

SIGNIFICANCE OF GURUPURNIMA

Guru Purnima Lecture by Swami Paramarthananda

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NOTE: Swami Paramarthananda has not verified the transcription of talks.
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Significance of Gurupūrnima

sadāsiva samārambhām sankarāchārya madhyamām
asmad āchārya paryantām vande guru paramparām

Gurupūrnima is a significant and important day especially, for the **Sanyāsis**. Therefore, it is well known function among Sanyāsis and also among those people who are associated with Sanyāsis. For the other people, this day is not that well known.

The significance of Gurupūrnima or for that matter, any function in our tradition, can be known only when we know the prescribed Vēdic lifestyle. Once upon a time, we were **Vaidikās** and we were closely following the lifestyle prescribed by the Vēdās. That is why, our lifestyle is called **Vaidika Dharmaha** or **Sanātana Dharmaha**.

The lifestyle prescribed by the Vēdās is known as **Varnāshrama Dharmaha**. **Varna** means the fourfold division of the society which is now notoriously known as the Caste System. It is **Varna Dharmaha**. The other is **Āshrama Dharmaha** - The lifestyle based upon the four stages of life such as the student's life, householder's life, a hermit's life and a monk's life.

Of this **Varnāshrama Dharma**, **Varna Dharma** is primarily meant for social harmony. It is primarily keeping the society in view and an individual's duty in the society. The individual plays only a secondary role, but society is given prominence in Varna Dharma.

When it comes to **Āshrama Dharma**, which is our way of life with regard to various stages, the individual growth is given the prominence and the society comes to a secondary position. In **Varna Dharma**, society is prominent and individual is subservient. In **Āshrama Dharma**, individual is prominent and society is kept as a secondary thing.

If Varna Dharma and Āshrama Dharma are both followed, then social growth as well as the individual growth will be taken care of. This is the scheme prescribed by the Vēdās and by the secondary scriptures called

the [Smṛuti](#), [Itihāsa](#), [Purānās](#) etc. Therefore, we can understand the significance of many of the things that we do, only if we keep the Varnāshrama Dharmaha's scheme in mind.

But unfortunately, the present situation is that the Varnāshrama Scheme has almost collapsed. Whether you take Varna Dharma (caste system) or the Āshrama Dharma, both of them have almost collapsed. Therefore, we find that we are not able to see the significance of many of our functions, rituals or Pūja.

They appear to be insignificant, they appear to be irrelevant or sometimes, they even appear to be mockery. For example, during Upanayana, they have an arrangement where the Mama (the uncle) has to carry the boy before the Upanayanam. This ritual was enjoyable in those days because the Upanayanam was done at the seventh year.

Now, the Upanayanam is done just before wedding or in some communities, during the morning of the wedding. Therefore, at the age of 25 or 30, imagine the uncle trying to carry this boy of 75 kilos! Similarly, they have [Kanyakā Dānam](#) during which the daughter has to sit on the lap of father. If she sits on the father's lap at the age of 35, the father will collapse.

Thus, you find many of the things that we do now appear to be insignificant and irrelevant. Therefore, gradually it becomes more mechanical and after one or two generations, they fade away. If they fade away and a different lifestyle is taken, you cannot say it right or wrong. Now, nothing is normal, nothing is abnormal because you cannot decide what is normal and what is abnormal.

Normal means that which is in keeping with a norm. That which violates the norm is abnormal. **Now, what is the norm to decide any action to be right or wrong?** Varnāshrama scheme was the norm in those days and keeping the Varnāshrama Dharma, we can say certain actions are right, certain actions are wrong; certain actions are normal or abnormal.

When the Varnāshrama scheme itself is either collapsed or collapsing, you do not have any norm to decide if something is wrong or right. For example, when somebody is singing, how do you know whether it is Apashruti or in keeping with Shruti? You can judge if some singing is in keeping with Shruti or Apashruti only when you have got a Shruti. There is a Tambura or a Shruti Petti behind.

