northern India which three of the most revered Nayanārs (Shaivite saints) have glorified with their songs. The city has almost 2000 temples dedicated to all the major deities.

Many legends record that the true devotee achieves freedom from death and *saṃsāra* by the worship of Shiva. It is believed that after death, the soul is not taken by Yama's messengers but is directly taken by Shiva's messengers to His abode on Mount Kailash. There is a popular belief that Shiva himself blows the *tāraka-mantra* (mantra of salvation) into the ears of people who die naturally at Kāshi.

The Tumultuous History of Kāshi and the Temple

Kāshi has seen the rule of many kings, some of them quite well-known in history. It was also ruled by the Buddhists for some time. The city has seen its share of slaughter and destruction. The temples were plundered by the Mughals time and again. The original temples were re-built, then



destroyed and built again.

The original Vishwanātha temple was destroyed by the army of Qutb-ud-din Aibak in 1194 CE, when he defeated the Rājā of Kannauj, as a commander of Mohammad Ghorī. The temple was rebuilt by a Gujarati merchant during the reign of Delhi's Sultan Iltutmish (1211-1266 CE). It was demolished again during the rule of either Hussain Shah Sharqi (1447-1458) or Sikandar Lodhi (1489-1517). Rājā Mān Singh built the temple during Mughal emperor Akbar's rule, but orthodox Hindus boycotted it as the Rājā had let the Mughals marry within his family. Rājā Todārmal further re-built the temple with Akbar's funding at its original site in 1585.

In 1669 CE, Aurangzeb destroyed the temple and built the *Gyānavāpi* Mosque in its place. The remains of the erstwhile temple can be seen in the foundation and the columns and at the rear part of the mosque.

In 1742, the Marāthā ruler Malhar Rao Holkar made a plan to demolish the mosque and reconstruct Vishweshwara temple at the site. However, his plan did not materialize, partially because of the intervention by the Nawābs of Lucknow, who controlled the territory. Around 1750, the Mahārājā of Jaipur commissioned a survey of the land around the site, with the objective of purchasing land to rebuild the Kāshi Vishwanātha temple. However, his plan to rebuild the temple did not materialize either. In 1780, Malhar Rao's daughter-in-law Ahilyabai Holkar constructed the present temple, adjacent to the mosque.

In 1828, Baiza Bai, widow of the Marāthā ruler Daulat Rao Scindhia of Gwalior State, built a low-roofed colonnade with over 40 pillars in the *Gyānavāpi* precincts. During

1833-1840 CE, the boundary of *Gyānavāpi* Well, the ghāts and other nearby temples were constructed. A 7-feet-high stone statue of *Nandi*, gifted by the Raja of Nepal lies to the east of the colonnade.

Many royal families from various parts of the Indian subcontinent have made generous contributions for the operations of the temple. In 1841, the Bhosales of Nagpur donated silver to the temple. In 1835, Mahārājā Ranjit Singh donated 1 tonne of gold for plating the dome of the temple.

The Structure of the Temple

The temple complex consists of a series of smaller shrines, located in a small lane called the Vishwanātha *Galli*, near the river. The main temple is in a quadrangle and is surrounded by shrines of other gods. There



are small temples for Kālabhairava, Dhandapāni, Avimukteshwara, Vishnu, Vināyaka, Sanishwara, Virupāksha and Virupāksha-Gauri in the complex.

The *jyotirlinga* is a dark brown stone, placed on a silver base. It is 60cm tall and 90cm in circumference.

There is a *sabhāgriha* or Congregation Hall, leading to the inner *garbhagriha* or *sanctum sanctorum*.

A noteworthy feature about the temple is the 15.5-metre-high gold spire and gold dome. There are three domes, each made up of pure gold. The towers are gold-plated, with a golden *chhatra* on the top. It is believed that any wish, made after seeing the *chhatra*, is fulfilled. Because of the golden spire, the temple is also referred to as the golden temple of Vāranasi.

