

VOL. 1 ISSUE 8

THE HAMSA

A magazine for learning and living Advaita Vedānta

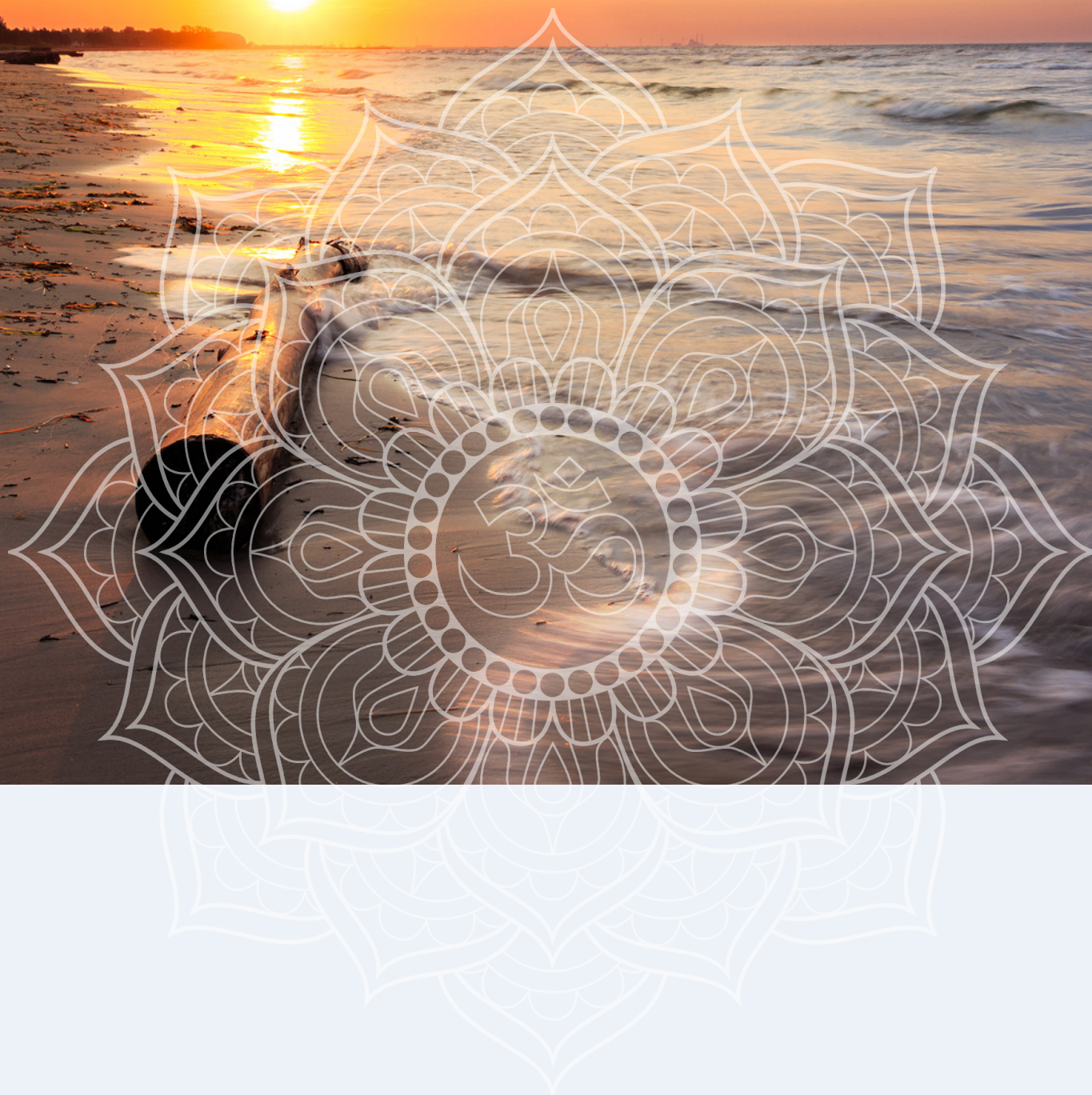


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Dedication to Our Lineage

This magazine is created with deepest gratitude to our spiritual teacher, our Guru and guide, Acharya Shunya, who is disciple of her Guru, Baba Ayodhyanath, who is disciple of his Guru, Paramatman Shanti Prakash. These eminent teachers, from Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India are bearers of sacred knowledge of Advaita Vedānta, as expounded in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gīta and Brahma Sutras.

This magazine is a humble reflection of the non-dual Truth Acharya Shunya’s students have received from her live discourses in her Vedic Spiritual Studies Program at Vedika Global - Acharya Shunya’s wisdom school in Emeryville, California.



Letter from the Editor



Welcome to Issue 8 of The Hamsa Magazine

Have you ever held a stone that has become smooth from being under flowing water? There is something hypnotic about running one’s fingers across the surface of a rock that has been worn with time and persistence into a refined texture. When we sit quietly with a stone like this in our palm, the mind may wonder at how something so hard, so difficult to break, could be moulded by something as soft as water.

Yet we are internally experiencing this every day as students. As we let the voice of our teacher pour the wisdom of Advaita Vedānta through our consciousness, the seemingly immovable set-ups of *samsāra* (subjective reality) are methodically worn away to dust. By choosing to submerge our minds in a river of wisdom, the transmission of Self knowledge through the *parampara* (spiritual lineage) teachings reshapes our false identities which we ignorantly thought were built in stone.



One highlight in this issue is Shreyas’ personal reflection on his childhood spent among sandcastles which reveals truths about our unlimited capacity to build and consciously re-build our default actions. Another is an article on the Kleshas summarizing Acharya Shunya’s teachings from Sage Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras about the sources of suffering in the mind and how we can systematically deconstruct these ignorant thought patterns to burn out the seeds of suffering.