Then, the Tambura becomes a norm. Based on that, you can say whether the song is in Shruti or Apashruti. For example, one thing that is happening prevalently is the so called, inter-caste marriage, inter-community marriage, inter-religious marriage which is disturbing many parents.

Now, the parents want to convince the children regarding its normality or rightness. But the problem is that if they have to convince the youngsters that this is an abnormal thing then, they have to first talk about the normal. If we have to talk about abnormal and normal, we have to talk about the norm. **What is the norm?** The norm is **Varnāshrama Dharma**.

Once we are convinced about the Varnāshrama Dharma, we can say whether the inter-caste, inter-religious marriage is right or wrong. Now, when Varnāshrama Dharma is not at all functioning, you find that when the parents try to talk with the children, they are not able to convince at all because they don't know what the norm is. To convince, they have to talk about the Varnāshrama Dharmaha.

They have to put the Tambura first to show the Apashruti. The moment you put the Tambura to point out that other person has got Apashruti, I discover one terrible thing. That is, I find my singing is more Apashruti than the so called, Shishya's singing. Therefore, once the parents try to bring in Varnāshrama Dharma norm, the parents discover or the intelligent children ask parents - **what about your life and activities now?**

They find that the present parents are not leading a normal life in keeping with Varnāshrama Dharma. Their very profession is not according to **Varna Dharma** and their daily activities are not in keeping **Grihastha Dharma**. Therefore, when they are not keeping the norm, you find that they are not able to talk about normality or abnormality.

It is because the significance of maintaining the caste, the significance of maintaining religion, the significance of maintaining the community you can discover only when you see **Varna Āshrama Vyavastha**. This is true with regard to anything. This is true with regard to **Gurupūrnima** also.

It is because here also, you will often find that it has become some kind of a ritual only. In the Four Āshramās, the most important Āshramās are only two. One is **Grihastha Āshrama** and another is **Sanyāsa Āshrama**. **Brahmacharya Āshrama** is only a preparatory step for Grihastha Āshrama.

Therefore, Brahmacharya Āshrama can be included in Grihastha Āshrama. Similarly, **Vānaprastha Āshrama** is only a preparatory step for **Sanyāsa Āshrama** and therefore, Vānaprastha Āshrama can be included in Sanyāsa Āshrama. Therefore, there are only two important Āshramās. One is Grihastha and another is Sanyāsa.

One is **Pravrutti Dharmaha** and another is **Nivrutti Dharmaha**. For following Pravrutti Dharma or Grihastha Āshrama lifestyle, they follow the **Pūrva Bhāga** of the Vēda, the first portion of Vēda namely, the **Karma Kānda**, the ritualistic section. Thus, Pūrva Bhāga, otherwise known as **Dharma Shāstra**, becomes the norm for the Grihasthās.

For Sanyāsis, the primary norm is the **Uttara Bhāga** or the final portion or the Vēdāntic portion. Now, the scriptures prescribe lifestyle and duties for both the Grihasthās as well as Sanyāsis. In this way, the Sanyāsis also have got their own Achārās, their own Anushthāna, and their own duties.

Sanyāsa Āshrama is not totally giving up of Achāra Anushthāna. Sanyāsa Āshrama is changing the Achāra Anushthāna from one particular method to another particular method. To symbolize this, in the tradition, they had a **Danda** in the case of a Sanyāsi.

For a Grihastha, they had the **Yagnyōpavītam**, the tuft etc., which symbolize the Grihastha Āshrama Dharma or way of life. It is a symbolic representation of the norms that he has to follow. In the case of Sanyāsi, he gives up Yagnyōpavītam and he gives up Shikha or tuft. Therefore, in his case, his duties have to be symbolized by something else. Therefore, he kept the Danda.

