

Aum Pranava Ashram Newsletter

July 2019



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A few words at the beginning of our Newsletter

On the Indian subcontinent, the summer holidays are long over. The heatwave has given way to a refreshingly cooler climate. We haven't had such heavenly season showers for many years.

Children are back in school since the first week of June, and study-timetables govern their daily routine. They are excited at the beginning of each new school year until this enthusiasm wears out little by little. In the end, everybody is happy with the prospect of the upcoming, new holidays!

The concept of something new, then applying one's imagination to it, then experiencing the imagined, and finally losing interest in the now-old-thing is the most ancient (not to say primitive) of all human patterns. Falling for the newness is the only repetitive and predictable thing that does not seem to tire us in our everyday affairs, and we are more than ready to let ourselves be carried away with surging emotions as something "new" appears on the horizon. Even though it is for the millionth time.

Is that where our wisdom comes from? Experiencing weariness and excitement in alternating sequences until we get old and too tired to get carried away?

Well, there are places where to find out! Yes, in ashrams.

What exactly is an Ashram?

In our last Newsletter, I announced that we would throw light on the topic of the ashram in a cultural, spiritual, and social context of *Sanathana Dharma*.

Let me start to say that there is no literal translation for the word *ashram*. The term *ashram* is derived from the Sanskrit root *śram*, meaning “intense exertion or suffering.” It refers to the mode of life associated with the spiritual striving to leave this suffering behind and the abode of those so engaged.

Ashrams had existed since time immemorial in India, long before this land was called India. The translations *spiritual retreat*, *hermitage* or *monastery* come closest to its meaning when we think of the ancient dwelling places of *Rishis* (spiritual seers and sages) who lived there with their family and disciples, far away from disturbances of the mundane world. Some *Rishis* wrote epic stories like the *Ramayana* (Maharishi Valmiki) or the *Mahabharatha* (Maharishi Vedavyas) to illustrate the otherwise incomprehensible spiritual knowledge to the people.

We also find numerous hints that *ashrams* must have existed in abundance. It is said that, over a long period of time, 7 crores (70 million) *Rishis* lived in this part of the world, imparting knowledge and inspiration through some of the 4 crores (40 million) *Mahamantras* (syllables or sound capsules carrying spiritual energy to illuminate our being) to the worthy disciples. These numbers sound spectacular, and it may be difficult to process such pieces of information. What we *can* understand from them is that ashrams were indeed highly prevalent in ancient India and have served as dwelling places for spiritual aspirants for many millennia. They have also helped in preserving the Vedas and the spiritual traditions of *Bharath* (the ancient name for India).

More spiritually oriented ashrams organize courses for learning the sciences of Spirituality, Yoga, and Ayurveda in various and manifold ways, the differences lie mainly in the degrees of preserving traditional customs and scientific knowledge. There are vast treasures of ancient scriptures (usually in Sanskrit) which can be studied academically in ashrams, like in Universities. A lot of modern Ayurvedic teaching and research is carried out in ashrams. Ayurveda and Yoga have become trademarks of Indian origin, both are being taught at Universities as well as in ashrams. In some cases, ashrams have even turned into Institutes for Yogic Studies (e.g., Bihar School of Yoga)

Ashrams have also served as shelters for outcasts or mendicants. In today's world, these places are usually founded by individuals who give life-support to people in need, irrespective of age, and background. According to the level of institutionalization and co-operation with other public facilities, these institutions render service to society on a public or a more individual level.

Service-oriented ashrams dedicate themselves either to rendering medical help for needy people, abandoned / orphaned / single-parent children whose family and economic background is exceptionally fragile or platforms that support only children's education with material / financial contributions, old-age homes, women's self-help groups, and other social NGO projects (Non-Governmental Organisations).

In yet another category of an ashram, nature lovers or environmentalists protect nature and animals by performing agricultural work, or conducting research work on ecological farming and the protection of original seeds, and even turn arid land into green forests.

Ashrams are many, but peace and happiness are one.

Whatever category an ashram belongs to, all ashrams have only ONE purpose, which is to increase the peace and happiness within us. Ashrams allow us, nay even compel us, to take the time and look inside of us, come to terms with us. Ashrams should have a Divine Atmosphere, where it is possible to drop the burdens weighing heavily on the shoulders and open our hearts and minds to the One Reality, [*Sat-Chit-Ananda*](#) (Existence-Awareness-Bliss).

Where does the Aum Pranava Ashram fit in?

