

Thoughts on Sandhyā Vandanam

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June 2014

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Guide to Transliteration symbols used in the book

The transliteration schema used in this book is based on International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST). IAST is a transliteration scheme that allows a lossless romanization of scripts as employed by the Sanskrit language. The details are given below.

Vowels

अ	a	उ	u	ऌ	ḷ	ओ	o
आ	ā	ऊ	ū	ऴ	Ḵ	औ	au
इ	i	ऋ	ṛ	ए	e	अं	ṁ
ई	ī	ॠ	ṝ	ऐ	ai	अः	ḥ

Consonants

क	ka	च	ca	ट	ṭa	त	ta	प	pa
ख	kha	छ	cha	ठ	ṭha	थ	tha	फ	pha
ग	ga	ज	ja	ड	ḍa	द	da	ब	ba
घ	gha	झ	jha	ढ	ḍha	ध	dha	भ	bha
ङ	ṅa	ञ	ña	ण	ṇa	न	na	म	ma

ह	ha	य	ya	र	ra	ल	la	व	va
		श	śa	ष	ṣa	स	sa		

Others

क्ष	kṣa	त्र	tra	ज्ञ	jña	श्र	śra	ऽ	‘
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Preface

We are living in an era characterized by scientific discoveries of various kinds. In the last two hundred and fifty years we have discovered new technologies one after the other. These have played a major role in shaping our thinking and the way of life. However, more importantly, as a nation, we have also been introduced to a number of ideas from the western civilizations. One important impact of this is a general feeling among an average, well-meaning educated Indian that anything of western origin is good, credible and the way to go forward. Even the traditionally educated *pandits* in the country crave for recognition of their scholarship by the western educated group. With the result there is a widespread feeling that anything worthwhile must pass through the lens of western acceptance.

The recent onslaught of mass media and computers and the success of media convergence as a reliable technology seem to accelerate this process. As a result there is a heightened exposure to other social structures and practices across the globe. Indian society is fast joining the global melting pot of culture and social practices.

Imbibing newer ideas and practices is generally viewed as a sign of evolution and growth. However, *replacing altogether* one set of cultural practices with another does not amount to evolution. At times it can be counter-productive and retrograde in nature. Therefore, giving up one's own native culture and social practices is not a healthy idea for any society. The Indian society is preparing to make such a choice. However, there is ambiguity and confusion among the citizens about the pros and cons of such a choice. With the result a vast majority of our population are like the cat on the wall not knowing what to do.

Interestingly, on the other side, there is a growing interest among the youngsters to know more about the Indian traditions. Current educational policies and practices encourage them to “question” everything. This is in sharp contrast to the Ancient Indian paradigm of having a very healthy “spirit of inquiry”. There is a subtle difference between the two approaches, even though the basic motivation seems to be one of getting clarified about an unknown concept. A spirit of inquiry stems out of humility whereas an attitude of questioning arises out of ego.

A natural extension of this attitude has resulted in them wanting to know more about some of the ancestral knowledge and cultural practices that we follow even today. Honestly, a vast majority of youngsters are simply clueless about various facets of Ancient Indian wisdom. They are anxiously waiting for someone to discuss these in a language and a format that they are used to.

Ancestral Indian wisdom is rich, multi-faceted and profound. It offers grand paradigms for living and setting goals for one’s own progress in life. It also has multiple perspectives on some of the important issues such as attaining peace, tranquility and contentment. These are organized systematically in several layers. *Ṛiti*, which is otherwise known as Vedas and *Upaniṣads* has defined governing principles for life. On the other hand, *Smṛtis* have detailed them and provided useful guidelines by way of rules for day-to-day living. The *Dharma śāstras* provide these details and specify *Sāmānya* and *Viśeṣa dharmas*. They also point to *Nitya* and *Naimittika karmas* that everyone must follow.

Sandhyā Vandanam is the basic and most fundamental *Nitya karma* to be followed by Brahmins, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* belonging to all the four *āshramas*. However, unfortunately in the current context of jet setting and hectic life styles many have

abandoned this important duty. Many others are performing half-heartedly, not knowing what they are doing and why. There are still many more who have been diligently following the practice of performing *Sandhyā Vandanam* three times daily.

This booklet has been prepared keeping a target group of youngsters and office goers in mind. This group has always been having a question about the usefulness of this karma, its importance and its primacy in our scheme of daily living. Since English has become the defacto medium for all and the sundry, this has been written in English. The choice of the language and the style of writing are such that the target audience will be able to read it with ease and relate the ideas without much difficulty.

However, it does not mean we need to compromise on the original intent and messages that our ancestors have with respect to *Gāyatrī mantra* and *Sandhyā Vandanam*. Therefore, while compiling various ideas I have quoted generously from earlier writings, *Dharma śāstra* and other texts that I have been able to go through to the extent possible.

I do not claim expertise in the subject matter. I have been greatly benefitted by reading three commentaries on *Sandhyā Vandanam*. The first is a two part essay in Kannada by His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyā Tīrtha Mahā Swamīgal of *ṣṅgeri śāradā Peetham*. One essay was on *Gāyatrī Mahimā* and the other on *Sandhyā Mahimā*. These essays were subsequently translated into Tamil by Changanur Subramaniya Aiyar Trust, Coimbatore and published in 1999 by *Śri Śāradā* Trust, Bangalore.

The second source is a *bhashya* on *Sandhyā Vandanam* by Srivatsa Somadeva Sarma, the founder of *Vaidika Dharma Vardhini*, Chennai. This *bhāṣya* was published in Tamil in 1952.

The third source was the *Sandhyā Vandanam Bhāṣya* by “Anna” and published by Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai in 1956. I was also greatly benefited by the book “*Samkṣepa Dharma Sāstra*” written in Tamil by Manjakudi Venkatrama Sastrigal and published by Heritage India Educational Trust, Mylapore, Chennai in 1985.

I have added some modern features in this write up including an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section. I have also taken the liberty to reproduce an interesting conversation between an Educational Officer and His Holiness *Jagadguru Sri Chandraśekhara Bhārati Swāmīgal* of *Sringeri Śārada Peetham*. This is indeed an inspiring conversation. It adds like a crown jewel to this write up.

The desire to bring some of the interested youngsters back into the fold of *Sanātana Dharma* motivated me to venture into this exercise. If there are any errors and omissions it is entirely due to my ignorance of the subject matter. I beg to be forgiven and request the readers to be kind enough to bring it to my attention so that I can correct them.

B Mahadevan
June 2014

1

Importance of Sun worship

Everyone is aware that the presiding deity of worship through *Sandhyā Vandanam* is the Sun God. As per the practice, *Sandhyā Vandanam* is expected to be done daily thrice without fail until we breath our last. Therefore, the first question that comes to our mind is what is the idea behind this? Why did our ancestors accord so much importance to Sun worship? It is important to reflect on the need for this, the significance of sun worship and the role of the Sun God in worldly matters.

If we carefully go through the ancient Indian literature, we will find that prayer to the Sun occupies most prominence, *Sandhyā Vandanam* being one, albeit important element. The celebrated *Aruna Praśnaḥ* (also known as *Sūrya Namaskāram*), which is a part of the *Taittirīya Aranyaka* of Krishna Yajur Veda is a hymn to the Sun God, is recited with fervor even today. Even in day-to-day Yoga practices, *Sūrya Namaskāram* is an integral aspect. All these point to the centrality of the Sun in many worldly matters.

Sun – The very reason for our existence

Why is the Sun so important that we need to pray to the Sun God three times a day? Let us look at modern science first. Anybody who has some familiarity with basic physics knows that the sustainability of the earth critically depends on the Sun, which is the centre of the solar system associated with the earth. Balanced climatic conditions, regularity of rainfall, availability of water and natural resources to not only the mankind but also to

the entire living creatures and the plant kingdom are possible only because of the Sun. If for some reason the Sun chooses to come closer to the earth by an inch we will all be burnt to ashes and the entire solar system will lose its equilibrium. Similarly, if the Sun decides not to rise on the earth's horizon for a week, it will lead to catastrophic effect on the entire living system in the planet earth.

To quote Swami Ranganathananda's commentary on the *Gītā*¹, “... All our energy comes from the Sun. We have in India, idealized the concept of the Sun. In fact, The National Geographic Magazine of USA (Sep. 1948) in its article on “The Smithsonian Institution” by Thomas R Henry says: “The sun is the great Mother. All life on earth may be considered as transient materialization of the exhaustless floods of radiance which she pours on the planet's surface. This enables green plants to synthesize sugars and starches from water in the soil and from carbon-di-oxide gas in the atmosphere, thus making possible all other essential foods. We eat sun in sugar, bread, and meat, burn sunshine millions of years ago in coal and oil, wear sunshine in wool and cotton; sunshine makes the winds and the rain, the summers and winters of years and ages. Particularly interwoven are the threads of life and light. ...”

In *Praśna* Upanishad, in response to a query, from *Kātyāyana Kabandhī* one of the six disciples, “Wherefrom the creatures are born?”, Sage *Pippalāda* replies that it comes out of matter (*Rayī*) and energy (*Prāṇa*). The sage further explains that the Sun is verily the life and the Moon is the matter.²

¹ Swami Ranganathananda (2000), “The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā: Volume 1”, pp 356 – 357.

² See *Praśna Upaniṣad* (1.3 to 1.5) for more details on this.

अथ कबन्धी कात्यायन उपेत्य पप्रच्छ । भगवन् कुते ह वा इमाः प्रजाः
प्रजायन्त इति ॥

*atha kabandhī kātyāyana upetya papraccha, bhagavan kute ha vā
imāḥ prajāḥ prajāyanta iti.*

रयिं च प्राणं चेत्येतौ मे बहुधा प्रजाः करिष्यत इति ॥
आदित्यो ह वै प्राणो रयिरेव चन्द्रमा ...

*rayim ca prāṇam cetyetau me bahudhā prajāḥ karṣhyata iti.
ādityo ha vai prāṇo rayireva chandramā ...*

A great source of inspiration

Let us turn our attention to another aspect of the Sun. It is known to us by common sense that light is the source of enthusiasm, inspiration and energy for the life to go on. Also, bright light and the very notion of brightness in various forms are associated with knowledge, power and strength. The word *Tejas* in Sanskrit nearly captures all these aspects and relates it to the Sun. For all these reasons, light is associated with anything that is Divine. That is why in India the practice is to have a circular bright light source behind idols in temples (and even in photographs depicting divine entities and Gods).

