



The Vision

A monthly journal started by HH Swami Ramdas in 1933
DEDICATED TO UNIVERSAL LOVE AND SERVICE

Vol. 91

JANUARY 2024

No.04



ANANDASHRAM, PO ANANDASHRAM 671531, INDIA



CONTENTS

From The Editor	-	1
On Temple Worship	- Swami Ramdas	2
Worship In Temples	- Swami Satchidananda	3
Editor Answers	-	4
Worshiping Him Includes		
Seva Of Co-Creations	-	6
Hearts Of Devotees Are		
Temples Of The Lord	- Mother Vanamali	7
To Love All Is The		
True Bhakti Of God	-	8
Epistles Of Swami Ramdas	-	9
Learning From		
The School Of Life	-	10
Homage To Luminaries	-	12
Important Days In 2024	-	13
Anandashram News	-	13
Japa Yagna	-	13
Anand Kutir	-	14
Year-End Programmes	-	15

THE VISION**A monthly Magazine****Published by****ANANDASHRAM**

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FROM THE EDITOR

Beloved Reader,

The first step on the Divine path is Bhakti which means a keen, burning desire to realise immortal peace and freedom. The devotee must be seized with a discontent which never ceases until the goal is reached. By and large, the starting point in this direction is visiting temple where the deity is worshipped with faith and devotion. As years go by, the devotee is expected to see the Divine element not only in the deity but also within oneself and then gradually in all. Otherwise, the all-pervading Lord will be, unknowingly, limited to the particular form of the Lord or temple.

This month's issue of THE VISION touches upon devotion to the Form and transcending it. □

— **Editor**

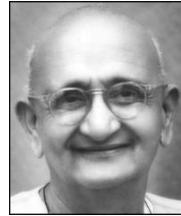


“When you remember God in a particular form, you worship Him as Saguna, and when the image dissolves in your mind, raising you beyond the sense of duality, then you realise Him as Nirguna. Both are aspects of one Truth.” — Swami Ramdas

ON TEMPLE WORSHIP

By Swami Ramdas

Man cannot conceive of God, who is infinite and eternal. God is beyond name and form. The instrument, which we have to make use of in trying to comprehend Him, is the mind. And the mind can think



only in terms of name and form. So, if we want to concentrate our mind on God, we have to give Him a name and a form. The image in the temple serves this purpose. When we stand before the image, we take it as the very embodiment of the Divine. We sing before it of His great attributes, His infinite glory and power, His eternal existence, knowledge and joy.

The image, by itself, is only a mere idol, made of metal, wood or stone. But the consecratory ceremonies at the time of the installation of the idol invest it with Divine powers. When thousands fix their faith upon that image, it naturally adds to the Divine light and power generated therein. So temples have become places of worship for the masses, in general, who are not yet fit to turn inwards and find God within their own hearts, in His true and eternal nature. □

WORSHIP IN TEMPLES

By Swami Satchidananda



Devotees are attached to deities whom they call as their own Ishta-Devata. They are drawn to these deities, may be, because of the Sadhana in their earlier life. But whatever deity we worship, actually we are worshipping the Supreme Being only. One deity is not different from the other. This must be kept in our mind. We find more followers in a particular temple because there they, by total and unqualified devotion and prayer, feel the living presence of their Ishta Devata.

It is true that a good number of temple-goers do not bother about philosophy or on the indwelling God. Some are satisfied with some sort of external worship while some go there to pray for material prosperity or for peace of mind. At the same time, some do go with total Bhakti. There are different stages in one's progress towards the realisation of the ultimate. When God wills that they should go to a higher level, He will bring about suitable situations by which they will become more introverted. □

EDITOR ANSWERS

Question: Usually, whenever we are in trouble, we remember the deity whom we worship and intensely pray to Him for relief. We then realise that this form of worship has not helped us go beyond the circle of 'me' and 'mine'. How can we transform such worship into one of a higher form?

Answer: Right from our childhood, we have been tutored to approach God in the form of deities. In the initial stages, deity worship enables us to accept the truth that there is a Higher Power. In our moments of crisis, we wholeheartedly pray for immediate relief. Proportionate to our faith, our prayers are answered. However, the limiting factor to this approach is that it makes us believe that God, whom we pray to, is outside — an Entity other than ourselves. This brings about a sense of separation between us, God and the rest of the manifestation leading to the dominance of 'me' and 'mine'.

