



Touched by the Master

Pranams to Ganesha



During an evening program at a Chinmaya Spiritual Camp, the Bala Vihar children put up a play about Ganesha. A four-year-old child played the part of Ganesha. Her face was covered with a purple plate, which had been fashioned to look like an elephant's head. Since she couldn't see through the mask, someone led her onto the stage and sat her down in a chair. Then a group of children came onto the stage and sang their prayer to Ganesha. After the prayer, all the children left, but the young "Ganesha" remained. Unable to see through her mask, she no doubt was not aware that she was alone on the stage, nor could she find her way off the stage alone.

Swamiji, who was sitting in the audience, as he always did at every cultural event at his spiritual camps, burst out laughing. Then he went up to the stage and touched the young "Ganesha's" feet and afterwards guided her down the steps.

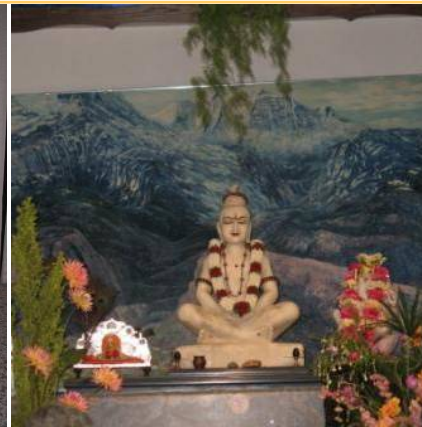
Turning to the audience, he said: "The child is still innocent. She was fully the character she was playing."

This is an excerpt from the book "At Every Breath, A Teaching," by *Rudite Emir*

Janmashtami and Ganesh Chaturthi

Tiny blue footprints led us from the entrance of the ashram at Sandeepany to the altar upstairs where the room was all set to celebrate the birth of Krishna. A large picture of the enchanting young Krishna playing a flute was propped up on one side of the altar. The Swaranjali choir set the tone for the evening with the beautiful songs they rendered in praise of the Lord, finally imploring us to look for Him in our own hearts! Panditji's puja of the Lord followed by arathi and bhajans and sharing delicious prasad capped off a beautiful celebration of Janmashtami.

We also celebrated Lord Ganesha's birthday in September at our ashram. Ganesha's image made of clay with his huge head and ears, curved trunk, four arms and a broken tusk reminded us of the symbolism of the form of this most beloved deity of India.



Janmashdami and Ganesh Chaturthi (continued)

Ganesha, through his form alone, represents a man of perfect wisdom. The path of knowledge that the man of wisdom has to follow requires that he must have a great head to understand the logic of vedantic thought. The truth of the Vedas can be comprehended only through shravanam or listening, hence large ears for intelligent and attentive listening. After shravanam, the vedantin needs to contemplate on the subject and have an appreciation and accommodation for all beings in the universe. He needs the ability to distinguish between the imperishable and the perishable. The trunk of Ganesha represents this superior power of discrimination. An elephant's trunk is one of the most versatile and efficient tools in nature. It is capable of uprooting a tree or picking up a single blade of grass. A wise person's discrimination, similarly, should be capable of resolving problems in the outside world and also within the subtle layers of one's own inner personality. The two tusks represent the two factors that we usually need to discriminate between - good and evil, right and wrong. The broken tusk indicates that an evolved student of Vedanta like the Lord has gone beyond the pairs of opposites.

The Lord is also represented as having a huge stomach with the largest appetite – as a man of perfection he has an endless appetite for life and can digest all its experiences with equanimity. The whole world lies at the feet of such a yogi and this is represented by all the food offered at his feet. Amidst all this food, quivering with anticipation is a small mouse, waiting to be fed a morsel. This mouse represents the power of desire, which is completely subdued and totally obedient to the will of the master. By riding this mouse the Lord shows that it is his desire to serve the world that makes the mouse his vehicle to move about and act.

Ganesha is depicted with four arms. With the axe in one hand he cuts off the attachments of his devotees to the world of plurality and thus ends all sorrows. With the rope in another hand, he pulls his devotees closer to the truth and the highest goal. His modaka in the third hand represents the reward of the joys that he bestows upon his devotees. With his fourth hand, he blesses and protects his devotees.

After arathi, bhajans and sharing prasada, including mouth – watering modakas, the Lord was given a send off at Pacifica beach the next day, when huge waves at the evening high tide gathered the beautiful form of the Lord into their arms.



