

PRERANA



e-zine

AN INSPIRATION TO HINDU WOMEN



मकर संक्रांति

ISSUE 16 - 2024

PRERANA

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

We, as women, are always busy with personal and professional commitments. Our day mostly begins with household chores and continues until late evening, doing a number of routine jobs for our family and people around us. At times, it seems that we are working like machines, going on without rest. And then, without realizing, disappointment, despair, and loneliness seep in and we begin to question: 'Why am I doing all this, and for whom?' This is the time, we need to reflect and introspect. This is the time we need to as

catch up with other women around us and ask, 'How are we all doing?'

This magazine, '**Prerana**' is an attempt to reconnect women with each other and with our own self to find our inner '*Prerana*', the motivation to continue working ceaselessly, but with clarity and a vision that we are moving on together to build a strong Hindu society, brick by brick, with our collective efforts, with love and enthusiasm. Let us bring out the beauty in each other, support each other, and thrive together!

WRITE TO PRERANA

Have something to share? You can write about your experiences in HSS, art and craft projects, book reviews, recipes, or about any topic that appeals to you.

Not sure what to write? Each issue has articles under the titles '*American Women I admire*', '*Hindu women from History*', '*What inspires me*', '*The book that changed my life*', '*I want to share*' and many others. Hope this gives you *Prerana* to write to us. Send in your articles, questions and comments to: prerana.feedback@gmail.com

DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in "Prerana" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the publisher or any member(s) of the Prerana editorial team.

PREVIOUS ISSUES

Check out all the previous issues of Prerana here:

<https://www.hssus.org/prerana-e-zine>

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh



Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) USA is a voluntary, non-profit, socio-cultural organization. It aims to organize the Hindu community in order to preserve, practice and promote Hindu ideals and values.

HSS conducts structured programs of regular athletic and academic activities to develop strong character and leadership skills in its members, and encourage maintaining Hindu cultural identity in harmony with the larger community.

Visit www.hssus.org for more information

परा वाणी

EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

Let me tell you a story: Once a man is driving through the countryside and suddenly, at midnight, his car stops. He looks around and sees a monastery. He goes inside and asks for help. A monk tells him that he can rest for the night, and someone might be able to help the next day.

During the night the man hears some beautiful sounds. The next day, he asks the monk what the sound was and where it was coming from. The monk says, "Ah...you heard it? I cannot tell you the source of that sound as you are not a monk." Upon insistence, the monk suggests that the man go around the world three times, do 36 rounds of *puja*, and do a certain *sadhana* for 12 years.

The man does everything that the monk had said and returns to the monk after 20 years. The monk takes the man inside a long tunnel, gives him a key, and asks him to begin his next journey. The man begins his search to unlock the next door. Finally, when he opens the 7th door, he sees the most amazing thing which was the source of that sound...you know what it was? I can't tell you the source of that sound, as you are not a monk!"

Such is the nature of Para Vani!

So far, we have talked about the three types of speech- *Vaikhari*, *Madhyama*, and *Pashyanti*. The fourth one is *Para*, the highest manifestation of sound energy, the divine voice! 'Para' literally means, 'beyond.' *Para* is pure intention because it is a direct expression of the will of reality, unadulterated by any personal preference. It is beyond all objects of any sort, motionless, eternally equipoised, so subtle that it is commonly perceptible only to those who are highly evolved.

Sant Kabir says in one of his couplets -

लाली मेरे लाल की, जित देखूं तित लाल
लाली देखन में गई, मैं भी हो गई लाल

Such all-pervading is the light of my divine,
that when I went looking for it, I got colored too, completely soaked in Her charisma!



When one goes into deeper levels of consciousness, the five senses dissolve and become one, then that state is the state of pure consciousness- the speech of *Para Vani*. It represents the state of a *Yogi* where one who is deeply devoted to *Brahm* and becomes *Brahm* himself. In such a state, the 'lover', the 'beloved', and the 'love' are not separate from one another. They all dissolve and become one. A seeker's *sadhana* can bring about a manifestation of any sound.

Vaikhari, the only audible one, is expressed through the throat as the seeker chants out loud.

Madhyama is experienced within the mind as the seeker's chanting intermediates a mental task.

Pashyanti finds manifestation in the heart as the seeker keeps chanting on its own, in auto-mode.

Para finds manifestation in prana where the seeker breathes with Him in every breath!

It's all '*Rammay*' anyway, chant the way you want. The emotion is all over the globe for all *Sanatins*, and it's indescribable. Devotion unfurling like never before. Soak it the way you want, as much as you can! History is in the making as the Pran Pratishtha ceremony completes in Ram Mandir, Ayodhya!

Richa Yadav, Ph.D
Sankar Shakha, Flower Mount, TX
Hobbies: Loves reading and cooking

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REFLECTION

Sitting by Skaneateles Lake



WRITTEN BY: ESHA PATIL

The soft crunch of gravel followed my step. The water, crashing rhythmically on the shore, excitedly greeted me. The weight of the bountiful sun gently laid on my back. The wind brushed my cheeks and hair as it went in for a big hug. Sitting on a rock at Skaneateles Lake, surrounded by four beautiful friends, I felt safe.

Safe, because nature unequivocally accepted me, so that I didn't feel lost and confused. Safe, because the elements moved vigorously around me, so that I didn't feel lonely. Safe in the sun's unasked-for embrace. Safe, because life's embrace made me feel that I don't have to feign indifference, to protect myself anymore.

There is a serenity that comes when you become one with nature. A healthy vulnerability in the realization that there is something so much bigger than you, without you being small.

In this safe space, I've meditated on self, forgiveness, acceptance, and growth. One life lesson I've learned is the reason why it's important to be true to myself. "**Just be yourself.**" We all grow up hearing this from our seniors as life goes on. This statement, however, begs the question:

How can I be true to myself if I don't even know myself?

