

REFLECTIONS



A Hindu Cultural Center of Albany Hindu Temple Society's Newsletter devoted to the Capital District's Indian-American community particularly its seniors

Editorial: Bereavement Support:

By Ram Chugh, Ph.D.



Recently, I submitted a proposal to the Chairs of the Hindu Temple's Board of Trustees and the Cultural Center's Board of Directors

suggesting the preparation of a bereavement support guide and formation of a support group to provide assistance to bereaved families in our community.

A death leaves the family heartbroken and in extreme grief. During this time of grief, the family has to take care of several things, such as making funeral and cremation arrangements, informing relatives and friends, food arrangements, and taking care of other details in conformity with state and local laws.

A bereaved family would benefit greatly if it had some community support in dealing with this tragic

situation. Most of our readers do not have the supportive network of family and relatives here as they would have back in India.

Our community and friends in the Albany area can and should provide immediate help to those of us who have suffered the loss of a loved one.

The Hindu Temple Society (HTS) can play a vital role in facilitating this by publishing a support guide explaining the steps a grieving family should take for making funeral and other arrangements and also creating a support group composed of volunteers to provide timely assistance to mourning families.

I have been concerned with this issue for some time. I have attended several funeral and cremation services of friends in the Albany area. Observing the way things were done and what relatives of the deceased had to go through, I felt a bereavement support guide and group could be very helpful to our community.

Some families may be self-sufficient and may have a self-contained support system. But many lack such support.

Our community is blessed with many caring people, and several of them would be willing to provide such assistance and emotional support to the bereaved. Arjun Patel is one such person. But there are many others like him. Let us identify such individuals and create a support guide and a support group.

Providing grief support would be an added service available to our community through the HTS that could benefit all in their time of need.

I believe it is a humane – and the right – thing to do.

We are always looking for ways to improve the Newsletter and we welcome suggestions. Please send your comments and ideas to me at Reflections.hcc@gmail.com.

Health Issues in Indian Women

By Richa Kaushik, MD*



Women today are more capable, independent and liberated than those of the previous era. They have redefined gender

roles, claimed more power and freedom for themselves and proved their potential to the fullest. However, in the process of fighting for equality and carving a niche for themselves, their health may take the toll. It is a rather unfortunate fact that Indian women (generally speaking) tend to ignore their own health concerns.

Indian women are used to the role of 'homemaking' and frequently do not find the time and energy to focus on their own health needs. Also, the possible disruption in family life and routine often dissuades them from health maintenance visits.

However, it is imperative to understand that by maintaining their own good health, women will help support and sustain their families longer!

This situation may sometimes be further confounded when living abroad as other factors come into play. Poor social/family support, language issues, cultural differences may make reaching out for healthcare even less desirable.

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A study from UCLA in 2009 reported that as many as 1 in 5 South Asians lack health insurance. Even among the insured South Asians, 15% reported no regular source of care.

Further, this community is very diverse in terms of religious affiliation, cultural backgrounds, languages spoken and English proficiency. This makes finding linguistically and culturally competent health information challenging. This in turn can lead to avoiding healthcare in South Asian patients specially women.

Often, hospitals do not have adequately trained interpreters in South Asians languages. Another factor is the stigma associated with mental illnesses and certain diseases like AIDS.

Many a time, women ignore their health till an emergency comes up. Women get so busy juggling home and careers that they give but little attention to their own health.

Some of the significant women's health issues that need emphasis are:

-Routine checkups and immunization- emphasizing the importance of preventive care may help avoid or detect early major illnesses.

-Diabetes and hypertension are rampant in our community. Encouraging a healthy lifestyle, regular exercise and complying with medications and checkups is vital.

-Coronary artery disease, though classically associated with middle-aged male it is an alarming issue amongst women too. Regular exercise and checkups should be encouraged. Also, it is important to note that women may have atypical signs of heart disease like shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort; pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach; breaking out in a cold sweat; nausea or light-headedness.

-Breast Cancer is responsible for 1 per cent of deaths worldwide. Awareness of self-checks, regular mammograms and early intervention are paramount in ensuring good outcomes.

-Cervical cancer screening is frequently ignored in our culture. Often by the time the cancer is symptomatic, the disease is widespread, emphasizing the importance of screening.