Chinmaya Bala Vihar

The Chinmaya Bala Vihar is conducted in three locations in the Bay area – at the Washington High School in Fremont on Saturdays from noon to 3pm; at the Los Cerros Middle School in Danville on Saturdays from 3:30pm to 6pm; at the Lincoln High School in San Jose on Sunday mornings from 9:00am to about 1pm. Due to the large number of students, classes are conducted in multiple sessions. For more details on the locations and timings, please visit <http://www.chinmaya-sanjose.org/new/bvloesch.shtml> . This photo article focuses on the San Jose Bala Vihar location.



Bala Vihar classes accommodate children of all ages - Yuva Kendra young adults in grades 9 through 12, or Bala Vihar kids in KG through grade 8.



Classes are held in a traditional class room setting, a group discussion setting, an unconventional outdoor setting or a 1 on 1 coaching type of setting.



Why I Attend Bala Vihar

by Aarushi Kalaimani

It is said, "Learn from Nature; her secret is patience. Instead of condemning yourself, patiently turn your attention toward the Lord—this is the secret of developing divine qualities."

For the past seven years or so, these very words of Swami Tejomayananda have influenced me to grow with noble ideas, healthy emotions, and physical discipline. I have always wanted to know "the secret of developing divine qualities," and have thus followed Swamiji's advice on a daily basis, in hopes of perhaps finding the answers to many of the questions I ponder—questions about God, life, and myself. Who am I, and what brought about my existence? What is the purpose of my life, and why did God create me? With such perplexing and mind-boggling questions accumulating in my confused self, I often fall into deep prayer and meditation, hoping that God would appear in front of me in one of His avatars and miraculously answer all my questions with love and patience. Sadly, nothing of the sort happened, and I felt like I would never find the answers to any of my queries. However, it was only when I heard about Bala Vihar and got enrolled that my hopes of getting to know more about God, life, and myself came back. Therefore, the fuel that motivates me to attend Bala Vihar on a weekly basis is my interest in ascertaining my identity.

Through a regular attendance at Bala Vihar, the personal and spiritual experiences that I have gained have helped create a cultural environment for me both at home and in the outside world. Although I was born in India, I admit that I didn't know a great deal about my culture and heritage; however, Bala Vihar classes helped me learn more about many such aspects of Hinduism, and assisted me in seeing why certain traditions are followed in the life of the average Hindu. For example, the reason why turmeric leaves are festooned at the top of the main door frame at many Hindu homes is that turmeric, an anti-septic and anti-bacterial plant, stops insects and bacteria from making their way into houses.

Another reason for my steady attendance is that I seek to develop and improve my moral character. The uncomfortable truth that I have learned is that humans are not perfect, and that we have at least a few negative qualities in our character, just as diamonds have impurities. However, even if I realistically will never be able to reach a point of flawlessness in life, I have discovered through Bala Vihar that there are ways to slowly omit at least a few evils and vices in ourselves, such as envy and greed. Therefore, I believe that just out of seventy-five minutes of class, I gain a pound's worth of useful advice and information each Sunday on my culture and customs, and how the "ideal Indian" should live and act in his or her life.

From listening to a plethora of stories from the Bhagavad-Gita and Mahabharata to the Ramayana and tales of Vishnu, Ganesha, and other gods, not only have I learned a tad more about ancient Indian culture, customs, and heritage, but my experiences at Bala Vihar have helped increase the bit of spiritual knowledge in me each week. Frankly speaking, it is as if God is giving me clues and hints to finding the answers to my questions bit by bit through Bala Vihar itself. The inscrutable questions I had pondered on for nearly half my life now seem to show the way a little, and point me in the direction to uncovering the answers. Via Bala Vihar teachings and stories, I came to know more about how God created man and Earth, man's experiences on the newly created planet, and how the world came into being. To be honest, I am still uncertain about the accuracy of the spiritual information I have compiled so far, but I hope that further presence at classes will help fill in the blanks to the hypotheses that I have as of now. All in all, even if I never come to understand the secret that Swami Tejomayananda speaks of, I shall never part with the spirit of Bala Vihar, for the personal and divine gains that I have felt, and continue to feel as a result of attending, are priceless!





The curriculum includes the study of scriptural texts, story telling, arts and crafts, plays and singing. Children participate in all activities with great enthusiasm! There are many classes for many Indian languages as well.



The excellent facility at the Lincoln High School, San Jose that provides these opportunities to adults and children.





In fact, the biggest class of all is our Acharya's class – Bhagvad Gita during the first session and teaching the meanings of Vishnu Sahasranama during the second session. The second session also includes the regular assembly and the prayers. These classes are held at the Media Center of Lincoln High School.



