We welcome you to the first issue of our monthly spiritual E-magazine, “Divine Ambrosia – A Drink For All”. If one searches Thesaurus, Ambrosia ranges from the exotic mythological drink of gods to mother’s milk to nectar to the simple delicious table pudding. Unlike a normal drink which nourishes or sometimes harms our body, Divine Ambrosia is a spiritually charged Drink-For-All packed with nutrients like joy, wisdom, knowledge, purity and other divine virtues meant for the Immortal Soul within us, that even a child or a decagenarian can safely drink and digest! Our idea and title of this E-Magazine was inspired by Swami Sivananda, who in his pre-monastic life of a very talented doctor started a medical journal titled “The Ambrosia”, and who after his Sannyasa became a divine doctor. To Him, our Guru and Guide, our Strength and Inspiration, we humbly dedicate this small effort.

Our monthly magazine aims at bringing together spiritual seekers from all walks and modes of life, encouraging and helping each other to implement the spiritual precepts we have learned either through books, discourses or our Gurus in our day-to-day life. Thinking of these Great Masters, writing their words, disseminating their wisdom within and without – this is a wonderful form of Satsang for us, which motivated us in the first place to start this E-Magazine.

Every month, starting from the holy month of April we select a topic that will educate and entertain us in our journey and explore it deeper. In the section, “The Three H’s”, topics on cultivating Head (Jnana), Hand (Karma) and Heart (Bhakti) along with their integration in our daily life are explored. Experiences of pilgrimage travel are recounted in “Yaatra” to rekindle in us the true spirit of undertaking such journeys. Festivals of the month and their spiritual significance are presented in “Festive Moments”. “May I Answer That” is an exclusive section of Q & A with Swami Sivananda, aimed at clearing doubts and spiritual issues of the aspirants. An interesting topic that relates Science and Spirituality is explored in “Perspective”. Takeaways from recent Satsangs are captured in “Satsang Notes”. “Swadhyaya” picks an inspirational text for self-study. The life and teachings of a contemporary Saint who influenced many a spiritual seeker are briefly presented in the section “Divine Celebrity”. In the fun corner “Story Time With Appu”, wise and humorous tales for kids as well as adults are narrated. Spiritual Crossword and Humor are uniquely designed for seekers. “Health & Fitness” talks about both Asana and Ahara for keeping us physically fit and spiritually sound. “Special Features of the Month” highlights Book, Audio and Melody for the month. The experiences of contributors in a spiritual program, the company of a Saint or a tour to a holy place are presented in “Anubhava”. The section “Likhita Japa” can be used by one and all for their sadhana.

Since we are bringing this issue on a very special day celebrating the advent of Spring and new year according to the Hindu Calendar, our first issue is titled “Witnessing the Dawn of Spring Within”. The significance of Spring needs to be perceived in our spiritual inner core. All the life surrounding us – the trees, plants, grass – which suffered extreme harshness of cold and snow this winter presented a doubtful picture before us, “Can they survive?” But when the sun came, earth warmed and snow melted away, a grass blade slowly rose its cheerful head up – fully alive! Similarly, our true Divine nature is yet dormant, hiding under all the materialistic burdens and piles of mental prejudices we have acquired. It will reveal itself in full glory when the brilliant sun of knowledge shines and the ignorance melts. Let us welcome Spring, like the grass blade, eager to absorb the spiritual knowledge and watch the miracle of Dawn of Spring within.

Happy Spring ! Happy Reading !
Foundations of Spiritual Endeavour

**Foundations of Spiritual Endeavour**

The Three H's focuses on the Yoga of Synthesis as emphasized by Swami Sivananda that includes developing the Head through the means of Knowledge (Jnana), working with Endeavour (Karma) and cultivating love in our Heart to the Divine within and surrounding us by Devotion (Bhakti). The current issue speaks in the words of the Great Masters and Vedantic principles about how we should assimilate these in our day-to-day lives.

**IN FOCUS**

Foundations of Spiritual Endeavour

Foundation is the most important part of a construction which imparts structural stability to the whole building. Likewise a spiritual foundation is the most important part of the inner spiritual palace we are trying to build. Let us examine what constitutes the foundation of spiritual sadhana and how to go about building this foundation.

Generally, when we talk about sadhana, the first thing that comes to mind is meditation. But as we see from the well-known Patanjali Yoga Sutras which is an eight-limbed treatise, a firm grounding in ethical principles and goodness is sine qua non for getting at meditation. Meditation is only the seventh step. Comprehensively, the eight limbs are: Yama (Eternal Vows), Niyama (Internal Observances), Asana (Firm and comfortable meditative posture), Pranayama (Regulation of Vital Force), Pratyahara (Abstraction of senses and mind from objects), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation) and Samadhi (Super-Conscious state).

**Yama** and **Niyama** which are the first two steps are considered as the foundation of spiritual endeavour, which act by purifying the individual’s actions and making them more Satvic. This is the basis on which rest of the spiritual growth happens.

Yama or Eternal Vows include five canons, which are 1. Ahimsa (Non-injury), 2. Satya (Truth), 3. Asteya (Non-stealing), 4. Brahmacarya (Continence) and 5. Aparigraha (Non-aversion). These can be interpreted as external observances to be incorporated in daily life. Niyama or Internal Observances include five more canons: 1. Saucha (Purity), 2. Santosha (Contentment), 3. Tapas (Austerities), 4. Svadhyaya (Study) and 5. Isvaraparipadhanam (Surrender to God). Together, these ten canons are the initial rungs in the ladder of Yoga. The more time a Sadhaka or a spiritual aspirant spends in perfecting these, the less will be the time needed to attain perfection in meditation. Without this ethical basis, even after prolonged practice of meditation, spiritual growth will be limited. Hence, the recommended course of action is to try to get established in Yama and Niyama and at the same time practice Asana, Pranayama and Meditation.

To incorporate these ten canons in our day-to-day life, we need interest, inspiration and helping tools. Association with saints and sages (Satsanga) and being careful about the sensory inputs (Aahara Shuddhi) will help us in this endeavour. The next few paragraphs talk of the importance of these two concepts in cultivating a strong ethical background for our spiritual life.

Jagadguru Sri Adi Shankaracharya in his work, “Bhaja Govindam” writes, “Satsangavate Nissangatvam, Nissangavte Nirmohatvam, Nirmohatve Nischala Tattvam, Nischala Tattve jeeyan Muktih”, meaning “From Satsanga comes Detachment, from Detachment comes Freedom from delusion, from Freedom from delusion comes Firm knowledge, and from Firm knowledge comes Liberation”. In a nutshell he lists the means through which a Sadhaka progresses from one state to the next in spirituality ending with the ultimate goal which is Jivanmukti or Liberation.

“Satsanga” includes attending spiritual talks, discourses, retreats, singing kirtans, being in company of Mahatmas, saints, sages, spiritually advanced people and teachers. It also includes studying inspiring scriptures and books written by and about God-realized saints and devotees. The company of wise elevates us to grasp the reality of sublime truths and shuts off worldly cares and worries. It will show us what is right and what is wrong and how important the principles of Truth, Non-injury etc are in pursuing the goal of Self-realization. Satsanga also brings about a miraculous transformation in the individual and prepares him for the real spiritual journey. Satsanga must be practiced by all means. Opportunities must be created to have Satsanga with great souls. As a corollary, Dussanga or any association that is detrimental to spiritual progress should be avoided as it eats away whatever progress one makes in one’s sadhana.

In the Upanishads there is an aphorism – “Aahaara shuddhe Sattva shuddhih; Sattva shuddhe dhruvam smrutham; smruthir labdhvam sarva grantheenam vipra mokshah”, which translates to “From purity of food comes increased Sattva; from increased Sattva comes firm memory of one’s true identity and from firm memory one gets released from the fetters of bondage and attains liberation”.

“Aahara Shuddhi” means “purity of food”. “Food” is only one of the meanings of the word “Aahara” in Sanskrit. However Aahara implies any type of input. The mind receives inputs by the doors of Indriyas or senses and these inputs are of the form of sights, smells, tastes, touches and sounds. The nature of these inputs dictates the type of thoughts that arise and linger in the mind. Worldly inputs foster a worldly mind and sublime spiritual inputs foster a mind conducive to spiritual growth. Some practical examples of worldly inputs to be avoided include – watching television and cinemas, reading novels and newspapers, pampering the taste buds with delicacies especially the spicy, hot and sour varieties (rajasic and tamasic foods) and listening to movie songs. Avoiding these will allow us to follow the rules of celibacy and other observances more easily. By consciously monitoring the sensory inputs and taking only the good ones, Chitta shuddhi (Inner Purity) will result.