It is when I'm in the presence of nature that I realize my true self. I am there without the labels and boxes imposed by society. All my opinions, judgments, expectations, and identities get set aside and I have the opportunity to be present and exist without pressure. Just as evolution exists in nature, in society, we have the opportunity to change, grow, and evolve as individuals.

The only way to get to know yourself is by leaving your comfort zone and taking chances. You start to gain a better understanding of yourself: how you define success/failure, what qualities you value in people, how much you are willing to compromise, etcetera. The lessons you receive from taking chances and learning from failure, are what allows you to confidently take more chances in the future. When you are true to yourself, the problems that come up in your life are also true to who you are. This makes them easier to understand, accept, learn from, and grow. If you're not true to yourself, your problems won't be as well. Your understanding will lack clarity, and you'll likely repeat the same mistakes again.

Through the good and bad, I realize again and again that life is just an experience. Every situation, problem, and challenge stimulates evolution in some way. Life is like the ground beneath our feet, giving us a place to land when we fall and then a place to steady as we stand back up. Life is like water, working in waves and crests, to give us reason for growth. Life is like the sun, blessing us when we are doing our best and providing warmth during our hardships. Life is like the air, pushing and encouraging us to take chances. Life is about walking out of a good situation, feeling grateful you've had the chance to feel love, care, compassion, and happiness. Life is also about resolving a bad situation, learning from the pain, and moving forward with those lessons.

We can learn a great deal about ourselves when we take a moment to stop, quell the noise of our daily routine and of society, and introspect. So take a moment: pause, step outside, take a deep breath and appreciate being part of a whole.



Esha Patil

Shakha: Jai Hanuman Shakha, Hicksville, NY,
Hobbies: Painting, crocheting, sewing

BOOK REVIEW

Mahabharata Unravelled – By Ami Ganatra



WRITTEN BY: SUGANDHA GANESH

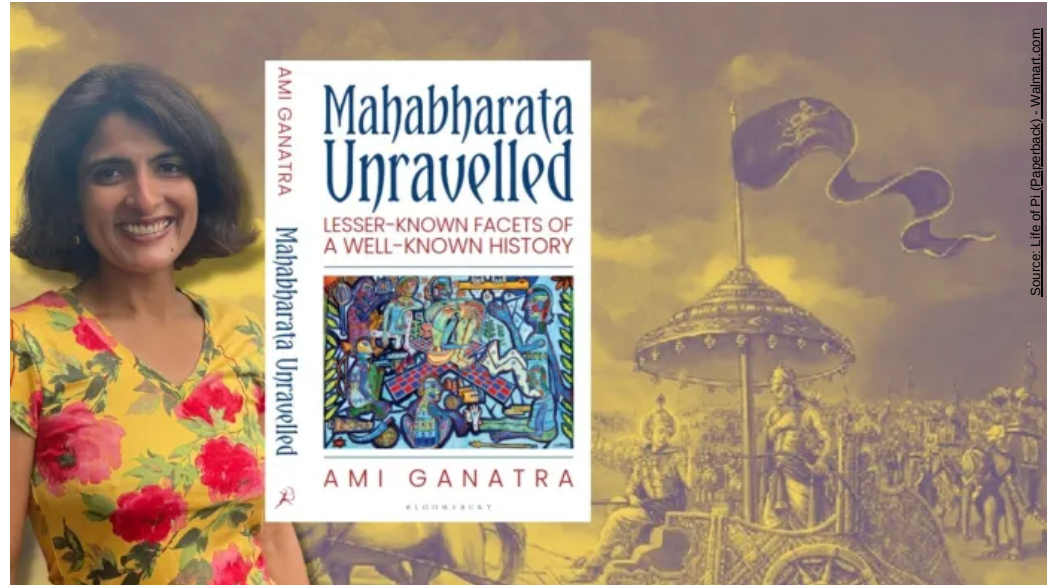
The stories from the Mahabharata have always fascinated me. Since childhood, I have been reading different versions of the Mahabharata and watching the Mahabharata television serials. Even though I listen to these stories multiple times, each time, there is a different perspective and different learning from it. I always had my curiosities and doubts, too.

I was curious to read the “Mahabharata Unravelled” after I heard a talk by the author Ami Ganatra. Ami Ganatra is an alumna of IIM Ahmedabad. She is also a Yoga practitioner and a student of Sanskrit and Indian Knowledge Systems.

There is a difference between mythology and history. Mahabharata and Ramayana have been known as ‘itihasa’(iti ha asa), and thus considered historical, as per the Indian tradition. These were actual events that had happened in the past. The original work of Shri Vyasa, Mahabharata contained more than 100,000 verses so telling these stories to common folk was not easy. For this reason, through generations, Mahabharata was told and retold through oral storytelling (e.g., folk tales) and visual storytelling (e.g., dramas, serials, or movies). Many times, the storytellers added their flavors, and their understanding with the masses, which sometimes changed the narrative. The same stories have been passed from generation to generation.

Ami Ganatra has researched based on the accepted translations of Vyasa-written Mahabharata. The works she refers to are the Gita Press publications, the Pune-based Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute's Critical Edition of Mahabharata (BORI CE), and Kisari Mohan Ganguli's English translation of Krishna - Dwaipayana Vyasa.

I had many eye-opening moments while reading Ami ji's book. For example, in the famous episode of the



Kauravas visiting Indraprastha, it is commonly believed that when Duryodhana fell in a pool of water thinking it was the floor, Draupadi said, '*Andhe ka putra andha*' (blind son of the blind father) ridiculing him. This NEVER happened, says Ami. She adds that there is no mention of Draupadi saying this to Duryodhana in Vyasa's Mahabharata as well. For ages, many believed that this dialogue was one of the reasons for the Mahabharata war. I feel that this narrative was likely built to show Draupadi (as a woman) in a lower light and to make her the reason for the Mahabharata war. Knowing the facts changes the perspective.

