

Chinmaya Smrithi



A Bi-Monthly News Magazine of the Chinmaya Mission Washington Regional Center (CMWRC)

Chinmaya Smrithi - Rachana Special – JULY 2014



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Introduction to the Special Rachana Issue of Chinmaya Smrithi

Vandana Bapna

Dear Chinmaya Families,
Hari Om and Pranams!

2014 has been the launch year for the Rachana Creative contest in which all age groups, the young and the old, had an opportunity to express their creativity through various media -- short or long essays, poem, audio/video and artwork within the framework of age specific theme(s) and topics.

We had a total of 28 participants this year from Chinmayam, Frederick and Virginia. On May 3rd-4th, 2014, the participants were recognized, and we are excited to congratulate each of them for their creative pursuits. Swamiji Dheerananda blessed everyone by awarding the certificates and a beautiful Om scarf. This special issue of Chinmaya Smrithi - Rachana edition—2014 is published as a tribute to Sri Gurudev. We invite you to explore and enjoy the creative dedications.

Our heartfelt thanks are to the Rachana Team of judges for their diligent and cheerful seva behind the scenes. They have done a fantastic job of objectively judging each entry and exhibited this selfless seva, unseen and anonymous in a real sense. The Rachana Team of Judges will remain anonymous as they will continue to be on the judge panel going forward. All the submissions were also judged as anonymous entries and the participant names were opened only at the conclusion of the judging process. The judges have conveyed that they enjoyed all the submissions thoroughly and have sent their best wishes to all the

participants. Keep it up! Our pranams are to the team of silent and selfless judges amidst us.

Orchestrating this contest was truly a team-work, and it would not have been possible to pull it together in the uncharted waters without the teammates and the blessings of our Swamiji Dheerananda and Acharya Vilasiniji. A big thank you is to Sri Sitaram Kowtha (for compiling Rachana-Smrithi edition), Smt. Deepa Krishnan (Bala Vihar Director-Chinmayam) and Sri Raja Kirkire (Director-Chinmayam) for their cheerful assistance, support, cooperation and excellent suggestions in making this possible. Personally, it has been a rewarding and joyful journey to work with the wonderful team of Acharyas, Coordinators, Judge Panels and Participant Families. My gratitude is to the Lord and to Sri Gurudev for the blessings and guidance to all of us and to everyone for giving this opportunity to grow, learn and serve.

We hope to build on the success of the Rachana Creative Contest, and offer it every year. We look forward to your participation. Please watch for Rachana e-mail announcements in December 2014. The submissions will be due by the Presidents Day in February 2015.

With Love and Best Wishes,
Vandana K. Bapna
(Rachana Coordinator)

Padmasree Veeraraghavan



Anisha Sankar, Grade 5



Shriya Yavasani, Grade 4



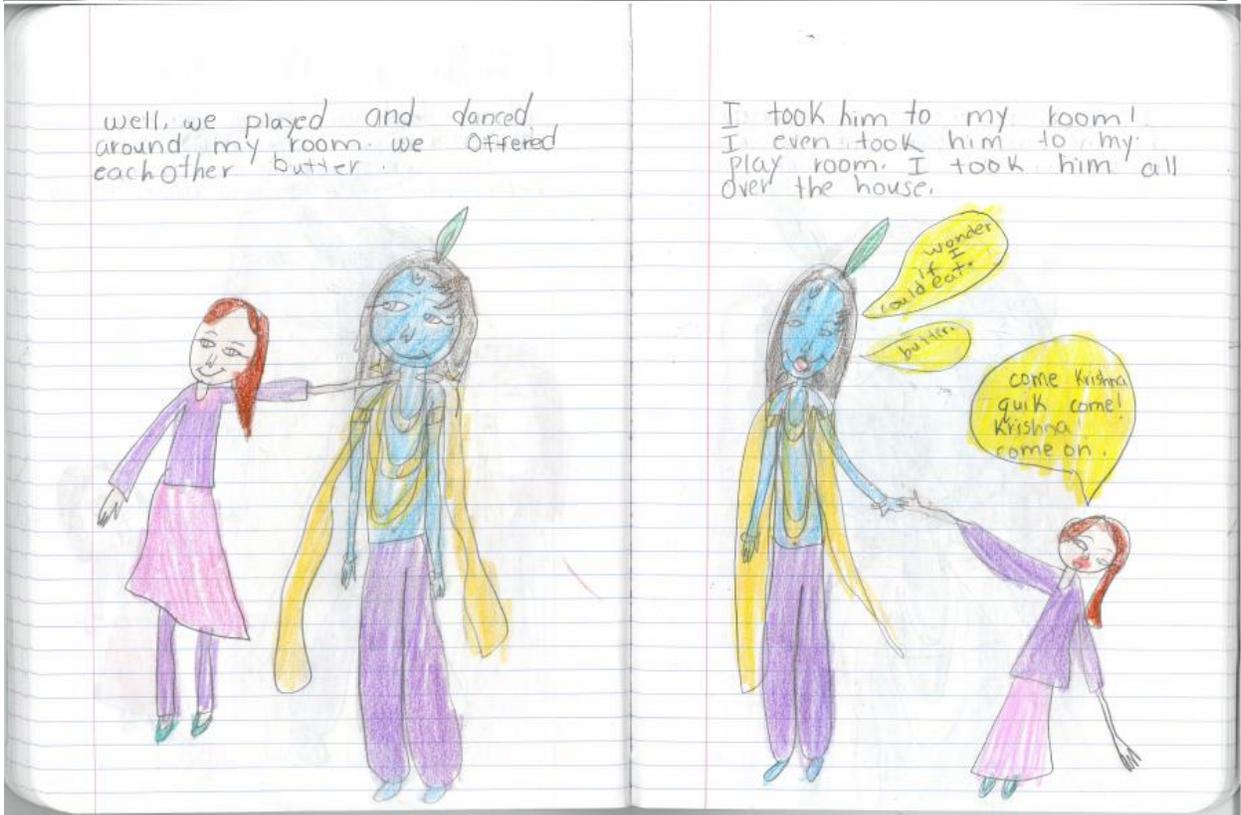
Sanjeevani Mukherjee, Grade 1



①
I will spend a day with Krishna by making a butter house for him. I would talk with him about he playing his flute. I would take him to Yamuna river. I would show him a gold palace. I would want him to meet my sister. I will ask him why Lord Shiva didn't kill Mahishasur and Goddess

②
Parvati did. I will also ask why Sita went back to her mother Earth. I will tell him that I wonder why there are no women presidents of United States of America.

Kashmira Deshpande, Grade 1



I showed him my picture
I drew of him. He gave a
great grin!



