

# YOGAKSHEMAM Newsletter

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## Sri T. Krishnamacharya's informal talks

*How to remain poised amidst vagaries of life ?*

Human life in this world is an admixture of joys and sorrows. No one can enjoy unalloyed happiness continuously nor face only unhappiness in life.

It is also necessary to retain mental poise when fortune smiles without going overboard with joy or get very depressed when beset with problems. One should avoid the tendency to take the credit for one's successes and blame Providence for one's failures. One should realise that whatever one enjoys in life is due to the combined result of their Karma and Providence. Human birth is the result of previous deeds and hence it is not possible to escape from one's Karma.

One who understands this truth, reposes faith in divine dispensation, accepts his lot with equanimity of mind, and prays to God to give him strength to face the vicissitudes of life.

The life of the Lord when He manifested as Râma serves to teach this important lesson which every human being must learn to face life situations. Râma underwent great trials and tribulations just like an average human being and His conduct in these situations is worthy of emulation. The manner in which Râma conducted Himself when He was banished to the forest on the eve of His coronation is a fitting guideline. Though there was a total reversal in His fortune, Râma was only intent on fulfilling the wishes of his father without any thought of personal discomfort.

(Excerpts from my notes, T.K. Sribhashyam)

"I am never born. I never change. I am the Lord of all beings,  
Master of my own nature. By my own power I come to be.

Whenever sacred law fails, and evil raises its head, I descend to  
guard the righteous, to root out sinners, and to establish sacred  
law."

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## Ândâl's Thiruppâvai

*Excerpts from an exclusive commentary by Sri T. Krishnamacharya*

*Thiruppâvai, in Tamil, the language of Tamil Nadu, is a poetic composition that has the power to lead to devotion.  
Thiruppâvai is a call for women to dedicate themselves to devotion*

**Poème 10** " Oh! Dear girl, who is very much confident of practising the rituals and entering heaven! Is it your custom not to open the doors and not even respond to our calls?

(Without getting any reply from her, the girls assembled outside her door try to make her listen to their talk as follows):

*If we sing in praise of Lord Nârâyana adorning the fragrant Tulasi garland on His head, He will surely bless us for our rituals.*

*Is it that Kumbhakarna who was, in days of yore made to leap to his death by Lord Râma, the embodiment of Dharma, has ceded his long spell of sleep to you after he was defeated (by you in a sleeping contest)?*

*O Girl overpowered by sleep! You are however, the precious jewel of our group. Hence, kindly (wake up) and come to the door with clear mind and open it."*

This tenth poem begins with an interesting happening. The cowherds who knock at the door of this girl address her as one who has completed the rituals and attained its benefit. Ândâl calls this benefit as svarga (the paradise) which is the immeasurable happiness indicating the experience with Lord Krishna.

The girls are in the phase of gathering and meeting together. Is it true that all these devotees have completed the rituals? No. Those who have realised the real nature of the Lord are deemed to have completed all the rituals blemishlessly. Hence, they need not take efforts specially. What is it that they have realised? They have realised that we, the souls are His assets, and therefore He will come and rescue us. We are subservient to Him and hence, we will be rescued by Him. Therefore, no efforts are necessary. He will take care of us.

There are two types of devotion (bhakti): Sâdhya bhakti or devotion acquired at birth and Sâdhana bhakti or devotion cultivated later in life. While the former is permanent in us, the latter needs to be developed all the time. Here, Ândâl is reminding her friends of the value of acquired devotion by saying that the girl is so immersed in devotion that she does not care to follow the rituals.

Ândâl invokes the Lord wearing the sacred Tulasi (the holy basil) on His head to assure us that His duty is to grace Liberation to those who come to Him. Tulasi is the favourite leaf of Lord Krishna and of Vishnu and also His consort. Ândâl was found in the garden of Tulasi in and she used to prepared garlands of Tulasi leaves, wear them before offering to Deity (Read earlier editions).

Kumbhakarna is one of the three demons (Râvana, Vibhîshana and Kumbhakarna. Read Râmâyana) who were all very devoted to Lord Shiva. When Lord Shiva appeared before Kumbhakarna and asked what boon he wanted, Kumbhakarna made an error in language and asked for continuous sleep instead of continuous victory. Accordingly, Kumbhakarna slept the rest of his life, except when his brother Râvana woke him up to fight against Lord Râma, and met his death. Here Ândâl is asking her friend whether she won over Kumbhakarna, any contest to be so much lost in sleep. That is to say, whether the girl is lost in her sleep or whether she is sleeping in the joy of Lord's presence.

