

॥ श्रीः ॥

Devi Māhātmyam
Apr 2020 Discourse Series
Part - 8

By

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDgxo9bAL0M>

Bhaskara Prakasha Ashram

॥śrī sadgurucaraṇāravindābhyāṃ namaḥ ॥

॥ श्रीः ॥



śrī vimarśānandanāthaṃ satyāmbāsahitaṃ gurum |

hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

śrī prakāśānandanāthaṃ vimarśāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |

hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

śrī rāmānanda nāthaṃ rāmāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |

hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

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Introduction

śrī gurubhyo namaḥ ||

śiva-śakti samārambhāṃ bhāsurānanda madhyamām |
asmat śrī nātha paryantāṃ vande guru paramparām ||

I am praying that each and every one of you enjoy all the paripūrṇa anugrahaṃ of the Guru on Guru Pūrṇima day. If a person has the anugrahaṃ (blessings) of the Guru, then there is nothing else that person requires. If a person has all the *sampat* but does not have the blessings of the Guru, then as he or she nears the goal post, they will not be able to reach it—they will slide and fall down. Guru Anugrahaṃ is the secret. That is why in all of our pūjās we always do a Guru Vandanaṃ.

Returning to the Devi Māhātmyam, we are in the the thirteenth chapter. In this chapter, we see the importance of the Guru. I would like to share an anecdote that is related to Guru's importance: About a year ago--I believe it was December 18th, 2019--an international conference on ŚrīVidyā took place near Bhopal in a place called Sansi. The Vice Chancellor there is a very good friend to Hari Prasād Swāmigaḷ, who happened to be a very good friend of mine as well.

Since he was invited to this conference, he told the organizers that they should extend an invitation to another person who was also a ŚrīVidyā upāsaka--he was referring to me. So the invitation was extended to me. However since this is an international conference happening in a university campus, they had already printed the brochures with [the names of] the speakers etc. The flight ticket was a last minute purchase for me. What would normally cost INR 3000 for a flight between Chennai to Bhopal was now going for INR 25,000. They extended the formalities to me. The Governor convened and opened the conference. The name of the Principal was similar to mine: His name was Yegnarathna Dīkṣitar. Since I had come to the conference, the organizers were able to find me a slot at 2:30 PM and they requested me to speak then. They asked me what I would like to speak about and I said I will talk about Devī Prabhāvam. Since it was an international conference, there were many speakers. Even Dr. Mythili Seetharaman was a speaker. The whole set up with a moderator and all the paraphernalia was all arranged at the conference. I asked them how much time I have and they said please talk for about 15 minutes. There were 6 speakers to go after me. For me, talking about Caṇḍī or about Devī is like eating a sweet. I don't really require preparation to talk about Caṇḍī. So specifically [within the vast topic of] Devī Prabhāvam, I started to talk about Caṇḍī.

Devī Māhātmyam - A Recap

In Devī Māhātmyam, there are 3 main characters: The Brahmaṛṣi Sumedhas, King Suratha and the merchant Samādhī. The story starts with the two of them seeking [refuge with] the Brahmaṛṣi and asking him for a solution for their own personal agony and pain. In Devī Bhāgavatam, they say, all of the good people seem to suffer. If a person has done plenty of wrong things, and if he suffers, then at least you can provide a justification for his

suffering. But then when a good person suffers, how do you explain that? Do good deeds bring in suffering and pain? Or do we say, “There are plenty of others who have suffered worse than you and in comparison your suffering is much less significant--so take your sufferings in stride”? [Do we have to resort to providing perspective in] this way in providing an answer to good people who are suffering? The R̥ṣi says: Ambā is filled with avyājakaruṇā -- To have compassion with no reason at all.

avyājakaruṇāmūrtayē namaḥ (śrī lalitā sahasranāmā, 992)

Our parents have a similar compassion towards us as their children. Gurus have the same compassion towards us. It is due to this compassion of Ambā that these 2 (King Suratha and merchant Samādhī) had a sorrow afflicting them. [The sorrow and suffering lead them to seek jñāna and then subsequently attain liberation or mokṣa].

amūrtiranaghōcintyō bhayakṛdbhayanāśanaḥ (viṣṇu sahasranāmā, Verse 89)

Like [the above description of Viṣṇu as both conferrer of fear and remover of fear], Ambā [as the Veiling Grace or tirodhāna śakti] gave the king and the merchant sorrow; and She is going to take that away from them as well. So let's come to the story. If I am given sorrow, then I need to make an effort to come out of that sorrow, because I am feeling the agony from the pain of suffering. If it is another person experiencing the pain and suffering, then one can be a [passive] spectator. However, when one is undergoing pain and sorrow himself or herself, then one has to make an effort to get out of the state of sorrow. So these two people ask the sage the reason for their suffering--and the way out of the suffering. This is similar to us humans seeking out help from an elderly person or any person that we think is capable of helping us or offering advice [to remedy our pain]. [In a conflict situation,] if we are incapable of solving an issue amicably then we reach out to a neutral third party to help resolve this issue for us. These are some of the things we do in general.

So here the king and the merchant went to the sage.

The first chapter begins like this:

sāvṛṇiḥ sūryatanayō yō manuḥ kathyatē: 'ṣṭamaḥ |
nīśāmaya tadutpattiṁ, vistarād gadatō mama|| (Chapter 1, Verse 2)
mahāmāyā: nubhāvēna yathā manvantarādhipaḥ |
sa babhūva mahābhāgaḥ, sāvṛṇistanayō ravēḥ|| (Chapter 1, Verse 3)

Right in the beginning the BrahmaR̥ṣi Mārkaṇḍeya states: Thanks to Ambā's Mahāmāyā's Grace and prabhāvam, I am going to tell the story of the 8th Manu called Sāvṛṇi. That is how Rishi Markendeya starts. This leads to the questions: what was the story of the Manu called Sāvṛṇi? What is the story of his previous birth? What good deeds did he do [to reach this exalted position]?

If a person is a rich man in this janma (or even if that person is living comfortably in his retirement years), we surmise the following: either the person has inherited their wealth from their parents, or that person has earned well and been smart about investing--and hence is able to live off a good pension or retirement benefits in their old age. Is that not the case? A tree will yield a fruit --but someone planted a seed and took care of the sapling and nurtured it.

So, how did this Manu named Sāvṛṇi become a Manu? [i.e., How did he reach the position of leader of the world?] It is due to Mahāmāyā's Prabhāvam. You need to remember this detail very well. It is not said “due to Caṇḍikā's Prabhāvam”.

Not only that, the king lost his entire kingdom and the merchant was chased out of his home by his own family. So the king's question to the sage is: "I have lost my kingdom. And even though it is not mine any more, I still have pangs and worries about how the people in my kingdom are doing. Even though I cannot go there, I still worry about how my wife is doing. I am worried about my children. [Why?]" The merchant is in a similar situation: Even though his own family--his own kith and kin--chased him away, he is still worried about his wife and his children. He is still concerned about their wellbeing.

It is not that the king and the merchant were not intelligent [or without the powers of discrimination or *viveka*]. Even though they were intelligent and had great sense, they were still lost in worry over situations beyond their control. [Note: They also knew things were not under their control in these situations!]