In contrast, to my delight, the book has pointed out in many places how dharmic Draupadi actually was. Draupadi was a powerful woman. During her darkest hours too, she never left the side of the Dharma. She always encouraged her husbands to always follow the path of the Dharma.

Having read a few books on the Mahabharata by different authors and TV serials, I had a particular impression of a few characters like **Karna**. This book has multiple references where it was clear to me that there was no reason for me to compare him with Arjun. He was likely a person of extremely high ego who was not following the path of Dharma. He had many chances where he could guide Duryodhana but instead, Karna constantly instigated Duryodhana leading him to war that killed thousands of innocent people.

The way Karna had always been mentioned as '*Suta Putra*' in a few TV serials or books on Karna, gave an impression that he was insulted based on his caste. Ami says that it did not happen. Instead, there are many examples in the Mahabharata where

cont'd

those considered now as lower jatis, were in very high positions.

Ami ji has shared the facts from the Mahabharata with references to the 'parvas' (chapters) where those can be found. She emphasizes that as Mahabharata and Ramayana represent our history, we should make an effort to know and learn the facts as they were to form opinions and get inspired.

As for the different narratives that have been set for unknown reasons through dramas, books, and TV serials, I think it is time for us to do a fact-check.

I loved reading Ami ji's "Mahabharata Unravelling". This book has inspired me to learn about different narratives and now I am looking forward to reading the Ramyana Unravelling next!

Sugandha Ganesh

Shakha: Rani Lakshmi Bai Shakha, Fords, NJ

Hobbies: Storytelling, Reading, Writing, Painting, Cooking

SEWA LEAD PROGRAM

Leadership Development Through Community Engagement



WRITTEN BY: DEEPTI SHARAN

Sewa LEAD stands for "Leadership, Education, And Development" program. This initiative is tailored for teenagers sharing a passion for giving back to the community through simple yet impactful projects, fostering a sense of unity as they work collaboratively. Each thoughtfully crafted project not only encourages leadership and ownership among teens but also instills dharmic values in their young, impressionable minds, providing a holistic foundation for personal and community development.

Highlighted are some of the activities conducted by these dedicated San Antonian High Schoolers in 2023, who



volunteered for 238 hours and showcased their commitment and enthusiasm:

I Do Yoga (IDY)

Distributed free goodie bags and sold IDY T-shirts to the Riverside community from early morning through late afternoon.

Meal Preparation

Prepared a meal for the Teachers Training Camp at Aum



cont'd



Ashram. LEAD volunteers served the prepared meals in environmentally friendly stainless steel utensils, not only saving dollars on disposables but also preventing more trash from going to landfills. Once the scrumptious meal was over, volunteers assisted in cleaning up cookware and utensils.

National Youth Convention (NYC)

The Third National Youth Convention (NYC) was held on July 29th 2023 that had high school students flawlessly emcee events and moderate discussions. They also interviewed some of the leading tech giants from IT and medicine.

Lead Program Lecture Series

High school volunteers attended deeply insightful sessions - 'Pillars of Indic Culture' - By Dr. Devraj Nayak ji. 'Union of Body and Mind' by Suhail Arastu ji.

American Council of Blind Texas (ACBT)

Spreading out to cover multiple shifts over a 3-day ACBT convention held Aug 24-27. They guided visually disabled participants to walk to the elevators, tables, and restrooms and in between their sessions.

Labor Intensive Construction

With the help of adult Sewa volunteers, constructed eight parking spots at the Aum Ashram. This physically labor-intensive activity needed some muscle power to manually shove bedrock and gravel using a hand shovel. They barreled it across a 3.75-acre property and then spread and flattened it, one parking lot at a time.

Weeding

Weeding the Mission Ranch, San Juan Farms San Antonio (Part of Food Bank San Antonio): On the morning of Sep 16th, some 15 high schoolers and their parents together weeded the Peach orchards in preparation for fall.

5k Walk

This event was to honor the wounded warriors on Oct 7th, 2023.

Food Bank

Food Bank San Antonio Collection Drive: High school students participated in SewaDiwali for safoodbank.org.

Clothes Drive for Refugees

Indian Clothes Drive for Refugees: Students collected from their friends and neighbors close to 500-gallon bags full of clothes that were donated between October 12 and November 4, 2023.

Deepti Sharan

Shakha: Shivaji Shakha, San Antonio, Texas

Hobbies: Vegan Ambassador & Activist, Health Enthusiast

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

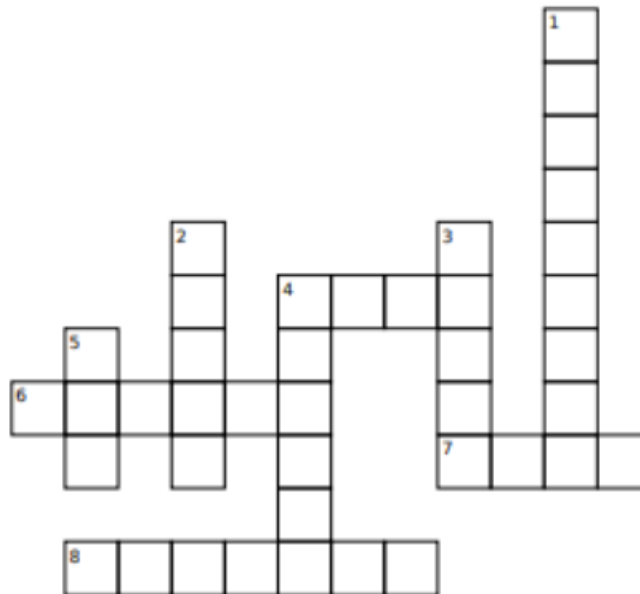
- Mahatma Gandhi



CREATED BY: VIRAJ PITHADIYA

Makar Sankranti

UNSCRAMBLE THE WORDS



Down:

1. Makar Sankranti marks the transition of the Sun into the ___ sign.
2. The day following Makar Sankranti is known as ___.
3. People celebrate Makar Sankranti by flying colorful ___.
4. The traditional sweet dish made during Makar Sankranti with sesame seeds and jaggery is called ___.
5. The festival of Makar Sankranti is dedicated to the Sun ___.