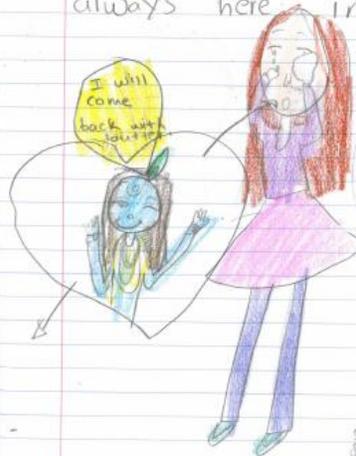
I wanted him to meet
my mom and dad. Ofcourse
my brother because he would
be surprised.



last, we talked about what
I like to do in my room.
I actually draw pictures of him.
That's what I like the most.



At the end, we say bye
to each other. I cry. I
think he will come back though.
I think he will come back because
I keep drawing pictures of him,
because he is in my heart!
But guess what? He does not
have to come back. He is
always here in my heart.



The end

We Stand as One Family

Roma Venkateswaran, Grade 9

Accompanying Audio – <http://www.chinmayadc.org/Smrithi/Roma.wav>

She's sitting lonely,
No one by her side,
Arms around her knees,
Fallen from the sky,
Cast away,
On her own,
But she needs to know (needs to know)
That she'll never be alone.

She'll never be alone.

Meet her eyes,
Try to make her smile.
She's loved by someone,
She's known.

We stand,
We stand as a family,
Bound to each other.
We love one another.

And we stand,
We stand as a family,
Hand in hand,
No matter what happens,
We stand.
We stand as a family.

He sighs,
A long look on his face,
And I wonder, Should I help?
What if I just hurt him more?

But I keep in mind
What I pledge each Saturday,
Because, if he were my brother,
I wouldn't even hesitate.

We stand,
We stand as a family,

Bound to each other.
We love one another.

And we stand,
We stand as a family,
Hand in hand,
No matter what happens,
We stand.

We stand as a family.
You could be my sister, my brother
My father, my mother.
I'll answer your call,
Because God is in is all.

God is in us all.

We stand as a family
Bound to each other with love and respect.

(We) Stand,
We stand as a family,
Bound to each other.
We love one another.

And we stand,
We stand as a family,
Bound to each other.
We love one another

We stand (we stand),
We stand as a family,
Bound to each other.
We love one another.

We stand
As a family,
Hand in hand.
No matter what happens
We stand as a family.

My Best Friend: Hanuman

Pranav Boreddy, Grade KG

I want Hanuman to teach me how to use his club. I want Hanuman fly me to India to visit my grandparents. I want Hanuman to change disguise and show me. I want Hanuman to play in the snow with me. I want to introduce my friend Isha to Hanuman. I want Hanuman to fly me over the sea. I want Hanuman to meet my naughty sister at my house. I want Hanuman to play Chess and Tennis with me. I want to talk with Hanuman about how he thought the Sun was a fruit when he was a kid.

My Play Date with Krishna

Meru Gopalan, Grade 1

If I had a day with Krishna I would play games like Monopoly. Then I would take him to the Space Museum to learn about Novas. Then I would show him my crown which has jewels all over it. Then I would make him meet my best friend Jacob. Then we would talk about my Guitar lessons which only happen on Thursdays.

The End.

A Day with Krishna

Mohnish Mahajan, Grade 3

If I had a day with Krishna I would first take Krishna to my house I will show him my Lego collection and introduce him to my family. I will teach him how to build with Legos and show him my room. We will have lot of fun. In my room I will show him my trophies, my secret box, my collection of basketball card, and show him some of my projects that I have in my room. After I show him my room I will take him to the basement and will show him my science fair project and Roman project. We will play freeze tag along with my sister

(Alisha) downstairs. After we play freeze tag we will put on our snow gear and go outside to play in the snow. We will make a snow man, make tunnels, have a snow ball fight, and go sledding.

When we finished the snowman it looked good. But when we looked closely at the snow man something was missing. It was the arms, but we thought we can't use snow arms because they won't stay up. Then Krishna said we can use sticks as arms. So we went to get some sticks for our snowman. After putting the sticks on the snowman we went inside to get mittens and a scarf for the snowman. When we came outside we put the mittens and scarf on him.

Then we went to make tunnels so we could play in them. We had to dig deep in to the snow for the tunnels but I said how we could would we do that. Suddenly Krishna used his magical powers to make a tunnel along with the tunnel he made walls protecting the tunnel. It looked so cool I thanked Krishna for making the tunnel. I told Krishna, for the snowball fight we will need two tunnels that are connecting and a wall to protect the tunnels. Krishna agreed so he used his magical powers again. After he made the second base we both worked on making snowballs for are snowball fight and we also made some traps and some duck and covers.

We both got some time to prepare for the snowball fight. I hid in my tunnel with my snowballs and waited for Krishna, he knew where I was but he pretended to look for me. He threw a thousand snowballs at me I retreated to my base I went to my stash of snowballs but Krishna went through my duck in cover he quietly came in my base but this time I was prepared for him as soon as he got in I threw snow balls at him. While I was throwing snowballs at him he was making an enormous snow ball when he was down I was out of snowballs he through the enormous snowball as soon as it hit me it turned into a humongous bag of SKITTLES! We had lot of fun and I learned some strategies for a snowball fight.

Then we went for sledding in the front yard. We first made a track, after we made the track we went on my sled and went down the hill. We went down fast in to the track and when we came to the end we crashed into a big pill of snow. We went again and again, this time when we got to the top we made four more tracks we went on the fourth one. Track number 4 was very **FAST FUN and SWIRLY** we went so fast that we flew high in to the air when we landed on the road and suddenly it started to snow hard. Krishna and I went down the road and we were so fast that we had to jump out of the sled. Our sled landed on the frozen pound we had to walk on the ice to get my sled I tried but I slipped and fell on the ice the ice started

to crack, I was just about to fall into the pond when Krishna caught my hand and pulled me up. My sled was under water by now but Krishna did not give up, he dived in to the water to get my sled. When he got out of the water I thanked him for saving my life and getting my sled. I was wet and cold then Krishna took me inside, and touched my hand and warmed me up and left me a **SMALL GOLDEN MODEL OF INDA. THE END!!!**

A Day with my best friend Hanuman

Vaishali Sukumar, Grade 3

I would spend a day with Hanuman and hitch a ride on his back to see all the places he has been and seen like Ayodhya and Lanka. I would love to go to these places with Hanuman more than with anybody else so he can narrate all his adventures he had, better than anybody else.

