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# Inner Flame

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Hari Om,

The flame of realization of the eternal truth is being continuously lit by the 'Guru-s' in this holy land for many a millennium. All negativities, doubts and hesitations experienced by the disciples are instantaneously burnt away by the immeasurable kindness of the 'Guruparamparā', which is a manifestation of the divine grace itself.

One such gem in this unbroken chain of 'Rishi-s' is Shree Chattambi Swāmikal from God's own country i.e. Kerala. His heroic struggles after taking birth in a family that belonged to a lower caste, the legendary mastery over many domains of knowledge he could attain and his boundless love for humanity shine through with blinding brilliance to touch us deeply.

Swāmi Chidānanda delves into the process of 'obtaining happiness through the fulfillment of desires' to reaffirm the Upanishadic revelation that the highest level of happiness can be achieved only by renouncing all desires with the right understanding of the truth.

The culture in this country has always upheld the ancient saying in Sanskrit that says "Gods revel where ladies are worshipped". Ladies themselves have played vital roles to uphold the culture while displaying an innate beauty of character, great strength in the face of oppression and fortitude through long periods of suffering.

We carry an article on an extremely popular character in the Mahābhārata whose entire life was a constant struggle against selfish tendencies of human beings - Draupadi. She was the epitome of the fiery passion for righteousness which ensured that the guilty persons got punished in the great epic.

We take you to visit two more holy shrines this month, viz. Kedārnatha, ensconced in the snow-clad upper reaches of the Himālayas and Ghrshneshwara, the hidden jewel in the Charanandri hills, located in Aurangabad district of the state of Maharashtra.

In the Guest Corner, there is an interesting list of 14 tips for day-to-day happiness, drawn up by the Harvard professor Tal Ben Shahar, who runs an extremely popular course in Positive Psychology at this esteemed institution.

Under a new series 'Fleeting moments, Enduring Impressions', Swāmi Chidānanda recounts to telling effect, his interesting meeting with the widely acclaimed management guru Stephen R Covey, who incorporated in his discourses, the wisdom of the spiritual traditions of the east.

As usual, there are brief glances at the pearl within the lotus in our regular features viz. Rhythms for the Soul, What do we learn from Upanishads and Eternal Vibrations.

Wish you absorbing reading and engaging contemplation on the reality that lies beyond the charming words.

*Cdr HC Guruprasad (IN, Retd)*  
**For the Editorial Team**



# Inner Flame

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Swāmi Chidānanda

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**Cover design of this issue: Rashmi Hande**

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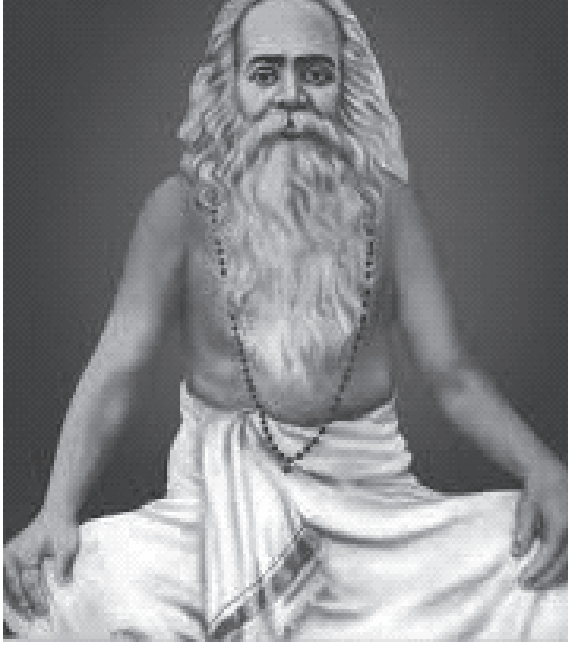
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## ETERNAL VIBRATIONS

The Golden Rule of Ethics

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- Compiled by Dakshu Mansukhani

**Inequality among God's own children**

It is said that the oldest of all the *Purāna*-s, the *Matsya Purāna*, sets the story of the *Matsyāvatāra* (fish incarnation) of Lord Vishnu, in the Malaya Mountains, which lie in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The earliest Sanskrit text to mention Kerala by name is the *Aitareya Aranyaka* of the *Rigveda*. Nature seemed to favour Kerala and she bestowed her richest bounties on Kerala; the sun never failed by day and the land received plenty of rainfall in due season and an eternal summer covered the scene with golden hues. On the cultural and religious fronts, in Kerala, 'there were no social inequalities or caste system, where people freely pursued

their spiritual and material welfare and the dignity of labour received universal recognition.' It was a composite, homogenous culture wherein the caste system was understood in its primary perspective, where society was organized on the basis of the principles of social freedom and equality.

By 1891, however, the situation was starkly different. A very rigid and discriminatory caste system had reduced the social, cultural and religious ethos to a state where society was riddled with gross inequalities and injustice. In fact, the social environment in Kerala was so deplorable that Swami Vivekananda condemned the state as a mental asylum. Fleeing this stranglehold on material and spiritual advancement, thousands of Hindus converted to Christianity and Islam. Half the temples were destroyed by the converters and the converted. The elevating, egalitarian thinking of *advaitin* Adi Shankaracharya, who had taken birth in Kerala in the 8th century, were all but non-operational. Kerala needed strong and powerful leaders to sow the seeds of reform within the Hindu code, to regenerate the unity in diversity, so persuasively explained by the Great Master Himself. Another champion was required.

That champion came in the guise of a child named Ayyappan or Kunjan ('small male child', as he was lovingly called by



his mother), who was born on 25th August 1853 at Kollam. His birth had been predicted by one of his ancestors; among his ancestors were scholars, saints and *siddhas* like Eshwara Pillai, who was a disciple of a saint Harihara Sāstrikal, an *Advaitin*. Before his birth, his mother, Kunjipennu Pillai, also known as Nangammā, worked at the home of a higher caste family, cleaning their home and its surroundings. She was a very poor woman. When Vasudevan Namboodiri, a priest at the Devi Temple was posted in the same village, her generally pleasant demeanour appealed to him; he approached her family and Kunjipennu and Vasudevan underwent a *sambandha* marriage (a man having a 'visiting relationship' with a woman). They had three children, the first of whom was Ayyappan / Kunjan. Despite having married a man of a higher caste, Kunjan's mother and her children remained poverty-stricken as her husband, due to the custom followed at that time, was not obliged to provide for the family. In fact, the rules of caste were so strict that neither father nor son was allowed to touch the other and were it to happen by mistake, the father had to go through a purificatory bath. This remained in Ayyappan's mind and later added fire to his ideological fight against caste pollution.

*"Discrimination between man and man? It is high time that we tossed those imagined differences between man and man into the Arabian Sea."*

### **Divine Sanskāra-s**

Even as a child, his face shone with divine grace. His actions bespoke his compassionate nature. He would be very slow in consuming his share of the limited amount of food his mother got as wages, so that his younger brother and sister could eat more. Nevertheless, his brother and his sister died very young due to malnutrition and lack of timely medication. He had nothing to wear but a torn towel but he folded it astutely, so as to not show the torn part. He was very considerate not only to other people around him but also to animals and birds. On his own, he maintained a disciplined routine, taking a bath twice a day to keep his body clean. He was internally pure too; he tried to prevent his mother from buying fish from a friend who happened to sell them for a living. In a fit of anger, his mother once hit him with a big fish; the impression of the hurt he received, both physically and emotionally, was never forgotten by him. Later, he strongly supported vegetarianism, telling those who would listen to him:

- "Eschew eating the flesh of dead creatures".
- "Living organisms have been created to be loved, not eaten".
- "Vegetarians are perhaps not totally non-violent. But they are certainly a few notches above the flesh-eaters in the ladder of non-violence".
- "Saints and spiritual masters have invariably advocated vegetarianism".
- "Non-vegetarianism distorts the basic

character of man".

- "This universe is the manifestation of but one mind. Alienation between one mind and another mind is unnatural. The mind of man is in no way different from the mind of any other creature".
- "Love an insect, and it can be seen that it reciprocates".
- "Salvation is the ultimate outcome of non-violence".

