

**MY WAY-
THE
HIGHWAY**

By

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INTRODUCTION

I have been expressing my personal views on various aspects of my way of life and I am happy to put all of them together for my friends and relatives to read and understand my feelings.

The views expressed are mine and my readers are free to accept them, reject them or follow them but those who wish to criticise these should offer equally valid alternatives or just relax and follow their own ways.

I am doing this for one reason only and that is to enlighten my people about Hinduism so that the future generations can freely follow the true essence of this credible way of life.

Hinduism provides the best form of family life if the followers refrain from hierocracy and obsolete ceremonies. It gives us the freedom to follow, pray and believe and we should just do these without any fear of contradiction. Let our home and heart be our greatest temple.

Truth, beauty and goodness remain the cornerstone of this powerful and open way of life.

Ram Lakhan Prasad

The Hindu Way of Life

“It is already becoming clear that a chapter that has a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race...At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation is the ancient Hindu way. Here we have the attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family.”- Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) British historian.

Knowledge I believe, should be given freely to all deserving students interested in learning. The thoughts presented here have been around for millennia and there is nothing original in this presentation. These are for people to read, analyse,

accept or reject if they have a better alternative.

So let us first look at the word Dharma. The word “Dharma” has no equivalent word in English. It takes many English words to describe Dharma. The word “religion” is commonly used but a religion is a specific system of institutionalized faith or worship.

“Sanātan Dharma” or “Mānav Dharma” is not a religion but a way of life. Everything we do in life, including preaching, praying, eating and sleeping, are done according to our own dharma. This is our way of life and living and we get used to it as we grow older and mature in our thoughts.

The Sanskrit word Dharma is derived from the root word “Dhri” which means to

hold together or support. Dharma supports or holds together everyone and everything. It supports and holds the person, the family, the community, the society and the country.

Dharma is also described as “duty” - ones duty towards oneself, ones family, community, country, and the world. Knowledge about our Dharma or what is right and wrong in our life will help and guide us through our lives. This knowledge should be learnt by every righteous person if an acceptable way of life has to be attained and accomplished.

Dharma is the universal code of behaviour towards all living creatures and nonliving things. It is in the best interest of all and includes all the virtues like truth, goodness, beauty, nobility, justice, non-violence, compassion, faith, duty, modesty, steadfastness, and

control over senses, our loyalty, our honesty and many other human traits.

Dharma is also absence of negative tendencies like selfishness, lust, greed, envy, anger, arrogance and similar feelings. A life according to Dharma is necessary for success in meditation. Dharma sustains and supports life in general, and helps to hold the community together.

Dharma has two parts –

- 1. Sāmānya Dharma – duties that are common to all people.**
- 2. Vishesha Dharma - is special duties of mother, father, husband, wife, child, student, teacher, farmer, businessperson, king, soldier, brother and sister.**

All these duties are described in ancient Indian literature but what happens when

“Dharma” is not followed? There are many examples in history of societies and civilizations that have fallen apart when the people have not followed the righteous path.

Even today we can see so many individuals, communities, countries wasting their valuable time, resources and thoughts after unethical projects, unnecessary traditional beliefs, and obsolete cultural practices and leading themselves, their families and people to disaster and confusion.

The word “Hindu” is not found in the ancient scriptures of India. It was the name given to the group of people by invaders. People living along the river Sindhu were called “Hindus” by foreigners. River Sindhu flows from Himalaya Mountain in the North and through North Western part of what was India.

Most of the foreign invaders came to India from the North-West. The religion followed by people of India was called “Hinduism” by the foreigners.

This is similar to how the original people of North America were called “Indians” by Europeans who were looking for “India” and when they first arrived in America thought they were in India.

The original people of India were called Āryans and Dravidians and the country was “Āryāvarta”. The people did not come from anywhere but had lived there for millennia and had developed a well advanced civilization. Other names for their religion were –Sanātan Dharma (eternal religion), Védic Dharma (religion of the Védas), Ārya Dharma (religion of the Āryans), or Mānav Dharma (religion of mankind).

The name of the country “India” was also coined by foreigners. The Indian names for India are “Āryāvarta” (the land of Āryans) or “Bhāratvarsha” (the land of king Bharat).

Culture has been defined in different ways. “A characteristic way of life inspired by fundamental values expressed through art, religion, literature, social institutions and behaviour”. It may also include education, scientific and technological advances, customs of the people, and the way in which people interact with each other and live in a civilized society.

“Indian” culture is one of the very few cultures that have continuously survived for quite a few millennia in spite of multiple invasions, brutal occupations by foreigners, and systematic attempts to destroy it.

How did it survive in India? A system of “Gurukul” or schools, strong family traditions, and the unique system of dividing the society into four classes with assigned duties for education, defence, trade, and service that helped maintain the knowledge and culture in India. The people with vested interest extended this division of labour into distasteful caste system that made the Hindu religion loose its core values and progress.

Knowledge of one’s cultural heritage is important for one’s self-esteem. When people loose their self-esteem and self-respect, they do not do well in life. It is very important for the welfare of our future generations that they learn the positive aspects of our culture and heritage and do not dwell in the negatives and unnecessary, obsolete and unwanted traditions that make us hypocrritical.

We cannot possibly learn and pass on to our children all that can be included in our “culture”. Not all of us may agree what is essential and what is not. The choice lies with the individual. Hinduism provides that freedom to pray, practice and perform whatever tradition and ceremonies suit us. There is no need for lavish and obsolete ceremonies. A belief in the essence of truth, beauty and goodness of living and a belief in the power of the Supreme Creator can give a person all that is needed to live a healthy and fruitful life.

Our culture shows us how to live our life whether we are in India, Australia, USA or anywhere else. It is therefore important to teach our children and grandchildren at the earliest age about their acceptable culture and heritage before their brains are filled with negative ideas about our “culture” and

they begin to follow unacceptable ways and methods of praying and beliefs.

Second reason for preserving cultural heritage is for the children to grow up having positive self-esteem, a good feeling about them. If children know that they are coming from a good, strong, and stable background, they will have the confidence to handle any situation and do well in life. If children learn at an early age that their culture, heritage, ancestors, were of inferior quality or that “they will burn in hell for eternity” because of their religion and their out dated religious practices then they are likely to have many problems.

I feel that one does not have to declare himself Hindu to conduct prayers. There is no system of conversion to Hinduism because we are born Hindus. Since there is only one God and we are all human, it

should be logical to pray in our own homes or in any house of religion anywhere. The early Hindus had no temples or mandirs but just found a peaceful place in their homes or environment to conduct their prayers.

Maybe this is the reason why Doctor Radhakrishnan told us that there was no need for any temple or specific place to conduct our prayers because the real place of prayer was our home and heart.

We all know that “God lives in everything” (omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscience). We as good human beings should freely and peacefully love God in our homes and hearts without any interference from anyone. There should be no requirement of any specific language or methods for our prayers. We should be able to conduct our prayers ourselves peacefully.

There is an “energy” that forms the basis of all that exists in the universe, a “force” that keeps us alive. Something that cannot be described nor can it be experienced by our senses (touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste); an “entity” that can be addressed by any name or imagined to take up any form, and “that” which has no beginning or an end. I define this as my God.

For good human beings there are four goals in life:

1. Kāma (desire) – fulfilling desires to satisfy senses e.g. thirst, hunger, sex and others. These are common to all in the animal kingdom.

2. Artha (wealth) – earning money to buy food, shelter, clothes and other essential items. This goal is considered higher than

Kāma because it is not found in animal kingdom.

3. Dharma – Kāma and Artha are achieved according to Dharma. It is higher than both of them.

4. Moksha – liberation from the cycle of birth and death or merging of Ātmā (soul) with Paramātmā (God). This is the highest goal in life. All activities in the fields of Kāma and Artha give temporary pleasure. Moksha is permanent bliss.

I firmly believe that all human beings can achieve these goals. One does not have to pray to a specific “God” or belong to a specific religious sect to attain these.

Hindus believe in many things – from one all pervading God to many Gods and even no God. All views are accepted. Everyone has the freedom to choose and nobody is permanently denied Moksha (salvation).

Following beliefs are some of the important ones:

Ātmā (Self, soul, Jivātmā) and Paramātmā (Brahma, God).

The force or energy that keeps us alive is called Ātmā. Our body becomes life-less when it leaves our body. This energy can not be damaged or destroyed. It is the same in all living things. Paramātmā is the ocean of life-force from which all forms of Ātmā originate. After a process of evolution, all Ātmā merge with Paramātmā (God).

God can be worshiped in any form we wish and any name by which we want to call Him. All our prayers are heard by one and the same Supreme Reality (God).

Karma- Literal meaning of Karma is action. However, Karma includes the intentions behind the action, the means used in performing the action and the consequences of that action (Karma-phal). An “action” is good if the intention is unselfish and methods used are non-violent (according to Dharma).

We do not have any control over what follows the “action” (the consequences). Every act or even a

thought has similar consequences. “Good” thoughts and “good” actions have “good” consequences. We have choice only over our intentions and the means used to perform any action. If we do something for others with good intentions and without expecting anything in return for ourselves, good things will eventually happen to us. It is essential that we analyse our intentions continuously, do our best, work hard, persevere and leave the results to Him.

c. Punarjanma - (Rebirth). Just as we discard old clothes and take on new clothes, in the same way we discard old bodies and we obtain new bodies.

We believe that the soul leaves the body at the time of death and takes up another body (reincarnates) or becomes part and parcel of the Supreme Being, God Almighty. We are all evolving spiritually and take many births until we have no desires and all karmas are successfully resolved. Then our ātmā (soul) merges

with Paramātmā (Brahma, God) and attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death (Moksha).

Everyone is entitled to moksha. If at the time of death we have any unfulfilled desire or unresolved karma then we take birth in a new body. We are born in a family and under circumstances according to our unresolved karmas and unfulfilled desires. This gives us the opportunity to progress spiritually.

Satya (truth), Ahimsā (non-violence), and Brahmacharya (discipline, self-control) are some of the important values for people who follow Mānav Dharma.

There are three meanings of the word “truth”:

1. Satya or Truth:-

The dictionary meaning of truth is “what is real”.

b. Second meaning of truth is “when our speech and actions are the same as our thoughts”.

c. In Védas, “Truth” means what is real today, what was the same yesterday, a hundred years ago, and even a billion years ago; what will be the same tomorrow, a hundred years from today, and even a billion years from now. In other words, they are the things that do not change over time.

To put it in better terms we say that “Truth” is changeless, beginning less, endless and everlasting.

The first two (a and b) are to be practised. The third one is a goal to be achieved.

2. Non-violence (Ahimsā):-

“Ahimsā paramo dharma”, Non-violence is the supreme dharma.