I would like for him to take me to places like the battle field where Ravana was killed and the ocean he jumped over. I would also ask him to take me to Sri Lanka to have a quick tour. Then, I would ask for him to take me to the Hanuman temple nearest to our house. I think it would be nice to go there because the temple is raising money to make a 35 foot tall Hanuman idol. I would want Hanuman to see the model plans because the priests and people helping to build it are so devoted to Hanuman. I would like for the priests to see Hanuman themselves. Everyone at the temple would love to pray to the real lord more than the idols.

After we get home, I would show Hanuman my room and all the pictures around the room of him and the beautiful altar for Hanuman that my grandmother made for me, to show how much I love him and how much I am devoted to him.

Then, I would go outside and show Hanuman all the beautiful and colorful flowers in our garden. If we have enough flowers, we will have a really big fun flower petal fight!!!

After the petal fight, I would talk to Hanuman about how beautiful life is. I would also ask for one wish....for the Gods to please, use their powers to stop people from hurting nature. Plants or animals, insects or spiders, it is not good to hurt nature.

I would talk to Hanuman about how much I love him and about every single vision I got of him. I will tell him what I would do if

I were in a situation like the kids and parents in the Newtown school in Connecticut, I would use 2 of my favorite qualities of Hanuman - Ajayam-being alert, and Nirbayathvam - being fearless.

I would show my trusted friends who believe in Gods and Goddesses and introduce them to my friend Hanuman.

I will ask my mother to make Vada-Mala for a dinner surprise. I will let Hanuman know that he can ask my mother to fix something about the Vadas if he doesn't like it.

The ride on Hanuman's back will be so exciting. I will feel very relaxed feeling the light breeze whipping my hair onto my face while I zoom away on Hanuman's back. What a ride it will be!!! I will thank Hanuman for being generous and letting me ride, for he does not let anyone on his back but Rama, Sita and Lakshmanan.

These are the plans I have for Hanuman's visit. I know we will have a great time!

My favorite Ramayana Character: Bharata

Meghna Krishnan, Grade 4

There are so many characters in the Ramayana. Each one has different personalities and lessons for us. For example, Lord Rama teaches us about bravery and loyalty, Goddess Sita for her courage, Lakshmana for his persistence and Hanuman for his devotion.

My favorite character is Bharata. Bharata was Rama's younger brother. Once when he left Ayodhya to visit his uncle, his mother Queen Kaikeyi banished Rama to the forest for 14 years and made Bharata crown prince. Rama left for the forest accompanied by his wife Sita and brother, Lakshmana. His father King Dasaratha died of grief.

Bharata came home to these shocking events. He had lost his two brothers. He had lost his reputation amongst citizens of Ayodhya for no fault of his own. But he had the throne. Even though he had the chance to take the royal throne, he did not. This is first reason I like Bharata. He had the will power to deny the throne because he knew it was Rama's. He went to Rama and asked him to come back. Unfortunately, Rama did not come back because Rama too had the same sense of will power,

so Bharata took Rama's sandals and kept them on the throne. He told Rama if he came even a day late, he would take his life.

Another reason I chose Bharata is because he had a strong amount of Dharma. He always did the right thing. This is a very important trait I learned from Bharata. There is always a comfortable thing to do, and the difficult but correct thing to do. For example, the correct thing to do would be to help around the house. Though the comfortable thing to do would be to play on the computer. I have learned from Bharata the right thing to do is the best! In conclusion, I chose Bharata because of his personality. His sense of duty, loyalty to his brother Rama, and determination are all lessons for me.

**My favorite Ramayana Character:
Sita**

Debanshi Chowdhury, Grade 5

My favorite character from Ramayan is Sita because she was loving, caring and determined. When Ram was sent to exile for 14 years with Laxman, Sita eagerly wanted to accompany her husband, no matter what. Sita agreed to go through the fire test after she was free from Ravan. Town's men and women commented on Ram being too harsh to his wife. Laxman was most mad of all. Still, Sita had the same love and honor for her husband.

When I think of Sita, I picture her as the most beautiful, patient, and pure lady in the world. She was a princess of King Janak, but couldn't get much comfort, after her marriage. She was persistent with her commitment.

Ravan had hijacked Sita, and put her in, "Ashoka Baan". Once he was about to touch her but then Sita got only one strand of grass and said that if he would touch her, the strand of grass would burn him. That indicated the purity of Sita.

Hanuman offered Sita to escape from Ravan. She didn't accept the offer. There are two reasons behind this. First she didn't want to touch another male person and secondly she wanted Lord Ram to punish Ravan for his mis-deeds.

Sita's dedication to her husband, love to her children, family members and all the subjects of Ayodhya, makes her an unique female character in the Ramayan and an example to all women in the world for all times.

My favorite character in the Ramayana is Rama. He is my

**My favorite Ramayana Character:
Rama**

Alisha Mahajan, Grade 5

favorite character because he is respectful, obedient, brave, caring, determined, and ideal. He shows those traits many times during the Ramayana. He still inspires us today, even though this event occurred centuries before. I will share some events from the Ramayana in which Rama shows those traits.

One of the many times Rama was obedient was when he was put to exile. When Kaikeyi told him of the bad news he didn't argue, but he started getting ready to go to the forest. Rama was positive about everything that was happening; he knew that this was for the best. He comforted his mother, calmed down Lakshmana, and took leave with Sita and Lakshmana who pleaded to go with him. Rama quickly set for the forest to obey the orders.

Rama was respectful to everyone he met. A time Rama showed this characteristic was when Bharata meets Rama in the forest. Bharata begs Rama to come back. But, Rama respectfully declined to go back and accept the crown. He told Bharata that he would have to carry out the exile to respect his father's words.

A time Rama showed his bravery was when he and Lakshmana fought the evil raksas named Kabandha. Kabandha trapped Rama and Lakshmana and challenged them to a fight. The fight was long and the brothers fought hard. Rama was brave and finally defeated the raksas. After the fight the raksas asked the brothers to put him in the fire to undo his curse. And in return Kabandha advised them to get help from Sugriva the monkey king. Rama's bravery helped the brothers because they never would have defeated Kabandha without Rama's bravery.

Rama shows the characteristic of caring when Ravana abducts Sita. Rama cared so much for Sita that he started to cry. And he began to search for her everywhere. He searched in every area nearby, every pond, lake and corner. In his sadness of losing Sita he became unconscious. Even Lakshmana couldn't comfort Rama; Rama was worried sick about Sita. He cared for her so much; he would not stop looking for her.

Rama is determined when he tries to find Sita. He would not stop and take any breaks. All day and night he would look for

Sita; even raksasas could not stop him. He would kill anyone that got in his way. Rama received help from Sugriva and Hanuman. They led Rama south to Ravanna's palace, where many raksasas guarded Sita and Ravana. Rama and Ravana fought for days, and Rama's determination led him to victory. Rama won his love back, all because of his determination.

Rama was an ideal king and ruler. He put his people before himself. He banishes Sita because his subjects were talking ill about Sita's abduction in Lanka. To set a good example for his subjects he decided to banish Sita from Ayodhya. He was to be an ideal king and set a good example to his subjects.

My Favorite Ramayana Character: Lakshman

Shivani Sawant, Grade 5

When people are asked who your favorite character in the Ramayan is, they typically say, "Ram, Sita, or Hanuman." However, I've always had a soft spot for the underdogs, and Lakshman is the first thought that comes to mind when I think of the under rated. Why? Let's find out.

First of all, if most people were in Laskhman's place, they would feel jealous instead of proud of Ram. They would think, "Oh, my brother thinks he's so good, he's so great." However Lakshaman was perfectly content to stay out of the limelight, to just protect and serve his brother.

Not only was he not jealous but also very loyal to Ram. An example of this is when Ram had to go to the forest for fourteen years. Of course, Ram had to go because he needed to make sure his father kept his promise. On the other hand, Lakshman had a choice. He could stay with what he knew, wealth and his new wife, but he chose to go to the forest, and live as a hermit. Why? He was ready to do anything to be with, and protect, his brother.

Additionally, even though Lakshman got angry, he always was able to restrain himself, unlike other people (ahem, Ravana). For example, when Sugriva forgot his promise in helping Ram, Lakshman was really fuming mad. Nevertheless, he was able to restrain himself when Sugriva's wife talked to him. This shows he is able to calm down and restrain himself before he did something too impulsive.

He had another worthy quality, the ability to admit when he was wrong. He did quickly jump to the wrong conclusion when

he saw Bharat, armed and all, approaching them in the forest. However, when Ram attempted to calm him down, and he saw Bharat's sorrow and love for Ram, he was able to admit his mistake in misjudging Bharat.

Also, in my opinion, he is more believable. Ram is a perfect son, perfect husband, and perfect brother. One can try to be like him, but it just isn't that possible. Lakshman also had many good qualities, but was not perfect. He was short-tempered, and was hasty at times, but was able to admit when he was wrong. To me, that makes him more realistic.

However, there is one thing I did not like about Lakshman. He should get a life other than Ram. Meaning, he is too attached to Ram. An example of this is when at the end Sage Durvasa comes to meet Ram. Ram was meeting with another sage and had told Lakshman to guard the door and that anybody disturbing them would be given the death sentence! Lakshman had to choose between obeying his brother and not letting anyone in or letting the sage curse Ayodhya with death. Lakshman obviously decided that Ayodhya is more important than Ram being disturbed so opened the door and went in. Instead of giving Lakshman a death sentence Ram sent him away from the kingdom. Lakshman then decided to give up his life. I don't agree that it was a right decision.

In conclusion, other than the way he took his life, Lakshman was a very likable character and is my favorite character in Ramayan.

My Favorite Ramayana Character: Hanuman

Akshaya Balaji, Grade 6

My favorite character is Hanuman, and I will tell you why. First of all, he was in the Ramayana. He played a big role. Without him, Ramayana would have probably been a sad story. Now, let me tell you about examples from the Ramayana that shows why I like Hanuman. For example, he helped Rama by giving Seeta a ring showing her Rama was coming to save her. Also, when Lakshmana was unconscious Hanuman went to get the medicine, but he didn't know which tree it was on. That didn't stop Hanuman. He brought everything. I like this because; this

shows even when you don't know what the answer is, don't let that stop you from achieving. When I was young, I didn't know many things, but I didn't let that stop me from exploring things like, how to on the T.V, how to walk, how to eat by myself, and etc. Also, Hanuman was brave. I liked this quality because it showed that if you're brave you can overcome any obstacle in your life, just like my friend's grandpa did. My friend's grandpa was deaf, but he was brave. He stood up to it and didn't let his life be ruined. Now, he is a great scientist and studies animals. In fact I have a story of my own. I was in 3rd grade, and I was afraid of being alone, so my dad told me to sing the Hanuman Chalisa every day. Today, I am not scared anymore, and I can be left alone at anytime. Also, in my Balavihar class we are learning about Vibishana Geeta. We are learning about the chariot of life. It is the chariot that tells you what is right and what is wrong. Hanuman used a lot of these qualities. For example the horses needed to work together {strength, telling what is right and what is wrong, concern for others, and control of senses}. Hanuman showed strength on the battlefield fighting for what was right. He chose the right choice when he had to make a decision. Also, he showed concern for Lakshmana when he went to get the medicine that could save him. Finally, he showed control of senses all the time. He never got tempted. Finally, he had a lot of devotion and he prayed to Rama. This is why I like Hanuman, my friend and god.

My Favorite Ramayana Character: Hanuman

Prajeet Kalakonda, Grade 6

My favorite Ramayan character is Hanuman. He is my favorite character because although he is a God, a form of Lord Shiva, he was serving Rama all through his life. He was devoted to Rama and always followed his Lord. Hanuman has a lot of power and was very knowledgeable, having learned from Lord Surya himself. He was very powerful, even when he was little, as he tried to eat the Sun. He is the son of Vayu himself and an incarnation of Lord Shiva. Even though Hanuman was extremely powerful, he was humble, determined and devoted never losing sight of the destination.

Hanuman used his powers to help those around him especially Lord Rama. Even though he was devoted to Lord Rama, he still didn't let his loyalty to Sugriva waver. When he was offered a place to rest on his way to Sri Lanka, he refused knowing that Lord Rama was counting on him to find Sita as soon as possible. This shows determination and devotion and shows that

Hanuman is willing to sacrifice anything for Lord Rama. Hanuman served the Lord all his life, even after Lord Rama and Sita left the world. Even when Hanuman made a mistake, he admitted to it and asked for forgiveness.

Hanuman is the ideal devotee of God. He inspired me and continues to inspire me. His devotion to Lord Rama as well as his loyalty to Sugriva never wavered. That is why Hanuman is my favorite character. He inspires many people to become who they are today. He is the ideal devotee of the Lord.

The Meaning of Chinmaya Mission Pledge

Varsha Krishnan, Grade 7

"We stand as one family bound to each other with love and respect..." You know the rest, and so do I. And I have known this pledge since I was little; knowing that it had to be memorized because it was important, but not understanding why it was so important. As I grew older and was able to comprehend the pledge a little more, I realized how much it influences my daily life and actions. Let me illustrate what I mean:

"We seek the Lord's grace to keep us on the path of virtue, courage and wisdom." This verse is probably the verse that mostly relates to my everyday life. Every day I try to do prayers with my mom in the morning, especially on days when I have exams. On days I have the exams, I seek the Lord's grace to give me the wisdom to think correctly and do well in the exam. Sometimes, I know I have done wrong – such as not doing my homework or my chores. I pray that I have the courage to say the truth and apologize if this is what is needed.

"Ever ready to fight against all low tendencies and false values, within and without us." When I am about to make an important decision I think about the consequences with each choice and choose the decision that keeps me away from bad consequences. On the bus ride to and from school, occasionally a few students come onto my bus and in conversations they talk badly about teachers and other students using words that could be avoided. When they choose to use these words they are allowing low tendencies and false values to come in, rather than preventing. Even with good friends we should try to be nice and appreciative of all things that need to be appreciated, rather than pulling in false values and talking bad about someone or something.

“May thy grace and blessings flow through us to the world around us” I am very grateful for all the things I have, and thankful for my parents for all the things they have given me and all the great places they have guided me to. I do community service at Manna Foods, a community service organization in my county. Here, we pack canned foods for the less fortunate families. Each box can contain at least twelve items of cereals and grains, canned vegetables and fruits. This feeds a family of four for only three days! When I think about this, I feel that I am fortunate to have a family and food every night.

“We know our responsibilities give us the ability and courage to fulfill them.” Every Sunday, even though I may not eager to wake up, I know if I do, I will be able to go to Chinmaya mission and learn new things that affect my daily life.

Do you think/feel God in Everyone?

Dakshesh Nimishe, Grade 8

Dictionary defines “God” as “the one Supreme Being, the creator and ruler of the universe.” At Chinmaya Mission we know that God is more than that. God is like a guardian, doing its best to help everyone and meet everyone’s needs. But God is not always our Superman when we’re a Lois Lane that needs saving, we have to do our part as well. We have to do good things to others, such as being kind and helping each other with our conflicts. As Swami Chinmayananda said, “Man can change his destiny not by wishing for it, but by working for it.”

God is simply all that is good. We as humans always associate good traits with God. Christians believe Jesus Christ is God because of how he endured lots of pain for others. Most religions believe that if one is God, they are good or have good qualities. But since we always associate good people with God the converse is also true, in that if one has good qualities, then they are God. Because of this, God is in everyone since everyone has a few good qualities at least.

However, people don’t always see the good in others and only stress on the bad qualities of others. For example, imagine a kid has lots of toys already which he continues to love. But when he wants another one, his parents refuse. This kid is now angry at his parents, and will only continue to remember this moment of refusal from his parents. Like this, people commonly think about all the bad things certain humans have done, and ignore their good qualities. They refuse to see the true God in them.

For example, Adolf Hitler was known for his ruthlessness to those of the Jewish faith. While we all know of his unforgivable and heinous crimes, at the same time he brought all of Germany out of poverty and depression, much like Franklin D. Roosevelt with his “New Deal” to end the Great Depression. If Hitler hadn’t brought the Germans out of their ordeal, the German nation might have collapsed, eliminating lots of trade and goods from Germany going to other countries. While some people may look entirely sinister, there are always some good things in them. We need to look at the good in people in order to be at peace with everyone.

In conclusion, God is in everyone because of how we all have some good qualities that reflect God in us. So, we should stop seeing the bad in people and focus on the good qualities. In addition, this will make us happy. So, go out and be kind to all of your friends and family, since they are all God, and as a result you can feel happy too!

Life in His Eyes

Eesha Vasist, Grade 8

His eyes glance around with mystery, I am questioning with misery;

The trees are quiet as night, while his mind decides to prance along the midnight stars.

He stares with wide brown eyes that dance, along the lifeless night sky.

I wonder, what is life in his eyes?

To me a book is a breeze gliding through, but to those eyes staring at bewildering books.

What is going through his unknown mind?

I have no words to describe his plight, are fluttering fireflies lying in lies?

I still wonder, what is life in his eyes?

Is his mind subtle or raging in a battle within? The confusion lingers around me.....

His skills may be inept; but he is the light of my life!

For the millionth time, what is life in his eyes?

Poet’s Note: This poem is dedicated to my little brother who continues to challenge his challenges bravely everyday!!

Sadhana Inspired by Satsang at Chinmaya Mission

Sanyogeeta Sawant

Inspired by a recent exercise that Swami Dheerananda had the kids do in one of the Saturday sessions during common time, I took up the task of writing this essay. The exercise was about the ladder of achievement. The first rung of the ladder was:

I cannot, I do not know how

My first thought on hearing about the Rachna contest was I can't. My excuses were numerous, "it is too hard, I don't have the time, don't know what to write".

A part of me responded-" You are telling your daughter to do it. Shouldn't you be setting an example?

OK so: I wish I could

Thanks to the numerous email reminders I could not forget it and now- the deadline had even been extended!

No more excuses. I had already written last year about Guru and Swami Chinmayanda, so I flipped a coin to decide between the other two topics, as both seemed equally challenging.

Next step: What is it

What is Sadhana?

Gurudev said " To reach the pinnacle of peace, fulfillment, and tranquility called Self realization, we have to work on cleaning away from our real nature the accumulated conditionings (ignorance) that hide its pristine beauty. That process of cleansing is called spiritual practice, or sadhana."

Now I know what it is I am going to write about.

Climbing up! I think I might, I think I can.

Now that I have a clearer vision of my theme, here goes:

My sadhana began when I started bringing my daughter to Balvihar. Listening to Swami Dheerananda expound on the Gita in his own inimitable style had me craving for more. I started reading small booklets and listening to audio CDs on my long commute. Instead of listening to the radio and the usual depressing news I started listening to prayers and Jnana Sara by Gurudev, which beautifully explains the journey of the seeker. What I was doing is Shravana-active listening of scriptures or

Vedanta from a Guru. At times the subject matter seems hopelessly complex but right about the time I start to get frustrated I will invariably come across a quote by Gurudev or listen to Swami Tejomananda say on the CD don't give up-keep listening. Now Swami Dheerananda's Saturday discourses have become a vital part of my life.

The next step Manana (reflection) has been tougher but starting to keep notes has helped. I have tried explaining what Swamiji teaches on Saturdays to my husband without much success! I plan on joining the discussion groups, which is what is recommended.

Daily life and its demands get in the way-Chinmaya mission offers a lot and I try to attend as much as I can- mediation sessions on Friday Satsang by Vilasiniji helped me start to incorporate mediation into my life. I learnt there is no perfect time to mediate and it is hard! I will bring my meditation CD and listen to it while waiting in the car for my son or daughter to finish their activity.

One other thing that I started was doing Japa. Having never done it before I was hesitant to start but after hearing the importance and that it can even be done by beginners-I was willing to try it. It has gotten easier.

Another thing that I read that made complete sense to me was that if I could not use the knowledge that I was gaining it was useless to me. So applying what I am learning from the Geeta in my daily life is what I am trying to do. Trying to maintain my equanimity in upsetting situations at work and home. I am getting better but of course I have a long way to go.

Shri Vijaykumarji in his very inspiring New Year's message said something which struck a chord with me. He asked us what changed after the 18 chapters of the Geeta? Not the Pandavas, certainly not the Kauravas, not even Lord Krishna nor the threat of imminent war. What changed was Arjuna's perception. With his newfound knowledge he was prepared to face the same problem that confronted him at the beginning.

I resolved to try even harder to change myself and apply my knowledge to the problems facing me.

Next two rungs of the ladder: I can and I will

Measuring progress

How do I know if I am making any progress in my sadhana or just spinning wheels?

Guruji asks us to check by asking ourselves these questions and being honest with ourselves

1. Equipose: When you lose your balance, how fast do you regain it?
2. Are you enjoying your sadhana? Are you still doing Japa, Dhyana and puja as a job to be done or whether you look forward to doing it
3. Analyze yourself to see if your love of God and your knowledge are increasing
4. Have the wordly desires and cravings reduced?

In all honesty, I think I have made progress in my sadhana from when I first started..

Small steps yes, but as Swami Sivananda says “Every bit of Sadhana done is surely recorded without fail in the hidden Consciousness. No sadhana ever goes in vain. Every bit of it is credited immediately towards your evolution. This is the law. Do not think negative thoughts but calmly go on with the sadhana”. Very inspiring for a beginner like me to keep going.

Finally to quote Gurudev:

“Study is the means, Self control is the way but Self-realization is the goal.”

I guess that’s my sadhana, and now I’m done with the essay. But wait, I forgot one thing:

Final rung of the ladder

I DID IT!

Hari Om

Shri Gurubhyo Namah

Sri Gurudev

Vanaja Jaligam

Swami Chinmayananda known as ‘Gurudev’ with reverence has undoubtedly touched the lives of many people across the globe during his time and will continue to do so with his Missionary works. His early life, student life, his role in the freedom movement of India from British rule and his transformation from a skeptic journalist to a spiritual leader are quoted in several sources (1, 2 and 3). He came to save generations to

come from spiritual and social degradation. He is a great leader of spiritual renaissance and the cause for revival of Hinduism (1, 2 and 3).

Gurudev built a perpetual tripod stand in the form of activities, his writings and discourses to hold together the three age groups: kids, youth and the adults. The giving of one group to another binds them in a relation called family, which in turn makes a society. We are tied together in life with pristine love, to begin with when we emerge in this world and then traverse through duties, responsibilities, ambitions and materialistic desires. In such a complex journey, to define a balance to such a concoction of life and stand clear through the right path of Dharma is no easy road; as we all know. But truly knowing Gurudev’s life and teachings can definitely help strengthen steering our life in the right direction from time to time. His activities and teachings are spiritually enriching at all age levels. He strengthened these very three groups with his missionary activities like Balavihars, Yuva kendras-CHYK and adult Study groups/Satsang/spiritual retreats. Above all, he has left a legacy forever through his visionary Chinmaya Mission activities and also leaving behind several great Swamijis and Acharyas for generations to come. Swami Chinmayananda’s knowledge and vibrant spirituality flows to us through these Swamiji’s and Acharya’s discourses. Thus, have kept a continuum for the access of this powerful knowledge in our lives and have blessed us with their guidance. The Mission set up several Centres across the world (2, 3). It also runs institutes, hospitals, schools, clinics, orphanages and old age homes (2, 3).

Gurudev received pure knowledge from his Guru Swami Sivananda, Swami Tapovan Maharaj, meditation and his own eagerness to find the bigger meaning of life (1, 2 and 3). These are etched for us in Swami Chinmayananda’s discourses, Jnana Yagnas, commentaries on Upanishads, Advaita Vedanta and Shrimad Bhagawad Gita. Especially his insightful and practical commentaries on Bhagawad Gita brought him critical acclaim transforming several lives across several countries (1, 3). He was very respectful to all religions and nationals. If one ponders why Gurudev was so much eager to bring this immense knowledge with selfless dedication and incessant hard work to flow through people like the pristine glacier of Ganges, you come to realize the eternal spiritual bliss and realization that Gurudev was living in; which he wanted to share with every one of us. Gurudev has given numerous discourses at public gatherings and at family get together about Vedanta and Gita as a way of life.

Gurudev was very vibrant, creative, devoted, compassionate, dedicated, hardworking, profound speaker and yet a humble leader (3, 4). While he was a legendary figure, he always considered himself very simple and less important (3). As people realize his value and attempt to restore his talks and translations, it is not surprising to see numerous video recordings appearing on you tube etc. from individuals who have seen him live or were present at the time of seeking answers to their questions in life. He answered their questions regarding various stages of life and various situations in life. He was an earnest believer of making better and wise goals in life that is not only hard to achieve but also takes long time. As the goal should keep one motivated to work towards it every day (5).

There comes a time in one's life when one questions situations, circumstances, life changing events and the cycle of life. That is the time one looks deeply into spirituality for answers (5). Thanks to us, we have so much to gain, explore and understand from Swami Chinmayananda's works; that a life time won't be enough to get it all, I guess. But we can always reach out to these books, teachings, Bhagavad Gita commentaries and enriching spiritual discussions. In a way helping oneself and enriching each other's knowledge. Gurudev also said that one should live and not merely exist (3, 4). In memory of Gurudev's centenary celebration, we can remember several great qualities in Swami Chinmayananda. To mention a few would be his selfless dedication, sacrifice, compassion, sense of humor, incessant hard work and being a great teacher. He was also excellent orator (5) and knowledgeable writer, which is why his work attracted so many people across the world leaving an indelible mark on them. One could plunge into understanding the deeper meaning of life rather than be lost completely in the materialistic world.

One can go about praising Swami Chinmayananda forever, he who knows neither desire nor greed for any accolades, awards nor money for self. He deserves lifetime gratitude from every generation to come; who come to his abode (Mission) in the pursuit of knowledge or seek spirituality. The seeker's realized self; spirituality embraced life and positive attitude is in itself a small Gurudakshina to Gurudev. While his perpetual source of Vedanta knowledge and Gita discourses shall be an eternal bliss to mankind.

References:-

- 1) <http://www.chinmayamission.com/>
- 2) <http://thesilentway.org/lineage.html>
- 3) Book 1. He did it: Swami Chinmayananda, A legacy.
- 4) Book 2. Vedanta: Swami Chinmayananda, his words His legacy.
- 5) Art of Man Making - discourses by Swami Chinmayananda (Audio)

My Favorite Geeta Verse: 18-66

Smitha Vasist

Hari OM!

As a young girl growing up in India with my one and only sibling, I so vividly remember accusing my mother of loving my brother more than me. I also remember her never ever reacting to it. Eventually as it happens in life, I too am a mother to two who are wonderful... at least most of the times when they choose to be that!! They too sometimes accuse me of favoring one over the other and now I realize how can a mother ever love one child more than the other? Now I understand my mother's silence too. I know we, as parents have a different emotional quotient with each of our child mainly because as parents especially mothers, we somehow are able to perceive that every child's nature, their requirements and aspirations are different. We learn to handle them with kid gloves, always trying to extract the best from them.... for them.

When the Rachana contest was announced and we were required to write on our favorite verse from the Gita, I was once again experiencing the very same feeling of being a mother with seven hundred and one children and being asked to choose whom I love the most. How can just one of these verses be my favorite?

Each and every word is written in gold and unparalleled. Yet to be understood, learnt and implemented in life to the best of our abilities! Every time I read the Gita, I get this feeling of opening a window and a rush of fresh air come in and uncomplainingly a different view presenting itself. Sometimes it's the expansion of the old view but with something new and more meaningful to know and enjoy. It has never ever failed to mesmerize me or give me an answer to some of life's biggest challenges or

confusion. At times it has given me the power and the strength to look at something in a totally different angle and perception. It unfailingly reminds me of Robert Frost's words in his poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" ...

'The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

The Bhagwad Gita or The Song Divine is not just a holy book for the Hindus but a life manual. Every toy, electrical equipment, car and such we buy comes with a detailed 'Users Manual'. The Gita is the manual for our body, soul, mind and intellect. If we choose to make the Gita that guiding manual, we are indeed blessed and no matter where and how we choose to lead our life ...we will lead a contented and fulfilled life. The only thing we really need to remember to refer to this 'manual' as often as possible because then alone will we be able to operate this machinery called LIFE. Like everything else we see and experience in life it is all up to us and our attitude that really matters because our final equation is with HIM, everything else is pure myth.

I am just a very ordinary conditioned soul and definitely am not a realized master like our Gurudev or Swamiji and this is a very humble attempt to share the verse which has made some sense to me and always unfailingly brought immense peace and trustable hope ...

The Bhagwad Gita (Chapter 18 Verse 66)

sarva-dharman parityajya

mam ekam saranam vraja

aham tva sarva-papebhyeh

moksaisyami ma sucah

Meaning

sarva-dharman--all Dharmas; parityajya--abandoning; mam--unto Me; ekam--only/alone; saranam--refuge; vraja--take; aham--I; tvam--you/thee; sarva--all; papebhyah--from sinful reactions; moksaisyami--will liberate/set free; ma--not; sucah--worry/grieve.

TRANSLATION

Abandoning all Dharmas(of body, mind, and intellect) take refuge in me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.

(Meaning adapted from Gurudev's commentary)

In summarizing Bhagwad-Gita, in the very last chapter the Lord Shri Krishna says that Arjuna should give up all the processes that have been explained to him; he should simply surrender to Him and Him alone. That surrender will liberate him from all sins and worries. It is a promise from the Lord himself.

We as ordinary mortals think that only one who has become free from all sinful actions one can take to the worship of Lord Krishna. Thus, one may think that unless he is free from all sinful actions he cannot take up the process of surrendering. To such doubts it is here said that even if one is not free from all sinful actions, simply by the process of surrendering to HIM he is automatically freed. We should unhesitatingly accept Krishna as the supreme savior of all living entities with utmost love and devotion.

The word Dharma used here can be confusing and at the same time a very omnipotent explanation of the existence of mankind. The self is realized only when we are able to do away with the false sense of identification we have of the mind, body and intellect. Here as I understand the Lord basically wants us surrender our egos and rise above false assumptions and values. Do away with life's mundane and selfish actions and bow with love, respect and pure devotion to HIM and HIM alone. The extremely convincing and powerful words used here, ma sucah, which could mean anything, "Don't fear, don't worry, don't grieve," are very significant. These words alone carry the entire essence of the Gita on their shoulders. It's like hugging our own mother, putting our head on her lap and finally surrendering to her all our worries, perplexities, shortcomings and doubts because we know with her they are safe and she will always understand the smallest details and have a solution to all our worries and anxieties. Just because we also know that she alone knows us more than we know ourselves just like HE does.

May we all be blessed with HIS grace and work on keeping our promises before we sleep!

Hari OM!

The Value of Chinmaya Mission in my Life

Sudha Sivaram

The experience of Hinduism in India has both religious and cultural dimensions. Some functions have clear religious connotations where the centrality of the celebration is to evoke the divine deity. The celebrations of Vinayaka Chaturthi and Maha Shivaratri and Krishna Jayanti are some examples. There are others, it may be argued, such as harvest festivals of Pongal/Sankranti, Lohri that celebrate those elements of nature that nourish life but also involve prayer and rituals that have been shaped over time. Regardless of the festival or the celebration, there are three elements to every occasion: prayer, food and fellowship.

Sanskrit chants, poems and couplets about the divine, as well as devotional music combine to bring to life the spirit of the festival. Shiva manasa puja during Maha Shivaratri; Lalitha Sahasranama during the auspicious time of Navaratri are some examples. Equally important to experience are the colors and aromas of the festivities. Yes, the sweets – the ladoos and pedas during Diwali; the chakkara pongal and ven pongal during Pongal, the kootu and kali during Vishu – the fragrance of nuts roasting in ghee, the cardamom garnish and the crunch of the savory items! Finally, being with family and friends – new beginnings, revisiting old conversations, meeting family after a long time, greeting new babies – everywhere celebrations bring family together.

I argue that one thing that is missing in these celebrations is the question of “why”. Of course, we know the significance of these festivals as they have been narrated to us as children. But the enquiry of ‘Why’ is not to instruct a curious child’s mind, but to understand how these celebrations help us grow as productive and engaged members of society? Does eating the appropriate food in a festival fulfill its significance? What if you do not make modakams during Vinayaka Chaturthi? Are you breaking with tradition and somehow missing yet another opportunity to transfer your knowledge of cultural heritage to your children? What if you do not invite all your friends for Navaratri because you have had some very hectic weeks leading up to it? And if you do not know any Shiva shlokams are you a lesser participant in Maha Shivaratri?

Chinmaya Mission has helped me begin this process of self-reflection and repositioning mentally on the practice of Hinduism. In one of Gurudev’s many teachings, he discusses the meaning of Sanathanaa Dharma. Interpreting his teaching, this means Dharma or duty that is Sanathanaa – that which cannot be destroyed. Here he outlines the need to reflect on our many customs and rituals- our aacharaas. He urges us to find deeper meaning in these rituals in the practice of Hinduism. He first clarifies that Hinduism is a way of life. In essence, I take it to mean that the way we live our life reflects on our religion and not what we do at certain times in the year. Gurudev goes on to cite the following verse that eloquently and yet very directly outlines our responsibilities as practitioners of Hinduism.

