

## Samasrayanam

### An article by [Sri Karalappakam Anantha Padhmanabhan](#)

#### **Necessity for Spiritual Knowledge:**

Any intelligent person will have queries like "Who am I?"; "Who is God?"; "What is my duty?"; "Why am I suffering through the process of birth, old age, disease and death?"; "What is death?"; "What is the relationship between myself and God?"; etc. These are highly important queries which leads one to realize the actual realities.

The fact is that, everyone is individually a spiritual entity called jIvAtmA, who is eternally subservient to the Supreme Lord SrIman NArAyanA. Due to the karmA (good and bad activities) associated with the jIvAtmA, it takes varieties of bodies like that of a bacteria, plant, bird, animal, human being etc. It is very very rare to get a human body.

Once a jivAtmA gets the highly precious human body, he ('he' refers to jIvAtmA eventhough there is no gender associated) has to start enquiring about the actual purpose of life. There are many varieties of knowledge floating around. But he has to pick up the 'sAram'(essence). He should choose that type of knowledge which will answer the important queries as raised above. These fundamental queries are answered by the spiritual knowledge.

Materialistic knowledge (as explained by modern science etc) finally doesn't help the jIvAtmA. For instance, a glorified Nobel Laureate may take the body of donkey in the next birth. What is then the credit of being a Nobel Laureate in his human birth? The purpose of human birth is to have the realisation of God (SrIman NArAyanA). If this human body is used for other purposes, then the activities of that person boils down to eating, sleeping and mating. This is the way an animal spends its life.

As long as one identifies himself as a body made of flesh and not as a jIvAtmA, he leads a life of an animal and thereby wastes the most precious human body. The greatness of Spiritual Knowledge is that it makes one understand the truth that he is a jIvAtmA, subservient to SrIman NArAyanA and not the body housing him. It also reveals the processes (Bhakti YogA and Prapatti) by which one can terminate the repeated cycles of birth and death in this material world, and reach the spiritual kingdom of SrIman NArAyanA known as "Vaikuntam", thereby attaining complete bliss.

One has to start knowing about himself first, rather than speculating about matter. Without knowing the answer for the question "Who Am I?", what is use of studying other things? Without knowing the purpose of human life, what is the use of engaging in varieties of activities? So an intelligent seeker of knowledge gets hold of the spiritual knowledge which is complete in itself and thus understands the ultimate knowledge one needs to know.

#### **Approaching the AchAryA of Sri Vaishnava ParamparA**

Spiritual Knowledge is something which is far beyond the materialistic knowledge gained through a study of modern science. It is far beyond the reach of one's senses. One can't understand these on his own. Even for materialistic knowledge which are highly evident to our eyes (senses in general), one has to go to school for years. This process of learning from experienced persons goes on and on. Now, what to speak of Spiritual Knowledge, which deals with the relationship existing between the three realities namely,

1. IshwarA (Supreme Lord): SrIman NArAyanA (NArAyanA who is ever united with

Sri)

2. ChetanAs (entities with knowledge): jivAtmAs
3. achetanAs (entities without knowledge): Matter, Time, Suddha-SattvA

Obviously, one has to approach a person who has this type of knowledge. But so many pose themselves to know this. How to find a bonafide AchAryA?

The answer to this is really simple. The Supremely merciful Lord Sriman NArAyanA reveals the spiritual knowledge to His most ardent devotees. They in turn instruct others. This is called a "ParamparA". Thus, NArAyanA Himself becomes the first AchAryA and the knowledge revealed in the paramparA is nothing but what NArAyanA Himself has revealed. This chain of tradition beginning from Sriman NArAyanA is also known as the "Sat SampradAyam".

The Sri Vaishnava SampradAyam has Lord NArAyanA as the first AchAryA, followed by His beloved consort 'Sri'(MahALakshmi), Sri Vishvaksenar (Commander in chief of Sri Vaikuntam), Saint ShatakopA (NammAzhvAr), Sri NATHamuni, Sri PundarikAkshA (UyyakkondAr), Sri RAMamishrA (ManakkAl Nambi), Sri YAmunAchAryA, Sri Ghoshti PUrnA (Peria Nambi), Sri Bhagavad RAMAnujA, and so on down to our presentAchAryAs.

The current AchAryA of the illustrious Ahobila Matam is Sri Lakshmi Nrusimha Divya pAduka Sevaka Srivan Shatagopa Sri NArAyana Yateendra MahAdesikan. Ahobila Matam was founded by the Supreme Lord Lakshmi Nrusimhan Himself, by initiating a twenty year old genius and supremely devout brahmachAri named kidAmbi SrinivAsAchAryA of Melkotte. He is well known as Sri Adivan Shatagopa Yateendra MahAdesikan.

The knowledge coming through the SriVaishnava SampradAyam (SatSampradAyam) is thus faultless. So, ONLY the AchAryA belonging to the Sat SampradAyam is bonafide. Such an AchAryA is called as a "sadAchAryA" (Ideal Preceptor). He will be well versed in the spiritual knowledge delineated by Sanskrit VedAs (including Upanishads), Tamil VedAs (Divya Prabandham by AzhvArs), Rahasya TrayA, Brahma SutrAs, Smrithis, IthihAsAs (RAMAyanam and MahAbhAratham), SAthvika PurAnAs (like Vishnu purAnam, Srimad BhAgavatham), PAncharAtrA & VaikhAnasa AgamAs.

