

May 2023

Established 1985

Issue 5/2023

In this issue we cover the concepts and practices of Daan (charity) and Dakshina (a donation or an honorarium given to a priest for the performance of rites.)

Charity and service to the poor is a pathway to liberation and is karma yoga. When one plants a seed, nature in turn grows a tree that provides shade from the sun and fruit for sustenance. In this is the lesson about giving and sharing.

Our feature article is "Daan: The Distinguishing Feature of Humanity" by Pt Shobana Singh and Karuna Mohan covering an interfaith overview of Daan. Indeed all faiths promote, and practice acts of charity. This is a common focal point to build united actions for the benefit of all.

"The Aryan Benevolent Home: The Spirit of Giving" is a keynote address by Hon. Thabo Mbeki to the ABH Gala Dinner on 17 February 2023. The speech reinforces the social contract and covers the role of government in caring for the poor.

Hinduism in its diversity has survived many centuries. The honorarium to priests has always been linked to the valuable role they played in society as teacher, mentor, and spiritual guide. The performance of sanskaars cannot be a commodity that is sold for a tendered amount. It is a spiritual contract between a purohit and a yajmaan to pay respect to the All Mighty Paramathma.

"Dakshina: Each According to Need, Each According to Ability" was authored by Pts D Raghubir and S Singh, while the article on "The Social Impact of Dakshina" was authored by Pts R Rambaros and S Singh. We have an interesting discourse on "Mata, Pita, Guru Deva" in our series "Views from our Priests" by Pt. B Basdhew.

Your contributions and comments are welcome. Please see the last page for the criteria for articles.

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ओम् प्र गायत्रेण गायत पवमानं विचर्षणिम् । इन्दुं सहस्रचक्षसम्

॥

Aum pra gāyatrena gāyata pavamānaṃ vicarṣaṇim, induṃ sahasracakṣasam. Rig Veda 9.60.1

Meaning: Sing forth the spiritual hymn, the Gayatri, to adore the Lord, Who is our Purifier and Who sees us all with thousand eyes.

ओम् नि षसाद धृतरतो वरुणः पस्त्या ३ स्वा । साम्राज्याय सुक्रतुः

॥

Aum ni ṣasāda dhṛtavrato varuṇaḥ pastyā 3 svā, sāmrājyāya sukratuḥ. Rig Veda 1. 25.10

Meaning: He who is firm in his actions who establishes irrevocable laws, Whose deeds are flawless, pervades and permeates every heart in order to hold His sway over all.

Discussion: Only gullible people who are devoid of common sense and who lack power of reasoning, believe implicitly in miracles which are only tricks and devices played by magicians, jugglers, and hypnotists.

A miracle is a deed performed so quickly and dexterously by the hand that the eye of the spectator is utterly astonished and astounded, baffled, and bewildered.

Published by Veda Niketan, Arya Samaj SA

Daan: The Distinguishing Feature of Humanity

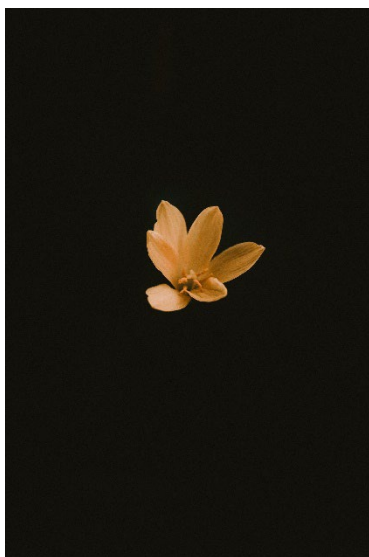
Every miracle of feat has, behind it, one or other secret, which appears to be magical. The secret is known to the person who performs the trick. As long as others do not know the trick they will say it was a miracle. Hence the uneducated person will easily fall victim to the so-called miracles. This has become the root cause of blind faith. In this way people become ensnared into the net of the swindlers. One should analyse, scrutinise, and interpret the miracle.

Science is based on universal laws or basic natural laws. A scientist does not brand himself as a performer of miracles. A scientist explains the cause and effect according to scientific findings. Scientists search for the truth. They never trap the gullible with a view to fleecing them of wealth and earnings or to be worshipped as God. Scientists use science for the betterment of humanity.

A theologian or spiritualist, by dint of yogic power or meditation, achieves or does something which a layman is incapable of doing. Spiritualist is a mystic, seer, thinker, pantheist, and saint who, in addition to his two external eyes, possesses inner eye which enables him to see past, present, and future. The science of yoga or meditation can work wonders. But man should remember that such a saint or yogi is not God. He is a man and man cannot be God.

Now-a-days, religious places have assumed the shape of shops where the priests or hereditary proprietors of such religious places indulge in earning money.

Pt Shobana Singh



The spirit of giving, caring, and sharing is a distinguishing feature of humanity. All religions guide humanity towards caring for the poor and downtrodden. In this article we look at how various religions practice *Daan* and institutionalise the spirit of giving.

We share the different religious views on giving and considerations on factors such as wealth, income, education, and marital status as well as how religious belief influences or are the determining agents in terms of giving.

Schmidt, 1931 in his book *Exploring Religion* states, "New religious movements and established groups differ. The established religious groups have survived through generations and continue to function today." The new religious groups are functioning all around us and their members are also expected to give donations and gifts.



