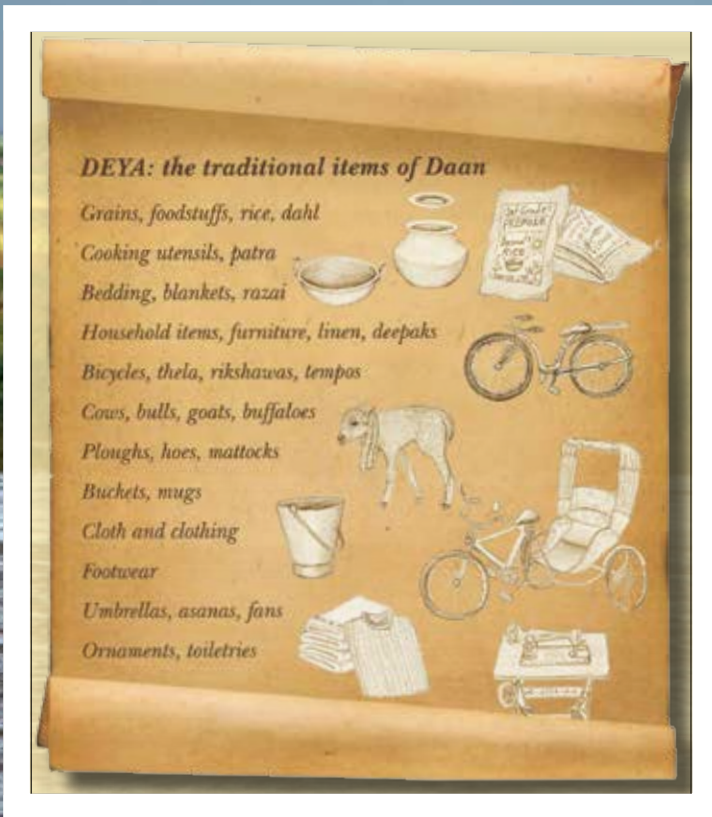


CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS SERIES

Daan

Path to Positivity and Purity

Swami Ratnashakti Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Daan
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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

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Under the Guidance of

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



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Daan: Path to Positivity and Purity

Swami Ratnashakti Saraswati

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Published by Yoga Publications Trust

First edition 2021

ISBN: 978-81-949328-4-0

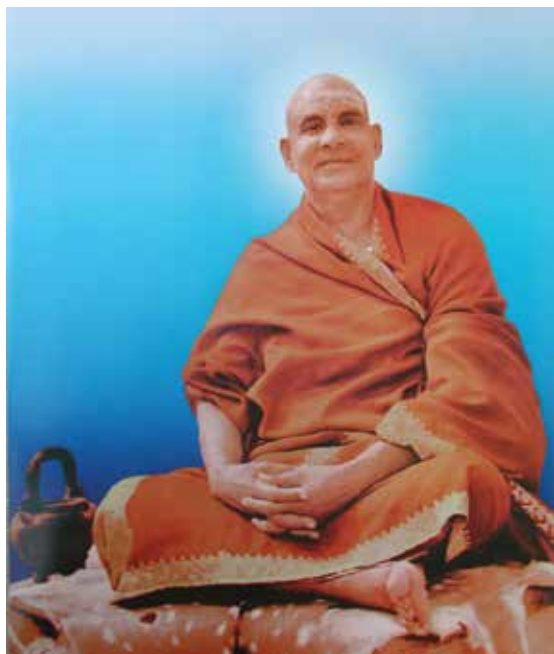
Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Garuda Vishnu,
PO Ganga Darshan, Fort, Munger, Bihar, India

Website: www.sannyasapeeth.net

www.biharyoga.net

www.satyamyogaprasad.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.*

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Preface

Daan is one of the foundations of human dharma. Vedic thought states that three aspects constitute human dharma: *yajna*, propitiating life, earth, nature and divine; *daan*, the act of giving; and *swadhyaya*, self-observation, self-analysis and self-correction. Dharma expresses the righteous word, thought and deed. Daan is the first mandate given by the Divine to humankind.

Daan is not charity as many people believe it to be. Charity is giving with the idea and understanding that ‘I am helping someone else’; whereas the idea and understanding of daan is that ‘I am giving it for my betterment’.

Daan is an act of giving. The act of giving is to purify the mind, sentiments, emotions of the giver; it is for the betterment of the giver, for attaining and sustaining positivity and purity of the Self.

Daan ensures that at material level all have sufficient to live a happy and contented life; at emotional level it provides a connection with people based on empathy, understanding and reciprocity; at spiritual level it provides you with means to overcome the selfish and self-oriented ego and transcend it by expanding the awareness.