Keeping in mind the significance of these fundamental spiritual principles, let us all strive to get established in the Yama and Niyama, and facilitate our minds to engage in an unbroken meditative flow on the Supreme Self.
Revised Action Plan of Get-Set-Go in Karma Yoga

If, for a moment, we reflect on the protocol behind most of our actions, a protocol which more or less defines the natural transition of an idea from conception to implementation, we will observe that it broadly follows this pattern: We get a desire to do something or achieve something. This desire triggers our mind to generate thoughts and we set a plan of how we should achieve that desire. Once a plan is formed, we go ahead and execute the plan with all available resources. This Get-Set-Go principle permeates the field of our actions so much that we fail to gauge the rapidity with which we are driven to performing an action in our day-to-day life. Of course, since we are not machines that implicitly execute their commands, we spice up our Get-Set-Go chain with binding emotions, obligations, considerations and many such feelings. However, the seed of this entire chain of events is in our minds in the form of desire, and the end fruit is the result of the desire-driven-action. Most of the times, the seed that triggers Get-Set-Go is desire for success, fame, recognition, wealth or anything that expects a return according to the person’s tastes or liking. Thus, we are being driven by our minds through desires and are enmeshed in the wheel of Karma or Action as great sages and saints of yore have proclaimed.

As long as we are driven by desires, we are bound to the gross mis-identity of “I am this body and mind” which in turn fuels our desires and actions. To reap the fruits of our actions, both good and bad, we take birth again and again. This is the Law of Karma as discovered by the ancient Seers and Rishis, a discovery which is magnificently greater than the discovery of Law of Gravitation.

Though it seems that not having desire in the first place is the solution to escape from actions (Karma Sannyasa), it is not feasible as we need to perform actions as long as we live. Action by itself does not bind us, so much as the motive behind the action and the sense of attachment we give to the action. Thus, the means to escape from this cycle of Karma is to engage oneself in Karma Yoga. What is Karma Yoga? Lord Krishna in BhagavadGita says (Gita 2-48):

Yagyastah Kuru Karmani Sangam Tyakta Dhananjaya
Sirhyasidhyoh Sama Bhutva Samatvam Yoga Uchyaite

“Perform Action, O Dhananjaya, dwelling in union with the Divine, renouncing attachments, and balanced evenly in success and failure; equilibrium is Yoga.”

If we want to be Karma Yogins, the first step we need to take is to evaluate the usual chain of Get-Set-Go behind our actions by questioning ourselves three things: 1. Do I consider myself to be the Doer? 2. Am I attached with this action? 3. Do I expect something out of it? For many of us, in many cases and at many times, the answer is “Yes”.

However, if we introduce the following three crucial elements as instructed by the Great Masters in our Karma, practice them gradually and meticulously at every opportunity, our answer to the above will slowly transform to a ‘No’ and we will be on the right track of performing Karma Yoga:

1. **Nimmita Bhav:** “I am not the doer, but an instrument in the hands of the Lord”. This is the key to negating the feeling of doership. God alone is the controller of all our organs, the mind and the intellect. He is the inspiration behind all our ideas and creativity. We are the mediums of his divine purpose and are part of a grand picture. We should constantly think “I am Nimitta. God works through my hands, eats through my mouth and sees through my eyes.” By slowly acknowledging the Divine Will alone as the doer and we as just tools, we will not be perturbed easily by success and failure.

2. **Narayana Bhav:** “The whole world is manifestation of God”. If we are driven by selfish motives, we are attached with the work. We consider ourselves to be different from the rest and hence selfishness will delude us in wanting something only for ourselves, making us attached with what we think belongs to us. If we develop the feeling of Narayan Bhav, it will give a new dimension to our work. It will make us see God in all beings and hence we include them to be served by us in our action plan. By serving others selflessly, we will soon remove the element of selfishness and false attachment from the work. This will immensely help us in purifying our hearts.

3. **Narayanaarpana Bhav:** “I offer all the fruits of my actions unto the Lord!”. If we are successful in implementing the above two steps, this step becomes easier. The way to cultivate this feeling is first renouncing all unreal and false expectations like thanks, gratitude, appreciation, applause, recognition, approbation, salute or smile etc. After negating these expectations at our egoistic level, we need to offer all the actions and their results at the lotus feet of the Lord. By doing an action as an offering for Lord and not expecting any results, we will derive immense peace.

By practicing this Karma Yoga, we do not lose anything. Even by an iota of its practice, our heart gets purified and made ready to receive the Divine Knowledge of the Self. Lord Krishna in BhagavadGita says (Gita 2-40):

*Nehahikramanaasasoti pratya vyadgyana vaidyate *
*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya traya yate mahato bhayaat *

“There is no loss of effort here, there is no harm. Even a little of the practice of Karma Yoga delivers one from great fear.”

Are you ready to revise your action plan of the usual, monotonous, selfish Get-Set-Go and jump into true Selfless Service? For myself, I am.
Witnessing the Dawn of Spring Within

Spiritual Shield for the Snares of Spring!

A thousand years had passed since Lord Siva went into Samadhi, the Super-Conscious state, surrounded by the snow-clad peaks in his abode, Kailas. The devas were not particularly happy about it. They intended to hinder Siva’s meditation, and get him married to Girija, the daughter of Himalayas, whose son was destined to kill the demonic forces, the archenemies of devas. Scheming in the background, they sent Manmatha (One who ignites or churns the heart by exciting passions), or Lord of Love near Siva. After several unsuccessful attempts to break Siva’s Samadhi, Manmatha ultimately resolved to manifest Spring, which is the King of all seasons. At his command, a very lovely Spring defying all expressions spread over nature.

When Spring manifested, there was beauty all around; trees were laden with lovely blossoms and gentle breeze carried their fragrances stirring and igniting passion in the minds of all beings. Lotuses bloomed in plentiful in lakes and bees danced around them drinking their nectar. Swans, cuckoos, parrots sang melodiously and celestial damsels sang and danced. The whole world was caught in the grip of the passion of sensual pleasures that Spring had brought along with her. When Manmatha threw an arrow at Lord Siva out of frustration, Siva out of his deep meditation and with an anger that shook the entire universe, He opened his Third Eye and destroyed the igniter of passions. Hence Siva was called “Kamari” (Kama + Ari) or The enemy of Desire or Passion.

The above is a beautiful narration that occurs in many devotional texts like Tulasi Ramayan, which proves why Lord Siva is The Supreme and why we are nowhere near Him. Unlike Siva, we normally find ourselves succumbing even to the smallest of temptations like satisfying tiny taste buds, what to speak of the charms of Spring? After a period of prolonged winter, we jump at the arrival of Spring, fill our calendars with outing dates, party and get-togethers, long drives, sunny-vacations and many such so-called “fun” activities which generally involve eating delicious foods, drinking, chatting, gossiping and enjoying sensual pleasures with the motivation that we need to enjoy while Sun is here.

With all these sense-pleasing sights, sounds and smells, Spring cleverly engages us in external enjoyments while we unintentionally or consciously lose track of our spiritual priorities. In all our hurry to welcome spring and do an external garden-garage-house-closet-clean up, we forget that we have a number of worse and messy closets of anger, passion, greed, jealousy and others in our mind which need to be tackled first. Hence, a spiritual seeker who aspires to realize the Divine should not fall for this external manifestation of beauty, but be extra-vigilant and transform Spring into a period of introspection and communion with the Divine Lord within.

We need to create a spiritual shield that deflects the potential deviations from spiritual path and protects our sadhana. By establishing ourselves in a daily regular schedule of Japa, Kirtan, Asanas, and Satsang, we will make our mental will power stronger, thereby not easily succumbing to temptations. Following the rules of Brahmacharya, engaging in less gossiping, less partying and according to my own Guruji, doing more “inning” than “outing”, we can check the dissipation of precious vital energy and redirect it to sadhana. We can also take certain resolutions which will help us in perceiving the Divine presence surrounding us and increasing our devotion. For example:

- Take time daily to watch the Sunrise and Sunset. Marvel at the beauty of the Master Painting created by the Master Painter. The living principle in the Sun is within us.
- Take solitary walk in the nearby woods, or park for at least a mile, get fresh air and observe the various elements of nature – earth, trees, flowers, birds, butterflies which are simple and joyous. Feel that the Lord is enabling the earth to blossom, the trees to be stable and the birds to fly. Meditate in Silence.
- Grow a plant from a seed. Reflect and meditate on the conversation between Uddalaka (The Guru) and Swetaketu (The Disciple) in Chandogya Upanishad which illustrates that the sublime essence present in the seed, which is not visible, is within us. We are contained in that Self. Thou Art That. Meditate on this sublime Truth.
- Grow a garden of flowers to offer to the Lord for daily worship.
- Go for a silent Japa-Dhyana retreat camp for any weekend in nature’s campgrounds – either by yourself or under a spiritual master. Utilize this time for solitary walks, introspection, reflection, meditation, bhajans and swadhyaya.
- Even under obligation of attending any party or social gatherings, stick to your Japa and Meditation timings. If possible, ask the host to excuse you as you have a very urgent work to do.