So even though they had the knowledge and common sense they still were worried about everyone; and further upset about being helpless themselves. In their dire helplessness they approached the sage and they asked the revered sage: "Why is it that our minds are clouded with moha (delusion) over things that we cannot control, or over things that we know will not change or will not happen? As a result of this moha we feel very upset and we are worried thinking about these things. Can you tell us the reason for these thoughts and worries?"

**dr̥ṣṭadōṣē:'pi viṣayē, mamatvākṛṣṭa-mānasau |
tat kimētan-mahābhāga! yanmōhō jñāninōrapī|| (Chapter 1, verse 44)**

So then there is a connection between Mahāmāyā and this moha or delusion. I have also told you while talking about Chapter 12 that moha can happen to wise people too, however scholarly they may be. Let us take the example of a person who has studied all the 4 vedās, all the upaniṣads, all of the prescribed vidyās. Even for such a person--when ahaṃkāra creeps in even a little in their minds, they get dragged into a deep pit. One would think or expect that, for such a learned person, he would not fall prey to any ahaṃkāra--and that he would be above all of that. But this scholar is no different than any normal person. [He is human and susceptible to the delusion]. [Ahaṃkāra too] is caused by Moha. Back to the story, the specific question that these two seekers ask the revered sage is: "Even though we have jñāna [or viveka, the ability to discriminate], why are we succumbing to this fallacy that is Moha?"

In response to that, the sage answers that the root cause for all miseries is Mahāmāyā. Even the very learned are vulnerable to this trapping and fallacy due to Mahāmāyā. What is to be said for a common man [who is not learned] then?

**mahāmāyā-prabhāvēṇa, saṃsāra-sthiti-kāriṇā |
tannātra viśmayaḥ kāryō, yōganidrā jagatpatēḥ|| (Chapter 1, Verse 54)**

**mahāmāyā harēścaīṣā, tayā sammōhyatē jagat |
jñānināmapi cētāṃsi, dēvī bhagavatī hi sā|| (Chapter 1, Verse 55)**

**balādākṛṣya mōhāya, mahāmāyā prayacchati |
tayā viśṛjyate viśvam, jagadēta-ccarācaram|| (Chapter 1, Verse 56)**

Out of all this, there is only one thing that the King is able to hear: the term "Mahāmāyā".

He asks the sage, “Hey Bhagavān! Who is this Dēvī? Who is this Mahāmāyā? What is her Prabhāvāṃ or glory? What is her svarūpā or form? Please tell me everything about her in detail.”

rājōvāca|| (Chapter 1, Verse 59)

bhagavan! kā hi sā dēvī, mahā-māyēti yāṃ bhavān|| (Chapter 1, Verse 60)

**bravīti kathamutpannā sā, karmāsyāśca kiṃ dvija |
yat-prabhāvā ca sā dēvī, yat-svarūpā yadud-bhavā|| (Chapter 1, Verse 61)**

tatsarvaṃ śrōtomicchāmi, tvattō brahmaividāṃ vara|| Chapter 1, Verse 62)

The Sage starts to recount the glory of Mahāmāyā in detail.

Specifically, the sage talks about Rātri suktam: [This is Brahmā’s hymn to the Great Goddess, the Veiling Grace]. In this suktam, Brahmā calls Mahāmāyā “Viṣṇu-māyā”--which means: “the One that has Viṣṇuḥ under the spell of Moha” and hence has Him in deep Yoga-nidra.”

The one that is capable of even holding the mighty Viṣṇu under Her powerful spell is Mahāmāyā! Can you imagine: Viṣṇuḥ is not able to hear his own child Brahmā’s cries of distress, as He is under the spell of Mahāmāyā! So Brahmā beseeches Mahāmāyā thus: “You are the mightiest of all. Right now I am under extreme distress due to Madhu and Kaiṭabha. I request you to please fill these two demons with delusion--cloud their minds and devise a way in which they can be slain.”

**mōhayaitau durādharaṣā-vasurau madhu-kaiṭabhau |
prabōdhaṃ ca jagat-svāmī, nīyatā-macyutō laghu|| (Chapter 1, Verse 86)**

After the prathama caritram, in no other chapter [within the bulwark of the three stories in the Devi Māhātmyaṃ] will you find the term “Mahāmāyā”. But, you will see how this Mahāmāyā takes the name of “Caṇḍikā” in the subsequent chapters.

Nārāyaṇī Stutiḥ

Let us fast forward to Chapter 11 now. Here the Devās are extolling Ambā! with great devotion in [an exquisite hymn which is known as] the Nārāyaṇī Stutiḥ. [This is the hymn with the refrain: “nārāyaṇi! namō:'stu tē”].

**lakṣmi lajjē mahā-vidyē śraddhē puṣṭi-svadhē dhruvē |
mahā-rātri mahā:'vidyē nārāyaṇi! namō:'stu tē|| (Chapter 12, Verse 22)**

There are 2 occurrences of the padam “Mahā:'vidyē” in this stutiḥ, but in many other schools and traditions, we will find that this padam is also commonly chanted as “Mahā:'māyē”:

mahā-rātri mahā:'māyē nārāyaṇi! namō:'stu tē||

“O Mother (Ammā), You are the only I have. You have this world under your [veil of] Moha. You are the creator,

protector and destroyer. You are the only that rules this world.”

**tayaitan-mōhyatē viśvaṁ saiva viśvaṁ prasūyatē |
sā yācitā ca vijñānaṁ, tuṣṭā ṛddhiṁ prayacchati|| (Chapter 12, Verse 37)**

Chapter 13

Let us move on, from the end of Chapter 12 to the start of Chapter 13.

[You may recall] how the Rṣi started the story in Chapter 1 with the padam “Mahā-Māyā”. He also starts Chapter 13 using the same padam.

ōṁ ṛṣiruvāca|| (Chapter 13, Verse1)

**ētat tē kathitaṁ bhūpa! dēvī-māhātmyamuttamam |
ēvam prabhāvā sā dēvī yayēdaṁ dhāryatē jagat|| (Chapter 13, Verse 2)**

The Sage says to the King and the Merchant: I have been telling you both the story of Mahāmāyā so far. [She is] the one who supports the whole cosmos. The entire cosmos is her svarūpam or manifestation.

**vidyā tathaiva kriyatē bhagavad-viṣṇu-māyayā |
tayā tvamēṣa vaiśyaśca tathaivānyē vivēkinaḥ|| (Chapter 13, Verse 3)**

He brings back the phrase “viṣṇu-māyayā”. He started off with [the padam] “mahāmāyā prabhāvena”. He adds “viṣṇu-māyayā” in the third verse (above). [Please note that] there is no difference between the 2 phrases.

**mōhyantē mōhitāścaiva mōhamēṣyanti cāparē |
tāmupaihi mahārāja! śaraṇaṁ paramēśvarīm|| (Chapter 13, Verse 4)**

The sage finishes his account of the prabhāvam of Devi, by saying no one is free from the Moha or Veiling Power of Mahāmāyā. He tells Suratha and Samādhi: “Both of you are experiencing suffering due to the affliction of Mahāmāyā. People in the world experience sorrow due to the affliction of [Moha or deluding power of] Mahāmāyā. People that are yet to come in the future will also undergo pain and suffering due to this Mahāmāyā.”