The supreme Lord Sriman NArAyanA, in His wonderful avatAram as Sri KrishnA, instructs everyone to approach the sadAchAryA. In His Glta Upadesam, Sri KrishnA says "Learn the spiritual knowledge by prostrating, by questioning and by service to wise men (sadAchAryAs), who sees the truth. They (sadAchAryAs) will teach it to you." (4.34)

Thus the person desirous of becoming linked to the Sri Vaishnava SampradAyam, approaches the SadAchAryA with great humility. One cannot attain a sadAchAryA easily. The reasons behind the acquisition of a sadAchAryA are:

1. Sriman NArAyanA's benevolence.
2. Merit acquired accidentally.
3. Grace of Sriman NArAyanA.
4. No aversion towards Sriman NArAyanA.
5. Listened to the anectodes of NArAyanA (Stories about avatArams of NArAyanA like NrusimhA, RAMA and KrishnA etc) and eagerness to learn.
6. Conversated with devotees of NArAyanA.

So, one should be highly fortunate to attain a sadAchAryA. AchAryA (henceforth used to refer to sadAchAryA) has every right to test that person, even for many years, before he can be initiated by him. Thus, SamAshrayanam is a result of great mercy from the part of our AchAryAs. Only the highly fortunate souls gets this rarest opportunity of getting initiated (SamAshrayanam) and thereby become a "SriVaishnavA".

### **What is Samashrayanam?**

SamAshrayanam means 'to approach (AchAryA) with all sincerity'. In a nut shell, during 'SamAshrayanam', the AchAryA initiates a person, irrespective of caste, creed or sex, as his sishyA. It is a commitment from the disciple that he or she will live as per the wishes of the AchAryA. Thus the person gets the link to the Sri Vaishnava paramparA. During SamAshrayanam, Pancha SamskAram (five Purifications) is performed and he becomes a "Sri VaishnavA".

The five samskArams and its main purposes are:

- 1. thApam - To emboss the impressions of heated Sankha and ChakrA on the arms (near the shoulders).
- 2. pundram - To wear the dvAdasa Urdhva pundram (12 Thiruman & Srichoornam)
- 3. nAmam - To be christened by the AchAryA afresh as "RAmAnuja dAsan"(addition of 'dAsA'at the end of ones name) to indicate that one is forever a servant of the Supreme Lord SrIman NArAyanA and BhagavAnRAmAnujA.
- 4. manthram - To get the initiation of "Rahasya Traya MantrAs" - AshtAksharam, Dvayam and charama slokam.
- 5. Ijyai - To learn the worship of SrIman nArAyanA in proper form (Bhagavad ThiruvArAdhanam).

### **Panca Samskaram**

In general, the human body must undergo many samskArams. This is done basically to make the body more pure and thereby aid the jIvAtmA in the path of Spiritualism, which culminates in God Realisation. The greatest stumbling block for one's advancement in Spiritualism is their body itself, which is a result of their previous karmAs. So, sAstrAs prescribe various samskArams like JAtakarmA, NAmakaranAa, Upanayanam etc.

Pancha SamskArAm is superior to all such samskArams. One is not a born "Sri VaishnavA". It is this "Pancha SamskAram" that makes him one. Millions and Millions of janmAs (births) were simply wasted without becoming a "Sri VaishnavA". It is this highly sacred "Pancha SamskAram" which gives the real "birth" to the jIvAtmA. Since all the previous births were simply spent in the darkness of ignorance, they don't have any value. The real meaning of life starts, only when one becomes a "Sri VaishnavA". Since "Pancha SamskAram" marks the beginning of the true life one has to lead, it is a VERY VERY SPECIAL EVENT for the person undergoing it.

"IyengAr" means 'Aindhu angam Udayavar' or 'Aindhu kAryangal Udayavar'. These five refers to the 'Pancha SamskAram'. It also means the fiva angAs of prapatti. We can in general say that this Panca SamskAram gives one the name "IyengAr".

#### **1. thApa SamskAram:**

This is the first samskAram. The AchAryA embosses the impressions of Conch (Shankam) and Discuss (Sudarshana chakram) on the left and right arms of the disciple, respectively.

To give an analogy in the materialistic world, a sales representative wears a logo representing the organization for which he is working. Factually, we (JivAtmAs) are servants of the Supreme Lord Srīman NArAyanA. So, we also identify ourselves through the things which uniquely represent Him. NArAyanA holds the Conch(PAnchaJanyam) in His Left Hand and the Sudarshana Chakram in His right Hand. So, we also bear the same way. Any highly fortunate jivAtmA, who becomes a devotee of Lord Vishnu will be very happy about wearing Shankam and Chakram.

The AchAryA with great devotion recites the mantrAs to invoke Srīman NArAyanA and His weapons Sudarshana Chakram & PAnchajanyam. The Supremely merciful NArAyanA abides by it. The Lord and His weapons thus become present in the Agni (Fire). Then, the AchAryA prays specifically to the divine weapons to be eternally present with the disciples for whom Pancha SamskAram is being performed.

The emblem of "Sudarshana ChakrA" is heated in the agni and is embossed on the right hand, by chanting a hymn, which translates into "Oh! Sudarshana MahAJwAlA (Highly resplendent), as lusturous as crores of Sun, please show me, an ignorant one, the path of Lord Vishnu".

Then, the emblem of "PAnchajanyam" is heated in the fire and is embossed on the left hand, by chanting a hymn, which translates into "Oh! PAnchajanyA! You are capable of driving away the sins of individuals through your sound. Please protect me, a sinner, from this samsArA".