-Anemia, in which the oxygen carrying capacity of the blood is impaired, generally has an insidious onset. However, it may cause much fatigue and weakness and limit the patient's lifestyle. . Blood loss from menstruation, increased blood supply demand during pregnancy, deficiencies of vitamins like vitamins B2, B6, B12, and folic acid due to poor eating habits can cause anemia.

-Polycystic ovary disease is yet another issue that has come up to be one of the most common female endocrine disorders affecting about 5 to 10 per cent of women of reproductive age. It is a condition in which there are many small cysts in the ovaries, which can affect a woman's ability to conceive. The primary symptom is irregular, light or no periods. Others could be acne, excess growth of hair on the body, hair loss, infertility, weight gain or obesity and high insulin. Timely check-ups can prevent this from increasing. Right medical treatment can treat this disease and improve fertility.

-Endometriosis and fibroids generally present with abdominal discomfort and irregular periods. Managing these conditions may improve quality of life

-Urinary Tract Infections are more common in women due to their anatomy. If not treated early they may lead to severe infections and sepsis even leading to kidney failure

-Osteoporosis which implies weak bones due to low calcium is synonymous with women. It is a leading cause for fractures and disability. It may be asymptomatic until a fracture happens. Prevention and treatment choices include lifestyle changes such as no smoking, minimizing alcohol intake, regular (weight-bearing) exercise, maintaining healthy weight, low-salt and calcium plus vitamin D-rich diet. Routine DEXA scanning should be done. Patients may need to take medications to correct the bone abnormalities.

-Osteoarthritis is a collective term for joint discomfort mostly from wear and tear. It may lead to marked pain and limit activity. Women seem to be

especially prone and seem to get it earlier. Pain management, gentle exercises including aquatic therapy may be helpful in improving the quality of life.

-Depression affects more women than men. It is a physically debilitating and an emotionally painful condition. Hormonal changes, particularly after pregnancy (postpartum) or around menopause, can trigger the condition. They may exhibit suicidal tendencies, frequent bouts of crying, sleep disturbance, weight loss, a feeling of guilt and a general lack of interest in their surroundings. Recognizing depression and seeking help is most critical towards recovery. The stigma for mental illness in our culture may prevent addressing this serious health issue especially in women.

-Autoimmune diseases, like rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, also are more common in women than men. In these disorders the immune system produces antibodies against the body's tissues and attacks and destroys the healthy tissue instead of protecting it from infection or disease. Genetic, hormonal and environmental factors are suspected to be the risk factors. Diagnosing an autoimmune disease may need a series of tests and procedures and can sometimes take years.

I would encourage women to be proactive about their health and spend time and energy on it to improve the quality of life as well as to avoid major illnesses in the future.

* Dr. Kaushik is a family physician and gerontologist and works at VA Hospital in Albany. ■

Tongue

People often kill their happiness and their success in life by their tongues. They explode, say a mean thing, write a sharp letter, and the evil is done. And, sadly, the real victim is not the other person but oneself. (Vincent Peale)

Lord Ayyappan

By Gayathri Subramanian*



To me, the tale of Lord Ayyappan is one that my grandmother has told me over the years. The story of how the King of Pandalam finally found a son that

he loved and cared for as his own. Unbeknownst to him at the time, the child also happened to be the son of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu (Hari and Haran). Lord Ayyappan was created in order to destroy the demon, Mahishi. As he was the son of gods, he was indeed powerful; yet he was raised as any other earthly child. Ayyappan, also known as Manikandan to his family, was a well-rounded child and captured the heart of everyone around him.

His father, King Rajashekara, had found him deep within the forest on one of his hunting expeditions. Out of the kindness of his heart, the King took the baby home. The king and queen treated the little boy as their own and raised him to be the next in line for the throne as they had no other children at the time. As in many kingdoms, there were few who were jealous. One such person was the King's Diwan. The Diwan had hoped to be king someday as the King and Queen were childless and hence became infuriated at Manikandan for taking his spot at the throne.

Years later, the King and Queen were blessed with a little boy of their own which they named Raja Rajan. The Diwan then used the little boy to turn the Queen against Manikandan. The Queen, who was blinded by her devotion to her birth son, let the Diwan take advantage of her to kick Manikandan out of the king's life. The Diwan came up with a plan to get Ayyappan killed. He knew that he had to trick the king because King Rajashekara was so in love with both of his sons he would never let harm come to either of them.