Now let me tell you why we need to read Devi Māhātmyam.

**vidyā tathaiva kriyatē bhagavad-viṣṇu-māyayā
tayā tvamēṣa vaiśyaśca tathaivānyē vivēkinaḥ|| (Chapter 13, Verse 3)**

“Vivēkinaḥ” means someone who is well-read and has the ability to discriminate as a result of their intelligence [and scholarship]. Someone who is able to distinguish between what to do and what not to do [is said to possess “viveka”].

“ānyē vivēkinaḥ” means [“it is] not just the two of you [intelligent ones who are afflicted by Moha]”. All of the people in this world--common men or not--all who believe themselves to be intelligent--all of them are either

already caught in this web of suffering and are afflicted by pain and sorrow; or else **will** be ensnared by this web if they haven't already fallen into it. Hence the remedy related by R̥ṣi Medhas is not just a solution for the King and the merchant--rather, it is for the common man--it is for people like us. Please understand this very clearly and firmly. This is the reason why the padam “ānyē vivēkinaḥ” is employed. This is a story told for people like us.

tāmupaihi mahārāja! śaraṇam paramēśvarīm|| (Chapter 13, verse 4)

The solution is to surrender to Divine Mother Paramēśvarī. However the Sage uses the word “Mahārāja” [to address the King Suratha] even though the king is not a mahārāja at that moment. The king is in the forest. His current condition is even worse than that of a common man. If he finds anything to eat in the forest, his hunger may be satisfied; otherwise, he has to go hungry. However any word that is uttered by or comes from the *vak* or mouth of a very venerable person (such as R̥ṣi Medhas here) is already blessed and will bear the fruit or *phala* for the addressee.

In order to illuminate how the words of a great soul become the truth, I am going to tell you a small story.

[In the story of Satyavān-Sāvitrī], the god Yama blessed Sāvitrī with the words, “Dīrgha Sumaṅgalī Bhava", even as he was pulling the soul of her husband Satyavān away. However since Yama uttered auspicious blessings to Sāvitrī, he is now forced to reconsider. He can not take the soul of Satyavān away. That is the strength of ‘āśīrvādam’ or blessing [from great souls]. If we do a namaskāram to a mahān and if the mahān blesses with the words “Saubhāgyavati Bhava" then it means you are already a Saubhāgyavati-- and that all of your difficult times are now a relic of the past and that all good things are coming your way.

So the Sage uses the word “Mahārāja” and tells him that the solution to his problem is to [seek refuge in and] hold on to the feet of Ambāl: “śaraṇam paramēśvarīm”. The padam “tāmupaihi” can be split as tam+upa+ihi -- meaning “hold on to her feet”. This is the upadeśam of the venerable seer. Once you surrender to Ambāl then you derive all the benefits of having conducted a full ārādhana to her.

ārādhitā saiva nṛṇām, bhōga-svargā:'pavargadā|| (Chapter 12, Verse 5)

[If svarga is what is desired], svargā is guaranteed: Whatever you get from being Indra (king of devas) - all of the *sampatti*, and *aishwaryam* or prosperity, and all the comforts with great health, is how it is in *svargaloka*. There is no suffering from old age or disease in *svarga*. [If you desire liberation and seek refuge in the Divine Mother], this becomes your final *janma*, and you will attain *sāyujyam* or Unity with Devi. All of this is obtained just by doing the ārāadhanam of Ambāl. That is the last word from Sage Medhas.

If you observe, MahaR̥ṣi Medhas only comes to the story around Sloka 46 in Chapter 1.

r̥ṣiruvāca|| (Chapter 1, Verse 46)

jñānamasti samastasya, jantōr-viṣaya-gōcarē|| (Chapter 1, Verse 47)

And the final sloka from Sage Medhas :

tāmupaihi mahārāja! śaraṇam paramēśvarīm|| (Chapter 13, verse 4)

ārādhitā saiva nṛṇām, bhōga-svargā:'pavargadā|| (Chapter 12, Verse 5)

So the jist of what the Sage says is to seek refuge in (śaraṇam) and offer worship (ārāadhanam) to Ambāl. If you offer ārāadhanam, then you are blessed with all the riches of svarga, and you will ultimately attain sāyujyam.

Importance of Guru

If a guru gives a person an upadeśa or a dīkśa, the recipient of the dīkśa needs to practice-- i.e., do sādhana of the upadeśa or dīkśa. Only then will the person get the phalan of the dīkśa. Even if the Guru gives you a debit card, only if you swipe it for use and key in the PIN will you be able to use the debit card. [We need to make an effort.] Similarly, it is our duty to do the japa, pāraṇam or pūjā that the Guru has taught us in order to benefit from the upadeśam.

Coming back to our story of me talking about Devī Prabhāvam in Bhopal: I wrapped up my talk by saying two people approached a Sage with their problems; the sage advised them and gave them upadeśam on how to reach Ambāl. They followed the upadeśam the right way --and one got back his kingdom [and further became the Manu 'Sāvarni'] and the other attained mokśa or liberation. My allotted talking time was over and it was time for the 'Question & Answer' segment.

In the audience, there was a person who was a devotee of the Goddess and used to do nitya -pāraṇam and pūja. He was a professor at Mumbai University. His question was: "Swami, there is no hint in Devī Māhātmyam that the King Suratha and Merchant Samādhi ever received Navākśarī upadeśam. [Nor is there a hint as to whether or not] they were taught any details of pūja [and upacārās]. Nor does it say anywhere that they were taught how to do nyāsams. Why is that so?"

I replied to this great question as follows:

A mother tells her child, "Oh Dear! I have cooked all the food you like and have placed it on the table. I need to quickly go out to run an errand--I will be back soon. Please lock the door and play inside. If you are hungry, please eat the food. Now if the child listened to the mother and ate the food that the mother cooked, he or she would have satisfied his/her hunger; and then he or she would be playing happily. If the child did not listen to the instructions--and hence did not eat the food and remained hungry, then the child is not going to be playing, but instead would have a temper tantrum brought on by hunger.

Now we know that Suratha and Samādhi listened to their Guru, because there is clear mention in chapter 13 of the Devī Māhātmyam about the *phalan* that they received.

**sa ca vaiśya-stapastēpē dēvī-sūktam param japan |
tau tasmin pulinē dēvyāḥ, kṛtvā mūrṭim mahī-mayim|| (Chapter 13, Verse 10)
arhaṇām ckratustasyāḥ, puṣpa-dhūpāgni-tarpanaiḥ |
nirāhārau yatāhārau, tanmanaskau samāhitau|| (Chapter 13, Verse 11)**

The above verses clearly relate that the king and the merchant prayed to Ambāl with 'dēvī sūktam'. While offering worship, they consumed whatever food they could find--and sometimes they did not consume any food at all (nirāhārau yatāhārau). Ambāl apparates in front of them (*pratyakśa*).

If all this happened and if Ambāl did come in front of them it was only because they followed the upadeśam and followed the instructions of the Guru implicitly. Without that effort, how will they get the phalan of being able to see Ambal? They must have done pūja for many years and should have offered [countless] namaskārams. It is not sufficient for the Guru to say you should offer namaskārams with dēvī sūktam, but the student has to follow and do it sincerely, is it not?

