

**Thoughts on**  
**Sandhya Vandanam**

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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 seems 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 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". 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. *Sruti*, which is otherwise known as Vedas and Upanishads has defined governing principles for life. On the other hand, *Smritis* have detailed them and provided useful guidelines for day-to-day living. The *Dharma Sastras* provide these details and specify *Saamaanya* and *Vishesha dharmas*. They also point to *Nitya* and *Naimittika karmas* that everyone must follow.

*Sandhya Vandanam* is the basic and most fundamental *Nitya karma* to be followed by Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas belonging to all the four *ashramas*. 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 Sandhya 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 *Gayatri mantra* and *Sandhya Vandanam*. Therefore, while compiling various ideas I have quoted generously from earlier writings, Dharma Sastra 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 *Sandhya Vandanam*. The first is a two part essay in Kannada by His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidya Teertha Maha Swamigal of Sringeri Sharada Peetham. One essay was on Gayatri Mahima and the other on Sandhya Mahima. These essays were subsequently translated into Tamil by Changanur Subramaniya Aiyar Trust, Coimbatore and published in 1999 by Sri Sharada Trust, Bangalore.

The second source is a *bhashya* on *Sandhya Vandanam* by Srivatsa Somadeva Sarma, the founder of *Vaidika Dharma Vardhini*, Chennai. This *bhashya* was published in Tamil in 1952. The third source was the *Sandhya Vandanam Bhasya* by "Anna" and published by Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai in 1956. I was also greatly benefitted by the book "*Samkshepa Dharma Sastra*" 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 Chandrashekara Bharathi Swamigal of Sringeri Sharada 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 *Sanatana 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*

*May 2013*



# Thoughts on *Sandhya Vandanam*

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## Sandhya Vandanam

### Introduction

*Upanayanam* is performed in order to transform an individual into *Dwija*. *Dwijas* means twice born. Since Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas are supposed to be initiated to Gayathri *Upadesa* 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 Upadesa*, the individual, henceforth known as *Brahmachari*, is blessed and initiated into spiritual pursuits in his life.

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

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः कर्मणा जायते द्विजः ।

Performing *Sandhya Vandanam* three times a day is an important *Samskara* 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 *Pranayama* and *Japa*) of *Sandhya Vandanam* are being recognized as simple yet powerful tools to lead a healthy life by many today. Thus, performing *Sandhya Vandanam* with fervor not only bestows on an individual *Brahma Tejas* and spiritual prosperity but also healthy life that begets material prosperity.

In *Srimad Bhagavatam*, there is a wonderful description of the *Upanayanam* of *Vaamana* (fourth *Avataara* of *Vishnu* among the *Dasavataaras*). *Surya* initiated *Gayatri* mantra to *Vaamana*; *Brihaspati* gave *Yajna Upavita*; *Bhooma Devi* gave *Deer skin* for *Aasana*; *Soma* gave the *Palaasa Dhanda*, *Atiti* (*Vaamana's* Mother) gave *Kaupeena*, *Heavenly Gods* gave *Umbrella*, *Brahma* gave *Kamandal*, *Sapta Rishis* gave *Darbha* grass, *Saraswati* gave *Japa Maala*, *Kubhera* gave *Bhiksha Paatra* and *Uma Devi* (*Annapoorani*) offered *Bhiksha*.

### Importance of Sun worship

Everyone is aware that the presiding deity of worship through *Sandhya Vandanam* is the Sun God. Therefore, 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. The celebrated *Aruna Prasna*, which is a part of the *Taitrya Aranyaka* of *Yajur Veda* is a hymn to the Sun God, which is recited with fervor even today (also known as *Surya Namaskaara*). Even in day-to-day Yoga practices,



*Surya Namaskaara* is an integral aspect. All these point to the centrality of the Sun in many worldly matters.

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 Gita<sup>1</sup>, " ... 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. ..."

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).

In *Prasna* Upanishad, in response to a query, from Katyayana Kabandi one of the six disciples, "Wherefrom the creatures are born?", Sage *Pippalada* replies that it comes out of matter (*Rayi*) and energy (*Praana*). The sage further explains that the Sun is verily the life and the Moon is the matter.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Swami Ranganathananda (2000), "The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita: Volume 1", pp 356 – 357.