If we believe that God lives in all, how can we hurt anyone? Non - violence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution.

Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages. After slaughtering so many animals for food I am guilty of this trespassing but repentance may be one of my answers. The practice of ahimsā includes not harming anyone in our thoughts, by words, or by our actions. We can see all over the world that once the cycle of violence is started it is very difficult to control. Ahimsā and universal love go together.

However, the greatest practitioner of non-violence, Mahātmā Gāndhi, said that:

“My creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have, therefore, said more than once.....that if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of sufferings, i.e., non-violence, we must, if

we are men, be at least able to defend all these by fighting.”

3. Self-discipline (Brahmacharya):-

Brahmacharya means search for Brahma or moving towards Brahma, the changeless, beginning less, endless, God. It can also mean moving around in the field of Brahma or behaviour of some one who wants to attain Brahma.

Brahmacharya is learnt during first 25 years of life and practised all through the life. The main goal during this stage of life is to learn. To achieve this we give up all the comforts and pleasures of life and concentrate only on our studies. This training is like a ride in a hot air balloon. To go up you need to get rid of all unnecessary baggage and just carry what is absolutely necessary. The student learns to control all the five senses namely taste, smell, touch, vision and hearing.

It does not mean that later on in life, we do not enjoy good food or relationship between husband and wife but we try not to become slaves of these enjoyments and forget our duties or the ultimate goal in life. The training during Brahmachary āshram helps adults to control all their senses and set a good example for their children.

Life according to these values and virtues are useful for our progress on the evolutionary path to experiencing the “Devine” or “Self Realization”. Of course, there are many more values for Manav or human beings.

4. Fearlessness (Abhayam):- Fear interferes with good decision making.

5. Purity of thoughts (Satva-shamshuddhi):-

6. Yoga of knowledge (Gyan) Decisions and actions are based on the knowledge of morals & ethics, and right and wrong.

7. Charity (Dāan).

People and institutions doing work for the good of the society are supported by generous donations of money and time.

8. Etiquette (Shistachaar). How courteous or modest people are in their day to day dealings.

9. Mastery over all senses (Dambh, Brahmacharya). If our senses take control over our actions then we do not have time for worthwhile projects and our energies are diverted towards “fun” activities.

10. Personal sacrifices (Yagya). Desires for personal pleasures, power, prestige, possessions, etc. are given up for the good of the family, community & country.

11. Study of scriptures Regular study of useful and acceptable scriptures is necessary for our spiritual development and to keep us on the right track.

12. Disciplined effort (Tapa) towards a selfless cause.

For all sentient human beings it is also recommended the removal of the following impurities or weaknesses of the mind:

1. Hypocrisy (Dambh), pretending to be better than one really is.

2. Arrogance (Darp) of knowledge, colour of the skin, family, wealth, physical strength, etc.

3. False or excessive pride, hostile intention (Abhimaan).

4. Anger (Krodh).

5. Bullying nature (Pārushyam).

6. Ignorance (Agyaan) about one's place in the universe and relationship with other creatures, someone who thinks he is the most important person in the world.

These six are considered as devilish (Āsuric) characteristics or impurities in the mind of a person. Everyone has to try and remove these from their personality.

The ancient society in India was divided in to four groups according to their capabilities, aptitudes, education, personal effort (sāadhanā), and function they performed in the society. These were like the four pillars in four corners of a building supporting a roof overhead.

All four groups were equally important and none was respected more than the other. People were able to move freely amongst the four groups according to their qualities. Everyone was expected to live according to the dharma of their category. However, this idea was distorted and over simplified by the people with specific stake.

In the end do what you think is appropriate.

You can lift yourself up (but) do not degrade yourself.

You only are your (true) friend and you are your enemy.

In the last chapter, Shri Krishna in Bhagawad Gitā tells Arjun:

Think about all that I have said and then do as you please. The choice is yours. That is the essence of Hinduism.

“Do not accept what I have said because it has been so and said in the past;

Do not accept it because it has been handed down by tradition;

Do not accept it thinking it may be so;

Do not accept it because it is in the Holy Scriptures;

Do not accept it because it can be proven by inference;

Do not accept it thinking it is worldly wisdom;

Do not accept it because it seems to be plausible;

Do not accept it because it is said by a famous or holy monk;

But if you find that it appeals to your sense of discrimination and conscience

as being conducive to the benefit and happiness of all;

Then accept it and live up to it.” Buddha.



ATTACHMENT TO GOD or DEVOTION “MY BHAKTI”

After listening to so much of debate on matters relating to my way of life which has tremendously changed from that of my parents and grand parents, I felt that there was a need for me to clarify some of the issues regarding my attachment to God and my devotion for the sake of my future generation. Although I was raised as a Hindu, I can no longer enjoy the increasing imposture and so many aspects of double dealings and sanctimony that the current confused religious leaders are unilaterally imposing on us. Many ceremonies and ways are only an aspect of show-off and puppetry which in simple terms can be termed as hypocrisy or *dhakosla*, *dhong* and *pakhand*.

Therefore, I have decided to be an original Hindu where and when absolute freedom was given to a devotee to perform the devotional activities and refrain from all the hypocrisies that are now emerging to harm the new breed of followers. These are my personal views and opinions and people other than those who agree with me are free to go on living with their dubious, boloney and sanctimonious beliefs. I have no qualms with that but would press on regardless.

The term Bhakti means 'to be attached to God'. Bhajan, worship, Bhakti, Anurag, Prem, Priti are synonymous Hindi terms. Bhakti is love for love's sake. The devotee wants God and God alone. There is no selfish expectation here. There is no fear also. The devotee feels, believes, conceives and imagines that his feeling is an Ocean of Love.

Bhakti is the slender thread of love that binds the heart of a devotee with the Lord. Bhakti is intense devotion and supreme attachment to God. Bhakti is

supreme love for God. It is the spontaneous out-pouring of love and devotion towards the Beloved. It is pure, unselfish, divine love. There is not a bit of bargaining or expectation of anything here. This higher feeling is indescribable in words. It has to be sincerely experienced by the devotee. Bhakti is a sacred, higher emotion with sublime sentiments that unites the devotees with the Lord.

Let us see how love develops. First faith arises, then follows attraction and after that adoration. Adoration leads to suppression of mundane desires. The result is single-mindedness and satisfaction. Then grow attachment and supreme love towards God.

In this type of highest Bhakti, all attraction and attachment which one may have for objects of enjoyment are transferred to the only dearest object, viz., God. This leads the devotee to an eternal union with his Beloved and culminates in oneness.

TYPES OF DEVOTION

Bhakti is of various kinds. One classification is DESIRE FOR MATERIAL GAINS and the other is UNSELFISH DEVOTION. Whatever you want the Lord will certainly give you, if your devotion is intense and if your prayers are sincerely offered from the bottom of your heart. But you will not get supreme satisfaction, immortality and Moksha through selfish devotion.

Your Bhakti should always be unselfish. God has already given you a good life, position, a good job, family, wife and children and enough wealth. Be contented with these. Aspire for nothing more than just attachment with the Lord. Your heart will be purified and the Divine Grace will descend upon you. Be in communion with the Lord, you will become one with the Lord and you will enjoy all the divine attributes like wisdom, renunciation, power, love and knowledge. You will be able to see the Lord with your inner eye. He will help you

to dwell in Him. At the same time He will give you all the divine attributes without asking for He is the one who is the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.

The beginners decorate an image of God with flowers and garlands, ring the bell, offer food-offerings, wave lights and perform other ceremonial things. Nothing belongs to us because everything is God given therefore it is futility in offering anything that is His to Him. He does not want anything else but our love and devotion. So there is no real need for us to observe any dissembling rituals and ceremonies. These are for self satisfaction and concocted by people for their own benefits. The devotee should regard the Lord as a Supreme Person, who is immanent or inherent in that image and who can be propitiated or appeased through that form only.

He has no expanded heart. He is a sectarian. He dislikes other kinds of devotees who worship other gods. We must see the Lord and Lord alone

everywhere and feel His Power manifest as the entire universe. In our prayers we do say that "Thou art all-pervading; Thou art the Supreme Light, in whose borrowed light the sun, the moon, the stars and the fire shine."

Thus the devotee who recognizes the transcendental nature of God may take the food, offer it to God mentally; and the food will be purified. When you pass through a garden of flowers, mentally offer all the flowers to the Lord as an offering in worship. When you pass through the bazaar and see a sweetmeat shop, mentally offer all the sweetmeats as food to the Lord. Such practices will lead to divine devotion and will help us save on money, time and efforts and instead of wasting food and foliage we should give these to the needy and the poor to use.

Let us go from stage to stage. Just as a flower grows in the garden, so also gradually develop love and devotion in the garden of our heart. The enemy of

devotion is egoism and desire. Where there is no Kama or desire, there alone will be the Lord Himself. The enemies of peace and devotion are lust, anger and greed. Anger destroys your peace and your health also. When a person abuses you, keep peaceful. When blood begins to boil, it is impoverished. You lose vitality if you become a prey to fits of temper.

HOW TO CULTIVATE DEVOTION

It would be a gross mistake if you consider devotion as merely a stage of emotionalism, while it is actually a thorough discipline and training of one's will and the mind, a sure means to intuitive realization of God Almighty through intense love and affection for Him. It is a means to thorough apprehension of the true knowledge of Reality, beginning from the ordinary form of idol worship right up to the highest form of cosmic realisation of your oneness with Him.

Rather than wasting our time, energy and funds on unnecessary and obsolete ceremonies and hypocrisy we can achieve this by following various fundamental factors such as the practice of continuous thinking of God; or being anti discriminatory; or freedom from everything else and longing for God; or truthfulness; or straightforwardness; or doing good to others; or wishing well-being to all; or compassion; or non-injury; or charity; and or cheerfulness and optimism.

I have had some people put a question to me: "How can we love God whom we have not seen?"

Live in the company of knowledgeable people. Hear the glory and fame of God. Study the sacred scriptures. Worship Him first in His one form as manifested in the world. Worship the Lord or your Guru. Recite His Name. Sing His glories. Pray in your home which is the best temple. You will naturally develop deep love for God.

Every human act must be done that awakens the emotion of devotion. Keep your heart the worship room pure and clean always. Decorate your internal self. Light a lamp inside you. All these and other similar believable activities produce a benign influence on the mind and elevate the mind. They generate piety. They help to create the necessary feeling to invoke the God that you want to worship. The mind will be easily concentrated.

Practice of right conduct, prayer, worship, interaction with knowledgeable people service to the mankind, service of the poor and the sick with divine feeling, observance of family duties, offering of all actions and their fruits to the Lord, feeling the presence of the Lord in all beings, renunciation of earthly enjoyments and wealth, charity, austerities and vows, practice of non violence- all these will help you to develop devotion to God.