If we reflect on the source of light to the earth, it is only the Sun. Without the Sun there is no possibility of finding an alternative source of light. All other known sources of light such as the Moon, current electricity from any available source are nothing but derived sources of the Sun. Therefore, it is only natural to contemplate on this ultimate source of prosperity to the mankind. Recognizing such a central role of the Sun in our day-

to-day matters, our ancestors have felt it fitting to reflect on the Sun as the ultimate source of inspiration and knowledge. The bear minimum expected out of us, as a matter of modern day simple courteous living, is to say thank you Oh! Sun for all that you are doing to keep us alive.

According to Swami *Rāma Tīrtha*, the great Mathematician turned *Sannyāsi* who lived in the beginning of 20th century, “The Sun in the material world is a symbol of light, that is to say knowledge, The Sun is a symbol of power, it makes all the planets revolve. It is a symbol of existence, life: all life owes its origin to or is indebted to the Sun. The Sun is a symbol of beauty; it attracts the earth and everything – so dazzling. Now the Sun represents knowledge, light, life, power, existence, beauty and attractiveness ...”.³

The Notion of Time

In the modern parlance some of the most commonly heard phrases are “I am too busy, I have not time...”. We need to objectively think for a moment to understand what is the reference frame for us to make such comments. The notion of time, the notion of day and night are all nothing but manifestations of the Sun. *Bhartṛhari* in his *Vairāgya śataka* brings this idea very beautifully as follows:

आदित्यस्य गतागतैरहरहः संक्षीयते जीवितं
व्यापारैर्बहुकार्यगुरुभिः कालोऽपि न ज्ञायते ।

*ādityasya gatāgataiḥ aharahaḥ samkṣīyate jīvitam
vyāpāraiḥ bahu-kārya-gurubhiḥ kālopi na jñāyate*

³ In *woods of God-Realization*, Vol. 2, pp. 70, Swami Rama Tirtha Pratisthan, 2007.

As the Sun raises and sets every day, one's life shortens and (the flight of) time is not felt because we are too busy with a number of activities. The most important point to note is that without the Sun, we may not be able to measure time, know how much time has passed and set deadlines for many of our personal and professional activities that we pursue.

This is well articulated in the fourth mantra in *Aruṇa Praśna*. The Sun exercises certain Lordship over the Earth by being beyond the Earth and casting its light on the planet. Further, by its act of heating (creating several climatic cycles) it makes us aware of the notion of time. This whole notion of time is an activity that happens continuously on account of the Sun, like a constant flow of water in a perennial river.

सूर्यो मरीचिमादत्ते । सर्वस्माद्भुवनादधि । तस्याः पाकविशेषेण । स्मृतं
कालविशेषणम् । नदीव प्रभवात्काचित् । अक्षय्यात्स्यन्दते यथा ॥

*suryo marīcimādatte, sarvasmāt bhuvanādadhi, tasyāḥ pāka-
viśeṣena, smṛtam kālaviśeṣanam, nadīva prabhavāt-kācit,
akṣayyat-syandate yathā.*

Sun – A true living entity

Our ancestors have a different conceptualization of the reality compared to the modern day scientific thinkers. Modern day scientific thinking views the Sun as an inert matter that could be the subject matter for physics and chemistry. To them the Sun is nothing but a mixture of gases organized in a particular fashion. How can the entity which brings the earth (and its millions of living creatures starting from the one called amoeba to the most refined human beings) to life be modeled or portrayed as a lifeless entity amenable only for science experiments?

On the other hand, for our rishis, the Sun is the most direct living expression of divinity for the reasons mentioned above. The Sun is the ultimate representation of consciousness, omnipresent and omnipotent Divine worthy of worship. That is why the Sun in our scheme of things is also known as *Sūrya Nārāyaṇa*. It is the most easily and directly approachable *Pratyakṣa Devatā* known to mankind.

It is no wonder that Sage *Agastya* recited the *Āditya Hṛdaya Stotram* for Sri Rama and inspired him to pray to the Sun God before vanquishing *Rāvana* in the battle field. The *Āditya Hṛdaya Stotram* that appears in the *Yuddha Khāndam* of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇam* is recited by thousands of people across the globe in the early morning when the Sun is rising.

Contemplating on the great qualities of the Sun, expressing a sense of thankfulness and praying for the intellectual and spiritual progress of an individual in a structured manner is what *Sandhyā Vandanam* is all about.

A Sense of Gratitude

When somebody offers us some help, we tend to say “Thank You”. We do this even for a very small help such as somebody helping us by picking the paper that we dropped on the floor. Saying “thank you” is a civilized and just behavior and is an expression of fairness, sense of gratitude and a good behavior that every one of us have inculcated. In fact, in most schools and even in households the young children are taught these basic mannerisms of life.

As we have seen so far, our ability to live happily is due to the Sun (as the National Geographic magazine proclaimed, we eat

sun, we breath sun and we wear sun). In a nutshell, the Sun is a fascinating and complex object, a gigantic fusion reactor that gives us life.

Therefore we are duty bound to do this act of thanksgiving if we have any sense of fairness, just behaviour and gratitude. *Sandhyā Vandanam* is at the outset an act of thanksgiving to the Sun God.

2

Upanayanam

Upanayanam is performed in order to transform an individual into *Dwija*. *Dwija* means twice born. Since *Brāhmins*, *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* are supposed to be initiated to *Gāyatrī Upadeśa* through *Upanayanam*, they are considered as twice born. The Sanskrit word *Upanayanam* has two parts “*Upa*” and “*Nayanam*”. What it means is bringing someone closer. What is implied is that by this act, the individual is brought closer to the ultimate truth, which is the constant search each one of us make in our life time. Through *Brahma Upadeśa*, the individual, henceforth known as *Brahmacāri*, is blessed and initiated into spiritual pursuits in his life.

There are prescribed ages for performing the *upanayanam*. According to *āpastamba*, from the time a *Brāhmin* child is conceived in the womb of the mother in the eight year *upanayanam* must be performed. If we account for the 10 months in the mother’s womb, what it means is that by the time the child is 7 years and 2 months old, *upanayanam* must be performed. In the case of *Kṣatriyas* it is 11 years and for *Vaiśyas* it is 12 years from the time the child is conceived in the womb of the mother.

गर्भाष्टमेषु ब्राह्मणमुपनीयत, गर्भैकादशेषु राजन्यम्, गर्भद्वादशेषु वैश्यम् ।

garbhāṣṭemeṣu brahmanam-upanayīta,
garbha-ekādaśeṣu rājanyam, garbha-dvādaśeṣu vaiśyam

According to Manu, if there is a genuine desire and enthusiasm in the father to endow the child with vedic knowledge soon and make him a *pandit*, then even at the age of five *upanayanam* could be performed for such a child:

ब्रह्मवर्चसकामस्य कार्यं विप्रस्य पञ्चमे ।

brahmavarcasa-kāmasya kāryam viprasya pañcame

In *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, there is a wonderful description of the *Upanayanam* of Vāmana (fourth *Avatāra* of Vishnu among the *Dasavatārās*). *Sūrya* initiated *Gāyatrī* mantra to *Vāmana*; *Brhaspati* gave *Yajña Upavīta*; *Bhūma* Devi gave deer skin for *āsana*; *Soma* gave the *Palāśa Danda*, *Atitī* (Vāmana's Mother) gave *Kaupīna*, Heavenly Gods gave Umbrella, Brahma gave *Kamandal*, *Sapta ṛṣis* gave *Darbha* grass, *Saraswatī* gave *Japa Māla*, *Kubhera* gave *Bhikṣa Pātra* and *Uma Devī* (*Annapūraṇī*) offered *Bhikṣa*.

This episode succinctly points to the purpose of the *upanayanam* and the expectations on the part of the *brahmacāri*. Upanayanam marks the beginning of an intense period of study and contemplation. In order to successfully complete the period of study, the student is required to live with utmost simplicity and austerity, devoid of any expectations and worldly distractions. Such a style of living is the most effective way to imbibe all the required worldly knowledge in a short span of time. As many of us may be aware, in a period of 12 years, a *brahmacāri* acquires all the knowledge required to gainfully live a worldly life as well as to pursue a serious spiritual life in due course. This is in stark contrast to the current style of living where the student life is full of distractions.

Sandhyā Vandanam is an integral part of a *Dwija*. That is why it is mentioned in our *Dharma śāstras* that by birth all are *sūdras* and only by the karma that they do (*Sandhyā Vandanam* etc.) one becomes a *Dwija*:

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः कर्मणा जायते द्विजः ।

janmanā jāyate sūdraḥ karmanā jāyate dwijaḥ

Performing *Sandhyā Vandanam* three times a day is an important *Samskāra* for a *Dwija*. While this age old practice is followed even today by several thousands of people spanning across the five great oceans, many components (such as *Pranāyāma* and *Japa*) of *Sandhyā Vandanam* are being recognized as simple yet powerful tools to lead a healthy life by many today. Thus, performing *Sandhyā Vandanam* with fervor not only bestows on an individual *Brahma Tejas* and spiritual prosperity but also healthy life that begets material prosperity.

Yajña Upavīta

Everyone who has undergone the *Upanayanam* ritual will be having the *Yajñopavīta* (the sacred thread). *Yajñopavīta* is neither a status symbol nor like a necklace which can be worn during occasions and removed and kept away. In fact, a *dwija* is expected to be always with *Upavīta*, for any ritual performed without *Yajñopavīta* is a futile exercise (अनुपवीतः यत्करोति न तत्कृतम्). If we carefully look at the *saṃkalpa* that we make at the time of the *yajñopavīta dhāraṇam*, we find that two reasons are attributed for wearing the sacred thread:

ममोपात्त समस्त दुरितक्षयद्वारा श्री परमेश्वरप्रीत्यर्थं श्रौत - स्मार्त - विहित
नित्यकर्मानुष्ठान - योग्यता - सिद्ध्यर्थं यज्ञोपवीत धारणं करिष्ये ॥

*mamopātta samasta durita-kṣaysdvārā śrī-parameśvara
prītyartham śrauta-smārta-vihita nitya-karmānuṣṭāna-yogyatā
siddhyartham brahmateja-abhivṛddhyartham yajñopavīta
dhāraṇam kariṣye*

The sacred thread is worn by us for two reasons:

- (a) To become eligible for performing all duties enjoined in the *śr̥tis* and *smṛtis*
- (b) And through such a process, obtain *Brahma Tejas* by removal of all sins.