The Christian tradition has always considered giving as a key to religious practice. Many Christians still look to the Hebrew Bible and the tithe (giving one-tenth of an individual's income) as a commandment. Christians are taught how to manage their money, how to use that 90% and hence they are also educated on the value of the 10% that is given to the churches to perform its duty.

Some of the new religious movements are first generational, they are groups with a foundational figure who may be living. The Roman Catholic Church, Protestant Church, Anglican Church, Methodist Church, Disciple of Christ, Presbyterians, and Lutherans are dominant new generation churches in the modern world. All these Churches are involved in the well-being of society. People who belong to these churches give voluntary subsidies to their churches. They are concerned with the well-being of people. They cooperate in joint projects with other religious groups to improve society. Their form of giving is regarded as unselfish.

New religious groups such as Wicca¹, Transcendental Meditation and ISKCON are set apart from other religious bodies from which they have separated. They too perform the act of giving through food for life programmes, caring for those in need and assisting the less fortunate. Many of these new religious groups are set up by charismatic leaders who are authoritative. Another group called the Peoples Temple urge their members to donate their property to others in the group.

The Pentecostals are perhaps the fastest growing movement of Christianity. It includes well established groups such as the Assemblies of God. They seek a holy second baptism, the baptism of Holy Spirit and worship through singing, clapping of hands, uplifted arms, and testimonies.

Jewish worship takes place in the home or in a synagogue and it focuses on "Yom Kippur", the Day of Atonement. The Jews observe holy days by fasting and through prayers of repentance and forgiveness. The prayers of "Yom Kippur" are prayed with 'we' rather than "I". Jews seek reconciliation and forgiveness for a community, not just an individual. They ask for atonement for all their transgressions. Their plight over the years and the treatment received has made them understand slavery, especially in Egypt, where the Jews were enslaved (reflected in their prayer books) as well as the Holocaust in which six million Jews were persecuted. The sanctifying of life means drawing closer to God through ritual process.

In Judaism the Hebrew Scriptures refer to "tzedakah" literally meaning justice or righteousness. It is considered a moral obligation to give to the needy. The commitment to help the poor, beyond just giving money and their time they should also display qualities of kindness and love and focus on the right relationship with one another. Giving charity is a Jewish law and tradition and it's viewed as obligatory self-taxation, rather than voluntary donation. Jewish communities willingly give charity to the needy and deserving.

While Jesus affected Western civilization, Muhammad initiated a momentous movement referred to as Islam.

For Muslims giving is a must. They are required to give 'zakat' (the mandatory payment of one's valuables, provided these are of a certain amount and have been in possession for one lunar year) and other performances of giving includes 'sadaqa'. According to Kidwa 2006 in his book 'The Quran Essential Teachings', he states, "zakah is the same spirit of total surrender and obedience to Allah." Muslims believe that man should give as directed by Allah out of love and devotion.

"On the Day of Judgement he will be asked to render an account as to how he spent what was granted to him...spending as the Quran directs" Kidwa 2006, Muslims give to kith and kin, orphans, weak and venerable members in the community, provide relief to the needy, these include widows, unemployed and temporary disabled people.

Muslim religious belief system focuses on helping the poor and needy. Prophet Mohammed considered the simple act of a smile as a simple act of charity for those who cannot afford financial help and food. The Koran inculcates the idea of giving and the value it adds to making the lives of less fortunate people better. Muslims have their own funeral and burial society, their own ambulance, schools, old age homes and clinics. They believe in helping their people to improve their lives.

The traditional African view on giving is also seen as important as they are also close to nature. The traditional Africans offer prayer for longevity, abundance of food and drink, for animals and for humans. Magesa, 1946 in his book 'African Religion: the moral traditions of abundant life' states: "sacrifices are usually made of items of value and ritual is bloody, whereas items of offering are symbolic, and the ritual is usually bloodless. In either case, it is meant to be removed from human possession or use and transferred to mystical powers, who become the new owners of the sacrificial or offered item." The reason for the sacrifice is by giving they will get. They are showing gratitude to God for providing resources in nature, and hence give back in the form of sacrifice. Traditional African views differ from tribe to tribe according to their customs, however many African people have adopted the Christian and the Islamic religion over time.



The Vedic mantras too are nature based. The *aadhidaivik* or natural meaning is that nature is ever giving, and the *adhyaatmik* meaning is that spiritual knowledge

¹Wicca, the largest of the modern Pagan, or Neo-Pagan, religions.

especially, must be given unconditionally, like God and nature do, for the good of all.

Hindus have a religious belief in giving: “*Swa, Swah* and *Swaahaa*,” meaning to give happily of one’s own wealth and skills and talents for the happiness of others; and “*Idan Na Mama*,” not expecting anything in return; unselfishness. Be a giver, not a taker!

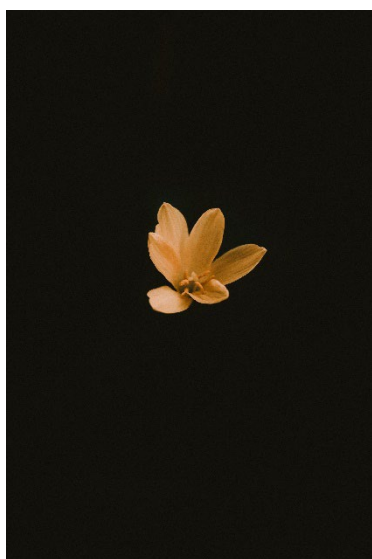
Daan refers to charity or a donation and is a significant part of Hinduism. *Daan* according to Vedic literature emphasizes giving help to the needy. It can be in the form of food, knowledge, land etc. It should be performed with clean intention and without hatred or malice.