The above seem to be very simple exercises to the point that they might be mistakenly overlooked. But these will help in increasing our adoration of the Supreme Lord and will constantly remind us of the grand source of beauty behind the external charms and make our minds attuned to sublime and positive thoughts.
Witnessing the Dawn of Spring Within

What is a pilgrimage and why do we undertake it? It is a journey which elevates our mind to attunement with powerful, positive vibrations of the holy place, the deity and the saints residing in the holy place, and by doing so removes our negativities and obstacles. Unfortunately, now-a-days we are losing the true spirit of a Yaatra. Instead, we engage in such a trip for fun, relaxation, sight-seeing or picnic. We make elaborate plans, about where to stay, what to eat, what to wear, what to see, but not even a consideration of utilizing the pilgrimage as a divine opportunity to engage in introspection, tapas, kirtan and other godly activities. To understand what a pilgrimage actually is, we are presenting here experience in the words of Swami Tapovan Ji Maharaj, one of the greatest Jnanis of the modern world and the Guru of Swami Chinmayananda of Chinmaya Mission. From his wanderings, we will get a glimpse of the inner experience expected during a Yaatra. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust has kindly given us permission to excerpt from Swamiji’s book “Wanderings in the Himalayas”.

**Badrinath, Part-I**

Swami Tapovanam

“It was in 1924 that I traveled from Kedarnath to Badrinath for the first time. On this occasion I could not, however, stay for long at Badri. Fortunately for me, since then I have had opportunities of visiting the place again and again. In 1930 and 1931 I traveled to Badrinath from Hrishikesh and on both occasions I spent some time there in devotion.

Even while I was passing my days in Badrikashram and other holy places in the Himalayas, I came to feel, every now and then, that the wonderful power of Maya (Illusion) was at work everywhere. It was not inactive even in the peaceful solitudes of these remote regions. Grasses and plants and trees flourish on water, blossom and bear fruits; streams and rivers flow on, winds blow, the sun shines. If the inanimate things themselves are so active what about the animate ones? Birds fly and sing; cows graze on the meadows, roam about and rest. Men too, whether ignorant or enlightened, eat and play and sleep. Thus everywhere you find ceaseless activity. And no wonder. Action is the natural order of the world. The life-force continues to stir all living bodies at all times. There is no state of inaction. A desireless, peaceful state of existence where the distinction between the Knower and the Known disappears, is difficult to attain, wherever man may be. That distinction fades away only when man has crossed the stream of action which shows itself in the activities of the physical senses and which produces pleasure and pain. But crossing the stream means the complete conquest of illusion and illusion is certainly difficult to overcome – “Mama Maya duratyaya”. Even in holy places like Badrikashram it is not easy to reach that stage of Supreme Bliss, where all distinctions disappear, where all activity ceases. There may be a few great souls who enjoy the state of Samadhi but even their minds and senses are not beyond the reach of the mighty illusion. One may ascend to the highest peak of the Himalayas; but unless one is exceptionally fortunate and possesses tireless industry, deep faith, true knowledge and the highest degree of detachment, one cannot overcome illusion completely and reach that final blissful state of merger with the Supreme.

Badrinath Temple was the sacred place where Nara and Narayana performed their penance. It is situated in the valley of the Alakananda, between two mountains named after them. The asram is described in the Puranas as the home of rishis and as covered with the smoke of yagnas. But today it appears in a totally altered form. There are some temples and rows of houses where priests and pilgrims lodge or foodstuffs are offered for sale. The whole place is noisy with the conversation of travelers and the altercation of priests who demand gifts and rewards from them. A hot pool called Thaptha Kunda and another the Brahama-Kapali, a short distance away, are the two chief theerthas in modern Badri. The famous temple of Badri Narayana is situated on a rising ground above the Thaptha Kunda. In the temple by the side of the image of Sri Narayana, are installed the figures of Nara and Narayana, the original dwellers of the place. Outside is a small temple dedicated to Sri Sankaracharya. But it is remarkable that there are no shrines here dedicated to Vyasa, Suka, or Gaudapada who once lived at this spot.

The temple of Badrinath is situated on the left bank of the Alakananda. As soon as a devotee’s eye falls on the lovely Lord of Badrinath his or her heart sheds all sinful tendencies and feels great devotion and happiness. Decked with various jewels and multicolored garlands of flowers, the lustrous Lord of Badri wins the heart of everyone at first sight. The fact that it is a Nambudiri Brahmin of Kerala who conducts the Pooja at Badri as at Guruvayoor and other temples of Kerala cannot but be a source of pride and pleasure to the sons and daughters of Malabar. The head-priest of Badri is generally known by his title “Ravalji”. It has been my pleasure to discuss with him, at times, the history of Badrinath Temple and the connection between the worship at Badri and the Nambudiris of Malabar. On such occasions, I have been filled with wonder and pride at the supreme greatness of Sri Sankara. It is a matter of common knowledge that it was the great Acharya who installed the image of Narayana on the side of Narayana Parvata. But exactly when a member of Sankara’s own community began to conduct the worship at the shrine is not known.
How wonderful were the life and achievements of Sri Sankara! In thought or in action he had no rival. It is only very rarely – very, very rarely – that such wise philosophers of heroic men of action make their appearance in the world. When we see the volume of work he accomplished and the number of books he wrote, against the brief span of his life and the age and circumstances in which he lived, we are not at all surprised at the view several scholars have taken that Sri Sankaracharya was an incarnation of Lord Sankara. Yet many people in India today do not know the greatness of the world-teacher, who raised the Sanatana Dharma once again to its pristine glory and honor. Such ignorance is the result of a very defective system of education. Truly, education is not worth its name if it does not teach people the noble lives of their own great countrymen and induce them to follow in the wake of those national heroes.

The temple of Badrinath owes its very existence to Kerala. Its priesthood and modes of worship are other ties which bind it fast to Malabar. One may even say that Badri Narayan is the tutelary deity of Kerala, as much as Guruwayoor Appan Himself. Yet, only a small number of Malayalees visit Badrinath from year to year and the reason is clear. From Malabar to the Himalayas it is a far cry. With all the modern conveniences of travel, it is not yet easy for the common man to reach the northernmost part of India from the southernmost. The few who accomplish the long journey gain not only merit and purity of mind which will save them hereafter; but also much valuable training and sense of discipline for success and happiness here itself. A visit to these northern regions helps to clear away the atheistic doubts and tendencies that at times assail even the faithful. The grand, beautiful, peaceful Himalayas which remain motionless in deep meditation help to purify any sinful mind and elevate it to a higher plane. The Himalayan region is the land of Jnana (true knowledge), the South is the land of Karma (action). In the north there is a greater sense of equality and fraternity because of the tradition inherited from the great rishis who had realized for themselves that there is nothing other than Brahman. Here, therefore, there is nothing like the ugly custom of unapproachability. But when I speak of the greater sense of equality prevailing in North India, I do not mean that the rules of Varnasrama dharma are totally in-operative in the north. I only mean that they do not function so harshly and abominably as in Malabar. A thoughtful pilgrim from Malabar, on his way to Badri, gets splendid opportunities of learning much about the cities of India, about the differences in religion, customs, manners, races and languages even among the Hindus themselves.

In the midst of all this diversity, one is struck by a sense of Aryan unity. For example, the names of Siva and Rama are loved and honored everywhere. In the early morning one bows to the Sun. Sanyasins, Brahmins and guests are honored at all places from Kanya Kumiari (Cape Camorin) to Badrinath. It may be, the language of welcome is different, the food served is different, the manners practised are different. Yet, they are honored and welcomed everywhere. It is a matter of pride and satisfaction for Hindus that in spite of the revolutions and counter-revolutions of Ages, the eternal principles of their Dharma have survived. Another advantage of such pilgrimages is that they give the pilgrims opportunities of visiting several holy places from Rameswar to Badriinath, of meeting many holy men and learning from them the subtle secrets of the spirit.

A mile to the north of the Badri Temple there is a famous rock called “Gaudapadasila”. This rather small, smooth and beautiful rock, on the left bank of the Alakananda, is said to have been the favorite seat of Rishi Gaudapada, disciple of Suka. It is well-known that Vyasa and Sankara wrote their important books at Badrikashram. Similarly Gaudapada composed his Karikas on Mandukyopanishad, it is said, sitting on this rock. There is a tradition that Sri Sankara actually met Gaudapada here and Gaudapada then entrusted his Mandukya karikas to Sankara in order that Sankara might write a commentary explaining Gaudapada’s views.

Fifteen or sixteen miles beyond Badrinath is the holy place called Swargarohini. It was from here that the great Yudhistira, while he was moving forward on his last journey without ever retracing a step or even looking back as his wife and brothers dropped down dead behind him one by one, was taken away to heaven by Indra’s charioteer, Mathali. Once, towards the beginning of July, when I was staying at Badrinath, I followed this route up into the mountains. Partly my love of Nature’s beauty, and partly my faith in and devotion to great souls induced me to go out on this adventure. The way to Swargarohini goes up along the valley to the west of Narayana Parvata. Starting from the Badri Temple and traveling three miles to the north along the bank of the Alakananda, over an extensive plain, one reaches a village called Mana. The village is now the home of uneducated agriculturists, and merchants; but there is enough evidence to prove that it was once inhabited by holy rishis. The cave of Vyasa, where Maharsi Badarayana, who was an incarnation of Vishnu, resided and the cave of Ganesa where he invoked God Ganesa for the composition of his works like the Mahabharata and the Cave of Muchukunda, where King Muchukunda passed his last days in accordance with Sri Krishna’s advice, are in the neighborhood. From April to October several Mahatmas make these caves their abode and practise penance in them. The Alakananda that comes down from a snow-ridge in the north-west and the Saraswati that flows down from the Lake of the Gods in the north, meet here and this holy place of junction is described in the Puranas as Kesava Prayag. From there a path proceeds in the direction of Tibet, over the Mana Pass, 18,000 feet high. Leave aside that path and go straight west along the bank of the Alakananda and then you reach a waterfall called Vasundhara. In fact, there are two falls which come down from the snow-clad peaks with a deafening noise. Vasundhara is regarded as a holy theertha.