Booming business: While many volunteer teachers are busy with the children catering to their intellectual and spiritual needs, volunteers here are busy providing them with snacks to fill their stomach, or books and a/v materials for their study.



Verse 24

This verse describes the various attributes of the Self by which it can be recognized as being eternal.

Since the *Atma* cannot be cleaved, burnt, wet or dried, it is everlasting. The *Atma* is pure-*Nithya*, all pervading-*Sarvagatah*, stable-*Sthanuh*, firm-*Achalah* and ancient or beyond time-*Sanatanah*.

Atma is pure-*Nithya* because time, space or objects cannot condition it. It is all pervading-*Sarvagatah*. It has only itself all around, at all places and at all times. Since the Self is all pervading, it is stable and firm like the base of a tree.

The Self is also ancient-*Sanatanah*, that which is beyond time. It is not born out of something therefore it is not the effect, but is the cause of everything. The *Atma* has no modifications hence, it is *Avikari*.

Another way to explain these qualities of *Atma* is with respect to karmas or actions.

Actions are divided into 4 groups.

- *Utpadhyam*: that which is created or produced. Since *Atma* is the cause of all creation it is eternal-*Nithya* and therefore it is not *Utpadhyam*.
- *Apayam*: that which is bought or obtained. Since *Atma* is all pervading-*Sarvagatah* and it is ancient-*Sanatanah* it is not *Apayam*.
- *Sanskaryam*: that which needs purification. *Atma* being the Absolute Truth, it is free from all impurities and hence it does not need any *Sanskaryam*.
- *Vikaryam*: that which needs modification. Since *Atma* is all-complete, all pure it does not need any modifications. It is *Avikari*.

Verse 25

In this verse the Lord continues to give more qualities of *Atma* as Unmanifest, Unthinkable and Unchangeable.

Lord Krishna continues to clear Arjuna's guilt of perceiving himself as the slayer of his kith and kin in the war. The Lord explains that the *Atma* is unmanifest because it cannot be perceived by any of the sense organs. The five great elements become subtler as we go from the gross-the earth then water, fire, air and finally space which is the subtlest. The availability to sense perception decreases as we go from the gross to the subtle. The Self cannot be perceived by any of the sense organs. The Self is the subject, the very cause because of which the sense organs can perceive.

Lord Krishna continues that the *Atma* or Self is Unthinkable, in the sense that it is incomprehensible to the mind and the intellect. The Self-being the subject and not the object it is difficult for the mind or the intellect to comprehend or rationalize this Infinitude. The Self-being

the very life that energizes this mind and intellect, which by themselves is inert and insentient, it is beyond any mental comprehension, it is thus unthinkable.

Finally the *Atma* is indicated as being formless- Unchangeable. Anything that has a form is restricted to a shape and form and therefore it is finite, subject to changes and modifications. The Self -*Atma* is thus immutable, unmanifest, unthinkable and unchangeable. The Lord asks Arjuna, and hence we all, to know *Atma* in this way and as his own true Self.

Verse 26

In the verses 24 and 25, Bhagawan concludes the qualities of the *Atma* from the highest standpoint, *Atma* being *Nithya*, *Sarvagatah*, *Sthanu*, *Achala*, *Sanatanah* etc. In the next two verses Bhagawan gives the benefit of the doubt to the materialistic thinking of those who believe that the Self is not everlasting and that it is constantly born and it constantly dies leaving no trace of it here or hereafter. People with such school of thought accept life as a constant influx of infinite births and infinite deaths. Having given consideration to this point of view also, Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to fight the war and not grieve for those who would die in the war

Verse 27

Continuing the materialistic school of thought Lord explains to Arjuna that death is certain of that which is born and birth is certain of that which has died. Embodiments are taken up by individual egos as per one's past experiences, except for those who have attained "Self Realization". This "Self Realized" man knows that the Self has no birth and has no death. Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that it is unintelligent for a man to moan and grieve over the very nature of life – the inevitable cycle of birth and death of this physical body.

Verse 28

From this stanza onwards the Lord addresses Arjuna's reluctance to fight in the war from the standpoint of the "man-of-the-world".

Bhagawan explains that this creation is nothing but a material world of objects that follows the law of causation. The world of effects rises from the world of causes. The effects are manifest and the causes are unmanifest. A creation of a thing is a projection from unmanifest to manifest.

Beings or *Bhutas* are made from the five great elements, space, air, fire, water, and earth. These beings are experienced as un-manifest in the beginning, are seen to be manifest in the middle state and become un-manifest again in the end.