At some point in life, God mysteriously brings us in touch with spiritual preceptors or scriptures to make us aware that He is not merely in deities, but is also the in-dwelling and all-pervading Reality. Slowly the truth dawns that God stands for the Subtle and Mysterious Power expressing in the form of Life Force, Awareness, Intelligence,

Creativity, Love, Compassion and the like. As these are abstract ideas, it is difficult to offer worship to these attributes of the Divine. Therefore, offering worship to the deities with the Bhavana that they symbolise all these facets sets in motion the process of transformation of worship from the Form to the Formless.

In this context a Shloka from the Bhagavad Gita throws some more light; the Lord said:

यच्चापि सर्वभूतानां बीजं तदहमर्जुन ।
न तदस्ति विना यत्स्या न्मया भूतं चराचरम्.

“I am the generating Seed of all living beings, O Arjuna. No creature moving or non-moving can exist without Me.”

Only when we try to understand that all of us have come from Him and that He is the source of all creations, we will realise that He is not only in temples but is also in all creations, including us. A stage then comes where the outer worship goes on and simultaneously an effort is also made to know Him as the in-dwelling Reality.

Idol worship has its relevance and needs to be given its due importance because its essence helps us to gradually transform our devotion, which would encompass worshipping Him as the Formless and beyond. □

WORSHIPING HIM INCLUDES SEVA OF CO-CREATIONS

“To serve your fellow beings is to serve God.”— Swami Ramdas

Normally our devotional activities are centred on deity worship and the ancillary festivals. And it hardly connects with the common run of life. But as one progresses in the truest form of devotion, our worship will not be limited to idols alone, but will also be extended to serving Him through as many co-creations as possible by becoming sensitive to their needs and sufferings.

Here is a real-life incident...

Many years ago, an ardent devotee of the Ashram, was diagnosed with a heart problem and doctors recommended an immediate open-heart surgery. As the surgery was quite expensive, he did not know how to move forward; but, as was his practice, he left it in the ever-protecting hands of the Lord.

In the meantime, an ex-colleague of this devotee, who is also a great Bhakta, got to know about the surgery. Though he was scheduled to go on a pilgrimage to various famous temples around that time, on hearing of the impending surgery, without a second thought he dropped his plans, cancelled his tickets and

visited the devotee. He said, “Here is the money for your surgery, go ahead with it immediately.”

The devotee, who totally relies on the Lord, was able to see the Divine in the form of this gesture. Thus, the Lord revealed that devotion to deities in temples and serving our fellow-beings and creatures are like the obverse and reverse sides of the same coin. □



HEARTS OF DEVOTEES ARE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

By Mother Vanamali

When Lord Krishna wanted to return to His abode, Uddhava asked Him, “When you have departed from these mortal coils, O Lord, where will I find You? Where will I seek You?”

The Holy One replied, “Go to My temples, O Uddhava! I will be residing there. And if you are in any doubt as to where My temples are situated, I will tell you. My temples are in the hearts of My devotees. Therefore, go where My devotees congregate. Wherever you hear My names chanted and My stories recited, there will I also be. Therefore, seek Me among My devotees, for, through them I will ever manifest Myself in this world”. □

Source: Srikrishna Lila

TO LOVE ALL IS THE TRUE BHAKTI OF GOD

One day when Dwarkadas, a close-minded follower of the caste system, was engaged in his Puja in the Kasaragod Ashram, Kanda, a so-called untouchable, approached him with a gift of a bunch of ripe plantains. The former flared up and shouted: "How dare you come near me? Don't you see that I doing Puja? Get away from my presence." Kanda shrank back. Beloved Papa observed the whole game. Getting up he quietly proceeded towards Dwarkadas, collected the images and the Puja materials by folding up the cloth on which they were placed and flung them into the ditch. Dwarkadas was stunned. Then Beloved Papa said: "Look here, Ramji, your devotions have been taking decidedly a wrong turn. That devotee (Kanda) before you came to you with a heart full of love. You chose to discard him. That means you have discarded the very love of God. For you in future the living human image should be God. **Worshipping brass images and conceiving hatred for man is not devotion.**" Instantly Dwarkadas got up and going to Kanda fell at his feet. □

*Source: Paraphrased anecdote from Beloved
Papa's book, IN THE VISION OF GOD*

EPISTLES OF SWAMI RAMDAS

Bhakti is the beginning; Bhakti is the end. Bhakti is the way; Bhakti is the goal. Jnana and Karma are only necessary props on which is hoisted the majestic dome of Bhakti. God says, “I am the same to all beings but My devotees are dear to Me.” So, true devotion is based on the equality of vision. Samadarshan gives knowledge and peace. Bhakti gives pure love and Premanand. Knowledge enlightens and upholds; devotion yields thrills of joy and ecstasy. The two combined make Purna Yoga.