Normally we find the people wear strands of three, six or nine. There have been confusions as to when one must wear a strand of nine. Some are told that when one becomes the head of the family he must wear nine. What signifies becoming the head of the family has again been a subject matter for interpretation. Some say that when the father passes away the son formally become as the head of his family. Some others say that by the time the *sīmantonayanam* function is done for his wife (heralding the new arrival in the family) the person becomes head of the family.

According to the *śāstras*, the prescriptions are a little different from these perspectives. *Bṛgu* says that a *brahmacāri* will wear a strand of three (which constitutes one set), a *grhasta* and a *vānaprastha* will wear a strand of six (two sets). *Yatis* will wear a strand of three (one set).

उपवीतं वटोरेकं द्वेतथैतरयोः स्मृते ।
एकमेव यतीनां स्यादिति शास्त्रस्यनिश्चयः ॥

*upavītam vaṭorekam dvetathā-itarayoḥ smṛte
ekameva yatīnam syaaditi śāstrasya niścayaḥ*

It is further clarified that the third set of three strands will have to be taken in lieu of the *uttariyam* (the *angavastram* that we wear on the upper part of the body).

तृतीयं उत्तरीयं स्याद्वस्त्राभावे तदिष्यते ।

ṭṛtīyam uttariyam syād-vastrābhāve tadiṣyate

3

Sandhyā Vandanam as a Nitya Karma

Every individual wants peace of mind and happiness in life. We engage in several activities on a day-to-day basis in pursuit of these. However the answer to the question, what provides peace of mind is neither simple nor straightforward. Things that we assume will provide peace of mind turnout to be otherwise over time bringing us back to square one. This leaves confusions in our mind. It appears that for an average person, peace of mind is an evading issue. This is where our ancestral wisdom plays a major role. The body of treasured knowledge collectively known as “*Sṛti, Smṛti, Dharma śāstras, Itihāsas, Purānās etc.*” address this issue in detail and provides guidelines for us to attain eternal bliss. There are several prescriptions in the *Dharma śāstras*, often known as *Sāmānya Dharma* and *Viśeṣa Dharma*, which help the individuals in their journey of seeking peace of mind and happiness.

In order for an individual to attain eternal bliss, proper knowledge of the right means is required. This is obtained only by a proper study of the vedas. In our scheme of things, one can be initiated into study of vedas only after he has been initiated with *Gāyatrī* mantra. In order to get initiated with *Gāyatrī* mantra upanayanam must be performed. *Gāyatrī upāsana* through Sandhyā Vandanam prepares an individual and qualifies him to receive the knowledge contained in vedas. Doing *Sandhyā Vandanam* first creates the eligibility for a *brāhmin* to do all rituals following it. Rituals done without doing *Sandhyā Vandanam* is regarded as fruitless by *Dharma śāstras*. Thus,

Sandhyā Vandanam forms the basis or regarded as the foundation for all other vedic rituals.

In the purāṇas it is mentioned that *Gāyatrī* is the mother of vedas, is the one who gives birth to a Brahmin and protects one who contemplates on her:

गायत्री वेदजननी गायत्री ब्रह्मणः प्रसूः ।
गायन्तं त्रायते यस्माद्गायत्रीति प्रगीयते ॥

*gāyatrī veda-jananī gāyatrī brahmanaḥ prasūḥ
gāyantam trāyate yasmāt gāyatrīti pragīyate*

One of the core prescriptions for the *Dwijas* pertaining to all the four *ashramas*⁴ is to perform *Sandhyā Vandanam*. Our ancestral prescriptions mention six *karmas* to be done every day and it includes taking bath, doing *Sandhyā Vandanam*, *japa*, *homa*, *deva pūja* and *vaiśva devam*:

सन्ध्या स्नानं जपो होमो देवतानाञ्च पूजनम् ।
आदित्यं वैश्वदेवञ्च षट्कर्माणि दिने दिने ॥

*sandhyā snānam japo homo devtānām ca pūjanam
ādityam vaishvadevam ca ṣatkarmāṇi dine dine*

The importance of *Sandhyā Vandanam* is highlighted by the following *śloka*, which proclaims that *Sandhyā* for a *Dwija* is like the root for the tree. If the root is cut, where is the opportunity to have flowers and fruits?:

⁴ The four *āśramas* are *Brahmacārya*, *Gruhastha*, *Vānaprastha* and *Sanyāsi*. All are supposed to perform *Sandhyā vandanam*. The practice for *Sanyāsis* differs from the other three *āśramas*.

विप्रो वृक्षः तस्य मूलं हि सन्ध्या ।
मूले छिन्ने नैव पुष्पं फलं वा ॥

*vipro vruksaḥ tasya mūlam hi sandhyā
mūle chinne naiva puṣpam phalam vā*

Likewise, in Manu *Smṛti* (4.94), the importance of *Sandhyā Vandanam* is mentioned as follows. Rishis who perform *Sandhyā Vandanam* for a long time attain long life, knowledge, good virtues, name and *Brahma Varcas*:

ऋषयो दीर्घं सन्ध्यत्वात् दीर्घमायुरवाप्नुयुः ।
प्रज्ञां यशश्च कीर्तिञ्च ब्रह्मवर्चसमेव च ॥

*ṛṣayo dīrgha sandhyātvāt dhīrghamāyur-avāpnuyuḥ
prajñām yaśaśca kīrtim ca brahma-varcasam eva ca*

Our sacred texts suggest that one can attain salvation through *Karma, Bhakti, Yoga or Jñāna*. *Sandhyā Vandanam* has all these aspects and proper understanding and steadfast approach of doing *Sandhyā Vandanam* can help an individual attain salvation using any of these. The above four aspects are found in *Sandhyā Vandanam* as indicated below:

- **Karma**: The three mantras in *Sandhyā Vandanam* आपः पुनन्तु पृथिवीं, अग्निश्च मा मन्युश्च and सूर्यश्च मा मन्युश्च end with स्वाहा, which point to the Karma aspect that one can follow
- **Yoga**: *Prāṇāyāma* is an important element of Yoga practice
- **Bhakti**: The offering of *Arghya* (अर्घ्यं प्रदानम्), points to the Bhakti aspect

- ***Jñāna***: The *aikya anusandhānam* (ऐक्य अनुसन्धानम्) mantra (असावादित्यो ब्रह्मा) enables one to pursue the path of *jñāna*

Yājñavalkya asks, when *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* have been observing this how can a *Brāhmin* ignore this karma?

ब्रह्मणोपास्यते सन्ध्या विष्णुना शंकरेण च ।
कस्मान्नोपासयेद्देवीं श्रेयस्कामो द्विजोत्तमः ॥

*brahmanopaasyate sandhyā vishnunā śaṅkarena ca
kasmāt na upāsayet devīm śreyas-kāmo dwijottamaḥ*

Rāma and *Kṛṣṇa*, our gotra ṛṣis (*Vasiṣṭa*, *Angiras*, *Atri*, *Kaśyapa*, *Gautama*, *Bharadwāja* etc.) have all performed *Sandhyā Vandanam*. Authors of *Sūtras* such as *āpasthamba*, *Bodhāyana*, *āśvalāyana*, great kings such as *Janaka*, *Bhaktas* and our *ācāryas* have all observed this karma. *Valmiki* and *Vyāsa* have mentioned about the greatness of *Sandhyā Karma* in *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* respectively. In *Kumārasambhava*, *Kālidasa* mentions that *Śiva* performed *Sandhyā Vandanam*.

According to *Yama*, *Gāyatrī* is equivalent to all the four vedas. Once *Brahma* put the four Vedas with all its *angās* on one side of a pan and *Gāyatrī* on the other side. It was found that pan was in perfect balance:

गायत्रीं चैव वेदांच तुलयाऽतुलयत् प्रभुः ।
एकश्चतुरो वेदान् सांगांश्च सपदक्रमान् ।
एकतश्चैव गायत्री तुल्यरूपा तु सा स्मृता ॥

*gāyatrīm caiva vedāmsca tulayā atolayat prabhuḥ
ekaścaturo vedān sām-gāmśca sapadakramān
ekataścaiva gāyatrīm tulayarūpā tu sā smṛtā*

Dwijas are required to do *Sandhyā Vandanam* as their *nitya karma*. If they are not doing, the *śāstras* say that the king who is steadfast in *dhārmic* practices must detail them to do works meant for the *sūdras*:

सायं प्रातस्तथा सन्ध्या ये विप्रा न ह्युपासते ।
तानेव धार्मिको राजा शूद्रकर्मसु योजयेत् ॥

*sāyam prāstathā sandhyā ye viprā na hyupāsate
tāneva dhārmiko rājā sūdrakarmasu yojayet*

Performing *Sandhyā Vandanam* with faith and with proper understanding of the mantras and adherence of the rules bestows greatest benefits. They are redeemed of all sins and will attain the *Brahma Loka* as explained in the following *śloka*:

सन्ध्यामुपासते ये तु सततं संशितव्रताः ।
विधूयपापास्ते यान्ति ब्रह्मलोकमनामयम् ॥

*Sandhyām upāsate ye tu satatam samśitavratāḥ
vidhūya-pāpāste yānti brahmalokam anāmayam*

It is therefore amply clear that the *dwijas* derive their stature, credibility and authenticity only by observing *Sandhyā Vandanam* karma on a daily basis. Moreover so much importance has been given to *Sandhyā Vandanam*. Our ancestors have also praised highly of the virtues and benefits of performing *Sandhyā Vandanam*.

Despite all these if we decide to develop anti-faith (अश्रद्धा) towards *Sandhyā Vandanam*, it is a strange behaviour on our part. When the employer tells us that we are qualified for a much higher job and offers us a better job and pay, will we deny that and instead choose to do only an inferior job for a meager salary?

4

Timely observance of Sandhyā Vandanam Karma

One of the key aspects of performing *Sandhyā Vandanam* is the importance of timing. The extreme importance of performing *Sandhyā Vandanam* at the right time is highlighted in many ways.