Even as a child, he would support other low-caste children of the neighbourhood. To supplement his mother's earnings, he made garlands from flowers picked in the wild. He was known to pick wild, leafy vegetables which he would sell, taking cooked rice, salt and pepper as payment.

A traumatic, personal experience made a strong impression on his young mind regarding the necessity and value of prayer and the worship of God. At a young age, he was afflicted by a severe skin disease which proved untreatable by local doctors. He and his mother took a vow that he would undertake one month of daily *bhajanam*<sup>1</sup> at the *Devi* temple that he regularly visited; at the end of one month, his mother would arrange for a special *puja* to be performed at the *Attukal* *Devi* temple on a festival day. Gradually, he was cured of the disease, affirming his and his mother's faith. His conviction that prayer is a solution to many problems that cannot be resolved otherwise, became fully established thereafter.

### **Yearning for learning**

Having had no formal education, he learned a smattering of Malayalam from his father and also from his cousin who was fortunate enough to be able to attend school. Rules prohibiting low-caste children from learning the Sanskrit language were very strictly enforced in those times; however, his strong desire to learn and that too, particularly the Sanskrit language, emboldened him to sit outside the Sanskrit class to catch whatever instruction the teacher was giving to Brahmin students. On discovering Kunjan's persistence and determination in this regard, the kindhearted teacher allowed the young child to attend the classes, provided he sat in a corner of the classroom, far away from the other students. Kunjan exhibited extraordinary intelligence; he learned to read Tamil and learnt a little mathematics by borrowing or even collecting discarded, corrected palm-leaf note books which had been used by school students. His wonderful personality earned him the name '*Chattambi*', which means a leader or reformer, as an accolade for his leadership qualities which he exhibited, even as a teenager.

Kunjan Pillai was introduced into the science of yoga by a wandering *sādhū*, who came to his village temple. He initiated him into the spiritual world by giving him *deekshā* of the *Balasubrahmanya Mantra*. Mastering this *mantra*, he acquired a new vigour and zeal; he assumed the name *Shanmukhadāsa* due to his deep

devotion to Lord Subrahmanya. He then spent many years learning under Subba Jatapādikal. He acquired a deep and extensive mastery of all *Shāstra*-s in Tamil and Sanskrit. He also learnt the *Siddha* system of traditional medicine, while learning music and the martial arts at the same time. During this period, he was greatly influenced by the works of Kodakanallur Sundara Swāmikal, a great *Advaitin* Philosopher. He later translated Sundara Swāmikal's work *Nijānanda Vilāsam*, containing the cream of Vedānta, into simple Malayalam to guide spiritual aspirants.

Chattambi Swāmikal lived a life of austere simplicity. A *mundu* (a garment worn around the waist in Kerala), an iron ring, an old umbrella, a walking stick and a *ganjirā* (a South Indian frame-drum) were his only possessions. He had no home and no intimate friends. This world was his family. He flitted from place to place like a carefree, singing bird.

#### **Master of all he surveyed**

Chattambi Swāmikal had commendable mastery over diverse fields of knowledge. He possessed extraordinary memory power. Veda, Grammar, Astrology, Ayurveda, Yoga, Tarkashāstra, Tantravidyā and Tamil and Sanskrit literature were a few areas of his interest. He was a singer and composer. While his favourite art was music, his favourite instrument was the *ganjirā*. His skill in playing any instrument with originality was widely known and acclaimed. He had interest in taking part in *Kathakali*. He was equally good at painting. He was a wrestler par

excellence. His poems and writings were the outpouring of the need to express himself.

The spiritual and mystical powers that Chattambi Swāmikal had acquired were innumerable. But he was ever averse to showing them off. If he was unavoidably compelled to display them on rare occasions, his intention was not to take credit or to impress others. His *brahmacharya* and intense *tapas* had conferred upon him all the *Yoga siddhis* which in turn had given him the power of prophecy. Swāmikal possessed a commanding power over natural elements, animals and human beings alike. But he never misused these powers for selfish ends. He had the power to cure seemingly incurable diseases and make cobras and even tigers obey his behests. *The Feast for Dogs* is considered the most popular miracle he performed. A vain officer once invited Swāmikal to dine at his house; Swāmikal accepted the invitation on the condition that he should be allowed to bring with him some of his disciples. When the feast was served on leaves, a pack of stray dogs entered the hall, sat by the leaves and had their meals in an uncharacteristically disciplined way. They finished their meal, took the leaves outside and disappeared mysteriously. Swāmikal said to the astonished host, 'These dogs were senior officers in their last life. Corruption, oppression, plunders and other heinous crimes led to their being reborn as dogs.'

He also spent long periods learning the Christian religion and philosophy and

the method of Christian meditation. Later, he lived with an old Muslim who was well-versed in the Quran and Sufi mysticism. It was from him that he learnt the main tenets of Islam. Kunjan acquired proficiency in reading the Quran in the traditional way. He then wandered for months with many *Avadhutas* in Southern Tamil Nadu and travelled all over India. Those days revealed to him that the basic concepts of all religions are the same.

At the end of his wanderings and quest, Kunjan Pillai was led to Self-realization by an *Avadhuta* whom he met at a wayside-inn at Vadaveeswaram, a village in Tamil Nadu. Kunjan lived with the *Avadhuta* in the forest for many months without any contact with the outside world. It is believed that this *Avadhuta* belonged to the line of immortal masters of Southern India, the *Siddha*-s, who knew the scientific art for realizing God. Kunjan returned to Kerala as a great scholar and saint.

### ***Reforming the society through his disciples***

Among Swāmikal's prominent disciples were Neelakanta Theerthapada and Theerthapada Parmahansa. His disciples belonged to different strata of society and most of them were householders. All these disciples and devotees of Swāmikal made significant contribution to social and spiritual regeneration of the people of Kerala. In 1882, at the Aniyoor Temple near Vamanapuram in Tamil Nadu, Swāmikal met a man named Nānu Āsan.

Later known as Nārāyana Guru, he was three years younger than Swāmikal and also in search of spiritual guidance. By then, Swāmikal was well-versed in yoga and spiritual matters and their meeting proved to be the start of a profound and cherished companionship, although the two were of completely different temperaments. In those days, Nānu Āsan was a soft-spoken introvert and Swāmikal was an outspoken extrovert. They lived and travelled together for many months. Swāmikal introduced Āsan to all the arts and sciences he had mastered and also to spiritual practices.

Sree Vidyādhiraja Chattambi Swāmikal, popularly known as Chattambi Swāmi, was one of the greatest scholar-saints of Kerala. He fought against the rigid caste system and social vices prevalent in the society. He denounced the orthodox interpretation of Hindu texts, citing sources from the Vedas. Chattambi Swāmikal was a multi-faced personality; he was a great peripatetic scholar. His religious quest and discovery, his austere simplicity and great self-denial, his humble sharing with others the light with which he himself was illumined, his loving tenderness for all living creatures are inspiring and instructive for all time. He was a saint, Yogi, Maharshi, friend of the world who loved all creations alike, great philosopher who pioneered social renaissance without being a part of it, famous scholar who had no higher education, expert who had built his knowledge out of his experience, social



reformer who succeeded in establishing cordial relations between different communities and learned intellectual genius of our times.

*"Knowledge is as essential for human existence as food. Nobody should be denied access to knowledge."*

Swāmikal also worked for the emancipation of women and encouraged them to be the leaders of society.

*"Supremacy of woman over man is an unquestionable fact".*

*"Enslavement of woman is a manifestation of male arrogance. It is against all canons of justice and ethics. It is criminal, immoral".*

*"Woman cannot be fettered by any power in the world. She is the symbol of the creative force and the presiding deity of the universe".*

It was Chattambi Swāmikal's meeting with Swami Vivekananda that was instrumental in bringing about greater social changes in the caste-ridden society. In 1892, when Swāmi Vivekānanda, as a wondering monk, was on his *parikramā*, he came across Chattambi Swāmikal who was then staying in the house of a devotee in Ernakulum. Conversing in Sanskrit, Swāmi Vivekānanda introduced the topic of *Chinmudrā* and asked Swāmikal to unfold its esoteric meaning and its role in achieving higher levels of consciousness. Quoting from an old commentary on the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, still unpublished, Swāmikal

explained that when the tips of the thumb and index finger touch each other, a vibratory energy is produced, and it flows up to the *sahasrapadma* of the aspirant, elevating him to a higher stage of consciousness. Swāmi Vivekānanda was very much impressed by this clarification and he wrote: "Here I met a remarkable man".