The time has come for a united approach to a pooling of resources to share with those who are in need. Is it possible for all religious groups to cooperate with each other and embark on a collective effort to share and care for the poor and downtrodden?

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The Aryan Benevolent Home: The Spirit of Giving

Recently I read a book entitled – ‘What We Owe Each Other’ – with the sub-title, ‘A New Social Contract’, by a highly accomplished Egyptian-British leader in the economic developmental field, Dame Minouche Shafik.

In essence she argues that all human societies must answer the question practically – what do we owe one another as members of the community in which we live, and sees it as an imperative of the human construct that the very existence of human society means that such society must be bound together by an agreed social contract.

She writes: “There is a long tradition of thinking about the relationship between the economy and society, starting with the founders of the Fabian Society and the London school of Economics, Beatrice and Sidney Webb. Beatrice spent years collecting data in the poorest parts of London and seeing the impact of deprivation first hand.”

As a Member of the 1909 Royal Commissions on Poor Laws, she authored a dissenting minority report that rejected the harsh system of workhouses and Britain’s piecemeal approach to supporting those in poverty. In it she argued that a new social contract for the UK would: “secure a national minimum of civilised life...open to all alike, of both sexes and all classes, by which we meant sufficient nourishment and training when young, a living wage when able-bodied, treatment when sick, and a modest but secured livelihood when disabled or aged.”

Dame Shafik then writes: “More than a hundred years later, that is still an aspiration in most countries in the world.”

I agree with her in this regard, certainly as this relates to our own country. This is exactly why both our governing party, the ANC, and virtually everybody else in our country has identified poverty, unemployment, and inequality as three of the most serious challenges our country faces.

During May 2022, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) reported to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health and Social Services as follows:

“Sassa's core business is to provide social assistance to eligible South Africans who are unable to support

themselves and their dependents with the goal of alleviating poverty. About 31% of the South African population (about 18 million people) relies on social grants. There are approximately 10 million beneficiaries who depend on the monthly R350 special Covid-19 social relief of distress (SRD) grant. This increases the number of South Africans who rely on social transfers to about 47%".

Practically, this means that half of our population depends on social grants to rescue itself from abject poverty. In this context the explanation for the 2021/22 Social Development budget said:

"The social assistance programme is an important lever in government's strategy to tackle poverty and inequality. Over the medium term, the department will continue to use this lever to provide direct income support to the elderly, children, war veterans and people with disabilities. The number of social grant beneficiaries is expected to increase from 18.2 million in 2020/21 to 19.3 million in 2023/24, accounting for an estimated 95 per cent (R606.9 billion) of the department's budget over the period ahead...Social grants are expected to be extended to 300 000 additional beneficiaries per year. To administer social grants, the department expects to transfer R22.5 billion over the medium term to the South African Social Security Agency accounting for an estimated 3.5. per cent of total expenditure."

This statement constituted a firm Government commitment that it would continue to meet its obligations regarding the established social grants.

Of course this was most welcome given the persisting high levels of poverty in our country. In this regard, I am certain that because of the targeted persons of these grants all of us would want them to be adequately funded.

One of these is what SASSA describes as a grant for older persons, in other words a pension. There can be no doubt that our elder citizens deserve a dignified life during their retirement.

SASSA also disburses a disability grant, which I am certain all of us would support.

Like other countries, we also have a war veterans grant which speaks for itself.

The care dependency grant is very necessary because it helps those who take care of children with severe disability and need full-time special care.

The foster child grant is also important because it helps foster parents to take care of a foster child or children below the age of 18 years.

We also have a child support grant. It is obvious that many poor families need this grant to properly take care of their children.

Grant-in-aid is awarded to persons who are receiving a social grant, such as for disability, as a war veteran or an older person, who need full-time care.

The social relief of distress grant was introduced in the context of the severe disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic as a temporary provision of assistance intended for persons in such a dire material need that they are unable to meet their families' most basic needs.

I have described these eight government social grants to emphasise their importance, and therefore that they cannot be reduced to meet shortfalls elsewhere.

In 2021 the World Bank in collaboration with our government published a Report entitled "*Social Assistance Programs and Systems Review: South Africa*" which underscored the critical role of the grant and social assistance system in mitigating poverty in the country.

Among others, the Report says:

"The report finds that overall, South Africa's system of programs is effective, well-targeted, and provides sizeable benefits to the poorest households. The social assistance system effectively reduces poverty and inequality rates. Cash transfer programs are having positive and important impacts on a wide variety of outcomes, including nutrition and food security, educational attainment, health, labour supply, and livelihoods..."

"Accounting for 3.3% of GDP and 15.4% of total government spending, the cost of South Africa's social assistance system is relatively high compared to the average of other upper middle-income countries (UMICs)."

In 2014 the Government published a Paper on Social Protection in South Africa during the two decades from 1994.

Taking a step away from only looking at the role of the government institutions in the area of social protection, the Paper also reflected on the role played by the Non-Profit and Non-Governmental Organisations (NPOs and

NGOs), pointing to their importance in reaching the previously marginalised during the apartheid years.

Among others it said:

“Government also continues to work in conjunction with civil society in the provision of welfare services. Civil society organisations provide support for the umbrella of welfare services, which encompasses child welfare, child services, youth services, youth welfare, family services, and services for the handicapped and the elderly.