Hearing this reply of mine, the professor did understand and replied, "True! They must have obtained the upadeśam

from the Sage and they must have followed the guru's instructions to them. That is the reason why the merchant and the king were able to get *sāyujyam* and *manvantarādhipatyam* respectively.”

Later in Rahasya-Trayam, [specifically] in ‘Mūrti Rahasyam’ it is revealed:

tasmāt sarva-prayatnēna, dēvīm japa nirantaram|| (murti rahasyam, Verse 23)
Saptajanmār-jitair-ghōrair-brahma-hatyā-samairapi| (murti rahasyam, Verse 24)

If one were to make an effort with all earnestness (*sarva prayatnēna*) to chant the *japa* of dēvī always, then all of the *ghora pāpams* (or demerit accumulated) over his or her past 7 births are erased. But for this to happen, one has to do the *japa*.

So if the [merchant and the king] did get the *phalan* then it is enough proof again for us that they worshipped dēvī as prescribed.

The question that was asked was a very tricky one but a very valid question. Because the answer is not straightforward. It has to be inferred. But there are so many [*pramāṇams* -- or affirmations] within the story to confirm the inference. Now it is not that I knew all of this. If you were to ask me, “..then how did it strike you to answer the question in this way? Why did you reply [spontaneously] in the way you did?” In order to answer all of this, I need to tell you about the *anugrahaṃ* or blessings of the Guru. The reminder of my discourse for today is all about Guru's *anugrahaṃ*.

Guru Anugrahaṃ

Earlier I told you that a great Seer [who is the Guru to the Manu Sāvarni --who was King Suratha], addresses King Suratha as Mahārājā. And we know what King Suratha received as a result of the Seer addressing him as Emperor or Sovereign [he attained the exalted *manvantarādhipatyam*]. Now, who is a Guru? You should remember one thing - Guru and Ambāl are one and the same. If you have a [true] Guru then you will see Ambāl in Guru. I want to share with you all an experience from 1959 that happened on Vyāsa Pūjā.

Recently we performed pūjā on Guru Pūrṇimā. So I thought I should share my personal experience with all of you. The reason being, on Vyāsa Pūjā day Ambāl was adorned with a sari vastram. Usually there would be a devotee that would want to offer a sari to Ambāl on that day. I would tell them to please write their name, phone number on the box that the sari comes packed in. This is a way for us to contact them and share a picture of Ambāl adorning the sari that they lovingly gave. [Without this system] it is otherwise difficult to keep the list together--remember too that we don't have any specific preference on which day what sari Ambāl wears. In any event, it is just each one's blessings and grace [to have the blessing of having their sari offering be the vastram that is draped on Ambāl on any given day].

So this year, we looked at the details on who gave this sari that Ambāl adorned on that day. It was possibly given by the person perhaps more than a year ago I think. A gentleman from California called Śrī Ramakrishnan had come for a darshan a year ago and at that point he offered this sari for Ambāl. It was this sari that Ambāl wore for Vyāsa Pūjā. I sent a photo of Ambāl with the vastram to Śrī Ramakrishnan. He was extremely happy and replied back saying that he received this picture after he had just completed pūjā at home. He was extremely thrilled and was thankful. [And it turns out that] even though his name is Ramakrishnan his *nāmakaraṇam* name is Yegnarāman.

So I asked him, “Isn’t your name Yegnarāman? He was surprised and replied, “How did you know that?” Well, I remembered it because he is the grandson of Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar. Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar was a very good friend of my grandfather (Śrī Prakāshananda Nathendra Saraswathī Swāmigaḷ, who in was Sivaswāmi Dīkṣitar in his *pūrvāśrama*). Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar was well-versed in the Śrauta Karma (branch of Yajur veda) encompassing iṣṭi, yāga, etc.). My grandfather Śrī Prakāshananda Nathendra Saraswathī Swāmigaḷ would not conduct any of this without having Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar present. Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar hailed from a village called Kallidaikkurichi in Tamil Nadu.

Now, my grandfather decided to take the last stage which is Sanyāsā (or renunciation). There are some processes which one is required to follow, in order to properly take up Sanyāsa.

Now to understand the process, a Sanyāsi belonging to a Mutt takes Sanyāsa directly from the Brahmacharya [stage] to Sanyāsa. For everyone else, they will have to go through the stages of Brahmacharyaṃ, Gṛhasthāśrama, Vānaprasthaṃ, and finally Sanyāsaṃ. The Vedās say that the person has to finish all of his duties before entering Sanyāsa. So whichever branch of vedas one is born into, he has to (a) study that branch of vedas, (b) uphold the dharma and (c) get into gṛhasthāśrama --before taking Sanyāsa.

Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar was very scholarly. He had studied the Vedās from his grandfather. He then went to learn the śāstrās from another teacher. Imagine if we were to go in search of a university where the teaching faculty for our chosen subject is good.. similarly Śrī Dīkṣitar went to learn sāstrās from another teacher. He went to Trivandrum for that. When I met him once, I asked him as to why he went to Trivandrum. He said they offered free meals in the nearby *ootṭupura* [i.e., traditional dining hall or *bhojana-śālā* associated with the temple]. It was convenient to eat there and continue to learn from the teacher. This way he wouldn’t burden the teacher and his family while he was studying--this was his intent.

However somehow Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar felt he didn’t get the quality education that he was expecting. So he came to our paramēṣṭhi guru Śrī Rāmānanda-nātha, also known as Kallidaikkurichi Periyavā--and joined his tutelage as his disciple. At this time, my grandfather Śrī Prakāśānanda-nāthā was also married and was a gṛhasthā. In those days they got married very young - my grandmother was 5 years old and he was 10 years old. However in those days, the wife was with the parents [until puberty] and so the groom was free to go and learn and get the education. My grandfather studied as a śiṣya under Śrī Rāmānanda Nathendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ for 15 years.

Guru Rāmānanda-nātha said, “Well, let’s hold off a little bit on Vedānta learning. First, let me teach you about agnihotraṃ and Śrauta karma.” This was so because he was married--and so, agnihotraṃ had to be started. [By his own admission] the student went to learn about Vedānta but the Guru started off first with Karma Kāṇḍam. [Strict observance of Karmakāṇḍam will take us to Jñānakāṇḍam.]

[There are four Vedas, the classification of which is attributed to Krishna dvaipayana, who is also hailed as Veda Vyasa. Each Veda is divided into four parts viz. Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishad. Excluding the Upanishads, which contain the philosophical thought of our ancients, the rest is collectively known as Karmakāṇḍa. The hymns of the ‘Samhita’ part are chanted at the yagñās or yāgās, which are elaborately dealt with in the Brahmanās and the Āraṇyakās.

Four hundred sacrifices are said to be mentioned in the Vedas. Out of these, twenty-one are required to be performed at least once in one’s lifetime. These form part of the 40 saṃskārās which are elaborated in the Kalpa Sūtrās and the Dharma Sūtrās. These sacrifices fall into two broad categories – Śrauta and Smārta.