The Diwan told the Queen to feign ill. He then proceeded to tell the King and the people at the palace that she could only be cured by the milk of a

tigress. The king sent many people out to fetch the milk but none succeeded. Ayyappan, then a strong little boy, asked his father if he could go. The king automatically said no, but Manikandan kept begging and finally convinced the King to let him help his mother. And so, Manikandan went into the forest in search of the tigress. He



came in contact with the demon Mahishi who was sent down to destroy Manikandan. Mahishi, once realizing that the young boy was the son of both Hari and Haran, gave up and Ayyappan then proceeded to kill her. And so he went along on his search for the milk.

In time, a guru came to the palace and told the King and his people who the little boy really was. The King was awestruck. When Manikandan came back to the palace with the milk, the King asked for forgiveness. Seeing that the King was pure of heart, Ayyappan asked the King what he wanted. The King said that all he wanted was a place to worship Ayyappan. Manikandan shot an arrow and it landed on mountain named Shabiri. He then told the King to construct a temple there where people could come visit. The King readily agreed.

This story shows how the pure of heart will always succeed and that kindness goes a long way. Jealousy will not do anyone any favors. I visited Sabarimala when I was a little girl with my dad and grandma. It was a magical trip to travel up the mountain which required a lot of preparation. The songs that we used to sing at our temple for our monthly Ayyappan Pooja started to make sense as I got older and realized the meaning behind the words. We climbed through sticks and stones, we climbed up 18 steps, all to see the powerful Manikandan. And because our pilgrimage was done with a pure

heart, we were rewarded with the darshan that not many are fortunate enough to have received.

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Some beautiful answers and way of thinking of Turkish poet *Rumi*...

*What Is Poison?

- *Anything Which Is More Than Our Necessity Is Poison. It May Be Power, Wealth, Hunger, Ego, Greed, Laziness, Love, Ambition, Hate or Anything.

*What Is Fear?

Answer: Non Acceptance of Uncertainty.

If We Accept That Uncertainty, It Becomes Adventure.

*What Is Envy?

Answer: *Non Acceptance of Good In Others. * If We Accept That Good, It Becomes Inspiration.

*What Is Anger?

Answer: *Non Acceptance Of Things Which Are Beyond Our Control. *

If We Accept, It Becomes Tolerance.

*What Is Hatred?

Answer: *Non Acceptance of Person as He Is.* If We *Accept any Person Unconditionally, It Becomes Love.

The sweet tooth is your great friend

Amar Chandel*



Many people wonder why they have such uncontrollable craving for sweet items if there is already so much of excess sugar floating around in their system. Some think that their acute desire to gorge on sugary treats is a sign of glucose being in short supply and therefore badly needed in the body. Their perception is bolstered by the fact that those who happen to have diabetes go into a shock if their sugar level falls too sharply. So, they think that they too must eat sweet

items when it strikes their fancy because if they don't do so, they may develop some health issues like their diabetic friends.

Then there are those who curse themselves for having an unhealthy taste for all things sweet. They very well know that too many desserts are not good for them but still just cannot control themselves. These fridge-raiders blame this tendency on their lack of self-control, putting the fault at the door of God who ruined their lives by giving them a sweet tooth, plus 31 more. They too need to understand the science behind sugar cravings. The fact of the matter is that instead of being a curse, it happens to be a life-saving mechanism.

Whatever Nature considers to be essential for our survival and the continuation of our species, is made highly pleasurable. For instance, since we cannot exist if we don't eat, Nature has made eating such a joy. This sensation is so strong that we rather ignore many other essential tasks for the sake of feasting on our favourites.

Nature has endowed us with hunger, for if there was no hunger, many of us would have been too busy to spare time for a "mundane" task like eating. The way we are designed, once hunger pangs kick in, we have to take a meal break, no matter what we are doing.

To understand the importance of sweetness, we will need to go back to the time when man was a hunter gatherer and the only food items available for satiating his hunger were fruits, veggies and nuts. Sweetness guaranteed four things. One, that the food was not poisonous or harmful. Two, that it was not rotten. Three, it was a sign that it was fully ripe.

But the most important reason was however the fourth. Nature wanted us to eat items with more calories first and go in for less calorie-dense options only later. So, the foodstuff with more calories was made sweet (fruits for example). Even a chimpanzee or a monkey would prefer to eat bananas first and tomatoes later because the bananas are tastier and sweeter. This was an ingenious way to ensure that they had enough energy to run the

body in an emergency and this was obtained in the most fuel-efficient way.