<sup>2</sup> See *Prasna Upanishad* (1.3 to 1.5) for more details on this.

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 bare 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.

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 Surya Narayana. It is the most easily and directly approachable *Pratyaksha Devata* known to mankind.

It is no wonder that Sage *Agastya* recited the *Aditya Hrudaya Stotra* for Sri Rama and inspired him to pray to the Sun God before vanquishing Ravana in the battle field. The *Aditya Hrudaya Stotra* that appears in the *Yuddha Khanda* of Valmiki Ramayana 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 *Sandhya Vandanam* is all about.

### **Sandhya 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 turn out 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 "*Sruti, Smrti, Dharma Sastras, Itihasas, Puranas etc.*" address this issue in detail and provides guidelines for us to attain eternal bliss. There are several prescriptions in the *Dharma Sastras*, often known as *Saamanyam Dharma* and *Vishesham 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 Gayatri mantra. In order to get initiated with Gayatri mantra upanayanam must be

performed. Gayatri *upaasana* through Sandhya Vandanam prepares an individual and qualifies him to receive the knowledge contained in vedas. Doing Sandhya Vandanam first creates the eligibility for a brahmin to do all rituals following it. Rituals done without doing Sandhya Vandanam is regarded as fruitless by *Dharma Sastras*. Thus, Sandhya Vandanam forms the basis or regarded as the foundation for all other vedic rituals.

In the puranas it is mentioned that Gayatri 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 ॥

One of the core prescriptions for the *Dwijas* pertaining to all the four *ashramas*<sup>3</sup> is to perform *Sandhya Vandanam*. Our ancestral prescriptions mention six *karmas* to be done every day and it includes taking bath, doing *sandhya Vandanam*, *japa*, *homa*, *deva pooja* and *vaishwa devam*:

सन्ध्या स्नानं जपो होमो देवतानाञ्च पूजनम् ।

आदित्यं वैश्वदेवञ्च षट्कर्माणि दिने दिने ॥

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

विप्रो वृक्षः तस्य मूलं हि सन्ध्या ।

मूले छिन्ने नैव पुष्पं फलं वा ॥

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

ऋषयो दीर्घं सन्ध्यत्वात् दीर्घमायुरवाप्नुयुः ।

प्रज्ञां यशश्च कीर्तिञ्च ब्रह्मवर्चसमेव च ॥

Our sacred texts suggest that one can attain salvation through *Karma*, *Bhakti*, *Yoga* or *Gnana*. Sandhya Vandanam has all these aspects and proper understanding and

<sup>3</sup> The four ashramas are *Brahmachari*, *Grahasta*, *Vaanaprastha* and *Sanyasi*. All are supposed to perform *Sandhya vandanam*. The practice for *Sanyasis* differs from the other three ashramas.

steadfast approach of doing Sandhya Vandanam can help an individual attain salvation using any of these. The above four aspects are found in Sandhya Vandanam as indicated below:

- **Karma:** The three mantras in Sandhya 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:** Pranayama is an important element of Yoga practice
- **Bhakti:** The offering of *Argya* (अर्घ्य प्रदानम्), points to the Bhakti aspect
- **Gnana:** The *Aikya Anusandhanam* (ऐक्य अनुसन्धानम्) mantra (असावादित्यो ब्रह्म) enables one to pursue the path of Gnana

Yajnavalkya asks when Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva have been observing this how can a Brahmin ignore this karma?

ब्रह्मणोपास्यते सन्ध्या विष्णुना शंकरेण च ।

कस्मान्नोपासयेद्देवी श्रेयस्कामो द्विजोत्तमः ॥

Rama and Krishna, our gotra rishis (Vashishta, Angiras, Athri, Kashyapa, Gautama, Bharadwaja etc.) have all performed Sandhya Vandanam. Authors of Sutras such as Aapasthamba, Bodhaayana, Ashvalaayana, great kings such as Janaka, Bhaktas and our Acharyas have all observed this karma. Valmiki and Vyasa have mentioned the greatness of Sandhya Karma in Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively. In *Kumarasambhava*, Kalidasa mentions that Shiva performed Sandhya Vandanam.