When it came to be known that Aurangazeb was planning to destroy the temple, the *jyotirlinga* was hidden in a well (*Gyānavāpi*) to protect it from destruction. The priest who jumped into *Gyānavāpi* with the *linga* also had the name Vishwanātha.

According to some, a *linga* called Avimukteshvara, today situated in the courtyard of the Vishwanātha temple, is the original self-emanated *linga*.

Festivals, etc.

The Kāshi Vishwanātha temple receives around 3,000 visitors every day. On certain occasions, the numbers reach 1,000,000 and more.

Hordes of pilgrims from all over the world gather at Kāshi during the festivals of *Makara Sankrānti*, *Kārtik Poornimā*, *Shivarātri*, *Mahāshivarātri*, *Devadeepāwali* and 'Annakoot'.

Along with the Kāshi Vishwanātha Temple, other sacred sites including the 'Annapurnā Mātā Temple', 'Vishālākshi Temple' and 'Kālabhairava Temple' are visited by many pilgrims.

Many leading saints, including Ādi Sankarāchārya, Guru Nānak, Goswāmi Tulsidas, Rāmakrishna Paramahansa, Swāmi Vivekānanda, Bamakhyapa and

Sathya Sāi Bābā have visited the city and the temple.

There are 5 daily āratīs of Shree Kāshi Vishwanātha - mangala-āratī, bhoga-āratī, sandhyā-āratī, shrngāra-āratī, shayana-āratī.

The temple used to be managed by a hereditary group of pandā-s or mahant-s. It is now managed by the government of Uttar Pradesh. During the religious occasion of Shivarātri, Kāshi-Naresh (King of Kāshi) is the chief officiating priest.

The development of a 50-feet-wide Kāshi Vishwanāth Corridor is under way. As of today, one has to walk through narrow and congested lanes to reach the temple. Once the project is completed, one can reach the temple directly from the western ghat of Gangā. The temple will also be visible from other nearby ghats. The estimated total cost of this project is around Rupees 400 crores.



The original holy well—Gyānavāpi, in between the temple and the Gyānavāpi Mosque

10. Tryambakeshwara Jyotirlinga

The Tryambakeshwara *Jyotirlinga* temple is located in Tryambakeshwara,



about 18 km. from Nasik in Maharashtra. It is situated in the eastern spur of the Sahyādrī range of the Western Ghāts at the foothills of a mountain range called Brahmagiri, from where the river Godāvari flows.

The Legend associated with the temple

According to the *Shivapurāna*, Rishi Gautama had earlier earned a boon from Varuna in the form of a pit from which he received an inexhaustible supply of food. The gods were jealous of Gautama. They sent a cow into his hermitage. The cow was unintentionally 'killed' by Gautama Rishi, who then worshipped Lord Shiva and requested Him to purify him and the hermitage. Lord Shiva asked Gangā to flow through the land to make it pure. Everyone sang in praise of the Lord and at their request, He then resided beside Gangā in the form of Tryambakeshwar *jyotirlinga*. It is believed that desires of devotees get fulfilled by praying at this temple. Godāvari is also known as 'Gautami Gangā' and is revered as a very sacred river in Southern India.

'Tryambakeshwar' literally means 'the three-eyed-Lord' i.e. Lord Shiva. The extraordinary feature of this *jyotirlinga* is that it has three faces, which embody Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Rudra

respectively. Due to continued use of water during worship, the *linga* has begun to erode - in a sense, symbolising the eroding nature of human society. The *linga* is adorned by a bejewelled crown placed over it. The crown is said to be from the age of the *Pāndava*-s and is studded with diamonds, emeralds, and other precious stones. The crown is displayed every Monday from 4-5 pm.

Tryambakeshwar is a 500-year-old city, developed by the Peshwās. They constructed/ renovated the temple in the 18th century. They also beautified the temple and the city during their regime. The Peshwās gave importance to scriptural learning and rituals. Tryambakeshwar is considered a place of ancient wisdom and follows the Vedic culture. Along with Marathi, which is the local language, Sanskrit is also spoken fluently by many people here. Tryambakeshwar town also has several caves which are associated with the 'Nāth' sect.