“Through support and extending government funding to voluntary organisations and NGOs, including those that were previously excluded from funding, welfare services are being expanded to underserved communities...”

The Paper stated that “NGOs play a crucial role in reaching out to marginalised communities, building trust, and attempting to provide much-needed help and support. (It said the evolution of the) NGOs over the years has contributed to creating diversity in the social welfare sector.”

It acknowledged that “the collaboration between government and the non-profit sector has improved access to welfare services, especially in the under-resourced areas of society, (stating that) in many cases, the ability of civil society to provide services on the local level has been better than that of government.”

The Paper paid special tribute to “the home- and community-based care (HCBC) programme...formally introduced in 1999, (which it said) served as a critical factor in actualising government’s commitment to constructing a developmental welfare system... (It said) HCBC organisations operate in all provinces in South Africa, offering a range of services, targeting vulnerable households with financial support in the form of government subsidies.”

Of importance, the Paper also acknowledged the underfunding of the NGOs despite their important contribution to social protection in our country. Among others it pointed out that 90 percent of the budget of the Social development budget is spent on the social grants and therefore that only 10 percent of the budget was available to pay for services provided by the NGOs and other government institutions.

However, it still lamented the fact that especially the home-and-community-based-care were short-changed as this meant that “poor communities are asked to carry the burden that would otherwise be that of society as a

collective at stipends below a decent wage. (It said) this poses a threat to their long-term survival in providing a vital service.”

The Paper correctly noted that “while funding for (the NPO) sector is not adequate, it is unacceptable that while NGOs struggle with funding, there are unspent transfer funds that should have been channelled to the NGOs.”

A survey conducted in July 2020 covering 733 respondents from 717 NPOs, therefore during the Covid-19 pandemic, said that ‘some 72% of the NPOs had to work with decreased funding, with only 22% reporting a funding increase. Despite these hardships, 61% reported that they had not received any government-related funding.

Though the assessment about the Non-Governmental Sector I have cited was made at least eight years ago, it remains as valid to this day as its observation then that:

“Government needs to consolidate the partnership with the NGO sector. It should decide where it will intervene and how civil society will play a role, and then make the resources available to NGOs to provide the services that would otherwise be its responsibility.”

Of course what is required not only to make resources available to NGOs, but also provide ‘a living wage to those who are able-bodied’ and avail ‘a modest but secured livelihood to those who are disabled or aged’, to recall what Beatrice Webb wrote, is to ensure that our economy grows and therefore produces new wealth.

As all of us know, this is one of the most serious challenges our country faces. But fortunately, we have the possibility that the social partners, government, business, labour, and civil society, will get together to engage our economic challenges.

In 2020, responding in part to the problems created by the Covid-19 pandemic, President Ramaphosa said:

“At this time, durable social compacts are more important than ever. It is through consensus-building between government, business, labour, and civil society that we have been able to develop a common programme, and the same spirit of collaboration and partnership must guide us in the difficult days ahead...Regardless of where we sit across the political divide, we must find the political courage to unite behind this common vision for our recovery. We must work together to build this new inclusive economy and to build a South Africa that works.”

Speaking through its ad-hoc collective, Business for South Africa (B4SA), again in 2020, business said:

“In recognition of the gravity of the present situation, B4SA was constituted to mobilise business’ capabilities in response to the Covid-19 crisis and to assist government in addressing the associated ramifications for the economy and society at large. Secondly, B4SA sought to formulate an integrated accelerated economic recovery strategy which harnesses South Africa’s potential in the shortest possible time by leveraging all resources – across government, business, and civil society – to address the economic challenges we face...”

Earlier this month, when he delivered the State of the Nation Address, President Ramaphosa returned to this important matter of the social compact and said:

“In the State of the Nation Address last year, we spoke of our intention to forge a comprehensive social compact that would join all social partners in a common programme to rebuild our economy and enable higher growth.

We were not able to conclude a social compact in the timeframe we had envisaged because a number of new circumstances emerged that made it difficult for social partners to forge a consensus.

But the good thing is the social partners have expressed their intention – and I’ve been talking to them up till just yesterday, labour, business and community. They have expressed a clear intention to conclude a social compact and have continued to work on a framework to enable joint action in key areas such as energy, transport, logistics, employment creation and skills development, investment and localisation, social protection, crime and corruption.

I have no reason to doubt the commitment that they have expressed to me.”

I have drawn attention to these comments by President Ramaphosa, speaking on behalf of Government, and Business to emphasise the critical importance of the said social compact.

All of us are perfectly aware of the very serious problems of very high levels of poverty and unemployment. The reality is that it will not be possible for us to address these challenges unless we achieve high and sustained economic growth rates as well as the transformation of the economy.

And we cannot achieve these objectives unless we achieve and implement the social compact about whose necessity all the four social partners are agreed.

I do hope that all those of us who can help ensure that we realise this objective of achieving a social compact will do what they can in this regard.

Of course I have also spent time on the matter of this compact because of the absolute imperative to achieve the goal of a better life for all our people, including those whom the Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH) has cared for, for an entire century.

We have convened here this evening to salute ABH and indeed to celebrate 100 years of Caring, Sharing and Serving.

There can be no gainsaying the fact that ABH has done outstanding work practically to live up to its Vision – “For every child a brighter future; for every aged person, light in their twilight; and, for every victim of abuse, another opportunity.”

It is a matter of great pride and inspiration to all of us as human beings that in ABH, for a century, we have had a welcoming home to the most marginalised in our country.