What does Danda mean? Initially, they had **Tridanda** and later, they come to **Eka Danda Sanyāsa**. In **Tridanda Sanyāsa**, they have to follow three disciplines - **Kāya Danda**, **Vāk Danda**, **Manō Danda**. He must be disciplined physically - in eating, in speaking, in activity, in rest, in sleep, in waking etc. It is called **Kāya Danda**.

Vāk Danda is discipline at the level of speech. The most difficult and most important is **Manō Danda**. **Danda** means discipline. Having gained them, he has to come to **Eka Danda**. Eka Danda indicates one primary discipline namely, **Gnyāna Dandam**. Gnyāna - the pursuit of **Shravana**, **Manana** and **Nidhidhyāsanam**.

Along with that, they kept certain rituals and other disciplines like **Pārāyanam**, **Tarpanam**, **Omkāra Japa**, **Upanishad Pārāyanam**, **Shankara Bhāshya Pārāyanam** etc. Once upon a time, I was wondering why Sanyāsi also has so many disciplines. Then only, I understood that it is required for two reasons. One reason is that in the olden days, a person must have followed certain **Achāra** and **Anushthānam** like **Sandhyā Vandanam**, **Pūja**, **Japa** etc, during Grihastha Āshrama.

Having followed certain Achārams and Anushthānams, if he drops all of them suddenly, there will be a big vacuum. It is like a man retiring. It is very difficult to handle him. We may not know how to handle sudden vacuum. Therefore, they kept some more Japa.

But Gāyatri was replaced by Omkāra, Stōtra Pārāyanam was replaced by Upanishad Pārāyanam. The disciplines in the household duties were replaced by disciplines in the Āshrama like [Guru Susrūsha](#), [Āshrama Sēva](#) etc. The only difference is that all the Achārās were in keeping with [Vēdānta Shravana Manana Nidhidhyāsanam](#).

Instead of Rāmaya Namaha, it may be Aham Brahmāsmi Mantra, or Omkāra Mantra, or Sōham Mantra. Therefore, one reason was to remove the vacuum. The second reason is that even after taking Sanyāsa, one need not necessarily have all the [Sādhana Chatushtaya Sampatti](#).

I am using this terminology thinking that all of you are students. One may or may not have all the necessary qualifications for spirituality after taking Sanyāsa. If he is lacking the purity of mind and outwardly, he has got a Sanyāsi dress, it can prove to be dangerous. As Krishna said in third chapter -

**karmēndriyāni samyamyā ya āstē manasā smaran
indriyārthān vimūdhātmā mithyāchārasya uchyatē**

He can become a hypocritical Sanyāsi. If a Sanyāsi has to purify his mind, he cannot do daily rituals because he has renounced. Therefore, he is given certain Sanyāsa Āshrama rituals, Sanyāsa Āshrama Pārāyanam, Sanyāsa Āshrama Japa etc, for the sake of filling up the missing qualification.

Among the many types of duties, one of the duties given is the [Vyāsapūrnima](#) or [Gurupūrnima Pūja Anushthānam](#). This is a primary duty given to a Sanyāsi. Sanyāsis are of different types. A [Tridandi Sanyāsi](#), a Sanyāsi who has three Dandās has to do physical Pūja, but once a person comes to [Eka Danda Sanyāsa](#) then, it is said that he need not and should not do the physical Pūja on Gurupūrnima day.

He has to do [Mānasa Vyāsa Pūja](#) because he is supposed to be advanced by that time. Therefore, either [Mānasa](#) or [Kāyika](#), physically or

mentally, a Pūja is to be done and the Pūja is dedicated to [Vyāsāchārya](#). Along with this Pūja, [Chāturmāsya Vratam](#) also begins.

The significance of this Pūja and the Vratam will be clear only when [Varnāshrama Dharmaha](#) norm is kept. It is because according to the Vēdās, once a person has become an [Eka Danda Sanyāsi](#), he is not supposed to stay in one place. Therefore, he is supposed to move about from one place to another. He has to be [Parivrājakaha](#).