Explaining the importance of the ‘Karmakāṇḍa’, the Mahāswāmi of Kānchi, Paramapūjya Śrī Candraśekharendra Saraswatī, has observed: “The Vedās and the Vedānta are not at variance with one another. The Karmakāṇḍa prepares us for Vedānta or Jñānakāṇḍa. The former has to do with this world and with many deities and its adherents are subject to the three guṇās. But it is the first step to go beyond the three guṇās and to sever oneself from worldly existence or laukikaṃ. If we perform the rites laid down in the Karmakāṇḍa, keeping in mind their true purpose, we shall naturally be qualifying for the Jñānakāṇḍa.” (from *Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life*).]

Hence my grandfather would observe the iṣṭi and yāgam that was being performed and he thus only acquired practical knowledge. The days went by with [my grandfather being steeped in karmakāṇḍam and this type of practical learning].

On one fine Ādrā Darśanam day, Guru Śrī Rāmānanda Nāthendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ decided to take sanyāsa. On that day, in Kallidaikkurichi, Lord Natarāja's *utsava-mūrti* (processional idol) is making his annual yātrā [or procession through the streets of the township]. The Guru realized that the yātrā was coming towards his doorstep [and decided that *that* was the moment he would take up the life of a renunciate]. At that time, my grandfather Śrī Prakāśānanda-nāthā was performing agnihotraṃ. Guru Śrī Rāmānanda-nāthā simply tore the clothes he was wearing; and performed the *preṣa-uccaraṇam* (articulation of his intent) for *Sanyāsa Sweekāram* (adopting the path of renunciation of worldly existence) in the flames of the agnihotraṃ being observed by my grandfather. The Guru then wore a kāṣāya vastram (robes worn by ascetics) and went to stay in the āyirankāl maṇḍapam (1000-pillared *maṇḍapam*) in the village temple. My grandfather went along to do śúsrūṣā (obedient service) for the Guru. My grandmother accompanied my grandfather [and also served the Guru] until the Guru left his mortal coil for the next 15 years [through all of the Guru's travels]. In those years, the Guru also initiated my grandfather into Śrīvidyā and taught him all of the pūjā vidhi in Śrīvidyā.

[If you think on this,] I am sure you all will understand and appreciate that my grandfather had a full time job! Now that you all have been initiated into Śrīvidyā, I am sure that you don't have much free time. Everyday, there is the (nitya) japam, pārayaṇam and Lalitā Sahasranāmaṃ. Along with this, you also have your responsibilities towards your family. Haven't you noticed that you don't have much free time? It was the same story with my grandparents also. So my grandfather did not have much time to learn Vedānta. However the Guru would do Vedānta pārayaṇam. Everyday the Guru would do Sūtra Bhāṣyam. There would be a set of people from the community who would come to listen to the Guru. The Guru would do yātrā and visit many places [and offer discourses].

The Guru and my grandparents subsequently came to Kālahasti. Just before they came to Kālahasti, my grandfather Śrī Prakāśānanda-nāthā became a bit unwell due to Cholera. Now you need to listen attentively. The Guru is placing the head of the śiṣya in his lap, just like a mother would do. The Guru said: "You are not at the end of your life--you have time left to live out your life. So you do not have to take Sanyāsam and perform preṣōccaraṇam yet. You still have a lot more nitya-karma (duties) to perform and your time to take Sanyāsa will happen yet [at a later time]."

By this time my grandfather already had 4 children: my father (Śrī Vimarśānanda Nāthendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ who in his *pūrvāśrama* was Rangaswāmy Dikṣitar) and his 2 younger siblings were sent to Veda Pāṭaśālā. (Once the child reaches 7 years of age, he was sent to Pāṭaśālā.) In fact, after this [milestone], one more child was born called Yegña Kāmeśwaran.

The Guru said, "You will become alright by tomorrow!" And true to His word, my grandfather became alright the very next day! All of the people around had thought that the chances of my grandfather's recovery were very low given how sick he was. However, the Guru's Vākhyam can never be false--and my grandfather recovered fully. That indeed is the Grace of Guru.

Later, Guru Śrī Rāmānanda Nāthendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ announced: "I am preparing to leave for Kāśī. However, I don't want you to follow me--because if you come along with me to Kāśī, then you will not go back." So the Guru sent my grandfather back home. He advised my grandfather to do agnihotraṃ and perform Soma Yāga.

Guru Śrī Rāmānanda Nāthendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ added that my grandfather would [be able to] take up sanyāsa as per the krama, after performing his agnihotraṃ duties and after completing Soma Yāgam. Because the Guru took his Sanyāsa at the agnihotra śāla (where my grandfather observed agnihotraṃ), agnihotrīs would subsequently need to perform Āgñeya iṣṭi, Prājāpatya iṣṭi and other fire oblations. My grandfather would have to complete all of these

karmās before taking up Sanyāsa. This is similar to weddings of yore: in a ritually authentic wedding, a vratham is performed prior to the wedding ceremony. In those days, the vratham would be an aṣṭa-vratham for 7-8 days. So the Guru asked the Shishya, my grandfather, to go back home, to complete all the prescribed duties.

My grandfather said to His Guru: “I also wish to end my days in Kāshī,” To which, the Guru replied, “Yes--you will come to Kāśī kshetram and also get Sanyāsa.”

Guru Rāmānanda Nāthendra Swamigal had 4 disciples [who came to him daily]. My grandfather was the one who would set up all that was needed and recite the Dakṣiṇāmūrti aṣṭakam. After the Guru finished his daily bhāṣyam, my grandfather would clean up and put things away. The Guru addressed my grandfather and said, “The sūtram that I taught today, you will continue it from tomorrow onwards. [You will] finish the reminder of the sūtrās for these 4 students.”

With folded hands, my grandfather replied, “Swāmin - I came to you with the aim of learning all of this. However I completely forgot about that. It is only now I am even realizing that I came to you to learn all these things. You are asking me to take lessons for the 4 students--how is this even possible when I myself have not learned these lessons from you?” To which the Guru just said, “You sit down tomorrow and all will be well.”

[The Guru had spoken; so my grandfather sat down with the students] the very next day. He started the lesson exactly from where the Guru had left the lesson, further giving a lecture to the students on the sūtram! This is a true story.

This goes to show that if you have the anugrahaṃ of the Guru, not only will you understand what the Guru says, but you will also understand what is unspoken. All [knowledge] will [be transmitted to you and] become accessible to you if you have the anugrahaṃ of the Guru. This is [the truth].

Prelude to Vyāsa Pūjā

Śrī Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa Sāstrigal was my grandfather’s grandfather and he was an exponent of all the sāstrās. He had the following inquiries: How do Yatis (exalted souls) take sanyāsa? What is their code of conduct and karma? What is the pūja that a sanyāsi has to perform? Once they leave their mortal coil and attain Siddhi, what are the karmās, if any, that need to be performed thereafter? Śrī Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa Sāstrigal had written in detail about all of that. [However] this was written in Grantham (one of the ancient scripts in which Sanskrit texts used to be written). My grandfather had a desire to somehow take all of his grandfather’s notes and compile the details together by hand--he wanted to create a complete, cohesive compilation on the subject of Yati dharma.