Across:

4. Another name for Makar Sankranti in South India is ___.
6. In some regions, Makar Sankranti is also known as ___ or Uttarayan.
7. On Makar Sankranti, people take a holy dip in rivers like the Ganga to wash away their ___.
8. The popular kite festival associated with Makar Sankranti is celebrated in the state of ___.



Viraj Pithadiya

Shakha: Shivaji Shakha, Colorado, CO.

Hobbies: Classical Dance, Painting, Cooking, Reading

Answers on Page 16

HINDU WOMEN



Anandamayi Ma : 'Blissful Mother.'

WRITTEN BY: VEENA KULKARNI

'I am what I was and what I shall be. I am whatever you conceive, think, or say ...This body is the material embodiment of all your thoughts and ideas. You all wanted it, and you have it now.' She is also quoted as saying, 'I find one vast garden spread out all over the Universe. All plants and animals, human beings, and higher mind-bodies are playing about in this garden in various ways; each has its uniqueness and beauty, their presence and variety give me great delight. Every one of you adds your special feature to the glory of the garden.'

— Anandamayi Ma

Anandamayi Ma, lovingly known as the "Blissful Mother," was a radiant embodiment of joyous self-sufficiency. Everyone who came to her experienced this divine energy.

Anandamayi Ma (1896-1982) took birth in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in a small village named Kheora. She was born into a Brahmin family of simple means, yet this 'shining' baby in the cot was visited by a great saint who declared her the 'Mother of the World.'



During childhood, people from the surrounding villages flocked to meet her. Known as Runga Didi, she had the power of divine attraction and a magnetic presence. All who came into her presence felt the presence of her divine state, regardless of their societal ranking. Anandamayi Ma never had a Guru, and she never turned to the scriptures and books on yoga. Her inner guidance itself revealed ancient Sanskrit texts and sacred mantras that she had never heard of before, as well as images of various aspects of God.

Anandamayi Ma's body took on challenging hatha yoga asanas, inaccessible to ordinary people, and not having many years of hard training. When asked who her teacher was, she answered: 'Your Shakti' (Divine Power). She also self initiated herself with the Bija mantra. On August 3, 1922, guided by the whispers of her inner Shakti, Anandamayi Ma embarked on a unique spiritual journey. She shed the traditional path of seeking external guidance and instead, embraced the profound wisdom within. In a remarkable act of self-reliance, she performed the ritual of self-initiation, assuming the dual roles of both guru and disciple. The sacred bija mantra resonated through her being, marking a pivotal moment in her spiritual awakening. Later Ma went against tradition, personally giving mantra initiation to her husband and plunging him into the deepest trance for two hours.

Ma, often experienced the visions of various forms of God, recognizing her complete identity with their essence. She had ignored her body; she barely ate and rarely slept.

Teachings of Ma.

Surrender

Surrender yourself to Him and His will, and then nothing will seem to be alien.

Chant Mantras

Ma. Anandmayi always emphasized chanting Mantras. You have to chant the Mantra repeatedly

Do everything for the sake of God.

This body has lived with our father, mother, husband, and all my kin. I have served all those related to me. But view this from another standpoint, my father, mother, husband, and all those I have served are different manifestations of one Supreme Power, our Almighty God. In the end, we are serving God. We cook food for Him, we tend to His temple. Whatever I did in this body, all was meant for Him.

Happiness in God is only Real.

It's easy to see happiness in external things like spouse, family, or material possessions. But these sources of happiness prove fleeting; they cannot endure. The only true and everlasting joy lies in discovering it within, in the presence of God.

A Guru treats everyone equally.

Saints, sage, and Gurus are like trees. Trees provide shelter to whoever comes to them, whether a child, man, woman, or animal. The Guru shows the right path to anyone who seeks their guidance and teachings, regardless of their gender, age, or status,

Veena Kulkarni

Shakha: Chanakya Shakha MI Vibhag Great lakes Sambhag
Hobbies: Gardening, hiking, playing Throwball and volleyball

Quick Yoga for Women at Workplace or Home Office

WRITTEN BY: SHRADDHA JOSHI



Life is busy whether you are going to the office or working from home. We are in a constant state of rushing from one thing to another. It worsens when you get to work – where you spend 8+ hours daily. Office environments are often some of the most fast-paced and stressful.

It would help if you still got the washing done when you get home. It can be a lot and by the end of the day, your shoulders are around your ears with stress, your lower back is sore from the desk and your legs are stiff.

So while an average office worker does not have ample time, a quick daily yoga practice does wonders for mindset, stress relief, and body wellness. With that in mind, here are a few easy yoga tricks that women can do at the workplace. Find a quiet spot in the office or home office, put down your yoga mat, and get ready to release the work-related tension from your body and mind.

Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Sodhan)



Many of us may not think of breathing as a yoga pose, however, this Office Yoga Flow starts with breath as a way to arrive into your body and release the work stress from your mind.

