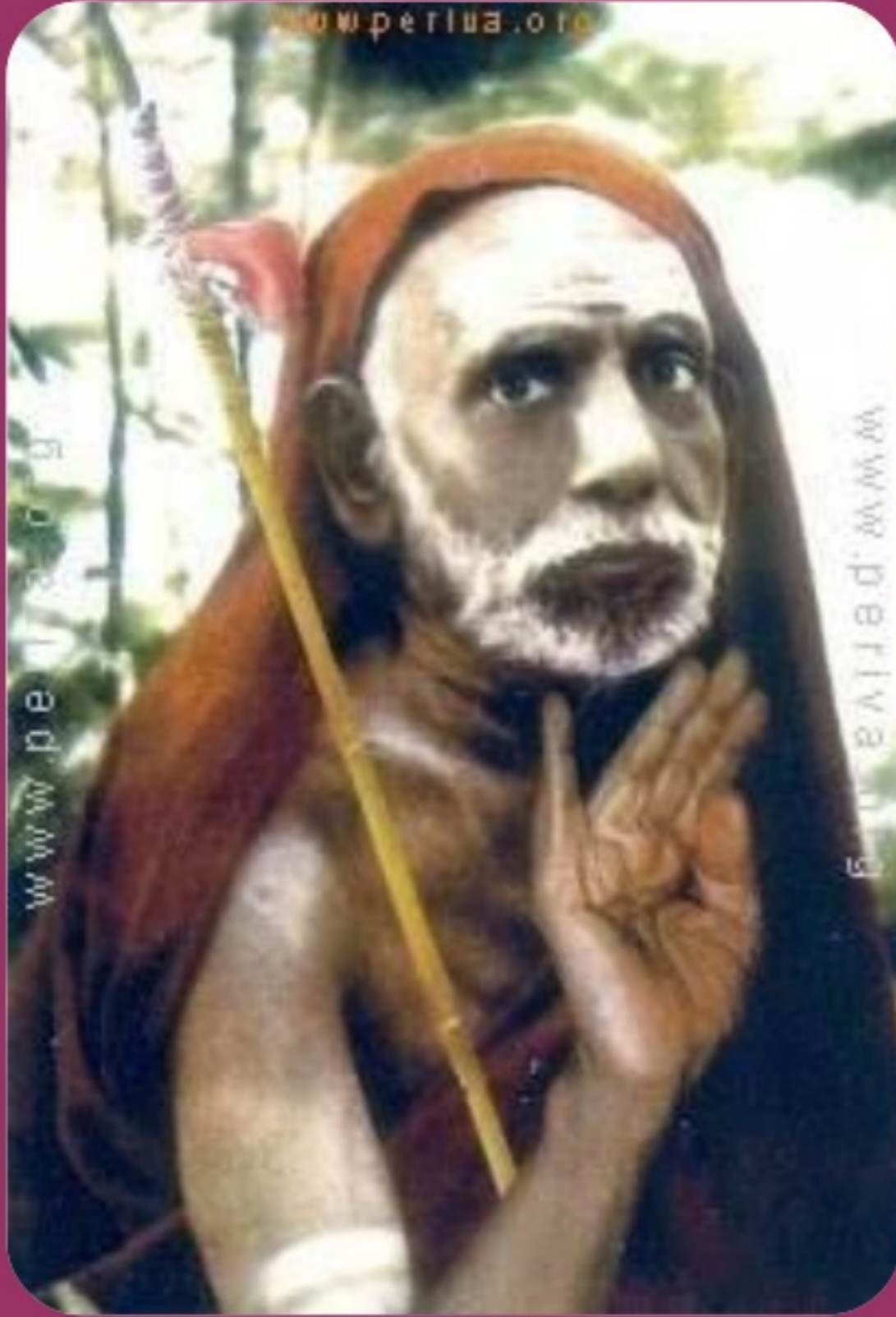


E-Book from Kanchi Periva Forum

The Essence of Hindu Tradition and Culture

Periva Aradhana 2013 Special Edition



**Hindu Dharma,
Dharma Saastra &
Common Dharmas
applicable to all**

Volume : 20

Published : December 2013

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Shri Kanchi Maha Periva Thiruvadigal Saranam

Introduction

Hari Om!

We are pleased to bring you the **Twentieth edition** of the e-book series from the **Kanchi Periva Forum**. As you might be aware, we have been regularly publishing free ebooks with a view to disseminate knowledge about the Hindu tradition & culture, and more importantly carry the message of Sri Maha Periva to our members by setting His discourses within the appropriate topic and in the right context for the readers to read and relish the same.

This month's ebook is a special edition focused on Dharma Sastras & Common Dharmas applicable to all – which are extracted from a series of discourses given by Sri Maha Periva. As has been our practice, we are adding Periva's rare photos within the book for you to preserve and treasure for times to come.

We are sure that this Ebook will be extremely useful to you and request you to forward this to all your friends and relatives. For those who are not familiar about our website and forum, we welcome you to visit <http://www.periva.org/> for a collection of rare videos and complete online library of upanyasams of Sri Maha Periva.

If you are not already a member of our Forum and received this ebook from any of your friends, please also register on the forum <http://www.periva.proboards.com> to stay updated on devotees' experiences and to receive our regular free publications.

We humbly submit this e-book edition at the lotus feet of Shri Maha Periva and distribute the same with His blessings.

Though this book is for restricted circulation among like-minded members of the society, this is a free publication like all our other publications, which can be downloaded from www.periva.proboards.com

Any feedback or queries may be sent to us at kanchiperiva@gmail.com

Administrator
Kanchi Periva Forum

Jaya Jaya Shankara, Hara Hara Shankara!

Dharma Saastra - Discourses by Sri Maha Periva

Realising the ideals of the Puraanas



The noble characters who figure in the Puranas serve as an ideal for all of us to follow.

When we read their stories we are inspired by their example and we ask ourselves why we cannot be like them ourselves, why we should not share their qualities.

But, even if we wanted to emulate their lives, would we be able to live like them without deviating at any time from the high principles that they upheld?

Man by nature is always unstill: he cannot keep his mind quiescent even for a moment. Bhagavan says in the Gita : "Not for a moment can a man remain still, without doing work". So one must know the right path for work.

One must make one's mind pure, acquire the highest of qualities and, finally, transcending these very qualities, realise the Brahman.

How can we live according to the tenets of our religion? How can we wash away our sins and cleanse our Self? And what must we do to attain everlasting happiness? Is not our present birth a consequence of the sins we committed in our past lives? We have to free ourselves from them and be careful not to sin afresh.

We must elevate ourselves, our mind and character, so that we are not embroiled in sin again. The purpose of religion is this, to ennoble us and turn us away from sin. But how? How do we live according to the teachings of our religion? We do not know how.

In our present condition, what do we claim to know? Perhaps a little bit of Ramayana, the Bhagavata and other Puranas. We learn about the religious life lived by the characters portrayed in these works. But neither the Puranas nor the epics deal with the rights in a codified form, nor do they contain directions for their proper performance.

The Puranas and the epics give a dominant place to devotion. Is it possible to be engaged in devotion all the time, or to keep singing the glory of the Lord day and night? Or, for that matter, to be similarly engaged in a puja and meditation throughout? No. We have a family to look after.

We have to bath and eat and we have so much other work to do - all this takes time. The remaining hours cannot be set apart for puja. It would all be tiresome and we have, besides, to do other good works. How do we get such information?

From the Dharmasastra.

Of the fourteen branches of learning (caturdasa-vidya) Dharmasastra comes last. Puranic characters, who represent our ideal, show us the goal. The path to attain that goal starts with the performance of karma, works.

The Dharmasastra contain practical instructions in our duties, in the rites to be performed by us. In the Vedas these duties are mentioned here and there. The Dharmasastra is an Upanga that deals with them in detail and in a codified form.

There is an orderly way of doing things, a proper way, with regard to household and personal matters including even bathing and eating. The ordinances of Vedas cover all aspects of life and to conduct ourselves according to them is to ennoble our Self. Whatever we do must be done in the right manner - how we lie down, how we dress, how we build our house. The idea is that all this helps our being.

Life is not compartmentalised into the secular, worldly and the religious. The Vedic dharma is such that in it even mundane affairs are inspired by the religious spirit. Whatever work is done is done with the chanting of mantras and thus becomes a mean of Atmic progress. Just as worldly life and religious life are integrated, harmonised, so are the goals of individual liberation and common welfare kept together.

The devotion we imbibe from the Puranas is part of the Vedas also. But with it is associated a good deal of karma. When devotion takes the form of rite called puja there are certain rules to be observed. Apart from puja there are sacrifices and rites like sraddha and tarpana as important elements of the Vedic dharma. But these are not codified in the Vedas nor is any procedure laid down for each of them.

"Vedo khilo dharmamulam" says Manu (The Vedas are the root of all dharma.) The work that the Vedas bid us perform for our inner well-being also serve the purpose of bringing good to the world. What is called dharma is that which fosters both individual and social welfare. The Vedas are the root of this dharma, its fountainhead.

But the rites and duties are not given in an orderly form in the Vedas, nor is the procedure for works laid down in detail. Of the Vedas that are infinite we have obtained only a very small part. And we do not comprehend fully the meaning of many of the passages even of this small part.

As we have seen the sixth Vedanga, Kalpa, contains the Dharmasutras, Grhyasutras and Srautasutras, relating to rites based on the Vedas. But the sutras are brief and do not constitute a detailed guide. The dharmasastras elaborate upon them without leaving any room for doubt.

The Dharmasutras (by Apastamba, Gautama and others) are terse statements and are so according to the very definition of the term "sutras". The dharmasastras (by Manu, Yagnavalkya, Parasara and others) are called Smrtis and are in verse and detail in treatment. Their basis, however, is constituted by the Vedas.

The function of Dharmasastra is to analyse and explicate the sutras of Kalpa which have to some extent systematised the Vedic rules and injunctions.

If Kalpa gives instructions about the constructions of the Vedic altar, of houses, etc, Dharmasastra provides a code of conduct embracing all human activities.

We want to perform a ritual, but how do we go about it? We do not know where the propriety or otherwise of performing it is mentioned in the Vedas. Nor do we know where instructions are given about it. What are we to do then? We do not know anyone who has mastered all the Vedas.

Extracting information from them about the rite we want to perform is impossible because they are like the expanse of a vast ocean. If the Vedas bid us "Do like this, " we do so. But since we do not know their ordinances well enough, what are we to do?

The answers to this questions are given by Manu: "The sages who had mastered the Vedas composed the Smrtis. Find out what they have to say. "What we call Smrtis make up Dharmasastra.

"Vedo'khilo dharmamulam / Smrtisile ca tadvidam".

"Smrti" is what is remembered. "Vismrti" is insanity. Manu observes : "There is Smrti for the Vedas in the form of notes. The sages who had a profound understanding of the Vedas have brought together the duties and rites (dharma and karma) mentioned in them in the form of notes and they constitute the Smrtis.

They are written in a language that we can easily understand. Read them. They tell you about your in detail, the do's and don'ts, and how the rites are to be performed. "

We have seen that the sixth Vedanga, Kalpa, contains instructions about the Vedic works. The Grhyasastras, Dharmasastras and Srautasastras of Kalpa deal with sacrifices and other rites.

The Smrtis elaborate on them and contain detailed instructions with regard to the rite one has to perform through one's entire life.

Actually, there are rituals to be conducted from the time of conception until death. The Smrtis also lay down the daily routine to be followed by all of us.

Smritis and allied works



Manu, Parasara, Yajnavalkya, Gautama, Harita, Yama, Visnu, Sankha, Likhita, Brhaspati, Daksa, Angiras, Pracetas, Samvarta, Acanas, Atri, Apastamba and Satatapa are the eighteen sages who mastered the Vedas with their superhuman power and derived the Smrtis from them.

Their works are known after them like Manusmrti, Yajnavalkya-smrti, Parasara-Smrti and so on, and they contain all that we need to know about all the dharmas to be adhered to and all the rituals to be performed during our entire life.

Apart from these eighteen , there are eighteen subsidiary Smrtis called Upasmrtis. It is customary to include the Bhagavadgita among the Smrtis.

What we find in one Smrti may not be found in the other. There may also be differences between one Smrti and another. These give rise to doubts which are sought to be cleared by works called "Dharmasastra Nibandhanas".

There are some Smrtis which do not contain instructions with regard to all observances. For instance, some do not mention sandhyavandana. The reason must be it is such a common rite that everybody is expected to know it.

Then some omit the sraddha ceremony and some others are silent on various types of "pollution" (for instance, that due to the birth of a child in the family or death of a relative). Certain matters are taken for granted. After all, we do not have to be told about how to breathe or eat.

The nibhandanas do not leave out any rite or dharma. Differences between various Smrtis are sought to be reconciled in them.