It is indeed a remarkable achievement worth emulating by many others throughout our country that in ABH we have an organisation which has given practical expression to the outlook shared by its founder, Mr DG Satyadeva that everyone must see his or her welfare in the welfare of others.

The importance of this lies in the fact that most unfortunately it is inevitable that our country will continue to produce ever more of the kind of children and people in distress that ABH is and has been caring for with unequalled devotion.

For instance, to take one of the groups looked after by ABH, a 2008 dissertation on the phenomenon of street children in Johannesburg by one Ngwenjah Rose Lefeh says:

“In South Africa, the number of children living on the streets increased gradually up to the mid-1990s and then experienced exponential growth... In 1987 there were an estimated 5000 street children and by 1995 had doubled to about 10,000 street children between the ages of eight and seventeen. Less than a decade later the number of street children increased dramatically to an estimated 250,000...Based on this information, it is anticipated by many practitioners in the field that over the next 10 years,

the number of street children will double due to increasing levels of adult unemployment...and the breakdown in African family support...Street children are the most vulnerable category of children at risk, as they are exposed to different kinds of assault including rape and prostitution which make them more vulnerable to HIV and other related diseases. They are equally the most marginalized in society due to their family background.”

What this means is that all of us have an absolute obligation to help ensure that as its need will grow with each passing day, ABH has the means to continue to help the marginalised in our society such as the children, the battered wives and the abandoned old people who have found a true home at ABH.

What should help to inspire us in this regard is the great care and honesty with which ABH has looked after and properly utilised the resources it has received as donations particularly from an admiring and concerned public, ensuring that no stench of corruption attaches to it.

It is precisely to sustain this reputation that ABH has a strong and effective governance system and management and a Staff truly dedicated to serve the marginalised who come in through the doors of this hundred-year-old-home.

Of course, as active supporters of ABH, we must not forget the two major statements made by the Government, that:

- NGOs like ABH are vital contributors to our country's system of social protection, reaching sections of our people in need, that Government has left unattended; and,
- it has not lived up to expectations in terms of providing the necessary funds to these NGOs.

Indeed, in this regard we know that over time Government has reduced the funds it has been contributing to ABH.

Here we are faced with the conundrum that as the actual need to support the marginalised and excluded has increased even for ABH itself, the funds provided by Government to address this greater need have become less and less.

All this emphasises the obligation we have as the general public to internalise Mr DG Satyadeva's philosophical outlook that we see our own welfare in the welfare of others, and therefore the imperative to extend a helping

hand to AHB to continue attending to the welfare of the excluded in our society.

Some of the great ills afflicting our society are corruption and amorality as well as pervasive criminality amounting to lawlessness.

All this conveys the message that whatever social cohesion existed in the past, it is getting rapidly eroded, reducing the human impulse that we are to one another our brother's and sister's keepers.

It is exactly this negative development affecting all our communities throughout the country, which leads to ever greater numbers of our people becoming social outcasts, thrown out to become the marginalised like the street children.

Objectively, all this emphasises the vital importance of a strong system of social protection so that we do not end up with large numbers of our people becoming the wretched of the earth!

It is of vital importance that eminent civil society organisations such as ABH must be strengthened so that, working with Government, they make certain that our country does not sink into the abyss of barbarism when we would have arrived at the point when the centre ceases to hold.

I am honoured to reiterate my thanks to everybody present here this evening because your presence communicates the critically important message that exactly because we are one another's brothers and sisters – because we know what we owe to one another - we will not allow that other human beings should be left abandoned in the streets as the excluded and marginalised.

Address of the Patron of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation (TMF), Thabo Mbeki, at the Centenary Gala of The Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH): Durban International Conference Centre, 17 February 2023



Dakshina: Each according to Need, Each According to Ability

Dakshina in Vedic culture is an offering made for the service of a priest. Originally this was a cow, which was wealth, however in these days it may be cash and food items.

Dakshina comes from *da*, meaning "offering" or "giving", *kshi*, meaning to "abide" or "to dwell in" and *na*, meaning knowledge".

When *dakshina* is given willingly and freely then blessings are received to those who are charitable.

Rig Veda 1.1.1: Like God as *Purohit* and *Ritvik* of the *Yajna* of creation does so with Knowledge and a spirit of sacrifice – *Hotaaram*, so must the *Pandit* – *poora karna chahiye*, enhancing knowledge of the Vedas and other scriptures of truth for oneself, and for society.

Priesthood is a voluntary, noble service in the name of God, not a job or business or employment. Families or hosts are not clients, but *Yajmaans* – *performers of Yajna*.

Yajna is an expression of inner desire and intention for goodness. *Pandits* must continually study, enquire, explore, research, and investigate (*swadhaaya*: self-development), and impart their acquired knowledge unconditionally with truth, unselfishness, and humility.

Hindu religion has different groupings with different belief systems, and these have their own guidelines in terms of giving. All Hindus believe in the sharing of resources and hence know the value of giving. According to scripture, the Vedic view is outlined in Vedas and other scriptures as well as by Gurus (teachers).

Puranic priests (follow the Puranas essentially) are sometimes qualified through a structured course, while others are not qualified but have learnt through a family lineage of *purohits*, having gotten the knowledge from father or grandfather.

Puranic followers offer huge amount of *dakshina* to their priests as they believe these gifts money, *Sidha*- items of food, umbrella, blanket, handkerchief, etc.), will reach their departed ones. People themselves are not aware that these gifts and tokens are for the priests and not their departed loved ones.