This form of yogic breathing is called Alternate Nostril Breathing. It's a simple yet powerful technique that settles the mind, body, and emotions. You can use it to quiet your mind and ease racing thoughts if you are experiencing anxiety, stress, or even having trouble falling asleep.

How to do Alternate Nostril Breathing

Inhale from the left nostril and exhale through the right side. Go slow. Now, gently inhale from the right nostril and exhale from the left. This is one cycle. Continue for up to 5 minutes. Always complete the practice by finishing with an exhale on the left side.

Bound Angle Pose (Baddha Konasana)



This particular pose is beautiful for women to practice, as it relieves the symptoms of menstrual cycles and menopause by circulating energy through the pelvic organs. It is very effective at reducing the stiffness in hip joints that arises after sitting in a chair for long periods.

How to do the Bound Angle Pose

Sit with your legs straight out in front of you, raising your pelvis on a blanket if your hips are too tight. Exhale, bend your knees, pull your heels toward your pelvis, then drop your knees out to the sides and press the soles of your feet together.

Garland Pose (Malasana)



The Garland Pose is particularly great for pregnant women and health, in general, as it stretches the calves and inner thighs, relieves the back ache from sitting at a desk, and opens the pubic symphysis in the pelvis.

How to do the Garland Pose

Come down into a squat with your feet as close together as possible. Keep your heels on the floor if you can; otherwise, support them on a folded mat.

Warrior 1 (Virabhadrasana 1)



Warrior 1 is a gentle backbend; and a great pose for stretching open the front body (quads, hip flexors, psoas) while strengthening the legs, hips, buttocks, core, and upper body. It is great for those with sedentary jobs as it stimulates

the metabolism as well as restores the spine. It also helps release stress from the shoulders almost immediately.

How to do Warrior 1

Raise your arms above your head with the palms facing each other, or bring the palms together crossing the thumbs, or interlace the fingers together and point the index finger up. Keep the shoulders relaxed and the chest lifted, carefully arch back, and look up towards the ceiling. Keep your hips squared to the front and bend deeply into your front leg, letting the heat build in your thigh. Hold here for 3-6 breaths.

Child's Pose (Balasana)



One of my favorite poses and a great one to end with is Child's Pose, this is a fantastic resting pose and way of

finishing off your practice; it's great not just for beginners but is used by Yogis of all levels. This is a great go-to pose to use when you're fatigued after a long day, to use before bed at night or anytime you need a mental break to work out any tension and stress relief.

How to do the Child Pose

In this pose, kneel and sit on your knees. Lean forward, keeping your buttocks on your heels, and rest your forehead on the floor. Move your arms so they're next to your legs, palms facing up.

This yoga practice will help reduce the stress level and help the body to regain the health and well-being that it needs.

Shraddha Joshi

Vivekanand Shakha, South East Sambhag
Hobbies: Reading & Yoga

WHAT I HAVE LEARNT FROM MY CHILD



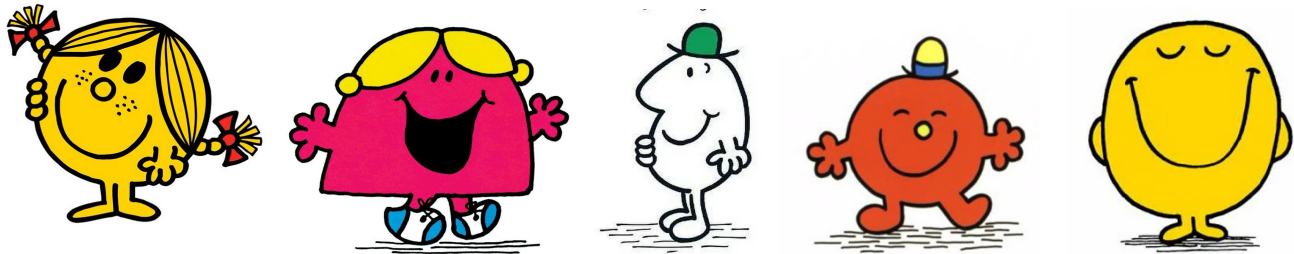
WRITTEN BY : NAVANEETHA BHAT

Life lessons from Little Hearts!

On a lively summer evening in Edinburgh, I picked up my 3-year-old daughter, Mihika, from her nursery. Boarding bus No. 36, we were welcomed by the familiar faces of fellow commuters. My daughter, a chatterbox brimming with sunshine, lit up the atmosphere with her infectious smile and animated small talk. This particular day, however, held a unique encounter.

As we boarded the bus, Mihika, ever-sunny, greeted the new driver with a joyful "Hello, Driver!" To our surprise, the driver, unlike the usual friendly exchanges, offered no reply. Unfazed, Mihika tried again, drawing the attention of nearby passengers with her persistence. Despite her efforts, the driver remained silent. Suspecting hesitation due to my daughter's different skin color, a pang of concern crossed my mind. Encouraging her to find a seat, I watched as Mihika, undeterred, tried one last time. This time, the driver finally responded with a simple "Hello!" Mihika, her smile brighter than ever, found a seat for the journey.

As the bus rolled through Edinburgh's streets, I realized the profound lesson Mihika unintentionally taught me. In her eyes, every encounter was an opportunity to form a new friendship. Her innocent gesture illuminated the simplicity of human connection, uncomplicated by societal expectations of skin color, language, or background.



Fast forward a decade, and my 2-year-old Vedant blossoms into a master of savoring life's simplest treasures. From stirring dosa batter to the pure delight of playing with a door stopper or splashing in water while tending to plants, he discovers genuine happiness every day. The joy he experiences while picking flowers of different colors from our backyard, inhaling the fragrance of its leaves, and feeling its texture far surpasses the excitement generated by a store-bought color sorter he received as a gift.