Swāmi Chinmayānanda, founder of the Chinmaya Mission, was given the name Bālakrishna by none other than the revered Chattambi Swāmikal, whose love and affection he enjoyed during his childhood. Swāmi Chinmayānanda wrote: "My teacher Sree Swāmi Tapovanam had a great reverence for Sree Chattambi Swāmikal and it is in fact from Sri Gurudeva that I heard so often of the spiritual and mystical glory of this rare sage of Kerala". "Sree Chattambi Swamikal has been one of the constant altars at which I have surrendered and invoked endless streams of power and strength. His spiritual stature is unmatched by any of the greatest men I have so far met. What I am today capable of in serving the world, I owe to this unique Sage... It seems that I had a secret initiation at the hands of the Swāmikal. My homage at the altar of this Majesty of knowledge".

Supporting non-violence (*ahimsā*) in every walk of life, Swāmikal strongly believed that the different religions and different paths lead to the same place. He strongly opposed the conversion activities of the Christian missionaries but he was not against Christianity.

Throughout his intellectually and spiritually enriched life, Chattambi Swāmikal maintained a large number of friends from different regions and religions of Kerala. Along with Nārāyana Guru, Swāmikal strove to reform the heavily ritualistic and caste-ridden Hindu society prevalent in Kerala during the last decade of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. The so-called downtrodden communities were not permitted to enjoy the basic rights of a human being: Untouchability, Inapproachability and Un-see-ability existed in the society by which the so-called *avarnas* (ones who do not have a *varna*) were prohibited from seeing and touching a caste-Hindu.

Having no home of his own, Swāmikal stayed with friends. Swāmikal had written many literary works experimenting on various topics that include history, language, Vedas, Upanishads and Culture. Many of his writings have been lost or remain hidden; However, *Advaita Chinta Paddhati*; *Vedāntasangraham*; *Vedānta Sāram* and *Vedādhikāra Nirupanam*, to mention but four, are well preserved and widely studied even today. *Vedādhikāra Nirupanam* is considered to be one of his greatest works. It refuted the baseless customs and rules that existed in Kerala. For the first time in the region's history, the work questioned the monopolisation of Vedas, sciences and education by a minority. When Nitya Chaitanya Yathi read it to his Master Natarāja Guru, the Master said 'The words of the book are true like fire and it was to be considered

our luck that these papers have not got burned'.

Swāmikal was a genius. The humorous expression of his brilliance can be seen in his works, all of which have a common quality, in that they are a deep examination of a subject. Chattambi Swāmikal's unique style and independent thinking is his trade mark. When examining a subject, he tried to accept the entirety of that subject as much as possible. Any kind of topic that was difficult to understand was made lighter for readers by including everyday examples. Such was his kind of verbal efficiency, even though "the depth of the thought and the content of his writings often adversely affects their literary grace."

Chattambi Swāmikal belonged to that rare band of religious leaders and world-benefactors who led a selfless life in the midst of common people with their mundane concerns. They set an example for others to follow. They raised the moral and spiritual standards of the society they lived in. Swāmikal visualized a universal family of man without the barriers of caste or creed. With his abundant love and compassion for all created things, he started a new epoch in spiritual regeneration. Even humble creatures like ants and dogs were his brothers or friends. His ideal of a new social structure involved all mankind united by the bond of love, equality of all mankind and a deep reverence for God... as professed in his own words:

*"The whole universe is the*

*manifestation of the One. The apparent differences between different objects are only an illusion. An understanding of this truth will lead to liberation and salvation".*

*"Thought should precede every action of yours".*

*"Avoid boastful thoughts about your physical achievements and material accumulations. Contemplate over the ultimate reality of existence. That alone will give meaning to life".*

*"Light a lamp; set a bowl of fragrant flowers before it; fix the image of the goddess in your mind; gently and tunelessly chant the thousand names of Devi Lalithā. And no wish of yours will remain unfulfilled".*

He spent his last years in Panmana, a remote village in Kollam. Like other *Siddha*-s before him, he had a clear premonition about the impending end of his physical existence which he left on May 5, 1924. One can say without any doubt that he was an enlightened soul, eminent yogi, great scholar and social reformer with a difference.

**Notes:**

- *Bhajanam* (at a temple) is a vow taken up by a devotee for a certain number of days (3 days, one week, one month, etc.) wherein he/ she effectively undertakes to spend the entire day at the temple, to be present during all the *puja*-s and rituals performed at the temple and to partake of only the *prasadam* given by the temple (usually taking no other food). *Bhajanam* is taken up by the devotee to appease the deity and to appeal for the deity's grace in obtaining a cure for mental or physical illness or other afflictions or for removing specific obstacles in the devotee's life. It is known to be a very therapeutic experience for the devotee and also reduces stress, confusion, conflicts, etc.
- *Bhajanam* is thus quite different from the chanting of hymns or *bhajans*. *Bhajanam* is a popular practice in the temples of Kerala, such as the Guruvayoor Krishna Temple and the Chottanikkara Bhagavathy Temple.

**Sources:**

Panmanashram.com, Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in, Omshivam.wordpress.com, Satsangh-foundation.org



- Swāmi Chidānanda

A thousand objects of desire, when acquired, give us happiness. Our life generally consists of chasing some object or the other in the hope of finding happiness. Ādi Shankara put it summarily<sup>1</sup>:

*Playing with toys in years of childhood,  
Drawn to young women when  
enjoying youth,  
Sinking in worries during times  
when old,  
Man has no time for the Supreme Truth!*

The above verse, implying many more temptations like power or position, lets us understand how we are generally preoccupied by some fancy or the other, all our life.

### **Vedānta does not forbid desire**

The comprehensive vision of the Upanishads (the Vedānta) recognizes and respects desires in human life. Not to do so would be a serious contradiction between 'veda-poorva' and 'vedānta'. Going for an analogy of modern times, it would be as though Ph.D. work looks down at graduate or under-graduate work. The researcher, who is busy with his Ph.D. work, was at one time an under-graduate student, who slowly progressed on his path to pursue M.Sc. (graduate program), and is now, yes, pursuing his Ph.D. in an advanced area of interest.

For example, the *Mundaka* Upanishad, at the beginning, praises the field of action, declaring<sup>2</sup>, "Take this to be true!" This implies that the rituals leading to heaven are not fancy, that they (the *mantra*-s that endorse Vedic rituals) are rather sure shots towards gaining the bliss of *svarga* (heaven). This further implies that action in general, secular or religious, fulfils various desires of mankind and thereby, brings happiness. Don't we experience happiness in daily life when we get even small jobs done and triumphantly move on to other pending jobs? Desire indeed is a



disturbance in our minds and typically, an appropriate action gets us the object of desire, and happiness emerges when the disturbance subsides.

Hundreds of motivational workshops thus ask us to *get up, take action and fulfil our dreams*. Vedānta talks of a chain of evils (*anartha-paramparā*) – *avidyā*, *kāma* and *karma* – and generally, we are moving back and forth between the latter



two among the three mentioned here. Desire (*kāma*) prompts us towards action (*karma*); there is momentary happiness; desire arises again, and we are propelled to act again! Let higher spirituality mock at desire; life in general, however, revolves around desire. If somebody has no desire, we generally think something is wrong with him!

Echoing the Upanishadic outlook, Shri Krishna says<sup>3</sup>, "See Me in desire, when it is unopposed to *dharma*!" The Lord, the divinity, is present in desire. When our desires are immoral, however, it is the demon who visits us in the disguise of the divine.

#### ***The happiness when there is no desire***

All of us know very well the happiness born of the contact between objects (*vishaya*) and us, the subjects (*vishayī*). Ice cream, for example, is an object. A boy can be the subject, who contacts the ice cream through his tongue. He experiences happiness, and wants more of the object that gave him happiness. In fact, in a larger sense, objects can be both outside and inside. Food, drinks, wealth and position are outside us. We derive happiness from them. Good health, knowledge gained through study and good understanding of various things and situations in life are also the causes of happiness. These are inner (*ādhyātmika*) means of happiness. They are also objects (*vishaya*) in the broader sense of the term. Vedānta explores the questions, "Is there happiness without depending upon any object (*nirvishaya*, *svābhāvika*)?"