Swargarohini, the Snow-clad peak

(Badrinath, Part-1 (Contd.))

(To be continued in next issue)
**The Advent of Rama**

Who is Rama? When a blue bundle of bliss along with his three younger siblings was born to King Dasaratha of Ayodhya and his three Queens, their Royal Sage Vasishta was invited to name them. Sage Vasishta said “Your first son is going to be called as ‘Rama’ as He is the Supreme Being who sports in the hearts of all and the Delighter of all”.

Tulasi Ramayan beautifully says:

Jee Aannadadhopi Suvaashee Shokar Te Balsee Suvaashee ||
So Suvshyam Raa Aas Nama Abhilshek Dhaayak Vidhram ||

Jo anandsindhu sukharasai siikar te trailoka supaasi.
So sukhadhaama rama aas naama akhila loka daayaka biraama.

“The Supreme Self who is the embodiment of joy and ocean of Bliss, from which a small droplet fills the three worlds with happiness, He is ‘Rama’, the very home of bliss and the comforter of all the three worlds.”

Rama was born on the very auspicious Ninth day (Suddha Navami) of the first Hindu calendar month of Spring, Chaitra. Thus, this day of birth of Rama is celebrated throughout India as Rama Navami. The reasons for the Supreme Lord to incarnate Himself in the human form of Rama were many. Mother Earth was unable to carry the burden of adharma (non-righteousness) on her. Brahma, the Creator heard her plea, and prayed to the Supreme Lord to alleviate her suffering. It was then promised to them that He would incarnate as a human being, establish the path of dharma and vanquish the unjust. Also, He wanted to grant the desire of the several devotees who were doing rigorous penance for beholding a small glimpse of His divine beauty. Swami Tejomayananda in “Ram and Nam” quotes from RamcharitManas, “rama bhagata hita nara tanu dhaani”, meaning that Rama has incarnated for the sake and upliftment of His devotees. To fulfill all these as well as to create an eternal impression of the name “Rama”, the taraka mantra or the life-saving mantra in the minds of people till dissolution, the Supreme Lord has incarnated Himself as Rama in the Treta Yuga, and exhibited His divine and mysterious Leelas.

Valmiki Ramayana, the earliest MahaKavya to be composed on this plane of earth, is the first hand account of Rama’s life and deeds as narrated by his contemporary, Sage Valmiki, who attained a rogue-turned-saint status by repeating the name “Rama”. In Valmiki’s account, we find that Rama acted like an ordinary man and underwent trials and tribulations, but all the while following the path of Dharma and upholding the Universal Principles. Rama showed to the world how a man can rise from the human level to the perfection of divinity.

As spiritual aspirants, celebration of the birth of Lord Rama takes on a higher sublime dimension for us than just doing little ritual. The following two paragraphs are the powerful words of a great spiritual master of India, Swami Krishnananda in the book “Spiritual Significance of Religious Festivals” as to how we should celebrate this occasion.

“Rama showed what human perfection is and how it becomes a stepping-stone to divine perfection. This we can know only when we read the whole of the Ramayana from beginning to the end, reading also between the lines. The Ramayana most of us know is very superficial. However, the real Ramayana is the spirit that is manifest in its words when we read the original of the Masters. Whether it is Kamban’s or Tulsidas’s or Valmiki’s Ramayana, ultimately it makes no difference, because it is said that all great men think alike. All these masters thought alike and they had a common purpose of transforming human nature into divine perfection.”

“The important aspect relevant to a sadhaka or seeker of Truth is that Sri Rama Navami is a day for divine contemplation on the Supreme Spirit, God or Sri Rama, as we all call Him. It is a day of self-control and an occasion to raise our emotions, feelings and understanding to the level of the understanding of Valmiki or Tulasidas or Kamban, or of Sri Rama Himself. These contemplations are processes by which Consciousness, our own Self, establishes relationship with the powers of the cosmos. The observation of the birthday of Sri Rama is not a day of mere rejoicing or feasting, but a day of spiritual contemplation and self-restraint by which we become en rapport with the forces of the world. What was the power of Rama? Why was He so powerful and powerful? We say that He was incarnation of God. But why is God so powerful, while we are not? What is the difference? What makes these masters, heroes and incarnations centers of such energy, force and activity, while we are the contrary of it? The simple reason is that they are en rapport with the forces of the universe, while we are cut off from them. They are facing the light of the sun and so they drink the nectar of the rays of the sun. But we turn our backs to the sun and see only darkness. This is the difference between mortal men and divine incarnations who are immortal, eternal emblems moving on this earth.”

“So, in these contemplations on this auspicious day, as on similar occasions, we should recharge the cells of our personality by introducing a new light of divinity into ourselves. Let not the day pass in waste, in idle talk or merely hearing a few words about the Ramayana from someone. These celebrations are only indications for us, pointers to us, to help us raise ourselves up to a state higher than we were yesterday. Let us imbibe the grace of Masters by exerting in our spiritual quest and contemplating on the divine attributes of Lord Rama.”
In this column, Swami Sivananda answers many of the questions and problems of the spiritual seekers during the course of their sadhana or spiritual practice. Doubts about vedanta and general spiritual life are also cleared. This column will benefit the spiritual aspirants and guide them in the right path towards the goal of Self-realisation.

Q1: May I enquire how the power of concentration increases?
A: Concentration increases by curtailing your wants and desires, by observing Mouna (Silence) for two hours daily, by remaining in seclusion in a quiet room for one or two hours daily, by practicing Pranayam, by prayer, by increasing the number of sittings in meditation in the evening and at night, and by introspection.

Q2: It takes a long time to remove Mala (impurity) and Vikshepa (vacillation) of the mind. What to do?
A: If you want to become a Master of Arts, it takes a large number of years. You will have to pass through the Matriculation, Intermediate and B.A. courses and then take up the M.A course. Even so, you will have to plod on and persevere for many years to remove the impurities and vacillations of the mind. How patiently does the fisherman wait with concentrated gaze to catch a single fish! When such is the case for a trifling thing, what to speak of attaining Brahma-Jnana or the Knowledge of Self? It is like walking along the blade of a sharp razor.

Q3: Which is better? To lead a family life or to become a recluse?
A: You cannot renounce the world all at once. The world is a vast university. Nature is the best teacher. In the world you can develop virtues like mercy, tolerance, etc. You cannot develop them if you remain in a cave. The world is the best teacher. Gradually, when you have evolved, you can renounce. Guru Nanak remained in the world with two or three children. There is nothing wrong in the world. Prayer will remove all obstacles.

Q4: When the grace of Guru and God is there, why is the mind still not controlled?
A: There must be Purushartha or Self-effort also. Only when you exert, the grace will come. A professor will not answer the questions for you and make you pass. The Gita says “Uddharet Atmanaamam“. One should raise oneself. Grace only helps one to raise oneself. Everybody should work out his own salvation. You may ask, “What is grace then?”. If an aspirant gets letters from his preceptor, clearing his doubts, that is grace. If an aspirant goes to Rishikesh, takes Ganges bath and hears the spiritual discourses, that is grace. Many people are thirsting, even Crows (those who possess crores of rupees), to come here and bathe in the Ganges, but all do not get a chance of coming and having their wish fulfilled. If good books are available for Svadyaya (Spiritual Study), it is grace. If one enjoys good health for doing Sadhana, that is grace. If God so wishes, He can give liberation to the whole world in an instant; but He does not do so. Grace descends only when there is Self-effort.

Q5: Which is greater - Love or Wisdom? Bhakti or Jnana?
A: Keep your intellect in a box. Love and wisdom are one. Bhakti and Jnana are one. Love leads to Wisdom. The one helps the other. People read books and start arguments - Is this great? Or is that great? It is all foolishness. God is both Love and Wisdom. One should not waste his time in these useless arguments.

Q6: Can prayers cure diseases when doctors fail? Is it true that many things are wrought by prayers than the world could dream of?
A: Doctors and medicines are only instruments in the hands of God. Unless God wills, none can cure or get cured. Man should do his best, with initiative, enterprise and perseverance, but depend on God's grace for everything. To bear with suffering and accept it as a blessing of God in disguise is great wisdom. Prayer invokes the inner potentialities of the individual, which flow only from God, and they can certainly work miracles.

Q7: Sometimes I hush up things in my mind. I get men tal torments thereby. What shall I do to get rid of this habit?
A: You must be frank and as simple as a child. Then only you will get the divine light. You will grow spiritually. Even if it is a horrible crime, you must admit it before a Guru. Then only you will get his sympathy and protection. By admitting your faults before others, you remove the effects of bad actions. It serves as Prapanyak or expiatory action.