Behold God as all, and still be His child and servant. You are at once He and His child. God is His own devotee. He is a mystery, but a revealed mystery — revealed in love and joy. To be ever singing His name and glories is to be in tune with Him. Beloved Ram is captured within our heart. “Where can You go, O Beloved? Thou art always in Thy child.” Surrender to Him, and He looks after you, plans and arranges everything for the best for you. He is the all-loving Divine Mother. □

Ramdas

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LEARNING FROM THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

Unveiling The Inherent Human Values From Frequently Used Articles

“We have the magnificent book of nature spread out before us — a picture of unsurpassing beauty and charm — the spontaneous and blissful self-expression of the indwelling God. Let us look at it, read in it the glorious presentation and the varied activity of the Beloved. Look on the infinite play of the Infinite One, and by deep absorption into the Beloved — the Universal Being — enjoy immortal joy. This is the goal — all else is ephemeral and not worth striving for.” — Swami Ramdas

Every object that we use in our day-to-day lives conveys some aspects of human values. Normally we do not cognise these values, but the moment we start viewing everything with this perspective, we will come to accept that ‘nothing is irrelevant, nothing is unimportant and nothing is insignificant.’

Here are a couple of examples:

Signpost:

For success in any field, the first thing needed is to set the goal to be achieved, and then seek directions and guidance on how to achieve the goal. Signpost reminds us of these key factors.



Coin:

Every aspect of life can be viewed from various perspectives; and each perspective has its pros and cons. Whenever we deal with situations, we should try to put ourselves in the other's shoes and understand their perspective before jumping to conclusions. □

**WORDS TO INSPIRE**

“Bhakti is the highest form of Yoga where the mind is absorbed in the love of the Divine.”

— Swami Sivananda

HOMAGE TO LUMINARIES

Spiritual luminaries awaken the sleeping soul to the awareness of its immortal and all-blissful nature. They live what they preach and preaches what they live. Their influence inspires the hearts, minds, and souls of the human beings they come in contact with. Thus, in line with the teachings of Beloved Papa, THE VISION will feature a few words of reverential adoration in honour of a couple of Mahatmas every month:

◆ **12th Jan 2024, the 161st Jayanti of Swami Vivekananda:**

Nationalism was a prominent theme in Swami Vivekananda's thought. He wanted to set in motion a machinery which would bring noblest ideas to the doorstep of the poorest and the meanest. He was a patriot among saints and saint among patriots.

◆ **21st Jan 2024, the 129th Jayanti Swami Omkarji Maharaj:**

As soon as one enters the Samadhi Mandir at Shanti Ashram in Thotapalli (Andra Pradesh) — founded by Swami Omkarji Maharaj in 1917 — one sees the following words: “Swami is dead; Omkar is alive in your heart.” Through these words it is conveyed that ‘OMKAR’ stands

for the Base, the Substratum, the Prop and Support of everything, which is eternal. Bodies come and go, but 'Omkar' is always there.

On these occasions, THE VISION offers its homage to these great Mahatmas and seeks their beneficent blessings on one and all for speedy spiritual progress culminating in experiencing the absence of otherness.



IMPORTANT DAYS IN 2024

- Feb 16 Fri Mataji Krishnabai's Mahasamadhi Day
 Apr 23 Tue Beloved Papa Swami Ramdas' Jayanti
 Jul 21 Sun Guru Purnima
 Aug 9 Fri Beloved Papa's Mahasamadhi Day
 Oct 2 Wed Mataji Krishnabai's Jayanti
 Oct 12 Sat Swami Satchidanandaji's Mahasamadhi Day
 Nov 12 Tue Swami Satchidanandaji's Jayanti
 Dec 27 Fri Beloved Papa's Sannyas Day □



ANANDASHRAM NEWS

15,500-CRORE NAMA JAPA YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE: The total Japa received in the fourth round of the 15500-Crore Nama Japa

Yagna For World Peace in the month of November 2023, which includes the count given by Ram Nam Bank in Chennai, is 200 crores, chanted by 173265 devotees. The grand total of the Japa done so far in this round now stands at 1210 crores.