To give more opportunities to stay soaked in transformational wisdom, *The Hamsa Magazine* is launching a new platform, called *The Hamsa Bulletin*. The purpose of this more frequent email publication is to offer one or two articles to keep you inspired towards deep *mananam* (contemplation) between *The Hamsa Magazine* releases. Topics will range from lineage teachings selectively taught by Acharya Shunya from the oral tradition, to pieces that require some background context to grasp, so the *The Hamsa Bulletin* will be sent only to ongoing enrolled students.

Enjoy this issue. Allow it to invite you back to the river of wisdom. Let it remind you to stay exposed to the transmission of Self knowledge, and watch how ignorance effortlessly washes away by the flowing power of *Shāstra* (sacred texts revealing the Self), Guru and Parampara.

In Service of Truth,

Ishani Naidu
Editor in Chief

Kleshas

Uprooting the Deepest Sources of Suffering in the Mind



Acharya Shunya provided a four-class overview of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras at the end of 2016. The sessions were a welcome revision for those students who had studied the text previously with Acharya Shunya, and a comprehensive introduction for those encountering the text for the first time.

In the classic text on Yoga Philosophy, known as the *Yoga Sutras*, author Sage Patanjali offers a rigorous framework for the spiritual aspirant to observe their thoughts, calm the mind, and eventually experience the internal witness (the eternal subject) which is always separate from the objects of experience, including the mind and its contents. The method of discerning the inner witness, known as *Purusha*, (akin to Self or *Ātman* of Advaita Vedānta) from matter, known as *Prakriti* (that pertains to the fluctuating thoughts of the mind) is called Yoga.

A special methodology of Yoga, known as *Kriya Yoga*, includes an active path of *tapas*, *svādhyāya* and *Īshvara pranidhāna*. Tapas is literally a “glow, or heat” that emerges through the practice of behavioral regulations ranging from voluntary celibacy to disciplined intake of food and balanced lifestyle regimens, to speaking only as required while speaking only the truth. This heat of discipline burns away the ignorance in the mind (born out of sloth).

Svādhyāya is the study of *Shāstra*, or scriptures, which explain the reasons why one should perform Kriya Yoga.

Īshvara pranidhāna is surrender to Īshvara, meaning a dedication of all fruits of actions to Īshvara, replacing selfish actions with deliberately selfless ones, and choosing to act according to duty over desire. Īshvara here indicates God, but God is not restricted to a specific form and name, but to a higher indiscernible, boundless supreme reality.

Sage Patanjali informs the student that there are five types of root causes of suffering that exist in the mind. These are called *kleshas*, and they are the deepest held beliefs lodged inside the mind, even deeper than the thoughts (*vrittis*). All perceived suffering and the fluctuations of *rajas* and *tamas* (agitating and disturbing qualities of the mind) that hinder the path of Yoga come from the kleshas.

When left unexamined, our kleshas travelling forward with us from birth to birth compel us to take actions that further fortify our karma (unexamined actions) and require future births to experience the fruits of such actions. These kleshas are what keep us locked up in the wheel of *samsāra*. Here, the word *samsāra* refers to bondage to a cycle of non stop existence and obligation to undergo repeated births and deaths, without freedom to choose or opt out of this existence whose main experience is uncertainty, change, loss and sorrow. Kriya yoga exposes the kleshas (root causes of suffering) to new thought systems that weaken their power, and these thought systems are able to finally scorch the kleshas to such an extent that they are permanently no longer active in the mind. Once the kleshas are fully deactivated, there is no need for future births.



Kleshas and the Continuous Wheel of Samsāra

What are the Five Kleshas?

1. Avidya – Ignorance

Avidya is the deepest and most pervasive klesha. It is the soil in which all the other kleshas grow and ripen. It is never dormant, but always exerting itself until nothing short of total enlightenment finally burns it off.

This avidya is not merely the absence of vidya, or knowledge. We may go on accumulating right knowledge from Shāstra throughout our lifetime, but even that learning is still laying on a bed of avidya. Our conscious mind may go on being filled with the light of knowledge, but our deepest subconscious still has the basic ignorance of who we really are. Avidya locks our mind into a fundamental error: we confuse our true Self with the body. The eternal, spotless, blissful, and pure consciousness of the Soul, which is our true nature, becomes misidentified by the subconscious as the fragile, messy, suffering body, mind and senses. This ignorance even leads us to define ourselves by our material possessions, relationships, ego-based personality, etc.



2. Asmitā – Ego

Asmitā is the general ignorance of avidya condensed into a strong “I am-ness.” It is the birth of a very false self, and the observer / spirit becomes totally fused with the instruments of observation. The ego's collection of past thoughts and experiences build up into a relentless identification with the very fragile construct of who we believe ourselves to be. Asmitā demands we struggle very hard to protect this ego, which is so vulnerable to the vagaries of *samsāra*, because we cling to the ego as if our existence depends on it.

3 & 4. Rāga and Dvesha – Attachment and Aversion

Ego gives rise to extreme likes (*rāga*) and extreme dislikes (*dvesha*). The memory within the ego activates these flip sides of the same coin. When we have enjoyed something in the past, we want to recreate it without evaluating why we want it. The stronger the desire for something, the greater the suffering because the ego is so invested in getting it. The stronger the *rāga*, the more likely the ego will compromise all else in life to chase it. This is how ethics are transgressed, health is sacrificed, etc., in the ego's pursuit of a certain object or experience.

Because of ignorance, there is a foolish desire never to experience pain. This is the accompanying and opposite side of *rāga*. We try hard to avoid what we do not like as much as possible. Even when we enjoy something pleasurable, the fear of pain when it inevitably leaves us is always lurking just below the surface.