Source: “May I Answer That” by Swami Sivananda
Western and Indian Psychology – A Comparative Study

Swami Sivananda

Each of the senses in man (Indriyas) executes only one function. Eyes can only see; ears can only hear; tongue can only taste; skin can only touch; nose can only smell. But the mind can see, hear, taste, touch and smell. All the sense-faculties are blended in the mind. You can see and hear directly though the mind by Yogic practice (clairvoyance and clairaudience). This blows out the western psychological theory of perception. Mind and Indriyas are related this way; the Indriyas are a prolongation of the mind. Mind is a mass of Indriyas. Mind is a consolidated Indriya. Indriya is mind in manifestation. Indriya represents backwaters. The desire in the mind to eat has manifested as tongue, teeth and stomach. If you can control the senses, you can control the senses. If you have controlled the senses, you have already controlled the mind.

According to Western medical science, light vibrations from outside strike the retina and inverted image is formed there. These vibrations are carried through optic tract and optic thalamus to the center of vision in the occipital lobe of the brain in the back part of the head. There, a positive image is formed. Only then does one see the object in front of one. The Vedantic theory of perception is that the mind comes out through the eye and assumes the shape of the object outside. It is only the individual mind that sees the objects outside. If you see the same objects through a telescope, they appear different. If you can see with the mind directly, you will have a different vision altogether. Hiranyakarsha or Karya Brahman has a different vision. He sees everything as a vibration or movement within himself as his own Samkalpa (Will), just as you can imagine within your own mind that a big war is going on and many people are dying on either side. You withdraw the imagination at will.

The Western psychologists’ exposition of dream-psychology, though having much to its credit in the shape of research and some valuable information, yet leaves much unexplained. It lacks much that can be supplied only from theories of the East. They can only be explained by thoughtful inferences from the theories of rebirth, the Law of Karma, the operation of external factors like the Akasic records and the occult factors like thought-transference and action of astral entities like pretas of deceased persons. Only a sincere attempt to make a deep study into the working of these factors can form a full and more adequate exposition of the mysterious subject of dream. To the Yogi who has successfully transcended the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep, the knowledge of all these comes perfectly. To the Jnani, no doubt with intuitive perception, the mystery of dreams becomes perfectly solved.

That the Western dream theory is sex-ridden is due to the fact that they start with a wrong notion of what in reality constitutes Man. To them, man is mainly a physical creature endowed with a mind and possessed of a soul. This is just the contrary of the Oriental view that man in reality is Spirit or Atman, expressing himself through the medium of a mind, which has the physical body as its counterpart to function upon the gross external plane. Thus, we see, to the India mind, the true Self of man is entirely devoid of sex. It is the body that suffers under the tyranny of a gender. This body is the least part of man as defined by the philosophical mind of the East. Sex is therefore just but one aspect – though a dominant one perhaps – of the individual soul that goes about as Man upon this earthly stage.

Psychologists say that the functions of organs are controlled by the nerves and nervous system. They also say that the organs, etc., are controlled by mind. Devotees say that the organs are controlled by presiding deities. Vedantins say that the organs are controlled by the Inner Ruler or Antaryamin. The nerves, the mind and the senses and the gods derive this power and light from the Inner Ruler who is the ultimate source for everything. This is the truth. If the mind is pure and free from distractions, you will behold the Supreme Self (Atman) within and everywhere. Know That – The Impeller of actions.

There are some psychologists and philosophers who do believe that mind is a secretion of the brain. What a wild, absurd conviction! They have come to admit the presence of the subconscious mind, however, the “Dual-Mind theory” which is known to the immortal sages from time immemorial. Mind is not self-luminous like the Self-effulgent Atman or the supreme Spirit. It shines in borrowed feathers.

Just as a piece of iron moves in the immediate presence of magnet, even so this insentient mind moves and works in the presence of the Inner Ruler. This point has not been properly understood by the Western psychologists, rationalists, free thinkers, economists, socialists and others. Hence, they are always restless and are groping in total darkness. The vibrations of psychic or subtle Prana manufacture thoughts in the mind. The mind is insentient (Jada) but it appears as Chaitanya (Chaitanyavat) by borrowing the light from the Adishishtha (source) – Atman – just as water exposed to the sun borrows the heat from the sun. Because there is reflection of intelligence in the mind from the background, the source or womb for this mind, this insentient mind appears as intelligent. This is the real truth. This is the bold genuine philosophy of the Hindu sages of yore.

Source: “Conquest of Mind” by Swami Sivananda
Speaking on the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna Puja, Swamiji summarized the message of Sri Ramakrishna to mankind. The two main parts of his message were: (1) Purpose of human life is to realize the divinity that is present in us, and (2) All religious paths lead to the same goal which is realization of that divinity. Swamiji further gave the gist of “Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna” in the form of the following eight important instructions given by Sri Ramakrishna especially to his Grihastha (householder) disciples.

1. Repeat God’s Name always with devotion. In Kali yuga this alone is sufficient. “Harer Nameve Kevalam”
2. Chant or Sing the glory of the Guru or God. There have been many devotees and saints who gave us devotional songs, hymns and stotras in various languages. Hymns like the Purusha Sukta appear in the Vedas; numerous stotras appear in the Puranas, Ramanuja and Mahabharata; and devotees like Tulasi Das, Sur Das, Purandara Das, Rama Das, Tyagaraja have composed melodious devotional songs.
3. Seek holy company. Holy company influences us in positive ways. It lifts us up, clarifies our thoughts and shows us the way. Likewise avoid evil company at all costs as it influences negatively. Narada says in his Bhakti Sutras, “Dussanga Sarvadeva Tyajyah”
4. Pray in solitude or Ekanta. Solitude is a protection against evil or unhelpful effects of environment. These could be things like radio, newspaper, bad thoughts, etc. A sapling when small must be protected with a fence. Similarly in the beginning stages of Sadhana we must protect ourselves through solitude. Gita also recommends solitude through “Ekoaki yata chittatma”.
5. Meditate on God, either in His Saguna aspect or His Nirguna aspect. Meditation is the only way to communicate with the divine within us.
6. Practice Viveka or Discrimination. Read the “Viveka Chudamani”, the crest jewel of discrimination to develop the ability to distinguish between permanent, eternal, unchanging Atman and the temporary, limited, finite and undesirable world.
7. Do all duties but keep the mind on God. Perform duties as worship or service and dedicate them to God.
8. Develop strong yearning for God. Human life is a very precious gift; do not let it go in waste.

Obstacles in Spiritual Life

In Patanjali Yoga Sutras, there are two sutras that list the obstacles in spiritual life. The obstacles according to Patanjali are -

1. Vyadhi – Disease: Disease, be it physical or mental, poses a big problem in spiritual endeavour.
2. Sthyaanaam – Mental Laziness: Not doing something that is required due to lack of motivation. For continued motivation have Satsanga with holy people who are advanced in the spiritual path or study biographies of great saints.
3. Samshayam – Doubt: Trace of doubt persists for a very long time until we realize God in everything as it needs direct experience of Truth and not others’ experience.
4. Pramaadaah – Lack of enthusiasm, or failure to do what is needed or doing some prohibited action. Not exerting enough. The greatest error we do almost all the time is to identify ourselves with the body and mind. Sanat kumara explains the nature of Death in Mahabharata. He says that Death is not the end of the physical body, but it is forgetfulness of the divine present in us.
5. Adayanam – Lethargy or postponement of tasks
6. Avirathi – Clinging to sense enjoysments; wanting to have sensory pleasures; outwardness of mind and indriyas.
7. Bhranti Darshanah - False perception. Forming quick impression and acting according to that impression. Most of the time it would not be accurate but based on pre-conceived notions.
8. Alabdha Bhumikatvam – Not being able to attain concentration. This is due to wandering of the mind when we sit for meditation or while doing some action. The remedy for this is Abhyasa (repeated practice) and Vairagya (enquiry into why mind is not focused). For Olympics, athletes practise for many hours daily; like them spiritual seekers must practice daily. We must tell ourselves - “I have accustomed this mind to go out to things freely without control. Now I will not allow it to go as they are worthless”.
9. Anavasthitatvam – Not being able to maintain concentration. Meditation is like “walking the dog” - while walking along a sidewalk, the dog must walk in front of you and you follow it with a leash. After every few steps the dog goes left or right and you bring it back on the path by giving a tug on the leash. You don’t beat it up for going here and there. Treat the mind also like that during meditation. Gita says, “Yato Yato Nischarati Manah, Chanchalam Asthirim, Tatstato Niyamayi Todatmanyeva vasham naveth” – wherever the mind goes due to its nature of fickleness, bring it back from there and make it rest in the Self.
10. Dukkham – Grief. We must remember that destiny is more powerful and recover quickly from spells of grief and move on.
11. Durmanasam – Mental Distress - feelings of tension, worry, stress, anger and conflict which cannot be fully avoided but must be properly managed.
12. Angabhejayaathvam – Tremor of the body and Shwaasa-Prashwaasa – Irregular breathing : These are possible during practice of advanced pranayama. Guidance of a teacher is important for advanced yogic practices.
Raja Bhartruhari is a well-known poet, philosopher and Jnani who lived many centuries ago in India. Though belonging to the royal family and a brother of Raja Vikramaditya, Bhartruhari was endowed with great dispassion and he took to the renounced way of life. He composed several beautiful poems and Satakams (sets of 100 poems). Vairagya Satakam is a compilation of 100 poems that convey inspiring messages on dispassion. A few poems from this Satakam are presented below.

