

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

By Rajendra Prasad, MD, FRCPC

(in Tamil by Mr. L. Jawahar)

I constantly learn from observation and studying. Over 2000 years ago Avvayar said “Katrathu Kaimannalavu; Kallathathu Ulakalavu” (What we know is very little. What we do not know is as big as this earth!). I constantly ask myself questions and try to find the answers to become a better human being. The ultimate goal in life is to get salvation or moksha. I feel that the following questions and answers will be helpful to the reader.

1. What is Dussehra?

Dasha (10) Hara (kill/defeat) is a Sanskrit word, which means removal of ten undesirable qualities..

- * Kama vasana (Lust)
- * Krodha (Anger)
- * Moha (Attachment)
- * Lobha (Greed)
- * Mada (Over Pride)
- * Matsara (Jealousy)
- * Swartha (Selfishness)
- * Anyaaya (Injustice)
- * Amanavta (Cruelty)
- * Ahankara (Ego)

'Vijaydashami' means Victory over these ten binding qualities.

2. What is the eight fold path of Buddha?

Right View

Right Intentions

Right Speech

Right Action

Right Livelihood

Right Effort

Right Concentration

Right Mindfulness

Buddha wanted his disciples to follow his teachings (rather than follow him), and become enlightened.

3. What are the five koshas or sheaths?

We human beings are made up of a) Annamaya kosha or the material body which is constantly replaced by the food we eat b) Pranamaya kosha or the energy which keeps our heart and lungs and the rest of the body function, like a battery in a toy c) Manomaya kosha or our entire nervous system d) Vignanamaya kosha or intellect e) Anandamaya kosha or pure joy.

Our inner most core is pure joy or ananda. Usually we are not aware or forget that we should be joyful all the time and become sad or depressed because of external forces, called stress. We should consciously develop a barrier to prevent external forces from affecting our inner core of pure joy. Now you know why every swamiji assumes the name of ananda when ordained. Happiness is within us and we have to learn to be joyful all the time. Happiness is not in America or India. It is within each one of us.

Can you name the country which has gross national happiness index (GNH)? It was initiated by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck IN 1972. The aim is for all the Bhutanese to be quite happy all the time, based on Buddhist spiritual values. It is enshrined in the constitution and is taught in schools.

4. Is it a sin to earn a lot of wealth?

No. It is not a sin to earn a lot of wealth as long as it is created in a moral way. Making lot of money makes life more comfortable. You have to know that being rich may not give you happiness but will give you comforts. Accumulating wealth and sitting on a pile of money is a sin.

With money you can help the poor and disadvantaged people in the society. Thiruvalluvar says in Adhikaram Egai (kural 226): “Atrar azhipasi theerthal ahdoruvar pettran porulvippazhi”. You have to relieve the hunger of poor people and that is the right place for your wealth.

Also please do not forget to help your school. This will help educate new students. Education will lift people out of poverty.

Swami Vivekananda told us “Feel my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad; then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy”.

5. Learn a lot about India and there is a lot to learn about.

I will give you some examples. Diamonds were first mined and cut in India in the 4th century B.C. Chaturanga or chess originated in India during the Gupta Empire in the 6th century. Brahmi numerals were used in India in 3rd century B.C. The Brahmi numerals are followed by the Hindu numerals including 0 and the decimal system. The Arabs took this to the west and was called Arab numerals. Angus Madison, a British economist has documented that India was the richest country in the world from 1 AD to 1700 AD, until the British looted India. The English East India Co was established on Dec 31, 1600 chartered by Elizabeth I. The company was dissolved in 1874. Sanskrit speaking people migrated to all over Europe and India. Sanskrit is the root language for European languages like German, Latin, Lithuanian, as well as modern Indian languages. Sanskrit is very rich as a language. For example Arthasastra was written by the great genius, Chanakya in 330 B.C. Chandragupta Mourya was a student of Chanakya. Using these principles defeated the tyrannical rule of the Nanda kings and established the Mourya dynasty which ruled over the country of Maghada for 136 years, the golden period. Samraat Ashoka was a Mourya emperor. Mouryas ruled with fairness and justice following Arthasasthra. Beej Ganit originated in India and later called algebra. The so called Pythagorean Theorem was developed by 12th century Indian mathematician Bhaskara. Hatha yoga and meditation which originated in India are practiced by millions of people around the globe. More Indians should practice yoga and meditation. Yoga keeps your body flexible. Meditation decreases stress; decreases blood pressure; helps you sleep better; helps you focus better; improves immunity and help fight diseases; makes you happier; improves brain function, etc.