However, there are some who believe in feeding the needy and helping the less fortunate in the name of their loved ones as more of a blessing.

Home based priests who call themselves as 'seers', have little or no qualifications and see people in their temples or at home. They also have a set amount of money or fee, and ask for extra and huge payments for special prayers to get rid of bad luck.

People who go there need to question themselves about the power of these seers.

The Bhagavad Gita 4.19: defines a *Pandit*: *Yasya sarve samaarambhaah kaama sankalpa varjitaah. Jyaan agni dagdha karmaanam tamaahuh panditam budhaah.*

He is a *Pandit* whose undertakings are all free from material, worldly desire, and whose actions are burnt up by the fire of wisdom.

Your right is to work only, but never to the fruit thereof...

•Bhagavad Gita 2.47

Therefore go on efficiently doing your duty without attachment...

•Bhagavad Gita 3.19

Even death in the performance of one's duty brings blessedness. The actions of a priest should be free from expectation of any reward, one's duty should be performed without attachment.

•Bhagavad Gita 3.35

Vedic priests are trained according to the teachings of the Vedas in the School of Vedic Studies set up by the Arya Samaj South Africa. Priests swear an oath of service, adherence to the principles and values laid down in terms of giving and accepting (*dakshina*).

According to Rishi Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) the Vedic teacher (*Purohit/Pandit*) must attend to the work he chose and is called to, irrespective of all considerations whether he was being appreciated or not. It must be a life-long devotion to Vedic regeneration. We should never lie or leave the path of dharma due to fear of critics or due to greed.

Pandit Nardevji Vedalankar's response in respect of fees was simple, yet profound: *Paise ko chodo, kaam karo* "Don't worry about money, do your duty". On receipt of an honorarium at the age of 75, he spontaneously

returned a large portion for the establishment of a Dharma Prachaar Trust.

Dakshina is a voluntary offering of appreciation by *Yajmaans* according to their means. It is not a fee, price, tender or demand. Given realities such as the costs of travel and transport, it must be accepted that the absolute vast majority of *Yajmaans* are generous and kind in their offerings.

On accepting or receiving *Dakshina* with humility, it is incumbent on the *Purohit* to pray to God to bless the *Yajmaan* and family for good health and prosperity.

A primary quality of any good, great human being is humility. Maharishi Dayanand consistently refused to be addressed by terms like:

1. 'Guru,' indicating that this leads to guru worship and 'gurudom.'

2. 'His Holiness,' as this would reduce the Holiness of God.

3. '*Param Sahayak*:' Great Guide/Helper, asking how then would we address God?

4. 'Spiritual Head,' because the Spiritual Head of Arya Samaj will always be GOD.

5. He also strongly discouraged bowing to him or touching his feet, for the same reasons.

These are powerful, ever relevant lessons!

We all give according to our financial means and abilities. There are times when priests need to waiver the *Dakshina* as families may be facing financial difficulties. Hence, priests should not exploit the poor but instead give to them.

The Social Impact of Dakshina

In the Vedic era spiritual leaders and teachers were called *Brahmins*. Warriors and nobility were called *Kshatriyas*. Merchants and producers were called *Vaishyas*. Labourers were called *Shudras*. This system according to the work performed is called the *Varna* system.

In that era the *Brahmin* began preaching after entering the *Vanaprastha* stage of life (time when a person retires from career or occupation and gives up family obligations and domestic comforts). Brahmins travelled on foot. They went to homes to give spiritually uplifting discourses or to conduct *sanskaars* (sacraments). They were given alms to sustain themselves. These alms are the *Dakshina* given by members in the community to the learned people who do *prachaar* (teaching scripture) work. *Dakshina* is voluntary contribution.

The last five chapters of the Skanda Purana, Reva Kand form the Satyanarayan Katha. In one of the chapters Narad Muni approaches God to ask for a solution to end the miseries of the people on earth. The reply received was that a person should make a resolution (*vrata*) to cleanse oneself of anger, jealousy, greed, intoxication, and malpractices. Once cleansed the devotee should gather family and friends to listen to the katha, provide meals to all guests and give the Brahmin the token of appreciation in the form of grain, vegetables, and simple robes.

Emperor Raghu, founder of the Raghu dynasty, once performed the *Sarvamedha Yajna*, in which he donated for the welfare of the people the entire wealth of the treasury as well as personal possessions. The tradition whereby kings gave away their entire wealth for the welfare of the people persisted in India for thousands of years. The concept of *Ram Rajya* has evolved as an example of ideal government. This is depicted in the character of Rama in the Ramayan, the ideal king. Giving was considered as Dharma and during the period of Ram Rajya it was not uncommon to see kings making these huge sacrifices of giving away their possessions.

With the passage of time social changes occurred due to human interactions, relationships, behaviour patterns, and cultural norms. These changes impact on present day society.

Views from our Priests

The demands of a priest in current times can be devastating as depicted in a case of people living in a rental block of flats.

There was a man, his sister, and his nephew living in one of the flats. The man received the social grant, his sister and nephew worked as labourers. On the passing away of the man, there were the usual cost of the funeral service and the marquee and chairs as well as the meal at the end of the day.

Family and friends knowing of the low financial status in that home, rallied around to assist and managed to save the day. Some elders of the family approached the sister strongly advising her to observe two compulsory ceremonies warning her that if these were not done her brother's soul would be in limbo.