When our mind is free of longing for any object, it can perceive a certain kind of happiness. That is natural to us, and is called *brahmānanda*. In fact, happiness that is seemingly derived from objects – called *vishayānanda* – is a dim reflection of the natural happiness in us. The Upanishads beckon us to *brahmānanda*. Usually, we are again and again drawn to *vishayānanda*, which comes to us as the outcome of our previous, meritorious deeds (*punya-karma*). Particular thought-forms arise in our mind, which have "people or objects that we love" as their objects. Moreover, these thought-forms (*vritti-vishesha*) are not veiled by darkness (*tamas*), which is again a blessing of our *punya-karmas*. In such a situation, the natural (*svābhāvika*) happiness of ours gets reflected in the thought-forms and we feel delighted.

Ignorance (*avidyā*) is the primary error, which entails false constructs, including that of the one who is ignorant. *Avidyā* covers the innate, actually ever-present wisdom (*vijnāna*) in every one of us. Within this "error domain (*avidyā-bhoomi*)", all living beings – beginning with Brahmā and going up to an ant (and beyond) – experience happiness in varying degrees as per their karma. [Brahmā is the Creator, a god-form, a position that can be attained by a *jeeva* also if he/she earns immense merit.] Lesser the grip or pressure of *avidyā*, *kāma* or *karma*, the greater will be the happiness we experience.

#### ***The scale of happiness***

The Taittiriya Upanishad gives us a scale of happiness, highlighting the glory

In its astounding remark<sup>5</sup>, the Upanishad then says this measure of happiness (H2) is already included in the happiness of a '*person with Vedic*

To point out once more, increased happiness, which belongs to the higher beings in this creation, is directly attained as we are increasingly desireless (*akāmahata*). The three criteria<sup>6</sup> that bring the highest happiness (of Brahmā) to us here and now, are – having the spiritual (Vedic) wisdom, being pure-hearted and possessing no personal desires!

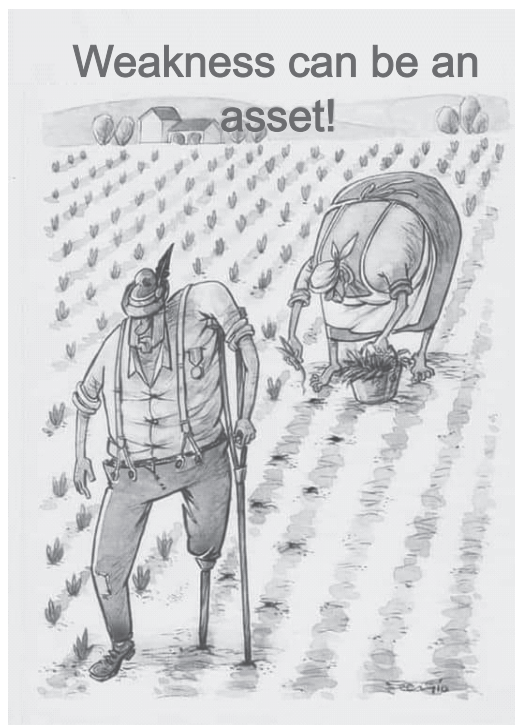
### ***Do we want to be happy?***

The message conveyed by the analysis of happiness (*ānanda-mimāṃsā*) above is that we must 1) study the Vedas<sup>7</sup> daily, 2) give up our sinful ways and 3) let go of our desires for egoistic gratification. This is the inner journey leading us to true, lasting happiness. All else is fleeting and most undependable.

~

#### **Notes:**

1. Bhaja Govindam – verse 7 [*bālas-tāvat kreedā saktah..*]
2. *tad-etaṭ-satyam* – Mu. Up. 1.2.1
3. *dharma-aviruddho bhooteshu kāmo'smi bharatarshabha* – Geetā 7.11
4. *mānushah ānandah*-Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.8.3
5. *shrotriyasya cha akāmahatasya*-Tai. Up. 2.8.3
6. *shrotriya*, *avrijina* and *akāmahata* - Commentary by Shankarāchārya (*shrotriya* and *adhyāyaka* go together; *sādhu* and *avrijina* go together.)
7. *vedonityam-adheeyatām* – first verse of the text named *sādhana-panchakam*.



- Osho

I will tell you a story. There was a great Sufi, Mulla Nasruddin. He was very afraid of death, as everyone is.

One day, he heard that someone had died. He came home trembling. He asked his wife, "Can you tell me how I will know when I am dead? What are the symptoms? How will I be able to know that death has come?" His wife said, "You are foolish. You will know. You will become cold..."

One day soon after, Mulla was working on his farm. The day was very cold and his hands became cold. He thought to himself, "It looks like I'm dying." He began to think about what he should do. "I must behave like a dead man now. The body is the body. My symptoms tell me that I am dead. What do dead men do? I must think about it." Dead men lie down, so he lay down and closed his eyes. Someone passed by. They thought that Mulla must be dead. He wanted to say, "I am not dead," but dead men don't speak. He thought: "Dead men never speak, I have never heard about a dead man speaking. It will be absolutely unnatural for me to speak."

They decided to carry Mulla to the cemetery. But because they were unfamiliar with that part of the country as they were foreigners, passing by on the

road, when they came to the crossroad, they didn't know in which direction the cemetery was; they didn't know where to go. Of course, Mulla knew where the cemetery was. He wondered if it would be alright to tell them the way to get there, but then he decided that it was impossible. And besides, someone would turn up and then they could ask.

No one turned up. Evening was descending and soon it would be night. The men began to be worried. Mulla thought, "They are so worried. I must help them" but of course, dead men cannot help.

Finally night had come, it was dark. They thought: "What to do? We cannot leave the dead body here. We don't know where to go: where his house is or where the cemetery is. What are we to do now?" Mulla said, "If you don't mind, it's not natural of course: I am a dead man, I should not speak; the rules don't permit it but if you allow me, I can show you the way. And then, I will stop talking."

If you are not, then you cannot even say that you are not. It's not possible. So the last assertion that the technique of surrender will lead to is 'I am not.' That is the last assertion. Then only the divine is. And when you are not, how can there be any difference between you and the



divine?

When you are not, you are divine.

So through the approach of will or the approach of surrender, you reach the

same point. Through one approach, 'the other' is killed, and through the opposite approach, 'you' are killed. In both cases, in the end, only one remains: the 'am'ness remains.



Do you not see how everybody works? Nobody can be altogether at rest; ninety-nine per cent of mankind work like slaves, and the result is misery; it is all selfish work. Work through freedom! Work through love!

The word "love" is very difficult to understand; love never comes until there is freedom...

If you buy a slave and tie him down in chains and make him work for you, he will work like a drudge, but there will be no love in him.

So when we ourselves work for the things of the world as slaves, there can be no love in us, and our work is not true work.

- Swami Vivekananda



## On Wanting Happiness

- Anthony De Mello, S.J.

I was saying that we don't want to be happy. We want other things. Or let's put it more accurately: We don't want to be unconditionally happy. I'm ready to be happy provided I have this and that and the other thing. But this is really to say to our friend or to our God or to anyone, "You are my happiness. If I don't get you, I refuse to be happy." It's so important to understand that. We cannot imagine being happy without those conditions. That's pretty accurate. We cannot conceive of being happy without them. We've been taught to place our happiness in them.

So that's the first thing we need to do if we want to come awake, which is the same thing as saying: if we want to love, if we want freedom, if we want joy and peace and spirituality. In that sense, spirituality is the most practical thing in the whole wide world. I challenge anyone to think of anything more practical than

spirituality as I have defined it—not piety, not devotion, not religion, not worship, but spirituality—waking up, waking up! Look at the heartache everywhere, look at the loneliness, look at the fear, the confusion, the conflict in the hearts of people, inner conflict, outer conflict. Suppose somebody gave you a way of getting rid of all of that? Suppose somebody gave you a way to stop that tremendous drainage of energy, of health, of emotion that comes from these conflicts and confusion. Would you want that? Suppose somebody showed us a way whereby we would truly love one another, and be at peace, be at love. Can you think of anything more practical than that? But, instead, you have people thinking that big business is more practical, that politics is more practical, that science is more practical. What's the earthly use of putting a man on the moon when we cannot live on the earth?