Each region follows its own nibhandhana. In the North, it is the one authored by Kasinatha Upadhyaya. In Maharastra, it is the Mitaksara: it has the force of law and is accepted as such by the law courts. Nirayasindhu by Kamalakara Bhatta is also accepted as an authority there. In the South, Vaidyanatha-Diksitiyam by Vaidyanatha Diksita is followed.

These are the important authorities for householders. Sannyasins follow Visvesvara-samhita. In Tamil Nadu the Dharmasastra means the Vaidyanatha-Diksitiyam. The nibandhana has been translated into Tamil.

The Dharmasastras are not as difficult to follow as the Vedas and can be understood with a little knowledge of Sanskrit.

Vaidyanatha Dikshitiyam



Vaidyanatha Diksita's own name for his work is Smrti-Muktaphala-Nibhandana-Grantha. We know very little about the author of this extremely useful book.

Diksita must have lived some two hundred years ago; he belonged to Kandiramanikkam, near Nacciyarkoil (in Tanjavur district). It must be noted that he himself practised the dharmas he had dealt with in his nibhandana and he is also believed to have performed big sacrifices.

Vaidyanatha-Diksitiyam is considered superior to similar works by Medhatithi, Vijnesvara, Hemadri and so on. Exhaustive in nature, it deals with the duties and rites pertaining to the different castes and asramas (the four stages of life), ritual purity, sradhha, prayascitta, stridharma, dayabhaga, dravyasuddhi.

It even gives directions about the division of paternal property.

When the Hindu code Bill was introduced in free India some put forward the view that the division of property must be based on the sastras. Such division is called "Dayabhaga".

The division of property in Kerala, in the uncle-nephew line, is called marumakkatayam. The word "dayadi" is derived from "daya".

Diksitiyam is the last among the nibhandanas. In the preparation of this work Vaidyanatha Diksita had the advantage of making a comparative study of all the previous works on Dharmasastra.

Before it the authority followed it to some extent in the South was the nibhandana of Tozhappar. Vaisnavas and Smartas alike today accept the Diksitiyam as an authority.

The nibhandanas are not like the Vedas (Sruti), the Kalpa-sutras and the Smrtis. Since they came later it is not easy to make them acceptable to all. Diksita, it must be noted, does not show the least trace of bias in his work and has followed the Mimamsa in determining the meaning of Vedic texts.

He has brought together previous sastras and arrived at conclusions only after resolving the contradictions in them. This is the reason why his work is considered as authority in the South.

When the Smrtis differ in some matters, he takes a broad view and suggests: "Let each individual follow the practices of his region and the tradition of his forefathers".

Freedom and Discipline



There are a hundred thousand aspects to be considered in a man's life. Rules cannot be laid down to determine each and every one of them. That would be tantamount to making a legal enactment.

Laws are indeed necessary to keep a man bound to a system. Our sastras do contain many do's and don'ts, many rules of conduct.

There is much talk today of freedom and democracy. In practice what do we see?

Freedom has come to mean the licence to do what one likes, to indulge one's every whim. The strong and the rough are free to harass the weak and the virtuous.

Thus we recognise the need to keep people bound to certain laws and rules. However the restrictions must not be too many.

There must be a restriction on restrictions, a limit set on how far individuals and the society can be kept under control.

To choke a man with too many rules and regulations is to kill his spirit. He will break loose and run away from it all.

That is the reason why our Sastras have not committed everything to writing and enacted laws to embrace all activities. In many matters they let people follow in the footsteps of their elders or great men. Treating me as a great man and respecting me for that reason, don't you, on your own, do what I do-wear ashes, perform Pujas and observe fasts?

In some matters people are given the freedom to follow the tradition or go by the personal example of others or by local or family custom. Only thus will they have faith and willingness to respect the rules prescribed with regard to other matters.

Setting an example through one's life is the best way of making others do their duty or practice their dharma. The next best is to make them do the same on their own persuasion. The third course is compulsion in the form of written rules.

Nowadays there are written laws for anything and everything. Anyone who has pen and paper writes whatever comes to his mind and has it printed.

Hindu Dharmasastra has come under attack for ordering a man's life with countless rules and regulating and not allowing him freedom to act on his own.

But, actually, the sastras respect his freedom and allow him to act on his own in many spheres. Were he given unbridled freedom he would ruin himself and bring ruin upon the world also.

The purpose of the code of conduct formulated by our sastras is to keep him within certain bounds. But this code does not cover all activities since the makers of our sastras thought that people should not be too tightly shackled by the dharmic regulations.

You may feel that with regard to some aspects of life there is an element of compulsion in the sastras, but you may not feel the same when you follow the tradition, the local or family custom or the example of great men.

Indeed you will take pride in doing so. This fact is accepted, in the large-heartedness of its author, by the Vaidyanatha-Diksitiyam.

Previous works on Dharmasastra shared the same view. The Apastamba-sutra is an authority widely followed. In its concluding part the great sage Apastamba observes: "I have not dealt with all duties. There are so many dharmas still to be learned. Know them from the fourth varna. "

From this it is clear that the usual criticism that men kept women suppressed or that Brahmins kept non-Brahmins suppressed is not true.

In a renowned and widely accepted dharmasastra such as that of Apastamba women and Sudras are authoritatively recognised to be knowledgeable in some aspects of dharma.

Asvalayana and some other "original" authors of sutras say that the word of women is to be respected in the matter of the arati in weddings and application of paccai. The posts supporting the marriage pandal are installed to the chanting of mantras.

Even so, if the servant or worker erecting the pandal has a story to tell about it or some tradition connected with it, you must not ignore it. In this way everyone is respected in the sastras and given what is called "democratic" freedom.

The dharmasastras include the samskaras and other rituals to be performed by the fourth varna. That caste has not been ignored and its duties and rituals are dealt with in the chapters on varnasrama, anhika and sraddha in the Diksitiyam.

The dharmasastras have usually chapters on "acara" and "vyavahara". The first denotes matters of custom and tradition that serve as a general discipline. The second means translating them in terms of outward rites or works.

Signs and Marks



If we call ourselves Hindus we must bear certain external marks, outward symbols.

The boy scouts have a uniform of their own. Army and navy men are distinguished by certain insignia. There are number of divisions in police force.

Even though their functions will not change if they wear one another's uniforms or badges, there is a strict rule with regard to their dress and insignia. The policeman's cap must not be worn by the sailor. There is a certain discipline and orderliness among all these forces.

This discipline as well as orderliness is essential in religion also. That is why different jatis and different asramas have different functions and signs.

According to the dharmasastras we must wear the dhoti or the sari in such and such a way or apply the mark to the forehead in a particular manner. All this is not meant for social discipline alone. There is a high purpose, that of purifying our inner life.

The court attendant has a tavalu. The officials do not have it. Is it sensible to why? But we do not take the same attitude with regard to the different signs and marks assigned to the people according to their vocations and family customs.

We make a noise in the name of equality. Even though we remain divided in the matter of vocations-which indeed is for the welfare of the entire community-we are of one heart.

This is the ideal behind the social arrangement in which different jatis are assigned different rites and external symbols, these in keeping with their natural qualities and callings.

There is no high or low in all this. But we keep fighting among ourselves imagining that there is.

Now we have come to such a pass that nobody wears any of the external marks of our religion. At the same time, we are not ashamed of wearing other types of signs or badges. To wear those marks that bring uplift of the Self we are ashamed.

We dismiss all religious marks and symbols as part of superstition. But those who want to proclaim themselves to be reformers don a particular type of cap or upper cloth and these external trappings are given greater importance than symbols of a divine nature.

Smritis – not independent works



There is a wrong impression about the dharmasastras even among those who treat them with respect. They think that the rules and duties of the Smritis were formulated by their authors on their own.

They call these authors "lawgivers" who, in their opinion, laid down "laws" that reflect their own views.

Further they think that the dharmasastras were composed in the same way as our Constitution. Such a view give rise to another idea. We keep amending the Constitution whenever we find that it stands in the way of certain measures being introduced.

It is asked, on the same logic, why the dharmasastras too should not be changed according to the beliefs and ideas of the present times.

People ask me : "Why should not the sastras be changed to suit the times? The government changes its laws, does it not? "

They sing my praises and tell me: "You are like the sages, the authors of the Smritis. If only you make up your mind you can change the Smritis to suit our times. " In effect what they respectfully suggest is this: "Please change the sastras as we would like them to be changed. "

If the Smritis really represent the views of the authors there is nothing wrong in what these people think about them and about what they want me to do about them. But those who want the dharmasastras changed do not see to know that they (the Smritis) do not reflect the view of the sages who composed them.

What the authors of the Smritis have done is to present us in an orderly fashion what is already contained in the Vedas. The Vedic word cannot and must not be changed at any time and on any account. The same applies to the rules and laws laid down in the Smritis.

I may not be capable enough, or worthy enough, to persuade you to live according to the sastras. But changing them is certainly not my function. I have been installed here (in the Matha) to make people perform their duties and rites. That is according to the command of the Acarya.

I do not possess the authority to revise the sastras according to what is felt to be convenient to the present times or what is in keeping with the new beliefs.

If the sages had created the Smritis on their own, to represent their own views, there would be no compulsion to accept them. If the Smritis are not needed we could reject them outright. If their contents are not based on the Vedas and include rules and directions that reflect the views of the authors, then we can do without them. In this way so many people have written down so much about so many things.

We too may write down whatever comes to our mind. The Smritis must be looked upon as an authority for today and tomorrow and for all time because they are founded on the Vedas. But what is the proof for this claim?

The source of Smritis is the Vedas



The best testimony to the claim that the Smritis are founded on the Vedas is provided by the words of mahakavi(great poet). Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, the founders of our religio-philosophical systems, proclaim that our dharmasastras are in accord with the Vedas. But they had, each of them, a doctrine to establish.

Besides they had also the goal before them of preserving the tradition and they would not naturally go against it. With a poet it is different. He has no doctrine to establish, no belief to promote.

He speaks what he feels to be the truth since he does not have to lend his support to any particular concept or system.

The greatest of the mahakavis, Kalidasa, makes a reference to the Smritis in his Raghuvamsam.

As all of you know, Dasaratha was the father of Rama. Dasaratha's father was Aja and Aja's father was Raghu. Rama was named Raghurama after his great-grandfather. We do not often come across "Dasarathi" among the names of Rama.

Usually one is named after one's grandfather. But Rama did not take the name of Aja and is better known after his great-grandfather. Raghu had such fame and glory. The name Raghava also means one belonging to the family of Raghu.

Raghu's father was Dilipa. For long he did not have a son. The guru of Dilipa's family was Vasistha. Dilipa approached him and said to him: "Svamin, I don't have a child. Bless me that my family will continue and prosper. " Vasistha had a cow called Nandini, the daughter of Kamadhenu. The sage asked the king to look after the cow and worship her with faith. He blessed Dilipa thus: "A son will be born to you. " Think of it, a king was asked to look after the cow. How humble he must have been.

Dilipa took charge of the cow right away. Like a cowherd he took Nandini to the forest, grazed her, bathed her and looked after with devotion. He carried a bow with just one arrow to protect her from wild beasts. He scratched the cow, stopped on the way if she stopped, lay down if she lay down, walked if she walked. If we

sit down our shadow too will seem to sit down, if we stand up so too our shadow will seem to stand up, if we run then too our shadow will seem to run. "Chayeva tam bhupatiranvagacchat, ", says Kalidasa. Dilipa followed the cow like a shadow.

Every day, as Dilipa took the cow to graze, his wife Sudhaksina would follow him to some distance and then return home. Very religiously she would send her husband out with Nandini and wait in the evening for them to return from the forest. Sudhaksina kept caring for Dilipa and, if the king followed Nandini like a shadow, she too followed him in turn like a shadow.

The duties of a Pativrata are described by Janaka during the marriage of his daughter Sita to Rama. He says to Rama: "My child Sita will follow you like a shadow (chayevanugata)". This is in Valmiki Ramayana. Kalidasa retells the story of Rama that Valmiki has told. He speaks about Lava and Kusa who came after Rama and also about Rama's predecessors. And he gives to his great poetical work the title of Raghuvamsam after Rama's great-grandfather Raghu of unsurpassed fame. Verily, to speak of this family is to sanctify one's speech.

In the passage describing how Sudhaksina followed Dilipa as he goes grazing the cow, the poet makes a reference to the sages creating the Smrtis. He does so not in pursuance of any doctrine, not also after any deliberation. He speaks spontaneously about the Smrtis, unpremeditatedly.

The poet describes how Sudhaksina follows the cow to some distance. Nandini is in the front and Sudhaksina walks behind. The cow raises a little dust with her hoofs and the queen goes some distance looking at the hollowed dust. Kalidasa excels all other poets in similes. Each poet has some distinction or other.

There is a saying: "Upama Kalidasasya" (For similes Kalidasa-Kalidasa excels in similes). It is in the context of Sudhaksina following Nandini that the poet brings in the simile of the queen following the cow like the Smrtis following the Vedas.