Considering the cost of the marquee, trestles, chairs, and the variety of dishes to be made and the long list of items for the *dakshina* left her at her wits end. Barely had the ashes of her late brother cooled, and the wound of the loss allowed to heal, here was this dilemma of how to bear the cost of all this.

Priests must consider the impact of their demands on families who are less fortunate, before making demands.

Affluent families are not perturbed by cost and readily accept these conditions. But the effect it has on low-income families must be considered. Unscrupulous individuals request a high amount of cash and in the memorial services. The bereaved are also expected to give something in gold. This practice claims that only with this gift of gold, will the soul be satisfied and enabled to travel in peace based on certain Puranic teachings.

There is a need for awareness to be developed considering circumstances especially when practicing funeral customs and traditions. These should be tailored to be less harmful especially to the vulnerable lower income groups and to women.

We all need to imbibe a noble spiritual ethos. Until that happens, individuals will be self-centred and will not be able to grant survival space to others. Hence the spiritual agenda for building a healthy nation should be worked on.

Authors Pt. Ressa Rambaross & Pt. Shobana Singh.

Mata, Pita, Guru, Deva!

When youngsters, having prepared themselves for the future by growing in material and spiritual knowledge, reach marriageable age, they would seek a compatible partner of the opposite gender and commit themselves to the pledges of marriage.

By this time the couple must understand the responsibilities of being a householder. For peace, harmony and unity is critical. They would make all the necessary arrangements so that children born into the family are provided for in regard to food, clothing, shelter, education and medical treatment.

As marriage entails progeny and raising of responsible children, the couple would seek God's blessings for a good, healthy, and intelligent child and, without lust, engage in intimacy, in readiness for the future.

When the child is born, the first person it encounters is its mother {MATA}. The bond between the child and the mother is special for it was in the comfort of the womb for approximately nine months where the mother gave it special attention in the form of safety, healthcare, and the singing of melodious songs. These special attentions continue as the mother gives the child regular baths, dresses it with neat clothes and feeds it with breast milk.

The father {PITA} is then introduced to the child who treats it with love and attention, and a meaningful name is bestowed onto the child at a special ceremony. As the child grows both parents ensure that all its needs are attended to, and as their duty they would also instil ethics, morals, and values into the child from an early age.

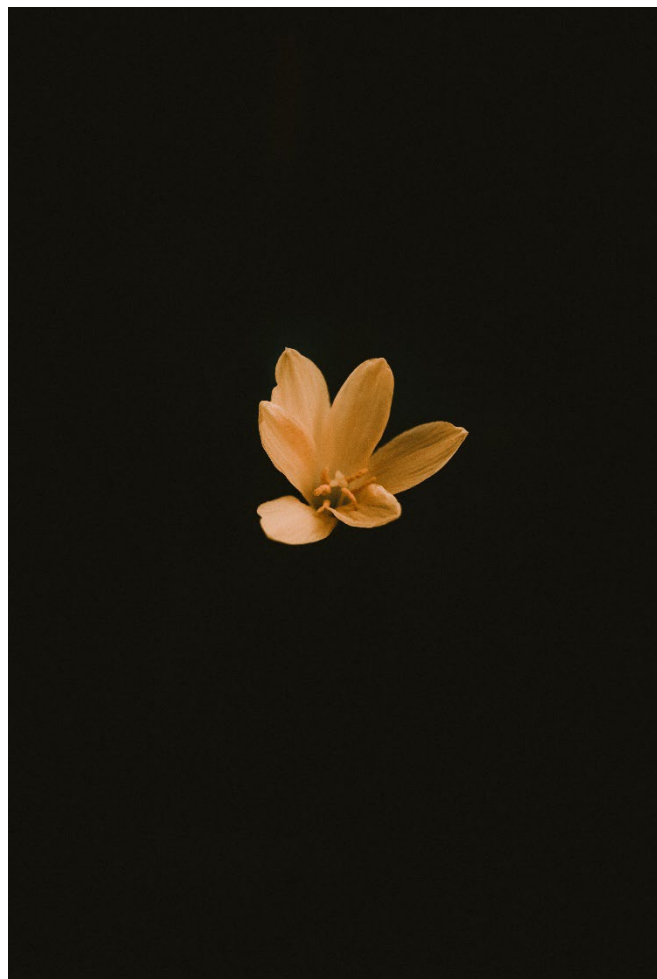
When the child reaches between five to six years of age the parents would invite the family teacher {GURU} to their home and having introduced him to the child the teacher would perform a special ceremony in relation to the child's education. Although most parents would then enrol their children in the normal schools where the focus is on career advancement, those parents who value a balanced life for their children would seek a school where the teachers are not only learned in the various career subjects but are also well-versed in spirituality.

These children would in addition to the academic subjects also be taught about God {DEVA}, the just, all-knowing,

all-powerful, ever-present, eternal, Supreme Being, who is the creator and preserver of this vast universe of which we the humans and all the other living beings are a part of.

So, when one talks of, 'Mata, Pita, Guru, Deva', one is referring to the four most important personalities in a child's life; the mother, the father, the teacher, and God, without whom life on this planet would indeed be a challenge.

Author Pt Basdhew Bhagirathi.



Message from the President

Dear Readers

Namaste

At the blink of an eyelid the month of May has crept up on us.

Nothing has changed for the better, for the people of our country – they are still experiencing dire poverty, social injustices, lack of clean drinking water, poor sanitation, energy crisis and a million other circumstances that contribute to one unhappy nation.