That is why they say [Paramahamsa Parivrājakāchāryaha](#). Now, if you see the present day, most of the Sanyāsis are attached to some institution or some Āshrama. Therefore, [Parivrājakam Dharma](#) is also compromised. Like any other Āshrama Dharma, even in Sanyāsa Āshrama Dharma there are lot of compromises and changes.

Therefore, there is no question of moving about. When they were moving about regularly, they had to stop their moving now because the rainy season starts. It is rainy season all over and many insects will be there on road, many small plants might have come and he might step over them. Therefore, he has to stop moving.

Not only that, but wherever he stops, whichever village is there at that time, in that village, he has to follow the Gurupūrnima function with the help of local village people. **What does that mean?** The venue of Gurupūrnima can never be preplanned because a moving Sanyāsi doesn't know where he is going to stop during rainy season.

What about these days? First of all, the Sanyāsis don't move. Therefore, there is not much relevance for that. Again, venue is also fixed well in advance. **Therefore, which is normal which is abnormal?** We will find that we cannot talk about normality or abnormality, but what we do is, according to modern society, we shift the significance and continue that.

The original significance is gone because Sanyāsis are not moving and again it is preplanned and again, Eka Danda Sanyāsis also do the physical Pūja. All are abnormal. We are still more abnormal as we do

not have even one Danda. **Which group do we come under?** There is another group. There are groups in **Paramahansa Sanyāsis**.

One is **Amukhya Paramahansa** called **Vividishā Sanyāsi** another is **Mukhya Parmahansa** who is called **Vidvat Sanyāsi**. An **Amukhya Paramahansa** carries an **Eka Danda** and follows everything because he is doing Shraavanam, Mananam. After finishing Shravana, Manana, Nidhidhyāsana, he can become a **Mukhya Paramahansa**.

When he becomes a Mukhya Paramahansa, it is said that he need not have a Danda. But at the same time, we cannot claim ourselves to be Mukhya Paramahansa because the one who gives up **Danda** is supposed to give up **Vastra** and become an **Avadhūta**. Whether you take Grihastha's Dharma, whether you take Sanyāsa Dharma, there is no norm which is prevalent now.

Therefore, different things are happening. But what we can do is that we can attribute a particular significance according to modern time. That significance which I would say is that one day has to be allotted to thank Vyāsāchārya. Vyāsāchārya has done so much to us. Therefore, we have to thank Vyāsāchārya one day especially, since we are studying the Vēdānta.

If you ask how to study Vēdānta, Vyāsāchārya alone has clearly presented in written form, the method of studying Vēdānta in his original **Brahma Sūtrāni**. **Brahma Sūtra** is the most important one for a Vēdāntic student because the Vēdāntic methodology has been beautifully presented by Vyāsāchārya. Therefore, we allot one day to remember Vyāsāchārya.

I remember Vyāsāchārya because I am able to teach in a particular method because of Vyāsāchāryā's Brahma Sutra contribution. You are able to understand because of this methodology that I use. Therefore, you are also indirectly indebted to Vyāsāchārya. Therefore, this day is significant for one purpose - That is, we are indebted to Vyāsāchārya. Therefore, we remember the Slōkās -

vyāsāya vishnu rūpāya vyāsa rūpāya vishnavē
namō vai brahma nidhayē vāsishtāya namō namaha

shankaram shankarāchāryam kēshavam bādarāyanam
sutra bhāshya kratau vandē bhagvantau punah punaha

Thus, we worship Vyāsāchārya and associated with that, we worship all the Āchāryās. Shankarāchārya is also included, our Āchāryās are also included and **Sadāsiva Samārambhām**, **Dakshināmūrthy** is included. Therefore, I would say this is the day of expressing gratitude to Vyāsāchārya, the Guru who presented Vēdāntic methodology in a systematic form.

**Pūrnmadah Pūrnamidam Pūrnāth Pūrnāmudachyatē.
Pūrnasya Pūrnāmādāya Pūrnāmēvāvasishyatē..**

Om shānti shānti shāntihi



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