Ândâl invokes the Saint Peyâlwar in this poem. He was born in Chennai.

### **Sri T. Krishnamâcharya's commentary:**

There are two key words in this poem: the heaven and the ornament. Heaven is not the paradise that we usually think of, but union with God or the happiness in this life. The cowherd has completed all her rites of self-surrender to the Lord and hence is enjoying His company, which is the real paradise. Ornament is the jewel that is worn by God. It also means a real devotee. The presence of a self-surrendered devotee in the midst of other devotees shines like an ornament on the chest of the Lord.

Sri T.Krishnamacharya observes that the 9th and 10th poems suggest that those who perform auspicious deeds will enjoy happiness here as well as in the other world.

When Kumbhakarna came to the battle scene, he was still half awake. On seeing Lord Râma, he says: Oh Lord! I was not sleeping out of lethargy. I could not tolerate the misdeeds of Râvana's and others. I took a firm resolve to see nothing but Your Form and so I closed my eyes (I slept). Now, I have obtained Your real vision. I am willing to die at Your hands. I will fight for Râvana but I am surrendering to You."

Same way, one should surrender to God while fighting against the misdeeds of others.

Through this poem, Ândâl teaches us that the real heaven is here in this world when we obtain the pleasure and happiness of being in God and with God; that whatever we offer Him (be it a Tulasi leaf),

we should offer with utmost devotion, that we should renounce our human characters and offer Him our soul with pure devotion.

## The Head and the Tail in Hindu Astronomy Rāhu and Ketu, the two invisible planets

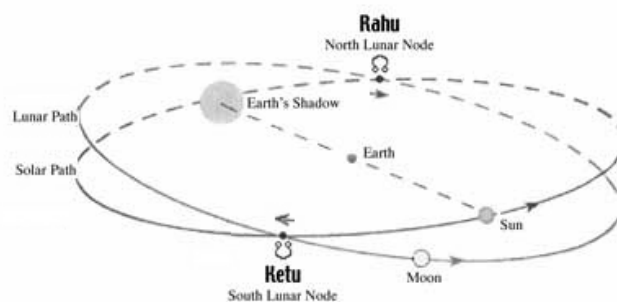
- Sri V.K.Murthy, Astrologer, Hyderabad

In Hindu mythology there is a wonderful story that describes how the gods and the demons once formed an alliance to produce a nectar that could give them immortality (*Read Yogakshemam Newsletter N° 13*). When the nectar that was churned from this ocean was being served to the gods, a demon, disguised as a god, sat between the Sun and the Moon in an attempt to procure the nectar. When he was detected by the Sun and the Moon, Vishnu immediately severed his head from his body. Unfortunately, the demon had already tasted a small quantity of the nectar and had become immortal. Ever since, this demon is said to wreak vengeance on the Sun and Moon whenever they come near. The head of this great demon is known as Rāhu, while his tail is known as Ketu. In Hindu astronomy, Rāhu and Ketu are known as two invisible planets. They are the enemies of the Sun and the Moon, who at certain times of the year (during conjunction or opposition) swallow the Sun or the Moon causing either a solar or a lunar eclipse.

In Sanskrit this is known as *grahana*, which means "to seize." What perhaps sounds like a childish story is a powerful metaphor for what actually happens when an eclipse takes place. Rāhu and Ketu are the astronomical points in the sky respectively called the North and South Lunar Nodes.

To an observer on earth, the paths of the sun and the moon appear as two great circles projected onto the celestial sphere (see the diagram below). The sun's path is called the solar ecliptic. The sun makes a complete revolution along this path once a year. At the same time, the moon's path is completed in about one month. Since the apparent motion of the moon in relation to the sun is much faster, the moon overtakes the sun every month. When the moon meets up with the sun they are said to be in conjunctions. This creates the new moon or in Sanskrit *amāvāsya*. When this occurs the sun and moon are separated by 0 degrees. Two weeks later the sun and moon are separated by 180 degrees and they are said to be in opposition. This kind of alignment creates the full moon, which in Sanskrit is called *purnima*.