The system worked perfectly fine as long as the choice was between fruit and vegetables. Then an accident of history happened: man learnt how to make sugar and suddenly all hell broke loose. This manmade material was far sweeter than anything that the mankind had ever known till then, be it honey or dates, nature's most potent sweeteners. Take a test yourself. Add a certain quantity of honey, powdered dates and sugar to three different containers with a litre of water each. Stir well and taste. Which is the sweetest? The one in which you had added man-made sugar, of course.

Obviously, the homo sapiens who were genetically engineered to go in for the sweetest possible items, shifted to food made by adding sugar to it. (Incidentally, the art of making sugar originated in India and spread all over Asia through the soldiers of Alexander. From Asia, sugar travelled to the West and reached throughout the world like forest fire. In fact, the very course of history was shaped by the craze for sugar. Maritime powers kicked off a veritable race to colonise areas where sugar could be grown. This also fuelled the slave trade.)

The mad rush precipitated a huge crisis. Whenever Nature makes sweet items, it puts in place enough checks and balances so that these do not raise one's sugar level too sharply. In other words, you can call the naturally sweet items as slow-release mechanisms. Unfortunately, the man-made ones had an exactly opposite impact. As a result, the taste for sweet items, which was a life-saving mechanism till then, turned into a life-threatening one.

The side-effects of man-made sugar are too scary to recount and yet it is everywhere. Even if you cannot totally eliminate it from your life, you must at least replace it with fruits etc. This way, you will not suffer from withdrawal symptoms. So go big on mangoes, grapes, bananas, dates, raisins and figs while at the same time you must aim at cutting down on cakes and pastries with their dangerously high glycemic index.

Ironically, we have not only ruined our lives with sugar, we have done the same to domestic pets like dogs and cats also. They never have diabetes in the wild, but the domestic ones do. They eat our kind of food; they get our kind of diseases.

Incidentally, the only animal that does get diabetes even while living in the wild is the bear. Why? Yes, you got it right. It is so very fond of honey and raids beehives whenever it can. The excess honey does no good to its constitution also.

A word of caution to people who are at the other extreme and fear even sweet fruits. Their apprehension is unfounded. As said earlier, when God makes poison, it always incorporates an antidote into it. Fruit are a complete package. So indulge in those without fear or guilt. Those will neither make you fat nor give you diabetes, provided you eat in moderation.

This fear is whetted by the fact that the diabetes patients are not allowed to eat such fruit. That is only because they have overworked their pancreas so much that it has lost the capability to even digest fruit, leading people to believe that the diabetes was caused by the fruit. The real culprits are items made with man-made sugar. If you have been staying off them, you are in the safe zone. Fruit not only have fibre in abundance but are also full of phytochemicals which ensure that the juicy gifts from god's nursery do not cause you any harm. Unfortunately, advocates of the sugar industry mislead the public by saying that even fruit are full of sugar. They never admit that this sugar is as different from the man-made one as chalk is from the cheese.

There is no end to their machinations and some have come to believe that since carbohydrates get converted into sugar, those too are the villains. This presumption is completely wrong. We must learn to differentiate between refined, processed carbohydrates and complex, natural carbohydrates. Banning the healthy along with the sickening would be akin to throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Unfortunately, most packaged and ready-to-eat items are made out of

refined flour, which is notorious for increasing the sugar level and leading to weight gain. On the other hand, food made from whole-wheat flour carries no such threat. And yet, that too is shunned, with disastrous results.

The unfounded fear of carbohydrates has made some to go in for excessive consumption of fats or proteins. Since our basic diet is carbs, fat and protein intake does lead to weight loss initially, but later, our kidneys and other vital organs have to pay a heavy price for this indiscretion.

Please remember that carbohydrates have to be a major part of your meal, and fruits and vegetables are carbs too. In fact, fruit and vegetables are to be given precedence over grains, rice and beans.

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Subhashita (Wisdom verse): By Dr. M.G.Prasad*

Ahimsaa Satyamasteyam
Shouchamindriyanigrahaha
Etam Saamaasikam Dharmam
Chaaturvarnyebraveenmanuhu



Meaning: In this Subhashita, the great sage Manu with the vision of Dharma (righteous duties) emphasizes

that for the equanimity and peace in society, all human beings should perform the following five essential duties namely Non-violence, Truthfulness, Non-stealing of other person's property, Purity and Sense-control.