In Chennai, there was a śiṣya of Guru Śrī Rāmānanda Nātha called Shankara Subramanya Śāstrigal, a great vidwān living in Mylapore. So my grandfather asked for Śāstrigal’s help to compile and edit the book into fruition. While this work was underway, my grandfather decided to make a trip to Kāśī, and I thought I would go along with him to assist him. Having taken the help to compile the book, my grandfather was able to complete the compilation. The editing too got done --and now a handwritten copy of the book was produced and available.

Before undertaking this journey to Kāśī, my grandfather went to meet pūjya Kānchi Paramācāryā Śrī Candraśekharendra Saraswatī to ask for his permission and blessings for the trip to Kāśī.

This is how the conversation between Mahā-Periyavā and my grandfather went:

Mahā Periyavā: “What is the urgency to go to Kāśī now? “

My grandfather: “Well, I am getting old..”

Mahā Periyavā: “You are not old, and Kāśī Visvanāthā will wait for you. Just before this, did you not mention compiling a book about “Yati Dharma” --all handwritten? First, you need to make that hand-written book into a printed book. I will arrange any help that is needed towards bringing out the book into publication.”

Mahā Periyavā continued:

In 1958, Cāturmāsya pūjā and Vyāsa pūjā were held in the Sankara Mutt in Mylapore, Chennai. That space is still available. In 1959, you please do the Vyāsa Pūjā there and be there for 4 months. By then all of the work involved in bringing this book published will also be completed. After that you may proceed to Kāśī.”

That is how the book on Yati Dharma came into publication. The book came into publication and 4 months passed by. And in February, the preface to the book was given by pūjya Mahā Periyavā (Kānchi Paramācāryā Śrī Candraśekharendra Saraswatī). Sringeri Mahāsannidhānam also gave a preface to the book. Bhāṣya Swāmigaḷ also gave a preface.

Taking a printed copy of the book, my grandfather went to meet Mahā Periyavā. I was there as well. I was in my youth and I did not have any fear or trepidation being in the presence of Mahā Periyavā; but my only concern was that my grandfather’s daṇḍam (sanyāsa daṇḍam that my grandfather had with him after becoming a sanyāsi) should not fall down --as Mahā Periyavā was in a small 6x6 space. Mahā Periyavā invited my grandfather inside. There was a small āsanā for him to be seated in front of Mahā Periyavā who was also seated. There was just enough space for 2 people to sit but I also squeezed inside and was standing. My father (Śrī Vimarśānanda Nāthendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ) who also accompanied us was standing outside the room.

Maha Periyavā saw me standing and inquired with my grandfather as to who I was.

My grandfather said, “He is Rangaswāmy’s puthran (son).”

(He could not say that I was his grandson, as he had taken sanyāsa already.)

Mahā Periyavā asked, “What is he doing? What has he studied?”

I used to have a tuft of hair in the back, tied. I was wearing 4 yds of dhoti and no cloth cover for the upper body. I had vibhuti on my forehead and arms, and was wearing a rudrākṣa around my neck. Mahā Periyavā [must have perhaps] thought I had studied Vedānta and śāstrās etc.

My grandfather replied : “He has all aspirations to study the śāstrās, however he doesn’t have the required time. He is busy with the kitchen, taking care [of overseeing things] and ensuring that things happen correctly all around.”

Mahā Periyavā smiled hearing that.

But that was true, because I would start 10 slokas in Māgham (a reference to Sanskrit poet Māgha’s work. I would then fold that book and keep it away and start to read ‘Kīrātārjunīyam’ (written by another Sanskrit poet Bhāravi). I would never be able to finish anything fully as I used to not have the required time. [Lack of time] was the primary reason.

Mahā Periyavā then told my grandfather: “Do one thing then. You speak everything in his ears now. Whenever the need arises, everything will automatically all come to him at the appropriate times.”

Now see the way this has come true! I am now talking with you all--how did I know and intuit the message to talk

with you all? It comes to me [because of Guru's greatness]. It is all nothing but the anugrahaṃ and blessings of Maha Periyava. That is-- **when the Guru says, "this" will happen, you should definitely know that "that" has happened already [or is slated to happen no matter what]. There is no doubt in that.**

So in this Yati Dharma book, there is a chapter on Vyāsa Pūjā, which was written by Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar that I was telling you all about earlier. He wrote about Vyāsa Pūja in that book, and he mentions: **"yāvat jīvaṃ agnihotraṃ juhuyāt"**, meaning as long as there is life, one should do agnihotra. When you feel you are done with all the responsibilities and feel you want to move away from family and worldly ties and materiality, then you are eligible to enter Sanyāsa Āśrama. However, [you must] get into that āśrama after you have completed 70 years of age: **"saptyāha ūrdhvaṃ sanyāsam"**.

The age difference between me and my grandfather was 60 years. We both were born on the same Īśvara Varṣa. Exactly when he reached 70 years of age, he spoke with my grandmother and told her about wanting to enter the Sanyāsa Āśrama. He also mentioned the date that this would happen. The reason being, a learned person or paṇḍita is needed to help with all the samskāraṃ that need to be completed when entering Sanyāsa-āśrama. Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar was only available on the date mentioned by my grandfather. My grandmother asked, "Have you broken this news to the children?" Grandfather replied, "What is the need to tell them? I am the one who is going to enter Sanyāsa-āśrama, and I have decided. I am leaving home and going away. Only if I am going to be a guest in somebody's home will I need to ask for permission". However my grandmother felt that her children needed to know about this.

I have to tell you all one more thing. Before this Sanyāsa Āśrama event, our Sri Gnanananda Teertha Swamigaḷ's upanayana brahmopadeśam (and thread ceremony) also happened. Agnihotraṃ was initiated and commenced for my uncle (chittappa or younger brother of Śrī Vimarśānanda Nātha Swamigaḷ) also. This was all as per the request of my grandmother, who asked that all of these [milestone ceremonies be conducted] in the presence and guidance of my grandfather. Anyway, upon the insistence of my grandmother, my grandfather reluctantly wrote a postcard letter to his children about entering into Sanyāsa Āśrama on the chosen date. And all the needed ceremonies with ishti and yāgam and everything began. Because my grandfather had made his mind about this Sanyāsa Sweekāram, he had called the paṇḍitās and dīkṣitās for the iṣṭi and yāgam oblations.

By the time the postcard written by my grandfather reached my other chittappa/uncle --and by the time he could come to see his father, the ceremonies prescribed for sanyāsa sweekāram had already been ongoing for about 7 days. At the time, this uncle was working in a place called Kalliḍaikkurichi, which is close to Aruppukōṭṭai. In those days, to reach Virudhunagar he had to take bus transportation but the bus to Virudhunagar had already left from Aruppukōṭṭai. So he started to walk a distance of about 12 or 14 miles to reach Virudhunagar in the night. He caught the early morning train at Virudhunagar and reached home around 8 AM to do a namaskāram to his father, before he officially entered Sanyāsa Āśrama. [There are a few] reasons why I am relating all of these details to you: One is so that you understand how my grandfather was with his family, and how resolute and determined he was in his decision to enter Sanyāsa. I was then in Madurai in a hostel.

The other reason for telling this elaborate story is: the person who was the main officiator of the sanyāsa karmās for my grandfather, was Śrī Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar! [This was the same] Yegnarāma Dīkṣitar [that] wrote the chapter on Vyāsa Pūjā in the Yati Dharmam book.