As I ponder this, the parallels to adult behavior, especially in our choices surrounding material possessions, become undeniable. We often invest in, for example, an expensive designer bag when a simple one would suffice. My toddler's delight in the simple joys serves as a reminder that true happiness lies not in extravagance, but in the experience itself.

A cherished ritual in our home these days is Vedant gleefully pushing his elder sister Mihika on his ride-on bike. Though unaware that these bikes are intended for smaller children, his sharing nature prevails. Surprisingly, Mihika, fully aware of the bike's limitations, wholeheartedly embraces the spontaneous joy, casting aside worries about upcoming homework or the potential of the bike breaking under her weight.

Observing these carefree moments has made me realize the significance of living in the moment and enjoying the present, without being burdened by future concerns or societal expectations. Also, the selfless act of sharing serves as an example of unconditional love, empathy and enduring connection between people, enduring bond between siblings.

My children have reshaped my parenting journey, reminding me that parenthood's true magic lies in learning and growing alongside our little ones. This journey has rekindled my appreciation for life's simple pleasures, ignited a love for spontaneity, and rediscovered the profound beauty of living in the present. It has taught me a valuable and timeless lesson: finding happiness in the journey rather than solely focusing on the destination!

Navaneetha Bhat

Shakha: Prerana Shakha, Plano (Dallas East Vibhag), Texas.

Hobbies: Expressing my creativity through a mix of art, sculptures and DIY crafts

Hindu Festival – Makar Sankranti



WRITTEN BY: RIYA SAROLKAR

Makar Sankranti which we celebrate on January 14th or 15th every year is a Hindu festival celebrated in India and Nepal that coincides with several harvest festivals from across the country during the same time with unique regional variations. In Panjab it's Lohri, in Tamilnadu it's Pongal, Assam's Bhogali Bihu...all these harvest festivals mark significant seasonal change around this time. Festival of Makar Sankranti gets the name from the fact that it marks the sun's northward transition from Sagittarius (Dhanu) to Capricorn (Makar rashi). As the sun enters Uttarayan, we start getting more energy.

Ayurveda always focuses on achieving balance and harmony in the body, mind, and spirit. It emphasizes the importance of individualized care, considering a person's unique constitution (dosha), lifestyle, and environment. As we have learned in previous articles, what happens in nature (outside the body), also happens inside our body.

‘यत् पिण्डे तत् ब्रह्माण्डे।

During this time of the year in January, its extreme winter time with severe cold and windy dry conditions. To balance increased vata dosha and kapha dosha, Ayurved suggests to follow warm and little oily food. In India, food culture has always been intertwined with Ayurvedic wisdom. During Makar Sankranti, it is a tradition to prepare and consume a mixture of sesame seeds and jaggery. This mixture holds cultural and symbolic significance.

Sesame seeds-Til alone can be used for many benefits:

- Improve strength and imparting oiliness to the body
- Improve digestive power
- Calm vata and kapha and slightly increases pitta
- Work as an excellent laxative
- Help to strengthen the bones, muscles, and joints
- Clear and cleanse body channels
- Improve intelligence and memory
- Good for hair, skin, and teeth (specially black sesame seeds)
- Have anti-aging and rejuvenating properties
- Overall Sesame seeds improve overall strength and immunity

Sesame oil is also useful internally and for external applications in many conditions.

- Toothache, gingivitis, tingling of teeth, weak teeth :
 - Water mixed with sesame seed paste can be kept for 3 to 5 minutes
 - Oil is used for oil pulling specially in mouth ulcers
 - Chewing of sesame seeds
- It is best to prevent the excessive dryness of skin, it controls dry scalp and kills dandruff
- It protects the skin from the effects of chlorine in swimming pool water
- It is beneficial in reducing swelling of hemorrhoids
- It calms down burns
- As hair oil for children to kill lice infestations
- Sesame oil as nasal drop is effective in chronic sinusitis
- With sesame oil no cosmetics are needed as it is a natural UV protector, perfect moisturizer, and night cream
- It is traditionally applied over wounds for healing
- It should be specially included in diet during fractures, muscle tear and osteoporosis

Jaggery- Gud alone can be used for many benefits:

- Jaggery is made from concentrated sugarcane juice. We get two types of gud
- Nava gud (newly made jaggery)
- Puran gud (more than a year old jaggery)
- Old jaggery is recommended as more beneficial. Now a days, jaggery is mixed with chemicals. So, it's important to get good quality organic jaggery to get the benefits



- Helps in acute as well as chronic constipation. Jaggery can work as detox, so it can help to cleanse colons.
- Provides instant energy to the body.
- It produces warmth in the lungs and dilates the respiratory tract, so it helps in dry cough, asthma, and breathing trouble.
- It reduces inflammation of urinary bladder and helps in proper urination.
- Helps in migraine and headache (jaggery with cow ghee)
- Jaggery helps in muscle strain and ruptured tendon
- It helps in quick healing and relieves muscular strain.
- Reduces uterine cramps and abdominal pain before menstruation.

Til an Gud combination enhances each other's properties:

- protects the body from seasonal infections and boosts immunity.
- Til Gud laddoo helps to reduce joint pain and arthritis
- beneficial for women who suffer from menstrual cramps
- Depending upon dhosha dhatu avastha in the body and individual's prakruti, Til and Gud can be used as a food to balance doshas but also can be used with combination of other elements like pippali, dry ginger, ghee, are used in the form of medicated milk, or powder or avaleh (jam)

Til gives the strength and Gud has a capacity to reach the smallest part in the body very quickly (sookshma gamitva). Til and Gud combination not only gives strength and warmth to our body but also helps creating bonds in the relationships.

Let's start our Gregorian new year with good health and strong bond with ourselves and people around us.