Explanation: Sanaatana Dharma refers to everlasting principles. Also a society that understands and follows these principles will survive the test of time. It is known that in India, the societal values have been established on the basis of Sanaatana Dharma derived from the Vedas. The rishis not

only heard the Vedic mantras in the deep states of their meditation but also properly taught them to their disciples. Hence the Vedas are called as Shruti. However it is not easy for everyone to understand the deeper meaning of the Vedas. Hence rishis composed Vedic literature such as Smritis, Historical Epics and Puranas, which convey the Vedic message and values in an understandable language to all.

This subhashita is from Manusmriti written by sage Manu. In this Subhashita, Manu has clearly given five duties that all human beings should follow to establish harmony and joyful peace in a society. These five duties are *Non-violence, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Purity and Control of senses*. The first value *Non-violence* is an important quality that everyone should follow in thought, speech and action. The second value is *Truthfulness*, in other words means "do as you say". If a person says one thing and does another thing, then any interaction with such as person results in disharmony.

The third value is *Non-stealing*. Generally a person works hard for achieving his or her goals. If someone steals other person's acquisitions then that results in disharmony and unrest in society. The fourth value is *Purity*, which is to be followed at three domains namely thought, speech and body. Purity in speech refers to Truthfulness. The fifth value is *Control of one's senses*. When a person loses control of senses, then that person crosses the limit in societal harmony, which results in unrest in the society. Thus these five values when followed by everyone in a society, results in harmony and peace.

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Vallabhai Patel – A Tribute

Bimal K. Malaviya, Ph.D. *



At the dawn of independence, the Indian subcontinent comprised British India and a welter of more than 500

semiautonomous

princely states – big and small, scattered all over the land, so that the map of the subcontinent looked like a fragmented patchwork quilt – a piece of Swiss cheese. The task of unifying the nation by integrating these anomalous feudal states presented a daunting challenge as these states had been ruled for centuries by well ensconced independent Maharajas used to an opulent saturnalian life style and these powerful potentates were loath to give up their well cherished plum fiefdoms. The miraculous feat of successfully integrating these states into the new nation was accomplished by none other than Vallabhbhai Patel – one of the most illustrious sons of India, who brought his unique diplomatic skills, steely tenacious grit and superb administrative acumen to accomplish the Herculean task. He has been compared to Bismarck – the great unifier of Germany in the nineteenth century.

While the integration of princely states and the unification of India was his signature achievement, Sardar Patel – the strong man of action, made numerous seminal and enduring contributions to the shaping and forging of modern India. As the nation's first Home Minister, he revamped the Indian Administrative and Police Services giving them roles of importance and dignity, thereby laying the strong foundation for an efficient governance structure. He was called the patron saint of the civil servants. He fortified the ruling party's political machine and, as the first minister of Information and Broadcasting, defined the proper role of media and the perimeters of a free press. He provided wise counsel to the prime minister in all matters of state



including foreign policy and was a voice of reason and prudence in the Indian cabinet. He was aptly recognized as the Iron man of India.

The two dominant stalwarts of the freedom struggle under Mahatma Gandhi were Sardar Patel and Pandit Nehru and the shape of the new nation was strongly influenced by the complex dynamics of the relationships and interactions among these three personalities. Unlike Nehru, Patel came from plebian beginnings; he was a self-made man, who by dint of his innate abilities became a brilliant lawyer with a lucrative practice. Both Nehru and Patel came under Gandhi's spell early on and gave up their all to submit to his leadership; both men bore in their psyche, the scars of long years of confinement in British gaols and the resulting enforced social isolation with no family life. Nehru's bonds with Gandhi was highly emotional; although a supreme rationalist and agnostic, he almost always deferred to Gandhi's political judgment against his own rational instincts. In a controversial decision, Gandhi chose Nehru to be his political successor which doomed to him the prime ministership of independent India. Patel and Nehru shared a deep mutual respect and affection. When Nehru became the PM, he carved out a special position of Deputy Prime Minister for Patel and gave him the important portfolios of Home and Information and Broadcasting ministries – positions that he filled with great distinction.