The sari given by his grandson is what was adorned by Ambal on this year's Vyāsa Pūjā day. Do you now see and understand the connection?

The word "Mahārājā" that is used by the Sage Sumedhas in the story results in the King attaining manvantarādhipatyam--this goes to say that when a great seer utters a word or blessing, it will always bear fruit or

the phala.

Vyāsa Pūjā

Arrangement

What is Vyāsa Pūjā? Having spoken about Vyāsa Pūjā, I should tell you the details on what it is about. Let's take a step back. At the time of marriage, what does a man vow? He says: "I am marrying this girl, I will take care of her for as long as I am alive. I will bring forth good children who will aid and support the society and follow the dharma." [This is the essence of] the sankalpa that a person entering Gṛhasthāśrama takes.

Now for a person entering into Sanyāsa Āśrama, the Sankalpa taken is as follows: "I will not be the cause for any living organism to undergo any pain", "**ahiṃsā paramo dharmah.**" "No one needs to be scared of me nor will I perform any action that will bring forth fear into the minds of any person. I will always only bless everyone. Even if anyone beats me, I will not beat them back." It is there in every religion is it not? If someone slaps one cheek then show the other cheek, doesn't [the Bible] say this? "**ahiṃsā paramo dharmah.**"

There is another sankalpam: "**abhayam sarva boothebhyah**" (meaning: I will give refuge to everyone). This is the dharma that a person entering sanyāsa takes on.

It was the rainy season when my grandfather entered Sanyāsa Āśrama. The South West monsoon was active in South India and during this season all of the insects, bugs, snakes all of them are very active as well. Another dharma for Sanyāsi is that they cannot stay in one place. They have to be moving from one place to another. It says do not stay in one place for more than 3 days. Keep moving from one village to another by walking. The reason is to disable any sort of attachment. If we keep seeing a person every day then there is a sense of affinity or attachment that usually develops. That is the reason that a Sanyāsi has to be on the move and cannot stay in one place for more than 3 days. However during the rainy season, a Sanyāsi cannot keep moving so often. So they have to stay in one place. If the rainy season is a cāturmāsya then they stay in one place for 4 months. [Some Sanyāsis treat one Pakṣa (one fortnight) as one month; in this event, Cāturmāsya becomes 4 Pakṣās. Technically since 4 Pakṣās spans 2 months, they observe the vratha only for two months instead of 4 months.] So many Sanyāsis stay for a minimum of 2 months in one place during Cāturmāsya. So when a sanyāsi stays in a particular place, they will need to have bhikṣa or take the offering of the villagers. Usually, the people in the village that the Sanyāsi is staying at during the rainy season, would ask them to stay for a Cāturmāsya vratham. This will ensure that the sanyāsi stays in the village for the next 4 months. And during that period, the villagers would usually take care of all the needs of the sanyāsi.

We do a Gaṇapati Pūjā before we start any of the pūjās that we have made a sankalpam to perform. Gaṇapati Pūjā becomes an angā of the bigger pūjā that we have made sankalpam for. One of the angās in the cāturmāsya vratha is Vyāsa Pūjā. However they don't call it as Vyāsa Pūjā --but it must be noted that somehow this term has made it into our pancāngam (almanac).

Vyāsa is one of the 47 names in the Pūjā. The actual name is "**Mahā Gurvādi Pūjā**". All over India Vyāsa pūjā day is called Guru Pūrṇima. On that day, everyone offers a namaskāram to the Guru. In North India, they celebrate it in a very big way--special arcana is performed with a lot of flowers, and people pay their obeisance to the Guru. They arrange lemons [on the pūjā dais] and then they would perform pūjās. And if anyone were to wonder what devatās are being invoked in the pūjā, [they need not wonder about] whom they could ask about this. All of that is documented in [the Vyāsa pūjā section of the Yati Dharma book] just so we understand the reasons.

Let me explain this to you in detail. I started with this ślokaṃ:

**Sadā-śiva samārambhāṃ śankārācārya madhyamām |
asmat ācārya paryantām vande guru paramparām ||**

So [we prepare for Vyāsa pūjā by] placing 5 lemons (to a set) in each of the 4 principal directions and then 1 set of 5 lemons in the center: in this way, we get 25 lemons total. Each of the 25 lemons represents a devatā. I will tell you in greater detail about the devatās later. Surrounding the 25 devatās, there are 8 deities, also represented by 8 lemons. Then we have 4 additional deities in the 4 corners namely (SE, SW, NW, NE), symbolized by 4 lemons. In addition, we also invoke the Daśa Dikpālas with 10 lemons. When we add the number of lemons, we get $25+8+4+10 = 47$. So in total there are 47 Devatās propitiated in Vyāsa pūjā. Now let us look at this array in closer detail.

In Vyāsa pūjā, we invoke and perform pūjās to Īśānādi Panca Brahma devatās, Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Guru, Parama Guru, Parameṣṭi Guru, Parāpara Guru, Ādi Śankara Bhagavatpādā, Sage Vyāsa, Dattātreya, Durvāsa, 8 Īśānās, MahāGaṇapati, Mahālakṣmī, Durgā, Bhairava, and Daśa Dikpālākās to name a few - we offer pūjās to a total of 47 devatās.

The sankalpam for the array of five sets of (5) devatās (each) is most beautiful: [all these 25 devatās represent the most exalted Guru Tattva, beginning with Sadāśiva].

Recall that we began with the invocation: **Sadā-śiva samārambhāṃ**. Sadāśiva is invoked in the middle (the centermost space). The centermost (4+1) arrangement is very similar to what we see in [Sadyojātādi Pancavakra] Śiva pūjā: pūjās are offered to the five facets of Sadāśiva: Īśāna, Tatpuruṣa, Vāmadeva, Aghora and Sadyojāta (in the center). The sankalpam is as follows:

Īśāna rūpa Dakṣiṇāmūrti Mahā gurum āvāhayāmi - I invoke Mahā-guru Dakṣiṇāmūrti in the form of Īśāna.

[The next phrase in the invocatory ślokaṃ above is:] **Śankārācārya madhyamām**. In the East, we invoke **ĀdiŚankara Bhagavatpādā** and his 4 Śiṣyās: Bhagavatpāda is placed in the center of this cluster, surrounded by Padmapādācārya, Sureśvarācārya, Totakācārya, and Hastāmalakācārya.

The next phrase in the invocation is: **asmat-ācārya paryantām**. In the Southern direction, we invoke Śrī Guru, Paramaguru, Parameṣṭiguru, Parāpara Guru and Brahmavidyā Sāmpradāya Guru.

[Let me explain this further: even after we finish our Masters, if we are a Phd aspirant, we go in search of Professors who are the expert or specialist in our field.] So too we propitiate each of these exalted Gurus--and we pray to each and every one of them.

Now coming to the Northern direction, we invoke Vyāsa. Why do we pay our obeisance to Sage Vyāsa? Sage Vyāsa is the great sage who separated the 4 Vedas. He is not the creator of the Vedās -- rather, he separated and codified śruti (the knowledge that was revealed), into the 4 vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sāma and Atharvaṇa). He is the author of all of the 18 purāṇās. It is to Sage Parāśara's (i.e., Sage Vyāsa's father's) Brahma Sūtrās, that many scholars have written commentaries. So Sage Vyāsa has a special place.