An eclipse, of course, occurs when the sun, the moon and the earth line up. One may think, therefore, that an eclipse can occur twice a month during either the new or the full moons. The reason an eclipse does not occur at these times is because one more factor must be present before an eclipse can take place. The sun, the earth and the moon must not only be aligned, but they must also be in the same plane.



Usually, during new moon or full moon, the moon's path passes just above or below the sun's path in relation to the earth. They are not in the same plane and so no eclipse occurs. But periodically, when the moon overtakes the sun at the place where their paths are in the same plane in relation to the earth, an eclipse can occur. There are two such places along the solar ecliptic where this can occur. This is where the path of the moon appears to cross or intersect the sun's path. (See the diagram above). Since they are 180 degrees from each other the sun and the moon will line up at these points in six month intervals. Therefore, the solar or lunar eclipse always take place six months apart during a time sometimes called the eclipse season.

In fact, it is common to have two eclipses separated by two weeks within the same month. This occurs because the moon is aligned with the sun on one side of the earth, at new moon, and then two weeks later it is aligned with the sun on the other side of the earth, during full moon. As long as the sun and the moon remain within the same plane (within the region of these nodes) the eclipse can occur. Therefore, in the symbolic language of mythology, Rahu and Ketu are said to “swallow up” the Sun and the Moon. In fact Rahu and Ketu are positions of mathematical calculations. Therefore, they are sometimes called invisible or shadow planets.

The ancient Hindu observers of the sky were aware of the cause of the solar and lunar eclipses and so described the process in the language of a metaphor.

## Faith is superior to knowledge

- an Indian story -

There was once a man who was overly influenced by *jnāna* or analytical reasoning in performing his worship to Lord Krishna.

Once, when he had to be away from home, he called his son and instructed him to bathe, dress and feed the deity of Lord Krishna while he was gone. The boy had not learned all the appropriate *mantra* as yet; but he had great faith and respect in Lord Krishna. That day, when his mother had prepared the food, he took it before the deity, placed a fragrant flower petal on the seat where Lord Krishna was being invited to eat. Then carefully putting a Tulasi leaf (Indian holy basil) on each preparation, with folded hands he humbly requested the Lord to accept the offerings of food. And he waited.

The boy saw that no food was being eaten by Lord Krishna and so he apologised to Him for not knowing all the proper *mantra* and beseeched Him to please eat His food anyway. After sometime when he saw that the food was still not being eaten, he told Lord Krishna that it was not his fault if his father had not taught him all the *mantra* properly. He asked Lord Krishna “Will you refrain from eating just because of that? If you do not eat then I will fast along with you until you decide to accept this offering”. Still the food remained on the plate. So the boy told Lord Krishna: “Alright if you will not eat, then I will go to sleep right now without eating or even drinking”. Hearing these plaintive words from the boy, Lord Krishna could not restrain Himself any longer and in compassion jumped down from the altar took His seat and happily ate all the food on the plate before returning back to His position on the altar as before.

When the boy returned with the empty plate to his mother she asked where the food was. The boy told her that it was with great difficulty that he finally persuaded Lord Krishna to eat. His mother, amazed, asked how is this possible? The boy repeated that Lord Krishna ate everything. And his mother told the boy: “Now we have to go to bed hungry because there is no more food remaining”.

When the father returned, his wife told him that they had to go to bed hungry last night because Lord Krishna had eaten all the food that was offered. Astonished, he asked how can this be? Reflecting further he concluded that an animal must have gotten in somehow and eaten all the food. But the son told his father that this was not the case because he had seen Lord Krishna eat all the food. The father, after deliberating for some time, told his son to offer the food again that day and unknown to his son he hid himself so he could see if Lord Krishna was really eating the offering.

The boy came in and placed a fragrant flower petal down on the seat where Lord Krishna was being invited to eat and carefully placed a Tulasi leaf on every preparation, he began ringing a small bell and offered the food to Lord Krishna. When the Lord did not begin eating immediately the boy asked: “Why are you not eating? You must eat your dinner. What has happened? Has the food not been prepared properly?” In a soft voice Lord Krishna said that today his father is hiding here. “Where is my father hiding?” asked the boy. Lord Krishna replied: “Over there, behind the curtain. That is why I am not eating”. “But you must eat your food anyway. It is time now and I will be very unhappy if you do not eat”, the boy pleaded. Lord Krishna told the boy to go and simply touch his father. The boy did so and just by the touch of his son the boy’s pure sentiment and firm faith in Lord Krishna arose in the father and the father could also see that Lord Krishna was actually partaking of the food.