Architecture

The entire temple, built in black stone in the Nagara style of architecture, is known for its appealing structure and sculptures. A *mandapa* with doors on four sides, is located in front of the inner sanctum. The doorways are decorated with arches and pillars. The temple features sculptures of various human and divine figures.

Festivals, etc.

The visit to Tryambakeshwar is considered complete only on visiting the temple, the Kushāvarta Kunda, and Brahmagiri. Pilgrims take a holy dip at Kushāvarta, the sacred place from where the Godāvari originates.



The circumambulation of the Tryambakeshwar/ Brahmagiri hill in the Hindu calendar month of Shrāvana is considered an extremely pious act. The 'Kumbha Melā' is held here every twelve years. Annual festivals include Nivruttinātha yātrā, Godāvari day, Mahāshivarātri and *rathayātrā* of Lord Tryambakeshwar.

Nearby places of interest

Nearby Nasik is famous for Panchavati, where Lord Rāma spent time in exile. Sāi

Bābā temple in Shirdi is a beautiful shrine that was built over the Samādhi of Shri Shirdi Sāi Bābā. Bhāskargad or Bhāsgad is a fort near the Tryambakeshwar temple, near village Nirgudpādā. The other nearby fort is Harihara. Shanishingnāpur is home to the temple of Lord Shanishwar. It is a village where there are no doors or locks, the symbolism being that Lord Shanishwar is so powerful that no one can steal anything and leave the village.

Tryambakeshwar can be reached from Nasik or from Igatpuri by road.

(To be continued)

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People say walking on water is a miracle, but to me walking peacefully on earth is the real miracle.

- Thich Nhat Hanh



They Were Forces To Reckon With

Sitā

- Co piled by Vijayalakshmi Menon

Viewed from a certain perspective, the Rāmāyana is really Sitā's saga: *sītāyāh charitam mahat!!* Sage Vālmiki, the author of



Rāmāyana, has described the epic thus, in Bālakāṇḍam. He has conceptualized Sitā as the paragon of virtue, a nonparallel among women. Some writers have described her as an embodiment of beauty, compassion, fidelity, endurance, courage and wisdom. Inspired by Sitā's story, Prof. K. R. Srinvasa Iyengar has retold the Rāmāyana as 'Sitāyana', epic of the earth-born. Swāmi Vivekānanda states that Shri Rāma is considered the archetype of the Absolute and Sitā, that of Power. According to him, there may have been several Rāmas, perhaps, but never more than one Sitā.

In their determination to uphold dharma on this earth, Vishnu and Lakshmi incarnated as human beings - as Rāma and Sitā - to experience the blossoms and thorns of life. Sitā stands for good character, good fortune, prosperity, success and happiness. The values that Sitā enshrined are held

sacred by generations of Indians. She is esteemed as the paragon of spousal and feminine virtues for all women. Rāmāyana shows all her key aspects in a favourable light, not as a queen of a state but as an ideal virtuous woman.

Rāmāyana proves the greatness of Sitā and her strength of character in many ways and in various situations.

- **Selfless love** - No one had imposed any conditions on her. It was her independent decision to stay by her husband even if it meant that she had to leave the royal comforts of a palace and follow her husband to the forest.

- **Duty** - In the ancient times, giving of alms to Brahmins was more of a duty to be performed, rather than an optional charitable act. This duty applied to the royalty even more strictly and they were to lead by example. Keeping her duty in mind, Sitā stepped out of the safety line to give alms to Rāvana, who was disguised as a Brahmin and that is how she got abducted.

- **Dharma** - It is not easy to follow the path of *dharma*. In the case of Sitā, not only did she follow the dharma of a *pativratā* wife



stringently, but she also asks Hanumān when he visits her, whether Sri Rāma was following His dharma or only lamenting on the loss of His wife, attributing it to bad times.

It is also said that she followed her husband to the forest so that he did not feel incomplete.