Tasyah khuranyasapavitrampsum
Apamsulanam dhuri kirtaniya
Margam manusyesvaradharmapatni
Sruterivartham Smrtiranvagacchat
-Raghuvamsam, 2. 2

"Pamsu" means dust. As Nandini goes grazing, dust is raised. "Khura" is hoof. "Khuranyasa" means placing of the hoof and "pavitra pamsu" the sacred dust.

The dust raised by the cow is particularly sacred. It sanctifies any place. Such is the case even with the dust raised by an ordinary cow, not to speak of the so sacred Nandini, Kamadhenu's daughter. Sudhaksina is a woman of spotless character - there is not a speck of dust on it - and such a woman has now cow dust on her.

"Apamsu" means free of dust and refers to Sudhaksina of unblemished character. She goes step by step along the hollowed path following the dust raised by the hoofs of the cow. How? Like the Smrtis composed by the sages that follow the Vedas - "Sruterivartham Smrtiranvagacchat".

"Anvagacchat" = (she) followed. Here the upamana (that with which a comparison is made) for the cow is Sruti or the Vedas. The "hoof steps" of the cow are to be taken as the meaning of the Vedas.

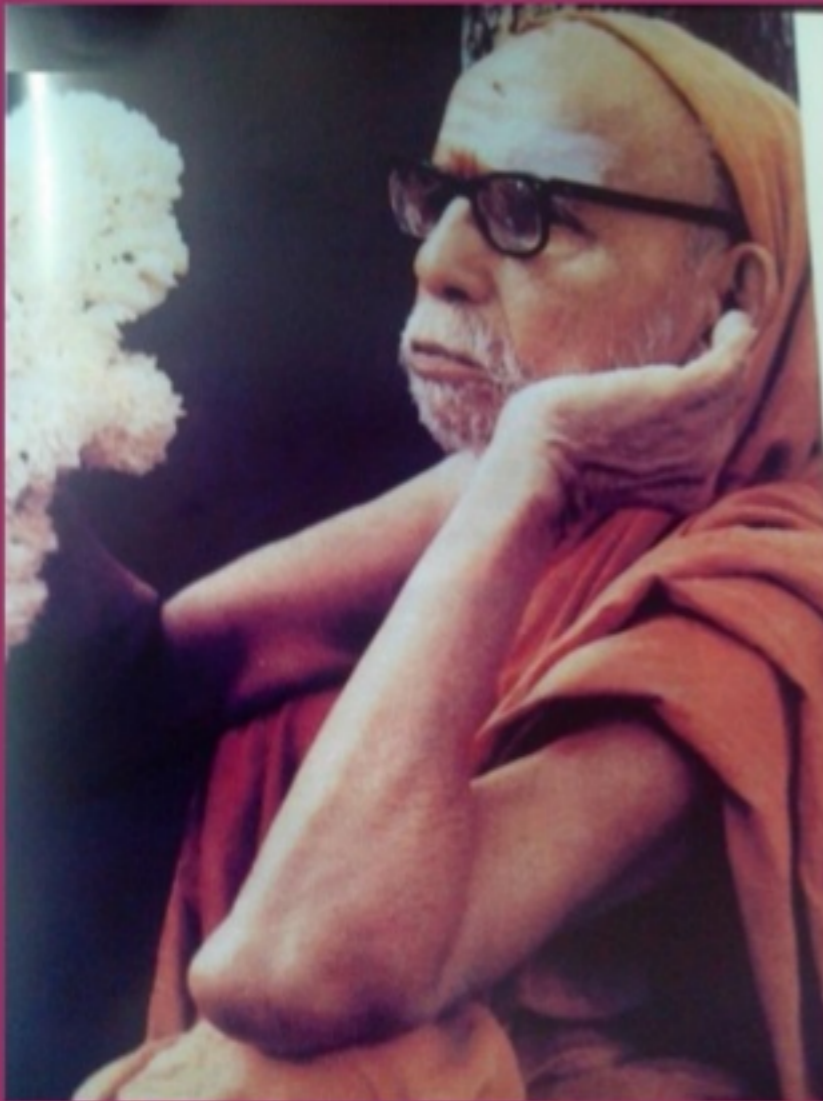
So Sudhaksina followed in the "hoof steps" of Nandini like the Smrtis following the meaning of the Vedas. Also, like the Smrtis not going in the entire way with the Vedas, she did not go all the distance with the cow. The idea is that the Smrtis do not repeat all that is said in the Vedas.

They are "notes from memory", but they truthfully follow the Vedas in their meaning. They do not, of course, represent all thousands of mantras of the scriptures but, all the same, they tell us how to make use of the Vedas.

"Sudhaksina with her pure antah-karana followed her husband and, without deviating even a little, walked along the path of the dust raised by Nandini's hoofs". Having said so much, Kalidasa thought he must bring in a good simile for Sudhaksina following the cow dust and it occurred to him in a flash: "Like the Smrtis following faithfully the meaning of the Vedas. "

The upamana is always superior to the upameya. If a face is compared to the lotus or the moon, the lotus or the moon must be more beautiful than the face. Here Sudhaksina, of matchless purity of character, following her husband Dilipa is likened to the Smrtis closely following the Vedas. No better authority is needed to support the view that the Smrtis are in accord with the Vedas.

Sruti-Smriti-Srauta-Smarta



To discriminate between Sruti and Smrti is not correct. Sruti, Smrti and the Puranas, all three belong to the same tradition. Sankara is said to be the abode of the three("Sruti-Smrti-Purananam alayam").

If the three were at variance with one another how can they exist in harmony in the same person? Those who follow the tradition of Acarya are called "Smartas". The word "Smarta" literally means one who adheres to the Smrtis.

To say that the Acarya descended to earth to uphold the Vedas and that those who follow his path are Smartas implies that the Vedas and Smrtis are one.

The rites that are not explicitly mentioned in the Vedas but are dealt with in the Smrtis are called Smarta karmas and those that are explicitly mentioned are called Srauta karmas.

This does not mean that the Smarta rites are in anyway inferior to Srauta. The householder's Smarta works include such an important rite as aupasana; equally important are the domestic rites like sraddha and the seven pakayajnas. Vedic mantras are chanted in all these.

Those who composed the Smrtis and laid down the performance of such rites must have been fully aware of the spirit of the Vedas. It is not proper to think that the Smrtis are inferior to the Vedas or that the Puranas are inferior to the Smrtis. We must learn to take an integrated view of all of them.

In Puranas the Vedic truths are illustrated in the form of stories. The Smrtis bring the Vedic dharmas and karmas in the form of instruction and injunctions and tell us how the rites are to be performed.

The sages had intuitive knowledge of the Vedas. As mentioned so often they did not compose them - they saw them. There was no intellectual effort on their part in this. "Srutim pasyanti munayah" (The sages see the Vedas). They used their intelligence to examine what they saw and, remembering it all, derived from the Vedas the duties and rites for various castes. This they gave us in a codified form called Smrti.

As I said before "Smrti" means memory. For the sages the Vedas constituted an experience that just happened to them. The Smrtis or the dharmasastras are derived from their memory of it. "Samskara-janyam jnanam Smrtih", the Nyaya-sastra define Smrti thus. It means that Smrti is knowledge derived from Samskara. Here "Samskara" means "atindriya". But what exactly is it?

We go to Kasi and worship at the temple of Visvanatha there. Many days after our return home, we go to the local temple which has a sanctum of "Kasi Visvanatha". At once we remember the experience we had of seeing the deity Visvanatha at Kasi. In between for many days, that is between our visit to Kasi and to the local temple, we had no memory of this deity. We come across so many people every day but we hardly think of them later.

But, when we happen to see them subsequently, we tell ourselves: "Ah, we must have seen them before somewhere. " In between there was no memory of the people. This "in between state" is called "samskara" or "atindriya". In that state there is an impression of our experience within us. When this impression manifests itself as an "expression" we have "Smrti" or memory. All told, Smrti is the result of our experience and samskara an impression of that experience within us.

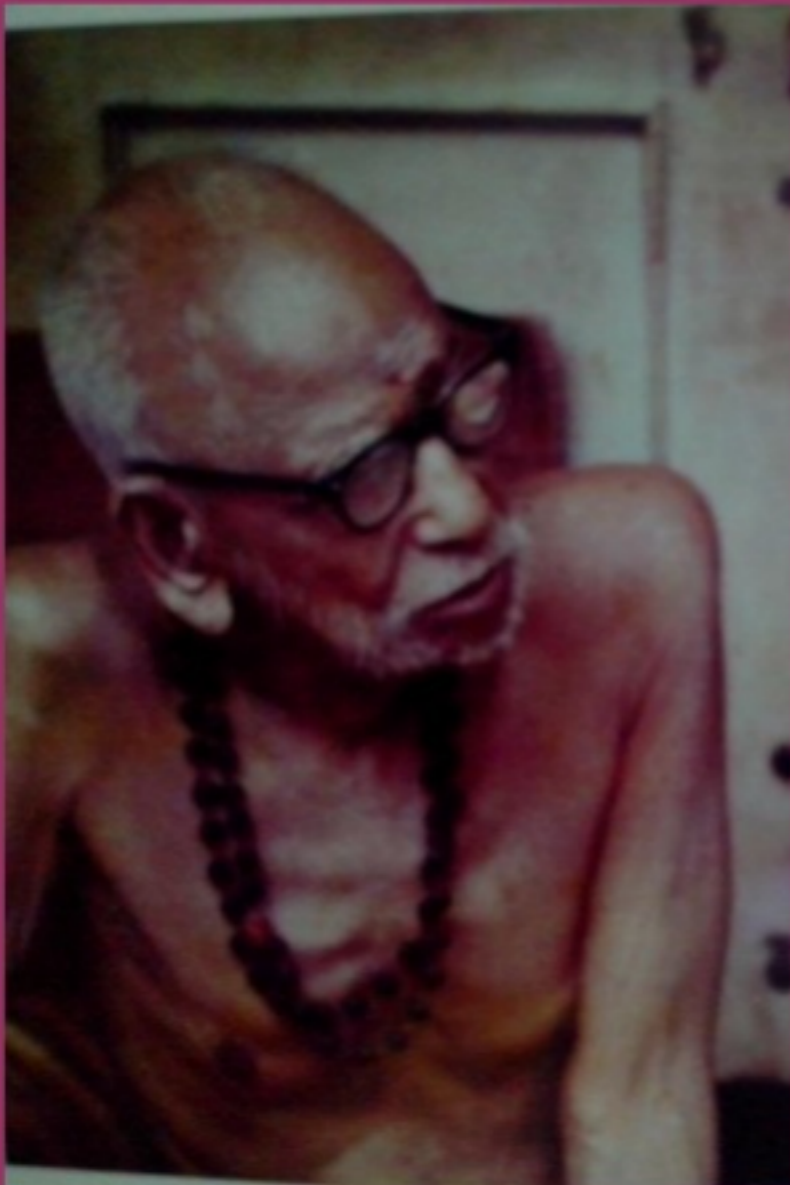
The experience constituted by the Vedas and manifested as the memory is the Smrti or Dharmasastra. Smrti does not become Smrti without its Vedic root. Are not the Vedas the "experience" that is the source of the Smrtis? Without such a source the name suggesting "notes of memory" would be meaningless. How can we describe as notes of remembrance" anything that is new and is not founded on something prior to it?

There is no second opinion regarding the fact that what is called "Srauta"(directly mentioned in the Vedas) is wholly authoritative. But what is not directly mentioned in Sruti but included in Smrti - that is Smarta - is not to be taken to be less authoritative. Smarta never contradicts Srauta. In some matters Smritis may go beyond Sruti, but that too is fully authoritative being based on the inner spirit of Sruti.

Just as the Sthala Puranas fill in the gaps in the major Puranas and the epics, so the Smrtis speak of what is left out in the Vedas. We use terms "Sruti pramana" and "Smrti pramana"(the authority of the Vedas and the authority of the Smrtis), but making such a distinction does not mean that we should treat Sruti and Smrti different or that we should think that the one is inferior to the other.

Dharmas common to all

How to control the mind



What is the obstacle to one-pointed meditation? The answer is the unstill mind. All problems are caused by the mind, by the desires arising in it. It is not easy to control the mind and keep it away effectively from desire.

If we ask the mind to think of an object, it seems to obey us for a moment, but soon it takes its own course, wandering off. When I speak to you about meditation and tranquillity, for a moment your mind will perhaps become still and you will be happy.

But in a trice it will go astray and the calm you experienced for a few seconds will give place to unquietness.

If you bid your mouth to keep shut, it obeys you for a brief moment. Similarly, if you close your eyes asking them not to see anything, they shut themselves off from the outside world for some moments. But try as you might to tell your mind not to think of anything, it will not listen to you.