- Compiled by RatnaViswanath

(Continued from the Previous Issue)

**11. Kedārnātha Jyotirlinga**

The Kedārnātha Jyotirlinga Temple is located on the Garhwal Himalayan Range in the Rudraprayāg District of Uttarākhand at an altitude of about 3,600 metres. Among the twelve *jyotirlingas*, it is situated at the northernmost point and is at the highest altitude. The river Mandākini has its source near Kedārnātha. Mandākini meets Alakananda at Rudraprayāg.



Kedārnātha is revered as the *jyotirlinga* closest to Lord Shiva's eternal abode of Mount Kailash. Nestled in the snow-clad Himalayas, it is an ancient shrine, rich in legend and tradition. Kedārnātha forms a part of the smaller Chār Dhām pilgrimage circuit. It is also one of the *Pādal Petra Sthalams* of *Vada Nādu*—places in the North, which three of the most revered *Nayanārs* (Shaivite saints) have glorified with their songs.

**The legends associated with Kedārnātha Jyotirlinga**

According to one legend, Lord Shiva was pleased by the severe penance of Nara and Nārāyana, the two incarnations of Lord Vishnu and took up permanent abode in Kedārnātha as a *jyotirlinga*.

Legend also has it that Pārvati worshipped Kedāreshwara in order to fulfil her wish of uniting with Shiva as *Ardhanāreeshwara*.

According to another legend, the *Pāndava*-s performed a great penance and prayed to Lord Shiva to absolve them of their sins after the *Kurukshetra* war. The *Pāndava*-s first went to Kāshi to meet the Lord; but He was in the Himalayas. They proceeded to the Himalayas, but Shiva did not want to pardon their sins easily. Therefore, He disguised himself as a bull/ buffalo and went to Guptakāshi (which is 49 km from Kedārnātha). The *Pāndavas* reached Guptakāshi too and spotted a unique - looking bull / buffalo. When thus discovered, the bull/ buffalo went into the earth, leaving its hump visible on the surface. The other story is that Bhima pulled the buffalo's tail; it then disintegrated and its hump fell in Kedārnātha.

The other body-parts of the bull/ buffalo fell elsewhere. Thus, when Shiva entered the ground, He became five-fold

- His hind remained at Kedār, His arms were at Tunganātha, His face at Rudranātha, His belly at Madhyameshwara and His *jatā* (matted locks) at Kalpeshwara. These five shrines together are known as the Pancha-Kedāra. The front portion of the body is believed to be in Nepal in Pashupatinātha.

Pleased with the *Pāndava*-s, Lord Shiva appeared at Kedārnātha in the form of a pyramidal *gyotirlinga*. The *Pāndava*-s are said to have built the temple using enormous stone slabs over a large rectangular dais.

The present temple, built in the 8th century A.D. by Ādi Shankarāchārya, stands adjacent to the site of the ancient temple. The temple premises cover 3 sq.km. Before the main temple, there is a low-roofed hall which has images of Pārvasi and the five *Pāndava*-s. The walls are adorned with figures of other characters from Mahābhārata. Outside the temple door, there is a huge statue of *Nandi*.

Pure ghee is applied on the Kedārnātha *lingam* as the bull/buffalo was injured when it dived into the earth or disintegrated.

### ***Pujā*-s and Festivals**

Tradition has it that pilgrims first visit Yamunotri and Gangotri and bring with them the holy waters from the sources of the rivers Yamunā and Gangā and offer *abhisheka* to Kedāreshwara.

During the winter, the temple is closed and the idol of Lord Shiva is

brought down to 'Ukhimath', where the deity is worshipped during the winter months. The idol is reinstated in the Kedārnātha Temple during the month of Vaisākha (April-May) and the temple is set open for pilgrims.

Apart from the daily *puja*-s and *abhisheka*, many annual festivals are also celebrated.

**Badri - Kedāra Utsav** is organised in June; this festival, dedicated to Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva is celebrated for 8 days. Prominent artists from all over Uttarakhand showcase their musical talent here.

**Shrāvani Annakoot Melā** is celebrated on the day preceding Rakshā Bandhan. The entire *gyotirlinga* is covered with cooked rice which is later distributed to devotees as *Prasad*.

To commemorate the *samādhi*-day of Ādi Shankarāchārya, *Samādhi Pūjā* is held on the day the temple closes for six months.

### **Places to Visit In Kedārnātha**

Apart from the *Panchakedāra* temples, the other important places nearby include:

- **Triyuginārāyana** - It is believed that the wedding of Lord Shiva and Mātā Pārvasi took place in this temple. The flame that was the witness to the wedding, continues to burn in front of the temple to this day.
- **Guptakāshi** is famous for the temples of Ardhanārishwara and Vishwanātha.



- **Chopta** is situated at a distance of 93 Kms from Kedārnātha, Chopta offers the most panoramic view of the Himalayas.
- **Vasuki Tal** is a lake at an altitude of 4135m. It gives a breathtaking view of the Chaukhamba peaks. This is a 6-km-trek from Kedārnātha Temple.
- **Gāndhi Sarovar**, also known as Chorabari Tal, is a small lake which lies at the foot of Kedārnātha Temple. Yudhishtira, the eldest *Pāndava*, is said to have departed to heaven from here.
- **Bhairavanātha** Temple is located just 1 km away from Kedārnātha Temple. From here, one can get a view of Kedārnātha valley and Kedārnātha shrine. It is believed that when Kedārnātha temple is closed for winter, it is Bhairavanāth who protects the Kedārnātha temple and the valley.
- **Gaurikunda** is the base for the trek to Kedārnātha. The village has a temple dedicated to Gauri. There are hot springs here.
- At Kedārnātha, there are several *kundas* (small tanks) that are considered sacred. Shivkunda, Retkunda, Hanskunda, Udakkunda, Rudhirkunda are well-known among them.
- There are more than 200 shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva in and around the area.

#### How to get there

One can reach Kedārnātha after an



arduous 16 km-trek from Gaurikunda. Horses or ponies are available to climb the steep path. There are sheds every few kilometers where devotees can rest during this arduous trek. It takes around 7 hours to reach Kedārnātha from Gaurikunda. Helicopter-service is also available.

Gaurikunda is connected via road to major cities like Haridwar, Dehradun and Rishikesh. The nearest airport is Dehradun. The nearest railhead is Rishikesh.

The traditional pilgrim route is Haridwār - Rishikesh - Devaprayāg - Tehri - Dharasu - Yamunotri - Uttar Kāshi - Gangotri - Triyuginārayana - Gowrikunda and Kedārnātha. Alternatively, the route to Kedāra from Rishikesh is via Devaprayāg, Srinagar, Rudraprayāg and Ukhimath.

#### 12. Ghrshneshwara Jyotirlinga

Ghrshneshwara *jyotirlinga* temple is located near Ellora, 11 km from Daulatābād (Devagiri) in the Charanandri hills in Aurangabad district in Maharashtra.

Krishnarāj, the Rāshtrakuta king of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, is believed to have built



this huge and beautiful temple on the banks of river Yelaganga in the village Verul. Verul was originally a settlement of the *Nāga* tribes, who called it Bambi. It was called 'Varul' in Marathi and became Verul over a period of time.

In 1599 CE, Malojiraje Bhosale, grandfather of Chhatrapati Shivāji, reconstructed the temple and the nearby Shivālaya Tirtha Kunda (tank). This temple is said to have been destroyed by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

An inscription here reads that the Ghrshneshwara Temple in its present structure, built with red stone, was reconstructed in 1730 CE by Gautamabāi, wife of Malharrao Holkar.

#### **The legends associated with Ghrshneshwara Jyotirlinga:**

One legend is that Lord Shiva and Devi Pārvathi were residing near Shivālaya. One day, while she was in the process of applying vermillion on her forehead, Pārvathi had saffron in her palm and she started rubbing it with the finger of her other hand, using water from Shivālaya. Shiva appeared on her palm in the form of a flame. The flame thus

created due to '*gharshana*' (friction) was then transmitted to a stone-*lingam* and named Ghrshneshwara.