Irrespective of whether a person is clean or otherwise, doing *Sandhyā Vandanam* at the appropriate time is very important as mentioned in the following *śloka*:

शुचिर्वा अशुचिर्वा काले सन्ध्यां समाचरेत् ॥

śucirvā aśucirvā kāle Sandhyām samācaret

The *śāstric* prescription is that we perform all vedic rites after taking bath (स्नात्वा कर्माणि कुर्वीत). Therefore, those who are healthy and able-bodied must endeavour to get up early in the morning, take bath and perform *Sandhyā Vandanam* at the appropriate time. If we are not keeping good health we can at least wipe the body with a wet cloth, change new clothes and then perform the karma. Since the essence of doing *Sandhyā Vandanam* lies in performing at the right time, at the minimum

we must wash our hands and feet and then do *Sandhyā Vandanam* at times when we are unable to take bath.

It is even suggested that when a person is doing the final rites for their parent, if it is the appropriate time for performing *Sandhyā Vandanam*, then the *Karta* is expected to take bath, perform *Sandhyā Vandanam* and then continue the rites. In Mahabharata it is mentioned that it was decided by the Kauravas that the war was to be fought even in the night. On account of this, the warriors were supposed to have done *Sandhyā Vandanam* even when they had the weapons in their hands.

If for some reason we have missed the *Sandhyā Vandanam* and the time for the next *Sandhyā Vandanam* has arrived, then we should not think that we can ignore the previous one. After doing the *Sandhyā Vandanam* for the stipulated time, we must do the *Sandhyā Vandanam* which we ought to have done earlier. To give an example, if we were in travel between 3 pm and 6 am the next day, and were not in a position to do the evening *Sandhyā*, then in the morning time we must first do the morning *Sandhyā Vandanam* and after that perform the evening *Sandhyā Vandanam*, which we missed.

According to *Yājñavalkya* morning *Sandhyā* should not be done after sunrise and evening *Sandhyā* should not be done after sunset. The time between the disappearance of the stars and sunrise is considered to be the appropriate time for performing the morning *Sandhyā*:

नक्षत्रज्योतिरारभ्य सुर्यस्योदय दर्शनात् ।
 प्रातसन्ध्येति तां प्राहुः श्रुतयो मुनिसत्तमाः ॥

*nakshatra-jyotirārabhya sūryasyodaya darśanāt
 prāta-sandhyeti tām prāhuḥ śrutayo munisattamāḥ*

According to another definition, the last two Nazhikas of the last *Yāma* of night is supposed to be the beginning time for morning *Sandhyā*. The appearance of the sun's rays facing upwards (which signifies imminent sunrise) is considered to be the end of the morning *Sandhyā*:

रात्र्यन्त्ययाम नाडि द्वे सन्ध्यादि कालः उच्यते ।
 दर्शनाद्रविरेखायाः तदन्तो मुनिभिः स्मृतः ॥

*rātrayntya-yāma nādi dve Sandhyādi kālaḥ ucyate
 darshanāt-ravi-rekhāyāḥ tadanto munibhiḥ smṛtaḥ*

Another *śloka* brings this aspect in a different fashion. According to this, performing the morning *Sandhyā* when stars are present is superior, doing it after the stars have disappeared is mediocre and doing it in the presence of the Sun is inferior:

उत्तमा तारकोपेता मध्यमा लुप्ततारका ।
 अधमा सूर्यसहिता प्रातः सन्ध्या त्रिधा मता ॥
*uttamā tārakopetā madhyamā lupta-tārakā
 adhamā sūrya-sahitā prātaḥ Sandhyā tridhā matā*

On the other hand, performing evening *Sandhyā* in the presence of the Sun is considered to be superior, performing after sunset (before the stars begin to appear) is mediocre and doing after all the stars have appeared on the sky is inferior:

उत्तमा सूर्यसहिता मध्यमाऽनुदिततारका ।
अधमा तारकोपेता सायं सन्ध्या त्रिधा मता ॥

*uttamā sūrya-sahitā madhyamā anudita-tārakā
adhamā tārakopetā sāyam Sandhyā tridhā matā*

Sastra provides a simple definition for *Sandhyā*. It says when the Sun and the *Nakṣatras* are both visible such a time is called *Sandhyā* as evident from the following phrases:

आज्योतिषो दर्शनात् सन्धि, ज्योतिषी भानुतारे

ājyotiṣo darśanāt sandhi, jyotiṣī bhānu-tāre

It is clear that the word *Sandhyā* denotes the junction (or unison) of two (in this case day and night). Therefore, there is a possibility to come to a conclusion that *Sandhyā Vandanam* has to be done twice only; once during the *Sandhyā* of night and dawn in the morning and again during the *Sandhyā* of day and dusk in the evening. Many find this argument convenient to them because they may be in the office and therefore missing the *Mādhyānikam* can be justified by this argument which appears rational. However, the correct practice is to do *Sandhyā Vandanam* three times a day. According to Atri, *Dwijas* always need to perform *Sandhyā Vandanam* three times:

सन्ध्यात्रयं तु कर्तव्यं द्विजेनात्मविदा सदा ।

Sandhyātrayam tu kartavyam dvijena-ātmaavidā sadā

This is further clarified by the following *śloka* attributed to Sankha, which suggests that morning *Sandhyā* must be done when the stars are still visible in the sky, the *Mādhyānikam* after the *Mādhyānika Snānam* and the evening *Sandhyā* while the sun is still in the sky:

प्रातःसन्ध्यां सनक्षत्रां मध्यमां स्नानकर्मणि ।

सादित्यां पश्चिमां सन्ध्यां उपासीत यथा विधि ॥

*prāta-Sandhyām sanakṣatrām madhyamām snāna-karmani
sādityām paścimām Sandhyām upāsīta yathā vidhi*

5

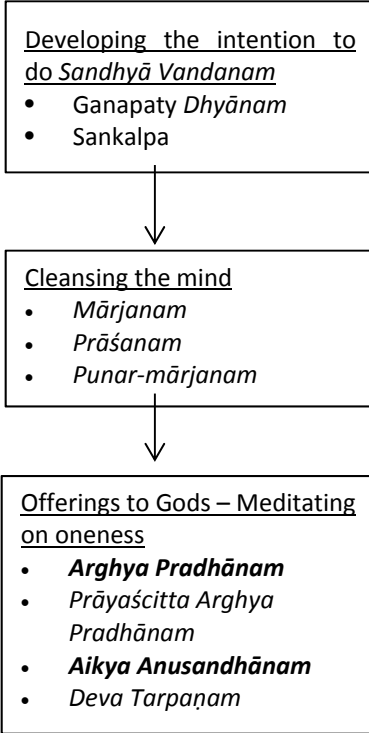
Overall Structure of Sandhyā Vandanam Mantras

Structurally, the *Sandhyā Vandanam* is divided into two portions: the *Pūrvāṅga* and the *Uttarāṅga*. All the mantras are organized around the four most important components (*Arghya Pradhānam*, *Aikya Anusandhānam*, the *Gāyatrī Japa* and the *Sūrya Upasthānam*) and set as preparatory elements for performing these. Figure below pictorially depicts the overall structure of *Sandhyā Vandanam*.

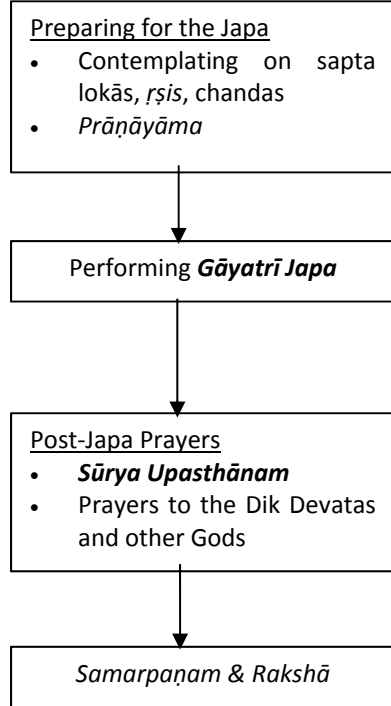
The order in which we utter various mantras during *Sandhyā Vandanam* has sound logic and purpose. Imagine that you are going to participate in an 800 meters running race. What do you do just before the commencement of the race? You prepare yourself physically and mentally. By physically I mean taking bath, wearing comfortable clothes and shoes, having the right amount and type of food etc. Similarly, preparing mentally would mean cleaning up unwanted thoughts, thinking about positive aspects of winning the race, contemplating on the strategies to run etc. With such a preparation, there is a good chance that we perform very well in the running race.

We do exactly same things in *Sandhyā Vandanam*. The first part of *Sandhyā Vandanam*, known as *Pūrvāṅga*, essentially prepares the *Brahmacāri* physically and mentally to eventually offer the *Arghya* to the Sun God.

Pūrvāṅga



Uttarāṅga



Items in bold are the critical elements of Sandhyā Vandanam

The second part, *Uttarāṅga* mainly consists of *Gāyatrī Japa*, equivalent to the actual race in the above example. However, our ancestors had considerable desire to know what they are doing, how and why. Hence the first part of *Uttarāṅga* explains in detail how the mantras that we contemplate in *Japa* are authored, who authored them, what is the underlying rhythm etc. After this nice introduction, we actually perform *Prāṇāyāma* and *Gāyatrī Japa*. We then rise and complete the *Sūrya Upasthānam*, which is the fourth important aspect of *Sandhyā Vandanam*. After the *Sūrya*

Upasthānam mantra we utter a series of *mantras* praising the Gods, mother earth and nature. If only we seriously meant these utterances, we would not dare inflict such damage on the ecology and our own surroundings by reckless abuse of resources and abuse of nature. Finally, we retire with a pair of *mantras*.

Prāṇāyāma and Japa are the most wonderful prescriptions of *Sandhyā Vandanam*. It bestows on us *Brahma Tejas* and will help us evolve in our spiritual journey. However, it turns out that these will bestow a healthy physical life as well. If only individuals perform these two as per the recommendations, they will be free from Asthma, Hyper-tension and Diabetes. Most of the recent day non-drug prescriptions for these widely prevalent silent killer diseases include breathing control and meditation. That is what we actually achieve through *Prāṇāyāma* and *Japa*. More than the physical benefits, it bestows on an individual an opportunity to calm the mind, feel the inner rhythm and achieve a balanced view of life, life goals and purpose. These issues are very important in our sojourn in this life especially as we grow older.