(* It is always important to define amount that works for our body. Too much amount of til and gud can lead to some adverse effects. For any specific condition, its always recommended to get advise from Ayurved practitioner.)

Ria Sarolkar

Shakha: Satsangh Shakha, Vibhag : Greater Boston

Hobbies: Want to speak in Sanskrit

My Art Tribal Art



WRITTEN BY: SHILPA KULKARNI

I have been very fond of tribal art since childhood. Art is a great way to express your feelings, your observations about society, etc. It is such a powerful medium.

Warli is a tribe from the state of Maharashtra. Traditionally, they paint on the walls of their huts. Warli painting is such a lovely form of art that encompasses the tribal diaspora through each figure in the painting. One can understand the day-to-day activities of the Warli tribe, their lifestyle, culture, and love for nature, by just looking at these pictures. It is very simple to draw yet powerful in expressing various aspects of their life.



This tribe uses typical musical instruments and presents the dance known as 'Tarpa' during festival season. They love nature and it is often reflected in the art through birds, trees, animals, sun, mountains, rivers, etc.

Traditionally, Warli painting is done on a brown(*gerua*) background with rice powder as paint. These drawings do not follow the regular painting norms like spacing, proportion, etc., but still, they are extremely beautiful. Nowadays, various artists try to include modern objects as well as different color combinations which is also beautiful, but personally, traditional Warli painting is my favorite. I have tried to include many such figures in my drawing. Hope you like it.

Shilpa Kulkarni

Omkar Shakha, Louisville, KY

hobbies : watching flowers and nature walking , listening to music, cooking

SHLOKA I GREW UP WITH

Ram Raksha Stotram



WRITTEN BY: ANURADHA MULKAR

I have beautiful memories of Ram Raksha Stotram. During summer days when we used to visit our maternal grandparents' house, in the evening we all cousins used to sit together in front of a small Devghar (Temple room) and chant evening Stotras including Shubham Karoti, Ganapati Stotra, and Maruti Stotra and at the end chanting Ram Raksha Stotra. Those days, we did not have a TV or any other electronics at home. So, the entire day we used to play outside, and then in the evening, one hour was strictly for prayers followed by Aarti by my grandmother. Who will not get a peaceful sleep after one hour of praying time? It was like yoga and meditation for us. Dinner used to be fresh and hot khichadi.



It is still a routine to recite Ram Raksha Stotram every day after lighting Diya in front of Bhagavan. My kids also learned Ram Raksha Stotram. We all sometimes sit together and recite it. When my kids were babies and they used to get sick at night due to fever or chest congestion and were not able to sleep, my mother used to ask me to put my hand on their forehead and recite Rama Raksha Stotram. It used to help to sleep well. As part of the Maushi ji's Ram Katha Pathan during Chaitra Navaratri, Ram Raksha Stotram has been recited as part of the Samarop ceremony in our shakha by all sevikas and their families.

Ram Raksha Stotram has immense power to cure disease; this is a "Siddha Stotra" for complete protection of the body and when we recite 1,300 times it can destroy all dangers that a person may be facing, reciting Ram Raksha Stotra will enhance your physical and emotional mental, and spiritual intelligence.

Ram Raksha Stotra is believed to have healing properties. It promotes good health and speeds up recovery from illness. By chanting Stotra devotees seek the blessings of lord Rama for restorations of their physical well-being. It also helps when you are feeling depressed or scared.

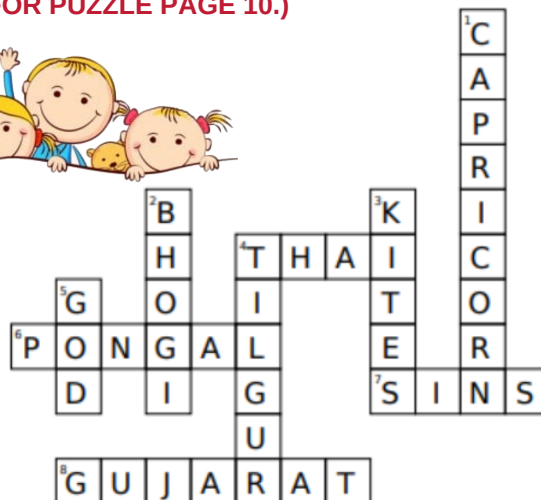
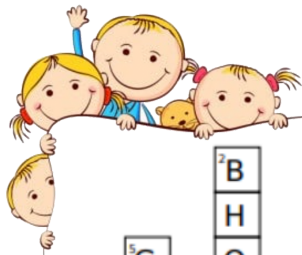
Nowadays you can hear Rama Raksha Stotram by playing it on YouTube any time. At my home, every evening I play it, and that way my kids listen to and memorize it.

Anuradha Mulkar

Eklavya Shakha, Rocky Hill, CT

Hobbies: Listening to music

MAKAR SANKRANTI (ANSWER FOR PUZZLE PAGE 10.)



HOME SWEET HOME



WRITTEN BY: ANJALI PATEL

I am a person of two cultures- Gujarati and Marathi. When I got married and was not comfortable with the language yet, I always used to say, “*Jau chun*” which means ‘I am going’ while leaving one place for another. Over time, I learned that I should have said, “*Avajo*”. It means ‘come again’ as both parties invite each other to their homes again. A similar parting word to say as a nice gesture is “*Bhetu*” in Marathi. It means “Let us meet again”. It means ‘you come back, and let us meet again’.

In Marathi, there is a word to denote a similar concept- “*yete/ yeto*” depending on the gender, and the meaning is, ‘I will be back’. By chance, if I said “*jate*” meaning “I am going,” my grandmother used to correct me. She would remind me to say “*yete*” instead of “*jate*.”