In Ahobila Matam, the procedure is much simpler since the emblems of ShankA and chakrA were given by the most merciful Lord Sri Lakshmi Nrusimhan Himself, to Sri Adivan Shatagopa Yateendra MahAdesikan.

This is a highly powerful samskAram. SudarshanAzhvAr's (ChakrA) mercy to the devotees of Srīman NArAyanA is highly glorifiable. No one can forget the wonderful way in which SudarshanAzhvAr chased DhurvAsa Muni for his BhAgavadha apachArA unto the great VaishnavA "Ambarish". That is the way in which Sri SudarshanAzhvAr extends his mercy to protect the devotees. He wards off the evil elements and thereby makes a nice pathway for the devotee to engage in Bhagavad Kainkaryam (service).

Nowadays, SudarshanAzhvAr is popular amongst the 'mooda bhakthAs' i.e. those people who pray for the fulfillment of their cheap materialistic desires. Its really a pity that eventhough SudarshanAzhvAr is highly merciful to ward off all the evil obstacles that obstruct a person from developing pure bhakti or performing prapatti, these people keep pestering him regarding their materialistic desires.

The divine conch 'PAnchajanyam' shatters all the evils through transcendental sound. The most important aspect is that we have to realize our ignorant way of leading the life. The whole life should be packed with *only* devotional services (kainkaryAs) unto Srīman NArAyanA and His devotees. If we are even an inch shorter to it, it clearly implies that we are ignorant. But, attaining the mood of kainkaryA is not a material phenomena. One must deeply depend on the mercy of AchAryAs and BhAgavathAs. This is the only way to get it.

But before coming to this position, one has to know that doing kainkaryam to the Divya Dampati (Sri and NArAyanA) is the ultimate goal of life. That's why, we pray to

SudarshanAzhvAr to show us the path of Vishnu. SudarshanAzhvAr will lead us to do prapatti and by becoming a prapanna, one will be ever ecstatic in performing various kainkaryAs. But, how will he help us if we don't want this from the depth of our hearts?

In addition to our unwillingness to completely surrender to the lotus feet of Sriman NArAyanA, there are so many nefarious traps in this world of samsArA. Since everyone is allured by this and indulge nicely in the materialistic activities, they pile up the sins. So, already being a sinner, who is attracted by all the petty materialistic things, we pray to 'PAnchajanyam' for his protection from 'SamsArA' (materialistic world).

ThApa SamskAram is highly glorified by the sAstrAs in various places. Some of them are as follows:

1. Brahmasooktha in the Atarva Mahopanishad says "ChakrA in the right shoulder and Sankha in the left shall be worn".
2. The Pushkala Samhita in Rig Veda says "Oh vishnu ! The learned wear the holy Sankha - Chakra to cross the ocean of samsArA".
3. Atarva veda says "By adorning the armour of the Lord, we shall live happily in this world and reach the abode of the Lord (conveying that others cannot reach Sri Vaikuntam)"
4. In the Vishnu Tattvam, the passage narrating about NarakalokA says " Wearing of Sankha and ChakrA informs the relationship with Vishnu. The sentries of YamA are afraid of them. The world will perish if they are belittled. The devotees of Vishnu are never seen in YamA's place due to the glory of Sriman NArAyanA".
5. BheeshmaparvA of MahAbhArathA says "All shall, as ordained in the PAncharAtrA SAstrA preached by Lord SankarshanA (NArAyanA), wear the chakrA mark. They only are eligible to worship BhagavAn Vishnu (Bhagavad ArAdhanam)"
6. VarAhapurAnam glorifies the persons wearing the hot seals of the Supreme Lord Sriman NArAyanA on their arms (shoulders). It says that these devotees ultimately reach Sri Vaikuntam.
7. Garuda PurAnam says that only those who have been affixed with the Sankha and ChakrA are eligible to take part in the ceremony toforefathers.

Atarva veda is very clear in the regard that one should adorn the heated symbols of Sriman NArAyanA on ones body, and continues to say that only such people attain the Supreme Abode (Sri Vaikuntam). Rig Veda is also categorical that the Sankha and chakrA be heated and adorned.

An intelligent person, after getting so much help from the divine weapons of Sriman NArAyanA, should proceed further to become a true Sri VaishnavA in practise.

Thus the AchAryA out of his dayA does this "thApA SamskArA" for the upliftment of the sishyA from the world of samsArA. Further, the disciple with Anjali MudrA should regularly chant the two hymns through which this samskAram has been performed and thereby derive the supreme protection from SudarsanAzhvAr and PAnchajanyam.

## **2. Pundra SamskAram:**

The achAryA makes the disciple aware of the places in the body where the 'upavyUha' forms of the Supreme Lord Sriman NArAyanA, are to be saluted. The sishya becomes fortunate enough to know the names of the Lord and piratti, associated with each 'upavyUha' form of

NArAyanA and also comes to know about the way in which he has to offer his salutations.

From the para-vAsudevA (Sri Vaikuntam) form, nArAyanA emanates into the four vyuha forms namely VAasudevA (Vyuha VAsudevA), SaNkarshaNA, PradyumnA and AniruddhA. From each of these four vyuha forms, nArAyanA emanates into three sub-vyuha forms known as 'upavyuha'(vyuhAntarA) forms.