Vairagya Satakam of Bhartruhari

Source: “Vairagya Satakam” by Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashrama
Divine Celebrity for the month’s issue is Swami Tadatmananda Saraswati, founder of Arsha Bodha Center in New Jersey, USA. A dynamic teacher engaged in dissemination of Spiritual Knowledge, Swamiji inspires and encourages one and all in the pursuit of life’s ultimate goal, which is Self-Realization. Swamiji has visited Milwaukee several times on the request of Spiritual Enrichment Program (SEP) and enlightened us with his interesting talks, anecdotes and examples. His teachings have helped people like us in applying spiritual principles in our daily lives. We are very indebted to this great teacher and we present to you his life and teachings briefly in the words of his disciple, Dr Anil Aggarwal, Milwaukee.

An exclusive session for children is going on with Swami Tadatmananda, when one kid shyly raises his hand to ask a question, “Swamiji, I go to a Hindu Temple and I see so many Gods with many names, Why do they have so many names?” Swamiji smilingly replies, “What do you call your mother?”. Quick came the reply, “Mom”. “What does your father call her?”. “Honey”. “Okay, now tell me, what does the newspaper man call her?”. “Mrs Gupta”. “Are these different names belonging to someone different than your mom?”. The kid moved his head for a “No”. “So, the same person whom you address as ‘Mom’ is different to different people. But she is one. Same way, God is one and we call him with different names”, answered Swamiji. The kid at once understood. This is Swami Tadatmananda, who transforms spiritual sessions for children, adolescents, adults into simple, interesting and educative lessons.

Swami Tadatmanandaji is a Hindu monk and resident teacher at Arsha Bodha Center, in Somerset, New Jersey. He is a disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Swamiji was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He grew up as catholic. After completing his education he had a successful carrier as a software consultant in California in seventies and eighties. Difficult personal situations changed the course of his life and he came in contact with Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He gave up his successful consulting business and was ordained into monastic order in 1993. He traveled extensively to the holy places in India and penned down his autobiographical book, “The Roar of Ganges”. In 2000, he came to USA and established Arsha Bodha Center in New Jersey, which is dedicated to the traditional teaching of Vedanta, Bhagavad Gita, Meditation, Chanting, Sanskrit and other spiritual practices.

How is Swamiji different from every other teacher of Spirituality? It is his wonderful ability to explain complex concepts so they become easy to understand even for beginners with minimal knowledge or background in Vedanta. Swamiji has a unique ability to unfold the practical aspects of the lofty Vedantic Scriptural teachings in day to day life situations. Swamiji has explained how difficult decisions such as divorce, abortion can be understood in context of our scriptural teachings. His favorite question is: “What can these teachings do for me today?”. Our scriptures were written thousands of years ago and in Sanskrit, language of ancient India. Swamiji, a Sanskrit scholar, not only translates the scriptures into modern English but also explains how the various statements need to be interpreted in current context. Swamiji’s favorite saying is, “Don’t believe what I say. You need to find it out yourself”. Swamiji is also a great singer, guitar player and pianist.

His ability to interact and relate to children of all ages also sets him apart. He has been a role model for hundreds of his disciples. His life exhibits the principles that he teaches. His personal commitment to non injury extends to not wearing or using any thing made out of leather. He has been able to explain our religion Hinduism to first generation Indian children and young adults alike so that they are proud of their heritage and not afraid of exclaiming that they are Hindus.

I am writing for all his disciples that we are so blessed to have a guru like him.

“Our search for God will never be successful as long as we keep looking in all the wrong places. But when we seek within ourselves, using the teachings of the ancient rishis to guide us, then the Lord’s already existent presence as the divine nature within us all can indeed be discovered, just as the rishis had discovered so long ago.”

-Swami Tadatmananda

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Dear all, meet our Appu, a wonderful Story-Teller. He has all the stories that you want to hear. But before that, we want to tell you about Appu, a little about his childhood and his adventures. Appu has kindly agreed to be on our contributing team and from next issue, you are promised loads of fun!

In the wild thick forests of Hidumbi, many many years ago, on a day when the sky was reverberating with sounds of thunder and pierced with swords of lightning, a baby elephant was born to a much awaiting elephant couple under the thatched palm-leaf roof of their modest hut. The Father Elephant prayed to the Gods of the Forest, the Sky, the Lightning and the Earth to protect their newborn from any harm, and promised that if they withdrew their wrath, he would name the baby after them. Soon the Gods cleared off from the skies, and the baby was named after them, “Applaxia Tico Meke Buulamba”, which, of course, was the longest and most difficult name in Hidumbi’s history.

Due to such a name, the baby elephant had to face some difficulties, especially in his class, when Mr. Burp, The Teacher, would call out for attendance. Well, Mr. Burp would always struggle to utter this particular name for a long 15-minutes and finally ended giving up. Some bullies in the class made fun of the baby elephant initially. His little friends - the birds, the monkeys, the squirrels and many others - held a conference to solve this tongue-twisting problem. It was then that, Monk, the Little Monkey, which had also been a close friend of the baby elephant since then, suggested the short name “Appu”. And that settled it.

Appu grew to be a diligent and intelligent student of Art, Literature, Linguistics, Algebra, Music, Medicine and Geography. Though always in the top of his class, he always helped those who were lagging behind, without any pride, and was much loved by one and all. He soon became a bright, young, handsome elephant, with love, kindness and joy brimming in his heart. Appu was the friend and confidante of one and all, and he treated all as his own. His parents were proud of him, and wished that Appu choose a suitable partner, settle with a large family and fend for them.

But Appu’s plans were different. He did not want to be entangled in these relationships. He did not care much for fame, wealth, power and position. His thirst for knowledge and wisdom was insatiable. Appu wanted to explore the world and life, and find the Truth that binds Life to the Universe. A very big desire indeed! He wanted to meet and get trained under The Ancient Beings and The Golden Ones, who resided in the Kesi forests surrounding the snow-capped mountains in the far Himalayas, and who imparted the secrets of the Kingly Science.

Thus, Appu set out from home one fine day, many many years ago, when he was still in his teens. His pursuit had taken him to many places laden with stories of greed, hope, love, faith and grief. He assimilated all the wisdom these stories had taught him. His adventures and exploits in his journey cannot be fit in a small book. Finally he reached Himalayas – The Abode Of Snow, and met The Golden One. Appu spent many years with The Golden One as his companion and student, serving selflessly and tirelessly his Teacher and all the Forest Dwellers – from nursing the small ant that fell in the river to the mighty Lion that bared his teeth at Appu. He served all and loved all. After acquiring the secrets of the Kingly Science, The Golden One asked Appu to spread the Tales of Wisdom and help all to live better and wiser.
Then, Appu became the Story-Teller of the Ancient and Wise tales, enchanting everyone with stories that he learnt from his experiences, from the world and The Golden One. He roamed many narrow, dangerous paths deep in the heart of the woods, singing the stories to the birds, chipmunks, snakes, lions, and tigers. They stood and watched and listened to him in wonder and adoration. Appu’s whole being now radiated love. He had nothing but Love to give others, while others gave him bananas and sugar-canes.

Finally, The Golden One, through his mystic powers, directed Appu to the wonder-filled and most beautiful Forest Kadamba, near the banks of River Sajala. It is here that Appu decided to settle down and built a small but charming thatched coconut and palm leaved hut. His kindness has attracted Kadamba Dwellers, and all flocked to him to hear his words of wisdom and his interesting tales. The kid-folk loved him with all their hearts. Soon, it seemed as though Appu lived in Forest Kadamba all his life!

Raja, The Lion Emperor of Kadamba, would seek the counsel and guidance of Appu in the affairs concerning state governance frequently. Qutie, the Little Ant consulted Appu for company and for a kind word to encourage its hard work. The Lion Emperor conferred upon Appu, the honorary title of “Appu, The Wise”. But Appu, in all his humility, spoke of himself as “just Appu” and requested everyone to call him as usual without any suffixes and prefixes. Appu’s Hut is now the choicest place for all the kids, who would gather around Appu after their school and supper, and listen to his stories, and sometimes sleep in the Tree House Appu had built for them on Mr Tarpole – The Tree abetting Appu’s Hut.


With all his extensive knowledge of Medicine, Appu also prepares medicinal potions from herbs and treats the ailments of the Forest Folk. In his spare time, he is engaged in penning down his memoirs, writing a book on the Ancient Wisdom, and compiling the Tales of the Universe, and of course daily doing his Yoga and Meditation.

Appu has come out of his solitude with Spring coming in, and he has agreed to entertain us with his tales from the next issue. Let us keep our eyes and ears open for the coming month!