The greatest thing I have done in the USA is to join Chinmaya Mission in 1987. My wife and I have learnt a lot from the mission by learning spirituality and Hindu scriptures. Our children and now our grand children are students of the mission. In the ancient past people who were eager to learn our Vedas and Upanishads had to go long distances including the Himalayas. Nowadays it is easy for anyone to join a mission like Chinmaya Mission or Ramakrishna Mission or others. The opportunity available now is amazing. We learnt a great program called 20-20-20 from Swami Chidananda in the 80s. Since then I have been following this regularly. When I wake up early in the morning, I meditate for 20 minutes and then do hatha yoga for 20 minutes. I also walk for 20 minutes. Before I go to bed I read our scriptures for 20 minutes. The results of doing is superb and cannot be just explained. You have to do it yourself to experience the benefits.

6. Who is superior; who is inferior?

No one is superior and no one is inferior. Never call anyone inferior. It is a sin. All the Hindus should study the Bhagavat Geeta and at least one Upanishad, assimilate the teachings and practice them. In the past few hundred years Hinduism has become corrupted. Please understand that caste is based on your job and it is not by birth. In the Vedic periods anyone can become a priest or a warrior or a merchant or a peasant. Any Hindu would marry another Hindu. Chapter 4 of Bhagavat Gita states very clearly the following:

You have to understand one thing. Everyone cannot do everything. A raja cannot be a doctor. A doctor cannot be a peasant. So based on one's guna that person takes up a certain job. Guna means attitude or bhavana. It is not based on birth. We have been practicing Hinduism against the teachings of Lord Krishna by discriminating between different castes. It is sinful. It has to stop now. God is in everyone and how can a person be inferior to another? You have to think and assimilate this point and practice it. Never call anyone inferior. Never.

This is a true story in the life of the great guru Adisankara. Once he was walking along the narrow lanes of Kasi with his disciples. On the opposite side a dirty fellow was coming with his dogs. One of the disciples of Adisankara tells him to move to the side to make room for His Holiness. That fellow asked the disciple whether he should move his body or the soul. Immediately Adisankara understood the greatness of that person and fell at his feet and asked for his forgiveness. This story illustrates the fact that everyone has a body and a soul and so no one can be superior or inferior.

7. What do you know about KhanAcademy.org?

This is a fascinating story of Mr. Salman Khan born in the USA to parents from India and Bangladesh. He is brilliant person and earned three degrees from the top ranked college called Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in mathematics, electrical engineering and computer science. He also received the degree of MBA from Harvard Business School. In 2004 his cousin Nadia asked for help with mathematics. He tutored her using Yahoo!'s Doodle Notepad. Nadia's friends and his other relatives loved it and started using his tuition. As it became popular he uploaded his tutorials into You Tube. As it became very popular, he quit his regular job and started a non-profit organization called Khan Academy. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Google, Carlos Slim Foundation and others have donated millions of dollars. All the videos are available free of charge at khanacademy.org. Math, science, computer programming, history, art, economics, and more are offered free of charge as online classes. Khan Academy can be viewed in over 20 languages including Hindi, Bengali and Telugu. I did not find Tamil in my review.

I have a dream. We can start our own Teachers at SKP school teach almost daily for many hours. We can find out which teachers will volunteer to be videographed. Then we can start a website into which these sessions can be uploaded. We will have something similar to You Tube. These can be used by any student who can go on line. Students living in remote places and villages can access these studies using a computer. I am sure there will be students who cannot afford to have a personal computer or Wi-Fi. In those places we can give charge to retired teachers to make this happen. I hope that the head master and teachers would look into this seriously. Then together we can build a castle under my dream and make it a reality. It will greatly benefit the society.

8. What do I advice for students?

It is not a sin to make lot of money as long as you do it in ethical ways. When you start earning save at least 10% of the income every month. In India, one of the best investments would be investing in the top 5 mutual funds ranked by Mutualfundindia.com in the past twelve months.

Hold your investments for one year and one day (to avoid taxation) you reallocate your money to 5 top new funds. When you retire you will be a millionaire! The investment is liquid and so you can sell them anytime if you need money. Give 10% of your income to the needy and the under privileged. The Mormons in the USA do that as a rule. Most Americans donate generously.

Borrow one hour from your sleep. Wake up early in the morning when the world is quiet and do meditation daily (you can cut two hours of sleep by meditating for twenty minutes); followed by hatha yoga; read our scriptures like Gita, Ramayan, Srimath Bhagavatham, Thirukural, about Adi Sankara and his writings, about Ramana Maharishi, Sri Arobindo, Vivekananda; learn Sanskrit, music, swimming, karate or kung fu for defending yourself and family. (According to Shaolin temple Bhodhidharma of Thanjavur taught the Shaolin Chinese monks kung fu)

In conclusion, practice the 20-20-20 program daily. Follow the eight fold path of Buddha. God has given us this life to enjoy on earth. Enjoy every minute of it. Do not worry about the past mistakes as you cannot go back and correct them. Do not worry about the future as we do not know what would happen. Always remain happy. Bhagawan Sri Sayta Sai Baba said "Help ever! Hurt never! You will succeed in life with the blessings of Sri Kannika Parameswari!

I am always indebted to you for your love and affection