- **Valour** - She was the only other person besides Sri Rāma who could lift the *Sivadhanush*.

Sitā is described as having the capability of killing Rāvana on her own but did not do so as Rāma had not instructed her.

- **Staying strong** - Unlike other narratives that portray Sitā as an obedient, demure wife, the Sitā of Vālmiki Rāmāyana had a mind of her own. In fact, she rebukes Shri Rāma for not being man enough and for being afraid to take his wife along to the forest.

She is also known for refusing all the very tempting offers made by Rāvana to become his queen and bearing all the torture meted out to her on her refusal to do so.

Sitā turned from wearing flowing royal robes to wearing bark of trees when Shri Rāma took to wearing clothes made of leaves and animal skin.

- **Chastity** - *pativratā dharma* was most important to her. It was customary for her to cover her face while talking to a man other than her husband. Even though she could not follow this custom when she had to speak to Rāvana, she placed a blade of grass that was available there, as a symbolic screen between herself and Rāvana.

When the *rākshasis* asked Sitā how

Rāvana looked, she is supposed to have said that Rāvana for her was like a dancing shadow on the surface of the sea. She had heard his voice, felt his footsteps but never seen his face.

When Hanumān was being paraded in Lankā with his tail set on fire, she invoked the power of her *pativratā dharma* and asked the fire to calm down.

- **Obedience** - When Sitā was asked to prove her innocence by trial of fire, she readily agreed to it. However, fire could not burn her because as Agni, the fire God, said, he burns only impure things and Sitā was pure in thought and body.

- Sitā rarely questioned or admonished Shri Rāma ever for anything He said or did. When Sitā got the news that Shri Rāma was going to conduct a *yajna*, not only did she send her two sons to Him with Vālmiki but also gave the sage her hairpin and requested him to give it to the lady who would take her place next to Shri Rāma as a *yajna* cannot be done without a wife. This also goes to show her magnanimity.

- **Fidelity** - This is often seen as an expression of love in its complete form. A *gandharva* once asked for Sitā's hand in marriage, as Shri Rāma had abandoned her. Without hesitation, she replied that she was Shri Rāma's and He was hers and that, with or without Shri Rāma by her side, she was complete in herself. She also told the *gandharva* that he should not assume that she was incomplete just because she was alone in the forest.

- **Gentle and helpful** - In the Ashokavana she taught the *rākshasis* to cook food the

way she had learned from her mother's kitchen as a child. Even though it was Shri Rāma who banished her from the royal household, before leaving her husband for good, she left instructions with each one of Shri Rāma's royal servants - the cook, the gardener, the sweeper, etc. on what and how he liked his things to be done and that they should only do it that way.

- **Belief** - Her strength came from her firm belief that whatever happens, her husband Sri Rāma would come and rescue her and punish her abductor. She had the opportunity to simply run away when Hanumān offered to



take her to Shri Rāma but she chose to stay back, not run away like a thief and instead insisted that Shri Rāma come to Lankā and rescue her. She protected all of Shri Rāma's decisions by saying that all His actions could be justified because it was not only about being right but about a king who is above all doubts.

Sitā is described as the daughter of Mother Earth, *Bhūmidevi*, and is said to be the adopted daughter of King Janaka of Videha / Mithilā and his wife, Queen Sunayanā. She had a younger sister named Urmilā and had female cousins Māndavi and

Shrutakirti. The birth place of Sitā is disputed. The Sitā Kunda pilgrimage site which is located in the present day Sitāmarhi Dist., Bihar, India, is viewed as the birthplace of Sitā. Apart from Sitāmarhi, Janakpur which is located in the present-day Province No 2, Nepal, is also said to be Sitā's birthplace. Here the seventeenth century Saint Surkishoredas found a gold image of the Goddess and preached *Sitā-upāsanā* or worship of Sitā. Here the wedding of Sitā is enacted every year around November - December.

Sitā was so named after she was found in a furrow by the childless King Janaka. As a child, Sitā attended conferences and discussions along with her father and met great Rishis such as Ashtāvakra, Gārgi and Yājñavalkya and gained spiritual knowledge. At home, she learnt the art of cooking and managing a household as very often Rishis and scholars visited Janaka.

When Sitā reached adulthood, King Janaka organized a *swayamvara* in Janakapurdhām with the condition that Sitā should marry only that person who would be able to string *Shivadhanush*, the bow of Lord Shiva. Lord Rāma lifted up the bow with his left hand, fastened the string tightly and finally broke the bow. Thus, on Vivāha Panchami day, Lord Rāma married Sitā, Bharata married Māndavi, Lakshmana married Urmilā and Shatrughna married Shrutakirti. King Janaka advised his daughter to bring happiness into marriage rather than seek happiness from it. This set the basis of how she conducted herself from then on.

Kaikeyi, Lord Rāma's stepmother,

compelled King Dasharatha to make her son Bharatha the crown-prince instead of Shri Rāma. With the coaxing of her maid Mantharā, she forced Dasharatha to make Rāma leave Ayodhyā and spend a period of time in exile in the forests of Dandaka and later Panchavati. Sitā and Lakshmana accompanied Rāma to the forest. Sitā was bold in speech and not passive, as many believe her to have been. She argued with Rāma and was determined to accompany Him. Lord Rāma was impressed by her courage. She told Shri Rāma that her *dharma* was to follow her husband and that was what she was going to do. Their relationship was based on love, mutual respect and free exchange of views. Understanding her nature, Lord Rāma asks her to accompany Him to the forest and to be His partner in all that he is destined to do in exile.

While in the Dandaka forest in exile, Sitā was abducted by Rāvana the *rākshasa* King of Lankā. Rāvana kidnapped Sitā, disguising himself as a mendicant, while Lord Rāma was away to catch the golden deer for her. Sitā had voiced her misgivings to Rāma on his fighting the demons even though he was supposed to lead an ascetic life. When Rāvana in the guise of a *sannyāsi*, revealed his true identity and declares his intentions, Sitā burst out and warned him: "you are doomed if you desire Rāma's beloved".

During her captivity for a year in Lankā, Rāvana expressed his desire for her. However, Sitā staved off his advances and struggled to maintain her chastity. She also bore the torments of the *rākshasis* bravely.

Hanumān was then sent by Lord Rāma to seek Sitā. He eventually succeeded in locating Sitā's whereabouts. Sitā gave Hanumān her jewellery and asked him to give it to her husband on his return. Hanumān returned across the sea to Lord Rāma after setting Lankā on fire.

Driven to despair by Rāvana's ultimatum, Sitā contemplated giving up her life but breathed revenge on Lankā and Rāvana. Sitā was finally rescued by Lord Rāma who waged a war to defeat Rāvana. Upon rescue, Shri Rāma made Sitā undergo a trial by fire to prove her chastity. In some versions of Rāmāyana, during this test, the fire God Agni appears in front of Shri Rāma, attests to Sitā's purity, and hands over to Him the real Sitā and declares that it was Māyā Sitā who was abducted by Rāvana.

In Tamil poet Kampan's version of Rāmāyana, Sitā is portrayed as Rāvana's daughter. It is said that Rāvana abducted her because he did not want his daughter to suffer in the jungle.

After the exile period was over, the couple returned to Ayodhyā where Shri Rāma was crowned King with Sitā by His side. However, after a brief blissful period in Ayodhyā with Rāma, a pregnant Sitā was exiled to the forest for a second time, all because an intemperate washerman, while berating his wayward wife, declared that he was no Rāma, who took back his wife after she had lived in the house of another man (Rāvana). The courageous Sitā gave birth to twins, Lava and Kusha in Sage Vālmiki's āshrama. In Wayanād, Kerala, there is a temple of Sitā with her two sons.

After twelve years, when Shri Rāma again asked her to prove her chastity, Sitā, now resigned to her fate, declared, "this earth is not for me, nor this husband, nor the people of Ayodhyā, whom no proof can ever convince". On the strength of fidelity to her husband, she appealed to her Mother Earth to take her away to her origins and thus Sitā was drawn deep down into the eternal embrace of Mother Earth for release from a cruel world as a testimony of her purity, after she had reunited her two sons Lava and Kusha with their father Lord Rāma. The

Sitāmai temple in Karnal marks the spot where the ground splits so that Sitā could enter the earth.

Sitā is one of the five *sati-s* / *panchakanyā-s* (chaste wives) mentioned in the scriptures. Down the ages, if Shri Rāma is revered, it is in no small measure due to the quiet and selfless role played by Sitā. From earth, she rose and unto the earth, she returned, probably reiterating the philosophy that life is a challenge and that from dust unto dust is the ultimate truth! Jai Siyā Rāma!



Why Silence?

There is but one Saviour --- that is the redeeming Spirit within us. The outer Redeemer points the way and the inner Redeemer carries us on it. He speaks to us in the silent solitude of our soul. Out of this inner stillness we often get the greatest refreshment. When our outer life is still, it opens up new avenues for unfoldment. That is why the practice of silence has so much value and helps so much toward spiritual development.

Swami Paramananda



- Malathi Moorthy*

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills!

So sang Wordsworth but even as the loneliness could be barely expressed, there came the panorama of a host of golden daffodils that lifted him out of the pensive sadness into an exhilarating ecstasy born of sheer beauty.

*When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.*

Can we therefore say that loneliness is but a temporary emotion that can be alleviated by a simple experience of spectacular beauty that yields unalloyed pleasure?

Perhaps yes or is this only a poet's fantasy?

Today we are reminded over and over again by those who monitor social trends that LONELINESS will reach epidemic proportions even as technology makes instantaneous communication available to almost everyone the world over. Yet the very access to easy communication seems to erect barriers that actually accentuate the pain of loneliness.

On the other hand, this easy communication seems to facilitate 'aleness'. You can use your laptop to write, your mobile phone to call anyone



anywhere at any time. You do not have to go to the post office to send a letter. It would seem that physical mobility and verbal communication are no longer absolutely necessary. This in turn means that you don't meet or greet the postman (does he even know you?), the milk delivery lad, the newspaper boy, the sweeper, the garbage truck driver or almost ANYONE whose service you take for granted.

The lively exchange of harmless gossip over the fence as we dawdle over simple tasks that add a little spice to the homemaker's life is now replaced by a frenzied multi-tasking as we ready ourselves and the family to jump-start the day, aided by little post-it notes stuck on lunch boxes, the refrigerator, the children's school bag and even, at times, the laptop cover to remind us LEST WE FORGET!

We might make a brief mention here of other terms used or associated with loneliness. In the Vedic context, 'solitude' is often urged upon or sought as the 'quiet' of reflection that encourages and enables a slowing down in the hectic phase of the

grihastha (householder) stage. This solitude is accompanied by the phased reduction of social and familial obligation so as to encourage the turning inward of one's gaze upon oneself.

In the Western mode of life, solitude is sometimes prescribed as a necessary respite from the hitherto frenzied pace of life that would enable one to recharge and recuperate. Alas, the 'quiet' can create an inexplicable panic described almost comically in the words of Cowper:

*Oh solitude, where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms
Than reign in this horrible place!*

Interestingly, this emotion seems to find an echo in India's elderly population today – the older generation is at times devastated by the necessity of having to fend for itself and disheartened by the necessity of having to accept the grim reality that their children may never return to their homeland except for brief courtesy visits. The solace of Emails and the Internet do not adequately compensate for the spectre of a large bungalow that is now ominously quiet, minus the chatter of the young and the patter of little feet!

Another interesting term that describes this situation is "melancholy". It was quite a fashionable state to be in if you were a young single lady in the Victorian setting as an indication of being genteel and admirably delicate or vulnerable. Consider

Wordsworth in "The Solitary Reaper" –

*Behold her, single in the field,
Stop here or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain
And sings a melancholy strain;*

In a curious way, loneliness is almost an unrecognized choice. The person who is lonely does have a variety of options to choose from but is either hesitant or unwilling to take the first step. There is perhaps a vague touch of the 'poor me' syndrome. Sometimes there is even a stronger feeling that someone needs to recognize and volunteer to amend the situation that has come to her, unsought and undeserved.