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

गायत्री चैव वेदांश्च तुलयाऽतोलयत् प्रभुः ।

एकश्चतुरो वेदान् सांगांश्च सपदक्रमान् ॥

एकतश्चैव गायत्री तुल्यरूपा तु सा स्मृता ॥

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

सायं प्रातस्तथा सन्ध्या ये विप्रा न ह्युपासते ।

तानेव धार्मिको राजा शूद्रकर्मसु योजयेत् ॥

Performing Sandhya 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 *sloka*:

सन्ध्यामुपासते ये तु सततं संशितव्रताः ।

विधूयपापास्ते यान्ति ब्रह्मलोकमानमयम् ॥

It is therefore amply clear that the dwijas derive their stature, credibility and authenticity only by observing sandhya Vandanam karma on a daily basis. Moreover so much importance has been given to Sandhya Vandanam. Our ancestors have also praised highly of the virtues and benefits of performing Sandhya Vandanam. Despite all these if we decide to develop anti-faith (अश्रद्धा) towards Sandhya 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?

### **Timely observance of Sandhya Vandanam Karma**

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

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

शुचिर्वा अशुचिर्वा काले सन्ध्यां समाचरेत् ॥

The shastric 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam lies in performing at the right time, at the minimum we must wash our hands and feet and then do Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam, then the *Karta* is expected

to take bath, perform Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam even when they had the weapons in their hands.

If for some reason we have missed the Sandhya Vandanam and the time for the next Sandhya Vandanam has arrived, then we should not think that we can ignore the previous one. After doing the Sandhya Vandanam for the stipulated time, we must do the Sandhya 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 Sandhya, then in the morning time we must first do the morning Sandhya Vanadana and after that perform the evening Sandhya Vandanam, which we missed.

According to Yajnavalkya morning Sandhya should not be done after sunrise and evening Sandhya 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 Sandhya:

नक्षत्रज्योतिरारभ्य सूर्यस्योदय दर्शनात् ।

प्रातसन्ध्येति तां प्राहुः श्रुतयो मुनिसत्तमाः ॥

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

रात्र्यन्त्ययाम नाडी द्वे सन्ध्यादि कालः उच्यते ।

दर्शनाद्रविरेखायाः तदन्तो मुनिभिः स्मृतः ॥

Another sloka brings this aspect in a different fashion. According to this, performing the morning Sandhya 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 ॥

On the other hand, performing evening Sandhya 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 ॥

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

आज्योतिषो दर्शनात् सन्धि, ज्यातिषी भानुतारे

It is clear that the word Sandhya denotes the junction (or unison) of two (in this case day and night). Therefore, there is a possibility to come to a conclusion that Sandhya Vandanam has to be done twice only; once during the Sandhya of night and dawn in the morning and again during the Sandhya 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 Maadhyaanika can be justified by this argument which appears rational. However, the correct practice is to do Sandhya Vandanam three times a day. According to Atri, Dwijas always need to perform Sandhya Vandanam three times:

सन्ध्यात्रयं तु कर्तव्यं द्विजेनात्मविदा सदा ।

This is further clarified by the following sloka attributed to Sankha, which suggests that morning sandhya must be done when the stars are still visible in the sky, the Maadhyaanika after the Maadhyaanika *Snaanam* and the evening sandhya while the sun is still in the sky:

प्रातःसन्ध्यां सनक्षत्रां मध्यमां स्नानकर्मणि ।

सादित्यां पश्चिमां सन्ध्यां उपासीत यथा विधि ॥

## Important components of Sandhya Vandanam

A person may be able to survive without limbs, eyes etc. However, without the vital force *Praana* he/she cannot even survive for a moment. In the same manner, there are certain vital components of Sandhya Vandanam. One must know these and perform them even when the situation for performing Sandhya Vandanam is very adverse. These are as follows: *Argya Pradhanaam* (अर्घ्यं प्रदानम्), *Aika Anusandhaanam* (ऐक्य अनुसन्धानम्), *Gayatri Japa* and *Surya Upastanam*. This is brought out succinctly by the following sloka:

अपरेतु अर्घ्यदानम् सन्ध्याध्यानं गायत्रीजपः उपस्थानं च प्रधानमिति वदन्ति ॥

Of these the first two form part of the *poorvaanga* and the later two form part of the *uttaraanga*. In *Aikya Anusandhaanam*, the *Mahavakya* of the corresponding Veda is included. As the name suggests, this is done to contemplate the oneness with the Brahman, which the *Maha Vakyas* proclaim. All the preceding mantras in the *poorvaanga* are meant to cleanse the mind and the body leading to performing these two important components of Sandhya Vandanam.

The importance of *Argya Pradhanaam* is highlighted by the following sloka which suggests that even in very adverse conditions *argya* 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 वाऽर्घ्यं मुत्क्षिपेत् ॥

तदभावेऽपि सूर्यस्य ध्यानमेव समाचरेत् ॥

## Overall Structure of Sandhya Vandanam Mantras

Structurally, the *Sandhya Vandanam* is divided into two portions: the *Poorvaanga* and the *Uttaraanga*. The other mantras are organized around the four most important components (*Argya Pradhanaam*, *Aikya Anusandhaanam*, the *Gayatri Japa* and the *Surya Upastanam*) and set as preparatory elements for performing these.

The order in which we utter various mantras during *Sandhya 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 *Sandhya Vandanam*. The first part of *Sandhya Vandanam*, known as *Poorvaanga*, essentially prepares the Brahmachari physically and mentally to eventually offer the *Argya* to the Sun God.

The second part, *Uttaaranga* mainly consists of *Gayatri 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 *Uttaraanga* 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 *Praanaayama* and *Gayatri Japa*. We then rise and complete the *Surya Upastanam*, which is the fourth important aspect of *Sandhya Vandanam*. After the *Surya Upastanam 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.

*Praanaayama and Japa* are the most wonderful prescriptions of *Sandhya 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 *Praanaayama* 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.

### Some aspects of Prayoga in Sandhya Vandanam

While *Aachamanam* is done, after having the water three times while uttering अच्युताय नमः, अनन्ताय नमः and गोविन्दाय नमः<sup>4</sup> we need to wipe the lips twice (each time after wiping the lips we need to clean the hands with water).

*Pranayaama* is done in a three stage process:

*Pooraka*: 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.

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<sup>4</sup> It appears that Rig vedis and those in Andhra do *Aachamanam* four times by uttering *Kesava, Narayana, Madhava and Govinda*.

The suggested proportion of time for these three steps is 1:3:2. Normally, the *pranayaama 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:

*Pooraka:* Start with the first mantra and utter up to *Dhiyo Yona Pracodhayaat*  
(धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्).

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

*Recaka:* Utter one full *Pranayama mantra*.

Reciting in this fashion we would have covered three mantras in one cycle of *Pooraka – Kumbhaka* and *Recaka*. One cycle of *Pooraka – Kumbhaka – Rechaka* constitutes one *Pranayaama*. After completing one pranayama, 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 *pranayaama 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 *Pranayaamas* 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 *Gayatri 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 *pranayaama mantra* nine times) is followed during morning, noon as well as evening *Sandhya Vandanam*. As mentioned before, it has great value in maintaining a healthy life.

The vedic prescription for performing *Argya* is that during *Sandhya* time the vedic scholars stand east facing and offer the *argya* after uttering the *Gayatri mantra*:

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

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

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

After offering the *Argya* we must do *Atma Parishesanam* (आत्म परिषेचनम्) with water after uttering Om Bhur-Bhuvas-Suvaha. We must follow this with *Atma Pradakshinam* (आत्म प्रदक्षिणम्). This is due to the vedic prescription that by doing so we will be able to absolve our sins:

यत्प्रदक्षिणं प्रक्रमन्ति तेन पाप्मानमवधून्वन्ति ।

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

- During morning *Sandhya Vandanam* the *japa* must be performed east facing in a standing posture.
- Many recommend that *Gayathri japa* during *Maadhyaanika* 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 *Sandhya Vandanam*. These are summarized below:

*Poorvaanga* is **never done facing west or south**. Normally, during Morning *Sandhya Vandanam* it is done facing east and during evening *Sandhya Vandanam* it is done facing north. The *poorvanga* of *Maadhyaanika* is normally done east facing. Some others recommend north facing also.