**DID YOU KNOW ?**

- Elephants are the largest land animals alive today, and are symbols of Majesty, Grace, Power and Peace.
- Appu’s ancestor was rescued by Lord Vishnu when he was in the clutches of a crocodile.
- According to folk-lore, Elephants used to have wings like birds and they used to roam freely in the sky, until they were cursed by a sage.
- A baby elephant is carried by the mom elephant in her womb for 22 months before giving birth.
Across:

6. The great devotee of Lord Vishnu who was protected by the Lord as Narasimha avatar (8)
8. Vital breath in living beings (Sanskrit term) (5)
9. In the Chariot metaphor of Katha Upanishad, the horses symbolise these (English term) (6)
10. The fourth Purushartha of man (6)
11. The eighth limb of Patanjali’s Eight-limbed Yoga (7)
12. Spiritual preceptor or guide (4)
14. The “Prasthana Trayam” (Scriptural Trinity) includes Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and _______ (6,6)
17. The sacred pilgrimage tour called “CharDham” includes BadriNath, KedarNath, Gangotri and which fourth place? (9)
21. The Sankhya philosophy was propounded by this great sage (6)
22. The founder and first Guru of the Sikh religion (6,5)
26. The abode of Lord Shiva (6)
27. The first element of Yama from Patanjali Yoga Sutras (Sanskrit term) (6)
28. The set of the 4 yugas together is termed as this (Sanskrit term) (8)
29. The Ashram established by Papa Ramdas is known as this (11)

Down:

1. One of the four Maha Vakyas of the Upanishads (Sanskrit term) (5)
2. Which great sage’s Jayanti (birthday) is celebrated as Guru Purnima? (5)
3. Defined as the Union of the Jiva (individual soul) with Ishwara (God), one of the six systems of philosophy (4)
4. Beautiful lake situated in Tibet that is a holy place of pilgrimage (11)
5. Sacred place in South India made up of seven hills; abode of Lord Venkateswara (8)
7. The Prayaga of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers is near this modern day city (9)
13. Foremost devotee of Lord Rama and the minister of King Sugriva (7)
15. The great Italian Saint Francis hailed from this place (6)
16. Sit at the feet of the teacher for spiritual instructions (Sanskrit term) (9)
18. The great saint of North India who composed the famous Ramayana in Avadhi dialect (9)
19. The I-Principle (3)
20. The concluding “knowledge” portion of the Vedas (7)
23. The place of origin of the sacred river Ganga (8)
24. This great devotee of Lord Krishna composed several melodious devotional bhajans (She was a Rajput princess) (7)
25. Younger brother and Minister of King Dhritarashtra (6)

Chidananda Rupa Sivoham!

A sadhu came and stood before Swamiji. He was going on repeating “Sivoham, Sivoham (I am Siva)”. Whenever he repeated Sivoham, Swamiji said “Daasoham (I am your servant)”. But the sadhu kept on repeating “Sivoham, Sivoham”.

Swamiji called the person Satyajnanam and said “Oji, take off the Kamandalu (a small pot which wandering monks carry for food and water) from that sadhu.”

Sri Satyajnanam approached him. The sadhu immediately said holding the Kamandalu with a firm grip, “Maharaj ! This Kamandalu is my life and my only possession. I cannot part with it !”

“See, the true color of Sivoham has come out now. Oji, don’t say Sivoham say ‘Kamandaloham’ (I am a pot)”, Swamiji said smilingly. All burst into laughter.

Answers in Next Issue.
WINNER gets a Prize ! Email us with Complete Answers
You may need to add “A” at the end of some words, like “Sankar” needs to be written as “Sankara”

Source: Sivananda Day-To-Day
by Swami Santananda
Sirhasana or Headstand

Sirhasana in Sanskrit means “head-pose” (sirsh+asana) and is called “Headstand” in normal terminology. This asana is considered a King among all asanas and is very beneficial for both the body and mind. In this pose, the normal effect of gravity is reversed by standing on the head and placing our feet on an invisible upper plane. The weight of the body is borne on the elbows and hand muscles by forming a tripod with interlocked fingers and placing the head in the center. By inverting our body and standing on the head, rich supply of fresh oxygen is brought to the head thereby recharging the brain-cells. The inverted pose also helps deep breathing which will help in emptying the lungs and filling them with fresh air which is healthy to the system. Everyone, ranging from an 8-year old child to an elderly person can safely practice this asana. In the beginning support of a wall can be used for placing the legs and pose can be held for 1-2 minutes. Slowly a 3-minute retaining of the pose should be cultivated. Gradually the practitioner should train himself to stand on his head without any external support. You can start with some strengthening exercises before doing this asana. As in all other asanas of Hatha Yoga, getting in and out of this asana should be gradual and should not be accompanied by sudden movements. Mastering this asana requires regular practice. This asana benefits both the physical and spiritual constitution.

1. Rest your weight on your forerarms. Place hands infront and interlock the fingers.

2. Place the back of your head in your clasped hands and top of your head on the floor. Hands and elbows form a tripod to hold firmly your inverted body.

3. Without bending the knees, walk your feet as close to your head as possible. Pull your hips so that your neck is in line with the spine.

4. Bend your knees into your chest and lift your feet off the floor pulling your hips backward. Pause and do not immediately attempt to raise your knees higher.

5. Slowly straighten your legs. See that your weight is on your forearms and not on your head. Slowly regulate your breathing.

6. Come out of the pose by reversing the steps and relax in a child’s pose for atleast six deep breaths after this asana.

What is on your plate this Spring?

Brahmacharya or Celibacy is important and highly beneficial for spiritual aspirants, men and women equally. Being celibate will substantially decrease the dissipation of mental energy rays and facilitates easy flow of meditation, one-pointedness and a sattvic, calm, sublime and divine nature. To a good extent, the food we eat determines the tendencies of Tamas (Inertia), Rajas (Passion) and Sattva (Peace) in us. We are subjected to the play of these three Gunaas through external factors like food, association, environment and internal ones like tendencies, personality type etc. While whimful indulgence in sensual pleasures is due to the dominance of Tamas and Rajas, a balanced life results from Sattva which is The Yogic Way of Living, and can be achieved in part by following a celibate life.

In this section, we will see some of the foods which will help us or harm us in following Celibacy so we can choose a healthy set of alternatives for the harmful ones.

FOODS THAT HELP CELIBACY:

- Havisya (rice boiled with milk, sugar and ghee)
- Wheat, Barley, Ragi, whole brown rice
- Moong dal, Toor Dal
- Milk, clarified butter, Honey (little each day)
- Potatoes and other tubers
- Plantains, tender coconut water
- Soaked and blanched almonds
- Dates, Figs, and other dry fruits
- Dried Ginger, arrowroot
- Sago, Fresh fruits and Sprouts

FOODS THAT HARM CELIBACY:

- Meat, fish, eggs
- Tobacco, liquor, excess soda drinks
- Stale food
- Overripe fruits
- Over use of chillies, salt and tamarind
- Cigarettes and Wine
- Onions & Garlic
- Spicy Masala

SOME TIPS:

- Fasting once in two weeks and living on fruits and milk that day does a wonderful cleaning of the system. But avoid excessive fasting as it produces weakness and irritates the system.
- Do not break the fast with heavy meal. Consume a light breakfast like Upma or Idli.
- Do not overeat. Eat only when you are hungry. Overeating at night is a big obstacle for Spiritual practice.
- When thoughts of lust and passion torment, go for a refreshing long walk, do Pranayam and head-stand.
- Pray before eating that the food may do good to the body and the mind and entertain sublime thoughts while eating, not worry, anger and impatience.

Reference:
Sivananda companion to Yoga
Role of Diet in Sex Control by Swami Sivananda
http://www.yoga-made-ez.com
STORIES FROM THE YOGA VASISHTHA by Swami Sivananda

Yoga Vasishtha is one of the ancient scriptures of India that deals with the supreme knowledge of the Self or Atman. It is a conversation between Sage Vasishtha and Lord Rama as documented by Sage Valmiki. The highest knowledge of Vedanta is taught by Vasishtha to his esteemed disciple Sri Rama. This text ranks foremost in the texts on Vedanta and consists of 6 prakaranas or sections, each dealing with a different aspect of the Truth. A doctrine is enunciated and interesting stories are narrated to explain it.

In the volume “Stories from the Yoga Vasishtha”, Sri Swami Sivananda in his inimitable style presents the gist of this great scripture in a very easy-to-understand manner while retaining all the lofty doctrines from the original text. Modern spiritual seekers do not have the ability or time to read and benefit from the original work and often times such texts go un-utilized. A study of this 150-page book by Sri Swami Sivananda yields all the benefits of studying the original text itself and needless to say is highly recommended.

This book had a profound impact on me for a long time. The unique concepts presented kept coming back to mind thus generating sublime thoughts. It also created in me a feeling of awe at the wisdom and intellectual grandeur of the Indian sages. Works like Yoga Vasishtha must be carefully preserved and made accessible to the society at large. Sri Swami Sivananda’s “Stories from the Yoga Vasishtha” serves this purpose extremely well.