Embracing his son, the father admitted that faith is superior to knowledge and thanked him for having provided him the vision of Lord Krishna.

## Vishnu (4th part)

- Sri D. Pattanaik, Mumbai

The demons grabbed the vessel from the hands of Dhanvantari and ran away. Angered by the theft, Vishnu decided to teach the demons a lesson. He approached them taking the form of an enchantress, Mohini, a voluptuous damsel with an alluring smile and enticing eyes.

"May I serve the amrita?" asked Mohini.

"You may," said the demons.

Mohini took the pot and began serving the nectar. The demons, bewitched by her beauty, failed to notice that she was pouring the divine drink only down the throats of the gods.

Rahu, a demon, sat amidst the gods disguised as one of them. The Sun and the Moon recognised the demon and alerted Vishnu. By then, however, some amrita had been poured into Rahu's mouth. Vishnu immediately hurled his discus, the Sudarshana Chakra, and severed Rahu's neck preventing the nectar entering his body. Deprived of his body, Rahu swore to destroy his betrayers. He became the demon of eclipse that gnaws the bright faces of the sun and the moon from time to time (Read article: [The Head and Tail](#) in Hindu Astronomy). His headless body became the astral entity known as Ketu.

The demons, deprived of the drink, remained dark and gloomy asuras. Feeling betrayed, they attacked the gods. Vishnu picked up Shâraṅga, the bow that had emerged from the cosmic sea, and shot deadly missiles at the demons and pushed them into the deepest recess of the cosmos, the Pâtâla.

Indra, the eldest of the gods, invited Lakshmi to marry Vishnu. Lakshmi, placed the garland of victory, Vijayanti, around Vishnu's neck and made him her beloved consort. The gods cheered this union. On Vishnu's chest is a beautiful curl of golden hair called Srivatsa. It is the symbol of Sri Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and fortune, his consort. Vishnu is the soul of the universe; Lakshmi its substance. He is the protector; she the provider. They are the divine couple who nurture life.

Enchanted by the splendour of the three worlds, Brahma sprouted four heads and began admiring his creation from every angle.

"Contain your pride," said Vishnu. "The universe you have molded out of my illusion, mâya, is not permanent. It exists today, but will be gone tomorrow."

"What is the purpose of such transitory existence?" asked the creator.

"Samsâra exists to help man explore and experience the divine," replied Vishnu.

Vishnu, took the form of a swan, Hamsa, and began swimming in a river. The river did not restrain the swan in any way. It could fly away whenever it wished to, with not one drop of water burdening his wings. Hamsa exclaimed: "I enjoy the river; it helps me live. But I can fly only when I detach myself from the water. In the same way, he who seeks divinity must live in samsâra without being attached to its flow." Thus did Vishnu explain to Brahma the essence of life mystery. The swan, the symbol of enlightenment and absolute freedom, became Brahma's mount.

After defeating the demons, the gods, led by Indra, claimed every treasure that had emerged from the cosmic sea. Rising up to the heavens, Swarga, they became rulers of the cosmos. The war on earth, ushered in light and rain, made the tides rise, the moon wax and wane.

The demons, angry and bitter, took an oath, "We will oppose the gods in every way we can: what they generate, we will destroy. If they spread light, we will extend darkness; If they support life, we will stifle it." They began attacking the gods – every day, every month, every year, every aeon, their victory causing winter to arrive, the tides to fall, the moon to wane and the sun to set.

The gods fought back. The unending battles of gods and demons, the successes followed by failures, gave Nature its cyclical rhythm.

When Vishnu was once asked how he could be recognised on earth, he replied, "I am Vishnu, the pervader; I exist everywhere, but I express myself best in all that is ideal, perfect, harmonious and beautiful.

To Vishnu does man offer the salute: Om namo bhâgavate vâsudevâya.