*Uttaraanga* is done in a different fashion. The easiest way to remember the direction for *Uttaraanga* 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 *Uttaraanga* are done with the same directional restriction as applicable for *Poorvaanga*. Also, the *Argya* offered to the Sun in *Poorvaanga* is done using the same direction rule that we follow for the *Uttaraanga*.

*Gayatri Japa* is performed by repeatedly uttering the *Gayatri 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 ।

During all the three times performing japa 1000<sup>5</sup> times is considered superior. If this is not possible japa must be done for 100 times. *Brahmacharis* and *Grahastas* are engaged in several activities pertaining to their *ashrama*. Therefore they can do japa 108 times. On the other hand, *vaanaprasthas* and *sanyasis* are expected to do japa 1008 times. The following sloka explains this:

गृहस्थो ब्रह्मचारी वा शतमष्टोत्तरं जपेत् ।

वानप्रस्थो यतिश्चैव जपेदष्ट सहस्रकम् ॥

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

दशकृत्वस्तु गायत्री मनसैवा शुचिः स्मरेत् ॥

In a practical sense, during unusual contingencies such as travel, urgent or emergency situation or *Aasucha* 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, 54 or 64. However, the procedure popularly followed in several parts of South India is as follows<sup>6</sup>:

|         |                  |
|---------|------------------|
| 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 Gayatri *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 Pratama*, *Ekadasi* and *Poornima*.

<sup>5</sup> All namavalis of Gods are 1000 in number (*Sahasranamas*). 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.

<sup>6</sup> This is the reason for suggesting the number of times *Pranayaama* to be done during morning, noon and evening *Sandhya* as 10, 3 and 6 respectively, as mentioned before.

During morning time both the hands must be kept in *Anjali mudra*<sup>7</sup> at the level of the face while doing the japa. During *Maadhyaanika* it must be performed by keeping the hand in the *Anjali mudra* at the level of the chest and during the evening Sandhya Vandanam the hands must be held at the naval level. At all times, we must cover the hands with the cloth.

Holding the *Yajna Upavita* in hand while doing the japa is not recommended.

Uttering the Gayathri mantra in a manner that is audible (known as *Vachikam*) 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 *Upaamsu*) 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 *Maanasam*) is considered to be a superior method:

उत्तमं मानसं जप्यं उपांशु मध्यम स्मृतम् ।

अधमं वाचिकं प्राहुस्सर्वमन्त्रेषु वै द्विजाः ॥

### Salient Aspects of Prayoga

|                             | Morning                                 | Noon          | Evening     |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------|-------------|
| <b>Poorvaanga Direction</b> | East                                    | East or North | North       |
| <b>Uttaraanga Direction</b> | East                                    | East or North | West        |
| <b>Argya Direction</b>      | East                                    | East or North | West        |
| <b>Argya/Japa Posture</b>   | Standing                                | Standing      | Sitting     |
| <b>Argya Position</b>       | Height equivalent to the Horns of a cow | Chest Level   | Chest Level |
| <b>Japa Position</b>        | Face Level                              | Chest Level   | Naval Level |

<sup>7</sup> *Anjali mudra* is the typical folded hands posture with which we greet our guests in the Indian tradition.