The whole idea sounds very simple, but it is such a positive affirmation. These days when we talk about positive enforcement, this small change can make a difference. Instead of saying “bye”, say “see you”. I remember a tradition that every time we embarked on a journey, the eldest, usually a grandmother, would place a dollop of curd on the palm of each traveler's



hand. It is believed that if you eat curd before leaving the house, it would be safe to travel. We were supposed to take blessings from God and tell Him — “Let my travel be safe and I will be back for your darshan soon”.

In the modern world, our children often leave home for higher education or professional pursuits while they are still very young. They stay alone in dorms and apartments. No one necessarily cares or asks them why they were so late, or if they ate their meal. Usually, this is okay. They usually tend to be smart enough to take care of themselves. But it would make so much difference if they could tell God in their home temple that they would come back. This habit of telling God at home that they would be back for a darshan could be a small way to ensure they do not feel lonely when they are away. This practice or ritual can emphasize two things: one, the expectation that God is in the house, and two, that there is someone at home for whom one must travel back home to meet. The thought of the presence of God in one's home can change one's perspective on life.

What do you think, moms? Do you think this habit should be instilled in every child? You might be from any part of Bharat and there might be another similar tradition. Other countries may have similar traditions to depart on a positive note too. I heard about a similar experience of a friend who was temporarily staying in Mexico when she suffered a miscarriage. It was her first pregnancy in Mexico. In her hospital, everyone only spoke Spanish. After all the treatment when she was leaving the hospital, the nurse came to the door. As a parting gesture, my friend said to the nurse, “*hasta luego*” which means I will come again. And the nurse replied, “NO... NO, say adios, Don't come again to the hospital .. stay fit!”

Anjali Patel

Shakha: Maitri Shakha, Frisco, Dallas, TX

Hobbies: Travelling and exploring



उदये सविता रक्तौ रक्तश्चास्तमने तथा ।
सम्पतौ च विपत्तौ च महतामेकरूपता ॥
udaye savitā raktāu raktaścāstmane tathā ।
sampatau cha vipattāu chamahatāmekarūpatā ॥

The sun looks alike while rising and setting. Great men too remain alike in both the good and bad times.

Remembering Ma. Nanda ji



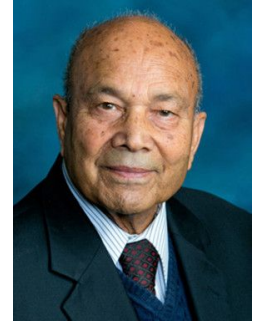
A Guiding light for Prerana

WRITTEN BY: CHITRA JAVDEKAR, PH.D

In our personal, professional, and organizational journeys, we meet many people. Yet only a few leave an indelible mark through their guidance and simple interactions.

Among them was Ma. Ved Nanda ji, who profoundly influenced the Prerana team with his conversations, appreciation, and encouragement. His departure from this world is difficult to accept.

It was during the uncertain times of COVID, amidst Zoom meetings and remote work, that HSS Sevikas envisioned Prerana's new chapter. The first draft of Prerana, crafted with nervous anticipation, reached Nanda ji for review. His words, a warm embrace of appreciation and gentle advice to strive for flawlessness, ignited our team's spirit.



While the world grappled with fear and anxiety in 2020-2021, Nanda ji embraced connection. Despite a whirlwind schedule filled with professional seminars, international law work, and Sangh commitments, we recall fondly that he prioritized Prerana, finding time for online meeting that energized us with his kind words and infectious enthusiasm.

Nanda ji's life journey, etched with the horrors of partition at a young age, was anything but ordinary. Yet, the darkness did not dim his light. He earned an M.A. Economics from Punjab University, a Law degree from Delhi University in India, and a Master of Law (LLM) from Northwestern University. He rose to become a revered human rights lawyer and professor, whose 50 years at the University of Denver empowered countless individuals in law, policy, and beyond. In recognition of his contributions to the field of Literature and Education, the Government of India conferred the prestigious Padma Bhushan award on Ma. Nanda ji in 2018.

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangha (HSS) of USA was blessed with his fatherly presence. We were inspired by his vast knowledge, unwavering sincerity, boundless energy, and masterful writing. Nanda ji's gentle humor and words, seasoned with wisdom, resonated with all, ensuring both personal growth and service to a greater cause.

Nanda ji's life story is incomplete without a reference to his wife, the late Shrimati Katharine ji Nanda who passed away just a few months before him. Katharine ji supported Nanda ji's work in every respect. They shared the values of love, respect, and strong work ethic. Together they raised a daughter and led a productive life guided by wisdom and light.

His life embodied the Gita's verses:

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥ Gita 2-14॥
यं हि न व्यथयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।
समदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥ Gita 2-15॥

"Our senses offer fleeting joys and sorrows, like passing seasons. One needs to learn to ride these waves and stay unruffled. He, who remained unmoved by joy or sorrow, was a true embodiment of liberation."

Though we grieve his absence, Nanda ji's memory continues to guide us. His commitment to excellence and spreading inspiration becomes our legacy, a torch we carry forward with unwavering dedication.

Chitra Javadekar, Ph.D

Shakha: Azad Shakha MA

Hobbies: baking, gardening, and reading

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh



हिन्दू स्वयंसेवक संघ

NORTH WEST

CENTRAL PACIFIC

MIDWEST

NORTH EAST

GREAT LAKES

PACIFIC SOUTH WEST

SOUTH WEST

MID ATLANTIC

SOUTH EAST

PRERANA^{e-zine}

AN INSPIRATION TO HINDU WOMEN

Music is the celestial sound, and it is sound that controls the whole universe, not atomic vibrations.
Sound energy, sound power, is much, much greater than any other power in the world.

~ Swami Satchidananda

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