VAsudevA -> KeSavA, NArAyanA, MADhavA  
 SaNkarshaNA -> GovindA, Vishnu, MadhusUdhanA  
 PradyumnA -> TrivikramA, VAmAnA, SridharA  
 AniruddhA -> HrusIkeSA, PadmanAbhA, DAModarA

There are some minor differences in these forms of Sriman NArAyanA. All these different forms of our merciful Lord are highly relished by different Yogis deeply meditating upon Sriman NArAyanA. For instance, let us take the case of sweets. Each one relishes a particular variety of sweet more than the other ones. Similarly, the taste of the Yogis/BhakthAs also differs. Each one gets attracted to a particular feature of Sriman NArAyanA.

Each 'upavyUha' form of Sriman NArAyanA is externally represented by the 'Urdhva pundram'(Thiruman kaapu). The 'thiruman' represents the Lord and the 'Sri Choornum' represents PirAtti. The salutation to the Lord has to be done with folded hands (Anjali Mudra): "KeSavAya Namaha" prefixed by pranavA, "MADhavAya Namaha" prefixed by pranavA etc. The salutation to the pirAtti is also done in a similar way: "Sriyai Namaha", prefixed by pranavA, "AmrutodhbhavAyai Namaha", prefixed by pranavAetc.

The thiruman (white color) should be like the outline of NArAyanAs Lotus foot. Sri choornum is yellow in color since the pirAttis thirumeni (divine body) is Golden in color. Since Red Color is for mangaLam (pirAtti), some do wear red colored Sri Choornum. There are minor differences between sampradAyams in the way of wearing Thiruman. SishyAs should follow their respective AchAryAs.

Urdhva Pundram is vertical and faces upwards denoting that it helps one in reaching 'Sri Vaikuntam', the spiritual abode of Sriman NArAyanA. These twelve Urdhvapundrams are known as the 'DvAdasa Urdhvapundram'.

According to the varnA of the sishyA, there are also differences in the number of Urdhvapundrams he has to wear.

The location of the Thiruman kaapu, forms, names and colour of all the UpavyUha NArAyanA are as follows:

	Location (Part of the body)	Form of Lord for Meditation	Name/Color of Lord	Name of PirAtti
1.	Forehead	ChakrA in all four hands	KeshavA/Golden	Sri
2.	Lower abdomen (middle)	Conch (Sanka) in all hands	NArAyanA/Blue cloud	AmruthodhbavA

3.	Chest	Mace in all four hands	MAdhavA/Gem	KamalA
4.	Front neck (middle)	Bow in all four hands	GovindA/Moon	Chandrasodari
5.	Lower abdomen (right)	Ploughshares in all four hands	Vishnu/Lotus filament	Vishnu Patni
6.	Right arm	Pounding Rod in all four hands	MadhusUdhanA/Lotus	Vaishnavi
7.	Neck (right)	Sword in all four hands	TrivikramA/Sparkling fire	VarArohA
8.	Lower abdomen (left)	Thunder Bolt in all four hands	vAmanA/Rising sun	Hari VallabhA
9.	Left arm	Axe in all four hands	SridharA/Lotus	shArngini
10.	Neck (left)	Crow-bar in all four hands	HrusIkeSA/Lightening	Deva DevikA
11.	Back (lower spinal)	All weapons in eight hands	PadmanAbhA/Luster of sun	MahALakshmi
12.	Back (upper spinal)	Whip in all four hands	DAmodarA/Silk worm)	Soorasundari

The upavyUha forms of NArAyanA also represent the twelve suns in the Universe corresponding to the twelve zodiacs of the universe. KeSavA is the presiding deity of month MArghazhi, NArAyanA is the presiding deity of month 'thai' and so on. They are the presiding deities of the twelve AdityAs.

Thus, the sishyA gets the unique privilege to wear the Thiruman kAppu. So, only after SamAshrayanam should one wear the dvAdasa Urdhva pundram. From then onwards, the sishyA *withour fail* should wear them. All the evils fly away on seeing the thiruman kApu (kAApu => protection).

Materialistic people apply powder, cream etc to their faces, hands etc. They keep on polishing this temporary body with their deep materialistic attachment towards it. They more over put many more ornaments over the lump of flesh(body) and foolishly think that they look beautiful. The very basic understanding is that one is a jIvAtmA (soul) who is ever subservient to the Divya Dampati, and not the lump of matter surrounding it.

The *best ornament* for the body is *Thiruman Kappu*. This should be applied with great humility, thanking the achAryA and Sriman NArAyanA for their mercy. One should be really proud of the fact that he is a servant of NArAyanA. He should be highly enthusiastic to wear the thiruman kAApu for the reason that it reminds him of the servant - master relationship eternally existing between himself and the Supreme Master Sriman NArAyanA.

Materialistic people take pride in identifying themselves as a fan of some other materialist (cinema star, sports hero etc), who is also a jIvA suffering in this whirlpool of samsArA. These so-called 'stars' of the material world are going to take bodies like donkey, cat etc in their future births. They are followed by thousand fools who are also going to take such bodies in the next births. Materialists are highly ignorant fools because, their level of understanding that someone is 'great' is highly limited. Once one becomes a fan of the

greatest of all greats 'Sriman NArAyanA', he *cannot* become a fan of any other person (except NArAyanAs staunch devotees). Even the greatness of demigods like BrahmA, SivA, IndrA in comparison with the greatness of nArAyanA is like the brightness of a small spark of light in front of the brightness of billions of suns.