These two kleshas keep us in a constant yo-yo effect – feverishly seeking what we are attracted to, while desperately fearing the pain of not having it or losing it once we do have it. Suffering will always come when we blindly follow the urgings of *rāga* and *dvesha*.

5. Abhinivesha – Fear of Death

The fear of death can lie dormant for a long time, and it may even appear that a person has ridden themselves of the previous kleshas, only to find that when a life threatening disease or situation arises, their mind is overtaken in an instant by this fear. How the most evolved persons face their death is a final showing of how cleaned up their kleshas have become. The person is not to blame for fearing death, it is simply to acknowledge that there is still work to do. Of course we can heal disease with lifestyle and treatments as needed, but we should not panic for fear of death. The one who faces mortality with equanimity truly understands the limitedness of the body and the unlimited nature of the soul. In them the abhinivesha klesha will have been fully burned away.

How to burn away the Kleshas?

Sage Patanjali gives us a tool to free ourselves from the suffering caused by the kleshas. He instructs yogis to cultivate the opposite state of mind for each klesha. For example, to counteract the deep-rooted ignorance of our true nature (*avidya*), we should assiduously study Shāstra under a master or Acharya, which brings light to this ignorance. The study of Shāstra intentionally crafts *vrittis* attuned toward Truth and from lifetime to lifetime we will become closer to sources of knowledge that remove the ignorance of the Self. Avidya causes a lot of *vrittis*, and to work on it we have to keep reviewing Shāstra and constantly remind ourselves that we are not the body, we are not the mind, we are spirit.

Asmitā must be counteracted by constantly discriminating between the authentic Self – which is a real being, and the false self – which is a projected phenomenal being. We must ask ourselves, “Is this my true Self or is this a false self acting and reacting in this situation?” and we may need to take time to ascertain the actor (false self) versus the real being (observer self) before taking a decision or action. We must stop making bargains for our small self, fretting about how to manipulate situations for the benefit of our ego. When we notice ourselves getting into a ‘fight or flight’ mode, we can acknowledge that the ego is getting activated since the authentic Self does not need to scramble for survival and has no need to react with a fight or with flight. How to know if a decision or feeling is coming from the false self? The false self gives rise to feelings of agitation, even when saying or doing nice and polite things, because *rajas* and *tamas* are operating. When the true Self is active, there is internal calm because the true Self has no agenda. No matter if a situation requires a delicate conversation, strong statement or silent action, anything coming from the authentic Self is done with internal calm. Releasing this klesha is a practice of constantly diffusing the ego.

The best medicine for *Rāga* and *Dvesha* is detachment (*vairagya*m). Relationships with people, objects, or experiences cultivated without the dramas of the ego reduce these kleshas. Detachment does not mean indifference, it means only separation of the ego from the investments of *rāga* and *dvesha*. When we notice excessive attachment, we have to keep a healthy distance and maintain a detached space. We can become free of the yo-yo of attachment and repulsion by persistently disengaging from excess in either direction.

Abhinivesha comes up most when we face disease, death, tragedy around us, etc. When the fear of death comes up, we have to remind ourselves of the eternal nature of the soul. Just as the snake effortlessly leaves its dead skin, so the body falls away from the soul. Acharya Shunya described the occasion of Baba's death – how he calmly completed his day's routine, gathered a few family members and students in his room, and with open eyes, chanted AUM and left his body with a small smile on his face. In this example we see an illumined being, effortlessly shedding the body, fully identified with the eternal Self, and naturally free of all fear of the transition of death.

For those who are crippled by fear of death, a beneficial experience is to lie down and visualize something falling from the ceiling and piercing through the body, and then visualizing how the body is dead but the independent consciousness remains. In this way, the fear of death can be met straight on. Since the root cause of all fears comes down to fear of death, when we face it we become free of many other fears automatically.

What happens when the kleshas are burned away?

Sage Patanjali teaches that Kriya yoga removes the bulk of the kleshas and makes the practice of meditation much more effective. Meditation further clarifies and cleanses the mind of the shadows of the kleshas. Finally, when a state of *samādhi* (total disconnection of the Soul from the mind) is reached, the kleshas are totally burned off, never to exert their power over the mind again and the wheel of *samsāra* is finally broken. The soul then exists in its state of pure consciousness and Oneness.

While the path of Yoga differs in a few key ways from the path of Advaita Vedānta, both aim toward an experience of and identification with the One universal consciousness. In pulling gems from across the rich spiritual heritage of Vedic thought, Acharya Shunya teaches Sage Patanjali's Yoga Sutras to her students for the day-to-day practical usefulness of concepts such as the kleshas, to help remove the ignorance clouding all seekers' understanding of the Self.

This article is compiled by sadasya Ishani Naidu from Acharya Shunya's Vedic Spiritual Studies satsangha on October 20th, 2016.

Lineage Story

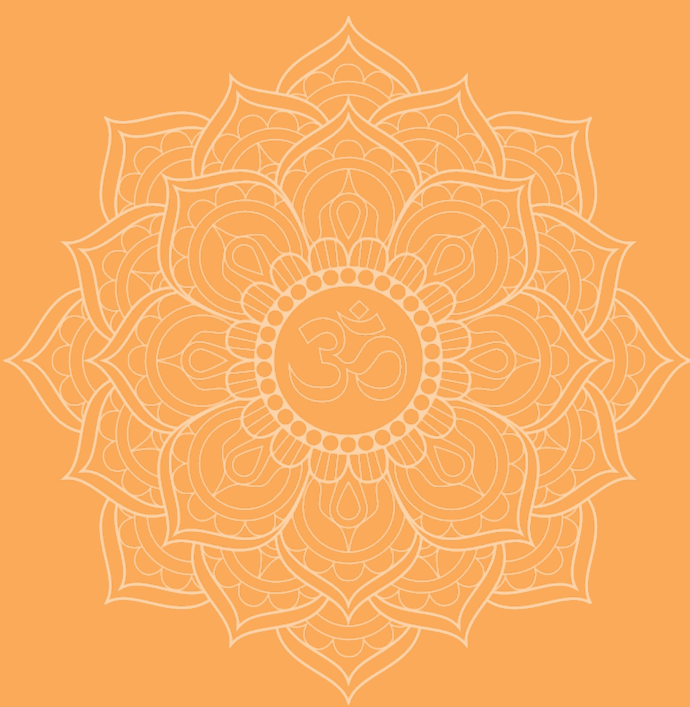
The Divine All Around Us



*Excerpt from “Ayurveda Lifestyle Wisdom”, by Acharya Shunya.
Published 2017 by Sounds True*