Patel's relationship with Gandhi was more complex. Although he had been a loyal lieutenant in the freedom struggle, he could be more analytical, rational and nuanced in his dealings with Gandhi. He was a pragmatist and was intrigued by Gandhi's mixing of religion and spirituality with politics. A man of action and an efficient hard-headed administrator, he was discomfited by Gandhi's tendency to make political decisions based on an "inner voice". A supreme nationalist,

he was no secularist. He was appalled by what he considered to be Gandhi's preferentially appeasing attitude and actions toward Muslims and Pakistan – to the detriment of the Hindu majority.

Things came to a head on the question of the division of assets between India and Pakistan at the time of partition – especially the issue of the payment of Fifty-Five crore rupees to Pakistan which Indian government could not afford and Patel and Nehru opposed. Gandhi insisted on the payment to Pakistan. In a shrewd attempt to solve the Kashmir issue, Patel made a public statement to the press on January 12, 1948, "I made it quite clear (to the Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Pakistan) that we would not agree to any payment until the Kashmir affair was settled." Unfortunately, Gandhi decided to use his ultimate weapon to force the payment to Pakistan – the threat of a fast- unto-death. It is believed that the wily Mountbatten and Patel's nemesis Maulana Azad – Pak sympathizers – had instigated Gandhi to undertake the fast. Nehru and Patel were unalterably opposed; for once, Nehru was willing to go against Gandhi. As Gandhi's life was ebbing away; the public pressure was too compelling. On the sixth day of the fast, in an emergency meeting, the Indian cabinet agreed to meet Gandhi's demands and release the funds. As usual, Gandhi had his way – but at what cost? Patel felt personally humiliated – every fibre of his patriotic frame and psyche must have ached. He never recovered from the shock; within a month, he would suffer his first heart attack.

Patel was the last leader to see Gandhi alive. On the fateful evening of 30th January 1948, Patel left Gandhi around 7 PM after an hour-long conference in which he presumably offered to tender his resignation. On his way home from the meeting, news came that Gandhi had been assassinated by Godse. The whole world was shattered, one of Godse's prime gripes was Gandhi's forcing the payment of fifty-five crore rupees to Pakistan. Cynics would note that there was much in Godse's patriotic

statement and his cry of Hindu Rashtra from the gallows that must have struck a resonant chord with Patel!

Despite failing health, Patel continued to labor long and hard for the nation's cause. His grip on the nation's governance remained firm and his administrative control of the political machine was supreme as ever. He lived to see his beloved India become a fully sovereign democratic republic on January 26, 1950 and he was successful in placing his own candidates for the leadership of the Republic and the Congress Party. His health continued to deteriorate; he had two other heart attacks in 1950. The end came on December 15 and he transited to the ages.

In a moving eulogy, a sorrowful Nehru offered a mournful nation's ultimate tribute to his lifelong comrade, "His name will live forever in history. He is the Architect of Modern India. He was a wise counselor in the hour of trial, a trustworthy friend and a mine of courage and inspiration." So the Sardar was gone – the strong Man of Iron, unifier of India, patron saint of Administrative Services and ever the voice of sanity and wisdom, went to his Maker – full of years and accomplishments, leaving in eternal debt the nation to which he had given his all and which he had served so well and so nobly. India would not see the likes of him again!

By an unfortunate twist of fate, Nehru's successor Shastri died suddenly and Indira Gandhi was catapulted to be the PM; she proceeded to establish a dynasty. In the process – either by design or happenstance, Patel's memory was partly zoomed out of the public radar screen and his monumental accomplishments were given scant recognition. In a shameful travesty of history, Patel was not even honored with a "Bharat Ratna" award till 1991 – more than forty years after his death – while many lesser mortals were inducted into that Pantheon. But Patel's place in history is secure. He has had the ultimate reward for any leader – the vindication of history – his wisdom, prescience and perspicacity have been borne out by later events.

Fortunately, the current government is giving him his long due recognition; Patel's birthday October 31 has been designated as the National Unity Day (Rashtriya Ekta Divas). However, perhaps the greatest recognition and silent homage comes from the frequent widespread wistful speculation among the public and pundits alike – of the big "What if?" of history – What if Gandhi and the Fates had anointed Patel and not Nehru to be the first Prime Minister of independent India.