## **Tulasi (ocimum sanctum)**

*The most holy plant of India*

*I bow down to the Tulasi, at whose base are all the holy places, at whose top reside all the deities and in whose middle are all the Vedas.*

In Sanskrit, Tulasi means that which is incomparable (in its qualities).

The tulasi leaves and plant is supposed to have been born at the time of the churning of the milky ocean, are considered to be dear to Lord Vishnu and are often identified with his consort Lakshmi.

Its presence in the courtyard of a house is believed to ward off the messengers of death. Hindu mythological scriptures declare that all gods and places of pilgrimage inhere in it.

In practically every temple in India, there is a special place reserved for this sacred plant. Hindus consider it a great privilege even to water her. Her qualities and amazing powers are found in the oldest writings on the earth, the Veda, where it is stated that that simply touching the wood purifies man.

Skanda Purana: "Oh Tulasi, just by touching you, one's body becomes pure. Any person who makes beautiful japa mālā [meditation beads] or neck beads out of Tulasi wood, and uses them, even if they do not perform any worship of Sri Vishnu, all of their activities become unlimitedly fruitful."

Tulasi was the devoted wife of Shankhachuda, a celestial being. She believed that Lord Krishna tricked her into sinning. So she cursed Him to become a stone (shâlagrâma). Admiring her devotion and adhered to righteousness, the Lord blessed her saying that she would become the worshipped plant Tulasi that would adorn His head. He also declared that all offerings would be incomplete without the Tulasi leaf. She also symbolises Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu. Those who wish to be righteous and have a happy family life worship the Tulasi.

Lord Krishna himself declared that among the flowers, Tulasi flower is the most sacred. In Hindu Vaishnava temple tradition, flowers have an incremental value. To give an example: blue lotus flower is inferior to a red lotus flower which is inferior to a hundred petalled red lotus which is inferior to a thousand petalled red lotus. Superior to all is a Tulasi leaf.

Food prepared as offering to God is prepared with fire from Tulasi twigs and roots mixed with other trees. In human life, beads made out of Tulasi branches are worn and used as prayer beads (Tulasi Mâlâ). Food is offered to God with a Tulasi leaf on top. It is a purifier of sins; hence, its twigs are used in the funeral pyre. Death ceremonies are conducted with the Tulasi twigs.

The tulasi leaf has great medicinal value and is used to cure various ailments. The Western chemists recognize considerable healing properties and have isolated eugenol, carvacrol, methyl eugenol and caryophyllene from the leaves alone.

## **The page of Srimathi T. Namagiriammal**

*(Wife of Sri T. Krishnamacharya)*

### **Tulasi, holy basil**

**Varieties:** White, black and camphor. Basil camphor is the crystallized oil of Tulasi

**Habitat and culture:** Outdoor plant in India, South and Central America. In Europe, an interior plant next to warmth.

**Parts used:** Fresh leaves, dried roots, seeds.

**Formulation:** Trituration from fresh leaves. Paste of fresh leaves. Powder of roots or seeds.

Extraction of juice by pressing fresh leaves

Particularity: Dried leaves do not contain medicinal properties.

**Ayurvedic properties:** Laghu (light, digestive) Rukshna (dry, hard, stiff)

**Action:** Alleviates the disorders of Kapha and Vatha. Helps produce Pitha.

#### **External uses:**

Insecticidal, deodorant. Paste of fresh leaves relieves the discomforts of chronic ulcers, oedema.

Massaging the skin with the juice of leaves improves the intradermal circulation.

#### **Internal uses**

Digestive system: appetizer, digestive, laxative and anthelmintic, hypoglycemic.

Circulatory system: Cardiac stimulant, hypotensive, anti-inflammatory, reduces the cholesterol ratio

Nervous system: Reduces consequences of stress

Respiratory system: Expectorant (crushed leaves mixed with honey)

Urinary system: Tulasi seeds are diuretic. Alleviates cystitis, calculi, urethritis and burning micturation. Powder mixed in water or tea made from the seeds.

Dosage: Juice: 10 ml. Seeds or powdered roots: 1 teaspoon of tea made thereof

*Note: Holy basil not being a spice is not used in cooking. However we can find it in numerous ayurvedic medical preparations.*

**Ayurvedic injunction:** women should not pluck the Tulasi leaves during their menstruation.