All Priests across the spectrum have been busy since March, with the Muslims beginning the fast of Ramadan; the Christians fasting for Lent and celebrating Good Friday and Easter; the Hindus celebrating the birth of Rama after Chaitra Navaratri over nine days. This period also included a fast of *Sattvik* foods only.

Priests are constantly playing an important role in their respective communities ensuring that all religious codes of conduct are adhered to.

The Arya Samaj South Africa boasts a contingent of 90 Priests, both male and female, who are the foot soldiers of the Samaj. They are expected to learn, read, and spread the word of the Vedas to their congregations and the greater community. The message of the Vedas is spiritual, thus paving the way for our Priests to embrace Interfaith dialogue, extending themselves to bring about unity amongst all people, while also strengthening the work of the Affiliate that they belong to.

This issue of the Veda Jyoti is filled with brilliant articles which speak of the service rendered by Priests and the awarding of an honorarium to them. It speaks of *Daan* and *Dakshina* (payments made to the Priests in lieu of their services rendered).

While the scriptures state that it is incumbent on the *Yajmans* (devotees) to reward a Priest justly, the Arya Samaj does not subscribe to Priests quoting huge amounts for the various Sanskars performed. In fact, during the recent Covid pandemic, many of our Priests conducted funerals and prayer services, not expecting anything in return.

The Purohiths of the Vedic Purohit Mandal of the Arya Samaj, study and pursue a course held over three and a half years before being ordained as Priests. The course is comprised of the theory and practice of the Sanskars as

well lay counselling. The work of the Priests is thus based largely on the teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, which is *Nishkaama Karma* – expecting nothing in return.

It is also firmly rooted in the message and meaning of the *Yajna* (Hawan), which is derived from the Sanskrit root *Yaj*. The *Yajna* is meant to bring people together in prayer and worship and communion with Paramatma. It also means *Daan* (Donation). This donation does not only mean doling out cash to charitable organisations but giving off of one's expertise and time for the betterment and upliftment of all Beings – like the physical fire of the *Yajna* does, when it burns up the fragrant and medicinal herbs of the *samagri* and pure butter ghee and breaks them down into fine particles which rise into the atmosphere to cleanse it of all pollution, for the benefit of all Beings.

Daan also means sacrificing one's time to serve those who are less fortunate, by way of supporting those organisations that are working around the clock to alleviate the suffering of the needy in our country.

As we fight for survival during these trying times, let us be reminded of those who are less fortunate; let us base our actions on Truth and Justice and follow the path of Dharma always.

Pt Arthi Nanackchand Shanand



Sanskrit words explained

श्रद्धा

Shraddha

Shraddha has two Sanskrit roots: *shrat* meaning "truth," "heart" or "faithfulness," and *dha*, meaning "to direct one's mind toward." Translated into English as faith. In common parlance, shraddha is understood to mean religious or spiritual faith, belief in some divine principle or supreme power.

It also denotes belief, trust, confidence, loyalty, respect, reverence etc. But none of these descriptions can do full justice to the concept of shraddha. In reality shraddha is much more than just having faith in something or the mere acceptance of a belief. It is one's worldview which revolves around the ultimate purpose of life. It defines one's sense of oneself. It is what specifies one's distinctiveness.

It is the way of perceiving oneself and establishing a meaningful and purposeful relationship with other things, beings, and events. Shraddha symbolises one's value system. In a nutshell, it is the vision of a good life.

BACK TO THE VEDAS LECTURES



Topic: What does the Light of Truth say about monotheism?

Speaker: Pt Arthi Shanand

Wednesday 17th May 2023 7pm to 8pm (GMT+2)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81299888772?pwd=bnFhRTcxS0htWTBDWE5FYVgza2w2dz09>

Meeting ID: 812 9988 8772

Passcode: back2vedas

Published by Veda Niketan, Arya Samaj SA

Announcements

You are invited to send articles to the editorial committee for publication. Please email your submissions to admin@aryasamajsa.org

Acceptance conditions:

1. All submissions must be in word for the attention of the editorial committee.
2. All Sanskrit words must be in Italics.
3. Photographs submitted must be in high resolution.
4. All references must be cited.
5. The limits for articles will be as follows:
 - 5.1. Short articles & messages three hundred words,
 - 5.2. Current issues and social justice up to nine hundred words
 - 5.3. Feature articles 1500 to 3000 words,
 - 5.4. Secondary articles up to 1500 words.
6. The acceptance of articles will be considered based on the following criteria:
 - 6.1. Vedic teachings,
 - 6.2. Principles of the Arya Samaj,
 - 6.3. Social justice and social action,
 - 6.4. Relevance to current issues.

To contribute to projects of the Arya Samaj contact admin@aryasamajsa.org
Please send your comments and suggestions to admin@aryasamajsa.org

Rig Veda 9.63.5

कृण्वन्तो विश्वामार्यम् "Krinvanto Vishwam Aryam" Make the World Noble

Yajur Veda 36.18

मित्रस्याहम् चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूताननि समीक्षे mitrasyāham chakṣuṣā sarvāṇi bhūtānani samīkṣe May we all live in friendly cooperation and mutual trust

मित्रस्याहम् चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे "mitrasyaaham chakshushaa sameekshaamahe" May we look at all with an Equal and Friendly Eye

Veda Jyoti Founding Editors were Pt Nardev Vedalankar (1913-1994) and the late Manohar Somera



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www.aryasamajsa.org PBO No. 18/11/13/2971