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It is the prime responsibility of every citizen to feel that his country is free and to defend its freedom is his duty. Every Indian should now forget that he is a Rajput, a Sikh or a Jat. He must remember that he is an Indian and he has every right in this country but with certain duties. – **Sardar Patel**

Power of Mantram

The mantram is one of the best prayers – one that we say not just when we get up or when we go to bed, but countless times throughout the day., and throughout the night as well. This prayer is not addressed to someone outside us, but to our deepest Self., the Lord of Love., who dwells in the hearts of us all. When we repeat it, we are not asking for anything in particular, like good health or solutions to our problems or richer personal relationships.

We are simply asking to get closer to the source of all strength and all joy and all love. To use Jesus' words, we are asking for "the kingdom of heaven," and we find at the same time that our health improves, our problems begin to be resolved, and our relationships blossom. (Eknath Easwaran)

Message from Vikash Agrawal, Chair, HCC Board

We are pleased to bring out yet another issue of *Reflections*. This issue includes articles on spirituality, religion, health, and on two India illustrious political and religious leaders Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Sri Ramanuja Acharya.

We are thankful to Richa Kaushik, Bimal Malviya, Amar Chandel, Gayathri Subraminan and M.G. Prasad for their articles. We are grateful to Dr. Ram Chugh for his tireless efforts for soliciting and editing such a rich collection of articles, and to Vijay Oruganti for formatting it.

We receive a lot of positive feedback from our readers on the quality of article in *Reflections*.

The newsletter is being sent out electronically using the email lists accessible to the HCC. Some of you might get duplicate copies because you may be on several e-mail lists. You may delete any duplicates. Let us know if you do not wish to receive this Newsletter.

Please send your comments and story ideas to Dr. Ram Chugh at:
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Life and Message of Sri Ramanuja Acharya (1017 AD to 1137 AD)

By Dr. M.G.Prasad*



Introduction:

Sri Ramanuja Acharya is one of the great acharyas of Sanatana Dharma

(Vedic Hinduism). He was born in 1017 A.D. This year is his 1000th birth anniversary. It is celebrated in India and around the world on May 1, 2017. He lived for 120 years in the period 1017 A.D to 1137 A.D. He was born in Sri Perumbudur near Chennai in Tamilnadu. His parents were from a highly traditional background. His mother was Srimati Kantimati and father was Sri Aasuri Keshava Somayaji

who was very well known for his knowledge of Sanatana Dharma (also known as Vedic Hinduism) and performance of Yajnas. It is universally established that Sri Ramanuja Acharya is one of the great seers of Sanatana Dharma. The term Acharya is described in a verse as below.

*Achinoti hi ShaastraaNi
Svayameva Aacharate
Aachaare Sthaapayati iti
Acharya vai Smritaha*

Which means "an Acharya is one who is not only has an expertise in Vedic Scriptures but also explains it well. Then in addition to his following the scriptural guidelines, he also guides others to follow and further establish them". In the full meaning of this verse, Bhagavad-Ramanuja Acharya was an Acharya.

His Contributions

Sri Ramanuja from his very young age was not only brilliant but also very kind hearted. He learnt from various teachers including from his highly learned father. Although he grew up in a traditional background, he was broadminded in his outlook. He always felt that anyone with sincere devotion and love towards Supreme Being should be respected and revered than someone just with learning and ego. One of his main teachers was not a brahmin. Sri Ramanuja was very keen in learning. Later Sri Ramanuja did his advanced learning from five great masters at that time. Then he became an Acharya. Throughout in his life, he was an embodiment of compassion to all.



The philosophical contributions of Sri Ramanuja Acharya are everlasting. He systematically (through the lineage of

earlier acharyas namely Sri Naada Muni also known as Naatha Muni and Sri Yaamuna Muni) established the Philosophy of Vishishtadvaita (referred as Qualified Non-Dualism) based on the triadic Vedic foundations of Sanatana Dharma,

which are Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad-Gita. In essence Vishishtadvaita is based on the triad namely Chit (sentient), Achit (non-sentient) and Para-Tatva (Supreme Reality also referred as Narayana and Ishwara). It is our experience that Chit (all sentient beings) as individual beings have a soul (Jeeva) with its body (deha). It is also seen that in life, the soul and its body are integrated and inseparable. Achit refers to all non-sentient things of the universe. Vishishtadvaita philosophy establishes that the Supreme Being (referred as Narayana, Paratatva, Ishwara) has His body as Chit (all sentient beings) and Achit (all non-sentient). Hence this One Supreme Being (Sriman Narayana) is inseparably present as indweller in Chit as well as Achit and is second to none and hence qualified non-dualism. It is also important to note that the Supreme Being (Narayana) has incomparable and inexhaustible good qualities, which are to be acquired through purusharthas (dharma, artha, kama and moksha) by the individual human beings for total fulfillment in life through their intense devotion (Bhakti) and total surrender (Sharanagati) to Supreme Being (Narayana).

Sri Ramanuja Acharya advocated that anyone with intense and sincere love devotion for the Supreme Being (Narayana) could follow the path of total surrender or Sharanagati. The verse below describes the various components of Sharanagati.

Aanookoolasya Samkalpaha
Praatikoolasya Varjanam
Rakshishyateeti Vishwaasaha
Goptritvaavaranam tatha
AtmaNikshepaha-Kaarpanye
Shadvidha Sharanagatihi

Which means that the six components of sharanagati are (1) Aanookoolasya Samkalpaha refers to tuning of one's thoughts, speech and actions to the will of Supreme Being Narayana. This also means that one sees and interacts through harmony and compassion with all sentient and non-sentient things, as they are inseparable from Sriman Narayana. (2) Praatikoolasya Varjanam refers to relinquishing all thoughts, speech and actions that are against to the will of Sriman Narayana.

(3) Rakshishyateeti Vishwaasaha refers to the unmoving faith and conviction that it is only Sriman Narayana who is the protector and supporter of our life and living. (4) Goptritvaavaranam refers to the realization that it is only the grace of Sriman Narayana that we desire and hope to seek for our protection and spiritual fulfillment. (5) Kaarpanya refers to the utter helplessness in our efforts that we will experience if not for the protection of Sriman Narayana. (6) Atmanikshepa refers to offering one-self to the Grace of Sriman Narayana.

Final message

At the end of earthy life of Sri Ramanuja Acharya, all devotees assembled around him. The all devotees requested the great Acharya for his advice as how to live in this world. Then Sri Ramanuja Acharya gave the following advice and guidelines to follow for spiritual fulfillment in life.

- A devotee who has truly surrendered himself at the feet of Supreme Being should not dwell upon any thought of his future because any anxiety felt in that connection only shows hypocrisy in his self-surrender.

- Also the present situation of a devotee is fully determined by his past karmas (actions), so it is not proper to grieve over it.

- Let not performance of your duties be regarded as a means for achieving worldly ends, but treat them as service rendered to the Supreme Being.

- Study the Sri Bhashya (commentary of Sri Ramanuja Acharya on Brahma sootras of Sri veda Vyasa) and teach it to others.

- If this is not possible, study the sacred compositions of Nammalwar and other Alwars (Nalayira Divya Prabandham).

- If this is not possible, spend your lives in sacred and holy places on earth such as Srirangam and Melkote.

- If this is not possible remain where you are, and throwing all burdens on the Supreme Being, remain immersed in the contemplation of sacred Narayana Dvaya Mantra.

- If none of the above is possible, seek a truly holy person full of wisdom, devotion and desirelessness and move with him and follow his advice.

- In this life on earth, find out by careful discrimination your friends, enemies and the indifferent. Holy persons are your friends. Those who are atheistic and hate God are your enemies. The worldly-minded ones are indifferent.

- Develop and rejoice your association with friends. Remember that the all-merciful Supreme Being will bless you with all that you pray for in your life. Never beg or receive anything from enemies.

Concluding Remarks

Thus the life of the great Sri Ramanuja Acharya is full of messages and advises for the spiritual seekers. His life, message and works have impacted the world. His emphasis on simplicity, straightforwardness, pure devotion and total dependence on the Supreme Being shows a clear path. May we all remember Sri Ramanuja Acharya but also study his life and messages not only on the occasion of his 1000th birth anniversary but also spread for all the interested spiritual seekers of the world. The message, philosophy and teachings of Sri Ramanuja Acharya will not only help the spiritual seekers but also contribute to the betterment of the world.

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Daily Prayer

Always start the day with prayer. It is the greatest of all mind conditioner. Even if you do not have the time, pray. It is that important. Always begin the day with the thought of God. His love and care, and with the thought of your responsibility for serving Him. An old friend of mine said it well: "Fill the mind full of God and the whole day will be full of happiness, even if the going gets hard." (Vincent Peale)