There is no room whatsoever for any form of bargaining with the God by asking Him to help you and you will perform a particular ceremonial activity. We cannot be an ideal devotee if we are not able to regard everyone as equal and have respect for all the ways of life of all human beings irrespective of their colour, creed and beliefs.

ABSOLUTE FEELINGS OF SELF-FORGETFULNESS IN DEVOTION

When the devotee grows in devotion there is absolute feeling of self-forgetfulness (Bhav). This establishes a true relationship between the devotee and the Lord. This self-forgetfulness then grows into extreme self-forgetfulness wherein the devotee lives, moves and has his being in the Lord. This is the consummation of love or Supreme Love.

There are many kinds of absolute feelings of self-forgetfulness we can display towards the Almighty and these feelings are natural to human beings and so these

are easy to practice whichever suits our temperament.

In the peaceful devotion the devotee does not jump, sing loudly with loud music or goes wild musically and dances. He is not highly emotional. His heart is filled with love and joy. A quiet corner in the home is the best temple. This is enough to mediate.

Then there is service to the Almighty where the devotee prays regularly and finds joy and bliss in the service of mankind.

When the devotee accepts God as a friend, as Arjun had this feeling towards Lord Krishna, the devotee moves with the Lord on equal terms. Arjun and Krishna used to sit, eat, talk and walk together as intimate friends. We can do this as well.

Then the devotee looks upon God as a child like Yasoda and Basdeo who had this feeling with Lord Krishna and Dashrath and Kaushalya had the same feeling for Lord Rama. There is no fear in

this feeling, because God is your pet child. The devotee serves, feeds, and looks upon God as a mother does in the case of her child.

There are other feelings for the Lord where the devotee regards the Lord as the Lover. This was the relation between Radha and Krishna and Meera and Krishna. This is total submission to the Lord. The lover and the beloved become one. The devotee and God feel one with each other and still maintain separateness in order to enjoy the bliss of the play of love between them. This is oneness in separation and separation in oneness. Of course, our scriptures have many examples of absolute devotion where people like Sabri and Kewat become one with the Lord.

This kind of absolute feeling of self-forgetfulness is absolutely different from conjugality of earthly experience. One should not be mistaken for the other. Earthly conjugality is purely selfish and is undertaken only because it gives

pleasure to one's own self. But in love for God it is because it gives pleasure to God and not for the sake of the devotee. Divine love is not selfish. It is born of truth, beauty and goodness whereas earthly lust is born of attachment to bodies. Earthly conjugality is the outcome of egoistic self-regarding egoistic feeling, while divine communion is the outcome of other-regarding feeling devoid of egoism. Strong selfishness is the root of worldly passion; divine love is the product of loss of egoism.

This is the greatest difference between lust and divine love. The two are related as darkness is related to light. No development of earthly affection, however perfect it may be, can lead one to supreme joy of divine communion. Lust lurks in the heart due to the passion that burns in the core of things. Divine love should be known to the all of us of this world, however unreligious we may be. The secret of divine love cannot be understood, and should not be tried to be understood, so long as man is only a man

and woman only a woman. The austere transformation of the human into the divine is the beginning of true love for God.

Devotion to God is developed in many different ways as said previously. It is supreme attachment to God through an absolute feeling of self-forgetfulness predominant in the devotee. Intense love is the common factor in all these modes. Exclusive love for God is expressed through various methods. All devotions of this type are above the formalities of the world. They are untouched by the laws of human way of life and are out and out concerned with God.

Good conduct and discipline which are in accordance with perfect human moral law are an auxiliary to pure devotion and it follows that the true devotion comes to us wherever we go and whatever we do. There is no place for false, obsolete and unwanted traditional and ceremonial activities. Freedom to be with the Lord is the essence of devotion. There is no one

way to be with the Lord. God does not want any double- dealing or puppetry.

One cannot develop true devotion to God if one is crooked in his heart, dirty in ones thinking and is unnecessarily argumentative on obsolete and outdated religious issues. Logic and rational thinking is part of deep devotion.

People can still have objects of love in this world and possess worldly things or have an honest family life. There is no need to starve or torture our body but look after our health well by eating nourishing food and being with the Lord. Detachment from all objects will not form a good part of devotion but sound discipline would lead us to be with the Lord. In fact this is what He would prefer the most. Love for the world and love for the Lord are inseparable conditions. We can conduct our family, business and personal life as the Lord dictates by being honest in all our deeds. That is devotion for the modern human being.

I believe that there are multiple forms of devotion and these include:

- **hearing of God's glories and stories,**
- **singing and listening to His glories,**
- **remembering and chanting His name and presence,**
- **servicing the humanity,**
- **worshiping God with no strings attached,**
- **paying proper respect to the Lord,**
- **cultivating the feeling of a servant of God,**
- **cultivating of the friendly feeling,**
- **complete surrender of the self to the Almighty and**
- **Not practising sanctimony and refraining from all forms of hypocrisy.**

A devotee can practice any method of devotion which suits him best. Through that he will attain divine illumination.

The devotee should develop an impartial knowledge of the way of life that a good human being should follow without

getting bogged into the irrelevant and unnecessary ceremonial activities. The enlightened devotee should try his best to live in the ideals that promote truth, beauty and goodness. I cannot put more emphasis on this issue. There is no place for any hypocrisy or to display any sanctimony and puppetry in becoming a devotee of God. An honest devotee should become liberated, be totally free from all forms of dissemblance or double dealing and enjoy the Supreme Bliss.

Worship can be done either with external materials or merely through an internal feeling or any other stronger feeling. The latter one is an advanced form of worship which only people who have more purified intellect and less boloney can do. The purpose of worship is to please the Lord, to purify the heart through surrender of the ego and love of God. There should be no “stage show” for devotion.

No amount of visits to temples or sacred places would assist a person to become

a good devotee. The scriptures cannot be followed blindly to do the activities related to devotion. A good devotee would always think clearly, logically and rationally to conduct any ceremonial activities that maintain tradition but if any change is necessary then it should be done as the devotee thinks fit and proper. There should be no compulsion from anyone and the devotees should have the complete freedom to practice the way of life that best suits them. There should not be any blind following because this would reveal ignorance and stupidity.

I believe that it is good to be always with the Lord, to treat Him as one's own dear relative or a friend belonging to one's own family, to be in His company at all times, and to love Him as one's own self. This is how I see as my devotion to the Lord. How do friends, real friends, love in this world? What amount of love do they possess between one another? Such a love should be developed towards God instead of towards mankind alone so that

our physical love turns into spiritual love. There is a transformation of the mundane into the Eternal.

If the devotee offers everything to God, including his body, mind and soul and he keeps nothing for himself to lose even his own self then he has no personal and independent existence. He has given up his self for God. He has become part and parcel of God. God takes care of him and God treats him as Himself. Grief and sorrow, pleasure and pain, the devotee treats as gifts sent by God and does not attach him to them. He considers himself as a follower of God and an instrument in the hands of God. The devotee then sees the image of God in every living thing.

This self-surrender is Absolute Love for God exclusively. There is nothing but God-consciousness in the devotee. Even against his own wishes, the devotee shall become one with God and lose his individuality. This is the law of being. The highest truth is Absoluteness and the soul rises above through different states

of consciousness until it attains Absolute Perfection when it becomes identical with God. This is the culmination of all aspiration and love.

It is indeed very sad that some people who have ascertained religious strength have begun to dictate terms to do things and perform ceremonies in their particular way and to their particular liking and financial gains. This is one of the reasons why the right thinking people are distancing themselves from obsolete and unnecessary religious ceremonies and matters.

FRUITS OF DEVOTION

Absolute devotion in any person softens the heart and removes jealousy, hatred, lust, anger, egoism, pride and arrogance. It infuses joy, divine ecstasy, bliss, peace and knowledge. All cares, worries and anxieties, fears, mental torments and tribulations entirely vanish. The devotee is freed from the wheel of births and deaths. He attains the immortal abode of

everlasting peace, bliss and knowledge. The atma or the soul merges with the Lord or paramatma after death. The reincarnation of soul comes to an end.

The fruit of devotion is appropriate knowledge to lead a good way of life rather than be bogged down in unnecessary and unwarranted ceremonies that have no meaning and substance for modern living. This knowledge intensifies our devotion. Knowledge or wisdom will dawn by itself when you practice Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti is the pleasant, smooth, direct road to God. Bhakti is sweet in the beginning, sweet in the middle and sweet in the end. It gives the highest, undeceiving bliss. Every person has the right to conduct the religious ceremonies the way they like, when they like it and at what place to perform these. There is no compulsion when it comes to devotion.

Therefore I feel that we should kindle love divine in our hearts and mind, for this is the immediate way to the Kingdom

of God and a better way to live and enjoy life on this earth and beyond. I will continue to pray to the Lord, sing His glory, recite His Name and try to become a channel of His grace the way and place I prefer. I will not only seek His will and do His will but will surrender to His will. I will not worry too much about the past obsolete and unnecessary traditional and ceremonial practices of any community or society. A good human being is a perfect Hindu for me.

When I surrender unto the Lord I am confident that He will become my charioteer on the field of life. He will drive my chariot well. I will reach the destination, the Abode of Immortal Bliss, my Nirvana. Nothing else matters to me.

My initial prayer is simple.

**Asato Maa Sad Gamaya
Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya
Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti**

***Oh Lord, lead me from untruth to truth,
from darkness to light, from death to
immortality.***

***Give me Peace, Make my life Peaceful
and help me attain Peace in my words,
deeds and thoughts.***

**I wake up or go to sleep with my prayers.
I love to recite the Gayatri Mantra as and
when I feel the need and urge.**

**Om Bhur Bhuva Swaha
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi
Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat**

***God is dear to us like our own soul, He is
the Dispeller of our pains, and Giver of
happiness. We meditate on the supremely
adorable Light of the Divine Creator, that
it may His radiant power inspire our
thought and understanding and illuminate
our intellect. O God destroy our sins and
direct our mental faculties in the right
direction to give us peace and prosperity.***

**Once everyday I recite my Maha
Mrityunjaya.**

**OM. Tryambakam Yajamahe, Sugandhim
Pushti-Vardhanam, Urvarukamiva
Bandhanaan, Mrityor MukshiYa
mamritaam .**

**I concentrate on my third eye which lies
behind the two eyes and this gives me
the power to feel the presence of
Almighty God and by this I feel happy,
satisfied and peaceful in life. I know that
immortality is not possible but some
extension can be given to my death by
the supreme powers of the Lord. Like the
cucumber I treasure within me the three
most important elements of humanity and
they are truth, beauty and goodness.**

**Of course I end my day with my urge for
personal and universal peace.**

**Om Dhew Shanti Antarikshaguang
Shanti Prithvi Shanti Rewa Shanti
Roshadaya
Shanti Vanaspataya Shanti Vishvayedeava**

**Shanti Brahma Shanti Sarva Shanti Reva
Shanti Saama Shanti Redhi
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti**

May there be peace in the heavenly region; may there be peace in the atmosphere, peace may reign on the earth, the waters of ocean and rivers be cool, the herbs be healed, the plants become peace-giving, may there be harmony in the celestial objects and perfection in knowledge, everything in the universe be peace, may peace pervade everywhere. May that peace come to me and to all of us.

This is the spiritual side of my life and I love it very much.



NIRVANA

I came to this world for my journey on 27th December 1939. I had no choice about when and where it would start. I did not know when, where or how it would end. I was not given any map but all I may have known that it was bound to end someday and sometime in the future.

However, I gathered during my journey that there were many rules that applied to my life and I had to learn them as I progressed. I could not totally control my route and even though many of my people claimed, I did not even know the whole purpose of my journey. All these would become clearer with time and discipline.

All I knew that once I started, I had to continue regardless every day, whether I liked it or not. A lot of it depended on what I did and how I performed my day-

to-day events, this was going to be my karma, good bad or ugly.

I started with no possessions and I was told that when at last I finished my journey on this earth, I must return all I had accumulated. I too would march out empty handed and no one would accompany me but my karma. In the end, I would either be rewarded or punished. I now understand that this is life and I could change it with my daily activities and having faith in the Supreme Power.

Therefore, with my determination to move along with all the motivation and some sense of humour I have managed to cushion many of the bumps in my life. I thank the Almighty God for all this and I am still on my journey.

When I was a first year university student, I read a novel by a Nobel Prize winning German author Hermann Hesse

titled *Siddhartha* that had some thematic resemblances to the life and living of Gautam Buddha.

In the novel, Siddhartha, a young man after receiving the necessary religious knowledge from his priestly father becomes totally confused and restless and leaves his family for a more contemplative, enlightening and peaceful life. He later gets in relationship with his Kamla, conceives a son, but is still bored and sickened by lust and greed so moves on again.

Near despair, Siddhartha comes to a river, which becomes a symbolism of cleansing for him. Here he hears a unique godly sound of OM. This sound signals the true beginning of his life. The beginning of total liberation from all suffering, letting go all attachment and aversion, attaining peace, and finally finding total enlightenment and wisdom

for internal serenity and limitless happiness.

Although the theme of the novel is related somewhat to Buddhism, the ideas therein expressed general interest of the conflict between mind, body and spirit. The author showed that a re-examination of the relationship between the various aspects of us was possible by exhorting to finding yourself through self-understanding. Hermann Hesse could only make a simple attempt to clarify the joyous and wonderful ideals of Nirvana through the words, actions, thoughts, character and habits of his character Siddhartha, a protagonist of Buddha. In order to fully understand the whole concept of Nirvana I had to go deeper into the various Hindu and Buddhist scriptures.

Siddhartha was born in a priestly family and grew up in the village with his best

friend Govinda. His father was an intellectual thus taught him all the needed knowledge of the priestly class. Siddhartha was able to make everyone happy but himself. The more he extended his knowledge the more troubled and restless he became. So much so that he was very dissatisfied with his routine family life and he announced his intention to opt out and join an opposing religious group known as the Samanas.

Naturally, his father was upset and forbade his departure but seeing that the obstinate youth's body was in the home but his mind had already departed, Siddhartha's father acquiesced to his son's wishes. Siddhartha's best friend Govinda joins him as they disappear into the forest in search of the Samanas by relinquishing all their possessions and dedicating themselves to meditation,

fasting and other methods of mortification.

As a result of this move, the normal human world became anathema to Siddhartha. For him it was all illusory and destined to decay leaving those who treasured it in great pain and suffering. He had one goal and that was to find enlightenment, ultimate joy, total liberation from all suffering and letting go all attachment and aversion. This was the idea of Nirvana for him.

Siddhartha was born in a Hindu family and wanted to find the way out of the cycle of rebirth through his karma. Hinduism is an extraordinarily tolerant way of life asserting that there are many ways one can approach Nirvana or to be one with the Divine. Whichever way appeals to each person depend on the person and therefore no path is ultimately better than another.

He was in search of a realization, which was going to liberate him and enlighten his life to lighten up the darkness that enveloped and deluded him. Consequently, Siddhartha believed that if he remained in the priestly class he would not attain peace because in his search no one from his class had ever attained Nirvana. Therefore, he went out in search of the ultimate truth, goodness and beauty of humanity.

After reading the novel, I had an urge to dig deeper in the teachings of Buddhism and other aspects of Hinduism to extract more aspects of Nirvana. In my reading, I was amazed at the neo religious concept of Hinduism. On the one hand I had read a fictitious novel titled Siddhartha but on the other hand there were the teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism that I had to research and then merge the two to

comprehend the idea of oneness with the Supreme also known as Nirvana.

My understanding of Nirvana gradually became clearer as I read and researched this complex topic.

I found out that the state of Nirvana was joyous, wonderful and healing to the mind of the one who made an attempt and reached that possible enlightenment. It is neither a euphemism for death nor an annihilation or dissolution. Therefore, I deduced that Nirvana was not the termination of the physical body and the exhaustion of one's merit but was in fact the dissolution of the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness like the fire that is burnt out or the winds that are stilled.

However, I also gathered from my detailed reading and research that these views were one-sided and perhaps

misleading and in actuality, Nirvana and Annihilation were as different as the day and night. ‘What is Nirvana then?’, I kept asking myself.

I constantly asked myself and went to the story of Prince Siddhartha meditating under the bodhi tree. Deep in meditation, he gazed at the starry sky and in a flash of insight; he saw the true nature of things and heard the unique godly sound of OM to become a fully enlightened being. I then understood that this awakening to the truth, beauty and goodness of life and the universe is what is called Nirvana.

I gathered that Gautam Buddha saw through the duality of *me* versus *them* and transcended the limitation of time and space to enter into the boundless realm of the body of truth or dharma. These ideas gave me a lot more questions than I could find answers and

so I posed another relevant question to myself, 'why should we be concerned with Nirvana in our life?' To get some satisfactory answers and valid explanations I had to do a lot more research, reading, and take stock of our lives.

I found out that human existence according to scriptures is limited in terms of both time and space. While our body lives, it has to die as well. Our life span is no more than a century at the most and the body usually grows no more than two metres tall. The biological and scientific composition of our entire body is very simple and destructible but the *Aatma* or soul is the governing aspect of our life.

The world is not just suffused with the Divine, it actually is the Divine. This is as true of human beings as it is of every other aspect of Nature. The aspect of the

Divine, which resides in humans is called *Aatma*; it is not that this *Aatma* is an incomplete piece of the Creator, and that if one were to take the sum of the Divine in all things one would constitute the whole of Creator. The Creator or as the Hindus believe, Brahma is indivisible, and so *Aatma* is just the name we apply to the Creator or Brahma in ourselves.

The phenomenal world which we daily experience is called Maya or an illusion. Ultimately, this world is an illusion, an elaborate costume which covers the essence of Absolute Reality, which, unnoticed, animates everything. Importantly, our subjective selves, our egos, are illusions (Maya) as well. For reasons unknown to us, our *Aatma* enters the cycle of birth and rebirth, Samsara, advancing through a series of lives, from unconsciousness, to consciousness, to self-consciousness. Self-consciousness

results in the development of the ego, but it does not terminate there.

As we are not really our ego but are *Aatma*, we are not fully self-conscious until we identify ourselves with our true natures. It is this realization, which liberates us from the cycle of rebirth, (liberation or Mukti), which dissolves our individuality and reunites us with the totality of being from which we sprang.

Therefore, my understanding is that Nirvana frees us from such limitations and allows us to break out of our shell of delusion. In Nirvana, life permeates all space, traverses the three realms# of existence and spans all directions. I gather from Buddhist literature that in Nirvana the life pulsates through all time, extends from antiquity to the present without change, lives through myriad *kalpas*+ and is forever new.

In such a state, the mind encompasses the entirety of the universe, traversing realms as numerous as grains of sand. When we see that 'self' and the material world resonate in harmony and when we understand 'self' and the 'other' as one, then there is no impulse to jealousy and no room for hatred or discrimination.

We are told that 'to put it simply, by rediscovering our original nature, we dwell in Nirvana and are once more able to see through the duality of subject versus object and the limitation of time and space.' Though human language and the human brain are limited and hardly conducive to fully understanding Nirvana, we as sentient beings should nevertheless, try to understand it in order to live happily and in peace with ourselves and all around us.

The word Nirvana is therefore really joyous and wonderful for all salient

beings because it means becoming *free* from the suffering brought on by the *deluded belief* in duality and discrimination. It also refers to the ensuing state of bliss, harmony, and being at ease with the world around us.

We are told in the Buddhist literature that we can define Nirvana by negation and by affirmation. It speaks of Nirvana among other explanations as being without form, limit, outflow, beginning, attachment, end, arising, clinging, decay, loss, equal, obstacles, want and affliction therefore it is unparalleled and immeasurable. It is also explained by affirmation to be absolute reality, permanent, secure, ultimate, hard to come by but perfect, pure and liberating.

Nirvana is also equated to Buddha Nature, the inherent nature of the body of truth (Dharma) and it is explained as the wisdom that knows what reasoning

cannot know therefore it is the wisdom that sees the nature of all things as well as the end of all reasoning and the quietening of all disturbances.

While all these descriptions and explanations may look different, the meaning is still the same. Essentially, what they all are saying is that Nirvana is “our pure, original nature and our true, original being.” Through these teachings, we become free of delusions and are able to attain Nirvana by rediscovering our true nature.

Let us see what Nirvana does for the sentient human beings like us.

- Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of greed.**
- Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of hatred.**

□ Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of ignorance, delusion, and erroneous views.

□ Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of affliction.

The Buddhist scriptures describe Nirvana as “the eradication of all sorrow, the extinguishing of the three fires, namely greed, hatred and delusion, the severing of the attachment to the three notions, namely the notion of life and death, the notion of Nirvana and the notion of non-discrimination, and the disassociation from all realms of rebirth.”

As unenlightened beings, we all tend to endow these constructs with a sense of substantiality, which keeps us from Nirvana. Having the notion of Nirvana keeps us from Nirvana, even the attachment to non-discrimination is discrimination in itself.

We often read in scriptures and hear people talk about the impermanence of life, but it is within this very impermanence of life that we find the unchanging nature of Nirvana.

We also hear Buddhists talk about suffering in this world and Nirvana as the ultimate happiness. When we say all suffering is rooted in the concept of self, we are referring to the usual connotation of self as a permanent and separate unit of identity that exists independently of others. When we speak of Nirvana as the ultimate happiness, we are still talking about a self, which feels this happiness. The self in the context of Nirvana is the true self and is different from the day-to-day connotation of self. This self is grounded in oneness and in the total harmony with all causes and conditions.

In addition to defining and understanding the meaning of Nirvana, we can also

develop a better appreciation for this state of being through some of the analogies that have been used in Hindu and Buddhist literature to characterize Nirvana.

Firstly, in the religious scriptures or literature, there are many references to lotus blossoms, especially in depicting purity and altruism. The lotus starts to grow in the muck and mire at the bottom of a pool; it passes through the water and blossoms in the clean air, untainted by the mud. Similarly, Nirvana grows out of the trials and tribulations of life, yet remains untainted by them.

Secondly, the literature compares Nirvana to water and states that like water, which extinguishes physical fires, Nirvana extinguishes the fires of delusion. Just as water quenches our physical thirst, the realization of Nirvana eliminates the thirst of desire.

Thirdly, we can compare Nirvana to an antidote when Nirvana according to Hindu and Buddhist scriptures is a sanctuary or medicine for the weary. Like an antidote, Nirvana neutralizes the poison of delusion.

Then we can compare Nirvana to the ocean. The ocean accepts all water regardless of its source. The ocean knows no discrimination. Nirvana is also a state of equanimity, without preference or aversion. Just as we could never measure fully the amount of water in the oceans, we could never fully describe the realm of Nirvana.

When we compare Nirvana to food, we notice that as food keeps us alive and healthy, so those who have attained Nirvana are free from the cycles of birth and death. In Nirvana, one is beyond the limitations of human life. Just as food relieves us of our hunger, the realization

of Nirvana frees us from the suffering of affliction.

Then there is a comparison of Nirvana to space in our scriptures. When we speak of space, there is no talk of arising, subsisting, changing, or passing away. The same is true of Nirvana. Once Nirvana is realized, one can never fall away from it. The realm of Nirvana is boundless. It is not to be found at any one place, yet it is everywhere. It is not dependent on any one thing, yet it is the foundation of all things. In Nirvana, one dwells in the midst of all phenomena and is in harmony with the universe.

When the scriptures compare Nirvana to a priceless, gem it makes a lot of sense. Like a priceless gem, Nirvana is radiant and appeals to all.

Finally, when our scriptures compare Nirvana to a mountain peak it gives a

much better understanding to us. The steadfastness of Nirvana can be compared to a tall mountain peak, reaching towards the sky, unfazed by the elements of weather. Nirvana stands tall, beyond the reach of all afflictions.

Buddhism speaks of four kinds of Nirvana:

- Nirvana of pure original nature,**
- Nirvana with remainder,**
- Nirvana without remainder, and**
- Nirvana of non-abiding.**

The Nirvana of pure original nature is the seeing of body of truth, the true nature of all phenomena. While delusion may temporarily prevent us from seeing the body of truth, its integrity is never compromised. Dharma or the body of truth has countless wondrous aspects and encompasses all things. It is not the

same as all dharmas, yet it is no different. Our body of truth is our pure, original nature. If we look inside of ourselves, we all can see the body of truth.

Nirvana with remainder is attained when one is still alive. In this case, the word remainder refers to the effects of karma. The term “with remainder” means that while no new karma is being created, the effects of past karma have not been entirely extinguished. Because of the presence of the physical body, one still feels the various effects of hunger, temperature, sickness, and aging.

In Nirvana with remainder, one still has to eat when hungry or rest when tired. Even though the body continues to experience sickness, old age, and death, the mind is no longer enslaved by these processes. Regardless of one’s circumstances, one can still go on with

life in a calm, reserved manner. This is what is meant by Nirvana with remainder.

The state of Nirvana without remainder is reached when all effects of karma are completely worked out, and the physical body is just a thing of the past. Without the creation of new karma, there is no coming together of the five aggregates* and no new birth results.

In this state, one's true nature is "dissolved" in all phenomena and becomes one with the universe. Just as sugar dissolves in water without a trace, its presence, though not visible, is indisputable. This total harmony is summed up in the saying, "Time from antiquity to the present is not separate from the present thought. The boundless land that separates you and me is nothing more than the tip of a down feather."

Nirvana of non-abiding is also known as Maha Nirvana. It is believed that of those who have attained Maha Nirvana, they are no longer attached to life and death because of their wisdom. Out of compassion, they are no longer attached to Nirvana. They see through the emptiness of the cycle of rebirth and continually reappear in this world to guide salient beings through the sea of suffering. They have everything, yet they do not call anything their own. They are always active helping sentient beings, yet they are always at peace. They are not attached to any one way and can skilfully employ all means.

From our entire discussion of the meaning and these various kinds of Nirvana, we can safely deduce that one does not have to wait until the end of one's life to enter Nirvana. When Prince Siddhartha became a fully enlightened

Buddha under the bodhi tree, he entered the realm of Nirvana with remainder.

When the Buddha passed away at the age of eighty between two sala trees, he entered Nirvana without remainder.

During the forty plus years when the Buddha travelled everywhere to teach the Dharma to all those with a willing ear, he lived a life free of attachment.

My assertion is that this kind of life that is purposeful yet without fixation on purpose is free and at ease. This is the realm of Nirvana.

I now believe that Nirvana is the total liberation from suffering. I also believe that those who have realized Nirvana experience unparalleled joy that flows from within.

My belief is that even the way enlightened ones conduct themselves

reflects their internal serenity. Therefore, simply by being in their presence, others can also share in this limitless happiness.

The Hindu and the Buddhist scriptures speak of Nirvana as the ultimate happiness that is attainable by the ones who make a genuine effort to do so.

However, those of us who cannot comprehend the meaning of Nirvana, think that the bliss of Nirvana comes from the suppression of all desires. This is a grave misunderstanding, as illustrated by the various scriptures and the exchange between various intellectuals.

I have heard some people ask and state that if the scriptures teach us to realize Nirvana by letting go of our sensory pleasures, which is very hard to do and causes us great pain, so what is the point

of realizing Nirvana if it takes all the joy out of living?

My answer as a HR practitioner and after my extensive reading on the topic is simple. “It is incorrect to equate Nirvana with the ‘pain’ of abstention. When the scriptures teach us to refrain from indulgence, it is only a means to an end. When one wants to learn a new skill, one has to first ‘painfully’ practice the basics of that skill before one can excel in it.”

In my presentation, I have repeatedly said that Nirvana is the total liberation from suffering because I firmly believe in that idea. When we let go of all attachment and aversion, we live in harmony with all that is conditioned and in so doing calm the agitation that comes with desire.

I have said that the realm of Nirvana is without arising, without abiding, without

attachment to the phenomenal self, and without blemish. In Nirvana, there is no arising and consequently no ceasing and no impermanence. Not only is there no arising of worldly phenomena, there is also no arising concerning the notion of Nirvana itself.

I am convinced that Nirvana is without blemish and is most wondrous and perfect. The serenity and joy that are experienced in Nirvana are not something that can be described in simple words and in a brief essay like this one.

Having said all these, I believe it is also something that we all can experience, and it is available to us at all times.

Now let me go back to the novel to conclude this presentation. In the end, though the lingering question that is left with me is how intertwined are the metaphysical and the ethical proposals of

Siddhartha. Should we accept reincarnation, the unity of all Being, and the fiction of time in order to accept Siddhartha's ethics of self-determination and love of good karma?

This becomes an allegory for all sentient beings, in fact a moral tale and not a philosophical treatise. In the end, we have the choice to follow Siddhartha's example in determining how much significance we can give to the Hindu way of life and Buddhism regarding Nirvana. I feel this leaves each one of us to come to our own conclusion.

NOTES:

The five realms are: heaven, human, animal, hungry ghost and hell.

+ Kalpas – a period in which the universe experiences a cycle of creation and destruction.

***Five aggregates are: form, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness.**

% Triple Gem constitutes Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.



The Festival of Lights

Let us illuminate our Inner Self

The festival of lights or the Hindu festival of Diwali every year gives all human beings an opportunity to reflect on their own ways of lives and clarify, correct, consolidate and control various aspects that do not conform to the norm. However, before this vital task of self-purification takes place one should be fully determined and be ready to concentrate to do the right things for the right purposes.

Prayers are our most important tools to move in this direction. So let us pray and pray with sincerity and calmness to get the best results always. In fact everyday should be our festival of lights rather than on any particular days or periods of

time. The festival of lights is of special significance for all human beings because our world is not doing everything in the right way for the peaceful co-existence of people.

God Almighty has put the self-luminous inner light of the Self Realization in every being and this light has the potentiality of ever shining steadily in the chamber of our heart. So let us sit quietly. Close our eyes. Withdraw the senses. Fix the mind on this supreme light and enjoy the real Festival of Lights everyday of our lives. This divine human action will definitely help us attain illumination of our mind, body, soul and environment. We will then need no more bliss and blessing in life.

In my seventy five years of existence in this world I have seen and experienced that all the lights of the world cannot be compared even to a ray of the inner light of the self. This is my reason to say that

we should try to merge ourselves in this light of lights and enjoy the supreme festival of lights everyday. This duty of human beings is possible and should be performed for our greater wellbeing.

Many festivals of lights have come and gone. Yet the hearts of the vast majority are as dark as the night of the new moon. The house is lit with lamps, but the heart is full of the darkness of ignorance.

Let us now wake up from all our slumber of ignorance. Let us all realise the constant and eternal light within ourselves, which neither rises nor sets. We can do this through our meditation and deep spiritual enquiry.

We can all attain full inner illumination if only we tried hard enough. Let the supreme light of lights enlighten our understanding! Let us all attain the inexhaustible spiritual wealth of the Self!

May we all prosper gloriously on the material as well as spiritual domains of this universe!

There is no one way to enjoy the festival of lights within us, or with our family and friends or within our environment. We can celebrate this awakening of *self* in multiple ways and the way we like the most. But the most important aspect of it is to celebrate it with pleasure, peace and purpose with your loved ones.

The festival of lights is no doubt the best way to forget all your troubles and problems for the time being. It helps in refreshing relations and giving everybody another chance. Overall, the whole month of this festival is a source of enjoyment for everyone. It is for this very reason that people try to express their love and feelings for each other by sending messages of good wishes and greeting cards to their loved ones as a continuity

of that vital human feeling and emotion of love and compassion.

So, the question when looking for reasons to celebrate the festival of lights is not only when, how, why, where and with whom but many more and much deeper. No one can deny the importance of the festival of lights because it is unique from other festivals in the sense that it helps us illuminate our inner self and make us live a full life with all the human dignity.

The message of this festival of lights is so simple that everyone is able to fully comprehend the essence of it because everybody knows the festival of lights. Lights diminish darkness and darkness is the worst enemy of humanity because it depicts ignorance and sin.

So our messages must be according to the various themes of the festival such as

peace, prosperity, progress and greater human dignity where truth, beauty and goodness prevail always. One thing is important and that is that the message of lights we spread in our messages to the community should be able to spread out the brightest lights in the darkness to overcome the evils, ills and illness of the people.

Also, remember that the festival of lights is to illuminate your appetite and stomach so sharing your sweets and food with our family and friends can provide greater self-satisfaction to everyone.

The ideas of giving and forgiving are the greatest assets of all good people. I remember my beloved wife harping on this aspect of human conduct during our loving family life of over fifty years. She is no more today but her thoughts are translated here. She said that the more everyone forgets and forgives the wrongs

that are done to others the better it is for good human interaction.

I personally feel that there is an air of freedom, festivity and friendliness in this aspect of human existence. The festival of lights brings about an extremely energetic experience to go out and put this conduct into practice for the unity of everyone. This personal behaviour instils a special charity in the hearts and minds of people for social unity when family members, friends and generous employers exchange gifts for their loved ones.

Thus in this festival of lights giving and forgiving become the greatest human interactions of our modern age and should always provide us with an opportunity to rise and shine above everybody. All the people who rise early truly shine the whole day in their duties and responsibilities.

This aspect of daily living is good for health; it provides ethical discipline to us, makes us efficient and effective at work and above all enhances our spiritual advancement. So why only wake up early on this particular day but make it a regular habit of our life and reap the benefits of healthy, wealthy and wise.

Thus, we would be able to promote all forms of unity and unify our friends, family and faith, mixing with one another freely without any reservation, rancour and real reason to forget all enmity that may exist between and among us. We would be able to openly and freely embrace one another with love, passion and compassion for the advancement of healthy human living and natural nation building.

Those of us who always wear a happy and favourable mood would easily be able to rejoice ourselves more and create

greater joy for our people thus creating a life conducive to harmonious human existence for better and stronger cultural, economic and spiritual advancement.

What more light and enlightenment are needed during the festival of lights after we have achieved all the above credentials? We would easily make the festival of lights one of the greatest unifying forces for people. Some of us would be able to hear the voices of the sages, who recite their prayers to warn the children of God to rise, shine, unite, give and forgive to love everyone around us.

In this violent world we need the vibrations of these types that are produced by and with the greetings of love and lustre to fill the atmosphere that would be more potent and powerful to

promote and bring about a needed change of human heart.

The current hearts of many people around the world have considerably hardened and only a continuous celebrations of the festivals of lights can rekindle in all of us that urgent need of turning away from various ruinous and evil paths of hate and war and move towards love and peace.

Prosper and Progress

Many people have expressed their own opinion on the significance of the festival of lights but I think if there are more then it would be a lot merrier and helpful for people to better understand the deeper meaning and significance of the occasion. I am able to think of some reasons for the celebration but the readers would also have many more ways of their own.

On this day, the people clean their homes and environment, decorate the surrounding by day, and illuminate everything by night. The best and finest illuminations would be the internal enlightenment.

Why do we celebrate the festival of light? It is not just the festive mood in the air that makes you happy, or just that it is a good time to enjoy but there are so many mythical and historical rational for the celebration.

From various Hindu scriptures, I can gather at least ten of those. It can be seen from these historical myths and legends that these are good reasons not just for Hindus but also for all people to celebrate this great Festival of Lights.

1. Birthday of the Goddess of Wealth:

The Goddess of wealth, Lakshmi was incarnated on the new moon day of this

month during the churning of the ocean, hence the association of Diwali with Lakshmi.

We all have our rightful wish to be rich and affluent and live with adequate material things around us to lead a successful family life.

This then becomes our responsibility to begin performing some appropriate economic activities to achieve our objective of acquiring wealth on this day. By praying to the Goddess of Wealth we tend to develop that needed stamina to persevere and work even harder with diligence and sustained effort. All successful people have shown us that this is plausible for everyone.

2. Vishnu Rescued Lakshmi:

On this very day, Lord Vishnu in his fifth incarnation rescued the goddess of wealth from the prison of King Bali and

this is another reason for us to worship the goddess of wealth to ask her blessing to grant us our needs and wants.

Of course, we can rescue someone from hardship and difficulty and create some illumination in their life or help some of the poor and desolate people of this world to lead a better life.

During this festival of lights if we can make sincere resolution to brighten the homes of some of the adversely affected people then our festival would become a lot more meaningful and valuable.

3. Lord Krishna Killed Narakaasur:

On the day preceding Diwali, Lord Krishna killed the demon king Narakaasur and rescued 16,000 women from his captivity. The celebration of this freedom went on for two days including the Diwali day as a victory festival.

This then is an appropriate time for every right thinking human being to celebrate and promote the liberation of so many suffering women all over the world by putting some light and shine in their respective lives.

4. The Return of the Pandavas:

According to the great epic Mahabharata, it was at this time when the Pandavas appeared from their 12 years of banishment because of their defeat in the hands of the Kauravas at the game of dice while they were gambling. The subjects who loved the Pandavas celebrated the day by lighting their homes and environment as well as showing the gamblers that the consequence of gambling was always distasteful and harmful.

Thus, it becomes imperative that everyone lights that lamp during this

festival of lights that would lead them away from gambling and such harmful pleasures.

5. The Victory of Lord Rama:

According to the epic Ramayana, it was the new moon day of this month when Lord Ram returned to Ayodhya after vanquishing cruel and evil king of Lanka Ravana. The citizens of Ayodhya cleaned and decorated the entire city with lights to illuminate it like never before.

This festival of lights is then our chance to do the same to make some effort to vanquish all of the cruel and evil people who live around us and harm us. We can light some aspect of wisdom in their evil thinking to make them respect the values of human dignity to promote the needed love in the community. Let us advise and help our leaders to increase their effort

to get rid of the terrorists and evil human beings.

6. Coronation of Vikramaditya:

It is believed that King Vikramaditya was crowned on this day, hence the festival of lights became a historical event as well for the people in his kingdom. Therefore, there are many such events in our own lives when respected members of our family and community are crowned with success and elevated to more respectable and senior positions. The event then becomes a moment of celebration and we tend to light some lamps of joy in their lives.

So the festival of lights is also here to rejoice the success of our loved ones who have been serving us sincerely with dignity and dedication. Let us light some specific lights in their life and keep

supporting them to serve us even better and with greater understanding.

7. Special Day for the Arya Samaj:

It was the new moon day of this month so many years ago when Maharshi Dayananda, one of the greatest reformers of Hinduism and the founder of Arya Samaj attained his nirvana or salvation.

It is time for us to celebrate the contribution of all our spiritual leaders who have shown us the path to nirvana and enlightened us to do better in our own life by reforming our way of living and getting rid of all the obsolete and unnecessary ceremonies that waste our time, money and effort.

Therefore, it would be appropriate and symbolic to generate specific lights during this festival to illuminate ourselves in order to assist us reach some form of nirvana within our lifetime.

8. Special Day for the Jains:

Mahavir Tirthankar who was considered the founder of modern Jainism also attained his nirvana on this particular day. Therefore, this day can become a special day for any one of us who is ready and willing to take that vital journey of salvation towards the attainment of truth, beauty and goodness. To light a few lamps to enlighten our internal self and external environment would enable us to complete the destination and make our world a better as well as more peaceful place to interact and coexist.

9. Special Day for the Sikhs:

I have read that the third Sikh Guru Amar Das institutionalized this day as a Red-Letter Day when all Sikhs would gather to receive the rich blessings of the Guru.

I found out that in 1577, the foundation stone of the Golden Temple at Amritsar

was laid on this particular day and people have been lighting the temple and their homes and suburbs with bright lamps to illuminate the environment and rejoice for the establishment of that magnificent religious structure.

I am told that in 1619, the sixth Sikh Guru Hargobind, who was held by the Mughal Emperor Jahengir, was released from the Gwalior fort along with 52 kings. That was the time for the people to rejoice and they did it by lighting lamps in the homes and streets.

Therefore during this festival of lights it can give us a lot of peace in our own minds when we visit a temple to light a few lamps to remember all religious and spiritual leaders who have shown us the path of righteousness.

10. The Pope's Diwali Speech:

It was reported that in 1999, Pope John Paul II performed a special Eucharist in an Indian church where the altar was decorated with Diwali lamps, the Pope had a tilak a religious symbol marked on his forehead and his speech was bristled with references to the festival of light.

I firmly believe that since this world has shrunk to a mini melting pot of multi religious and racial harmony we all can emulate the liberal sentiments of Pope John Paul II to respect and honour the various religious and different faiths that exist in our environment by lighting a few lights to generate greater knowledge, understanding and love.

Therefore, the readers can clearly see my point of view that there is no one way or one particular community or one kind of belief to celebrate this great festival of

lights but we all can celebrate it in our own way and within our own means. The main objective should be to cleanse ourselves internally and externally and make our environment a healthy place to co-exist in peace and with unconditional love and instinctual joy to save the human race from deteriorating any further.

Lessons that can be learnt from the Festival of Lights

During any enlightenment, an awakened human being should be able to differentiate the beautiful and the ugly things in life and the community but the important thing is that the enlightened person should have the courage of his or her conviction to do something to eradicate the ugliness and further improve the beauty of the words, thoughts and actions. Since this festival of lights is the period of enlightenment,

all sentient beings are definitely capable of that kind of consciousness, which can reveal truth, beauty and goodness in their lives. Therefore, we all have the duty and responsibility to brighten and enlighten our internal and external positions. This is the greatest essence of humanity.

Any form of darkness is synonymous with ignorance, guilt and hardship and as enlightened people we human beings have the capability to brighten ourselves, our environment and our community with knowledge, freedom and understanding through our words, actions, thoughts, conduct and help.

During this festival of lights, all our words need to be well selected for every occasion where love, peace and total understanding become our main focus of communication. One of the best ways to refine our words would be to distance ourselves from hatred, anger and stress.

This can easily be achieved through meditation and prayers in a quiet corner of our home sweet home with our friends and family members. We can learn a lot from the angry conducts and actions of such sages as Durvasa, Parasram, Bhrigu, Brihaspati and Kashyap by keeping our temper under control and seeing the essence of divine being in every person we interact with in our life.