Important components of Sandhyā Vandanam

A person may be able to survive without limbs, eyes etc. However, without the vital force *Prāṇa* he/she cannot even survive for a moment. In the same manner, there are certain vital components of *Sandhyā Vandanam*. One must know these and perform them even when the situation for performing *Sandhyā Vandanam* is very adverse. These are as follows: *Arghya Pradhānam* (अर्घ्यं प्रदानम्), *Aika Anusandhānam* (ऐक्य अनुसन्धानम्), *Gāyatrī Japa* and *Sūrya Upasthānam*. This is brought out succinctly by the following *śloka*:

अपरेतु अर्घ्यदानं सन्ध्या ध्यानं गायत्री जपः उपस्थानं च प्रधानमिति
वदन्ति ॥

*aparetu arghya-dānam Sandhyā-dhyānam gāyatrī-japaḥ
Upasthānam ca pradhānamiti vdanti*

Of these the first two form part of the *Pūrvāṅga* and the later two form part of the *Uttarāṅga*. In *Aikya Anusandhānam*, the *Mahāvākya* of the corresponding Veda is included. As the name suggests, this is done to contemplate the oneness with the Brahman, which the *Mahā Vākyas* proclaim. All the preceding mantras in the *Pūrvāṅga* are meant to cleanse the mind and the body leading to performing these two important components of *Sandhyā Vandanam*.

The importance of *Arghya Pradhānam* is highlighted by the following *śloka* which suggests that even in very adverse conditions *arghya* must be offered with dust of sand. Even if this is not possible, at least we must meditate on the Sun God. Examples of adverse conditions are a situation of not being able to find a source of water, a long journey, being under someone's control or impure:

जलाभावे महामार्गे बन्धनेत्वशुचावपि ।
उभयोः सन्ध्ययोः काले रजसा वाऽर्घ्यमुत्क्षिपेत् ।
तदभावेऽपि सूर्यस्य ध्यानमेव समाचरेत् ॥

*jalābhāve mahā-mārgē bandhanetu aśucāvapi
ubhayoḥ Sandhyayoḥ kāle rajasā vā arghyam utkṣipet
tadabhāve'pi Sūryasya dhyānameva samācaret*

6

Some aspects of Prayoga in Sandhyā Vandanam⁵

Today's children and even elders (read educated class) have the habit of asking a question. Why are we imposing several meaningless conditions when we engage in religious practices and rituals? For example we are required to sit east facing and do certain rituals. On the other hand, we are not supposed to do the *pūja* or *japa* south facing etc. There are other restrictions such as the nature dress we wear, the need to apply *vibhūti*, sandal etc. on our forehead etc. In fact it appears the list is rather long. It raises two important questions in our mind. First, can we not be left alone so that we may do it the way we want to? Secondly, all these are meaningless at one level and therefore it may not be a rational behavior to follow such practices blindly.

Sandhyā Vandanam has, as in the case of other practices, have several such conditions, which we will see in this chapter. However, before we discuss this in some detail, we need to resolve this confusion in our minds pertaining to the restrictions.

Understand the world of Vyavahāra

In order to understand this and develop clarity, we need to first know that we are talking about the “world of activities” or

⁵ This section is based on the practices observed among Smārta Brahmins in Tamil Nadu. There are several variations in practice across regions. This must be kept in mind while going through this section.

vyavahāra. Let us take the case of driving the car on the road. There are several conditions, such as we must drive only on the left (right side if you are in the US), stop at the signal when it is red, give right of way to ambulances and pedestrians, not blow the horn in the hospital and school zones etc. In fact the list of restrictions for driving a car is as long as or even longer than the one for doing *Sandhyā Vandanam*. How do we respond to this? Do we abandon driving the car because of these many restrictions? Or do we drive in our own way ignoring all these restrictions because it is too much for us? We don't do either. We rather adhere to these and follow it as much as we can.

Why are so many restrictions placed in this simple act of driving the car? This basically takes us to the fundamental idea that when a number of people interact, do certain activities etc., it is important to develop a code of norms and behavior and follow them. Otherwise it becomes complex to manage and make sense of what is happening. It also helps in developing familiarity, order and ease of learning and practising. It also provides a great relief from myriad confusion arising out of individualized behavioural fluctuations. Therefore, trying to run away from something since it imposes some restrictions is not the way we can approach life. More importantly, to argue that “my way or high way” is trying to compete with animals. Only animals are free from social norms of behaviours and restrictions.

The other major concern is about doing meaningless activities.

While *Ācamanam* is done, after having the water three times while uttering अच्युताय नमः, अनन्ताय नमः and गोविन्दाय नमः⁶ we

⁶ It appears that Rig vedis and those in Andhra do *Ācamanam* four times by uttering Kesava, Narayana, Madhava and Govinda.

need to wipe the lips twice (each time after wiping the lips we need to clean the hands with water).

Method of doing Prāṇāyāma

Prāṇāyāma is done in a three stage process:

Pūraka: Inhaling the air through one of the nostrils into the lungs.

Kumbhaka: Retaining the air in the lungs for some time.

Recaka: Exhaling the air through the other nostril out of the lungs.

The suggested proportion of time for these three steps is 1:3:2. Normally, the *Prāṇāyāma mantra* is uttered three times while the three steps are undertaken once and the ratio of 1:3:2 is adhered by the following practice:

Pūraka: Start with the first mantra and utter up to *Dhiyo Yo na Pracodayāt* (धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्).

Kumbhaka: Continue from *Om Apo Jyoti Raso* (ओमापो ज्योतीरसो), complete the first *Prāṇāyāma mantra* and continue with uttering the full *Prāṇāyāma mantra* for a second time.

Recaka: Utter one full *Prāṇāyāma mantra*.

Reciting in this fashion we would have covered three mantras in one cycle of *Pūraka – Kumbhaka* and *Recaka*. One cycle of *Pūraka – Kumbhaka – Rechaka* constitutes one *Prāṇāyāma*. After completing one *Prāṇāyāma*, we must touch the right ear. It is equivalent to cleaning the palms in the Ganges. Doing it three times, we would have covered the *Prāṇāyāma mantra* nine times. This is the suggested practice. If the drawing in of air,

retention and exhalation are not done as per the proportions mentioned, the other alternative suggested is to utter the *mantra* 10 times.

There are two popular versions in practice today which are in variance with this prescription.

- One is to uniformly perform 10 *Prāṇāyāma* during all the three times.
- The other practice is to perform 10 during morning, 3 during noon and 6 during evening. The latter practice appears to follow closely the number of times *Gāyatrī mantra* is uttered during the *Japa* during morning, noon and evening. This is surely a matter of convenience.

However, it may be indeed good if the suggested practice of doing three times (and thereby covering the *Prāṇāyāma* mantra nine times) is followed during morning, noon as well as evening *Sandhyā Vandanam*. As mentioned before, it has great value in maintaining a healthy life.

Rules for offering Arghya

The vedic prescription for performing *Arghya* is that during *Sandhyā* time the vedic scholars stand east facing and offer the *arghya* with water in the upward direction after uttering the *Gāyatrī mantra*:

तदु ह वा एते ब्रह्मवादिनः पूर्वाभिमुखाः सन्ध्यायां गायत्रियाऽभिमन्त्रिता
आप ऊर्ध्वं विक्षिपन्ति ।

When we give *arghya* (अर्घ्यं प्रदानम्) there are variations in the manner we offer:

- During morning *Sandhyā*, *arghya* is offered in the standing posture facing east, by raising both the hands to the height of the horns of a cow.
- The *arghya* offered during *Mādhyānikam* is offered facing north, in standing posture by many. However, some others offer it in a sitting posture.
- The *arghya* offered during the evening *Sandhyā* is given facing west, in a sitting posture only. We have to use both the hands to offer *arghya*.

After offering the Arghya we must do *Atma Pariṣecanam* (आत्मपरिषेचनम्) with water after uttering *Om Bhur-Bhuvas-Suvaha*. We must follow this with *Atma Pradakṣinam* (आत्मप्रदक्षिणम्). This is due to the vedic prescription that by doing so we will be able to absolve our sins:

यत्प्रदक्षिणं प्रक्रमन्ति तेन पाप्मानमवधून्वन्ति ।

yat-pradakṣinam prakramanti tena paapmānam avadhūnvanti

There are certain prescriptions with respect to performing the *Gāyatrī japa*.

- During morning *Sandhyā Vandanam* the *japa* must be performed east facing in a standing posture.
- Many recommend that *Gāyatrī japa* during *Mādhyānikam* time also must be performed east facing in the standing posture. Some others suggest that it could be done north facing.
- During the evening time the *Japa* is done west facing in sitting posture only.

Various prescriptions have been made that introduce directional restrictions while performing various components of *Sandhyā Vandanam*. These are summarized below:

Pūrvānga is **never done facing west or south**. Normally, during Morning *Sandhyā Vandanam* it is done facing east and during evening *Sandhyā Vandanam* it is done facing north. The *Pūrvānga* of *Mādhyānikam* is normally done east facing. Some others recommend north facing also.

Uttarānga is done in a different fashion. The easiest way to remember the direction for *Uttarānga* is the trajectory of the sun itself. For the morning, we face east and for the evening we face west. For the noon, we either face east or west (depending on the time of the day that we perform noon *Sandhya Vandanam*). However, the last three mantras in *Uttarānga* are done with the same directional restriction as applicable for *Pūrvānga*. Also, the *Arghya* offered to the Sun in *Pūrvānga* is done using the same direction rule that we follow for the *Uttarānga*.