A Sri VaishnavA is thus never attracted to even any of the demigods (what to speak of tiny materialists in earth). One who gets attracted to NArAyanAs divya mangala vighraha; kalyAna gunAs; avatAra IIIAs as in NrusimhA, RAMA and KrishnA avAtAra; Holy Names etc can never turn back to anything short of it. It is furthermore a duty of a Sri VaishnavA to follow what the AchAryA has taught him during samAshrayanam. Some may feel that they are ignorant about these facts. But, they also see so many Sri VaishnavAs, wearing the thiruman kApu and thus should automatically enquire into it. But, there are some who even after knowing that they should wear the DvAdasa Urdhva pundram daily, doesn't wear them out of shyness. Actually, this is due to their ignorance. Any devotee of Sriman NArAyanA is never a cheap personality. He is the most glorifiable one. So, one should wear them with love and enthusiasm without any hesitation. Once one understands about the glories of Sriman NArAyanA and the eternal connection existing between himself and the Lord, he will automatically wear the dvAdasa Urdhva pundram.

One can talk a lot about VedAs, upanishads etc. If he doesn't put them into practice, there is no use in learning them. NArAyanA gets pleased when one follows the sAstrAs. Moreover, if it is a upadeshA from an AchAryA and is followed by the sishyA, NArAyanA gets pleased to a much greater extent. At the same time, if a sishyA doesn't follow the AchAryA, NArAyanA will never be pleased with him. So, if a Sri VaishnavA doesn't wear the Urdhva pundrams, he is obviously not following the AchAryA and thereby becomes avaisnavA in practice. In extreme circumstances, when one is not able to wear the dvAdasa Urdhvapundrams, salutations to Sriman NArAyanA with Anjali MudrA, should be performed without fail as explained above (AchAryAs Upadesam).

The katA portion in YajurvedA says "One who prays to the Supreme Lord Vishnu by wearing the Urdhvapundram and by accepting the hot chakrA on the shoulder, reaches the Supreme Lord Himself". Such is the glory of pundram and thApa samskAram.

### 3. NAmA SamskAram:

The AchAryA adds the name 'DAsA' at the end of the disciples name, to indicate that he is forever the servant of Lord Sriman NArAyanA and Bhagavad RAMAnujA. He becomes a 'RAMAnuja dAsan'. This is highly important.

Eventhough Sri Vaishnavam is eternal, it was Bhagavad RAMAnujA who propagated it with intensity and fervour, out of his great compassion for all the living entities. He was a supreme devotee of Sriman NArAyanA and an intellectual genius. He gave the true imports of Brahma SUTras and established the eternal truth vouchsafed in the Upanishads. He made everyone understand that NArAyanA, the consort of 'Sri' is the Supreme Lord, who has all the sentient beings and insentient things as His body (ie. NArAyanA is supporter & controller of everything and everything exists for His pleasure).

He gave the secret doctrine of 'prapatti' (self-surrender) to the whole world. **Prapatti is the only way in this Kali Yuga by which one can reach Sri Vaikuntam (mOksham)**. Thus, it was Bhagavad RAMAnujA who opened the gates of Sri Vaikuntam for anyone, irrespective of caste, creed or sex. The greatness of Bhagavad RAMAnujA cannot be expressed in mere

words.

Since he was the one who redeemed the whole suffering humanity by propagating the eternal truth and the ultimate good to everyone, Lord RanganAthA residing at SriRangam became so moved that, the Supreme Lord placed at the disposal of RAmAnujAchAryA, all His possessions - IIIAvibhUti (Material World) and Nitya-VibhUti (Spiritual World ie. Sri Vaikuntam) - including Himself. In commemoration of that act, Lord RanganAthA conferred upon Bhagavad RAmAnujA the name of 'Udayavar' (Possessor or Master), to signify that he was thenceforth the Master of all. Thus, to enter the Spiritual Abode of Sriman NArAyanA, the link with 'Udayavar '(Sri RAmAnujA) becomes a vital and important criterion.

The sishyA should always identify himself through this 'dAsa 'nAmA. Whenever he speaks to other bhAgavathAs he should have the servitude attitude which in one way can be cultivated by remembering his 'dAsa 'nAmA.

#### **4. Mantra SamskAram:**

Eventhough all the five samskArams are highly important, Mantra SamskAram is the most important amongst them. The Rahasya traya (3 secrets) mantrAs are initiated to the sishyA. They are the AshtAksharam, Dvayam and the Charama slokam. These are the TOP MOST ESSENCE OF ALL THE KNOWLEDGE. They are highly potent and have deep philosophical meanings. These are secrets and are highly precious. These are to be learnt from the AchAryA only. The sishyAs at any cost CANNOT tell these mantrAs (AshtAksharam and dvayam) to others, who haven't had samAshrayanam. Only the AchAryA who is eligible to perform samAshrayanam to others is entitled to initiate the sishyAs with these mantrAs.

One should be *very very fortunate* to receive these mantrAs. The glories of these mantrAs have no bounds. The potency of the mantrAs work only when it is obtained from the AchAryA (paramparA). This is because, without getting the link to the paramparA, which is started by Sriman NArAyanA, one cannot obtain the benefits of the mantra; rather it may lead to negative results also. PADma purAnA says that "sampradAya - vihInA ye mantrAs te niShphalA matAhA" ie. "Unless mantrAs are initiated (by the AchAryA) through the sampradAyA, it has no effect". Anyone who wants to become the devotee of NArAyanA must get linked with the ParamparA. Sriman NArAyanA Himself has clearly laid out that the paramparA is the way through which one should approach Him.