The mind must be kept under control. Thinking and non-thinking must be governed by your will. Only then can we claim that it is under our control, that we are masters of our own consciousness.

Lunatics are usually referred to as people with no control over their minds. In fact none of us have any control over the mind. A madman keeps blabbering. But what about us? We let the mind go freely to keep blabbering inwardly.

Do you know what it means to have mental control? Suppose you are suffering from a severe pain. If you ask your mind not to feel the pain, it shall not feel it in obedience to you [that is you will not feel the pain]. Even if a tiger comes face to face with you and growls you will feel no fear if you ask your mind not to be afraid of the beast. Now we keep crying for no reason. If the mind is under control we will keep smiling even if there is cause for much sorrow. And under the gravest of provocations it will not be roused to anger and will remain calm.

First we must train our mind not to keep wandering. One way of doing it is to apply it to good activities. When oil falls in a steady flow, without spraying, it is called "tailadhara". The mind must be gathered together and made steady. It must be accustomed to think of noble and exalted objects like the Lord. Eventually, the very act of "thinking" will cease and we will dissolve in Isvara to become Isvara.

Yoga is controlling the mind in this manner.

Before we pass on, we must find a way to control the mind. Otherwise, we will be born again and we will be subject to the constant unquietness of the mind again. So we must use the opportunity of this birth itself to subdue the mind even while we are in the midst of so much that can rouse our desire or anger. A man who has succeeded in bridling his mind thus is called a "yukta" by the yogins. He is a "sukhin", one who truly experiences bliss, so says Sri Krsna.

You must not turn away from yoga thinking that it is meant only for people like the sages. Who needs medicine? The sick. We suffer from manovyadhi, mental sickness. So we must take the medicine that cures it.

There are two different ways of mastering the mind- the first is outward(bahiranga) and the second is inward(antaranga). We must have recourse to both. The Matha has a cartman and a cook. Their work is outward in nature. Then there are those who prepare the wicks of the lamps, gather flowers for the puja - they are "inward" workers.

Both types are needed for the functioning of the Matha. By employing both the outward and inward means, the mind must first be applied to good things one-pointedly and eventually lead to a state in which it does not think of anything at all.

The outward means consists, for example, of sandhyavandana, sacrifices, charity and so on. The best inward means is meditation. There are five inward(or antaranga) means to aid meditation. They are ahimsa(non-violence), satya(truthfulness), asteyam(non-stealing), sauca(cleanliness) and indriya-nigraha[subduing the senses, if not obliterating them]. To practise ahimsa is to imbue the mind with love for all and not even think of harming others.

Asteyam means not coveting other people's goods. For satya, or truthfulness, to be complete one's entire being, including body, mind and speech, must be involved in its practice.

Sauca is hygiene, observing cleanliness by bathing, maintaining ritual purity, etc. Indriya-nigraha implies limits placed on sensual enjoyment. "The eyes must not see certain things, the ears must not hear certain things and the mouth must not eat certain things"- restrictions with regard to what you can see, listen to, eat and do with your body.

The body is meant for sadhana, for Atmic discipline. The senses must be "fed" only to the extent necessary to keep the body alive. These five dharmas are to be practiced by all Hindus without any distinction of caste or community.

Ahimsa



According to the Manusmriti, ahimsa is the foremost among the dharmas that are common to all. It is included in the yoga of mind control. Ahimsa means much more than non-injury; it implies not doing harm to others even by thought or word.

By nature none of us wants to cause any hurt to other people. But if others do us harm we want to retaliate in anger. Suppose one of our children sets fire to our house in all innocence. We do not punish it but try to extinguish the fire and thereafter take care to see that the child is kept away from fire and other dangerous objects.

We must learn to think that all those who cause us pain are like this child. If a person tries to hurt us, we must lovingly prevent him from doing so. We must not bear any ill-will against him nor think of retaliating. This is true ahimsa.

The practice of ahimsa contributes greatly to the yoga of mind control. The mind is like a demon. But see what wonders the demon- the vetala- accomplished for Vikramaditya after he had been brought under control. The mind will do us unlimited good if it is made subservient to us.

Anjaneya [Hanuman] acquired his immense strength and was able to perform so many great and good deeds only because he had conquered his mind. The mind's power is immeasurable. All the cosmos is the work of the Supreme Goddess and in this creation of hers even the mind of a tiny ant pervades the entire universe.

Many great men, many yogins, have stated that they were able to control their minds by adhering to true ahimsa. When we practise ahimsa, anger will naturally give way, the mind will become clear and will easily be controlled.

Though the chief aim of non-violence the control of the mind, there is another unexpected benefit that it brings. It is called "avantara prayojana". All of you came to the Matha to see the puja. But with that you listened to the nagasvaram music and saw persons whom you had not seen for long - and now you listen to my discourse. All these belong to the category of avantara prayojana. Thus if a man practises true non-violence (by body, mind and speech), he will be rewarded with a benefit that he had not expected. In his presence all creatures will forget their ill-will and cease to cause hurt to any other creature.

Ahimsa- pratisthayam
tatsannidhau vairatyagah -yogasutra.
-- Yogasutra, 2. 35

The minds of even cruel people will be transformed in the presence of men practising utter ahimsa: in other words when a man is full of love he can make other people also loving and this is an avantara prayojana.

A sannyasin must observe total non-violence. He must not even pluck a leaf from a tree and must not do violence to plants by cooking them. It is because of the rule of absolute non-violence enjoined on him that there is an interdiction on his performing rites in the sacred fire.

Tending a fire for the conduct of a ritual might unwittingly make us responsible for the destruction of some insects. It is because the sannyasin has no Agni ceremony that when he dies his body is not cremated but interred. When he is initiated into sannyasa he takes a vow that he shall never be the cause of fear to any creature.

"Ahimsa paramo dharmah" (Non- violence is the supreme dharma). Buddhism and Jainism impose total non-violence on their followers. Not so our religion except in the case of ascetics. In Hinduism an exception to the general dharma of non-violence is made in the case of a righteous or just war and in a sacrifice in which sometimes animals are killed.

It is to fetch the divine powers to earth and to appease them that animals are sacrificed in yajnas. It is our belief that the animals so sacrificed will attain to a high state that they cannot otherwise through their own efforts. Altogether it means the good of the animals and the welfare of the world.

In a war, heroes of the army sacrifice themselves in the cause of the nation. Is it not better to lay down one's life for the sake of others than fatten oneself doing nothing?

It is easy to claim oral allegiance to the principle of non- injury but difficult to practise the same. Quarrels and disputes are inevitable in the workaday world. In dealing with them action that is apparently violent may have to be taken. In reality such action is not regarded as violent. The intention or purpose is important here, not the action itself.

Certain types of violence are justified according to the sastras and not considered sinful, because such violence is committed not for our personal delight but in pursuance of our duty towards the society: the offering of an animal in sacrifice, sentencing a murderer to death, killing an enemy in war.

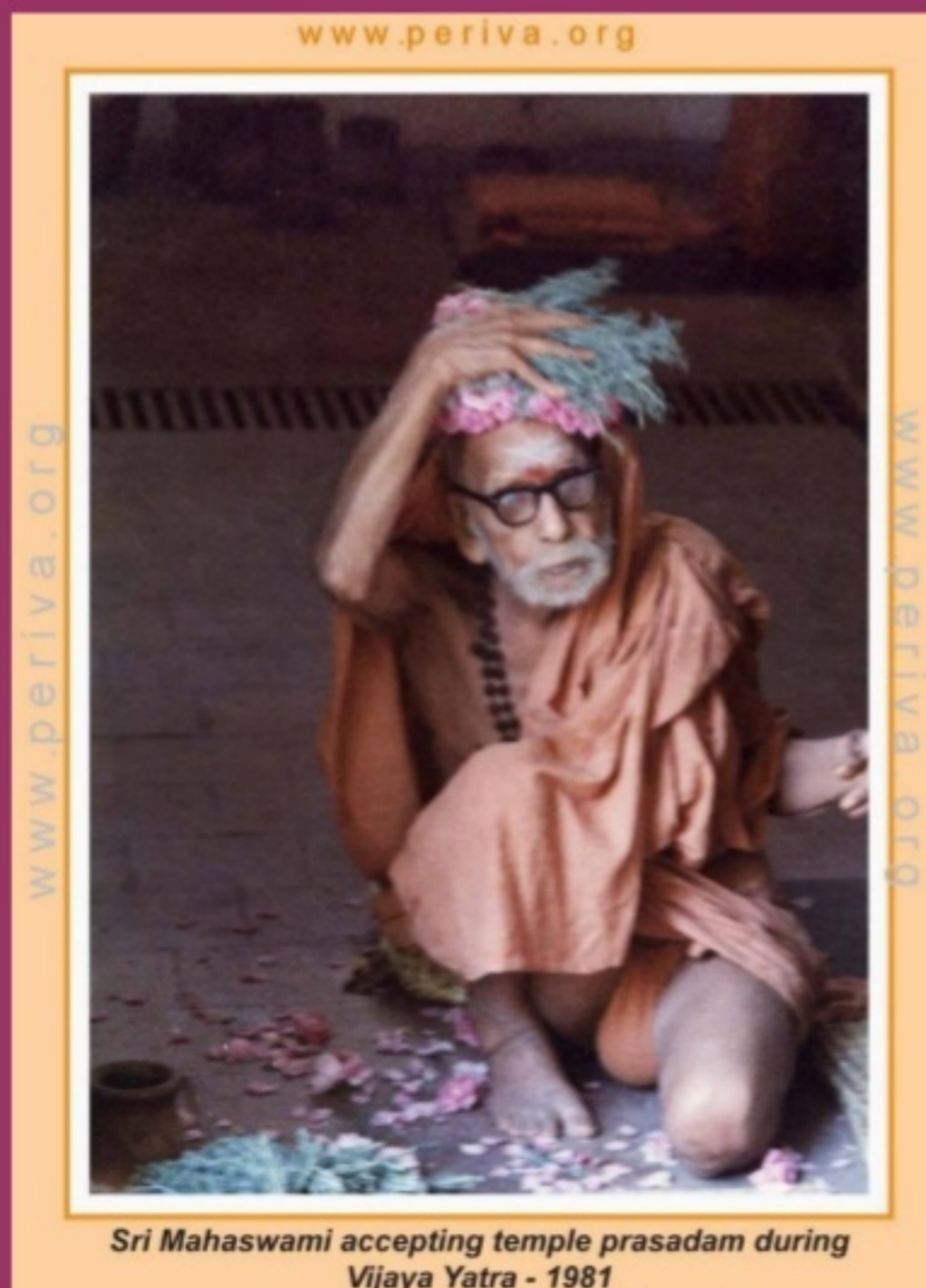
If a religion makes the practice of non-violence universally applicable, there will be problems. Obviously, all cannot practise it at all times. So those who find it not practicable to follow these rule of ahimsa are made liable to sin. Our religion has taken a more realistic view on the question. As we have seen, Buddhism imposes total non- violence on its followers. But what do we see in practice? In all those lands where Buddhism has a hold there are armies that take part in fighting. Besides, almost without exception, everybody is a meat-eater there.

If a great dharma or principle is made common to all, in the end it is likely to lead to a situation in which no one will respect it in practice. In our religion- to repeat- the rule of absolute non- violence is meant only for sannyasins. Following their example, Brahmins, Vaisnavas in regions like Gujarat and Sivas in the South like the Vellalas and Komutti Cettis practise ahimsa. Without being bound by any sastric injunction they have voluntarily adopted the principle and practised it from generation to generation. Influenced by the example of the sattva guna of ascetics these communities have become vegetarians on their own.

And, following their example and without being compelled to do so, other castes too abstain from meat on days likes the new moon, on the day of a sraddha, and days sacred to the various deities. When a principle is imposed only on a few, since it is difficult to make it universal it becomes an ideal for others to whom it may not formally apply: they try to practise it as far as they can. Non-violence is a samanya dharma(a dharma common to all) in Hinduism. It is kept as an ideal though, on occasion, adherence to it is not practicable.

In the Vedic dharma the definition of ahimsa is the absence of ill-feeling in all action.

Truthfulness



*Sri Mahaswami accepting temple prasadam during
Vijaya Yatra - 1981*

Truthfulness means mind and speech being well integrated. The wise say that speech being at variance with the mind is untruthfulness.

Vangmanasyoh aikarupyam satyam

God has given man the gift of speech so that he may give expression to his thoughts and feelings. If what we speak is at variance with what we think (with our mind) God will take away the faculty of speech from us in our next birth- that is we will be born in the animal kingdom.

There are, as we have seen before, exceptions made in our sastras to the rule of absolute non-violence: in waging a war to preserve dharma, in offering animals in sacrifice.

Are there similar exceptions to the rule of truthfulness? You will perhaps say none. But, as a matter of fact, there are.