During this festival of lights, let us illuminate ourselves and dedicate all our actions toward the welfare of every being we are related to culturally, economically and socially. Let our individual way of life dictate our intellect to do the right things at the right time. The way we are moving backwards in this world we would soon find that we have helped to destroy the idea of humanism and there would be nothing left to celebrate.

All our religious, racial, communal and national indifferences are growing so fast that we have begun to see war, hatred and animosity as the only solution to all our problems. During such festivals, our actions should be escalated to promoting greater peace, joy and love.

We should plan all our actions and then act all our plans for the benefit of humankind. Then and then only the objectives and the true meaning of the festival of lights could be achieved in the best way by all of us and everyday of our lives.

When it comes to refining our thoughts, we should be able to do this simply by increasing our knowledge about service to the community and keeping our families within the bounds of humanity rather than letting our children, relatives, friends and colleagues think and act adversely.

Since all evil, all wars and all sins generate in our thoughts we should light as many lights as possible to see that all such odd, obsolete and sinful thoughts are cleared from our hearts and minds for our own benefits forever. Once our thoughts become refined and conducive to our needs and wants we would be able to conduct all our human, social, economic and cultural activities with dignity and pleasure.

In order to conduct our acceptable and normal behaviour we cannot always walk where our legs lead us but use our wisdom and intellect to construct our future with ease and understanding. One of the ways this can easily be done is for us to love God and His creations and enlighten ourselves enough to maintain and manage our living and provide help where it is most needed.

Finally, in this episode let us examine the way we can help the people in the community to develop the positive power of enlightenment. Firstly, we must decide what are we passionate about as far as assisting the people is concerned.

All this depends on our special interest but one of the important things to remember is that it is not practical to want to help everyone. Choose one or two areas and focus on them with all your good efforts.

Time and money are important so the idea of volunteering is the best form of assistance. Many times, we have a lot of things in the house that we do not really need so these can be donated to various charitable organisations or poor needy people. The idea of giving some of your income to the needy is a possibility.

Thus, our festival of lights would provide us with a rewarding experience if we made a small start at all the above aspects.



My Invocation

I have always regarded dharma as an occupation that is able to sustain my existence. Consequently, I had been reasonably successful and more than able to sustain my existence by coordinating all my activities with the blessing and help of the Supreme Lord.

There always were two types of occupation for me. The first one, although inferior in nature, had been the path of enjoyment where I created my material existence that was temporary, illusionary and gave me many miseries.

The second one was the superior path of renunciation or sacrifice that I was able to perform for my internal joy, satisfaction and cause.

However, to help me get out of my miseries and confusions I tired and managed to follow my existence as

spiritually as I possible could to make my life somewhat eternal, blissful and reasonably knowledgeable. I accepted my miseries as normal materialistic existence. I enjoyed happiness, made good progress in life and there was ample prosperity.

God Almighty granted me whatever He thought was adequate for me because I managed to accept some aspects of the superior existence by conducting good humane actions, my karma. I firmly believed that God Almighty extracted part of His Being (soul) to create me as a sentient human being therefore I regarded all creations of God as equal.

For me there never has been any superior or inferior human being and so I have been promoting equality among humanity where there was no room for any caste, creed or colour.

As for the definition of my religion, I have been a human creation of God Almighty

and I have tried to put my best practice that enabled me to become a devotee of the Lord. In my humanistic devotion I see the spiritual element of my God (soul) in every human being that I interact with hence, I love, respect, like and honour everyone equally as far as they carry the qualities of humanity.

By giving and sharing some of my humanistic qualities, I have endeavoured to please my Lord who has bestowed many divine qualities into me in return with his richest blessings. I could not give Him anything else because of His omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient position. Thus, my entire existence and occupations have been flourishing. When the time comes, I shall return to live in the Realm of God.

Hindu scriptures reveal that the personality of the God Almighty is perfect and complete, and because He is completely perfect, all emanations from Him, such as this phenomenal world, are

perfectly equipped as complete wholes. Whatever is produced of the complete whole is also complete in itself because He is the complete whole, even though so many complete units emanate from Him, He remains the complete balance. This is my faith and I whole-heartedly believe in the supreme power of the Almighty God.

Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota and one should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.

One may aspire to live hundreds of years if he continuously goes on working in that way, for that sort of work will not bind him to the law of karma. There is no alternative to this way for human beings. God knows what to do with those that follow adverse living.

Everyone is engaged in action. The law of karma means that there are reactions to every action and that a person must endure the reactions to his actions.

According to yoga, every action, good or bad, produces some karmic reaction.

Actions that are “bad” create bad karmic reactions. A person who engages in heinous criminal actions or who lives simply like an animal, exploiting others, will have to eat the bitter fruit of such actions in the future.

The taker of the soul, whoever he may be, must enter into the planets known as the worlds of the faithless full of darkness and ignorance.

Although fixed in His abode, the Personality of Godhead is swifter than the mind and can overcome all other running. The powerful demigods cannot approach Him. Although in one place, He

controls those who supply the air and rain. He surpasses all in excellence.

The Supreme Lord walks and does not walk. He is far away, but He is very near as well. He is within everything, and yet He is outside of everything.

The one who sees everything in relation to the Supreme Lord, who sees all entities as His parts and parcels, and who sees the Supreme Lord within everything, he should never hate anything nor any being.

Such a person must factually know the greatest of all, who is unembodied, omniscient, beyond reproach, without veins, pure and uncontaminated, the self-sufficient philosopher, who has been fulfilling everyone's desires since time immemorial.

One who always sees all living entities as spiritual sparks, in quality one with the Lord, becomes a true knower of things.

What then can be illusion or anxiety for such people?

Those who engage in the culture of absence of knowledge or awareness or ignorance and agnostic activities shall enter into the darkness region of ignorance. Worse still they are those who are engaged in the culture of so-called knowledge but not wisdom.

Unfortunately, most of humanity spends the majority of its time in the culture of ignorance. We cultivate ignorance by serving our tongue, belly, genitals, and other senses like obedient slaves. The vast majority of our energy goes into this mad pursuit of sense pleasure.

Left with frazzled nerves, frustration, anger, jealousy, envy, greed, hate, loneliness, and confusion; we seek an escape in alcohol, cocaine, heroin, and a myriad of other legal and illegal consciousness dimmers. This is the cultivation of ignorance.

There is no possibility of one's becoming a yogi, O Arjuna, if one eats too much, or eats too little, sleeps too much or does not sleep enough. ~*Bhagavad-Gita 6:16*

Nor is sense gratification considered “bad.” Sense gratification comes and goes as a natural occurrence of the senses. For example, one cannot eat without tasting.

The point is that a life that is cantered on sense enjoyment, that makes sense enjoyment the goal, is a wasted life. Economic development is necessary for the maintenance of the body; so therefore it cannot be neglected. However, to seek economic development simply for the sake of endlessly increasing sensual pleasure is foolish.

No amount of sensual pleasure will ever really satisfy a person, so no amount of economic development will ever be considered “enough.” This is why people

in modern Western societies are still not satisfied, even though they are so economically advanced and thus have so much facility for sense enjoyment. They always want more.

Is there enough to go round? Immediately we encounter a serious difficulty: What is “enough”? Who can tell us?

Certainly he is not the economist who pursues “economic growth” as the highest of all values and therefore has no concept of “enough.” There are poor societies, which have too little; but where is the rich society that says: “Halt! We have enough”? There is none.*

What’s really needed is to recognize the need for spiritual as well as material happiness. A society that has great material prosperity but lacks spiritual purpose is really a poor society. A body without the soul is a dead body—even if it is nicely decorated with fancy ornaments.

The wise have explained that one result is derived from the culture of knowledge and that a different result is obtained from the culture of ignorance.

For one who lives a hedonistic life, a life in which ignorance is cultivated, the results are envy, anger, greed, impatience, disrespect for others, anxiety, depression, hatred, ever-increasing lust, forgetfulness, frustration, dissatisfaction, duplicity, fear of death, and so on.

On the other hand, for a person who cultivates wisdom or true knowledge, the results are inner peace, satisfaction, patience, respect for others, freedom from duplicity, compassion, joyfulness, remembrance of his spiritual identity, freedom from the fear of death, freedom from anxiety and depression, and so on.

The negative social results of a society populated primarily by hedonistic people should be obvious to anyone. A society of

self-cantered, animalistic people who have no other interest than their own sense enjoyment cannot be at all peaceful or progressive—either materially or spiritually.

However, the positive results of a society populated mostly by people who are serious about cultivating wisdom and spiritual understanding should be clear. If the citizens are peaceful, satisfied, respectful of others, compassionate, selfless, and so on, then society will be progressive both materially and spiritually.

It is believed that only the one, who can learn the process of ignorance and that of transcendental knowledge side by side, can transcend the influence of repeated birth and death and enjoy the full blessing of immortality to attain nirvana.

Some neophytes on the spiritual path may fall into the illusion that taking care

of the body is somehow evil, or a sign of spiritual backwardness. Not only may they neglect the needs of the body, but also they may go out of their way to actually damage the body. Such people actually hate the body. They see it as a source of misery, and thus they take out their anger on it. This is certainly a mistake.

Masochism can never lead to spiritual perfection. The body is actually a most precious property of the self; it enables the self to engage in various devotional activities that can bring about a change in consciousness. A person's external activities affect his consciousness, and his consciousness affects his external activities.

Knowing this, a *bhakti yogi* consciously chooses to engage in particular external activities in order to bring about the desired spiritual happiness and wisdom. If we love and like our body then we

would look after it well and guard it against all evil acts and intakes.

A person who tries to abstain to become a *swami* or a *yogi* is careful not to engage in those activities that are harmful to his spiritual development. For example, he refrains from taking intoxicants (including all sorts of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and so on); from having illicit sex; from gambling; and from eating meat, fish, and eggs.

If a person engages in the process of bhakti yoga and yet continues to engage in activities that are detrimental to spiritual progress, his spiritual progress will be very slow. This does not mean that a person must be completely free of all bad habits before he can even begin the process of bhakti yoga. For example, in the Philippines, one teacher saved many young people who were addicted to heroin and other drugs by teaching them the process of bhakti yoga. It took some

time before they could completely give up all drugs, but eventually they did.

Sometimes a person is still addicted to cigarette smoking or meat eating but if he or she follows the process of bhakti yoga, then gradually, he or she will be able to give up such habits. It is a question of tasting a higher taste. If a person engages in the process of bhakti yoga, he or she will gradually begin to taste the higher spiritual happiness, and he will be able to give up all vices naturally. After he gives up such bad habits, then his progress will be very rapid.

Those who are engaged in the worship of demigods enter into the darkest region of ignorance, and still more so do the worshipers of the impersonal Absolute.