**vyāsaṃ vasiṣṭha naphtāraṃ śakteḥ pautramakalmaṣaṃ |
parāśarātmajaṃ vande śukatātaṃ taponidhiṃ (viṣṇu sahasranāmaṃ, Verse 3)**

And so Sage Vyāsa is placed in the center in the Northern direction. Surrounding him are Sage Ribhu, Sage Nidhagā, Sage Durvāsā and Dattātreya. For us (in our Śrīvidyā tradition), Sage Durvāsā and Dattātreya are very

important. We use Paraśurāma Kalpa sūtrā for all of our pūjās and Dattātreya is the Guru of Paraśurāma.

Coming to the Western direction of the five-fold array of lemons, we have Sanaka, Sanatana, Sanandana, Sanatkumāra and Brahmaṛṣi. Now who is the Brahmaṛṣi? This is Vasiṣṭha or Sumedhas (Ṛṣi Sumedhas from the Devī Māhātmyam).

Other Deities Invoked in Vyāsa Pūjā

Because we invoke Sadāśiva in the center, we also propitiate 8 Īśānās (also called as Rudrās). These are: Ananteśaṃ (East), Sūkśmeśaṃ (South-East), Śivottameśaṃ (South), Ekanetreśaṃ (South-West), Ekarudreśaṃ (West), Trimūrtīśaṃ (North-West), Śrīkaṇṭheśaṃ (North), and Śikhaṇḍīśaṃ (North-East).

Whenever we start any auspicious work, we always pray to Gaṇapati seated in the Āgneya mūlam (or corner in the SE direction), followed by Durga, Mahālakṣmī and then Bhairava in the other corners--hence, 4 deities in this set.

[Next we invoke the Daśa Dikpālākās to this lineup: the guardians of the 8 directions (encompassing North, NorthEast, East, SouthEast, South, SouthWest, West, NorthWest), and the guardians of Zenith and Nadir -- together form the 10 daśa-dikpālās.

This is how Vyasa Pūjā is organized. [There are 47 deities in total that are invoked and propitiated here].





The important aspect of this Pūjā is that either lemons or coconuts or Nāvalpazham (black 'jāmun' fruit) are used. A white cloth is placed first and raw rice is spread over it. Then the fruits are arranged on top and the devatā āvāhanam is done. After the āvāhanam, pūjā and punarpūjā are performed. When the punarpūjā is concluded, the same raw akshatā rice and fruits used in the pūjā are given out as prasādam to everyone. This is because a sanyāsi cannot take anything from pūjā --everything is given out to everyone. This is how Vyāsa Pūjā is performed.

Sankalpam

Normally if a person were to do a sankalpam for a pūjā they would say: "Asmākam Saha Kuṭumbānām" (--essentially, they would state the names of all family members, their relatives, their friends, and near and dear ones --using their names, nakśatrams, gotrams.. and they would pray for these people's (and their own) health, wealth, longevity, blessing for home, work, children, spouse, and so forth).

But for a sanyāsi doing Vyāsa pūjā, their sankalpam is very different. In their Sankalpam, they pray like this:

- Let there be good rains
- Let there be a good yield of crops
- Let all types of living creatures be blessed and be happy
- Let there be welfare for everyone in the community
- If there was any karma missed for that renunciate (while in sanyāsa āśrama), then let the omissions be forgiven

Pūjā Steps

As I said earlier Guru is invoked in the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti:

Īśāna rūpa Dakṣiṇāmūrti Mahā gurum āvāhayāmi |

Hence, Dakṣiṇāmūrti aṣṭakam is chanted first and namaskāram is offered to the Guru.

Then the Guru stotram (also called Śiva Atharvaśiṛṣam comprised of 34 Riks) which begins with, **”Haraom yo ha vai rudrasya bhagavān..”** is chanted with hands over the sanyāsi’s head with the palms folded together.

When this Vyāsa Pūjā is happening, there is also a parallel chanting of Rudram, Camakam, Puruṣa Sūktam, Upaniṣads (4 of them) and Pañca Sānti is performed by the Brahmanās. After the Pūjā is concluded, everyone participates together in a Samaṣṭi Bhikṣāvandanam. With palms folded, the villagers supplicate (request) the Sanyāsi to stay in their village. They further request the Sanyāsi to bless them and their families by accepting bhikṣā (alms for sustenance) from them :

Bhoḥo Yatiśreṣṭhaha!

Madīyām Bhikṣām angikrutya asmākam sarveśām anugrahītavyam iti prārthanā pūrvakam namaskurmahe

They offer namaskārams by reciting,

gurur brahmā gurur viṣṇuḥ gurur devo maheśvaraḥ | guruḥ sāksāt param brahmā tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ

||

Hearing all of these, the Sanyāsi usually would reply with either “Nārāyaṇa” or “Mahādevā” as āśirvādams or blessings for all that one desires (to be realized). The Sanyāsis do not keep anything with themselves, including the namaskārams offered [i.e., even the namaskārams are diverted to Bhagavān].

Conclusion

It is already 8:30 PM IST. I would like to stop at this juncture now. I will start the next discourse by relating the remaining details of the Sanyāsi and Vyāsa Pūjā. The important thing for you all to understand is [as follows]: In the 13th chapter which is coming up, Ambāl is blessing you all in the form of the Guru.

[There] is a prayer to Lord Subramanyā [recited] in Tamil: **”Guruvāi varuvāi aruḷvāi Guhane.”** [The meaning being: “Come and shower Your Grace on me O Lord Guhā, as the Guru.”]

“It is hard for me to understand or cognize you if you come with your 6 arms and on a peacock; therefore, you please come in the form of my Guru and bless me.”

This is exactly the essence of the Devī Māhātmyam. I will tell this in detail later but I want to give a quick one liner:

Sage Sumedhas came in the form of that GURU who blessed King Suratha and merchant Samādhi and also gave instructions on how to do japa, and where to pray to Ambāl.

jagāma sadyastapasē sa ca vaiśyō mahā-munē |

saṁdarśanārtha-māmbāyā, nadī-pulīna-saṁsthitaḥ|| (Chapter 13, Verse 9)

With the intention of being able to have a pratyakṣa darśana of Ambāḷ and in the hopes of Devī blessing their personal aspirations, the merchant and the king head to the banks of a river to start their penance. Sage Sumedhas returns to his aśrama. After this point in the Devī Māhātmyam, the story is continued by Sage Mārkaṇḍeya—but instead of [being designated as] “ṛṣiruvāca” we see [that his words are presented as] “dēvyuvāca”.

So who is a Guru? It is sākṣāt Ambāḷ. Ambāḷ gives her two devotees vara pradānam. Let us meet next week.

May All of you be blessed. May All of you be filled with kṣema. May All of you be blessed with the paripūrṇa blessings of Guru. The chanting of Devī Māhātmyam on Guru Pūrṇimā day was excellent. I enjoyed it so very much. Many of you have learned [to recite the Devī Māhātmyam] very well. Please consider that [learning] to be the blessing of Ambāḷ.

Śrī Mātre Namaḥ ||
Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ ||