

Aum Pranava Ashram Newsletter



Nov 2019

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I. 1. Clap along if you know what happiness is to you :)

About Happiness

Yes, the title line is taken from the song of the adorable [Despicable Me](#) film, which lights up about every listener with joy instantaneously.

Everybody knows happiness. And I can say with certainty that everyone is looking for it. Happiness is the first and highest good of all beings since the beginning of time. Nobody wants to be unhappy; we do everything in our power to avoid so-called misfortune while striving hard to get what we want. We believe that doing so will finally make us happy.

Why do we look for happiness all the time? The most logical and incidentally also correct answer is that **we lose it all the time** 😞. Happiness incited through enjoyment or pleasure does not last. The abyss of time swallows it and sometimes even the memory of it. Therefore, human effort to retain or regain this joy is on repeat, eternally.

In an analytical mind, the following question might arise: if we are so sincere about it, why does it elude us every single time? How is it that we could not learn how to retain happiness and share it with others, too? What is it that takes joy and peace away from us?

In **Sanathana Dharma**, we speak of the six enemies within us, which are responsible for the loss of joy and peace. They are **Kamam** - Desire, **Krodham** - Anger, **Lobham** - Greed, **Moham** - Infatuation, **Madam** - Pride, **Matsaryam** - Jealousy. In the **Bhagavad Geetha** (one of the core scriptures of **Sanathana Dharma**), it is said that these six qualities are responsible for the downfall of man since the beginning of time. Dwelling in the egotistical tendencies of the human mind, they control the ups and downs we have to undergo every single day for weeks, months, years, decades, lifetimes. Their inherent energy is destructive.

Isn't it quite astonishing that we obviously don't reflect on the elusiveness of joy? Perhaps we take happiness for granted? Even though it keeps slipping through our fingers every time we try to hold on to it? Isn't that paradoxical? Adding to this complexity, the "six enemies" mentioned above will not allow anyone to be happy for a longer time. They are likened to sting-happy scorpions, swarms of ever-hungry mosquitoes, angry wasps, and hooded snakes ready to strike. That's how we lose our happiness. 😞

Only the truly great ones who have overcome human emotions and the delusional attachments to our likes and dislikes can master those harmful and selfish tendencies. These exemplary persons serve as guideposts to show the way. Once we come in touch with one such sublime person, we will know how happiness feels. Peace - exhilarated and calm at the same time - flowing through our body and energizing every cell in it. Feeling alive at last.

Be Happy and Make Others Happy!

These words are simple and clear, positive and light, and conspicuously non-spiritual, thus appealing to all. Contrarily, after 24 years of social service, my personal experience tells me that this simplicity is deceptive.

As simple and clear as the words are, finding our way to happiness leads through many layers of complicated and confused states of mind. To appropriate this positive and happy tune of joy, we must cross the frequently bitter river of truth. Eventually, the motto turns out to be conspicuously spiritual.

In the following paragraphs are presented what seem to be the cornerstones of happiness, following which we gradually learn to understand more about the intrinsic nature of our soul.

Truth Number One

Happiness does not need a reason to exist. It is already here, within ourselves, without us planting it or inventing it.

Truth Number Two

Objects do not contain happiness. Our mind seems to be hardwired to make us believe that happiness hides in the objects and creates desires in our minds to run after them.

Truth Number Three

The mind is a cloud of thoughts and desires. Remove them and revel in the blue skies of delight. The less the desires in our mind, the lighter, happier, and clearer we can be.

Truth Number Four

Not all desires are bad, and I am not even in the slightest condemning desires or the objects themselves. It is about retaining our **equanimity** in the face of fulfilled or unfulfilled desires stirring our mind into action.

Here is a quote from one of the brightest and purest stars of the Indian Spiritual Sky, Sri Ma Anandamayi:

“A worldly desire, if unfulfilled, makes you miserable; if fulfilled, it is almost invariably followed by some other desire, and the chain of desires disturbs your peace of mind. You will have peace only if you can rise above worldly desire.”

How do we rise above worldly desire? How do we escape the misery of depression, burn-out syndrome, and all kinds of bewitching stress symptoms? Putting a ceiling on our desires is a sure way to increase our peace. Spending more time in nature is another very positive influence on the mind, which can help us get in touch with ourselves. Yoga and meditation offer many possibilities for self-inquiry. Getting a grip on our likes and dislikes helps us balance our emotional stability! Coming in touch with this indelible joy living in our very hearts brings us back to life, most probably different from the one we knew before.

“Divine Happiness, even the tiniest particle of a grain of it, never leaves one again; and when one attains to the essence of things and finds

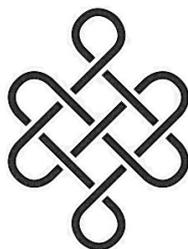
one's Self-this is Supreme Happiness. When it is found, nothing else remains to be found; the sense of want will not awaken anymore, and the heart's torment will be stilled forever. Do not be satisfied with fragmentary happiness, which is invariably interrupted by shocks and blows of fate; but become complete, and having attained to perfection, be YOURSELF." - Sri Ma Anandamayi

Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu! May all the worlds be happy!

I. 2. Karma and Dharma

Karma is an act or action. **Dharma** is a set of laws or mechanisms according to which this universe functions. The term **Sanathana Dharma** is used to describe actions or behavioral patterns that are in harmony with the eternal order or the cosmic code of conduct.

Karma in tune with **Dharma** (selfless and beneficial) produces happiness and a good life in unity with one's environment. "Bad" **karma** (selfish and harmful) creates the opposite - separation, strife, and turmoil.



"The Endless Knot" is a symbol used to express the intricate nature of karma

Karma and Sanathana Dharma

From physics, we know that each action produces an equal and opposite reaction. So, the meaning becomes more complex, because the word karma also implies the effects of our efforts on all levels of existence. The **Law of Karma** is like a clockwork that produces the subtle counter force to an action or actions.

In **Sanathana Dharma**, we also understand **karma** as the sum of all our actions, past and present. Karma even encompasses our future operations because our actions become predictable due to the formation of habits and all actions wait on their future-reactions. Past, present, and future are thus intricately intertwined like the warp and woof of a cloth. We call it fate or destiny. If our existence is so profoundly linked to this automatism, what happens to our free will? We will deal with this a little later.

Rāgas and Dveshas - Likes and Dislikes

The basic concept of **karma** (action-reaction), is easy to understand on a purely intellectual level. However, our likes and dislikes complicate these matters. We dedicate our day-to-day activities to fulfilling **rāgas** (likes) and **dveshas** (dislikes), which in itself is entirely natural and unobjectionable. The problem starts when there is an intense reaction if they are not fulfilled, which is often the case. We are so committed to the fulfillment of these likes and dislikes that a non-fulfillment generates a lot of frustration, depression, and sorrow. To escape these emotional complexes and to look for a positive solution, we carry out all kinds of **karmas**, thereby complicating matters considerably. We seem to like messing things up, don't we?



It always comes back! 🤔

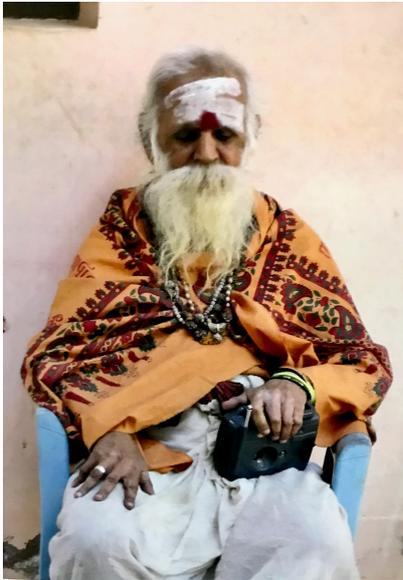
Karma Yoga

Vedanta (Science of Self-Knowledge) deals with the concept of **karma** in great detail. The **Bhagavad Geetha** (Lord Krishna's teaching to Arjuna, which is central to **Sanathana Dharma**) advocates **Karma Yoga** (conscious action) over renunciation of action. **Karma Yoga** means work with freedom from the attachment to our likes and dislikes. A **karma yogi**, a person pursuing the path of **karma yoga**, aims at equanimity and remains calm and composed in the face of defeat or victory. He/she does not go for a painless, more enjoyable, and pleasant action. That person will neither get exhilarated when something desirable is accomplished nor frustrated if something could not be accomplished. Remaining active without reacting to the results of our actions will loosen the ties to our likes and dislikes until we can perform all our activities with peace. **Karma Yoga** becomes a tool for self-purification, disentanglement from the painful karmic knots, and self-knowledge. Thanks to our free will to renounce the fruits of our actions, we do have an abundance of opportunities to experience inner freedom and wealth of peace - hundreds of times, every single day.