Our *Aum Pranava Ashram* is like an integral system of combined categories: We accommodate a Children's Home and an Old-Age Home, carry out community service activities, conduct Yoga classes, perform agricultural work and protect cows in the traditional *Goshala*-way (*Gosamrakshana*).

The spirit of all these activities is rooted in a spiritual attitude, which is where we get our tenacity, patience, love, strength, and happiness. It is the HOW and WHY behind all our actions, making them meaningful and worthy (at least to us).

Sanathana Dharma

Sanathana means eternal. This was the easy part of the translation. The complexity lies with the term *dharma*, for which there is no single-word translation in Western languages. In Hindu literature, it signifies behaviors or patterns of behavior that are considered to be in harmony with [Rta](#), the eternal order governing life and the whole universe, and includes duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues as well as the right way of living. In Buddhism, *dharma* means cosmic code and order and is also applied to the teachings of Buddha. In Buddhist philosophy, *dhamma/dharma* is also the term for “phenomena.” In Jainism, it refers to the instructions of [Tirthankara \(Jina\)](#) and the body of doctrine about the purification and moral transformation of human beings. For Sikhs, the word *dharma* means the path of righteousness and proper religious practice. The ancient Tamil moral text [Tirukkural](#) is based on *aram*, the Tamil term for *dharma*.

We could say that Sanathana Dharma deals with ethical/moral/psychological/spiritual/social/cultural as well as judicial and ministerial concepts and principles, expounding upon the dos and don'ts of living in this universe and also elucidating on the consequences of keeping or violating those rules and regulations.

The core principles of *Sanathana Dharma* are:

Unity of thought-word-deed

The most straightforward, fundamental concept of *Sanathana Dharma* rests upon the unity of thought, word, and deed. Up and down the centuries, time changes the things around us, but the seed of Truth contained in the heart (being-awareness-bliss) remains the same. Hon-

oring this Universal Truth through the unified stream of thought, word and deed is one aspect of living in Sanathana Dharma.

Know thyself

A human being's first and foremost duty in *Sanathana Dharma* is to know oneself. To define ourselves by physical appearance, activities or professions, the color of our skin, or the possessions accumulated in a whole life does not help us to know ourselves better. The quest for the real self sets us apart from other animals. Truly honoring our human nature means to unearth the Divine Qualities lying dormant within us through methods described in the scriptures.

Since *Sanathana Dharma* covers all aspects of life, we will deal with the most essential elements in successive newsletters. Here is a list of topics that will be covered in the following newsletters:

1. The four stages of human life: *ashramas* (not to be confused with ashrams!)
2. The **social construct** in Sanathana Dharma
3. *Mata, Pitha, Guru, Devam* - Mother, Father, Guru, God
4. *Dharma - Artha - Kama - Moksha* (righteousness-wealth-desire-liberation)
5. *Karma, Bhakti, Jnana* - Action, Devotion, Wisdom
6. Sanathana Dharma and *Swadharma* (individual dharma)
7. **Protect Dharma** and it will protect you

A short success story of the Aum Pranava Ashram ex-student, N. Sathish Kumar



Sathish Kumar and his little sister Thangam were brought to us by their father in January 2001 at a very young age. Their mother died in a gruesome accident shortly before they were brought to us. Both children were witnesses to this shocking incident. Sathish's body was visibly damaged by an already advanced Tuberculosis infection, his respiratory system was severely affected, he was emaciated and frail. Even a little exposure to rain and wind would cause heavy congestions in his lungs. Breathing was difficult, and many a night was spent in sleeplessness due to high fever and cough.

A six-month-long, intense medical treatment helped to steady his physical condition. Many years of homeopathic remedies were necessary to retrieve his stamina and help him recover entirely from the disease. Eventually, he grew into a strong, handsome man who had learned to live through difficult times.

Maybe this is the reason for his success. After completing school in April 2013, he chose a Vocational Electrical Diploma course in Coimbatore with the sponsorship of the Aum Pranava Ashram. He was lucky to get a training place at Royal Enfield (the British-Indian Motor Bike company), where he learned and worked hard to get a permanent job since 2015. Recently, he was informed that he was promoted to a probationary period, passing which he would get permanent work at Royal Enfield. It is a small step, and of course, we should not praise the day before the night, but for him, this is a real success.

In India, success comes by hard, especially for underprivileged people. A lot of endurance and hard work is necessary to succeed and stand out in an international company like Royal Enfield. Knowing how tough it was to get this promotion, we congratulate him on this success and wish him all the strength he needs to continue on his chosen path!

Timeline May-July 2019

Children 2019-20

To see the slideshow on our website of all the children living at the ashram in 2019/20, click [here](#).