## FAQs on Sandhya Vandanam

### 1. Why should I do Sandhya Vandanam?

*There are three compelling reasons for us to do Sandhya Vandanam.*

- 1. 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. Sandhya 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.*
- 2. Sandhya 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 Pranayaama) 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?*
- 3. A vast number of rishis, learned people and elders have again and again talked about the virtues of Sandhya 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam with earnestness, steadfastness and devotion.*

## 2. Should I always do Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam everyday provides a person 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam. Yaaska 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 भद्रमश्नुते नाकमेति ज्ञानविधूतपाप्मा ॥

*Another sloka 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 पशुर्भारवाही न तस्य फलमश्नुते ।

द्विजस्तथार्थानभिज्ञो न वेदफलमश्नुते ॥

*Therefore, performing Sandhya 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. This does not mean we should simply abandon doing Sandhya 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam?**

*There is a simple rule for this. In Tamil they say<sup>8</sup> “Kaanamal (without seeing), Konaamal (without any angle – in straight line), Kandu (while seeing), Kodu (Give)”. What it means is that the morning Sandhya Vandanam should be done before Sunrise, the Maadhyaanika at 12.00 noon and the evening Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam itself we offer Prayaschitta Argya (Refer to Argya Pradhana in Poorvanga for more details on this).*

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

*Maadhyaanika, 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 Gayatri 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.*

#### **6. I am convinced of the need to do Sandhya Vandanam. But it takes more than 45 minutes to do Sandhya 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?**

*Sandhya Vandanam is a nitya karma and it is a tri-kaala 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.*

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<sup>8</sup> There was one Idaikattu Chittar. He was tending cattle. He apparently said (in Tamil), “Kanamar konamar kandu kodu.”



*Let us look at another issue that also seems to be our nitya anushtana (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:*

1. *By and large people have not complained that it is taking too much time to use the new software.*
2. *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 Sandhya 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, Madhaaynika and Evening Sandhya Vanadana 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 Sandhya Vandanam is for our material as well as spiritual prosperity. Once we get convinced of this these issues will disappear and we will incorporate Sandhya 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya 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 Gayathi japa (at a minimum of 32 times). The poorvanga and other components of Uttranaga can be skipped. One can follow this routine whenever we face such similar difficult situations with respect to doing Sandhya Vandanam.*

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

*Obviously hotels and resorts are not going to provide you with any facilities for performing Sandhya Vandanam. Just as you take with you in your travel kit your toiletries, also carry a minimum set of things for doing Sandhya Vandanam. This includes a small plate, a small Pancha paatra 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 Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam. Is this true? Can I skip during such occasions?**

*During periods of Aasaucha (restrictions for religious practices) we do not do Sandhya Vandanam. But that does not mean we do not do Gayatri Japa. During these times we must do Gayatri Japa alone skipping all other components of Sandhya Vandanam. The practice is to do 10 times the Gayatri mantra during such occasions. However, during periods of Aasaucha, we are required to utter the Gayatri Japa silently (within the mind only). Also, it is mentioned that during periods of Aasaucha, it is enough to do only up to Arghya Pradhana.<sup>9</sup>*

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

*The Yajna Upavita 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 Yajna Upavita as sacred thread in English). When some Aasaucha happens, the thread is supposed to have lost its sanctity. Therefore, it needs to be replaced once the Aasaucha period is over. If we continue to use the same thread and continue doing Sandhya 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 Sandhya Vandanam and other religious practices will become futile.*

**12. Is the Sandhya 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, Ashvalayana and Sankhyaayana authored the kalpa sutra. This consists of Srouta sutras and Grihya sutras. The Grihya sutras cover the 40 samskaras which includes Sandhya 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.*

<sup>9</sup> *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.*

*Aapastamba, Bodhayana, Vaikānasa, Bhaṛadwaja, Varāha and Satyaśata wrote sutras for Krishna Yajur veda. Katyaayana and Bhaskara wrote sutras for Shukla Yajur veda. For the Sama veda, Traahyaayana Kopila wrote the sutras. The respective vedis will follow the prescribed sutras and perform Sandhya Vandanam.*

*There are some differences among these sutras in the manner the Sandhya karma is observed, although the core components do not vary. In any case the Gayathri mantra is the same for all these variations. A practical way to observe the Sandhya 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.*

**The Sandhya Worship**  
Sri CandrasEkhara BhArati SwAmigaL<sup>10</sup>

A touring Educational Officer once met His Holiness and said,

"I have occasions of being in constant touch with young boys, mostly BrAhmaNAs, studying in schools which I have to inspect. I have found that even the boys who perform their sandhyA 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"

*AcArya:* 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.