In a locality there must be a number of undesirable characters. Let us suppose that a certain citizen is annoyed with such characters and gives open expression to his anger. "He committed this outrage. That other man is guilty of such and such a crime," he keeps recounting the misdeeds of the bad elements. In

doing so he is being truthful, that is his speech and mind are in accord. But by giving expression to his feelings no purpose is served for neither he nor the community is benefited. It is a futile kind of accord - that of his speech and mind - and it cannot be called truthfulness.

Take the example of another person. He is full of evil thoughts and, if he gives expression to them, can he be called truthful? No.

So truthfulness, now we see, is not merely accord between mind and speech. It means voicing good thoughts, thoughts that are beneficial and are liked by people: "Satyr bhua hitam priyam."

Doing good through thought, word and deed is truthfulness. All that does ill is untruthfulness. It is not enough that you speak to a man what is good for him. You must speak with affection and the one to whom your words are addressed must find them acceptable. If you speak harshly nobody will listen to you even if you mean well. Thus words that serve no purpose do not constitute a truth. Your speech must be beneficial and, at the same time, capable of bringing happiness to the man to whom it is addressed. This is truthfulness.

The wise say: "May he speak the truth. May his speech be pleasing. May he not speak the truth that is unpleasing. And may he not speak an untruth that is pleasing."

Satyam bruyat priyam bruyat-
Na bruyat satyamaptryam
Priyam ca nanrtam bruyat-
Esha dharma sanatanah:

A mind that is subject to desire and anger will not give rise to words that bespeak affection and cause well-being. Truthful words that create good are the product of a mind free from desire and anger.

What is truth then? Thought and speech must be in accord; the mind must be serene; and the words spoken must do good to the speaker as well as the listener.

For a man rooted in truth there is an *avantara prayojana*, an incidental benefit, gained from his speech. Since such a person habitually speaks the truth, his words will become the truth. Such a man will never deliberately utter a lie. But, if unwittingly or out of ignorance, he commits an error while speaking, that error will turn out to be the truth. I will tell you a story to illustrate this.

In Tirukkadavur, in Tanjavur district, there was a great devotee of Amba called Abhiramibhatta. He would often go into an ecstasy of devotion to the goddess. During such times he would speak like one mad. Someone poisoned the ears of the raja Sarabhoji against him. "Abhiramibhatta is a drunkard," he told the ruler. "His devotion is a mere pretence."

Sarabhoji wanted to find out the truth. So he went to see Abhiramibhatta in Tirukkadavur and asked him: "What day of the moon is it today?" The Bhatta was then lost in devotional joy and, thinking only of the radiant face of Amba which was like the moon, said that it was a full moon day. Actually it was the new

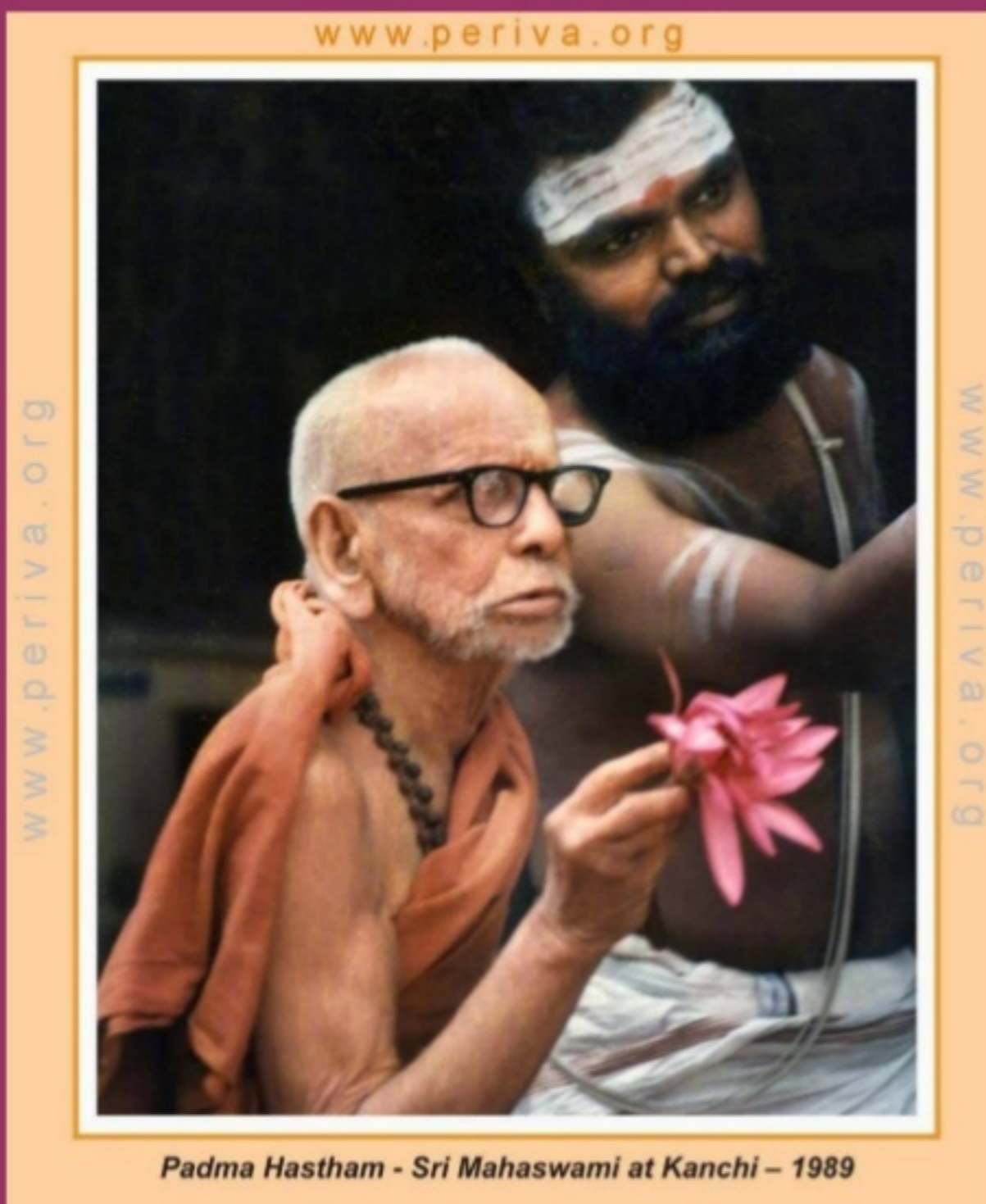
moon. The raja concluded that what he had heard about the Bhatta must be true and said scornfully: "Is that so? Let us look up and see whether the full moon has risen."

At that very moment the full moon did appear in the sky. Abhiramibhatta was steeped in truthfulness. By mistake he had spoken an untruth but Amba made it the truth by hurling her ear stud into the sky causing it to shine like the full moon. The blessings as well as the curses of great men come true because of the force of their innate and habitual truthfulness.

This is the "incidental benefit" they derive from their habit of truthfulness. But truthfulness must not be practised with the deliberate intention that what one speaks must come true. Power such as this is earned unintentionally and unconsciously.

A man will purify himself completely if he performs the forty samskaras and adheres to principles like non-violence, truthfulness, non-covetousness, cleanliness and also controls his senses. He will then develop the maturity and wisdom to find out who in truth he is, who Isvara is and what the Ultimate Reality is.

Sesame & Water: Where did they go?



All human beings must express their gratitude to their fathers (pitrs) and to the gods- they have a debt to pay their fathers, rites to perform for the gods. We must serve our fellow creatures to the best of our ability and extend hospitality at least to one guest a day.

This is atithya or what Thiruvalluvar calls "virundu", also known as manusyayajna. Then there is Brahmayajna to perform, the word "Brahma" here denoting the Vedas. Brahmayajna means chanting the Vedas and making others chant them.

This is a duty carried out by a few on behalf of all. One of the rites common to all is bhutayajna, demonstrating our love to all creatures, feeding them etc. Pitryajna, devayajna, manusyayajna, bhutayajana are rites all are duty-bound to perform in one way or.

If each individual does his work according to the Vedic dharma and does it in a spirit of dedication to Isvara he may be said to be performing Brahmayajna. Thiruvalluvar has said more or less the same thing as the Vedas say:

Tenpulattar, deivam, virundu, okkal, tan enru angu
aimbulattaru ombal talai.

Tenpulattar are the pitrs, the fathers. All are duty-bound to pay their debt to them. Mother Veda says: "Matr-
devo bhava, pitr-devo bhava. " (Be one to whom the mother is a deity. Be one to whom the father is a deity.)
Auvvai, who brings us the essence of the Vedas, observes: Annayum pitavum munnari deivam" [Mother and
Father are the deities first known.]

We must treat our parents with respect and do all we can to keep them in comfort. We cannot make
sufficient recompense for all the sacrifices they make on our behalf. After they depart from this world we
must without fail offer libations to them and perform the sraddha ceremony, all in the sastric manner.
Though they ridicule the idea of performing sraddha, even reformers have agreed that we must care for our
parents.

"The sesame you offer, the water, the balls of rice, the plantains and other items of food remain here," point
out the reformists. "Or we see someone removing them before our own eyes, or eating them. You say that
the departed parents are born again in this world. If that is true, is it not madness to claim that what is
offered here will reach them?" Some of you must be harbouring similar doubts.

Let me tell you a story.

A certain man had sent his son to college in a distant town. One day the boy woke up to the fact that he had
to pay his examination fee in a few days. So he wrote to his father: "Please send such and such a sum by
telegraphic money order. " The father was a little perplexed. All the same he went to the telegraph office and
handed the clerk at the counter the money that had to be sent to his son. "Please send it by telegraphic
money order," he told the clerk.

He had thought that the clerk would make holes in the notes, put a length of wire through them and send the
whole thing to his son. Moments later the clerk said to the man: "Your son will get your money. It has already
been sent. " The villager was again puzzled. He saw the money still in the cash box without the notes strung
together. He told the clerk:"My money is still here. You haven't made holes in the notes yet." The clerk
assured him: "It will reach your son." Now he turned to his work of sending messages: "Ka-tu-katu-katu." The
poor village was still not satisfied.

But the money of course reached his son.

Offering libations to one's fathers is similar. If this rite is performed according to the sastras, the deities
concerned will convey them to those for whom they are meant. If the fathers are reborn as cows the offering
made to them will be taken to them in the form of grass or hay. The deities in charge carry out the orders of
the Paramatman. So the father of the mother whose sraddha is performed need not personally come to
receive the offering.

Does not the telegraphic money order reach the addressee? If the addressee resides in a foreign country our currency will not be valid there. If rupees are paid here arrangements are made to pay the money in dollars, pounds of whatever. The things offered to the fathers according to the sastras are conveyed in a form suitable to them.

What is important is a sense of gratitude to our fathers and faith in the sastras. At parties a toast is proposed to somebody and all the guests drink or eat to his health. They do so in the belief that by virtue of the mental power the man toasted will become healthy. Sraddha means that which is done in faith. Faith is of the utmost importance. If we do something we must do it according to the rules laid down for it. When you write a letter how do you make sure that it reaches the addressee? "I will write the address as I like. Why should I drop the letter in that letterbox over there? I have a better box at home." would you speak thus?

In the state of worklessness, love, devotion, and jnana are not bound by any rules. But when an action has a purpose behind it you have to respect the rules pertaining to it.

Puja



Every family must perform puja to Isvara. Those who find it convenient to do so may conduct elaborate types of puja after receiving proper initiation into them.

Others need perform only a brief puja, not lasting more than ten minutes or so. Office goers must offer at least this brief worship. The sacred bell must ring in every home.

Images must be installed to worship Siva, Amba, Visnu, Vinayaka, and Surya. This is called "pancayatana puja". According to one custom, no graven images [images with limbs] are used but instead natural objects to represent the five deities.

The "bana-linga" for Siva is obtained from the Omkara -kunda of the Narmada river. The svarnamukhi stone for Ambika (it has a golden streak on it) is to be taken from the bed of the Svarnamukhi river in Andhra Pradesh.

The symbol of Vishnu, salagrama, is obtained from the Gandaki river in Nepal. The crystal stone for surya is got from Vallam, near Tanjavur. The sonabhadra stone for Vinayaka is obtained from the Sone river, a tributary of the Ganga. These five stones are symbolic of the unity of India.

None of these five stones has eyes, nose, ears, etc. Since they have no corners that become untidy, they are easy to bathe and dry. Being small they do not occupy much space. No big puja hall or room is necessary. A small casket is enough.

Pancayatana puja was revived by Sankara Bhagavatpada. As the creator of the Sanmata system (the worship of six deities) he added Subrahmanya to the five. So with the five stones we may add a small spear to represent Velayadah (Subrahmanya) who bears the spear.

Not much effort is needed for the puja. If you have the will, it could be performed wherever you happen to be.

At home when you do the puja you have to present to the deities cooked rice called "maha-naivedya". The Lord has created the entire cosmos for our sake. Our sense organs take delight in the various objects in creation. All that gives us joy, all that is beneficial in creation, must be offered to the Lord [symbolically] before being partaken of by us. When we offer any food as naivedya to Him, do we really give it away to Him? We just place it before Him and then partake of it ourselves.

Some ask, scornfully, whether the Lord himself eats what is offered to Him. "Nivedana" does not mean making the Lord really "eat" what is offered. He does not have to eat. Puja is meant to make us inwardly pure and the Lord does not have anything to gain from it.

"Nivedayami" means "I am making it know to you (informing you)" and does not mean "I am feeding you". You must speak thus to Isvara: "O Lord, in your compassion you have given us this food." Then you must eat the food thus offered, thinking of Him.

Without His grace how does the rice grow? Experts may conduct research and write big tomes on rice. But are they capable of making one grain of rice? What is called synthetic rice is made out of materials already created by Isvara.

So all that seems to be made of man must be finally traced to God's creation. To enjoy what he has given us without first presenting it to Him would be tantamount to thieving.

He who is present everywhere must be present where we want Him to be present so that He may be grasped by us. Whatever the material out of which His image or symbol is made—stone, earth, copper—He will come to us in that material and in that image or symbol. He will do so out of His compassion and He has the power to do so. We would have no need for Him otherwise.

The Lord must be worshipped in every home. He must be invoked and it must be made known to Him that we are using nothing but what he has made over as a gift to us. If we keep doing so, we will in due course have the wisdom not to use in puja things not fit to be offered to Him. We ourselves will come to possess good qualities.

Philanthropy



[In the chapter entitled, "Sesame and Water: Where do They Go?", the Paramaguru spoke of the debt to be paid to our fathers, our duty to worship Paramesvara as well as to feed the creatures of the earth. He stated that Tiruvalluvar also spoke of the same dharma in his "Kural": "Tenpulattar deivam, virundu, okkal tan enru angu aimbulattaru ombal talai."]

Here (in the foregoing quotation) is one good proof that Tiruvalluvar respected the authority of the Vedas.

Some suggest that he did not belong to the Vedic religion and that he was a Jaina or a Buddhist. And some claim that he transcended all religions. It is also suggested that he openly condemned sacrifices in which animals are killed. In support of their view they quote a stanza from the Kural.

[The Paramaguru's comment on the Kural passage is contained in the earlier paragraphs.]

Tiruvalluvar who composed his Kural, with its universal appeal, was not an atheist opposed to the Vedic dharma. What he refers to as virundu is the same as the Vedic manusyayajna.

Every morning a handful of rice (uncooked) must be set apart for the poor. All the families must do this without fail every day. The rice thus kept must be collected from house to house, from quarter to quarter, cooked offered to the deity of the local temple as naivedya and then distributed among the poor.

With the handful of rice set apart for the poor, keep just one paisa also. The paisa collected from each family would be sufficient to buy salt, chilli powder, etc, to mix with the rice to make it more palatable.

It would also serve to buy firewood and to pay the rent for the vessels. To carry out such a scheme is to do a great service to the poor - and to the Lord. Charity like this should encourage temple going, not to speak of devotion. Since the food is first offered as naivedya, it would mean that the poor will take it as prasada which will impart them inner purity.

Annadan or the gift of food is one kind of service of paropakara. We talk of service to the poor, social service and so on. Today all this is done with much fanfare and publicity. In the past the needy were served naturally, without making any noise. Service comes under "purta- dharma" and it includes digging wells and ponds for the public, feeding the poor, building temples for the spiritual well-being of people, laying our gardens.

Excavating wells and ponds has been mentioned first. The importance of this word may be gauged from such remarks in ordinary conversation: "What 's he doing? Digging a well or something?"It is extremely meritorious to excavate pond outside the village to slake the thirst of cattle. All the people in a village must join together without the distinction of poor and rich, high or low - work involving physical effort. It will incidentally contribute to greater social harmony.

With education we purify our intelligence, with meditation we cleanse our mind, with sloka or poetry we clarify our speech. How do we purify our body? By exerting ourselves in the service of others. As we keep serving people in this way we will obtain inward purity. When all take part in the work of digging a pond or well, without any differences, without one man feeling superior to another or inferior to him, our ego too will be dug away. More important than the water welling up in the pond is the love welling up from our hearts.

No outward show is needed in social service; we must not make an exhibition of our work. Collect pieces of glass scattered on the footpath and keep them away in a safe place; even this service to people and a means of cleansing ourselves. We must try to please the Lord with the very hands and feet that he has given us - we must do so by serving others and by looking upon all as himself.

To serve others is to feel blessed



A man can be fortunate in many ways. But there is nothing that makes him more fortunate than the opportunity he has of serving others.

When we serve our family we are not conscious of how we help it. We must learn to help people who are not our kin - other families, our village or home town, our nation, indeed all mankind.

We have so many problems ourselves, we suffer so many hardships, and we have so many worries and cares. We must not, however, mind serving others in the midst of all our difficulties.

We will forget our problems when we are immersed in the work of helping others. There is a saying : "Feed milk to your neighbour's child, your child will be nourished." The Lord will raise us up from our troubles as we do good to others. However, it is not with such considerations of profit that we must try to help people in difficulties. We must not worry about how others will benefit from our work, but consider how we will become naturally pure. Also, we must think of the happiness we will experience by serving our fellow men.

Service should not be confined to mankind but must be extended to the animal kingdom. In the olden days ponds were dug exclusively for cattle and stone pillars were installed here and there for them to scratch themselves. Everyone must feed at least one cow every day with a handful of grass. This is called "go-grasam"

and this act is extolled in the sastras, "Grasam" means a mouthful and the English word "grass" is derived from it.

Conducting sacrifices, offering oblations to the fathers and performing sraddha must be regarded as an extension of the service we do in this world to the denizens of other worlds. These rites must be gone through with the intoning of mantras.

There must be many others like us, many groups, who want to be engaged in social work. It should be ideal if the efforts of all were brought together under one body of like-minded members. Care must be taken that associations so formed do not break up; they must be managed honestly with a proper enforcement of discipline. Those who do philanthropic work must be men of courage and enthusiasm who take praise and blame equally.

You ought not to waste your time in eating places displaying appetizing fare nor in establishments where alluring objects are exhibited. Instead, you must spend your time in helping others. You will ask whether it is wrong to spend a little time in gaiety in the midst of life's worries and hardships. I should like to impress on you that the happiness you find in helping others is not to be found in anything else.

Krsna Paramatman was playful, wasn't he? But all his playfulness was an outward phenomenon for inwardly he served others all the time. How sportingly did he save people from trouble and how many were the men who were helped by him. To protect the cowherds the child Krsna lifted up the big Govardhana mountain. And, again, as a little child he danced on the hoods of the dreaded Kalinga(Kaliya) that poisoned the Yamuna.

It all seemed play, all the heroic acts he performed to save the people of Gokula. Nobody sported like Krsna but at the same time nobody served mankind like him. It was not worldly service alone that he did. He served mankind by imparting jnana. As a preceptor of Arjuna and Uddhava alike he taught great truths. All this he did with a smile, spreading serenity everywhere. What he did he did with utmost ease. Those who have taken up the work of serving humanity must be inspired by his example.

Among the various incarnations of the Lord, the service rendered to humanity was the greatest in that of Krsna. During the avatara of Rama, Anjaneya appeared as seva (service) personified. We must be inspired by their example [of Krsna and Hanuman] as we work for others; we must be unselfish like them and shun publicity.

We keep aloof from the outside world when we are ritually impure. We must regard any day on which we fail to do any service to others as a day of impurity. Paramesvara is the father of all creatures. By serving our fellow men we serve the Lord. This is the message of Tirumular in his Tirumantiram;

Nadamada-k-koyil nambar-k-konriyil
Padamada-k-koyil Bhagavarkadame

It means: Serving people is worshipping the Lord.

Making all creatures happy



We must not fail to perform sacrifices to the celestials, offer libations to our fathers and perform sraddha. In the past, apart from these, our ancestors did puja to the gods, fed guests and performed vaisvadeva which rite is meant for all creatures. You must have some idea of these rites even if you do not perform them. I will speak to you about vaisvadeva.

To sustain ourselves, we cause hurt to so many creatures, don't we? We take pride in keeping our house clean but we forget that every household is a butchery. According to dharmasastras it is not one butchery but five butcheries together. What are these five?

Pancasuna grhasthasya vartante harahah sada
Khandani pesani culli jalkumbha upaskarah

Khandani is used to cut vegetables- it stands for one type of butchery. Vegetables also do have life. The second butchery is represented by the grinding our pounding stone. We mercilessly grind corn, pulses, etc, in it.

Here an answer must be given to objections raised by meat-eaters about vegetarian food. They tell us:"Like the goats, cows and fowl that we eat, vegetables and cereals also have life." True. Though there is no difference in kind between them, there is a difference in the degree of violence done to vegetables and animals.

Plants have life and feelings like humans but they do not have the sensation of pain to the same degree as animals and birds have. This has been scientifically established.

Also, but for certain leafy vegetables which we uproot to be prepared as food, most other vegetables are obtained from plants without killing them: it is like removing our nails or hair. The plant suffers only a little pain.

Pain even to this degree will not be caused if we eat the fruits of these plants after they drop ripe. As for the cereals they are harvested only after the crop is ripe and dry.

There is one more argument in favour of vegetarianism. Now only certain types of meat like beef are eaten. Horsemeat is not usually eaten. During World War I or II, when the question arose as to whether the soldiers

could be fed horsemeat, the non-vegetarians themselves opposed the idea. People who think it civilized to eat birds and animals condemn tribes in some remote land who eat human flesh as barbarous and call them cannibals.

We must tell meat-eaters who remind us that vegetables also have life. "Yes, but when it comes to violence, are all creatures the same? Why do you make a difference between animal flesh and human flesh? Similarly, we make a distinction between plants and animals.

Vegetarianism also promotes sattvic qualities. "Unavoidably, for the sake of existence, we have to keep at home instruments of butchery like the khandani, pesani, etc.

The third butchery is represented by the culli or the kitchen fire. Many insects perish in the cooking fire. An ant crawls about the oven or fireplace and is burnt. Sometimes when we keep a pot on the floor or the shelf an insect or two get crushed. In the summer insects come seeking wet places, places for example where vessels are kept.

The water-pot is also included among the objects of butchery. Then there is the upaskara, the broomstick. Aren't many tiny insects killed as we sweep the floor? Thus there are five instruments or objects of butchery in our home.

We must not cause harm even to those creatures that hurt us. But what do we do? We cause pain to, or kill, even harmless creatures. It is sad to think that to live, to sustain ourselves, we have to keep hurting so many living things. But it all seems unavoidable.

We do not kill deliberately. There is an expiation for the sin committed unwittingly. It is the prayascitta of the "vaisvadeva".

We perform this function to ask the Lord to forgive us our sin of having caused the destruction of various creatures and to pray for their happiness in afterlife. Vaisvadeva is meant for the excommunicated and for all creatures of earth like dogs, crows, insects, all. This rite absolves us of many a sin.

The pancha-mahayajnas were conducted for eons by the sages, by the children of Brahma. All performed them from the hoary past until the time of our grandfathers. The five great sacrifices are to be performed uninterruptedly until the deluge.

But we have had the "good fortune" of having broken this tradition. Worse, we have deprived future generations of the benefits to be derived from them.

I have dealt with a variety of rites. Perform at least those you can without prejudice to your office or professional work.

If you fail to do so you must be regretful and make amends for the same.

Towards mental purity



There are a number of simple rites the performance of which will free you from inner impurities. From generation to generation our forefathers performed them and earned happiness and contentment. We must follow in their footsteps. We do not have to go in search of any new way of life, any new doctrine or belief.

We can learn from the great men of our past who have left us lessons not only in Atmic matters but in the conduct of family and social life. For instance, kinship and friendship in their time were based on high principles.

When there was a marriage or obsequial ceremony all friends and relatives came forward to help. It was cultured behaviour at its best and it was not based on any empty outward show.

People then were truly and sincerely interested in helping the needy and the poor. At weddings they gave a little cash to the bride's parents, five or ten rupees, and the burden of those who conducted the marriage was lightened.

When everybody pays a little to the needy. The donor does not feel the pinch but the donee has a tidy sum with which to celebrate a marriage or perform an obsequial ceremony. Among relatives in the past there was not much gap between the rich and the poor. And the rich man helped his poor relatives. All this is part of dharma. The man who helps purifies himself more than the man who is helped.

Now things have changed. The well-to-do do not help their poor relatives. Annadana (gift of food) was part of the noble tradition of the past. How is it today? At present too the well-to-do feed people, but with this difference that those fed are also well-to-do like them. When they give parties, banquets, etc, a great deal of money and material is spent in this manner. Where is the room for dharma or mental purity in all this?

A party is given not with any noble intention but to promote one's selfish interests. The man who gives it thinks that he is practicing deception on the invitees. But the invitees, however, knew that the host has no true feelings of affection for them. The host and the guest thus deceive one another. Altogether parties and toasts are nothing but part of modern art of deception and have nothing to do with the cleansing of mind.

If you help a poor man with food or material, you and he are equally happy: there is affection on both sides. In parties, on the contrary, there is even ill-will. Hatred and resentment are caused in the hearts of have-nots

by the parties given by the haves[for the haves]. Among relatives there should be no distinction between the rich and the poor.

You must not think that only the affluent can help the poor and earn merit. If you are not well off you may serve others by helping them physically. All of you in a locality may join together to dig a pond. All this contributes to inner purity. How do you deserve the grace of Isvara?

By constantly serving others, by being compassionate to all creatures. Your mind, your consciousness, will also become clear. In this pure consciousness of yours, in this pure citta, you will see the image of the Lord. Do you see any image in turbid water? We have made our minds muddy with impurities. We must make them limpid by being devoted to the Lord and by serving mankind. Then Isvara will be within our grasp.

Fault finding



To live a life inspired by dharma means coming under a certain discipline and following certain rules of conduct. It is important for people to acquaint themselves with these rules. It would be ideal if they lived according to them on their own because to abide by them out of compulsion is not a matter of pride. "Sampradaya" or tradition is something that has evolved naturally and it is natural that people adhere to them.

The customs and rules making up a sampradaya are not all of them written down in the sastras. Anything laid down as a law becomes a matter of compulsion. Nowadays everywhere people are asked to "Do this" and "not to do that." Notices are displayed about this and that.

They are displayed even where I perform the puja(in the Matha), notices that say, "Don't keep talking", "Don't wear shirts", etc.

When I speak thus and ask you not to do this or to do that, I myself am guilty if offending against the good rule I just spoke about. When I say, "Don't do", it becomes a law. I should speak to you thus: "You think about it yourselves whether it is right to have such notices."

"Do not magnify the faults of others," say the wise. "But if there is something good about a man speak appreciatively about it." I myself, however, am bringing your faults into the open. But, to repeat, you must not bring to light the drawbacks of others but only their good qualities. See, even the crescent moon is cool and radiant. That is why Siva wears it in his matted hair, makes its beauty known to the world. The same Siva swallowed the terrible halahala poison concealing it from everyone, so says Dandin in one of his poems.

Pointing a finger at the faults of others or exaggerating them in speech and writing has become the practice today. The more learned a man is, the more eager he is to find fault with others. "Finding fault is indeed the

work of a vidvan," it is said. "The word vidvan itself is said to mean a dosajna." But a dosajna is one who knows the faults of something or somebody, not one who reveals them to the world or exaggerates them. If you think a person has any drawbacks you must speak to him about them in a friendly manner [so that he may correct himself] but not constantly harp on them and expose them to the outside world.

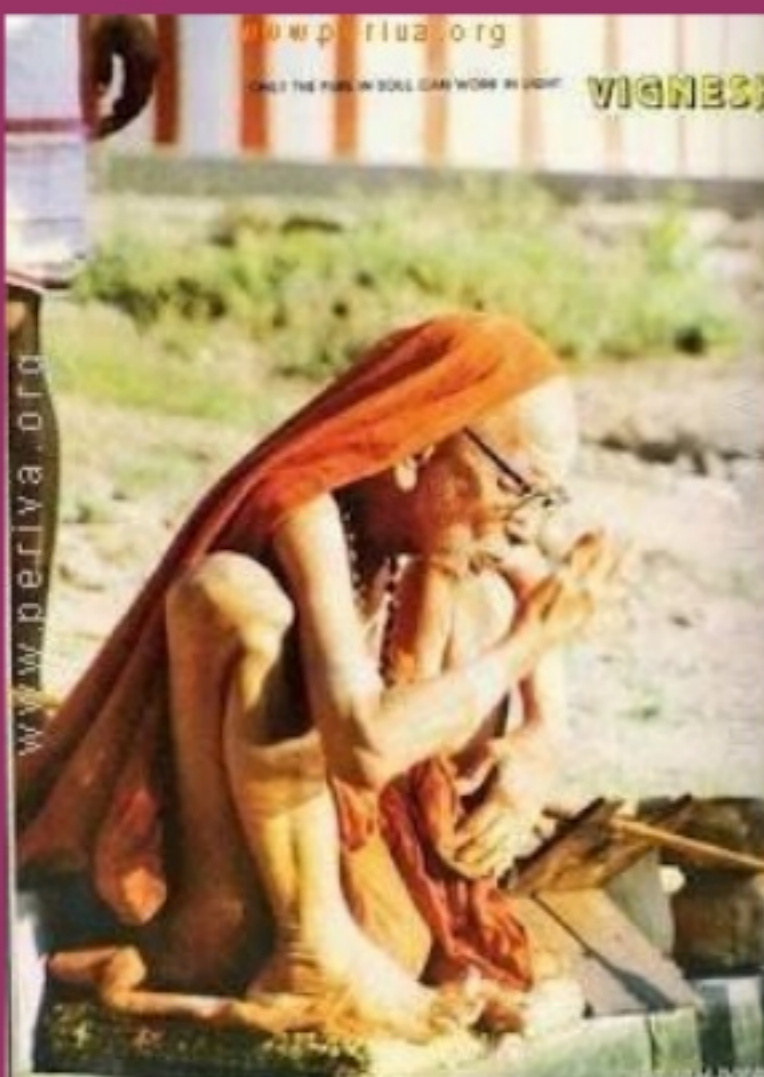
We must be worthy enough to speak about the faults of others and we cannot take upon ourselves the role of an adviser when we need to correct ourselves. Advice given by us then would be counterproductive. If we tell a man what is wrong about him he might even feel boastful about it. When are we fit to advise others? When we are worthy enough and when we know that our word will have the desired effect.

If we praise a person for his good qualities he will have greater enthusiasm to cultivate them further. But there should be restraint in praise too- praise indeed is a tricky thing. That is why the wise say: "Isvara and the guru alone may be praised directly. Friends and relatives, instead of being praised to their face, must be spoken of well to others. You may praise a servant only after he has carried out the job entrusted to him. (It is like patting a horse after a ride). You may never praise your son."

Pratyakse guravah stutyah
Parokse mitrabandhavah
Karyante dasabhrtyasca
Na svaputrah kadacana

I have been finding fault with you all the while. As I said fault -finding is not an exercise to be welcomed but the stanza just quoted frees me from any blame because it says that children should not be praised and that you must tell them what is wrong with them. So no fault can be ascribed to me for my having found fault with you.

Anger



It is customary to speak of kama(desire) and krodha(anger) together. Krsna Paramatman says in the Gita that desire and anger goad a man into sinful action.

When we intensely desire an object we try to get it by fair means or foul. It is a deadly enemy, desire: it eggs us on to commit sin. Equally deadly is anger. When we fail to get the object of our desire we turn our anger against the man who, we believe was an obstacle. Unfulfilled desire becomes anger.

If we throw a rubber against the wall, it bounces- in other words it returns to us. The ball thrown is desire and it is the same ball that becomes anger as it bounces. The attack we believe we make on others in our anger is actually an attack we make on ourselves- and we are hurt more than those we wanted to hurt.

When we are angry our whole body shakes. Anger indeed causes pain both to the body and the mind and we make ourselves ugly when we are angry. You will know the truth of this if you see a photograph taken when you are in foul mood.

Hunger is appeased by eating. But is fire assuaged in the same way? You keep feeding it and it keeps devouring everything. Fire is bright but it chars all that it consumes. Or, in other words, it turns everything black. That is why it is called "krsnavartman". Kama or desire is similar. It flares up like fire. The more it is fed the more it becomes hungry. Indeed kama blackens our mind. When a desire is gratified there is joy for the moment, but soon it goes in search of more "food" and the process we lose our peace of mind and happiness and become victims of sorrow and anger.

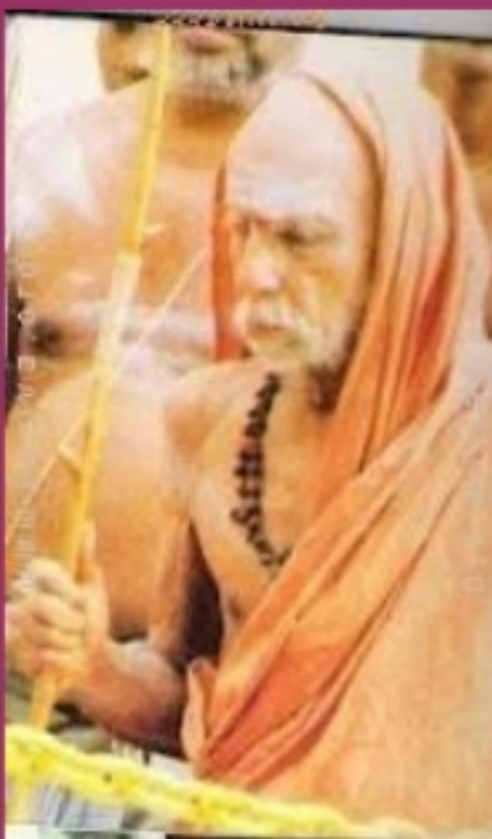
Sorrow and anger are two forms of unrequited desire. If we think that those who are a hindrance to the gratification of our desire are inferior to us, we turn our anger against them, and if we think they are superior, all we do is to grieve within ourselves. Anger is packed with more evil power than even desire. Naisadham, the story of Nala, illustrates this truth beautifully.

As King Kali makes his appearance, desire and anger (kama and krodha) accompany him as his two army commanders. The herald sings their praises. "There is no place that kama cannot gain entry to. No, there is a place he cannot enter. It is the fortress in which anger resides. This fortress is the heart of Durvasas. " Durvasas does not know desire but he is subject to fits of anger.

We must be extremely wary of this terrible sinner called anger. A little thought will convince us that we are not in the least qualified to be angry with anybody or to shout at anybody. We are even more guilty than those against whom we turn in our anger. We know this in our heart of hearts. Even if we are guiltless, before we rush to find fault with someone, we must ask ourselves whether we would not have committed the offence we think he is guilty of were we placed in the same circumstances as he.

We must try our best to keep anger always at a distance.

Are we worthy of being angry?



Often we find ourselves angry with some person or other. Anger is provoked in two ways. When we see a man guilty of an offence we lose our temper. But we do not pause to think whether we too are not like him.

Even if we have not been guilty of sinful deeds we must have had sinful thoughts. Perhaps we have reason to think that we have sinned less than others. This must be because we are a little more mature.

Even so, how difficult do we find it to correct ourselves. Would it not be more difficult for a habitual sinner to retrieve himself? We need not associate ourselves with him.

The sastras proclaim that the first step towards Atmic improvement is to sever ourselves from evil people and to seek the company of virtuous men. But there is no point in looking upon sinners with hatred or anger. All we can and must do is to pray that they turn to the path of virtue. If, by the grace of the Lord, we acquire a little grace ourselves we must use it to take them to the right path.

Our opponent is not likely to change his attitude towards us simply because we are angry with him. Instead, he might turn against us with greater venom. Hatred thus will be kept fuelled on either side. One must realise one's mistakes and try to reform oneself.

We cannot congratulate ourselves if a person corrects himself fearing our anger. Also the change thus brought about in him will not be enduring. If we think that there is something wrong with a man we must try to correct him with love.

Why do people sin? The reason must be their mental condition and the circumstances in which they are placed. If we happen to be free from any guilt, it must be because we are more favoured by circumstances. When you see a sinner you must pray: "O Ambika, I too might have sinned like him. But in your mercy you do not give me the occasion to do so. Be merciful to him in the same way."

We must not be angry with a man even if he bears ill-will against us. Our innermost mind knows how far we deserve to be spoken ill of. It may be that the man who nurses bad feelings against us is doing so not because of any wrong done by us.

We know, however, in our heart of hearts that the sins we have committed are indeed great. Such is our predicament that we must shed tears before Amba, atone for our sins and pray that they are washed away. In that way are we qualified to point accusing finger at others?

The question arises: may we direct our anger against others when we are free from all sin? Were we truly sinless, we would be all love and affection. Where is then the question of our being angry with anyone? Even towards a sinner we should have then no feeling other than that of love.