One night, as Baba and I sat inside watching the monsoon rains pouring down, he said, “Shunya, within your body lies buried the rare and potent ability to regenerate.” That year, the monsoon came after a tremendous delay. Everything had dried up in northern India. Even our favorite river, the vast Sarayu that flowed through town, was so shallow that my older cousins would wade almost all the way across to the other side. On this night, the heavens had unexpectedly obliged us, and we listened to the rain pound down almost violently, as if making up for lost time. The sky lit up dramatically with lightning bolts that sparked across the horizon. Ominous and gigantic cloud masses were bursting with deafening explosions above our house.

In my hometown, whenever the thunderclouds bellowed, we children cried out too, beckoning each other to splash in the puddles and streaking through the narrow streets yelling, “Baarish aayi! Baarish aayi!” (“Here come the rains!”) as if our neighbors might somehow miss the spectacle of this huge rainstorm without our calling it to their attention.



Peacocks, who lived by the hundreds in this river town, would spread their beautiful feathers majestically on the rooftops and riverbanks, performing an ethereal dance in the rain that, each year, held us spellbound. That night, I confess, I was a bit overcome by Nature’s sound and fury. I wondered how our family’s cow, Nandini, was doing in the lightning. The cowshed was warm and dry, but would all of this sound frighten her? Should I make her come sit by Baba too? She was only two years old, after all, and I was eight, so like any older sister, I often worried about her.

Later that evening, Baba told me about the powerful storm gods, the unstoppable spirits that “empty the udders of the sky” and bring life-giving rain to the earth. Known in the Vedas as the Maruts, these subtle forces know intimately the powerful medicinal herbs that grow on high mountaintops or deep inside the belly of overflowing rivers. “We refer to such extraordinary elements and phenomena of Nature as devas or devatā.” By this, he was saying that they are gods or godly.

“Why is this meaningful?” Baba asked in the way that he did when he fully intended to supply the answer from some Vedic text. He then did so: “By knowing one handful of earth, all earthen articles become known. The Veda reveals to us that one Ultimate Reality, Brahman, pure divine consciousness, is the substratum of all beings, all worlds, and all gods – and having known that, nothing else remains to be known. To a mind that has been initiated into this macro-understanding of divinity, the various forms of Nature – the five elements (ether, fire, air, water, earth) as well as the stars, sun, moon, clouds, rain, lightning, storms, rivers, mountains, planets, and, of course, our beloved mother planet Earth – are all revealed to be identical with the common truth of our existence. Truly, these are illumined forms within the common web of divine consciousness.”

“See Shunya,” he said, “how the Veda has given us the original vision of oneness even amid the plurality of our experiences. There is neither a multiplicity nor hierarchy of gods. There is merely the recognition of oneness and sacredness everywhere.”

I liked his message that we live in a world charged with devas. Even if I did not have the words to express my Baba’s teachings that night as the Maruts drenched my home, my Baba was putting into words my own spiritual intuition. He gave expression to the experience of sacredness in every nook and cranny of our existence. I had felt this all along, even though I wouldn’t be able to express it in words until many years later.

Every morning I enjoyed wading into River Sarayu. “She is my very absolute favorite devī,” I had concluded in my eight-year-old heart. There was also our aged Peepal tree, which is also renowned as the Bodhi tree, under which Gautama Buddha had gained enlightenment. Every morning, my mother would chant a special Vedic hymn, the Aswatha Vriksha Stotram, to this most sacred tree of Hindus, evoking its myriad blessings. I was told that my numerous sage ancestors, beginning with Rishi Vashishtha from Ayodhyā, had meditated under its deep foliage, and we always approached it with the words, “Vriksha rajaya namaha,” meaning, “I bow to the deva of trees.” Besides, that was my favorite tree to climb. In fact, my own list of devas was endless. I was grateful for and reassured by these devas and my feeling of connectedness with everything.

Amid dramatic lightning, and our evocative conversation on gods and goddesses, we sat in serenity sipping a warm drink made with Nandini’s fresh milk. My mother added saffron, turmeric, and other herbs according to my Baba’s medicinal recipe. Baba continued talking in his quiet and deeply reassuring voice – both his voice and his words taking away my fear of the thunderclouds. He explained that although they are fierce and often their will is almost demonic, the Maruts are actually divine healers. What they do benefits all that live on Earth. Human beings, animals, and plants would all wither and die if the Maruts did not force the clouds to release, drenching our planet with life-giving moisture. “See Shunya,” Baba said, “soon all will be green, juicy, and filled with sap.”

As Baba described Nature’s “divine healers,” a wave of joy arose in my heart, along with a desire to thank the loudly bellowing Maruts, but the hot-spiced milk flooding my mouth made me gulp instead. I kept quiet, listening to Baba. In my child’s mind, I did not know if it was story time or teaching time, as they were often one and the same with my Baba. I just knew it was something important, something I would need to tell the whole world about one day.