Rules for Gāyatrī Japa

Gāyatrī Japa is performed by repeatedly uttering the *Gāyatrī Mantra*. Hence it is important to know how many times one needs to repeat. In fact, it is being observed by our ancestors that doing japa without having a count is not worthwhile:

असंख्यातं तु यज्जप्तं तत्सर्वं स्यान्निरर्थकम् ।

asankhyātam tu yaj-japtam tat sarvam syāt nirarthakam

During all the three times performing *japa* 1000⁷ times is considered superior. If this is not possible *japa* must be done for 100 times. *Brahmacāris* and *Gruhastas* are engaged in several activities pertaining to their *āśrama*. Therefore they can do *japa* 108 times. On the other hand, *vānaprasthas* and *sanyāsis* are expected to do *japa* 1008 times. The following *śloka* explains this:

गृहस्थो ब्रह्मचारी वा शतमष्टोत्तरं जपेत् ।
वानप्रस्थो यतिश्चैव जपेदष्ट सहस्रकम् ॥

*gruhastho brahmacāri vā shatam-aṣṭottaram japet
vaanaprastho yatiścaiva japet aṣṭa sahasrakam*

Vyasa recommends performing Gayathri *japa* 10 times during periods of *āsuca*:

दशकृत्वस्तु गायत्रीं मनसैवाशुचि स्मरेत् ।

daśa-kṛtvastu gaayatrīm mansaiva aśuciḥ smaret

In a practical sense, during unusual contingencies such as travel, urgent or emergency situation or *āsuca japa* must be done 10 times. Doing *Japa* for 10 times is not advisable except in the case above situations. In practice there are several variations recommended by elders for minimum numbers such as 28, 32,

⁷ All *nāmāvalis* of Gods are 1000 in number (*Sahasranāmās*). According to some, the number 1008 is a practice which has come more as a method to ensure we do 1000. It appears that if we miss one or two counts then the extra will compensate for the loss. Similar logic may apply for the choice of 108.

54 or 64. However, the procedure popularly followed in several parts of South India is as follows⁸:

Morning	: 108 times
Noon	: 32 times
Evening	: 54 or 64 times

Since *Japa* is an ideal vehicle to increase the concentration power of young people and a powerful tool to relieve stress in the case of older people, it may be highly desirable for every one of us to look for opportunities to increase the number of times this could be done. One possibility is to do 108 times all three times a day, as per the original prescription. Once in a year, we have a practice of doing this 1008 times on the *Gāyatrī Japa* day. But one can add some more auspicious days to this list and try doing 1008 during those days also. These for instance may include *Krishna Pratamai*, *Ekādaśī* and *Pūrṇima*.

During morning time both the hands must be kept in *Anjali mudra*⁹ at the level of the face while doing the *japa*. During *Mādhyānikam* it must be performed by keeping the hand in the *Anjali mudra* at the level of the chest and during the evening *Sandhyā Vandanam* the hands must be held at the naval level. At all times, we must cover the hands with the cloth.

Holding the *Yajña Upavīta* in hand while doing the *japa* is not recommended.

⁸ This is perhaps the reason for suggesting the number of times *Prāṇāyāma* to be done during morning, noon and evening *Sandhya* as 10, 3 and 6 respectively, as mentioned before.

⁹ *Anjali mudra* is the typical folded hands posture with which we greet our guests in the Indian tradition.

Uttering the *Gāyatrī mantra* in a manner that is audible (known as *Vācīkam*) to others is an inferior method of doing the *japa*. On the other hand, uttering the mantra by movement of the lips but not in an audible tone (known as *Upāmsu*) is a mediocre method of doing the *japa*. However, doing the *japa* at the mind level without any form of external utterance or lip movements (known as *Mānasam*) is considered to be a superior method:

उत्तमं मानसं जप्यं उपांशु मध्यम स्मृतम् ।
अधमं वाचिकं प्राहुस्सर्वमन्त्रेषु वै द्विजाः ॥

uttamam mānasam japyam upāmsu madhyama smṛtam
adhamam vācīkam prāhus-sarvamantreṣu vai dvijāḥ

Salient Aspects of Prayoga

	Morning	Noon	Evening
<i>Pūrvānga</i> Direction	East	East or North	North
<i>Uttarānga</i> Direction	East	East or North	West
<i>Argya</i> Direction	East	East or North	West
<i>Argya/Japa</i> Posture	Standing	Standing	Sitting
<i>Argya</i> Position	Height equivalent to the Horns of a cow	Chest Level	Chest Level
<i>Japa</i> Position	Face Level	Chest Level	Naval Level

7

FAQs on *Sandhyā Vandanam*

1. Why should I do *Sandhyā Vandanam*?

There are three compelling reasons for us to do Sandhyā Vandanam.

- a. *When somebody offers us some help, we tend to say "Thank You". We do this even for a very small help such as somebody helping us by picking the paper that we dropped on the floor. Saying "thank you" is a civilized and just behavior and is an expression of fairness, sense of gratitude and a good behavior that every one of us have inculcated. Sandhyā Vandanam is at the outset an act of thanksgiving to the Sun God. Our ability to live happily is due to the Sun (as one article in the National Geographic magazine proclaimed, we eat sun, we breath sun and we wear sun). Therefore we are duty bound to do this act of thanksgiving if we have any sense of fairness, just behaviour and gratitude.*
- b. *Sandhyā Vandanam offers wonderful prescriptions for us to maintain a healthy life. It helps us cleanse the mind, maintain a good physical condition (through practices such as Prāṇāyāma) and provides us with greater opportunity to think about true evolution in our life and*

helps us in the journey of salvation. Why would someone not make use of this opportunity?

- c. *A vast number of rishis, learned people and elders have again and again talked about the virtues of Sandhyā Vandanam. When people of great legacy and respect again and again extol the virtues of doing something, we normally tend to practice the same without even bothering to analytically evaluate their statements or verifying it. This is considered to be a sensible aspect of living. For example, wherever you go in this world and ask someone what should you do to keep the hypertension or diabetes in control, you will be told to have simple eating habits and indulge in adequate physical exercises. It is foolish to say “I will personally get convinced about this by verifying this statement and then decide to follow this.” The same rule must apply with respect to performing Sandhyā Vandanam. Disregarding the prescriptions and advises of elders, rishis and ancestors is a laughable idea. It will amount to exposing our foolish approach to life.*

Therefore, if good sense prevails in our mind we will make every effort to perform Sandhyā Vandanam with earnestness, steadfastness and devotion.

2. Should I always do Sandhyā Vandanam?

This is as good as asking should I eat every day. We do not seem to even think of asking such questions when it comes to eating. Or does a student ask should I go to school every day? The student will never ask such a question. Eating everyday is required to keep our physical health in good condition and

draw enough energy for physical activities. In the same manner doing Sandhyā Vandanam everyday provides a person with a lot of spiritual energy, calmness and peace. All these come without any cost. The only cost is the time spent.

3. Should we know the meaning before performing Sandhyā Vandanam?

When we talk to someone about some subject matter, we do not do so without knowing the meaning of what we are talking. Similarly, when we do something, we do not do without knowing why we are doing it. Therefore, these must apply even in the case of doing Sandhyā Vandanam. Yāska in his work Nirukta observes that a person reciting vedas and mantras without knowing its meaning is like someone carrying heavy bags at his back or like a tree (which has no power to think and contemplate). On the other hand, by knowing the meaning he gets benefitted immensely from the exercise and attains true knowledge and gets absolved of all sins:

स्थाणुरयं भारहारः किलाभूत् अधीत्य वेदं न विजानाति योऽर्थम् ।
योऽर्थज्ञ इत्सकलं भद्रमश्रुते नाकमेति ज्ञानविधूतपाप्मा ॥

*sthānurayam bhārahāraḥ kilābhūt
adhītya vedam na vijānāti yo' artham
yo' arthajña itsakalam bhadram-aśnute
nākameti jñānavidhūta-pāpmā*

Another śloka brings this idea a little differently. A person uttering a mantra without knowing its meaning is like an animal carrying a load on its back. Just as the animal does not

get any benefits for itself from carrying the load, the person uttering the mantra without knowing the meaning also does not get benefited in any way:

यथा पशुर्भारवाहि न तस्य फलमश्रुते ।
द्विजस्तथार्थानभिज्ञो न वेदफलमश्रुते ॥

*yathā pasur-bhāravāhi na tasya phalam aśnute
dvijastathā arthān abhijñō na veda-phalam aśnute*

Therefore, performing Sandhyā Vandanam (or any such Karma or reciting mantras) after understanding its meaning is a worthwhile activity. It will bring vitality to the activity and provide the intended benefits. Moreover, it will also help in engaging oneself mentally in the activity.

This does not mean we should simply abandon doing Sandhyā Vandanam under the pretext of not knowing the meaning and wait until we get to know the meaning. If somebody takes such an approach he will never get to do the karma.

It merely suggests that as we continue to perform the Sandhyā karma, we must endeavour to know the meaning of the various mantras that we utter so that over time our efforts will begin to bear fruits. Until we know the meaning of the mantras, the Sandhyā Vandanam that we perform will provide us benefits, albeit, in a limited fashion.

On the other hand, if we keep uttering the mantras without knowing the meaning, then we are no different from a sparrow which can repeat what it has been trained. It makes the whole exercise a dry ritual. Over time we will only develop hatred to this exercise and find every opportunity to avoid this. This is true of not only Sandhyā Vandanam, but any mundane

activity that we do without knowing the meaning. This was how most of us began to abandon the vedic wisdom.

4. What is an appropriate time to do Sandhyā Vandanam?

There is a simple rule for this. In Tamil they say¹⁰ “காணாமல் - Kānāmal (without seeing), கோணாமல் - Konāmal (without any angle - in straight line), கண்டு - Kandu (while seeing), கொடு - Kodu (Give)”. What it means is that the morning Sandhyā Vandanam should be done before Sunrise, the Mādhyānikam at 12.00 noon and the evening Sandhyā Vandanam before Sunset. This is the broad guideline. One should endeavour to follow this as far as possible. Whenever we make deviations from this, as part of the Sandhyā Vandanam itself we offer Prāyaścitta Arghya (Refer to Arghya Pradhānam in Pūrvānga for more details on this).

5. Doing Mādhyānikam is difficult as I will be in school/office. Can I skip it?

Mādhyānikam, as explained earlier, needs to be done at 12.00 noon or around that time. With the current style of living this may be difficult. Therefore the question before us is do we skip it altogether till the rest of our professional life or do it at an earlier time (say in the morning before we leave for office/school). It may be better to do it at a slightly earlier time. Though it may sound inappropriate it is better than skipping it forever. The benefits of this are not only the blessings of Gāyatrī but also developing a better sense of time management as well. This will come handy when we grow up and step into higher responsibilities in life later.

¹⁰ There was one Idaikattu Chittar. He was tending cattle. He apparently said (in Tamil), “Kanamar konamar kandu kodu.”