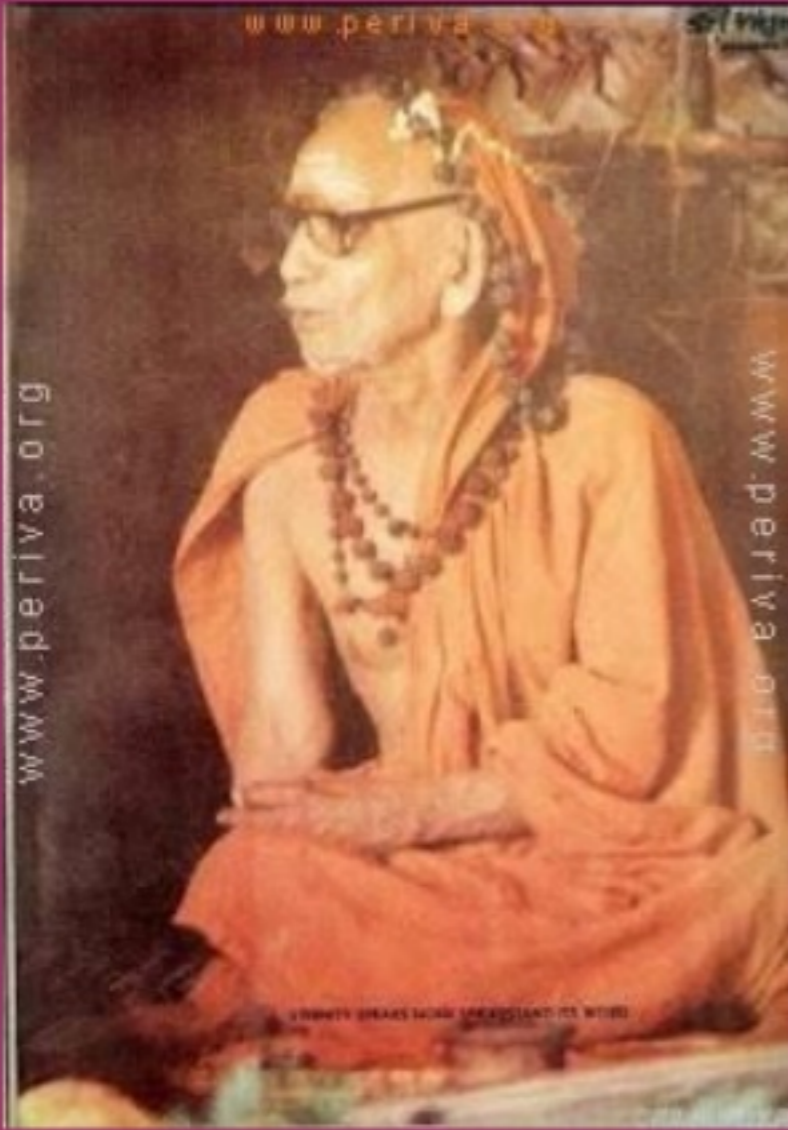
On the other hand, if we are guilty of wrongs ourselves we have no right to be angry with those we think are sinners. In the state of utter sinlessness we realise it all to be the sport of Amba. In her sport who merits praise, who deserves blame? Anger, in any case has no place in our life.

As I said earlier, according to Krsna Paramatman the two great forces inciting man to sin are desire and anger. In other words we hurt ourselves with our anger. Our opponent may ignore our anger but then we hurt ourselves with it-both our body and mind suffer.

The natural dharma of man is to be loving and affectionate. And to be loving and affectionate is to be ever in bliss. Love is Sivam, it is said.

We must always learn to attain the condition of love that is Sivam.

Love and Sorrow



The purpose of human birth is to live a life full of love for all. No joy is greater than that of loving others. Amassing wealth, acquiring property, earning fame, bedecking oneself give but transient pleasure, not any sense of fullness. The happiness that permeates our inner being is the happiness of loving others.

When we love others we are not conscious of our suffering, the physical exertion we make and the money we spend: indeed the joy of loving gives us a transcendent feeling. A life in which there is no love for others is a life lived in vain.

I said that when we love a person we forget our sorrows. But one day, at last, it may be that the object of our love itself becomes the cause of great sorrow. One day the person we love leaves us forever-or one day we will leave him forever. "O he has left me forever"- "O I am leaving him for ever": we lament in this manner.

We feel disturbed when we realise that all the happiness that love gave us has at last proved to be a lie and ended in sorrow. "Is the final outcome of love then sorrow?" we ask ourselves in agitation. The greater our love for a person the more intense our grief when he or she is separated from us forever. We may then even wonder whether a life without love, a life of selfishness or a life of insensibility would be better. One leading such a life will not be affected by being separated from the object of his affection.

A selfish or self-centred man, however, gathers only sin. Is it not a life lived without joy- a life lived without a sense of fullness- a life lived in vain, a life like that of a log of wood or stone?

[The problem then is]: Our love for others ends in sorrow. However, if there is no love there is no meaning in life. What is the solution to this problem? We must create such love as will never change, love that will be enduring. The object of our love must never become separated from us, never desert us. If there were such an object and if we devoted all our love to it we would never be separated from one another- there would be eternal bliss, everlasting fullness.

To explain, we must love the One Object that never changes. What is that Object? The Paramatman. The Paramatman will never be separated from us. Even if our life departs it will dissolve in the Paramatman and become one with him. Only that love is everlasting which is dedicated to him.

The question arises: If one is to love the Paramatman that never perishes, does it mean that we must not love anyone else, that we must not love others because they will perish one day? If our love for the Supreme Being keeps growing the truth will dawn on us that there is no one or nothing other than He. All those whom we loved, all those who caused us sorrow by being separated from us, they too will seem to us the

imperishable Supreme Being. We must learn to look upon the entire universe as the Paramatman and love it as such. Our love then shall never be a cause of sorrow.

Even if it be that our love is not such as to embrace the universe with all its creatures as an expression of the Paramatman, we can learn to love with ease all those great men of Atmic qualities as the Paramatman, so also our sadguru who is full of wisdom and grace. Sufficient it would be to love them and surrender to them. Through them the Paramatman will give us his blessings.

When someone we love dies we should not grieve for him. We must console ourselves that only the body which was the disguise of the Paramatman has perished, that the one who was in that disguise has become united with the Paramatman. Our love then will be everlasting. We must first learn to have such love for Isvara and for people of goodness, for men of God. Then step by step, we must enlarge it to embrace all creation. In this way the purpose of our life will be fulfilled.

Love



What is called love may be divided into three categories. We love great men for their high qualities, I mean distinguished men, men of truth, philanthropists, jnanins, men of grace. We mix with our friends and relatives intimately and affection develops between them and us.

Then we love people- love them ostensibly for a specific purpose, for the reason that we stand to gain from them. For instance, we may seem to love a rich man hoping that he would help us in our business or some other enterprise. We may love our employer because he pays us our wages.

These three types of love are neither true nor everlasting. If our employer sacks us we will cease to have either respect or affection for him. If people with whom we have had close contacts leave for a distant place or die or if we lose touch with them, we are likely in due course to forget them. All the sorrow we felt in the beginning because of being separated from them will eventually be forgotten.

Were it true love the grief also should be enduring. Even our love for a great man is not lasting. If there happens to be a diminution in his qualities- or if he seems to us not as great as we thought he was- we will love him in correspondingly lesser measure.

All three categories of love have some reason [or motive] behind them. That is why they are not everlasting. We love great men because they possess certain qualities: there is an element of selfish interest in our feelings for them: because we think they will be helpful in our advancement.

True love knows neither reason nor motive. When do we love a man truly? When our affection for him is unchanging and unwavering- we love him even if he does not apparently move closely with us or does not seem to possess inward qualities or the capacity to bless us; we love him even when we do not have any selfish interest to be served by him. Does anyone possess such love? Yes, only One. It is Isvara- he alone has such love.

God loves us for no reason. If he needed a reason he would not give us even a morsel of food. It is Paramesvara who forgives all our misdeeds and protects us- and he is all love. It is his love that is manifested in the three categories mentioned earlier.

We must learn to have such love as is revealed through Paramesvara; that is love that is universal, love that is not based on any reason or interest.

Why should we dislike a man because we think he is guilty of certain wrongs?

Are we not similarly guilty ourselves?

Do we then discard ourselves?

We must have the same attitude towards others as we have towards ourselves. There is nothing remarkable about our love for a great man; the remarkable thing is to love a sinner also.

If you ask me, you must have greater concern and affection for him. "He commits wrongs like us," we must tell ourselves. "His mind goads him into doing them. We must have sympathy for him and try to correct him". There may be a few whom Isvara, out of his compassion, has given the gift of blessing others. Such men must take it upon themselves the task of freeing others from sinful actions.

We must, to start with, learn to have disinterested love for an individual, that is love that is not tainted by self-interest. Eventually, this love will permeate us, inspire our inner being, and we will then be able to enlarge it to embrace all.

It is the teaching of the wise that we must have such love for our guru, love without any consideration of the fruits thereof. We must not look for any reason to love our preceptor. If we constantly "practise" to have such love for our guru we will be the recipients of his blessings.

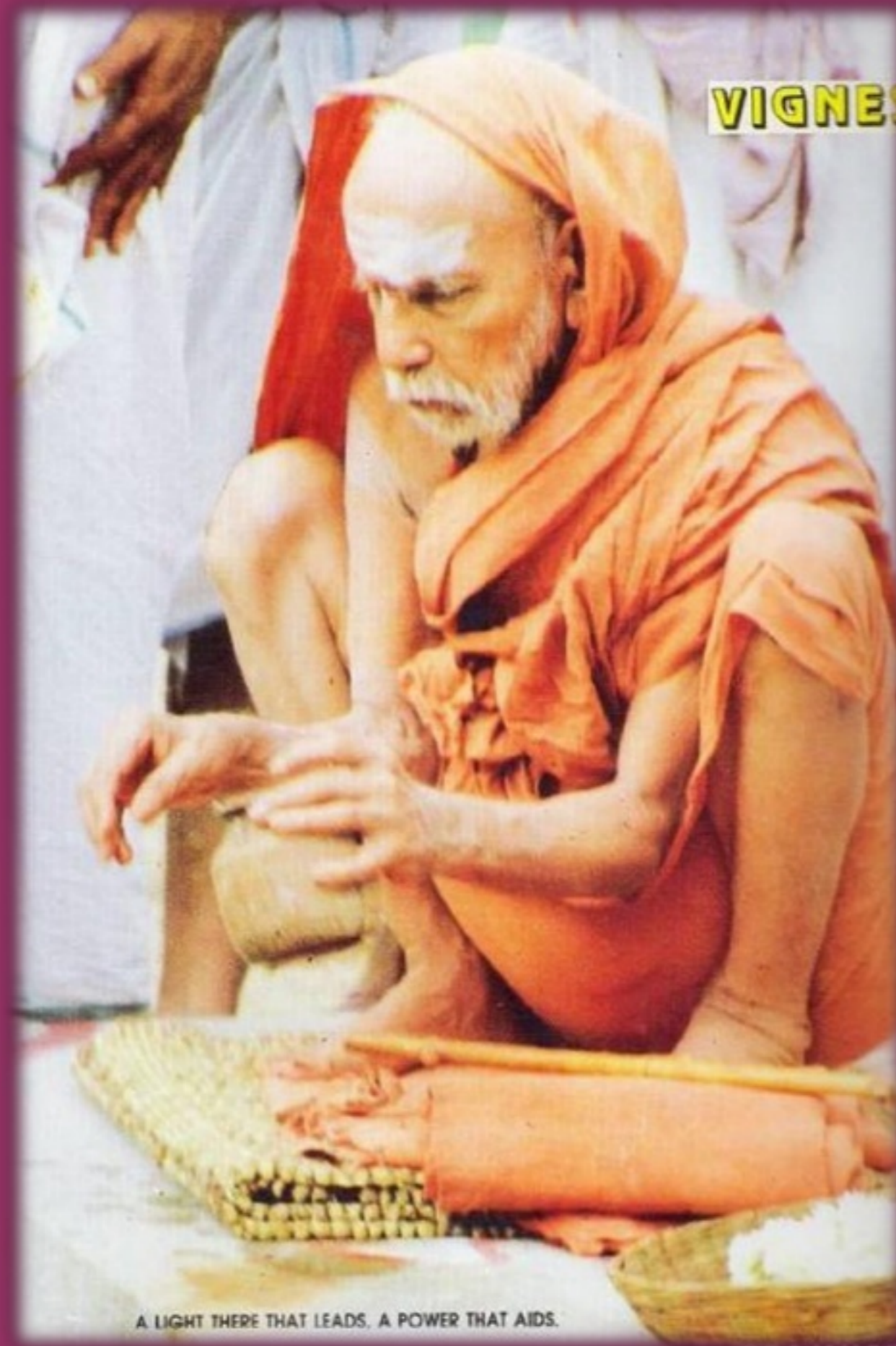
Our love for him will eventually grow into love that will encompass all. If our love is manifested in this manner there will be fullness, tranquility and bliss.

Jaya Jaya Shankara, Hara Hara Shankara !

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the following websites and books which contained a treasure of information for compiling this Ebook.

1. www.kamakoti.org
2. Hindu Dharma – Universal Way of Life published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai



Jaya Jaya Shankara, Hara Hara Shankara!