He spoke then about how our barren and dried-out Earth, exhausted from the burning heat of a parched summer, was being restored to a moist and green abundance. I knew that tomorrow, on my walk to school, I would find tiny flowers and grasses and herbs that had not been there the day before. Overnight, a bleak landscape would have burst into life and colorful splendor.

And it did. For the rains are messengers of life and the promise of continuity, herbs, fertility, abundant crops, health and happiness to all.

“As human beings,” Baba said, “we too can be rejuvenated. We need to mindfully apply God’s special ingredients.” By this, my grandfather meant the special foods and herbs that have but one dharma (purpose), and that is to rejuvenate. As the rains rejuvenate the Earth, any part of the body treated by these sacred and natural medicines can become rejuvenated. We will be bursting with health, in all its awesomeness, in the same way the Earth bursts forth with new life when there is rain. This is a natural law.

The Invitation

of a Spiritual Name



As students of a traditional Vedic lineage (known as a *sampradāya*), we member-students are given the opportunity to receive a Vedic name. This name is chosen by Acharya Shunya, our spiritual teacher and lineage holder, to offer us an inner invitation. This invitation is to our true selves, to continue to deepen our spiritual practice. As one of our fellow sadasyas (student-members) explains, “the names we [are] given ... represent not only their individual symbolic meanings, but a kind of rebirth into a new stage of life.” Some of these names are of Devī (goddess), others offer a challenge, while some are simply reminders. A certain beauty emerges, like that of a blooming flower, when a name graces and touches the life of a sadasya in a profound way.

For Tuere, her Vedic name of Janya served as a source of inspiration. *Janya* is that original “expansive, generative consciousness that births and nurtures creativity and life itself.” The name Janya has taught Tuere the importance of creativity as a lens to view the world. Janya has opened doors for Tuere to explore new abilities and talents in her life.

“Very early on in my studentship, Acharya Shunya saw me as an artist. To these ends, she requested that I create different visual art pieces as part of my *sevā* (selfless service) to our *kula* (school’s spiritual family). This has been very uncomfortable to me, as I had never seen myself as an artist. Through *shraddha* (faith) in my teacher, my great teacher Baba and *Īshwara* (God), I would attempt the art projects and push through my self-doubt and discomfort. When I received the name Janya, I cried at Acharya Shunya’s feet because I knew, through Baba’s grace, that she had been seeing the Divine essence in me that I could not see myself. Since that moment, I have been slowly dissolving any doubts about my abilities and clearing the way for the full force of Janya to come through me. I am now in a place where I honor my generative nature and am allowing creativity to flow forth in many different ways, even if it may look different from what I think it “should”. Seeing through the eyes of Janya is seeing through the eyes of the Mother who knows all of Her children are beautiful, special and important.”



For Amy, her Vedic name *Aparna* is a reminder of the importance and power that comes with *tapas* (spiritual discipline). Her name holds many layers, and these many meanings have presented themselves to Amy throughout her studentship.



“At first I understood this name as another aspect of the Goddess Pārvatī. A Goddess sounded like a good thing to be! Then I learned more about the stories associated with Goddess Aparna - that she underwent the most austere tapasya (austerities) to achieve self-realization. She meditated in the forest so diligently she even went without food for immense amounts of time. The rishis (sages) in the forest saw her in deep meditation and called her Aparna—the Leafless one—as she didn’t indulge in eating even one single edible leaf. It was during *Navratri* (the Nine-Day Goddess Festival) in my 2nd year of studentship that I recognized that Devī Brahmachārīnī was another aspect of Aparna. This goddess is renowned for her power of personal discipline (*sādhana*). This deepened my connection with my spiritual name as I realized the personal truth that my consciousness is naturally suited for spiritual disciplines—sādhana or tapas.”

Aparna spoke to me, she said, “I burn for fulfillment in the fire of tapas, and suffer when I indulge in unconscious behaviors, relationships, or communication. Over the years, I have gone from pridefully claiming Aparna like a small child, to self consciously adopting Aparna as a community name, to embodying it as a steadfast reminder to stay on my path. In recent years, I have learned of another meaning of this name: One without Debt. Here, debt refers to our karmic debts. With tapas as the path, our ultimate goal is to achieve freedom from this cycle of birth and death, *punyam* and *pāpam* (effects of good and bad actions in the past). Hearing my name reminds me to stay on track without an excess of sensory, mental, and emotional indulgences. It encourages me that my lifelong yearning for knowledge of God & Self is achievable, if not in this lifetime, then another. While Amy may fall down on the job, Aparna has the support of Guru, *Shāstra* (the sacred texts), and a thousand years of *sampradāya* (the lived wisdom of a vedic lineage) helping her to achieve *moksha* (spiritual freedom).”

For another student-member Deepa, her Vedic name *Vidya* has been an aide to her studentship. “Vidya” is “the knowledge of the True Self, the innermost spiritual being.” In the timeless Vedic tradition, this highest knowledge (vidya) was revealed to the rishis in their purified minds through deep meditative states. This knowledge was later codified in the teachings of Vedānta, found in the Upanishadic texts. This name was not so intuitive for Deepa, but rather it revealed itself over time. Vidya has given Deepa many reminders of the importance of *svādhya* (self-study of scriptures) and the depth these teachings hold. In turn, these teachings have served to protect and strengthen the being named Deepa.