AshtAksharam (also known as Moola Mantra, Thiru Mantra) is extolled by great people like AzhwArs and Rishis. This mantra originated from Lord BadriNArAyanA of BadrinAth, chanted in Gayathri Chandas and is addressed to Sriman NArAyanA. Since this mantra is initiated by the Lord NArAyanA Himself, this is highly sacred. Infact NArAyanA initiated this AshtAksharam to Thirumangai AzhwAr also. This same AshtAksharam was initiated to pundarIkA and PrahAdA by sage NArAdA. Yogis practising Bhakti YogA, who were ever immersed in seeing the wonderful form of Sriman NArAyanA, used this secret AshtAkshara mantram as the key to their success of God-Realisation (ie. realising NArAyanA).

AshtAkshara japam *must* be performed daily. AshtAkshara japam gives *all benefits* that one can derive from different mantrAs. More importantly, it facilitates the bondage between the person performing the japam and Sriman NArAyanA for SaranAgati (Prapatti).

This highly sacred mantra has pranavam(combination of A, U and M) in the beginning.

Vedic Scriptures strictly restrict the usage of pranavam. Only men of the first three varnAs are allowed to recite it. This pranavam cannot be used according to ones whims and fancy. Whenever it is referred in general public, it has to be addressed as pranavam only. One doesn't have the right to say this pranavam as a combination of A, U and M, in public (unless it is a part of the recitation of VedAs for a particular ceremony etc). But, the same effect of AshtAksharam can be obtained by others by reciting 'um' instead of pranavam.

Everyone can infact chant 'Namo NArAyanA' aloud in public (without even undergoing Pancha SamskAram). Its a humble request to all the bhAgavathAs, that the chanting of 'Namo NArAyanA' be propagated allover the world. This is the real medicine for the suffering of all the living entities swirling in the whirlpool of SamsArA. Since this has no restriction, anyone can be made to chant this and the soul can be saved. Propagation of the Holy Names of NArAyanA (esp. "Namo NArAyanA") is the best service for the whole society, irrespective of caste, creed, sex etc. The Holy Name will then make all the necessary arrangements for the spiritual upliftment of others.

Dvaya Mantram consists of two lines. It is eulogised as the 'Mantra RatnA' (Gem/Jewel amongst all the MantrAs). This helps one to perform SaranAgati unto SrIman NArAyanA. Once this mantrA is initiated by the AchAryA, it should be recited constantly within ourselves. It can be recited by the sishyA without bothering about time, place etc. Infact Dvayam should be dancing in the lips of all the SriVaishnavAs all the time. It is infact an instruction from BhagavAn Ramanuja that Dvayam should be chanted for maximum time possible.

Charama slokam is the famous 'Sarva DharmAn. . . . "sloka of SrImad Bhagavad GitA. It is a secret because of its invaluable hidden truth. SrIman NArAyanA during His Krishna AvatArA did the Gita UpadesA to all the people through ArjunA. Since Bhakti YogA was highly difficult even for ArjunA, Krishna out of His Mercy asked him (all the people) to perform 'Prapatti', as a means of God-Realisation.

Bhakti YogA is the *constant* meditation (without any break; as constant as the flow of an unbroken stream of oil from the hole in the bottom of a vessel filled with oil) with unsurpassed love, on the essential nature (svarUpA), qualities (kalyAna gunAs) and form (divya mangala vigrahA) of SrIman nArAyanA, by the aid of any one of the 32 vidyAs prescribed in the Upanishads. Such constant meditation is obviously difficult for the kali - yugA people. That is why nArAyanA in His Krishna avatArA pointed out the presence of another means of attaining salvation (prapatti) in the Upanishads.

Bhakti is very much different from Bhakti YogA. A SriVaishnavA should certainly have Bhakti in the sense of reciting VedAs, Divya Prabandhams, Nama Sankeertanams, StotrAs etc. And all these things are to be carried out as a kainkaryam (service) to the Divya Dampati with the understanding that it is the ocean of dayA of SrIman NArAyanA that was responsible for him to be selected as an instrument in performing the kainkaryam ie. SrIman NArAyanA is the actual doer. These services should be done for Lords pleasure and the fruits of these services are to be submitted to nArAyanA. Also one should do the duties (like SandhyA Vandanam, Bhagavad ArAdhanam etc) according to his varnA and AshramA, in the same spirit of kainkaryam to the Divya Dampati (Divine Couple) as mentioned above.

Regular recital of these mantrAs are highly essential and a Sri VaishnavA should be immersed in these mantras and its meanings.

### 5. Yaj~na (YAgA) SamskAram:

In this SamskAram, the AchAryA teaches about Bhagavad ArAdhanA (Ijyai). ArAdhanA is the way of worshipping Sriman NArAyanA. There are basically two forms of ArAdhanA: bahyA (External) and mAnasIkA (Internal).

This samskAram is initiated by the AchAryA through Sanskrit verses whose translation in English is as follows:

"After Achamanam, wearing Urdhvapundram, prostrating to the Lord (Sriman NArAyanA), sit in a seat. After prAnAyAmam, perform japam with DhyAna slokAs (AshtAksharam, etc). Later, worship the Lord Sriman NArAyanA residing in ones heart (mAnasIka ArAdhanA). Then with water from the vessel placed left (of Sriman nArAyanA), sprinkle water on flowers and other materials for worship and also vessels for arghyam, pAdyam etc. From water in arghyA Vessel, sprinkle water on flowers etc (for worship) and also self"

"After welcoming the Lord, offer arghyam, pAdyam, Achamaniam, give ritualistic bath. Then offer cloth, Yagno Pavitha (sacred thread), Sandal paste, flower, incense, light, in order. After Achamanam, honey and Achamanam. Later offer food comprising of pudding, rice, vegetables, water, pan-betel etc. After Prostration, restoring status quo is the procedure of worship of Vishnu"