The *Padma-Purāna* mentions the story of a great Brahmin scholar Sudharma and his wife Sudehā, who were childless. Sudehā persuaded Sudharma to marry her sister Ghushmā so that they could beget a child. Ghushmā was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. As part of her daily worship, she would make 101 *lingam*-s, worship them and discharge them in the nearby lake.

A son was born to Ghushmā and Sudharma. Over the years, Sudehā became blinded by jealousy towards her sister. She killed the boy in his sleep and threw the body into the lake. Ghushmā, though bereaved and in deep mourning, continued to repose intense faith in Lord Shiva. She went on with her daily morning ritual of worshipping the *lingam*-s. One day, she saw her son emerging from the lake. Pleased with her devotion, Lord Shiva had restored her son to her. Accepting Ghushmā's request that He reside there forever, the Lord assumed the form of a *jyotirlinga*. Thus, He came to be known as Ghushmeshwara.

The *jyotirlinga* is also referred to as 'Kusumeshwara' in some ancient texts.

The *Shivālaya Tirtha Kunda* is believed to have been created through the efforts of Lord Brahmā by bringing sacred water from eight different *thirthakunda*-s. It is made of red stone with four entrances and with 56 steps on each side. Near Shivālaya, there are eight temples, each dedicated to one of the eight *tirtha*-s.

### Architecture

The temple is 185 feet tall and is built of red stone. The five-tiered *shikhara* (tower) and the exquisite carvings exemplify the architectural brilliance of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The temple is '*dakshinābhimukha*' (the main entrance faces south) and stands on a raised platform. It has a large courtyard and a high wall built around it. There are three entrances- one *mahādwāra* (main entrance) and two *pakshadwāra-s* (side-entrances). There is a small shrine of Kokilā Mātā at the main entrance with her hand raised upward. There is a huge *sabhāmandapa*



with beautifully carved columns. The ten *avatāra-s* of Lord Vishnu are intricately carved in red stone. The wedding ceremony of Lord Shiva and Pārvathi devi is depicted in beautiful murals. The *garbhagrha* (sanctum sanctorum) is in an underground chamber. The *vyotirlinga* is of black stone. The *lingam* faces east.

The ceiling of the temple depicts

birds, animals, plants, hunters with bows, musicians, dancers and some girls playing in a circle with their hands inter-linked – a rhythmic movement, known as '*fugadi*' in Maharashtra.

Holy water is known to spring from inside the temple.

### Pūjā-s and Festivals

On Mahāshivarātri day, a procession of Lord Shiva in a palanquin is taken from the temple to the Shivālaya *Tirtha Kunda*.

Vaikuntha Chaturdashi is a special day celebrated here when Lord Shiva is offered '*tulsī*' leaves, a favourite of Lord Vishnu.

### How to get there

This temple is at a distance of 380 km from Mumbai and just 30 km away from Aurangabad. State transport buses ply regularly from Pune, Mumbai and Aurangabad. The nearest airport and the nearest railhead are at Aurangabad.

Ghrshneshwar is adjacent to the World Heritage Site, Kailas at Ellora Caves. A visit to Ghrshneshwara *vyotirlinga* is often combined with a tour to Ajanta and Ellora caves.

**(Concluded)**

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## They Were Forces To Reckon With

## A Woman of Substance - DRAUPADI

- Compiled by Vijayalakshmi Menon



### **A Life full of struggles**

Draupadi needs no introduction. She was the mysterious, fiery yet compassionate queen of the five Pāndava brothers, and is also considered as the sole reason behind the great Mahābhārata war. Draupadi is portrayed in the Mahābhārata as an aggressive, strong-willed woman whose life is a continuous battle to assert her individuality in a patriarchal society. She is one of the *panchakanyā*-s extolled in the scriptures and is also sometimes identified as a form of Pārvati or Ādi Parāshakti.

She was a princess of impressive lineage—her father King Drupada being a cousin of Lord Krishna - yet her life was one of struggle and tragedy. However, Draupadi and Lord Krishna shared a very special relationship. She considered Him as her *sakhā* or beloved friend and He addressed her as *sakhī*, as a symbol of

the platonic love that existed between them. Draupadi was the instrument Lord Krishna used to realize his mega plan of annihilating the evil Kauravas. The choice of Draupadi as the instrument explains the special place she had in His scheme of things.

Draupadi was put through severe tests in her life and the only true friend who validated her persona and came to her rescue, every time she found herself in dire circumstances, was Lord Krishna, whose divine presence she experienced constantly in her entire life. The Pāndavas gave Draupadi no joy, no sense of victory, no honour as a wife and no respect as a mother. In the end, they could only give her the status of a queen.

### ***Draupadi's birth, swayamvara and married life***

According to Mahābhārata, Pāñchāla is said to be the birth place of Draupadi and thus she is also referred to as Pāñchālī. King Drupada of Pāñchāla had been defeated by the Pāndava prince Arjuna, on behalf of Drona; Drona subsequently took half of Drupada's kingdom. To gain revenge on Drona, Drupada performed an *yajna* called the Putrakāmeshti *yajna*, in order to have children. Out of this sacrificial fire, a son called Dhrishtadyumna and then a daughter called Draupadi were born to Drupada. Draupadi, having emerged as a beautiful dark-skinned child, was also



known as Krishnā (one with a dark complexion). She also had another sibling by the name of Shikhandi. Besides being called Draupadi and Krishnā, she was also called Yājnaseni (meaning the daughter of Yajnasena, another name for Drupada or alternately, one born from a *yajna* or sacrificial fire), Drupadakanyā (the daughter of Drupada), Parshati (the granddaughter of Prishata), Nitya-yauvani (one who never becomes old), Mālini (one who makes garlands) and Yojanagandhā (she whose fragrance can be felt for a very long distance). She is described as one of the most beautiful women of those times. She is considered by many as the first feminist of Indian mythology. At the time of her birth, a celestial voice had proclaimed that this unparalleled beauty had taken birth to uproot the Kauravas and establish the rule of dharma.

At the *swayamvara* (a ritual in which the princess was allowed to choose her groom from amongst a group of contenders) of Draupadi, the kings and princes gathered in hundreds, each eager to marry the beautiful princess. King Drupada arranged a contest. At the centre of the hall, a mechanical device was erected and a revolving object in the shape of a fish was placed on it. The reflection of this revolving fish was seen in the water kept below. Anyone who desired the hand of Draupadi in marriage was to take aim with a bow and five arrows and shoot through the eye of the rotating fish by looking down at the reflection. Hearing this, many of the kings retreated and many others tried and lost.

Draupadi came to the *swayamvara sabhā* accompanied by Krishna. She refused to accept Karna as a suitor on account of his caste. This event altered the course of the epic itself. The affront to Karna sowed the seeds of the assault on her in the dice game later.

Finally, Arjuna succeeded in the contest and won Draupadi's hand. The Pāndavas returned home with Draupadi. On their arrival, Arjuna called out to his mother Kunti, saying that he had brought home a skilfully won prize. Without looking up, Kunti asked him to share the prize with all his brothers. To uphold their mother's words, the five brothers shared Draupadi as though she were an object won in a contest. She was a victim of circumstances and she asked her friend Krishna how she could divide herself and carry out the duties of a wife to five husbands. Krishna advised her to spend one year with each husband; the rest of her husbands would have no contact with her during that time and if any of them did so, even accidentally, he would be exiled for twelve years. Before she moved to the next husband, Draupadi had to walk through fire to regain her virginity and purity. Such rules were never made applicable to the polygamous husbands.

Thus Draupadi became the common consort to the five Pāndavas. In due course, Draupadi had five sons, one from each one of her husbands. Prativindhya was the son of Yudhishtira, Srutasoma of Bhima, Srutakirti of Arjuna, Satanika of Nakula and Srutakarma of Sahadeva. Besides, she was also stepmother to

Abhimanyu, Ghatotkacha and many others.