Here is what deepa shared with me regarding her name, Vidya: “Initially I did not know how to approach my Vedic name. It was with me but I did not know what to do with it. Listening to the *satsanghas* (the Guru’s teaching sessions) and dealing with tough life situations have made me reflect on the meaning of my name. Each time I find myself stuck, I think of Vidya, the knowledge that I am receiving, and how I can bring it into my life. [I have been contemplating] how I can approach the same situations with knowledge for some time now. To be honest I have failed to apply knowledge to my life situations, more than once, but as our teacher Acharya Shunya says: one has to keep at it and keep listening internally. In moments of difficulty, I think of my name and I try to let go. It has not been easy and still isn’t. In moments that I am able to, I get a sense of freedom and joy. I do not think I see *ātman* (the Self) & *Brahman* (the One Universal consciousness) at this juncture, but those few moments of freedom only make me more desirous of [true] spiritual expansion and freedom. This is a more *sattvic* (increasing qualities of inner clarity, harmony, inner intelligence) kind of desire, I hope.”



After talking to Janya, Aparna and Vidya, here is what I feel: The spiritual path is, at times, a clumsy dance. We do our best to be strong and to implement what we know is right, but due to our *vāsanās* (tendencies due to past actions) and karmic realities, we struggle. But as our lineage teacher Adi Shankaracharya puts it , “Through the grace of God, we receive this knowledge.” We receive the honor and the responsibility to live up to a new name, a name bestowed upon us by a history of tradition (*paramparā*) of great minds, great souls, and great teachers. These Vedic names are an invitation to open up our faculties and potential to make true understanding possible. These names are an invitation to the Truth.

These interviews with sadasyas were compiled and put into context by sadasya Shreyas Cousineau.

Baba’s 3 Vinaya Practices for Shishyas



Welcome to the Vinaya Column

From ancient times, Vedic spiritual communities have had their own distinct patterns of cultural behaviors, called Vinaya, which frame a proper approach to engaging with the teachings (*śāstra*), the teacher (*Acharya*) and the community (*kula*) itself. The literal translation of Vinaya is ‘humility/humbleness.’ Ultimately, Vinaya is a reflection of our own respect for this path, and our internal commitment to Self knowledge. When we cultivate humbleness, we are able to soften and open like a flower into a deeper trust (*śraddha*) in this ancient process. We become more able to absorb the teachings from the teacher and śāstra.

This column is an ongoing resource to explore this rich topic of Vinay – from explanations of concepts to common cultural etiquette requirements, to more detailed teachings on *tapasya* (austerity practices), daily *dharma* (social ethics), etc. Please read, contemplate and (for student members) share your experiences and questions on our L2O community.



Baba’s 3 Vinaya Values to Transform Your Student Journey

By Aparna Amy Lewis, Dean of the Vedic Spiritual Studies Program

We continue our study of Vinaya with this special lineage teaching from our *paramparā*, taught to Acharya Shunya by her teacher (our great teacher) Baba Ayodhyanath Sinha. I received this teaching from Acharya Shunya during a one on one satsangha in March 2017, and I am grateful to be able to share the words of our teachers with you all.

In Baba’s gurukulam, his students became *śishyas* (disciples) as they came to embody the following three Vinaya values. These Vinaya practices apply the teachings of Jñāna Yoga to our everyday behaviors. Baba knew that when students practiced these vinaya protocols in their daily lives, whether they were sitting at Baba’s feet, doing *sevā* (selfless service) in the community, managing their households, or being by themselves, they were fundamentally transforming their consciousness.

These three values are a little challenging to embody in one’s life, but when we apply these values as guiding principles in our life, we become “*Uccha koti*” – highest quality students.



Daridrata Mein Udāratā – behaving with generosity in material hardship/poverty

We embody *udāratā* when we exhibit amazing generosity even as we may be experiencing external material poverty. When we share what we do have, even when we have less. The practice of generosity is not just about sharing when we have abundance, but also when we are in poverty.

Baba had no source of income, and yet he never hesitated in practicing generosity because he had absolute *shraddha* in Īshwara. From this faith and practice of generosity, cows were bought, marriages of poor girls were assisted, herbs were prescribed, food was served, and an entire community was held. Vedika itself as an organization was started with \$400 and embodies this principle absolutely. Vedika gives more knowledge than less – and gives from a place of inner abundance, not outer poverty.

Make generosity a practice – a *sādbanā*: give a meal, clothes, donations, support when and where it is appropriate to give or share, including inside your kula. This generosity is not just an emotion, but a gift in kind. When we give generously in the face of material deprivation, we are no longer caught up in our afflictions or identified with them. Material afflictions make us behave in a small manner. Here is a pragmatic consideration: even when it comes to our community – if we find ourselves begrudging our student donations, let us each check in with our priorities. When we live this principle of *udāratā*, we remove our own mental obstacle of feeling small and powerless and attached to our material identity. To give in the face of poverty enables us to rise above our *abamkāra* and *mamakāra* (me and mine) identification.

When we practice deliberate generosity in hard times, when we connect with the VALUE of generosity, we become expansive. We become internally abundant, and we connect with our bigger Self. We share from that mutual space which has infinite eternal capacity.

Ekanta Mein Indriyanigraha – Behaving in a self-controlled manner by disciplining or reigning in the senses, even when alone (ekanta) - indicating the absence of external supervision or outer motivation.

Control of the senses is practicing Self Discipline. When we take back control of our senses we take responsibility for our own wellbeing. *Indriya nigraha* removes the most common causes of mental confusion, and it is a living value that students must work on moment by moment.

We often practice all kinds of *tapas* (austerities) in public in society for applause and accolades. We control our senses when we are around other people and are rewarded, “I’m on a diet, I’m cleansing, I’m becoming a minimalist, I’m going to church today, I’m meditating,” etc. This is common – we get to feel pious and maybe admired for our perceived self-control. The question for the sincere student however, is whether we are exerting that same control over our senses when we are alone or by ourselves, separate from friends and our Teacher. You may find yourself feeling really good about keeping on track on Thursday night satsanghas, but are you still managing your senses Friday through Wednesday?

When we control our senses even when we are alone, we remove ourselves from the “feedback loop” of external validation and approval seeking. When we manage our desires and intentionally direct our attention and energy towards *sattva* increasing sense objects/experiences (what we listen to, what we eat, what we watch, what we say, what we take in at every level) even when we are alone, it means we have taken our *sādhana* deeper. We are becoming our own mentor.

Ekanta Indriya Nigraha determines whether we progress on our spiritual path or whether our studentship is just so much talk.

Bhaya Mein Satyam Ki Upāsana - Evoking the memory of truth (the unchanging reality Brahman) especially amidst the fear (bhaya) evoked in the unawakened mind (samsāra) due to experience of a superimposed changing reality (māyā).

To evoke *Satyam* during extreme fear, we must consciously and intentionally remember Who We Are – Self – Ātman – Brahman. As students of Advaita Vedānta, we are intentionally exploring the nature of Self and Satyam (Truth). This is fairly easy when we are sitting with our teacher, pleasantly full of kitchari, and surrounded by good company. In satsangha we hear that essential Truth “*Brahma Satya, Jagat Mithyā*” – that Brahman alone is Truth, while the world as we know it is non-reality - in the sense that it is a qualified reality that is and is not at the same time (also known as *mithyā*). We may feel that we “know” this when we hear it from our teacher. The challenge of jñāna yoga is to remember this when we are not in pleasant circumstances.

Fear itself evokes *samsāra* – our subjective separate changing conditioned view of the world that separates us (from each other, from our Self, from God). When we deliberately practice evoking the *smriti* (memory) of *satyam* during *bhaya* (fear), we dispel *samsāra*, with the aid of that memory. Let Satyam be our walking stick supporting us on the rocky trails of *samsāra*, by constantly remembering that Oneness alone is Truth.

Just as Fear concretizes *samsāra*, Truth dispels *samsāra*.

The basic nature of *samsāra* is uncertainty – and fear comes from perception of this uncertainty (perception without understanding). We have no further to look than the current state of world affairs to see this connection between uncertainty and fear; fear and illusion. The non-real appears as real, and real appears non-real or non-existent, and our minds run amok – we find ourselves afraid in the dream. When we have fear and panic we forget Satyam and we can act in very reactive ways. When we are in fear, we are not able to find compassion in our affairs. When there is fear building in the outside world, Bhayam builds up in *samsāra*.



OUR PRACTICE then is to remember Satyam – that underneath all of this is Brahman and Ātman – the non dual supreme Truth. When we continually evoke this Truth, we dispel all illusion.

These three vinaya practices enable us to overcome the three main obstacles to Self knowledge – our material attachments, our tendency to “slack off” with sensory distractions, and the great Māyā that happens in Fear. Become Uccha Koti students of Baba and Acharya Shunya by starting these practices today!

Love and light,
Aparna

The Limitless Sand

Personal Reflection



From Sadasya Shreyas Cousineau
Student Member of Acharya Shunya’s Vedic Studies Program

I was reminded to embrace the beauty of poetry and written words, and below is a piece of poetry, part prose and part melodic, written from an imagination of the Truth. I do want to say that this piece of art emerged after a real time encounter with the Absolute Truth, a ‘moksba moment,’ which was preceded by a series of unconscious choices that I had chosen to undo. I really believe it is a testament to this Truth: In any moment, we can wake up.

The Limitless Sand

AUM

There really is a deep conditioning going on.

The spiritual path has been an ongoing process of remembering and forgetting, with each turn a new opportunity to make a choice. Every encounter, every situation, each day, and each season. What should I remember? What should I forget? The choice is made but the question remains whether I am the One who chooses, or whether my Action chooses for me.

The spiritual path has been an ongoing process of doing and undoing, with each turn a new opportunity to make a choice. Every morning, every thought, each outburst, and each angry phone call. How do I turn myself around? How do I undo the harm? The choice is made when I choose to do the work, and choose to re-choose my actions.

My spiritual teacher Acharya Shunya said, “Let go of shame.” Her Guru Baba Ayodhya Nath (who we call Baba) said every moment we may stand up with grace. Now I realize that shame is a choice. It’s a choice to remember an identity, an identity that is not really me, a story which I only inherited, but shall not be my destiny.

That’s why Baba said this world is perfectly crafted for us to wake up and renew our understandings. Now I can learn how to let go of the baggage; the shame drops effortlessly. My internal monologue shifts away from frustration. My internal thoughts drop any loathing. My memories gain a novel quality: nostalgia, sweetness, even comedy too. I no longer say, “Why did I do that? Why did I fail?” Now that sweetness comes up to the microphone to say "Ha ha! Who knew? Who knew I was just hurting myself, because I thought it was what I had to do."

That’s why I let go of atonement done with the notion of punishment. That's why I embraced self-forgiveness, now the undoing is done with ease. Now it feels simple to clean & declutter, because I know there’s no difference between me and the other.

So what is this Mithyā, this Māyā, we talk about? Some call it a mixed bag of truth, a shadow puppet pretending to be the real thing. Well some past undoing showed me another perspective. That’s why I have a story for you.

In my hometown, they have a festival. Where everyone goes to the beach. They ask who can make the most brilliant art, from only the sand of the sea. Have you ever seen a sand castle? Well these ones would surely impress. The sand transformed into mermaids and crocodiles from the pier down to tower three.

Now I look at each of these pieces, each a separate beauty. The artmakers mold the sand, push the sand, sculpt the sand, play with the sand. It’s amazing to see what the power of memory and action can create. All they need to create beauty is one simple cause. The beauty comes from sand, and infinite forms it takes. Even my four inch drip sand castle, owes its beauty to that.

But what type of beauty is it, when a wave could melt every scene? The wave comes, the rain comes, the bird comes, time comes. The sand melts back into sand alone, unchanged, with no tattoo. The sand doesn’t remember if it was a mermaid or crocodile, it doesn't particularly care. The sand doesn't say, “I don't want to be Eve's creation, because I was already Adam’s.”

That is what this Māyā is like, sand constantly changing form. That is what this Mithyā is like, sand borrowing an imagined form. Now to one without knowledge, this can cause woe. Instead of laughs there are tears, instead of love there is fear.

Let’s choose what to remember and what to forget. Let’s not say I can only be this or that, and fill out a role that was defined by our own undefined expectations and actions. Be a designer, embrace your design. Be an observer, witness your art. Let's be like the sand, forever molding and melting. Let’s not limit our limitless sand.

It’s an ongoing process of remembering and forgetting, an ongoing process of doing and undoing. But don't worry, you are not alone. There is a guide in you, dear sand castle, like a lamp whose flames spark with proper fuel. With the right eye and the right ear you will see, which fuel of memory and action to choose. And soon the grooves of even memory and action, will be unable to limit your limitless sand.

AUM Shanti Shanti Shanti



Sanskrit Words

Glossary



- anitya:** Ephemeral, non-eternal
- ahamkāra:** The ego’s strong attachment to the definition of “me” based on non-eternal, external factors, (i.e. job title, social status, income, bodily appearance, etc.)
- Aparna:** Name of the Goddess, ‘The Leafless One,’ one without karmic debt
- ātman:** The Self
- bhaya:** Fear stemming from ignorance of what is eternal and what is non-eternal.
- Brahman:** The One Universal Consciousness that is both experiencing and manifesting all of creation as the innermost reality; the underlying spiritual reality
- Devī:** Goddess
- dharma:** Righteousness, duty, noble values
- ekānta:** Alone, without the crutch of external supervision or outside motivation
- Gāyatri Mantra:** Refers to the core mantra of the Vedika lineage, it is a verse from the Rig Veda which extolls the virtues of Brahman in the form of the Sun and is widely known for its power to activate the divine energies within those who chant the mantra with reverence, as it contains the essence of the Vedas
- indriya nigraha:** A voluntary, self-controlled discipline or reigning in of the senses
- Īshvara:** God, the intelligent principle organizing all of creation
- janya:** The original expansive, generative consciousness that births and nurtures creativity and life itself
- jagat:** The objective phenomenal, outer world (as opposed to samsāra which is the subjective inner world, a creation of the mind)
- jīva:** A living being in the world
- jñāna yoga:** Path to knowing the Self through study of Vedānta scriptures (specifically Upanishads)
- kleshas:** The deepest rooted beliefs in the mind that give rise to suffering
- kula:** Spiritual family
- mamakāra:** The ego’s ignorant seeking of security by claiming many non-eternal, external objects (house, car, partners, etc.) as ‘mine’
- māyā:** The changing reality superimposed onto objective reality
- mithyā:** Not objective reality; the qualified reality that is perceived but does not remain constant through the past, present and future
- moksha:** Spiritual freedom
- Navratri:** Literally means Nine Nights, refers to a festival over nine days celebrating the many facets of the Goddess
- pāpam:** Karmic demerits resulting from negative actions
- parampara:** Spiritual lineage
- prakruti:** Matter, including the fluctuating thoughts in the mind
- pūjā:** Ritual worship
- punyam:** Karmic merits resulting from positive actions
- purusha:** Similar to the Self, or Ātman
- rishis:** Sages to whom the Vedas were revealed in meditation
- sadasya:** Student of a spiritual teacher, one who undertakes spiritual discipline to reach self-determined spiritual goals
- sādhanā:** Voluntary dedicated discipline to reach self-determined spiritual goals
- sampradāya:** Spiritual lineage imparting knowledge of the Self
- samsāra:** Bondage to the wheel of cyclical births and deaths; the subjective reality individual for each observer
- satsangha:** Gathering of students to hear spiritual discourses from a spiritual teacher
- sattva:** Quality of the mind manifesting inner clarity, harmony, inner intelligence
- sattvic:** Adjective for anything that increases sattva in the mind of the observer
- satyam:** Eternal Truth underlying all reality
- sevā:** Selfless service
- shāstra:** Sacred texts revealing Self
- shishya:** Disciple who practices Vinaya toward the guru
- shraddhā:** Faith, a functional openness in our minds, allowing us to receive new teachings from the shāstra and guru
- smriti:** Memory, a mental faculty that can be invoked to remember our true Self
- svadhyāya:** Independent self-study and review of the guru’s teachings and shāstra
- tapas, tapasya:** Spiritual discipline, austerities
- Uccha koti:** Highest quality of student,
- Udārata:** Generosity, even when we have little to share
- vāsanā:** Hidden desires, wants and traits borne from an imprint on the mind created by our actions, thoughts and perceptions in the past
- vidya:** Knowledge of the Self, jñānam



Invitation to Contribute



This magazine is a sevā offering created by sadasya members for the benefit of the entire sadasya kula. There are many ways you too can gift your words and insights to the rest of your conscious community. If you are interested in writing an article on a topic covered in a Satsangha, submitting your artwork or photography, sharing your personal reflections on how this knowledge is changing your life, editing stories from our lineage, or transcribing selected teachings from recordings, please contact Ishani, magazine Editor in Chief, ishani@vedikaglobal.org.

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About the Magazine Title, 'The Hamsa'

Just as the swan (*Hamsa* in Sanskrit) lives on water, but its feathers are never wet, similarly, an Advaita Vedāntin (follower of Advaita Vedānta) dwells in the Māyā-filled Samsāra, fulfilling all duties, but remains untouched and unpolluted by Māyā. Such a one is called a spiritual Hamsa. Vedic seekers must effort to emulate Hamsa-like ideals in their personal lives.