ANAND KUTIR:

- **Ram Nam:**

By the abundant grace of Beloved Papa, Ram Nam sessions were held in Anand Kutir from 5:00 to 5:30 pm on the 26th of November and then on the 3rd December 2023. In these soulful sessions, Ram Nam was sung in a slow tune to aid the mind in concentrating on the chanting.

- **Sessions With Children:**

In the month of November, 11 interactive sessions were held with children at Anand Kutir, in which 457 students participated.

Some of the points shared by the children were:

- A little care in our speech and behaviour will make a big difference.
- Hunger is not only experienced by humans.
- Gratitude should be expressed for all that has been provided by God.
- Our life should be a payback to society.

- Mutual respect and community perspective should be developed.
- We owe everything to others and therefore we should think of others as well.
- Everyone we meet plays an important role in our life.
- 'We' is correct, not 'me'!

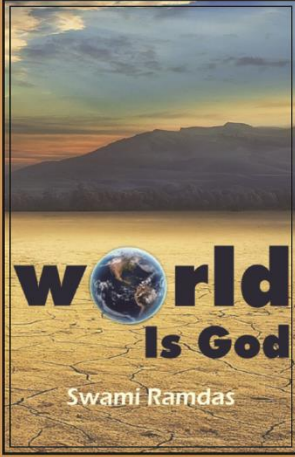
YEAR-END PROGRAMMES 2023: In order to give a boost to our spiritual practices, Beloved Papa arranged to have Ram Nam, Bhajans and Satsang sessions from 23rd to the 31st of December 2023.

The joy of having so many devotees of the same mindset, hailing from various places, joining the chanting round-the-clock, adds to the electric atmosphere caused by the spiritual fervour.

Along with the Nama Chanting, as prompted by Beloved Papa, some facets of the spiritual journey were also dwelt upon. Due to paucity of space, the details of the programmes will appear in the February issue of THE VISION. □

BOOK IN FOCUS:

WORLD IS GOD



An insightful saga of Swami Ramdas' world tour from June 1954 to January 1955.

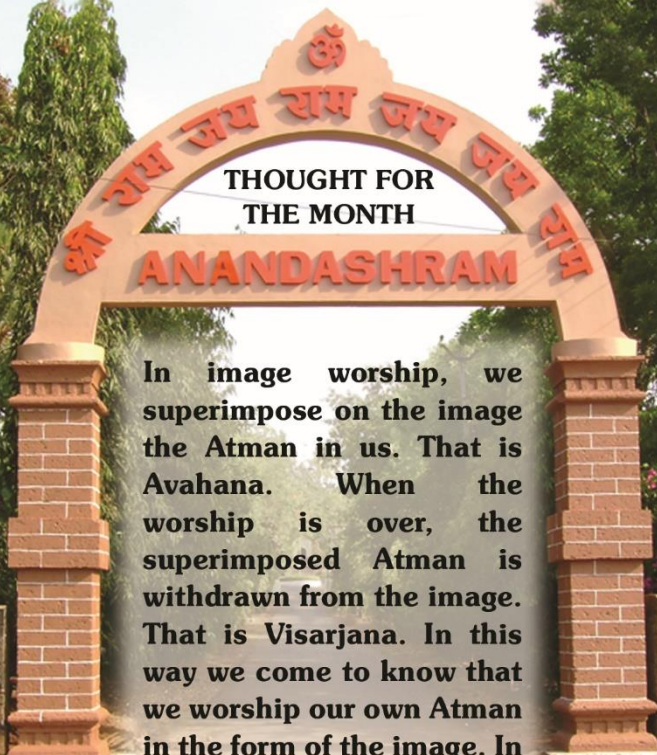
Wherever he travelled, he spread the glory of the Divine Name among people

from all walks of life.

This book divulges how spirituality is expressed in the form of expansiveness — growing from the individual to the Universal.

Available in English, Tamil and Kannada.





THOUGHT FOR
THE MONTH

ANANDASHRAM

In image worship, we superimpose on the image the Atman in us. That is Avahana. When the worship is over, the superimposed Atman is withdrawn from the image. That is Visarjana. In this way we come to know that we worship our own Atman in the form of the image. In the end we get the vision of the Atman.

— Swami Ramdas