

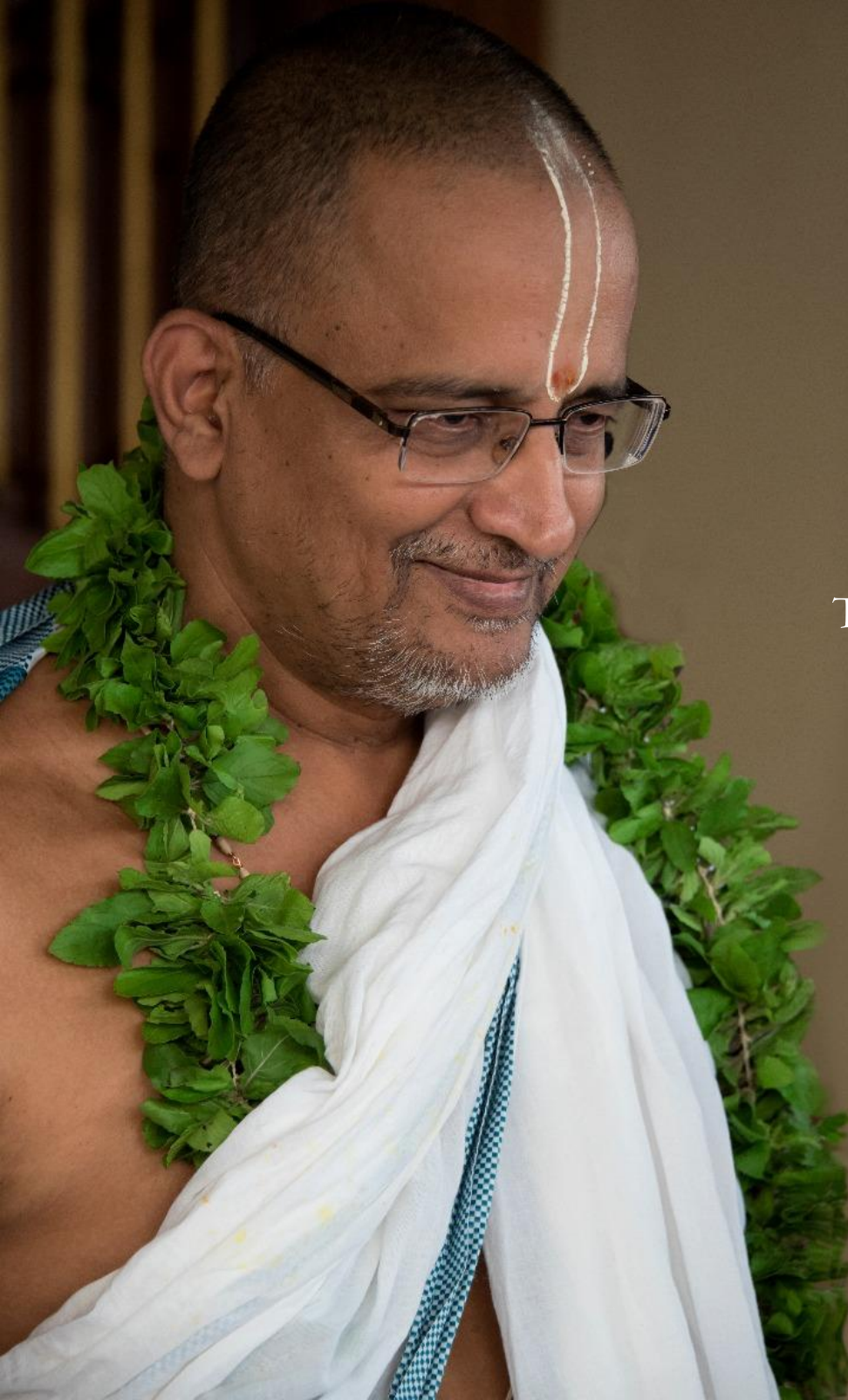
# FAST TRACK

*When Life in the Fast Lane Needs a Pit Stop*

Monthly Newsletter

February 2021

It does not matter  
where you are  
and what you do.  
Strongly believe  
that you are  
living for Krishna  
and Krishna alone  
and submit  
all your actions  
at His Lotus Feet.  
That alone is enough.  
- Sri Sri Swamiji



Every Ekadasi is like an utsav in our Madhurapuri. It is the practise of Sri Swamiji to perform abhishekam to Madhuri sakhi sametha Sri Premika Varadan and bless all with teertham. Bhaktas from many cities come to the ashram early in the morning. Amongst them some have the practice of visiting Madhurapuri every Ekadasi; some come to receive blessings from Sri Swamiji for some auspicious occasion in their families; some come from far off cities in order to place their prayers, in person, with Sri Swamiji; there are yet others who come to receive Sri Swamiji's blessings for their city temple utsavs, satsangs, etc.

After the puja when devotees come in the queue to receive teertha Prasad Sri Swamiji's compassionate interaction with each and every one is very charming. It is a real wonder to find Sri Swamiji remembering the matter each devotee had told him in his earlier visit even if it was several months or even years earlier. It is simply amazing to see Sri Swamiji pick up the thread from where it had been left off during the previous visit of the devotee!

Sri Swamiji would often say, "When we pray for something we do it with deep involvement. But once our prayer is fulfilled we forget to thank the Lord."



# THANKS TO PREMIKAVARADAN

**Dr A Bhagyanathan, Chennai**  
(Personal Secretary to Sri Sri Swamiji)

Once, on Ekadasi, a family had come from another town. After the puja Sri Swamiji sat in Premika Varadan's altar itself and was blessing all with teertha Prasad. When this family came up to Sri Swamiji, they said to him with tear- filled eyes, "We had come here some weeks back and placed a prayer with you. That matter which had been given up as absolutely impossible has come about successfully. We just are not able to believe it. It is verily your blessings! We have come only to thank you."

At once Sri Swamiji smiled and with folded palms looked at Sri Premika varadan and said, "Many come here and inform me as you have done now. But do you know the truth? When you people come here and place your prayers, leave alone my listening to it, Premika Varadan listens to everything. It is verily Premika Varadan who fulfils all the prayers. I am in no way connected to it. All that I do is keep looking at Premika Varadan; and, HE takes care of you all! Please offer your gratitude and pranams to Premika Varadan! Do lots of Namakirtan."

# WATCH OUT FOR THESE GUNAS!

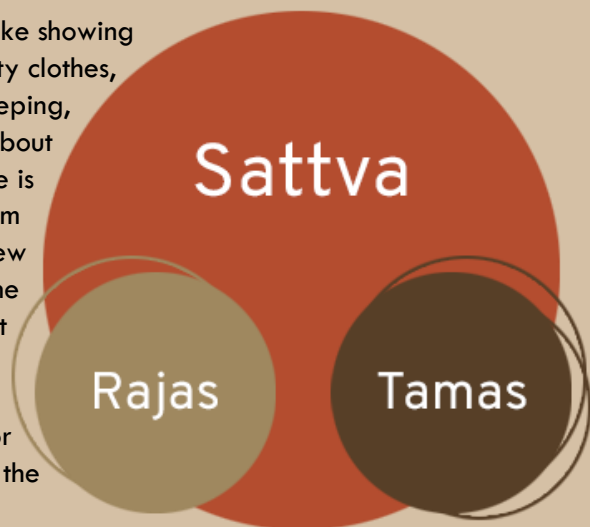
- Sri Easwar Prasad, Sydney  
(Translated from Sri Swamiji's Lectures)

Truth be told, there is no such thing as a good mind and a bad mind. The nature of the mind depends on our vasanas (latent tendencies). When the mind holds on to vasanas that drive it to do wrong, the nature of the mind is bad; when it holds on to vasanas that drive the mind to do the right things, the nature of the mind is good. Therefore we can never say a person is completely good or completely bad. The world refers to a person as good when they possess more good virtues are driven by good vasanas, and as bad when their bad vasanas overpower their good. These vasanas can be classified into sātvic (mode of goodness), rājasic (mode of passion) and tāmasic (mode of laziness). We can in turn further split sātvic itself into spiritual sātvic and worldly sātvic. A few examples for worldly sātvic could be feeling sympathetic towards the needy; feeling agonized seeing the orphaned, the widowed; the ailing; the animals subjected to cruelty; the aged who are suffering, so on and so forth. The desire to serve them selflessly is worldly sātvic. Performing Namasankirtan (singing The Lord's Divine Names), listening to the Lord's stories, reading our holy scriptures, doing kankarya (service) for the Lord and for the Guru, serving sadhus, undertaking pilgrimage to the holy kshetras (places), undertaking fasting and performing poojas are all activities pertaining to spiritual sātvic. Similarly for rājasic, we again have worldly rājasic and spiritual rājasic. One who works tirelessly in this world in pursuit of status, position, money and fame, willing to go to any extent to attain them is an example of worldly rājasic. Proclaiming oneself as a mahān (great noble soul), treating others as subordinates, using money as the means to control others, instilling fear in the minds of people and gaining control over them by performing siddhis (superhuman acts), making one's worldly and spiritual good deeds known to the world, desiring to be the most revered person on all occasions, doing bhakti for one's prayers to be fulfilled, thinking that no one can do bhakti or spiritual activities like themselves, finding faults with others, wanting to spread bhakti all over the world but thinking only they should do it, craving for respect and fan following are all a few illustrations of spiritual rājasic nature.

Spiritual tāmasic nature is reflected when one assumes that one has attained gnana (wisdom) or bhakti due to the challenges and difficulties they experience in life or with the half-baked knowledge gained from reading or listening to something; turning to monkhood by realising there is nothing else to attain in life but making sure they have regular meals; occasionally talking about God and the holy scriptures sitting on the shores of Ganga by concealing their inner feelings of lust, anger, etc.

For worldly tamas, we can again quote examples like showing little or no concern for their kith and kin, wearing dirty clothes, wasting away their time engaging only in eating, sleeping, playing, gossiping and watching television, unconcerned about their family responsibilities, unaware of how their spouse is looking after the needs of the family, running away from the house when there is a tussle only to return after a few weeks, chewing tobacco, procrastinating, sleeping all the time, respecting the ones with power and authority but bossing around and dominating the powerless, etc.

Hence, at times we mistake our tāmasic behavior for sātvic and feel happy. Instead, we should hold on to the qualities of a spiritual sātvic and lead a pure life.





# Ranganatha Beckons...

There once was a great devotee who sung the glory of Sri Ranganatha as:

“paccaimA malaipOl mEni pavaLavAy kamalac cengaN  
accutA amara rERE Ayartam kozhunde ennum”

His frame looks like a huge green mountain. His lips have the hue of the coral. His eyes resemble a red lotus. Oh, accutA, the leader of the celestials, and the darling of the cowherds (of GOKulam)

Another devotee sang:-

“en amudinai kaNDa kaNGal matroNDrinai KANAvE”

The eyes that saw my amudu (ambrosia) refuses to see any other thing.

One great Azhwar sang:-

“pallANDu pallANDu pallAyirathANDu  
palakODi nUrAyiram  
mallANDa thinthOL maNivaNNA....”

For several thousands of years and many more thousands of years; the strong shouldered blue hued victor of wrestlers, may your reddish sacred feet be well protected. This Azhwar blessed Perumal to live for several thousands of years in his pallaandu paasuram. Instead of just wishing well for each other if we also wish well for Bhagwan the world will prosper. So when we pray “aDiyArgal vAzhga aranga nagar vAzhga aruLicheyalgaL vAzhga” - wish well for bhaktas, for the kshetra, for the divine works of Mahatmas etc., then the world is bound to prosper because just like how the number 100 is contained within thousand & 1000 within ten thousand, 10000 within hundred thousand, 100,000 within 10 million and every other greater number is contained within infinity, so also this whole universe is contained within the Virat Swaroopa of Vishnu.

The Vishwaroopa shown to Arjuna sitting on the edge of his chariot by the ruler of this universe is a proof to this. Again, HE arrived at the Yagashala of Bali Chakravarthy as a little brahmin boy asking for alms and stood measuring the earth and the skies above. Since every living creature and the entire universe are contained within Him, pleasing Him will take care of the world's welfare. That is the message of Sanathana Dharma, and that is why we celebrate the Lord, and pray to Him for the wellbeing of the entire world. So, if we wish for Bhagavan to live well for several thousands of years, then naturally we will be blessed, the world will be blessed, and all the creatures living on it will be blessed, and the whole world will prosper.

(to be contd)

**- Mrs Kavitha Venkat, Auckland**

(Transcript of a popular TV lecture series  
'Azhaikindraan Arangan' by Sri Swamiji)

When Arjuna was in distress, clouded with confusion why did he ask guidance from Lord Krishna? What gave him the confidence that Lord Krishna can help resolve his plight? The simple answer is Krishna is the epitome of wisdom. Why do we say so - is it just because he is an Avatara? Not just that, in that Avatara he has also shown how a Jnani behaves even in a complex situation. In this case, when Arjuna was talking about his confusion in the entire chapter 1 of Bhagavad Gita, all Krishna did was just listen. He was appointed as the charioteer and that is what he was until Arjuna surrendered and asked for guidance from him. When such Jnanis give direction, they don't simply unload their thoughts but their guidance can be attested by the 3 stages of knowledge validation as recommended in our sastras: Sruthi, Yukthi, and Anubhava.

What is this 3-step validation? When something is told a Jnani always thinks if that has the approval of our Sastras (Sruthi), if it is logical or practical (Yukthi), and if they have experience (Anubhava) to advise others. For example, when we have headache, we immediately conclude that it is something to do with the head alone and start taking medications. But when that doesn't cure, we go to a doctor and they ask us more questions to diagnose the problem and say it is an infection in your stomach that is causing the headache. This might put us in utter surprise because according to us both are not connected at all.

Similarly, when Dhritarashtra calls upon Vidura and reveals to him that he is unable to sleep as he is anxious over the message that Sanjaya (his pastor) is about to deliver the next day before the court. Vidura smiles and asks why would a King be worried over his own minister's message? Then he says the following,

अभियुक्तं बलवता दुर्बलं हीनसादनम् ।  
हतस्वं कामिनं चोरमाविशन्ति प्रजागराः ॥  
abhiyuktam balavathA dhurbalam hlnasAdhanam ।  
hrutasvam kAminam choramAvishanthi prajAgarA: ॥

"Based on my knowledge there are 5 types of people who will not get sleep: (i) Those who feel weak because they have to fight a stronger enemy (ii) Those who have become weak having lost all wealth and power (iii) Those who have lost something dear to them (iv) Those who are in love with something or someone (v) A thief who steals wealth from others. Oh, brother, I hope that none of these grave calamities have overtaken you. Also, I hope, you don't grieve for holding on to other's wealth."

Now let us understand each one with an example.

अभियुक्तं बलवता (Feeling weak in front of a stronger enemy) - Duryodana despite having an all the more remarkable armed force and the best warriors on his side when compared with the Pandavas, felt feeble and deficient when he confronted them in the front line. This made him have a sleepless night.

दुर्बलं हीनसादनम् (Became weak having lost all wealth and power) - In Ramayana, in Yuddha Kaandam Ravana lost every one of his weapons during the battle with Rama and Rama asked that he return the following day to proceed with the battle. That night Ravana couldn't sleep.

हतस्वम् (Robbed or stripped of all personal belongings) - When Krishna was taken away by Akroora from Brindhavan, Gopas and Gopis lost sleep due to the loss of their treasure which they couldn't protect.

कामिनं (In love with something or someone) - Gopis due to their intense love towards Krishna, couldn't stop thinking of Him. This made them lose sleep.

चोरमाविशन्ति प्रजागराः (a thief) - A thief who steals wealth from others will constantly have the fear to protect the stolen wealth and sitting tight with fear for the day when he will be caught.

Vidura is a great example of a straight forward person. When Dhritarashtra asked him what is Shreyas for him, he points out the mistakes of Dhritarashtra by listing the reasons why one would have a sleepless night. The very reason why Dhritarashtra was not able to sleep was that he was holding on to something which didn't belong to him. Then Dhritarashtra asks Vidura to tell him the highest moral to help him come out of this restless mind. Vidura starts to reply by explaining who a wise man is. We will see that in the next article

(to be contd...)



# madhuraageetham

- MRS VASUMATHI SRIDHARAN, Melbourne

This delightful madhuraageetham that talks about Lord Krishna's compassion is set to melodious Hindolam ragam. Sri Swamiji implores Krishna himself to tell what his compassion looks like and later gives the definition for it in this simple yet profound kirtan.

In the first charanam, he points out what is not Bhagavan's compassion and why. He says that those people who think that Bhagavan's compassion takes the form of wealth, status and pleasurable life are dim-witted. Sri Swamiji says these things bind us to the world and cause the painful continuation of repeated births. Therefore, these cannot constitute Lord Krishna's highest compassion. A person may want material pleasures and may pray to Bhagavan to attain them. There is nothing wrong with that. Bhagavan, due to his compassion, may also answer his prayers. However, if all one does in life is accumulate wealth, status and utilize them to live a lavish life, is he living his best? Swamiji in the kirtan says a resounding no to it. Because there is so much more to being a human than living a life of consumption. Sooner or later, he needs to become mature enough to realize how this materialistic world cannot always give him happiness. Such a person, again with Bhagavan's compassion, becomes a spiritual seeker. What does Lord Krishna give then for a sincere spiritual seeker who has identified the limiting aspects of the materialistic world? Sri Swamiji elaborates in the second stanza.

In the second charanam, Swamiji lists all the qualities of a person who has received the true compassion of Bhagavan. If one becomes righteous by following dharma, becomes a seeker of truth and is involved in the austerities of body, speech and mind to purify oneself, he then gets dispassion towards what is not the reality (materialistic world), becomes steadfast in his devotion in the ultimate reality and receives the highest knowledge culminating in moksha (liberation). Our sastras talk about 4 purushartas - 4 pursuits of a human being: Dharma (Ethics), Artha (Security), Kama (Pleasures), Moksha (Liberation). The pursuit of Artha and Kama are called Preyas. The pursuit of Dharma and Moksha are called Shreyas. Everyone pursues artha and kama. However, for a human being to mature, they need to shift from Preyas to Shreyas. A person who has prioritized shreyas in his life ends up receiving Bhagavan's compassion.

Sri Swamiji ends the kirtan by offering a beautiful prayer to Lord Krishna asking him to bestow the same moksha that He bestowed on the elephant King, Gajendra.

**un karuNai enbadennavO Kanna**

What is meant by your compassion?

O Krishna!

**uNmaiyai solliDuvAy shyAma sundara**

Tell me the truth!

O the beautiful dark-hued one!

**nidhiyum padaviyum**

**sukha bOga vAzhkkaiyum**

Wealth, status and a life filled with gratification of materialistic desires

**un karuNai enDriDuvar aRivillA mUDar**

All these constitute your compassion, say people who lack intellect

**mINDum mINDum**

**piRavip piNiyl thaLLum**

When these things repeatedly push one into the cycle of birth and death

ivai eppaDi unthan karuNaiyAgum

how can they constitute your compassion?

**uNmaiyum thavamum**

**uyar ozhukkamum**

Truth, penance, highest virtues,

**un charaNatthil thiDamAna bhakthiyum**

steadfast devotion to your lotus feet,

**gnAnamum virakthiyum**

wisdom and dispassion

**varumAgil enthanukku**

**aduvE un karuNai thAmarai kaNNA**

if I obtain these qualities,

that is verily the sign of your compassion,

O lotus-eyed one!

**charaNamaDaIndEn AnaikkaruLiyavA**

**muraLidharanukku aruLvadennALO**

I surrender at the feet of the one who

blessed the elephant,

awaiting the day You will bless

Muralidharan!

Sanāthana dharmā, or Hinduism as we know it, is a way of life that is not confined to one specific path, set of guidelines or philosophy, but many. It teaches us in many ways, to lead a peaceful and righteous life; and most of these teachings are through conversations between Mahatmas. Srimad Bhāgavatham is considered the most relevant scripture for our current context, as it talks about the glory of Bhagavatha Dharma.

In the same way that Srimad Rāmāyanam and Mahābhāratham (and thereby Bhagavad Gīta) are retellings of a series of events, so is Srimad Bhāgavatham. Where it differs is that Srimad Bhāgavatham becomes a collection of stories that are not held together in chronological order, thereby taking us as the reader and listener through a journey through bhakthi. With such a profound context at its core, we wonder how Srimad Bhagavatham came to be, and how it is that we still have this grantha to read and relish to this very day. The original conversations take place between Sukha Muni, the enlightened son of Vedha Vyāsa Bhagavān, and King Parikshit, the son of Uthara saved from the astra of Ashvathāma by Bhagavān Sri Krishna Himself.

However, Srimad Bhāgavatham does not begin with this interaction between Sukha Muni and Parikshit. Instead, we begin with a conversation between a group of rishis led by Saunaka, and an esteemed Sūta pauranika, who was present in the original assemblage of scholars that accompanied Sukha Muni during the original recital of Srimad Bhāgavatham. In fact, this encounter between Sūta and Saunaka is orchestrated in such a way that the ultimate outcome is Srimad Bhāgavatham.

Let us have an insight into the manner in which Sri Saunaka questions Sri Sutha Pauranika. Saunaka and his group of rishis perform a sacrificial ritual (satram):

satram svargāya lokāya sahasra samam āsata  
(SB 1:1:4)

– a feat which to perform once within a lifetime itself is considered a remarkable accomplishment. However, these rishis had been performing this satram for one thousand years. Let's pause here to reflect on ourselves; we acknowledge the sheer difficulty of spending simply one hour entirely focused on a single task, let alone one whole day. In the middle of this satram, as these rishis take their break, one would expect them to relax and take their mind off the task at hand. But instead, they devote their full attention even more to Sūta as he recounts Srimad Bhāgavatham. They did not become distracted and fall asleep as they listened. It says in Srimad Bhagavatham, “yac-chrnavatām rasa-jnānām svādu svādu padē padē” – every single sentence that was uttered by Sūta was relished by those rishis. Such determination and shraddha are the qualities that we should aim to imbibe within ourselves around such sādhus.

At this point, Saunaka and the rishis ask a series of critical questions which lay the foundations for which Srimad Bhagavatham is recited by Sūta. The questions themselves are beautifully constructed in such a way that, in answering them, Sūta invariably recites all of Srimad Bhagavatham as he originally heard between Sukha Muni and Parikshit. Let us remind ourselves of the situation that the rishis were in – in the middle of a thousand-year sacrificial ritual, their mind finally given a break from the monotony of their day. If we were in such a situation, the first questions or words that would have come to our mind in that conversation would have been far less meaningful and more worldly. But what do they ask?

tatra tatrāñjas-āyusman bhavatā yad viniscitam  
pumsām ekāntatah shreyas tan nah shamsitum arhasi  
(SB 1:1:9)

Saunaka asks Sūta for a single sādhanā (practice) that will provide that shreyas (ultimate benefit) for the people of the world. Again, in this situation, any other person may have simply asked for the best path to take for the ultimate benefit of themselves. However, given the elevated state of Saunaka and these rishis, they ask for the benefit of the world. They do this because they know of the plight of the people of Kali Yuga (the current age):

prāyēna alpāyusha sabhya kalāy asmin yugē janāh  
mandāh sumanda matayo manda bhāgya hy-upādruṭāh  
(SB 1:1:10)

They know that the people of this age will require such a path since our lifetime will be much shorter than what they were able to experience; because our intellect will be much more limited; because we lack the motivation and drive to pursue things that we feel are beyond us; and because our physical bodies will be subject to illnesses and limitations. They go on to say:

bhūrīni bhūri karmāni shrotavyāni vibhāgasah  
atah sādho-tra yat sāram samuddhṛtya manīsayā  
brūhi bhadrāya bhūtānām yenātma suprasīdati  
(SB 1:1:11)

They acknowledge that there are many different paths within sanāthana dharma covering many different areas. It is clear that the people of Kali Yuga lack the time in their lives and analytical capacity to be able to discern the ideal path from the rest. So they ask Sūta for the ideal path in this age that contains the very essence (sāram) of the shastras and will help the people elevate themselves. They go on to ask about the reason by Bhagavān Sri Krishna took His avatāram (birth) on Earth as the son of Devaki and Vasudeva, as well as the līlas that He did during His time on Earth. They do not limit it to only the avatāra of Bhagavān Sri Krishna, but ask also about the stories of shrishti, sthithi & samhāram (creation, sustenance and destruction), as well as all of the other avatārās of Bhagavān. Finally, they ask Sūta what happened to dharmā after Bhagavān Sri Krishna left this Earth and Kali Yuga began.

If we look at these six questions, they truly encompass everything within Srimad Bhāgavatham, indicating how perfectly constructed these questions were to facilitate its retelling by Sūta. It is truly due to the shraddha of Shaunaka and those rishis that such questions were asked in the first place, and their sheer enthusiasm and thirst to experience Srimad Bhāgavatham that allowed it to be available to us in its entirety to this very day. Conversations between Mahatmas are for the welfare of the world, and never regarding worldly affairs. Hence, they indeed are vachanāmrutham (nectarine words).

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# Suryavamsam

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Suryavamsan consists of Brahma -> Marichi -> Kashyapa -> Vivasvan -> Vaivaswatha -> Ikshwaku -> Kukshi -> Vikukshi -> Banan -> Anaranyan -> Prithu -> Thrishanku -> Dhundhumaran -> Yuvanaswan -> Mandhatha -> Susandhi -> Dhruvasandhi/Prasenachith -> Bharathan -> Asithan -> Sagar -> Asamanjan -> Amshuman -> Dilipan -> Bhagirathan -> Kakuthsthan -> Raghu -> Kalmashapadhan -> Shankhanan -> Sudharshanan -> Agnivarnan -> Sheeghragan -> Maru -> Prashushrukan -> Ambarishan -> Nahushan -> Yayathi -> Nabhagan -> Ajan -> Dasaratha -> Srirama (Lakshmana, Bharatha, Shathrugna)

## Creation (Shristi):

Based on Bhagavan Sriman Narayanan's advice, Brahmadeva who was born from a lotus which emerged from the naabi (navel) of Bhagavan Narayanan, started creation (shristi). Initially he created 5 forms of ignorance (ajnanam) which are:

Thamas (Maya making one ignorant and oblivious of one's real identity)

Moham (attachment to the body / identifying one-self with the body)

Mahamoham (desire to enjoy through the senses)

Thamisram (anger due to fear of not able to achieve the sensual desires)

Andathamisram (fear due to ignorance that death is the end of one's soul)

Brahma was unhappy about such sinful creation. He prayed to God, cleansed his mind through meditation and then started creation again.

## Creation of Sanakadi Rishis and Rudra:

Brahma then created the 4 great sages named Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanadana and Sanathkumara by his thought (maanasa shristi). However they were not interested in worldly affairs as they were nishkriyas (not interested in any karma). Brahma told the four Sanakadi rishis to start performing their own creation, but as they were always thinking about Bhagavan Vasudeva to attain enlightenment, they were not inclined to engage themselves in the creation.

Brahma got angry when the 4 Sanakadi rishis did not follow his words. Brahma tried to control his anger using his intellect. However, he could not do it. The anger came out as a form of neelalohithan (mix of blue - similar to black rainy cloud and red) from between His eyebrows.

(to be contd...)

**“Your happiness means a lot to me”  
had a refreshing new meaning for me from this day.**

Scrambling around the town of Junagadh Gujarat, which was the playground of a great bhakta of Krishna called Narsi Mehta, I randomly had 2 separate experiences which provided me beautiful life lesson.

I looked left and right, trying to find a smallest of gap in the chaotic traffic so that I can cross the road to the other side. It was probably my 10th visit to India and by now I was proud that by my mere hand gesture the whole traffic could come to a halt to allow me to cross. As I crossed the road, my pride took a big hit as I noticed a leg-less person (hereafter referred to as Ramu Chacha) on somewhat of a pseudo-skateboard, who had crossed the road before me, using his mere hands to manoeuvre through the traffic so gracefully. I had a long way to go before I could proclaim myself to have conquered one of the greatest challenges in the world- crossing a street in India.

Casting my eyes on Ramu Chacha, I became so touched that I felt like doing something for him. I wanted to have the privilege of bringing a smile to his face. I approached him and requested him to accept my humble offering of whatever notes (in rupees obviously) that came in my hand as I ransacked my left pocket of my pants. I could tell that he was pleasantly surprised by it. And there, in the middle of that chaos and clamour, he showered me with heartfelt and teary blessings. That feeling, my friends, cannot be put into words. No amount of worldly achievement could match the feeling. Ramu Chacha, a mere stranger, had forever rented a place in my heart.

Fast forward two hours. Along with the family, we stopped at the local service station for a rest break on our way home. As I was coming out of the gent's room, my eyes fell on a young gentleman (hereafter referred to as Rahul Ji) who was clad in a saintly robe and whose forehead was decorated with religious markings. Immediately, my heart wanted to reach out to him to serve him in whatever way possible.

With all respect, I requested him if I could serve him in anyway. He was pleasantly surprised and with a smile he conveyed to me that he was travelling to a destination and would be happy if I took care of the bus fare. He told me an amount which would be the cost of the bus ticket. Very happily I requested him to accept an amount which was 10 times what he had stated. (Please note that the amount of money in this story is totally arbitrary and has no bearing on the message of the story nor is it an attempt from the writer to seek commendation)

Rahul ji looked at the money and went away after a slight nod and a smile, though somewhat contemplative. Just as we were about to board our taxi to return home, Rahul ji signalled to me to come over as he wanted to share something else. Curious as to what was on his mind, I went closer to him as he advised me that there were 12 more people travelling to specified destination and if I could oblige by looking after the ticket costs for the 12 other people. I knew I did not have that amount of money on me in cash at that moment. I was almost caught surprised. At the same time, my family members and hosts were already seated in the taxi which was ready to leave. I heard a horn, signalling the urgency to depart. They were all looking at me wondering what was happening. I had to share with Rahul ji of my inability to fulfil his request and walked off seeing his forlorn face.

I sat back in the car and we were off. The windows of my front passenger seat were down as I gazed outside, as if lost in some deep thought while looking at the distant sunset on the horizon of the green cotton field. I was feeling uneasy. Then suddenly I realised, the happiness that I experienced when I received the blessings from Ramu Chacha when crossing the road, was a memory I will keep close to my heart forever. However, the questioned lingered as to why I was not feeling the same happiness now after the most recent experience with Rahul ji. As I observed my inner state, I realised that I was somehow not experiencing the same joy.

Then I realised a simple but profound truth of life.

When Ramu Chacha became happy and overjoyed with my little inconsequential effort to serve him, his happiness gave me a lot of happiness. When Rahul ji was left unhappy and somewhat discontent from our little exchange, despite my sincere attempt to see a smile on his face, my happiness was taken away.

There are so many people in our lives who are constantly endeavouring or doing things to see us happy. Our parents who are the epitomes of sacrifice, have done and will always do anything to see us happy. Our siblings, friends, colleagues, and strangers, out of their sheer kindness have done these acts of kindness just to see a smile on our face (randomly or constantly).

Let us not even speak of the lofty topics of being grateful and reciprocating gratitude here. I am just speaking about being happy. Because... by not being happy, we take away the happiness of the ones who simply want to see us happy.

Now let us apply this scenario in our relationship with GOD. The favours and kindness we receive from our earthly relationships may be great. However, one will find that the grace, mercy, love and compassion our divine Lord has for all his children is unmatched. Nothing will ever compare to the favours which our Lord has bestowed on us.

Grace is the unmerited favour of God towards all his children. The majority of which we simply take for granted, like this rare human birth. It is said that one may be able to count the sand particles on this earth but counting the infinite favours of God is truly impossible.

The core lessons which struck my heart on that blessed day was that one of my primary duties is to be happy by coming to a more full and abundant awareness of HIS bountiful grace.

Let us count our blessings and become cheerful knowing how much the lord has favoured us.

Let us be forever joyful that the 'wonders of the world are present in me. The mere fact that we are able to see, feel, touch, hear and smell are the true miracles of the Lord.

Let us be always happy, for being sad, is one of the greatest acts of miserliness, as it acts to steal others happiness.

Let us vow to be always happy and positive, as being happy inspires others and GOD to continue to strive for your happiness (it pays off to be selfish in this sense ☺)

Let us always revel in happiness, as our dear Lord and Guru are happy when HIS children are happy on account of the abundant blessings HE has bestowed.

I heard people say, "Secret to happiness is in being obedient." - I would encourage us to broaden our thinking to be "Happiness itself is obedience of a higher order"

To sum it up, our beloved Swamiji once gave a profound definition of a Gopi (the cowherd girls of Vrindaban who are held in the highest esteem for their devotion). Sri Swamiji said that 'A gopi is one who is always happy, contented and cheerful'.

## SATHVIK KITCHEN RICE KHEER

Mrs Usha Ayyar, Sydney



### INGREDIENTS

Rice: 50gms

Milk: 1 Ltr

Sugar: 50gms (to taste)

Cardamom: ½ teaspoon

Assorted nuts: 2 tablespoons

### Traditional way to make Rice Kheer

Preparation Time: 2 hours

Rinse ¼ cup basmati rice a couple of times and then soak in enough water for 15 to 20 mins.

Meanwhile when the rice grains are soaking, take 1-litre full-fat milk in a heavy wide pan or saucepan or kadai. Keep the pan on a low to medium-low flame. stir at intervals so that the milk does not stick at the bottom of the pan. Let the milk come to a boil.

Take 1 tablespoon milk from the pan in a small bowl. Let the milk become warm. Then add a few saffron strands in the milk. Keep aside.

After the milk begins to boil, drain all the water from the rice and add it to the hot boiling milk. Simmer and cook rice on a low flame. No need to cover the pan when the rice is cooking. Cook the rice grains till they are 50% done or half-cooked. Then add 5 to 6 tablespoon sugar or add as required and mix the sugar in the milk.

Continue to cook rice on a low to medium-low flame. Do stir at intervals. Simmer till the rice is almost cooked. Then add ½ teaspoon cardamom powder.

Add 1 tablespoon each of sliced almonds, chopped cashews and sliced pistachios. You can blanch the almonds if you prefer or just slice them raw.

Mix well. Then add the saffron dissolved milk.

Again mix and continue to cook on a low flame till the rice kheer thickens and the rice grains have completely cooked.

Switch off the flame when the rice grains are completely cooked. The kheer will also thicken. On cooling rice kheer thickens more. Scrape milk solids from the sides of the pan and add to kheer.

# carried by grace

- Ms Mythrei Pham, Sydney

I often wonder if my Guru knows  
just how much I love him.  
You see, there are thousands upon thousands  
of devotees for my Guru  
Though only one of my Guru for me.  
If I could take the hand of only one other  
for all of eternity,  
if I had to choose only one, it would be  
His and his alone  
and I would be ever so perfectly happy.  
It is a visage I've oft painted in my mind;  
My Guru and I walking hand in hand,  
Leaving the world behind.  
There are moments where I have wished  
not to open my eyes if it couldn't be  
to set my eyes upon Him,  
But his wisdom whispers to me  
to see Him in everyone I meet.  
My Guru once told me,  
'The world is a myth. There are no worries.'  
But I am plagued by my senses,  
Of sight and sound and touch, Of hearing and taste  
Which render me dense and oft times  
blunt to His omnipresence.  
There are times I ashamedly keep Him  
at a distance from my thoughts,  
In order to escape the sharp and painful reminders  
that I am apart from Him.  
This only plunges me deeper into the recesses of maya  
And in doing so, I do myself no favours.  
Chant, be chanting all the time, he would tell.  
How he works so tirelessly to lift us from the  
soot and foolishness of the world to remind us of this.  
And so to chant is the smallest endeavour  
I can make to bridge the gap between us.  
There are times this invites unto me a bliss  
where there is not a worry in the world,  
An unassailable joy that cannot be tainted.  
And then there are times it brings me a quiet comfort,  
Like a lullaby's soothing caress to a child.  
I imagine my Guru would tell that  
there is no gap between us.  
That He is always with us. And by His Grace,  
I know this and am largely comforted by this.  
I write this not knowing who might read it,  
Who might smile or frown upon it  
That I do not care for so much.  
My one desire is that He should read it,  
My beautiful and beloved Guru  
And truly know it is only Him who exists in my heart.

# Faith

Mr Dinesh Ramanan, Sydney

We often associate faith with religion. Google the word, and the first definition that you will find is "strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof". It's no surprise that people often dismiss the need for having faith! The COVID-19 pandemic brought the whole world to a stop, in a way not many could have imagined. This of course, included the world of sport; stadiums were closed, competitions were halted and athletes sent home to train in isolation. However, after much discussion amongst the power brokers, the past month has seen a gradual return of sport across the globe, albeit in a very different, "Bio secure" way. Driving home from work last night, with the radio turned on, memories of growing up in a sports loving family came back. The intense rivalries, the highs of watching your team win competitions and the lows of seeing them beaten by the team my brother supported!! And that triggered one more thought...Why does sport evoke such emotional reactions? Why do we place countless prayers hoping for our favourite players to do well? Why do we feel like hiding away inside a closet the morning after seeing our team lose in a tight contest. Then it hit me...as human beings, we are inherently driven by faith...faith in a cause, a team, a God...whatever it may be. Without realising, in one way or the other, faith is that quality which provides us mental energy to live life at its fullest! Now, you may be thinking that drawing a parallel between watching sport and having faith is going that one step further? But is it really? Every time I turn on the television to watch football, I do so with faith that my team will win. Similarly, a parent will have the same faith that their children make the right decision when it comes to choosing friends at school! If we think about it, there are many more instances on a daily basis, where we go through the same process...In a recent study conducted by the Harvard Business Review, it was reported that there was an increasing trend of western corporate companies heading to India to get advice from astrologers on the timing of critical business decisions. At the heart of this trend, is a human being's inherent drive to have faith. It is what we survive on. Period. Perhaps the reason why faith is often associated with religion is that it is the one thing we can feel a sense of liberation with. In Hinduism, there are two concepts - "real" and "unreal: The "real" being the omnipotent spirit that drives life and the "unreal" being everything else, including this world we live in. Having faith in a sporting team, whilst it may bring temporary moments of elation, ultimately will only result in a rollercoaster ride of emotions. Having faith in a supreme being can free us from an endless cycle of hope and anxiety. It can give us strength to face challenges. And it will ultimately lead us to lasting happiness! What do you think? Can you relate to any similar situations in your life? Please share your stories!





# Chaos and the Butterfly

- Mr Arjun Karthik, Melbourne

The 'Butterfly effect' – Being one of the strangest phenomena known to mankind, it describes the event where a single inconsequential occurrence such as a mere butterfly flapping its wings can eventually lead to a devastating cyclone wreaking havoc. Sounds crazy right? Well, when we take a deeper dive into this theory, we'll realise how our lives itself are filled with 'big little moments' and what that could mean for us in the grand scheme of things. However, in order to understand this, let's first take a look at the origins of the theory. It started when a meteorology professor modelled weather predictions using many variables such as temperature and wind speed. He carefully inputted the data and produced a relatively accurate weather prediction – a nice sunny day! He then repeated the process with the exact same data, however this time, there was a huge change in the weather with what appeared to be such strong winds that it could potentially cause a cyclone! Extremely confused, the professor had a closer look at the algorithm until he realised that

a small glitch caused some of the decimal numbers in the input data to round up. It was here, that the theory was born: such miniscule changes in the wind, temperature or air pressure could cause such a dramatic shift in the weather. Could this mean that all of nature's creations such as a mere butterfly flapping its wings could cause small enough changes to the wind speed such that the weather in some other part of the world could change entirely from a sunny day to a cyclone? It was here, that the 'Butterfly effect' (or chaos theory) was born.

Now, when we uncover this theory a little more, we realise that it's not just a nice story about the weather. In fact, it's a nice story about us. We've all made a series of decisions that have led us to where we are in life. Have you ever looked back and wondered 'what if?'. What if I had taken that job? What if I didn't say no? What if I hadn't lied to him/her? What if... the ruling question that constantly plagues us all. Whilst these are the bigger decisions we think about, the butterfly effect teaches us that even the small decisions have altered our lives dramatically. For example, think back to the days when you were studying for that big exam to get into college. On any one of those nights, if you had decided not to learn a small piece of content and it ended up coming on the exam, those few marks that you would have lost may have meant that you did not go to the college that you studied at. This of course, may mean that you never met the same lifelong friends at university, you never got to have the same job opportunities, etc. This is a simple example that a lot of us share with respect to the butterfly effect – where a couple nights of studying (or a lack thereof!) could have resulted in never meeting your lifelong pals! If we all inspected our own lives (or our parents) in more detail, we would be able to find small things that would have resulted in vastly different outcomes if they had been done in a slightly different way (where some cases may even mean that we wouldn't have been born!). To put simply, these events are what I like to call the 'big little moments'.

Furthermore, the nature of the butterfly effect also begs the ultimate question of destiny. If we are all faced with a multitude of small decisions to make on a daily basis (with each one having the potential to ripple into a bigger life event, changing the way we live), is destiny really made out for us? Of course, the contrarian perspective to this, in favour of destiny is that the path we are on is already chosen through the choices we make (where the 'forsaken alternatives' were in fact forsaken, because it was already meant to be). Either way any of us look at it, making good choices is the way to go because any one of them could end up into something big without our knowing. Thus, the story of the butterfly effect can be woven into one of karma, where our actions don't just affect us, but others too. In essence, I'd like to think that life is what you make of it, and you can never go wrong with making the right choices (hence, good karma!). It's a good idea to ensure that you always have a positive impact on the people around you as you can never know when the butterfly effect can take place! So, the next time you think that 'little something' isn't important, think again! It just might be one of those 'big little moments'.

## Sthree Shakti

### RANI BHAVANI

In the latter half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, Rani Bhavani also known as Queen of Natore, who took up administration as a young widow, was a household name in Bengal, and the fame of her administrative ability and munificence is still living in proverbial expressions. Bhavani's life was a pattern of disciplined activity.

However, what made Rani Bhavani a household name among the common people was her philanthropy and general generosity, combined with an austere personal life. The number of temples, guesthouses and roads she constructed across Bengal is believed to be in the hundreds. She also built numerous water tanks, alleviating the acute water problem of her subjects. She was also interested in the spread of education and donated generously to many educational institutes.

During the era of Rani Bhavani, she made some great contributions for the development and renovation of Bhavanipur temple. Bhavanipur is a shakti-peeth which is located at Sherpur Upazila of Bogra District.

Some of the most prominent temples and ghats at Benares were built by her.

She also made great contributions in Tarapith. Tarapith, a Hindu Temple town situated in the Indian province of West Bengal is famous for (goddess Tara) & Saint Bamakhepa. In Varanasi, Durga Kund Mandir was constructed in 18th century by Rani Bhavani. Rani Bhavani's house in Natore remains a main tourist attraction in Bangladesh to date.

## PURANAVA

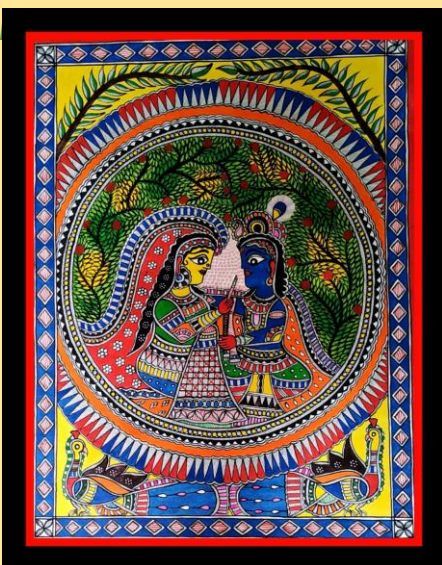
### Wondrous Whispers From Ancient India

The beautiful 16th century Veerabhadra temple, also known as Lepakshi temple, is located in the small historical village of Lepakshi in the Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh, India. Built in the typical style of Vijayanagara architecture, the temple features many exquisite sculptures of god, goddesses, dancers and musicians, and hundreds of paintings all over the walls, columns and ceiling depicting stories from the epics of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Puranas.

This temple is famed for another engineering wonder. Among the 70 stone pillars, there is one that hangs from the ceiling. The base of the pillar barely touches the ground and is possible to pass objects such as a thin sheet of paper or a piece of cloth from one side to the other.



## Creativity Corner



### MADHUBANI

Madhubani painting originated from the Mithila region of India and Nepal ( In today's Bihar state , in the north east of India). For the same reason Madhubani is also popularly known as Mithila Painting.

Madhubani paintings are traditionally made on canvas, cloth or hand paper. Natural dye and colours are used in creation of Madhubani artworks with geometrical figures and vibrant colors being key elements. Commonly depicted subjects in Madhubani paintings are Gods and goddesses, Marriages, Festivals, Animals, Sun and Moon and Nature.

Madhubani means 'a forest of honey' in Sanskrit.

Madhubani art classes are held by Gopa Kuteeram, Melbourne

- Mrs Harini Karthik  
Melbourne, Australia

## Meaningful Conversations

(Interesting discussions between  
Gopa Kuteeram teachers and students)

### VIRTUAL CLASSES BUT THE GRACE IS VERY REAL

It may be an exaggeration to term it a case of creativity in the face of adversity when GK classes went virtual in Mar'20, the reason being everything else has gone virtual due to the pandemic times. However, in its early days there was a general hope that the virus would be around only for a short time and we could manage by shutting down the GK classes for a couple of months. That's when Guruji's grace stepped in and in quick time, the on-line version of the course was made ready – the course material, tools and logistics. Due to that very grace, the classes were held with no break, even additional sessions, attendance was almost 100% in most sessions and the children's level of participation was the best in several years. The participation level of the children in the 2020 Sydney GK classes, especially in the L2 and L3 segment came about in a few different ways – responses to the on-line Kahoot quiz on the lessons, level and intensity of their questions and enthusiastic responses to various tasks asked of them. "Pop the Ravana within" was an interesting component of the class where the children identified a habit in them that needed rectified and committed to doing so by bursting a symbolic balloon.