Thus, the sishyA gets the eligibility to perform Bhagavad ArAdhanam (Ijyai) to Sriman NArAyanA's archA avatAram as 'SALagrAmA'. Since the food we take should only be the remnants of food offered to Sriman NArAyanA, SALagrAmA ArAdhanA is very important for a Sri VaishnavA. Lord Sri KrishnA in His GIIta Upadesam, says that

"Good people eating the remains of yaj~nAs are released from all sins. Those sinners who cook food for their own sake eat only sin" (3. 13)

Food is the major source of input to the body. It drastically affects the proportions of sAtvikkA, rAjAsA and tAmAsA gunAs in the body. By eating the food which are devoid of sAtvikA nature, the person drifts away from spiritualism and his indulgence in materialistic affairs increases. Further, if the food is not offered to NArAyanA through Bhagavad ArAdhanA, the person incurs lot of sins. Therefore, One should perform the Bhagavad ArAdhana kainkaryam daily without fail.

By performing SALagrAmA ArAdhanam, one gets cleansed from many impurities (seated in mind). The sacred water obtained after the ablution of SALagrAmA is highly potent. We have to remember that, the sacred water has had the direct contact with the thirumeni (divine body) of Sriman nArAyanA. Thus it makes one charged with sAtvika gunA and thus cultivates bhagavad bhakti very easily.

Of course there are many side - benefits like improvement in health, intelligence, memory, etc due to the intake of sacred water ('PerumAL theertham'). All these benefits are for aiding the cultivation of bhakti and shouldn't be seen in a materialistic perspective. The spiritual benefit obtained is enormous, and can only be felt by the devotee.

A true devotee of Sriman NArAyanA however does not worry about the so called scientific explanations for the side-benefits incurred during any devotional kainkaryA. These explanations are only for those who do not believe in NArAyanA and sAstrAs. For instance,

Sri AnnamAchAryA (disciple of Sri Adivan Sadagopa Yateendra MahAdesikan) and Sri ThyAgarAjA have sung many songs because of their intense bhakti to the lotus feet of the most wonderful Lord Sriman NArAyanA. RAga, tAlA etc are not planned. They pour out spontaneously out of their great devotion. But, to attract people, we can highlight the greatness of the rAgA, tAlA, way of composition etc. But, the important aspect is bhakti towards NArAyanA. If this is left out, then there is no point in discussing other things. Eventhough the rAgA, the composition structure etc are amazing, they must only aid one to create the mood of bhakti involved in that song. Similarly, we can talk about some petty, so called scientific explanations behind some devotional activities. But, the spiritual reason behind it and spiritual benifit one obtains is beyond the comprehension of our senses.

The archA form of NArAyanA is due to His Soulabhyam (easy accesibility to one and all) & Sowseelyam (Friendship shown by an exalted one towards a lowly person without expecting anything in return). His dayA (mercy) for all of us has no bounds. Garuda PurAnam says:

*"SALagrAma shilA yatra devo dwAravathIbhavaha  
vubhyoho sangamo yatra tatra mukthirna samshayaha"*

ie. Mukthi is assured without doubt in those places where SALagrAma silai and DwArakA silai coexist (ie. sALagrAma ArAdhanam leads a person to perform prapatti and makes him lead a life of true prapannan). The greatness of sALagrAma is that Sriman NArAyanA has Himself chosen (svayam vyaktA) to incarnate in that form ie. it is not consecrated or installed by others. SALagrAma can thus be straightaway worshipped without any special consecration.

Eventhough the sALagrAma ArAdhanA is performed by the male members of the three varnAs, ladies too have important role in that kinkaryam. They can make nice arrangements in terms of preparing food, gathering & making fragrant flower garlands, etc. Thus they too derive the same benifits out of the ArAdhanam. The entire family should assemble together for the 'SATrumurai', the concluding session of ArAdhanam. The important aspect in any kinkaryam is that it is purely for the pleasure of Sriman NArAyanA. SAstrAs also clearly specify the type of kinkaryam one has to perform, according to ones varnA & AshramA. So, one has to just take up the kinkaryam assigned to him/her & perform with devotion. This is the spirit behind the kinkaryam & thus one shouldn't entertain questions like "Why can't I do this?", "Why should they only do that?" etc.

mAnasIkA ArAdhanA has to be performed by all. This is similar to the bahyA ArAdhanA, but the whole ArAdhanA is done mentally. Pictures of Sriman NArAyanA in various Divya Desams, plays an important role here. Irrespective of the caste, place, time or sex, one can perform this mAnasIkA ArAdhanA.

Sri Sukabrahma maharishi in his nectarian Srimad BhAgavatham says about the way in which great devotees worship NArAyanA residing within their hearts (mAnasIkA ArAdhanA):

"These devotees meditate on NArAyanA with His four handsholding the Conch, Chakra, GadhA (club) and Lotus. They fix His figure firmly in their mind. Having fixed His figure firmly, they worship Him with the courtesies (as in Bahya ArAdhanA or pUjA) including serving of food, mentally. They conclude the worship with MangalAsAsanam (MangalArathi)".

If one doesn't remember about the upadesam of the AchAryA as regarding the Ijyai and unfortunately couldn't meet the AchAryA, he can approach another Sri VaishnavA who is spiritually advanced and learn the practical way of doing the sALagrAma ArAdhanA.

This samskAram is very important in many angles. thApa samskAram makes the sishyA eligible to start performing various kainkaryams to Sriman NArAyanA. The pundra samskAram makes a person eligible to wear the dvAdasa Urdhvapundram, which is a must while performing kainkaryams like Bhagavad ArAdhanam. NAMA samskAram makes the sishyA get the intimate relationship with Sriman NArAyanA & Bhagavad RAmanujA, which is again important while performing kainkaryams. The mantrAs initiated during the mantra samskAram are used to please Sriman NArAyanA while performing kainkaryams like Bhagavad ArAdhanam. So, all the samskArAs are ultimately aimed to make the sishyA perform the kainkaryams like Bhagavad ArAdhanam properly.

While doing Bhagavad ArAdhanam to Sriman NArAyanA, one is also reminded about the Lord in various Divya Desams, the nectarian anubhavA of AzhvArs, mercy of our AchAryAs etc. All types of spiritual emotions can be nicely poured out during the Bhagavad ArAdhanam, thereby bringing immense divine ecstasy. This makes one get rid of the sins that propel a person to engage in materialistic pleasures and makes him deeply attached to the Lotus Feet of the Supreme Lord Sriman NArAyanA.

### **Life after Samashrayanam:**

SamAshrayanam marks a great turning point in the journey of jIvAtmA through the cycle of repeated birth and death. The Pancha SamskAram performed is invaluable. But, one has to keep up the samskAram by his regular devotional activities. The samskArAs done loses its significance when one starts indulging in more materialistic activities, without caring about Sriman NArAyanA. The whole purpose is to make a person (jIvAtmA) get involved in the sanAtana dharmA (eternal dharmA). Surrender and love towards the Supreme Lord Sriman NArAyanA is the only purpose of human life. SamAshrayanam helps in a great way to make a person progress towards achieving this goal.

The disciple should be highly thankful to the AchAryA for his great compassion. He should take deep interest in the SampradAyam & gain the true knowledge from kAlakshepams (Discourses) either under the lotus feet of his achAryA or under other SriVaishnava achAryAs his achAryA directs him to do so. In the worst case, he should atleast learn from cassettes, books etc of our AchAryAs. He should learn the recitation & meanings of the most nectarian, unparalleled divine songs of the Tamil VedA(Divya Prabandham), which is embedded with soul stirring devotional pAsurams. He should carry out the duties (like SandhyAvandanam, Bhagavad ArAdhanam etc) without fail, according to the VarnA and AshramA. The taniyan of the AchAryA must necessarily be recited daily atleast after adorning the dvAdasa Urdhvapundram.

He should perform various services to the AchAryA and Sriman NArAyanA daily. Then, jn~AnA (knowledge), vairAgyA (detachment from materialistic things; sense control) and bhakti is automatically gained by the devotee due to blessings of the AchAryA. By performing prapatti, the devotee should lead a life of prapannA ever immersed in devotional kainkaryams (services). Eventhough he is in the midst of the society, he can earn through dharmA as a service to Sriman NArAyanA. The money so earned should be spent for various devotional services and not for materialistic pleasures. Swami Desikan says in his NyAsa vimsati that,

"The disciple too must fulfil certain requisite qualifications. He should have:

1. good sense,
2. friendly disposition towards sAdhus,
3. good character,
4. earnest desire to understand the tenets of the sampradAyA,
5. loving mind to render service to the AchAryA,
6. no self-esteem or self conceit,
7. abject obedience to the AchAryA, this being a *supreme duty*,
8. tendency to wait in readiness for the correct opportunity to get clarification of our doubts from AchAryA,
9. complete restraint over the external senses,
10. mental discipline,
11. keen interest to surrender to the AchAryA without any jealousy,
12. an implicit faith in what the SAstrAs say,
13. the ability to pass all the tests the AchAryA administers, and
14. supreme gratitude to the AchAryA for the great help.

Only such a disciple is eligible to be inducted into the philosophical training. "Nyasa Vimsati (3).

In his glorious 'pallAndu' to Sriman NArAyanA, PeriAzhvAr (Sri Vishnu chittar) glorifies samAshrayanam and instructs us the way one should lead the life after samAshrayanam: "Bearing (on our upper-arms) the imprint of Holy ChakrA, caused by the special consecrated instrument with the red - hot wheel-emblem which is blazing more fiercely than fire, we have been at the service of Lord Sriman NArAyanA, generation after generation".

Kindly follow the instructions of our dearest AzhvArs and AchAryAs and lead a life of a true Sri VaishnavA by their divine blessings.

AzhvAr, EmperumAnAr, Desikan thiruvadigaLE saranam  
Sri Adhi vaNN shatakOpa yateendra mahAdesikAya namaha  
Srimad Azhagiyasingar thiruvadigaLe saranam namo nArAyaNA  
adiyEn rAmAnuja dAsan anantha PadmanAbha dAsan  
sarvam sri KrishnArpanamastu

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## Credits

Actual credit goes to the AchAryAs who wrote these referred articles/book. Adiyen has simply assembled the various points presented by them with some elaboration.

If someone senses any mistake in the article, it is due to adiyens connection with prakruti. So, kindly pardon adiyen for the same. But, please do point out the mistake without fail.

For advanced learning, one should learn "Sath Charitra rakshai" of SwAmi VedAnta Desikan. No subject is left untouched by our Desikan. Hope that this article kindles further interest to learn the works of our AchAryAs & more importantly to undergo SamAshrayanam (for those who haven't had so).

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