6. **I am convinced of the need to do *Sandhyā Vandanam*. But it takes more than 45 minutes to do *Sandhyā Vandanam*. Spending such an amount of time three times a day is simply not possible for me. Therefore can I skip or do just once in a day?**

Sandhyā Vandanam is a nitya karma and it is a tri-kāla karma (thrice daily). Therefore, there is no scope for discounts on the number of times that one needs to do. The main issue is about the excessive time taken for this.

Let us look at another issue that also seems to be our nitya anuṣṭhāna (daily ritual), viz., using the computer for various chores. When you are introduced to Microsoft Word or Excel it took a lot of time to even know how to open, use the existing features and prepare the documents the way we want. We can observe two things in this process:

- a. *By and large people have not complained that it is taking too much time to use the new software.*
- b. *As we keep using, the time taken progressively comes down. After a few weeks it becomes almost like a child's play to use the software.*

What is also interesting to note is that we keep repeating this process several times (new software, new versions are introduced and we seem to go through the same process without any complaint).

*We need to take a similar approach in the case of learning *Sandhyā Vandanam* mantras and prayoga. While it may take about 45 minutes in the beginning, after a few weeks it may come down to about 15 minutes. The good news is that the*

mantras for the Morning, Mādhāynikam and Evening Sandhyā Vandanam are nearly 75% common. Therefore, we will have accelerated learning.

The main reason for us to raise these questions is that we have not been able to develop faith that Sandhyā Vandanam is for our material as well as spiritual prosperity. Once we get convinced of this these issues will disappear and we will incorporate Sandhyā Vandanam into our daily routine without any difficulty.

7. What do I do when I travel?

When we travel for long hours (say a 20 hour journey), the confusion is whether to do Sandhyā Vandanam. Resolving this confusion is very easy. Ask yourself whether you skip your daily chores such as eating. You don't. Therefore the idea is not to skip. However, we may not be able to do Sandhyā Vandanam in the normal way. You can simply wash your hands and face, sit calmly for a few minutes in your seat and perform only the Gāyatrī japa (at a minimum of 32 times). The pūrvānga and other components of Uttarānga can be skipped. One can follow this routine whenever we face such similar difficult situations with respect to doing Sandhyā Vandanam.

8. When I stay in hotels (when I tour), there are no facilities for me to do Sandhyā Vandanam. Can I therefore skip?

Obviously hotels and resorts are not going to provide you with any facilities for performing Sandhyā Vandanam. Just as you take with you in your travel kit your toiletries, also carry a minimum set of things for doing Sandhyā Vandanam. This includes a small plate, a small Pancha pātra and a small

pocket containing whatever you apply on your forehead while doing this activity. It does not occupy much space. It is only a question of getting used to this and feeling strongly the need for doing Sandhyā Vandanam.

9. Many a times I go to a place where I am unable to know the directions. I do not feel like asking some stranger which is east. What do I do?

You need not have to embarrass yourself with this issue. Simply carry in your travel kit a magnetic needle which can indicate you the direction. It comes in many ways (key chain, pendulum, small casing etc.).

10. I am told that if there is some death in the family we are not supposed to do Sandhyā Vandanam. Is this true? Can I skip during such occasions?

During periods of āsauca (restrictions for religious practices) we do not do Sandhyā Vandanam. But that does not mean we do not do Gāyatrī Japa. During these times we must do Gāyatrī Japa alone skipping all other components of Sandhyā Vandanam. The practice is to do 10 times the Gāyatrī mantra during such occasions. However, during periods of āsauca, we are required to utter the Gāyatrī Japa silently (within the mind only). Also, it is mentioned that during periods of āsauca, it is enough to do only up to Arghya Pradhānam.¹¹

¹¹ This observation is made based on the tamil translation of the work on Gayatri Mahima and Sandhya Vandana Mahima of Sringeri Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidya Teerta Swamigal, published by Sri Sharada Trust in 1999.

11. I am told to change my Yajña Upavīta because of some events (such as death) happening in the house. Is it important or can I ignore such advises?

The Yajña Upavīta is worn by a person from the day of Upanayana until his death. It is considered sacred and the more we do japa, the more sacred is the thread (that is why some people translate Yajña Upavīta as sacred thread in English). When some āsauca happens, the thread is supposed to have lost its sanctity. Therefore, it needs to be replaced once the āsauca period is over. If we continue to use the same thread and continue doing Sandhyā Vandanam, it is like continuing to use a tape recorder or any battery operated device even after the battery is dead. We lose data and continuity in such a case and a very similar thing happens in this case also. All your Sandhyā Vandanam and other religious practices will become futile.

12. Is the Sandhyā Vandanam karma the same for all vedas?

As we know the three vedic divisions are Rig, Yajur and Sama (Atarvana Veda is a later division made by Vysa and in several vedic traditions there is a mention of only three vedas). Based on the Rig Veda, Ashvalāyana and Sānkhyāyana authored the kalpa sutra. This consists of śrauta sutras and Gruhya sutras. The Gruhya sutras cover the 40 samskāras which includes Sandhyā Vandanam also. Therefore, Rig vedis will follow the prescriptions contained in this. In the case of Yajur veda there are two branches; Krishna Yajur veda and Shukla Yajur veda. Āpastamba, Bodhāyana, Vaikānasa, Bhāradwāja, Varāha and Satyashata wrote sutras for Krishna Yajur veda. Kātyāyana and Bhāskara wrote sutras for Shukla Yajur veda. For the Sama veda, Trāhyāyana Kopila wrote the sutras. The

respective vedis will follow the prescribed sutras and perform Sandhyā Vandanam.

There are some differences among these sutras in the manner the Sandhyā karma is observed, although the core components do not vary. In any case the Gāyatrī mantra is the same for all these variations. A practical way to observe the Sandhyā karma is to follow the practices that the elders and the ancestors in the family have been following. In this manner, the complications of which branch and which sutra to follow is addressed as these practices must have been handed down the generations.

8

The Sandhyā Worship

Śri Chandraśekara Bhārati Swāmigal¹²

A touring Educational Officer once met His Holiness and said,

"I have occasions of being in constant touch with young boys, mostly *Brāhmanās*, studying in schools which I have to inspect. I have found that even the boys who perform their *Sandhyā* do so more as a form than as real worship. I shall be very grateful if Your Holiness would give me some valuable hints which I could convey to them"

Ācārya: I am very glad to see that you are not content with mere official routine of inspection but desire to utilise the occasion for the betterment of the boys. It will be well if all educationists, inspecting officers or teachers, realise that they have been entrusted with the very grave responsibility of training up young men in the most impressionable period of their lives. In my opinion they are really to blame if they confine their attention only to the prescribed text books and neglect the spiritual side of the young generation.

¹² This article was originally compiled by Sri R. Krishnaswamy Iyer and was posted in Mr. Ajit Krishnan's website <http://www.mudgala.com>. It may also be noted that it is a local copy of an article found at: <http://www.srisharada.com/QA/Sandhya%20Worship.htm>. I am thankful to Prof. Sri Sridharan of Kellog School of Management, North Western University, Shri Sethuraman and Shri C N Krishnaswamy for bringing this to my attention.

E.O. : I always keep that end before me and I don't miss any opportunity of talking to the boys and giving them some useful advice. It is mainly with a view to do that work better that I request Your Holiness to give some practical suggestions.

Ācārya: Even if the boys to whom you propose to convey such suggestions may not benefit by them, you will certainly be benefited.

E.O. : Certainly.

Ācārya: You may therefore, for the present, ignore the boys and ask such questions the answers to which are likely to be useful to you.

E.O. : The first question which suggests itself to me is with reference to the *Sandhyā* worship. What is the deity or *upāsya devatā* in the *Sandhyā* Worship?

Ācārya: Before we consider that, please tell me what you understand ordinarily by the *Sandhyā* worship?

E.O. : By *Sandhyā* worship we mean the worship of the rising Sun, the setting Sun or Sun in the mid heavens.

Ācārya: Quite so. Comprehensively speaking, you mean worship of the Sun?

E.O. : Yes.

Ācārya: You tell me that *Sandhyā* is the worship of the Sun and yet you ask me what is worshipped in the *Sandhyā*. Don't you think it is an unnecessary question?

E.O. : Put so, it may seem an unnecessary question, but my real question is, what is the Sun that is worshipped?

Ācārya: What do you understand ordinarily by the Sun?

E.O. : We mean the bright celestial orb in the sky.

Ācārya: Then it is that bright celestial orb that is worshipped.

E.O. : But that orb is, according to science, mere inert matter in a state of high combustion and is certainly not worthy of being worshipped by intelligent beings like ourselves. It can neither hear our prayers nor respond to them. I cannot believe that our ancestors were so ignorant as to address their prayers to a mere burning mass of matter

Ācārya: I quite agree with you. They could never have been so foolish.

E.O. : What then did they see in the Sun to justify their prayers being addressed to it?

Ācārya: You said just now that addressing of prayers to inert matter cannot be justified by reason.

E.O. : Yes.

Ācārya: What then must be the nature of the entity to which a prayer is addressed?

E.O. : The primary condition is that it must not be mere inert matter, but must be endowed with intelligence.

Ācārya: And the second condition?

E.O. : That it must be able to hear our prayers and be powerful enough to answer them.

Ācārya: Quite so. If our ancients were not fools and yet addressed their prayers to the Sun, their conception of the Sun must have been quite different from that of mere inert matter, in a state of high combustion.

E.O. : Yes, they must have also postulated of its intelligence, the capacity to hear us and the ability to help us.

Ācārya: The 'us' including not only all those who are now living to raise their hands in prayer to the Sun, but also the generations, past and future, infinite in number though they may be?

E.O. : Of course.

Ācārya: Then, the entity that is worshipped as the Sun is therefore one whose intelligence or ability knows no limitation of space or time.

E.O. : It must be so.

Ācārya: You have now got your answer to the question as to who is worshipped in the *Sandhyā*? It is an intelligent Being, omniscient and omnipotent in the matter of hearing and responding to its votaries.

E.O. : Your Holiness then means that it is a *devatā* who has his habitation in the solar orb?

Ācārya: Quite so. He has not only his habitation there, but the solar orb itself is his physical body.

E.O. : Your Holiness means that the *devatā* enlivens the solar orb, just as we do our physical bodies?

