

# Sanatana Dharma

**Lesson 9: The four Varnas**

**Festival: Vasanta Panchami**



**Review of**

**Lesson 8: Karma and Rebirth**

# Śānti Mantras



- ॐ सह नाववतु ।  
सह नौ भनक्तु ।  
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।  
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥
- Om saha nāvavatu |  
sa ha nau bhunaktu |  
sa ha vīryam karavāvahai |  
tejasvināvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai |  
Om shāntiḥ shāntiḥ shāntiḥ ||

# Śānti Mantras



- Meaning:
  - 1: Om, May God Protect us Both (the Teacher and the Student),
  - 2: May God Nourish us Both,
  - 3: May we Work Together with Energy and Vigour,
  - 4: May our Study be Enlightening, not giving rise to Hostility,
  - 5: Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

# Review



- How do we explain Sanatana Dharma to those interested in learning about our culture, religion, and spiritual tradition?
- It is critical for us to be clear about the Sanatana Dharma principles ourselves
- Otherwise we cannot explain it to ourselves, let alone others!
- Discussion with balavihar children

# Festival: Vasanta Panchami



- Dedicated to **Goddess Sarasvati**, Goddess of knowledge
- We pray to Goddess Sarasvati so that our ignorance is replaced with knowledge
- Goddess Sarasvati is the one who gives the “sara” (essence or knowledge) about “sva” (the Self)

# Festival: Vasanta Panchami



- Traditionally, children are initiated into education on this day according to a ritual called “Akṣara Abhyasa” or “Vidya ārambham”
- “Akṣara Abhyasa” is a very significant rite in Sanatana Dharma
- “Akṣara” also means that which is unchanging or the Truth, i.e., God!
- Chant verse 15:16 from the Gita

# Review: Karma



- Karma is action, result, feeling while creating action, feeling while result is experienced, and a number of other things.
- Karma includes the merits we get (Papa and Punya)
- How to face the present moment? How to overcome the challenges and proceed towards destination? These are explained by Theory of Karma.

# Review: Karma & Karma Yoga



- Every action generates an effect and every effect generates another action; this cycle goes on until we understand the notion of “doership”
- Karma is ACTIVE; Karma  $\neq$  Fate; Karma  $\neq$  Helplessness
- Karma Yoga is an attitude of offering every action that we engage in to the Lord; do what needs to be done but do it with an attitude and spirit of selflessness



# Review: Karma and Rebirth



- The Law of Karma states that an individual is the creator of her/his own destiny
- The results of past actions place us in various circumstances (good or bad); how we act in these circumstances is up to us!
- If we act with our selfish interests in mind, we are bound to create more vasanas and eventually to more suffering down the road; if we act selflessly, we can transmute the karma!

# Review: Karma and Rebirth



- The “jiva” can be understood as a quantum of vasanas superimposed upon the Atman; once the vasanas are gone (Deepavali lamp example) all that remains is Atman or Self!
- Do you change clothes? Why?
- Reincarnation is similarly the process of acquiring new equipment (body) to exhaust different vasanas
- Death is an event that marks the expenditure of “old” vasanas

# Review: Karma



- The Law of Karma can be understood as two parts: Law of Compensation and Law of Retribution.
- The Law of Compensation says that every good deed is compensated. This law works at the level of cosmos and also at the level of an individual.
- The Law of Retribution states that every sinful action brings its own punishment. When we have some difficult situation in life, this is due to our past action.

# Benefits of understanding the Law of Karma



- Some people think that “God has made me the way I am. I know that not even a blade of grass will grow without His grace.” This causes them to become fatalistic. This notion is wrong.
- God is like sunlight – available to everyone. God has not cursed or blessed anyone - He is impartial. This feeling of “predestination” is due to wrong thinking. “My fate is already written” is the lament of many. This type of thinking makes God partial. No, God is not involved in such favoritism but is available equally to everyone.
- A proper understanding of the Law of Karma can help eliminate this wrong thinking.

# Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- Hymn from the Gita: 4:13
- Guṇas are key to understanding the four varṇas
- What are the three Guṇas?
  - Sattva
  - Rajas
  - Tamas
- What does each Guṇa represent?
  - Discussion in class

# Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- Do the guṇas change in an individual?
  - Yes
- How do the guṇas change in an individual?
  - Our attitude, thinking and actions affect the proportion of guṇas in each one of us
  - Life is essentially a series of choices
  - We can make intelligent choices to help us grow spiritually
  - If we practice Karma Yoga in all our actions, we mature to a stage where our thoughts and actions are sattvic

# Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- In the Vedic tradition, people were divided on the basis of guṇas
- Work of different types is essential for a society to be successful
  - Every successful society needs thinkers and philosophers, people who can protect the weak, people who can be effective in commerce and trade, and people who can do the work needed to sustain society

# Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- The four varṇas based on duty in the Vedic tradition were:
  - Brāhmaṇa
  - Kṣatriya
  - Vaiśya
  - Śudra
- In the Puruṣa sukta each of the four varṇas are explained as parts of the Cosmic Person or God
- Chant and discuss the verse relating to this idea from the Puruṣa sukta



# Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- Puruṣa sūkta and the Cosmic Person
- For example, the head (brāhmaṇa) cannot function without the shoulders/arms (kṣatriya), the supporting structure/legs (vaiśya), or the feet (śūdra)
- The same is true for the other three parts
- In essence, society cannot function efficiently without all its parts; in fact it is more than the sum of its individual parts

# Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- The Vedic society is a duty-based society
- Every duty is considered to be sacred and essential and should be performed with the proper attitude as prescribed by Karma Yoga principles
- Just because a person is born into a varṇa does not mean that a person has certain “rights” and superiority over others
- Karma Yoga teaches us that we only have duties; we are not “entitled” because we are born into a certain caste

# Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- We see varṇa-based divisions in modern society – in every country, every organization, and even in every family
- Group activity with children
  - Take 5 minutes to discuss amongst yourselves on how you see the varṇa system in action in your school
  - How does the varṇa system provide the infrastructure for every individual to gain maturity?
  - Present your analysis

# Concluding Śānti Mantra



- ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम पूर्णात् पूर्णमदच्यते ।  
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमीदाय पूर्णमैवावशिष्यते ॥  
Om Pūrṇamadah Pūrṇamidam Pūrṇāt-Purṇam-  
Udacyate  
Pūrṇasya Pūrṇamādāya Pūrṇamévāvaśiśyate ||  
Om Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ ||

Meaning:

That (God) is infinite; this (world) is whole;  
from the infinite the world becomes manifest.

From the infinite, even if the whole is taken away,  
what remains again is the infinite.