*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.

*AcArya:* 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.

*AcArya:* 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 sandhyA worship. What is the deity or upAsya dEvatA in the sandhyA Worship?

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

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

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

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<sup>10</sup> This article was originally compiled by Sri R. Krishnaswamy Iyer and was posted in Mr. Ajit Krishnan's admirable and incomparable 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 Kellogg School of Management, North Western University, Shri Sethuraman and Shri C N Krishnaswamy for bringing this to my attention.

*E.O.* : Yes.

*AcArya*: You tell me that sandhyaA is the worship of the Sun and yet you ask me what is worshipped in the sandhyaA. 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?

*AcArya*: What do you understand ordinarily by the Sun?

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

*AcArya*: 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

*AcArya*: 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?

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

*E.O.* : Yes.

*AcArya*: 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.

*AcArya*: And the second condition?

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

*AcArya*: 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.

*AcArya*: 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.

*AcArya*: 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.

*AcArya*: You have now got your answer to the question as to who is worshipped in the sandhya? 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 dEvatA who has his habitation in the solar orb?

*AcArya*: 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 dEvatA enlivens the solar orb, just as we do our physical bodies?

*AcArya*: 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?

*AcArya*: He attained that status by virtue of the appropriate karma and upAsana 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?

*AcArya*: Yes.

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

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

*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.

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

*E.O.* : Of course.

*AcArya:* Being a jIva 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.

*AcArya:* Quite so.

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

*AcArya:* Certainly not.

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

*AcArya:* Quite so.

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

*AcArya:* Certainly you may, unless of course such a worship is part of the duties enjoined on you by the SAstrAs.

*E.O. :* How can that be?

*AcArya:* 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.

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

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

*AcArya*: What of that?

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

*AcArya*: Quite so.

*E.O.* : But Your Holiness said that it was sUrya dEva who was worshipped?

*AcArya*: 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 upAsya. That power is called HiraNyagarbha. He enlivens and ensouls not only the sUrya, but all dEvatAs. 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.

*AcArya*: 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.

*AcArya*: It is so.

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

*AcArya*: 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 jlvas, just like myself, the same objection which I mentioned against the worship of sUrya dEva holds good in his case also.

*AcArya*: What then would you like to worship?

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

*AcArya*: Have it then that it is such a transcendent power that is worshipped in the sandhyaA. We give Him the name of ISwara, the Lord, or the antaryAmi, 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.

*AcArya*: 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.

*AcArya*: 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 ISwara.

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

*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 sUrya dEva that was the object of worship; when again I pointed out that he was only a limited jIva 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 jIva, however cosmic his sense of 'I' may be, you said that ISwara 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

*AcArya*: I did say so.

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

*AcArya*: 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 ISwara or Brahman at the same time?

*AcArya*: 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 ISwara and Brahman all put together?

*AcArya*: Nor did I say anything of that sort.

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

*AcArya*: When did I tell you that the upAsya was sUrya?

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

*AcArya*: Before you mentioned it, I said that it was even that mass that was the upAsya.

*E.O.* : Yes.

*AcArya*: 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 upAsya is the physical mass; to one, however, who declines to accept inert matter as an object of worship, I said the upAsya was sUrya dEvaTā. **The upAsya is ever one, but its exact nature varies with the competence of the worshipping aspirant.** The upAsya 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?

*AcArya*: 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?

*AcArya*: 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 ASrama 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 ASrama, their homage is therefore not paid to me but to my position or to the ASrama. And some others may not care what position I hold or in what ASrama 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.

**AcArya:** Quite so. But, ordinarily all these people, whether they really tender homage to the paraphernalia or to my status and ASrama 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

*AcArya:* 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 upAsya in the sandhyA 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.

*AcArya:* 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 GyAna have been given places in the daily worship, but that is a different matter. Simple as the sandhyA 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.