*Achaaryaath paadam aadatthe
paadam sishya swamedhayaa
paadam sa brahmachaaribhya
sesham kaala kramena cha*

It means that a person can get only one fourth of knowledge from the teacher or acharya. The next quarter of knowledge is based on self-analysis. The third by discussion and discourse with peers, and the final quarter by simply living by the teachings.

This simple yet profound verse helps put many things in context for me. Making modakams on Vinayaka Chaturthi fulfills a family tradition. Observing the day as a day of learning and reflection and discussing how we do this in our lives and in our families is more important and life changing. Chakkara pongal may be given a pass, but discussing the value of the harvest season and the farmer ensures that at least once a year we give thanks to the true Anna- Daata (giver of food) in our society. Watching Shah Rukh in the latest Diwali release may bring joy and fellowship, but it is also important to meditate on how we can be small lights to spread peace in this world. This is my interpretation. And I am thankful for this ongoing fellowship and opportunity to learn about wholesome living and the practice of Vedanta at Chinmaya Mission.

Personal Gitopadesham

Aparna Venkatakrishnan

Monitors buzzing beep beep beep... sounded like they are in acceptance of my denial as my mind went no no no.... My eyes were helping my mind to express its thoughts...

My Krishna at that moment - My dad looked at me and smiled and asked me 'What happened?'

Even though I was worried that I was going to weaken him, I didn't have anyone else there to console me or talk to me... I opened up and started sharing my thoughts and questions..

"Why us", "Why did us happen even after all the Pooja you did", "How can this happen after following all the religious rules meticulously", "Is there no purpose in following so many swamijis teachings?", "What is use in doing all the yoga you did" and on and on I went.

My dad, who was in the hospital bed undergoing the chemo and other treatments for 6 years, struggling to breathe with his oxygen pipes in his nose, smiled and said "It is our Prarabhda". I cannot accept that unseen thing from the other births controlling us in this birth, but I guess Prarabhda is the only explanation to accept the unacceptable things happening to us in this birth.

My dad never missed his nithya karma or pooja at any cost. He was an ardent devotee of Chinmayananda, a sincere follower of Sringeri matt and so many other Swamiji's and their teachings. He always talked about dharma, nyaya, punya karyam, acharam, anushtanam. I cannot believe that our family can be succceptable to cancer with both my mom and dad getting diagonised around the same time and mom didn't want to see my dad suffer and left pretty quick. My dad was hanging in there to help us understand the facts and prepare us for the worst.

I asked dad that if Prarabhda is controlling us, why bother doing pooja, follow the religious principles and do yoga and learn scriptures... there began the geethopadesam for me ..

"In MahaBharatha Pandavas went through so many challenging situations and Lord Krishna was right there with them. He could have stopped them from gambling, or atleast he could have made them win, he could have prevented the war but

no...Why? Prarabhda...They were meant to go through it. But what did Krishna do? He was always there with them and helping them. "

Like that, my dad said "since we did all the poojas and followed the dharmic principles, he is helping us with the cancer treatment expenses which an ordinary person cannot afford. We are getting treated in the best hospital...Kids are nearby in my death bed, my kids are grown up and are financially independent, I have seen my grand kids.. I have completed all my duties. Prayer does not mean that we won't have problems. We have to go through the life according to our prarabhda. But God will be with us to go through it. When I leave this world, he will be with you and guide you."

The best lesson I learned in my life from my dad. I had memorised Gita slokas and forgotten them. I used to read the meaning of the slokas and had forgotten them also. I have never applied anything to my life consciously. I have never even thought about it. But just like Arjuna was so desperate, I was too... and I got my Geethopadesa just like Arjuna did... Krishna comes in different forms.. My Krishna who was in my dad's form at that moment left his avatar after his war with cancer was over.

Close to my dad's first year anniversary, we were enacting the 12th chapter and I was given the role of Lord Krishna and I was chanting and explaining

"Jatasya hi dhruvo mrutyu h

Dhruvam janma mritasya cha

Tasmad apariharyerthe na tvam shochitum arhasi! "

He came into me to remind and reinstate.

Thanks to my dad and the universal one!

Gunas of Food

Nagaraj Neerchal

Adi Shankara defined saatwik actions as those actions which move the mind towards more peaceful thoughts. Clearly, taamasik actions are those which move the mind in the opposite direction. Raajasik actions are those driven by the strong motivation to reach goals. Even the actions taken by us to attain moksha are raajasik. As the human mind is constantly

engaged in a cost-benefit analysis of the consequences of our actions, every action starts a tug-of-war between peace and lack thereof in one's mind. For example, even after peaceful contemplation, a detracting thought regarding all the items from the unending "to do list" is unavoidable for normal people.

Shankara's ideas are readily applicable to food as well. Food that can be eaten without agitating our minds with un-peaceful thought should be considered saatwik . Therefore a saatwik meal avoids all items that bother us bodily (B), mentally (M) or intellectually (I). Eating food that have very strong aroma (such as garlic or onion) could make us feel very self-conscious of our breath and they are hence considered taamasik. Several years ago, when I was much less busy than I am now, I used to come home for lunch regularly to eat lunch with my mom. She cooked a simple lunch for me. I clearly remember her mentioning that she modified the recipes to exclude items with strong smell because I was going back to work! Bananas are healthy, vegetarian, and perhaps the most calming food for most people; however, once the mind starts thinking that "they may be grown in a snake infested farm which employs children earning less than pennies an hour, and flown daily from a far away tropical country burning fossil fuel", it will be no longer a saatwik food for that person. Hindu scriptures do not forbid eating meat, however, modern production methodologies may not be in compliance with the essential vedic principle of "ahimsa" or "compassion to all". Once the thought that "eater" and the "eaten" are one and the same surfaces in the mind, this saatwik thought will cascade into saatwik actions and start one's journey towards true peace.

BLISS

Sudhakar Kalakonda

Mother is for Motivation

Father is for Foundation

Acharya is for Aspiration

Institution is for Inspiration

Individual is for Intuition

Intuition is for Realization

Realization is for Bliss

Bliss is our True Nature.

Be Curious to Know the Truth

Not Furious to Express the Truth

Be Alert to recognize the Truth

Not Arrogant to convey the Truth

Bliss is our True Nature.

Rachana Participant Recognition, May 3rd, 4th 2014

Photos by Vanaja Jaligam, Smitha Vasist, Rajiv Mahajan