It is said that one result is obtained by worshiping the supreme cause of all causes and that another result is obtained by worshiping that which is not

supreme. All this is heard from the undisturbed authorities who clearly explained it.

One should know perfectly as the Personality of Godhead and His transcendental name, as well as the temporary material creation with its temporary demigods, men and animals. When one knows these, he surpasses death and the ephemeral cosmic manifestation with it, and in the eternal kingdom of God, he enjoys his eternal life of bliss and knowledge. (Nirvana, salvation, or mukti)

So my prayers are simply these: O my Lord, Sustainer of all our lives, Your real face is covered by Your dazzling effulgence. Please remove that covering and exhibit Yourself to Your pure devotee.

O my Lord, O primeval philosopher, maintainer of the universe, O regulating principle, destination of the pure

devotees, well-wisher of the progenitors of mankind - please remove the effulgence of Your transcendental rays so that I can see Your form of bliss. You are the eternal Supreme Personality of Godhead, like unto the sun, as am I.

Let this temporary body be burned to ashes, and let the air of life be merged with the totality of air. Now O my Lord, please remember all my sacrifices, and because You are the ultimate beneficiary, please remember all that I have done for You. Let my karma be my treasure.

O my Lord, powerful as fire, omnipotent one, now I offer You all obeisance's and fall on the ground at Your feet. O my Lord, please lead me on the right path to reach You, and since You know all that I have done in the past, please free me from the reactions to my past sins, so that there will be no hindrance to my progress and prosperity.

The above invocation can be obtained from various Hindu scriptures for maintaining ultimate peace of the mind. I am not wise, I am not foolish but I am always on the path to seek more knowledge that will help me to live a useful and contented life. If in doing so I am able to live and let others live, I am a sentient human being subject to sins, mistakes and errors that should never be repeated but become my lead to move to truth, beauty and goodness of life.

As advised in Chapter Thirteen of the Bhagavad-Gita (13.8-12), one should culture knowledge in some of the following ways:

- (1) One should become a perfect person and learn to give proper respect to others.**
- (2) One should not pose oneself as a religionist simply for name and fame.**
- (3) One should not become a source of anxiety to others by the actions of his**

body, by the thoughts of his mind, or by his words.

(4) One should learn forbearance even in the face of provocation from others.

(5) One should learn to avoid duplicity in his dealings with others.

(6) One should search out a bona fide spiritual master who can lead him gradually to the stage of spiritual realization, and one must submit himself to such a spiritual master, render him service and ask relevant questions.

(7) In order to approach the platform of self-realization, one must follow the regulative principles enjoined in the revealed scriptures.

(8) One must be fixed in the tenets of the revealed scriptures.

(9) One should completely refrain from practices which are detrimental to the interest of self-realization.

(10) One should not accept more than he requires for the maintenance of the body.

(11) One should not falsely identify himself with the gross material body, nor

should one consider those who are related to his body to be his own.

(12) One should always remember that as long as he has a material body he must face the miseries of repeated birth, old age, disease and death. There is no use in making plans to get rid of these miseries of the material body. The best course is to find out the means by which one may regain his spiritual identity.

(13) One should not be attached to more than the necessities of life required for spiritual advancement.

(14) One should not be more attached to wife, children and home than the revealed scriptures ordain.

(15) One should not be happy or distressed over desirables and undesirables, knowing that such feelings are just created by the mind.

(16) One should become an unalloyed devotee of the Personality of Godhead, Shri Krishna, and serve Him with rapt attention.

(17) One should develop a liking for residence in a secluded place with a

calm and quiet atmosphere favourable for spiritual culture, and one should avoid congested places where non-devotees congregate.

(18) One should become a scientist or philosopher and conduct research into spiritual knowledge, recognizing that spiritual knowledge is permanent whereas material knowledge ends with the death of the body.

These above eighteen items combine to form a gradual process by which real knowledge can be developed. One can seek and find a lot more ways through ones own enlightenment and knowledge.

Except for these, all other methods could be considered to be in the category of ignorance. It is maintained by people of knowledge that all forms of material knowledge are merely external features of the illusory energy and that by culturing them one becomes no better than an ass.

This same principle is found here in. By advancement of material knowledge, modern person is simply being converted into an ass.

Some materialistic politicians in spiritual guise decry the present system of civilization as satanic, but unfortunately, they do not care about the culture of real knowledge as it is described in the Bhagavad-Gita. Thus, they cannot change the satanic situation.

In the modern society, even a young person thinks that he or she is self-sufficient and pays no respect to elderly people. Due to the wrong type of education being imparted in our educational institutions, the younger people all over the world are giving their elders many headaches.

Thus, the culture of ignorance is different from that of knowledge. The universities are, so to speak, centres of shallow knowledge only; consequently, scientists

are busy discovering lethal weapons to wipe out the existence of other countries. University students today are not given instructions in the regulative principles of brahmacharya (celibate student life), nor do they have any faith in any scriptural injunctions. Religious principles are taught for the sake of name and fame only and not for the sake of practical action. Thus, there is animosity not only in social and political fields but in the field of religion as well.

Nationalism has developed in different parts of the world due to the cultivation of shallow knowledge by the general people. No one considers that this tiny earth is just a lump of matter floating in immeasurable space along with many other lumps.

In comparison to the vastness of space, these material lumps are like dust particles in the air. Because God has kindly made these lumps of matter complete in themselves, they are

perfectly equipped with all necessities for floating in space. The drivers of our spaceships may be very proud of their achievements, but they do not consider the supreme driver of these greater, more gigantic spaceships called planets.

There are innumerable suns and innumerable planetary systems also. As infinitesimal parts and parcels of the Supreme Lord, we small creatures are trying to dominate these unlimited planets. Thus, we take repeated birth and death and are generally frustrated by old age and disease.

The span of human life is scheduled for about a hundred years, although it is gradually decreasing to twenty or thirty years. Thanks to the culture of ignorance, befooled men have created their own nations within these planets in order to grasp sense enjoyment more effectively for these few years.

Such foolish people draw up various plans to render national demarcations perfectly, a task that is totally impossible. Yet for this purpose each and every nation has become a source of anxiety for others.

More than fifty percent of a nation's energy is devoted to defence measures and thus spoiled. No one cares for the cultivation of real knowledge, yet people are falsely proud of being advanced in both material and spiritual knowledge.

Scriptures warn us of this faulty type of education, and the Bhagavad-Gita gives instructions as to the development of real knowledge. This mantra states that the instructions of vidyā (knowledge) must be acquired from a dhīra. A dhīra is one who is not disturbed by material illusion.

No one can be undisturbed unless he or she is perfectly spiritually realized, at which time one neither hankers nor laments for anything. A dhīra realizes

that the material body and mind he or she has acquired by chance through material association are but foreign elements; therefore he or she simply makes the best use of a bad bargain.

The material body and mind are bad bargains for the spiritual living entity. The living entity has actual functions in the living, spiritual world, but this material world is dead. As long as the living spiritual sparks manipulate the dead lumps of matter, the dead world appears to be a living world.

Actually, it is the living souls, the parts and parcels of the supreme living being, which move the world. The dhiras have come to know all these facts by hearing them from superior authorities and have realized this knowledge by following the regulative principles.

To follow the regulative principles, one must take shelter of a bona fide spiritual master. The transcendental message and

regulative principles come down from the spiritual master to the disciple. Such knowledge does not come in the hazardous way of ignorant beings. One can become a dhīra only by submissively hearing from a bona fide spiritual master, a Guru.

Arjuna, for example, became a dhīra by submissively hearing from Lord Krishna, the Personality of Godhead Himself. Thus, the perfect disciple must be like Arjuna, and the spiritual master must be as good as the Lord Himself. This is the process of learning vidyā (knowledge) from the dhīra (the undisturbed).

An adhīra (one who has not undergone the training of a dhīra) cannot be an instructive leader. Modern leaders, teachers and politicians who pose themselves as dhīras are actually adhīras, and we cannot expect perfect knowledge from them. They are simply busy seeing to their own remuneration in dollars and cents.

How, then, can they lead the mass of people to the right path of self-realization? Thus, one must hear submissively from a dhīra in order to attain actual education.

As a sentient human being, I feel there are a variety of unnecessary traditional religious practices in Hinduism and all these are not giving the freedom to the believers to practice the truthful, good and beautiful ideas promoted by the books of knowledge. Those who want to change to follow their individual way of life and living have complete right and privilege to do so. There is no need for any one to impose their ideas on the devotees of God.

My prayers and devotional beliefs are my private and personal matters and I should be left alone to conduct my traditional and ceremonial obligations, as I want them to be done and not to be dictated by someone who has not attained the knowledge as I have gathered.

If I am able to perform my devotional duties with ease, my own understanding and my own internal beliefs then all my prayers give me an unlimited satisfaction that no other human being could have given me. My method, language and materials have no bearing on my individual prayer. I love to conduct my prayers the way I want.

A way of life that gives the freedom to the believers would flourish in this new world and any forced and imposed religion that clings to unnecessary and outdated traditional concepts would yield to other ways of inferior living. The sooner our illiterate and *pakhandi* people realize this vital point the better it would be for the salvation of our religion and our humanity.

In my 75 years of living, I have never imposed my views on anyone and I would not do it now and hereafter. My own home is the best and most peaceful

temple for my good and wise family members and I and all my honest and faithful friends make up my entire community that I serve. My heart is the most peaceful place to keep the blessings of God Almighty.

I live and let others live. I do whatever voluntary work I am able to do for the society. Thus, I plan my acts and act my plans. This is my way of life. I love it.



MY CONCLUSION

I once asked one of my senior students “what problems are people faced with at every waking moment?” The instant reply was sweet and short, “the problem of what to do next”.

So I concluded that we need good reasoning and judgement skills to be able to sort out “what to do next”. In this book I have expressed a lot of my personal views, observations and ideas that need some hard ‘chewing’ and ‘digesting’.

It is always very difficult to deviate from the norm but when the normal practices begin to show defects and become our pains, our good reasoning and clear judgements should be able to generate a lot of alternatives for us to honour, accept and follow in order to live and let others live a fruitful life.

I have never taken things for granted (TFG). If anyone told me that there was a candle burning in front of me I wanted to do several things to convince myself that it really was a candle and not a reflection or an image of it in the mirror.

I would like my readers to do the same. For all of us there are multiple ways and means to sort out 'what to do next'.

On the other hand those of us who cannot clearly see my point of views we are free to keep to our current beliefs. However, for others who can follow me and are prepared to open their hearts and minds to the future needed changes, they would certainly see a lot of merit in accepting My Way to get to the Highway of change for the entire humanity.

**Ram Lakhan Prasad - May
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