MANAS BHAKTI SUTRAM by Swami Tejomayananda

The sacred story of Ramayana written by Goswami Tulasidas hardly needs an introduction as it is one of the most popular scriptures of India. Sri Ram Charit Manas or Tulasi Ramayan is a melodious, devotional rendition of the story of Lord Rama and a sincere study of this text will definitely develop devotion in the heart of the student towards the lotus feet of the Lord. This is a practical experience of countless people. Tulasi Ramayan is also unique in that it contains the greatest philosophical truths or Jnana as well as profound descriptions of devotion or Bhakti.

In “Manasa Bhakti Sutram” Sri Swami Tejomayananda has culled out the characteristics of Bhakti as expounded in the Tulasi Ramayan and presented them as short aphorisms or Sutras. Manasa Bhakti Sutras are like Narada Bhakti Sutras, but with the source of the aphorisms being Sri Ram Charit Manas. Written in simple Sanskrit, the Manas Bhakti Sutras give a clear overview of the most important and relevant points concerning devotion starting from the definition of Bhakti, to the means of cultivating Bhakti and the do’s and don’ts along the way.

The set of 5 audio CDs contain discourses given by Sri Swami Tejomayananda himself on this excellent composition. As with all discourses of Sri Swamiji, these talks keep the listener glued with rapt attention to the subject matter. Upon listening to these talks, one is sure to emerge equipped with the essentials of devotion and ready to apply them in day to day sadhana. Please do acquire these CDs from Chinmaya Mission centers.

RAM BHajan Kar MAN by Kabir Das

O Mind, sing the glory of Ram!
Ram dwells in all, and in Ram dwell all,
He is the Master of Tulasi and Nanak’s Lord!
He is Ram, He is Rahim; He rules the hearts of all,
So says Kabir, and true is his word!

We are in Him and He is in us. So are we bound, so is our bond. Tulasi called Him Ram, Nanak called Him his Lord. He responded to both. Those who perceived His glorious Form called Him Ram. Those who identified His Formless glory, called Him Rahim. He is the One who blessed both. Jewels are many, but gold is one; Names are many, yet God is One. Sing of Him, O mind! Ram Bhajan Kar man!
LEARNING TO BE!

Anil Kumar, Chennai

I attended the Art of Living basic course in 2002, but, for various reasons, had not been able to attend the advanced course. When I heard that an advanced course was scheduled for December 2007 and that Sri Sri Ravishankar was expected to come on the last day and spend some time with the participants, I decided to register. The venue for this 4-day course was Kerala Ashram, in Trivandrum, India. I turned up in the morning on the first day and saw that there were more than 100 participants. However, only a third of them were doing the course for the first time, like me. The rest were repeating the course. There were people who had already done the course once, twice, thrice and so on. Some of them had done more than ten courses. There was a Polish woman who had stopped counting after her 15th course!

Towards the end of the first day, silence was enforced. The silence was to be observed for the next 3 days. However participants were encouraged to write down their questions and doubts on a slip, and hand it over to the teacher who would answer them during the evening sessions. The teacher who conducted the course was Joshyji, who had come over from the Bangalore Ashram for this purpose. During the course we were told that we should not share with others the details of the various meditations that were conducted there, and so I’m afraid I’ll have to pass on that.

The question and answer sessions were very interesting. Once Joshyji was asked about his spiritual background and his life in the Bangalore ashram. Joshyji told us how he had come from an orthodox Christian family, then turned to communism, and finally had been found by Sri Sri Ravishankar. He also described, in absorbing detail, how Sri Sri, without seeming to do so, had cured Joshyji’s mother of a terminal illness.

On the last day, the participants felt mounting excitement at the thought of Sri Sri’s visit. Joshyji laughingly remarked that usually on the last day of the course people are sad that the course is ending, but here, in this course, the people were happiest on the last day……because Sri Sri was coming! This was the first time I was seeing Sri Sri at close quarters. His presence has a very soothing and strengthening effect on the mind. He seemed slightly darker than I'd expected. As he passed near me, I bent down and touched his feet. He took his seat on the stage and asked us about the course, and whether we liked it. Then he jokingly asked, “Am I doing my work properly?” A resounding “Yes!” rose from all parts of the room. Somebody in the crowd shouted, “Gurujii, we love you!” Sri Sri smiled and asked, “Really?” and the crowd burst into laughter. From then on, the evening was filled with laughter, wisdom, bhajans, and lots and lots of joy.

DIVINE AFFECTION

Dr GSR Somayaji, Milwaukee

Tirupati Sri Venkateswaraswamy is our family deity. I worked in State Tourism as a senior officer during which time I had the privilege of not only having many a free direct darshan but also helped several officials and dignitaries to enjoy the bliss. Once I went to Tirupathi along with my wife on a personal visit. We could as well go straight for darshan by using my official status and influence but we decided to go in the normal queue line because I had been feeling guilty all along to have those privileged darshans.

Since it was slightly drizzling, we both sat for a while on the stairs opposite to temple outside. A woman-sweeper came cleaning the stairs and we stood to enable her to do her job. She looked at me as if she has recognized and wondered whether I was not that ‘big-officer’ who has appointed her son as watchman in the tourist guesthouse at Tirupathi. I told her that I don’t recollect because I do appointments throughout the State but she said that she has seen me there on that day. While expressing her gratitude she formally enquired as to why we were waiting there. On knowing our desire to have darshan, she not only offered her help but also pressurized us to come along with her promising direct darshan of the Lord. Initially I hesitated to take the help of a ‘sweeper’ because if I wanted I could meet my influential friend then. She persisted that in view of the likely heavy rain, we can have quick darshan and she had made a way for us immediately. We simply followed her without thinking much. She was going ahead very fast passing through gate after gate as if she owns the temple having none to stop much less even to ask about us. We were there in the sanctum sanctorum within no time. We enjoyed the divine presence of the Lord and begged for pardon for breaking our vow to come in the queue.

We came out and searched for the lady for an hour to thank her and give some tip. Our enquiry revealed that no sweeper can come like that and the security staff is very strict in such matters. None believed our real story.

Besides becoming overwhelmed with joy for the divine grace of the Lord, I had become very curious to verify whether she is really the mother of that so-called watchman whom I might have appointed. Next morning, I got down at Tirupathi Guesthouse and called the watchmen. Only one watchman came who was 50 years old and who was appointed 25 years back. The manager said that none was appointed in the guesthouse in the past ten years even temporarily on daily-wage basis! I once again prayed to the Lord for His Leela and returned home.
Likhita Japa constitutes an important part of spiritual sadhana. The groove of our Mantra is etched in more deeply in our minds with repetition and concentration. Rama Koti is a very widely used book for writing Likhita Japa. Each month in this section, we will provide a design of Rama Koti, which you can fill with the Lord’s name of your choice. Interesting designs to sustain interest in our Japa along with an inspiring caption will be given in this box below. All you need to do is to complete your Likhita Japa, tear it along the dashed lines and keep it in your Rama Koti record. ENJOY!

“Write down daily in a notebook your Ishta Mantra or Guru Mantra for half an hour. When you write the Mantra, observe Mouna or Silence. Write the Mantra clearly in ink. On sundays and holidays, write this for one hour. This is Likhita Japa. It brings about purity of heart, concentration of Mind, control of Asana, control of Senses and power of endurance.”

-Swami Sivananda

Rāma

The Beauty in the Flower,
Softness in its Petal,
Hue in its Core!
UNIVERSAL PRAYER

O Adorable Lord of Mercy and Love!
Salutations and Prostrations Unto Thee
Thou Art Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient
Thou Art Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss)
Thou Art the Indweller of All Beings!

Grant us an understanding heart,
Equal vision, balanced mind,
Faith, Devotion and Wisdom
Grant us Inner Spiritual strength,
To resist temptations and to control the mind
Free us from egoism, lust, greed, anger, jealousy and hatred
Fill our hearts with Divine Virtues!

Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms
Let us ever remember Thee
Let us ever sing Thy glories
Let Thy Name be ever on our lips
Let us Abide in Thee forever and ever!

-Swami Sivananda

ॐ सवेर्षां स्वस्तिः भवन्तु
सवेर्षां शािन्ति भवन्तु
सवेर्षां पूण्ते भवन्तु
सवेर्षां सन्तः निरामयः
सवेर्षां भद्राणि पश्यन्तु
मा कथित् दुः: भाग्भवेत्

Prosperity be unto all, Perfect peace be unto all
Fullness be unto all, Auspiciousness be unto all
Happiness be unto all, Perfect health be unto all
May all see good in everyone, May all be free from suffering.

We would like to hear from you about our new E-Magazine, any tips, suggestions and feedback for improvement. Your contributions are very welcome to be published in this magazine. We will appreciate if you can send us your contributions no later than April 20th, 2008 for the second issue on May 6th, 2008. Please note our email ID below and let us know what articles you would like to contribute for the next month’s issue. If you want to subscribe to this monthly E-Magazine, please email us to the below ID. In the meanwhile, if you think anyone will benefit from this E-Magazine, please send it to them. We hope you enjoyed this issue. Our issue is also available online at: http://saranaagathi.wordpress.com. Thank you for your time!

Om Peace.
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