~

*[*Malathi Moorthy returned to India in the year 1997 after living in UK for 3 years and in USA for 34 years. While abroad, she often took part in spiritual activities led by saints like Sant Keshavdas and Swami Chinmayananda and in organizations like ISKCON, PutthigeMatha, etc. Along with her husband, Late Dr. Shreenivas Moorthy, she always had deep interest in Indian spirituality and culture, along with some curiosity about Western values and practices. She had worked as a research assistant in University of Bombay after acquiring a Master's degree in Political Science, before going abroad. She received a Master's degree in Sociology from A&T University, Texas in 1987. She now lives in Bengaluru. – Editors]*



What do we learn from
Upanishads?

What is here, you will find there too!

- Swāmi Chidānanda



यदेवेह तदमुत्र यदमुत्र तदन्विह
yadeveha tadamutra, yadamutra tadanviha

As far as the inner world is concerned, wherever we go, we will meet the same bunch of advantages and challenges. Therefore, the wise do not attach undue importance to externalities like place, people and objects. They know that, really speaking, a man makes a position great and it is not the other way round. Whether we are in the noisy surroundings of cities or in the serene atmosphere of Himalayan resorts, we first have to face our own mind! Our likes and dislikes, our laziness or our false priorities do not spare us, no matter where we go!

The mantra (2.1.10) of Kathopanishad thus asks us to recognize the fact that golden opportunities to live a right, spiritual life exist everywhere – here as well as there. We must work on ourselves, wherever we are. We must not get carried away by the glitter and glamour of places or the charming appearances of people. Our main field of action is the arena called our own mind!

On a higher note, the mantra draws our attention to the same Self (*ātmā*) being present in the midst of physical (or mental) associations (here) or free of all associations (there).





अखण्डानन्दरूपस्य तस्यानन्दलवाश्रिताः
ब्रह्माद्यास्तारतम्येन भवन्त्यानन्दिनो अखिलाः ॥

Brahmā and Indra, the beings auspicious
get to relish but only a particle
of this Brahman, the mass of happiness endless
and derive delight from their fair share of that speckle

Atmabodha Verse 58



ETERNAL VIBRATIONS

WHO IS A YOGI?

The Litmus Test is Self-restraint



तांयोगमितिमन्यन्ते | *tāmyogamitimanyante* |
स्थिरामिन्द्रिय-धारणाम् | *sthirām-indriya-dhāranām* |

PRAISE OF SELF-CONTROL

The wise regard that as (true) yoga when one is able to keep one's sense-organs in balanced condition.

*Kathopanishad 2.3.11
(Chapter 2, valli 3 and mantra 11)*

{Many are the definitions of yoga and of a yogi. It is essentially a higher state of consciousness. Its hallmark is given above. More than being able to perform some complex *āsana*-s or *prāṇāyāma*-s, and more than being able to fast for days on end and such other unusual things, it is our ability to avoid either overindulgence or undue suppression (or starving) of the senses that makes us true yogis.}



FOWAI FORUM

Wisdom for Right Action

Dissemination of spiritual and secular wisdom is the main objective of the Fowai Forum. Educational activities, human welfare and services to all life are its concerns. Insights and observations especially based on Indian culture and heritage will find expression in its activities.

This public trust came into being in the year 2006. Registered as per the Mumbai Public Trust Act of 1950, the Forum engages in organizing talks and workshops as well as in publication of books and audio-visual media.

F.O.W.A.I. = Flame Of Who Am I?

“Who am I?” is the most basic question of life. The understanding of the self, the ‘me’, can cause radical change in the quality of life. This requires turning (the flame of) attention towards thoughts and emotions. When likes and dislikes fall away, pure perception takes place. That heralds freedom.

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