To see the slideshow of all the photos of the boys and girls supported for Higher Education in colleges in various cities of Tamil Nadu in 2019/20, click [here](#):



09.07.2019: Prizes awarded to three ashram girls by the “Kurinji” Library in Melagaram



From left: Dhanshika showing her trophy for reciting couplets from the *Tirukkural*, a Tamil classical; Sudha and Madhu Priya received trophies for their dance performances. The prizes were awarded by the Public “Kurinji” Library near Tenkasi, which conducts annual competitions for children from all schools in the closer vicinity.

It is a common practice for schools, libraries, and other educational institutions to conduct annual festivals and competitions. Children are used to holding microphones in their hands and recite poems, tell stories, hold speeches, sing a song, or take part in a dance performance. Most of the children like being the center of attention. I always thought that this is a direct consequence of being exposed to over-crowdedness in an overpopulated country. That if you wanted to show your talents, you would have to attract attention to get noticed. But over the years, I realized that this is a deep-rooted, charming quality of most Indian people to talk, sing and dance freely, in big or small groups, on or off stage, and spend time together happily, without fear of singing or dancing in front of others. This openness is a genuinely admirable feature of the children!

16.07.2019: Guru Poornima

We uploaded two videos of the Morning and Evening Programmes from Guru Poornima onto our website. [You can see them here](#)



21.07.2019: Rukhmani Kalyanam



While the storyteller (Bhagavathar) narrates the fair and romantically adventurous, but still profoundly spiritual, story of Krishna's wedding to Rukhmani, the children performed little extracts from the story and presented the Gopi's dance. The children love those programs and looked so endearing in their costumes! The Bhagavathar Divya Krishnadas adapted the

story for the children, excerpts of which you can see in the video which I have uploaded on our website: Click the link below to see the video.

[See the dance of the Gopis, Lord Hanuman, throwing bananas:\) and Lord Panduranga's gracious stand on bricks!](#)

Oh yes, and before I forget! The answer to the question of whether experience can give birth to Wisdom?

In Indian philosophy, there are three kinds of knowledge: *pratyaksha* (empirical), *paroksha* (comprehensible knowledge), and *aparoksha* (incomprehensible, transcendental). Imagine a place where you can sit down comfortably, turn all your attention within, and focus on this question in the light of these three kinds of knowledge. You may want to turn to a teacher or to a library to help you with the complexity of the research.

The teachers and the scriptures might say something like this: *Experiences are transient, time-, and space-bound, which makes them subject to continuous change. True Wisdom is related to Truth, eternal, and unchangeable. How can something mutable give birth to something eternal?* In Vedanta, there is a beautiful analogy which compares this paradox to a barren mother giving birth to a child. Incomprehensible? Quite so.

Another analogy is the rubbing of a wooden stick intensely against a wooden base until a spark of fire sets off a flame that will consume the wood from which it appeared. It is not the wood, but the heat which created the fire. Actually, wood and fire have nothing to do with each other. When the mind is churned by real contemplation on the One Truth, it creates a spark of fire (true Wisdom) which will light up the place, lift the fumes of wrong thinking and burn down the wood, the phantom truths of experience.

Transcendental knowledge (*aparoksha*) cannot be put into words, because it comes from a realm beyond words, beyond the mind and physical frame. It is ever free, self-revealing, and available to all who sincerely search for it.

Preview for our next Newsletter

- In our following Newsletter (end of October /beginning of November), we will cover more points about Sanathana Dharma,
- share the children's daily study timetables,
- upload photos of the Independence Day on 15 August 2019,
- share the story of Govind Charandasi@Mausi (nickname), an ashram inmate from Orissa,
- share photos and videos of the Navadina Navakoti Ramanama Japayagna from 19.08.-27.08.2019, and
- Navaratri 2019.

A few words to our dear friends and supporters

Thank you for reading this Newsletter with patience! Since spirituality is indeed treated as a science in India, it is very well possible that a text dealing with spiritual topics becomes a little expansive; in general, I try hard not to become too wordy.

Finally, we would like to say that there is not a single day that we don't think of all our friends, children sponsors, supporters of our projects, and the ashram in general.

We thank you for your love and continuous support!

May God protect you and your families wherever you are!###With Love and Peace from all of us at the Aum Pranava Ashram,

Traude and Visvanathan

Children and Elders

Staff members

Cows and Dogs,:)

P.S. If there was any problem in opening this newsletter, please write us a mail at aumpranavashram@gmail.com. A very short notice is enough and I will make sure to send you the newsletter in another, suitable format.