In the Ramayana class last year, a point was made by the teacher that Rama accompanying sage Vishwamitra to protect his yagnas helped him learn all the life skills that made him the best role model for all of us. This led to the following question from the children.

Q - How do we learn good life skills faster?

A - We can learn faster by learning from experiences of others. For that, we can read good books, biographies and autobiographies. It gives us an account of the life of great men and women, their value systems and thinking process. It inspires us when we come to know that they also had a fair share of struggles before they could taste success. Reading biographies is like conversing with great men in person even if they existed long before. It inspires us because we now know that if they could reach such heights, we can do it too. From good books, we can learn better ways to overcome the hurdles and come out victorious.

- **Sri Bala Subramanian**  
Faculty, Gopa Kuteeram Sydney

## Sustainability

- **Master Sricharan,**  
Melbourne Gopa Kuteeram

Global warming is a major issue in the world. Extreme weather and rising water levels are just some of the side effects to our careless actions. Sustainability is the race to fixing our environment. We generate over 2 billion tonnes of waste every year. Most of it ends up in a massive outdoor storage unit called landfill. This is extremely hazardous to Earth. Toxins produced by waste can go into our sky, and damage the thick blanket that protects our Earth, the Ozone layer. The Ozone layer is critical for human survival, as it protects us from dangerous light from the sun. Also, perilous amounts of waste can cause dangerous diseases, such as cancer. Trees inhale carbon dioxide, and exhale oxygen. What does this have to do with Sustainability? Well, since carbon dioxide is the chemical responsible for damaging Earth, we definitely should not be chopping down something that gets rid of it. By chopping trees down, all the carbon that they have inhaled would be released, making the situation worse than before. Aside from the two main issues that have been listed above, there are hundreds of causes that harm our environment. Sustainability means to reduce the amount of global warming to help our environment thrive.

Some things that can help the environment are:

- i) Recycling: Recycling means re-using already used materials. The easiest method of recycling is throwing paper and plastic into your recycling bin outside your house.
  - ii) Switching off electrical items when they are not in use: Start with healthy habits that can be made within your house, such as turning of lights when you exit a room, because generating electricity can be harmful to our planet.
  - iii) Avoid using your car when possible: Cars run on petrol, and to make it you have to burn coal. This emits smoke into the air, which can be harmful to our health and can damage the ozone layer. Try walking, or riding your bike to nearby places, instead of using your car.
  - iv) Use renewable energy: Using solar panels is a smart way of making electricity without harming the environment, as it contracts energy from the sun.
- Cars like the Tesla use rechargeable batteries, similar to what you have in your phone. This means we don't have to burn coal to make our car run, just recharge the car's battery, which is not harmful at all. Help our planet in these dire circumstances, or we might not have a planet at all.

## SYDNEY

The new year was welcomed by chanting the Mahamantra on Dec 31 from 10 pm to 12.15am followed by a 1 min prayer. We also participated in the Global Nama Relay on 2nd Jan 2021.

Starting from Jan 1, the Grihe Grihe Mahamantra (Nama at your doorstep initiative) commenced. In this virtual Satsang, Nama Bhiksha is being sought from new families across different parts of Australia who join the Satsang via zoom to chant the Mahamantra from the comfort of their respective homes between 8 and 8.30 PM followed by a 1-minute silent prayer for the wellbeing of the host family.

Srimad Bhagavatham Classes conducted by Namadwaar Sydney's priest, Sri Janardhanan Ganapati, continued. These Zoom classes include the recital of the slokas & explains the meaning of each verse from the Srimad Bhagavatam in great detail. The classes are conducted as 1.5-hour group sessions on different days & times of the week for approximately 10-15 devotees per session from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

Vaikunta Ekadashi was observed on Dec 25 with Akhanda Mahamantra chanting on Zoom and Saphala Ekadashi on Jan 9 and Putrada Ekadashi on Jan 24 with special pooja in the morning and Mahamantra Kirtan in the evening.

## MELBOURNE

As part of Margazhi Utsav, students from the Keerthana school of music and Saphaswara school of music performed musical concerts at Namadwaar on Dec 26 and Dec 27. Hanuman Jayanthi was celebrated on Jan 12 at Namadwaar by chanting Hanuman Chalisa 11 times. By Guru Maharaj's grace, we completed 30-day long Thiruppavai Satsang by Dr. Janani Vasudevan on Jan 13.

10 G.O.D. volunteers donated blood at the Red Cross on Jan 20. Nearly 30 people benefitted from the donated blood. The next donation event is planned on April 11.

## BRISBANE

Margazhi Satsang at Dr Revathi and Dr Balaji's residence on December 19. Mahamantra and Thiruppavai were chanted followed by a discourse on Andal Charitram by Smt Aparna Mahesh. Around 30 people participated in the Satsang. Margazhi and New Year Satsang was held on Jan 3 at Smt Aparna and Dr Mahesh's residence. Mahamantra and Thiruppavai were chanted followed by a discourse on Andal Charitram by Smt Aparna Mahesh. Around 40 people participated in the Satsang.

On Jan 13, a workshop entitled "Growth Mindset" was conducted on Zoom for Brisbane Gopa Kuteeram children (~25 attended) by Sydney GK teachers Smt Gayatri Eashwar, Smt Jayanthi Ashok and Ms Smrithi Shekhar.

## AUCKLAND

On Jan 2, Auckland G.O.D. devotees joined the Global Nama Relay initiated by G.O.D. India. We had a wonderful session with about 65 participants. Smt. Meera Sitaraman started with a brief introduction about our beloved Gurumaharaj, Ashram, and the activities initiated under Guruji's guidance. A special mention to Akarsh Shankar (Auckland Gopa Kuteeram student) who played the Tabla for the 2 hours of Nama chanting and Sri. Sathyakumar Katte on the Ganjira.

On the Jan 10, a Nama Satsangh was held at Sri. Umesh and Smt. Suma's residence. where about 60 people chanted the Nama. The programme concluded with knowledge sharing by Sri Venkatachalam who spoke about the importance of Satsangh. Tabla was played by Akarsh Shankar and the Ganjira by Sri Sathyakumar Katte.

## WELLINGTON

On Vaikunta Ekadashi (Dec 25th) devotees came together to chant Vishnu Shasaranamam and Mahamantra Kirtan along with Madhuraageethams. New year 2021 began with the divine Mahamantra Kirtan and continued the next day during Global Nama chanting, Wellington Satsang started around 3 pm and everyone enjoyed chanting which was followed by Thirupavai. By the grace of Guru Maharaj and Sri Madhuri-Sakhi sametha Sri Premika Varadan Thakurji, we are fortunate to have Satsang between 5.30 - 7pm every Saturday and Sunday's.