I. 3. Sharmaji, 06.12.1900 - 15.10.2019



Sharmaji in November 2018



Sharmaji in 2017, shortly before his fateful fall

For a little more than one and a half years, he was bed-ridden. On the evening of the 14th of October 2019, we were alarmed by his care-taker, who thought he might have had a stroke. On the following morning, his condition looked severe. Knowing that he might not live long anymore, Visvanathan and I sat beside his bed. We were chanting the [Sivapuram](#) when 119-year-old Sharmaji was conscious enough to correct our mistakes during the singing! However, his speech organs

were not fully co-operating with him anymore; his speech was drawling and hardly audible.

One hour later, on the morning of the 15th of October, he died peacefully.

The last rites were carried out by Visvanathan. Visitors came to the ashram to see him for the last time before his body was taken to the cremation ground. His ashes were scattered in the ocean near Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari. A small part was brought back for being kept in a memorial at the Aum Pranava Ashram. Next to his memorial place, we will plant a **Vilvam** tree, which is symbolic of his beloved Lord Shiva.

We will always remember his extraordinary devotion and will power. His retentive memory served him until the very end, and he remained conscious until the last second of his long life.

May his soul rest at Lord Shiva's Divine Lotus Feet!

Om Shanthi Shanthi Shanthi!

II. Timeline Aug-Nov 2019

1. Independence Day / 15 August 2019



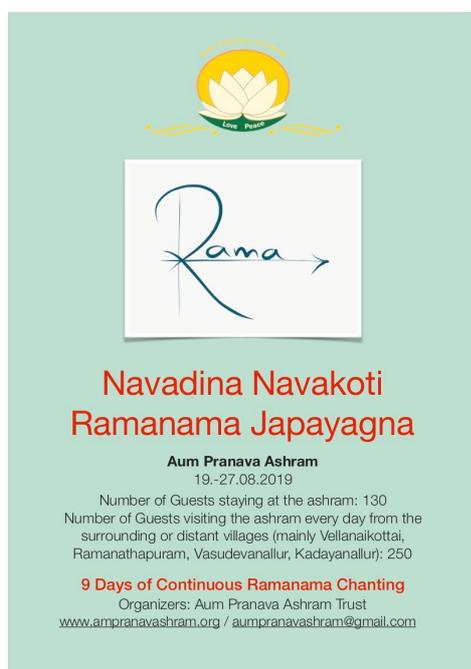
A picture of the play which the children performed on Independence Day

Apart from many cultural and religious holidays, India has three national holidays. The country celebrates Republic Day on the 26th of January, Independence Day on the 15th of August, and Gandhi Jayanti on the 2nd of October every year.

Schools and other educational institutions (like our ashram) organize programs such as dramas, various dances, speeches, etc. to commemorate the significance of this special day. Except for the welcoming address and the final vote of thanks, the children perform all the programs. Significant historical events, biographies of people who have played essential roles in shaping Indian history, or focus on a topic of current interest are the highlights of the event.

The climax of this year's program was a drama about the plight of Mother Earth concerning pollution. It was an excellent play nicely performed by the Aum Pranava kids, and they enjoyed every second of it! Here is the link to the video of the **In-dependence Day Celebration 2019**. You can also view it on our website <https://www.aumpranavashram.org/timeline-gallery/>.

2. Navadina Navakoti Ramanama/19-27 Aug '19



Inside and outside the Prayer Hall, every day, around 400 people gathered for the chanting of the Rama mantra. It was a very magnificent experience, and everybody was grateful to be able to take part in such an event (including ourselves). Entering the Prayer Hall was like a sudden uplift of the spirit. Whenever I¹ came close to the Prayer Hall, the thoughts in my mind lost their hold on me. On entering the hall, the thoughts would fly away like birds from a tree startled by a sound. The sincerity and happiness of the people were authentic. Even after the function, the sound of

Rama Nama continued to reverberate in and around the Prayer Hall. Please, click the link to the Timeline Gallery of our website to see the video of the event <https://www.aumpranavashram.org/timeline-gallery/> or on Youtube <https://youtu.be/eg14ALIYwjs>

We are looking forward to launching Navadina Navakoti Ramanama in 2020. If anybody wishes to participate in this event, kindly write an e-mail to aumpranavashram@gmail.com well in advance, so that we can make proper accommodation arrangements.

3. How are the Children?



On a trip to a nearby temple

We can gladly say that all the children are healthy and happy. The regular Yoga exercise and the nutritious vegetarian food give their bodies good stamina and resistance against viral fevers and other infections.

However, one young lady's health got us very worried. Muthuselvi was doing her first year of her Masters in Commerce when she was diagnosed with a very rare abdominal TB (Tuberculosis) infection a little more than one year ago. She underwent treatment and operation at the General Hospital in Tirunelveli. On the 25th of November, just a few days ago, the good news reached us from the hospital where she had her last check-up, that she has fully recovered from the disease. Due to her health condition, she discontinued her studies and stayed with us in the ashram. The food and the warmth of home helped her to quickly bounce back from the weakness, which had emaciated her body. We trust that this painful chapter of her life has finally come to an end.

Most of the children scored well in the Quarterly Exams in September 2019. In the very recent parents' meeting, the report cards for the latest tests were handed out, and we could gladly confirm that this trend seems to continue. We congratulate all the children on their efforts and promising results. We also pray that study-shy children will find more interest in their books and homework! From February onwards, the Public Exams for Classes X and XII will take place, which has considerable bearing on which college/vocational branch to choose for their further education. We'll keep our fingers crossed and pray for good results! Click the following **link** to see the **photo gallery** of the children's activities of recent months.

4. Navaratri / 29 Sep - 7 Oct 2019



Bala Tripurasundari

Navaratri is a festival wholly dedicated to the Divine Mother and all her manifestations in this creation as energies of Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Durga. **Nava** means 'nine,' and **ra**tri means 'night.' It lasts ten days and nine nights, ending with **Vijaya Dashami**, also called **Dassera** in the northern parts of India. The first three days are dedicated to Saraswati (the Creatress), Lakshmi (the Protectress) is worshipped during the second batch of three days, while Durga (the powerful Defendress of good and shielder from evil) is extolled in the last three days of **Pujas** (religious activities). The tenth day is consecrated to the victory of the Divine Mother over all demonic forces inside and outside of man. All energies are Hers, originating from the Will Power to turn an idea into a physical reality. When the will-power is intent on pure consciousness, the Self of all selves, it removes all delusional concepts and brings the soul to its peaceful home. The Child-Goddess **Bala Tripurasundari** pictured above is one such embodiment of Divine Energy capable of guiding a person's soul back to its true Self, beyond the three human stages of consciousness - Waking, Dream and Deep Sleep.

On a more mundane level, **Navaratri** is a time mainly for women to gather happily and pray for the protection of their families.

For the ashram members and me², **Navaratri** means a time of contemplation, **Chandi Parayanam**, and self-inquiry. The **Devi Mahatmyam**, also called **Chandi Path**, is a vital scripture of Vedic literature which we recite every day during the festival. It is a book of great inspiration and regeneration.

5. Diwali, 27 Oct 2019



Diwali is one of the most celebrated festivals in India. Families come together, and people distribute gifts to family members and friends, Diwali-typical sweets and savory delicacies are exchanged between families to commemorate this day. We buy new clothes for all the children and other ashram members as well as poverty-stricken families. The children's all-time favorites are the early-morning firecrackers

and the fireworks in the evening. For the kids, Diwali is indeed the most exciting festival of the whole year. They enjoyed the crackers and fireworks immensely!

III. Preview for our next newsletter

The [Annual November Programs](#) from 20 - 24 November 2019 have just now come to an end. The timeline will report about this function and also cover the Children's Half-Yearly exams, Christmas Celebration on the Eve of Christmas, and our annual Puttaparthi trip with all the children from 25 - 31 December 2019. Pongal in January 2020 will be the last point covered in the timeline of the February issue.

In the article section, I'm going to throw more light on the [Sanathana Dharma](#) view and way of life.

The rehearsals for the Children's Christmas Song 2019 have already begun! We hope all works out well; the video will reach your inbox before Christmas. Thank you for your attention and all your good wishes! We are ever grateful for your support, which facilitated what the Aum Pranava Ashram has grown into and stands and lives for.

Yours,

Traude and Visvanathan

AUM PRANAVA ASHRAM

Children, Elders and Staff Members

Cows and dogs... :)