Inspite of leading a life of total regimentation and self-control and having to make a lot of adjustments by changing her lifestyle every year to please her respective husband, she had to be a part of her husbands' polygamous lives as well, since the Pāndava brothers had other wives too! Bhima was married to demoness Hidimba. Arjuna married several other princesses, including Lord Krishna's sister Subhadrā. Nakula and Sahadeva married the respective daughters of Shishupāla and Jarāsandha as a token of friendship. However, the greatness of Draupadi lies in her managing these delicate relationships harmoniously.

### **Draupadi's trial by fire**

A lesser known fact is Draupadi's role as an empress. When it was time for the kingdom to be divided as proposed by Dhritarāshtra, the Pāndavas were assigned the wasteland Khandavaprastha, an 'unreclaimed desert'. With the help of Lord Krishna, the Pāndavas rebuilt Khāndavaprastha into the glorious Indraprastha in the Khāndava forest, where Draupadi resided in the 'palace of illusions'. Yudhishtira performed the *Rājasuya yajna* with Draupadi by his side; thereafter, the Pāndavas gained lordship over many regions. Trained in economics, Draupadi took upon herself the responsibility of managing the treasury of the empire and liaised with the citizens. Her duties as a busy

empress are mentioned in her famous conversation with Satyabhāmā, Lord Krishna's favourite wife, which the two ladies had during Draupadi's exile.

When he travelled to Indraprastha, Duryodhana witnessed the wealthiness of the Pāndavas and on his return, he mentioned this to his blind father; this became the root cause for his inviting his cousins for a game of dice. His main desire was to usurp the wealth of his cousins which they had accumulated on account of the *Rājasuya Yagna*. During this conversation with his father, Duryodhana mentioned as to how he also saw Draupadi serving food to everyone, including the physically challenged. He also expressed his anger at his having fallen into a pool of water and being laughed at and mocked by Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva and by others in the palace. He also fleetingly mentioned Draupadi's name, saying that she and other women had also joined them in their laughter, saying '*andhasya putrah andhah*' meaning 'a blind man's (referring to Dhritarāshtra) son is blind!' This incident is considered as one of the key reasons that ultimately led to the Kurukshetra war.

Together with his uncle Shakuni, Duryodhana conspired to call the Pāndavas to Hastināpura and win their kingdom in a game of gambling. There is a folklore which says that for this game, Shakuni designed a special dice which would never disobey him. As the game proceeded, Yudhishtira lost everything at first. In the next round, he lost Nakula

and subsequently he gambled away Sahadeva, Arjuna and Bhima. Finally, Yudhishtira put himself at stake and lost. For Duryodhana, the humiliation of the Pāndavas was not complete even with this. He prodded Yudhishtira, saying that since Draupadi was still with Yudhishtira, if he wished, he could win back everything by putting her at stake. To everyone's horror, Yudhishtira did exactly that but Shakuni won the next game. Draupadi was horrified that she had become Duryodhana's slave. Draupadi questioned Yudhishtira's right on her. Angry with Draupadi's questions, Duryodhana commanded his younger brother Duhshāsana to bring her to court, forcibly if required. Duhshāsana dragged Draupadi to court by her hair with her repeatedly questioning Yudhishtira's right to place her at stake. She was made to feel greater shame when Duryodhana pointed to his lap as if asking her to come and sit there; lewd remarks were passed by his friends and an attempt was made to disrobe her. Draupadi vowed not to tie her hair until she washed it with the blood of Duhshāsana.

What makes Draupadi really special is the way in which she responded to her abuse. First of all, she rebuked her husband and asked him if he staked her only after having lost himself (which he had) and in that case, whether it was really possible to stake her. She questioned the elders of the court as to how they had allowed such an abuse to take place and tried to get any one of them to rule on whether she really had been lost to Duryodhana. The attempt to

disrobe her (at Duryodhana's orders) was prevented when her sari proved never ending, thanks to her virtue and in some versions, to the intervention of Lord Krishna, to whom she was devoted. Eventually, ill omens forced Dhritarāshtra to intervene and grant Draupadi two boons. She chose freedom for Yudhishtira so that her son Prativindhya would not be called a slave and secondly, freedom for his four brothers, who were also her husbands, along with their weapons. That she did not ask for her own freedom reinforces her position that she never lost it. In this whole unfortunate episode, she proved her strength, initiative and superior understanding of morality.

Although Draupadi succeeded in freeing her husbands from slavery, the huge battle of Kurukshetra ensued between the two sets of cousins and their allies, in which Yudhishtira emerged as the one true king. During the years of exile, Draupadi suffered an abduction bid by a lustful King Jayadratha and an attempted seduction by Keechak. Her suffering was met with righteous anger and she had to repeatedly call upon her husbands to protect her honour and avenge the insults she had endured. She famously looked forward to being able to wash her hair in the blood of those who tried to disrobe her. The war made this possible but it also resulted in the death of her father, her brothers and her sons.

### ***Life after the war***

After the dishonour, Draupadi was very revengeful and insisted that those

who have dishonoured her should be killed and yet when her sons were killed by Aswathāmā, son of Dronāchārya, who was the teacher of both Pāndavas and Kauravas, she ended up forgiving him. Here, the important point to be noted is her duty, based on her broad role as a *kshatriya* lady. For Aswathāmā to have killed her five sons was a brutal act, but when Aswathāmā was brought before her, he had already been defeated and overpowered, and was in no position to cause any harm to anyone. Although Draupadi was grief-stricken, she was fully aware of the fact that according to the Vedic quotes, in the Vedic culture, a *brāhmaṇa*, a woman, children and cows are to be protected. Moreover, Aswathāmā had already lost his powers because of abuse of weapons and by Krishna's having arranged through Arjuna to take away his jewel, leaving him practically powerless. According to *dharma shāstra*, one consideration is that before pronouncing any judgment, one had to carefully look into what that person had done, the nature of that person and also the threat that person could cause to others. In the case of Aswathāmā, he was a *Brāhmaṇa* and a *brāhmaṇa* was not to be attacked or physically injured or killed.

When the Pāndavas got to know that Krishna gave up the body, they did not wish to live anymore. They retired from the world and went on their journey to the Himālayas towards heaven (Kailāsa). Draupadi accompanied them and was

the first to fall on this great journey. It is said that the five Pāndavas just left her there and continued with their journey. On the remaining journey, the rest of the Pāndavas all fell with only Yudhishtira surviving. Eventually, when he reached heaven, he found Draupadi sitting there in meditation in the form of Goddess Shri. He was told that it was this Goddess who had taken birth in the form of Draupadi.

Much of Draupadi 's character has been altered through time but what remains untouched and untarnished is the strength of her spirit.

She was fearless, and comes through as a woman of fierce independence, struggling to balance her passions against her *dharma*.

She lived with a fire burning in her soul, all her life. In various versions of the epic Mahābhārata, she is cast as something of an early feminist, ready and able to speak her mind, matching wits with Krishna!

Yet she is undeniably the heroine of Mahābhārata and is often held as an example of a pure woman and wife. She is worshipped as a Goddess and she is included in the *shloka* listing the *panchakanyās*. This *shloka* is chanted in Hindu households even today.

*ahalyādraupadiseetā  
tārāmandodaritathā ||  
pancha kanyāhsmaren nityam  
mahā pātaka nāshineeh ||*

[Kuntē in place of Seetā in a different version.]





- Swāmi Chidānanda



When Lakshmi and Sukumar asked me if I would like to see Dr. Stephen Covey (1932 – 2012), that day towards the end of October 1997, I was truly excited. Without batting an eyelid, I said 'yes'. The couple were among the hundreds in San Francisco Bay Area that had noticed how much I would quote Covey during my lectures on Vedānta. So it was on November 5, 1997 that I met the famous author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," at Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco city. Some employees of Hewlett Packard (where Sukumar himself was a senior engineer) had a table reserved, where Mr Covey would also join over dinner. The three of us took our chairs at the table.

This was a week-long program known as the *State of the World Forum*, and Mr. Covey had already spoken. This evening he was free, and I had the good fortune of discussing with him 'management and spirituality' for more than 20 minutes on a 'one-on-one' basis, as a few people listened to our conversation.