Ācārya: Just so.

E.O. : If then he is embodied just like us, how does he happen to have such high intelligence or power as to merit our obeisance?

Ācārya: He attained that status by virtue of the appropriate karma and *upāsana* done by him in a previous life.

E.O. : Does Your Holiness mean that he was at one time just like ourselves and that he attained that status by his endeavour?

Ācārya: Yes.

E.O. : Then he is no more than a *jīva*, which I also am. Why should a *jīva* make prostration before another *jīva*, howsoever superior?

Ācārya: Why should your son or pupil respect you and why should you show respect to your superior officers? Are not both of you *jīvas*?

E.O. : No doubt we are. But we respect our superiors as it is in their power to help us or injure us, if they so desire.

Ācārya: That is a very low kind of respect. Anyhow, taking even that kind of respect, we must respect *Sūrya devatā* if it is in his power to help us or injure us, if he so desires.

E.O. : Of course.

Ācārya: Being a *jīva* as much as your superior officers, he will help you if you appeal to him for help or injure you if you ignore

or despise him. In your own interest then, you are bound to worship him and secure his goodwill.

E.O. : But I need not court the favour nor fear the displeasure of my superior officer, if I carry out the duties of my office faithfully.

Ācārya: Quite so.

E.O. : If I preserve that attitude, there is no reason why I should propitiate my superior officer

Ācārya: Certainly not.

E.O. : Similarly, if I carry out strictly the duties enjoined on me by the *śāstras*, I need not propitiate any other *jīva*, be he the highest *devatā*.

Ācārya: Quite so.

E.O. : Then, should I not give up the worship of *Sūrya devatā*?

Ācārya: Certainly you may, unless of course such an worship is part of the duties enjoined on you by the *śāstras*.

E.O. : How can that be?

Ācārya: It is true that an honest and strict officer in performing the duties of his office need not mind the pleasure or the displeasure of his immediate superior. But the mere fact that he thinks it necessary or obligatory to perform those duties properly, shows that he has as the ultimate end the pleasure, or avoidance of the displeasure of a still higher officer who is superior to him as well as to his immediate superior. Even if he has no personal acquaintance with that higher officer, he always

has in the background of his mind an undefined power, call it the King or the Government, when he performs the duties of his office. And that power has the ability to benefit him by recognition of his services or to punish him by taking note of his delinquencies. Furthermore, that power rules both him and his immediate superior officer. If therefore that power requires him to behave in a particular manner towards his superior officer, he cannot afford to disobey that injunction, for if he disobeys, not only does he incur the displeasure of that officer but also of the higher power.

E.O. : That is so.

Ācārya: Similarly, if a power which rules both you as well as *Sūrya devatā* requires you to conduct yourself in a particular manner towards that *devatā* you cannot afford to neglect that injunction, but must conform to it or take the risk of incurring the displeasure of that *devatā* as also of the higher power.

E.O. : It is no doubt so. But in that case, in prostrating myself before *Sūrya devatā*, I shall be really worshipping the higher power even when my worship may seem addressed to the *Sūrya*.

Ācārya: What of that?

E.O. : If I am able to conceive of such a higher power who rules even the *Sūrya* , that power is really the worshipped entity although to all appearances the worship is addressed to the *Sūrya* only.

Ācārya: Quite so.

E.O. : But Your Holiness said that it was *Sūrya deva* who was worshipped?

Ācārya: Yes. It is correct so far as persons who are not able to conceive of a higher power are concerned. To those however who can conceive of that power, He is the real *upāśya*. That power is called Hiranagarbha. He enlivens and ensouls not only the *Sūrya*, but all *devatās*. He enlivens and inhabits not only the solar orb but all things. He is the cosmic personality who is the soul of all things.

E.O. : I suppose just as we have the sense of I 'in our physical bodies, so does that cosmic personality has the sense of "I" in the entire cosmos.

Ācārya: He has.

E.O. : If so, the difference between Him and me lies not in the presence or the absence of the sense of 'I' but only in the degree, the range or the magnitude of that sense. Mine is restricted, His is extended.

Ācārya: It is so.

E.O. : If it is the sense of "I" that is responsible for the concept of a *jīva*, he must be as much a *jīva* as myself

Ācārya: Quite so. In fact He is called the First Born.

E.O. : Then, even if this higher power happens to belong to the category of *jīvas*, just like myself, the same objection which I mentioned against the worship of *Sūrya deva* holds good in his case also.

Ācārya: What then would you like to worship?

E.O. : A transcendent power which is not a *jīva*.

Ācārya: Have it then that it is such a transcendent power that is worshipped in the *Sandhyā*. We give Him the name of *Īśvara*, the Lord, or the *antaryāmi*, the inner ruler.

E.O. : But I have heard it mentioned that the terms Lord' and Ruler' are only relative terms which are used in regard to Him when we want to describe Him in relation to the universe, which is 'lorded over 'or 'ruled' by Him.

Ācārya: Yes, it is so.

E.O. : It cannot be that we can have no conception of him apart from his relationship of some sort to the universe. His relationship to the universe can at best be only an extraneous circumstance. In His essence, He must have an independent existence quite unrelated to anything else.

Ācārya: You are right. We call that unrelated essential existence Brahman.

E.O. : If it is so, that must be the real object of worship rather than the relative aspect called *Īśvara*.

Ācārya: It is even as you say. It is really the unqualified Brahman that is worshipped in the *Sandhyā*.

E.O. : I cannot really understand Your Holiness. You first said that it was the solar orb that was the object of worship, but when I pointed out that it was only inert matter, you said that it was *Sūrya deva* that was the object of worship; when again I pointed out that he was only a limited *jīva* like myself, you said it was Hiranyagarbha, the cosmic soul, that was the object of worship: when once again I pointed out that he was after all a *jīva*, however cosmic his sense of 'I' may be, you said that *Īśvara* the Lord and Ruler of the universe was really the object of worship;

and lastly when I said that even he is but a relative aspect of Brahman, you said that the object of worship was Brahman itself

Ācārya: I did say so.

E.O. : But I fail to see how all these statements can be reconciled.

Ācārya: Where is the difficulty?

E.O. : The object in a particular worship can be only one. How can it be the solar orb or the deva enlivening it or *Hiranyagarbha* or *Īśvara* or Brahman at the same time?

Ācārya: I never said that it was the solar orb or the *deva* and so on.

E.O. : Does Your Holiness mean to say then that the object of worship is the solar orb and the *deva* and *Hiranyagarbha* and *Īśvara* and Brahman all put together?

Ācārya: Nor did I say anything of that sort.

E.O. : How then am I to understand Your Holiness' statements?

Ācārya: When did I tell you that the *upāsya* was *Sūrya*?

E.O. : When I mentioned that the physical mass of burning matter cannot be the object of worship.

Ācārya: Before you mentioned it, I said that it was even that mass that was the *upāsya*.

E.O. : Yes.

Ācārya: I never mentioned that it was the solar body or the *devatā* as an alternative. To one who cannot conceive of an enlivening soul, the *upāsya* is the physical mass; to one, however, who declines to accept inert matter as an object of worship, I said the *upāsya* was *Sūrya devatā*. **The *upāsya* is ever one, but its exact nature varies with the competence of the worshipping aspirant.** The *upāsya* gets further refined when even the concept of a *devatā* does not satisfy the inquiring devotee. We say then that it is *Hiranyagarbha*. When even such a concept seems meagre or unsatisfactory, we tell the devotee that he is really worshipping the Supreme Lord Himself. When he begins to feel that even the Lord-ness is a limitation of His essential nature, we tell him that it is the infinite Brahman itself that is really worshipped. Where is the difficulty?

E.O. : Does Your Holiness then mean that it is not possible to definitely say what the object of worship in the *Sandhyā* is except with reference to the mental equipment or intellectual advancement of the worshipper?

Ācārya: How can there be an object of worship if we ignore the worshipper? **The nature of the worshipped necessarily depends upon the nature of the worshipper.**

E.O. : How?

Ācārya: Take me for example. All of you show me respect. But the object of respect, though it is, roughly speaking, myself, does differ with each one of you. Ordinary people respect me and like to see me surrounded by glittering paraphernalia; their attention and respect are claimed by those articles rather than by my personality. Such people will show the same respect to others who have similar paraphernalia. Their homage is not therefore really paid to me but only to the paraphernalia. Some others respect me for the position that I hold or for the *āśrama*

in which I am. Such people will equally respect others who are or may come to be in such a position or in such an *āśrama*, their homage is therefore not paid to me but to my position or to the *āśrama*. And some others may not care what position I hold or in what *āśrama* I am, but give me homage wherever I go and however I may be; their object of respect is my physical body. A few others will not mind if my body is dark or ugly or even diseased, but will nevertheless give me homage if by purity of mind and character or by the power of my intellect and learning or by any spiritual merit that I may possess I command their respect. Only very very very few indeed will respect me for the spark of divine intelligence or Being which inheres in me, as it does in all of you.

E.O. : Of course it is not possible to say that all the devotees that approach Your Holiness are of the same mental equipment.

***Ācārya:* Quite so. But, ordinarily all these people, whether they really tender homage to the paraphernalia or to my status and Ashrama or to my body or to my mind or to my intellect or to the divine spark in me, prostrate before me to show their respect. Can you tell me, apart from any reference to the several devotees, to whom or to what they prostrate?**

E.O. : It is no doubt very difficult to answer

Ācārya: Similarly, it is so with every kind of worship. Externally viewed, there will be no appreciable difference between the one who respects me for the paraphernalia and another who respects me for the divine spark in me. Externally viewed, there will similarly be no appreciable difference between the devotee who in his blind faith is content to address his prayers to the luminous Sun and another who turns to it as a visible symbol of the infinite Brahman. The question as to what is the *upāsya* in

the *Sandhyā* worship can therefore be answered only in this way.

E.O. : I now understand how in the simple worship of the Sun all possible stages in spiritual perception have been provided for.

Ācārya: It is not only this, for you will find if you consider the matter still further, that all the three ways known as *karma*, *bhakti* and *Jñāna* have been given places in the daily worship, but that is a different matter. Simple as the *Sandhyā* worship seems to be, it is sufficient to help us on to the highest stages. It is as useful to the highest aspirant as it is to the beginner. It is a folly, therefore, to belittle its value or to neglect it in practice.