I have been an admirer of Covey

since the mid-1990s. I often connect his teachings with what we call *yoga-shāstra*, the science of personality integration, while essential Vedānta is, as we know, *brahma-vidyā*, the wisdom of rising above egoism.

Gentle and attentive, Mr. Covey answered my queries on his teachings and evinced much interest in the outlooks of Hinduism / Vedānta towards issues of life. One of my main questions to him was about one of the 7 *Habits* that he advises in his book, "Begin with the end in mind." I said to him we have a great teaching in the Bhagavad Geetā, where we are asked to focus on giving our best and not waste much energy on thoughts of the 'results' (end). How come he asks us to keep the 'end' in mind while taking up any work?

The large banquet hall had a hundred round tables, and dinner was being served at each table even as, on a little high stage, some speakers were getting ready to deliver their messages. {It was that evening itself that I had the opportunity to listen to Dr Dean Ornish, the famous California physician who made a certain vegetarian diet popular in USA, claiming it could reverse heart disease.}

Mr. Covey, to answer my question, pointed to somebody walking across the hall from one table to another, and said,

"You know, my teachings are meant for somebody like that man. He has a big shop in Manhattan and he needs to organize his business, his resources including time and money so that he meets the requirements of all his customers and his business grows and profits increase." He meant that most people would not understand the deeper philosophy (of *karmayoga*) but needed simpler directions to be effective in their endeavours.

Covey presented me with a signed copy of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families," which had just got published. When he queried if there was a good book that brought out the main principles of Hindu philosophy, I presented him with David Godman's compilation of Ramana Maharshi's teachings.

Adding some fun to the evening, there was John Covey at our table that evening. John spoke to me, introducing himself, "I am John Covey, Stephen's brother. I too have a bunch of 7 *Habits* like Stephen has but they are – *The 7*

*Habits of Highly Defective People!*" He then narrated the 7 such as "Be reactive, Begin with no idea of what you want, etc."!

I also asked Stephen on certain criticism that was in the air about famous people like him, saying they had gone 'commercial' with their work. Stephen said smilingly, "Oh, such comments do not bother me. I look at money as a blessing. My (7 Habits) programs are taking place in 44 countries. Tomorrow morning, 10,000 companies are taking up the *Seven Habits* program. To do all this, money is needed."

The meeting described above remains a memory that I cherish even today. These teachers do help us become aware of our bad habits or wrong ways of living, and we change for the better with increased understanding of the dynamics of the way we act.

[The above piece could be written with ease, taking help from an article Lakshmi Sukumar wrote in the January 1998 issue of CMW News in America.]



You either get bitter or you get better. It's that simple.  
You either take what has been dealt to you and allow it to make you a better person, or you allow it to tear you down.  
The choice does not belong to fate, it belongs to you.

- Josh Shipp



- Tal Ben Shahar



Did you know that at Harvard, one of the most prestigious universities in the world, the most popular and successful course teaches you how to learn to be happier? The Positive

Psychology class taught by Ben Shahar attracts 1400 students per semester and 20% of Harvard graduates take this elective course.

According to Ben Shahar, the class - which focuses on happiness, self-esteem and motivation - gives students the tools to succeed and face life with more joy. This 35-year-old teacher, considered by some to be "the happiness guru", highlights in his class, 14 key tips for improving the quality of our personal status and contributing to a positive life:

- Tip 1. "Thank God for everything you have" : Write down 10 things you have in your life that give you happiness. Focus on the good things!
- Tip 2. "Practise physical activity" Experts say exercising helps improve mood. 30 minutes of exercise is the best antidote against sadness and stress.
- Tip 3. "Breakfast" : Some people miss breakfast for lack of time or not to get fat. Studies show that breakfast gives you energy, helps you think and perform your activities successfully.
- Tip 4. "Assertive": Ask for what you want and say what you think. Being assertive helps improve your self-esteem. Being left out and remaining silent creates sadness and hopelessness.
- Tip 5. "Spend your money on experiences." A study found that 75% of people felt happier when they invested their money in travel, courses and classes, while only the rest said they felt happier when buying things.
- Tip 6. "Face your challenges" : Studies show that the more you postpone something, the more anxiety and tension you generate. Write short weekly lists of tasks and complete them.
- Tip 7. "Put everywhere nice memories, phrases and photos of your loved ones" : Fill your fridge, your computer, your desk, your room, YOUR LIFE with beautiful memories.
- Tip 8. "Always greet and be nice to other people" : More than 100 inquiries state that just smiling changes the mood.
- Tip 9. "Wear comfortable shoes" : If your feet hurt you, you become

moody, says Dr Keinth Wapner, President of the American Orthopaedics Association.

- Tip 10. "Take care of your posture" : Walk straight with your shoulders slightly backwards and the front view; it helps to maintain a good mood.
- Tip 11. "Listen to music" (Praise God): It is proven that listening to music awakens you to singing; this will make your life happy.
- Tip 12. "What you eat has an impact on your mood" : - Do not skip meals, eat lightly every 3 to 4 hours and keep glucose levels stable. - Avoid excess white flour and sugar. - Eat everything Healthy- Vary your food.
- Tip 13. "Take care of yourself and feel attractive" : 70% of people say they feel happier when they think they look good.
- Tip 14. "Fervently believe in God" : With him, nothing is impossible! Happiness is like a remote control, we lose it every time, we go crazy looking for it and many times without knowing it, we are sitting on top of it ...



### **Talks with Ramana : 453**

What is right and wrong? There is no standard by which to judge something to be right and another to be wrong. Opinions differ according to the nature of the individual and according to the surroundings. They are again ideas and nothing more. Do not worry about them but get rid of thoughts instead.





## What do we learn from the Upanishads?

## Give up Greed

- Swāmi Chidānanda

A much-quoted saying by Gāndhiji tells us that there is enough in this world for everybody's need but not enough to fulfil even one person's greed.

To distinguish between our needs and certain greed that rises in our minds is an important aspect of *viveka*, wise discrimination. This ability to discern is required by us in all areas of our lives, including material possessions, physical comforts and emotional issues. To desire some attention or recognition is understandable but if we want others to speak well of us anywhere and everywhere, it would be greedy on our part. We must do our part when we go up on the stage but gracefully give the opportunity to others when it is their turn. Giving up greed is essential towards the spiritual goal of rising above self-centred ways.

The Ishāvāsyā Upanishad asks us to look at everything as belonging to God, and therefore, give up the tendency to possess and grab.

**Do not seek (anything in excess)! Whose is wealth (after all)?**

*mā gridhah kasyasvidghanam*

Ishāvāsyā Upanishad, mantra 1



If you are seeking the limitless as something other than yourself, you seek limitlessly.

- Swāmi Dayānanda Saraswati



- Phyllis Culp Mabry

This is my creed, to do the best I can,  
To strive to make each day worth the living,  
To counsel and help my fellow man,  
To be both understanding and forgiving.

This is my creed, to do what's right, not wrong,  
To know that pleasure can be mixed with duty,  
To replace all earthy discord with a song,  
And hypocrisy of soul with truth and beauty.

This is my creed, to give my all each day  
As though there were no possible tomorrow,  
To use my joy to brighten someone's way,  
My happiness, to ease another's sorrow.

This is my creed, to be, at set of sun,  
When the last light of the day is put to rest,  
Contented with the things that I have done,  
And to know, deep in my heart, I've done my best.



## ETERNAL VIBRATIONS THE GOLDEN RULE OF ETHICS



श्रूयतां धर्मसर्वस्वम्      *shrooyatām dharma-sarvasvam*  
श्रुत्वा चापि अवधार्यताम् /      *shrutvā chāpi avadhāryatām*  
आत्मनः प्रतिकूलानि      *ātmanah pratikoolāni*  
परेषां न समाचरेत् ॥      *pareshām na samācharet*

पद्म-पुराण PADMA-PURĀNA 19/357-358

Listen, this is what dharma is all about. Contemplate on this, after listening. Do not do to others what you regard as bad for you!

(This principle of universal ethics is known in the West too, expressed generally as: Do unto others what you want them to do unto you. This golden rule is sure to appeal to the conscience of everybody. To violate this is to believe in inequality and amounts to double standards in the way we live.)

~



## **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.

**Dates of publication : 15th of October, December, February, April, June & August**  
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