Our ancestors have used daan as a means to go further in the discovery of themselves and their connection with other beings around them. This presentation brings forth the classical application of daan in a very scientific, systematic and practical manner for all to live the virtue of daan.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

1

Understanding Daan

See God everywhere. Share with all. The major portion must be given to others. Destroy the ingrained miserliness. Your heart will expand. You will have a broad outlook on life. You will have a new wide vision. You can feel the help you get from the indweller of the heart. You can experience an indescribable thrill of divine ecstasy and spiritual bliss. This will give you tremendous inner strength.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Daan is translated in English as giving, but the translation is inadequate. Daan is more than just giving and it is not charity. *Daan* is the expression of an expanded awareness and the manifestation of pure love. This love is not limited to those who are near and dear. It is unlimited and all-encompassing. It flourishes in those who experience truth in the interconnectedness of all life, beauty in the faces of all they behold, and the bliss of the divine essence infusing each and everything.

Daan benefits both the giver and the receiver, not only in the material dimension but also in the mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions of life. That form of daan generates social, environmental and spiritual harmony.

On the material level, daan is a social science of redistribution, a method to mitigate against poverty, ensure proper

distribution of resources and redress the environmental imbalance caused by uncontrolled greed and consumption. On the mental and emotional levels, daan is a way to connect with others, and learn how to share the best there is in life. It is an expression of the best in human sentiments – kindness, consideration, generosity and love. On the spiritual level, daan is a sadhana, a practical method to purify, restrain and transform the negative conditions of mind, expand awareness and attain progressively higher states of consciousness. Perfection of daan leads to the attainment and experience of *atmabhava*, the ability to see oneself in others.

Dharma and daan

Since ancient times the concept of daan has formed one of the bases for *dharma*, or righteousness. The word dharma is a derivation from the Sanskrit root *dhri*, which means to hold, maintain, support or keep. Dharma refers to the principles which remain constant and maintain order; the cosmic principles that created the universe from chaos, as well as the human attitudes and behaviour considered necessary for maintaining order in the universe. Dharma refers to the conduct, action and interaction which is necessary and appropriate. It is the dharma of the bee to make honey and of a cow to give milk. It is the dharma of the sun to radiate warmth and of a river to flow. When there is dharma, there is harmony and balance in life.



Daan is the original dharma of every human being. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* (3:17:4), there is a statement:

त्रयो धर्मस्कन्धाः यज्ञोऽध्ययनं दानमिति प्रथमम्

Trayo dharma skandhāḥ, yajño 'adhyayanam, dānam iti prathamam

There are three branches of dharma or righteous and appropriate living, yajna, swadhyaya and daan or giving are the first.

This is the statement of the Upanishads. This dharma is not the religion to which we are exposed, but *dharma* is the eternal harmony which we express with nature, and with the Divine and with ourselves. Dharma is the state of harmony, dharma is building up the state of harmony, dharma is uniting, coming together with the spirit in nature and with the spirit which is transcendental.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

In contrast, when there is *adharma*, the absence of dharma, there is chaos, instability, imbalance and strife. If the sun stopped shining, or rivers remained still, without flowing, imagine the chaos and panic. Life as we know it would be impossible. Dharma is what keeps things functioning and makes life possible. This is not only true in nature, but equally relevant and important for humanity. Dharma means righteous and appropriate living that supports the positive, creative and constructive growth and development of society, the family and individual. Adharma is unrestrained selfishness and negativity, leading to a social and environmental of imbalance that eventually destroys life.

Yajna is the means by which spiritual harmony as well as social and environmental balance can be attained and maintained in life. *Swadhyaya* or self-study relates to the individual. Swadhyaya is the means or method by which one can observe and understand the different levels of the

human experience, the physical, pranic, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. Swadhyaya means the effort that each individual makes to overcome the limitations and shortcomings of their personality and circumstances, and connect with their inner positivity. The outcome of swadhyaya is the experience of an integrated and harmonious nature and the expression of goodness in life. Together swadhyaya and yajna form two branches of dharma. The third is daan.

In ancient times King Harshavardhana gave away all his personal property at the conclusion of performing the Rajasooya Yajna. It is an historical fact, not a myth. He had attended the Maha Kumbha at Prayag. There he gifted away all his personal possessions and thereafter ate his meals from leaf plates, drank water from an earthen pot and slept on the bare ground. Think of it, the Emperor of Hindustan gave away everything that he possessed and slept on the ground!

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Dharma in the yugas

According to the scriptures, there are four *yugas* or eras of time. Each yuga has different characteristics according to the level of dharma exemplified in each age. The first is the Satya Yuga. In Satya Yuga, dharma is traditionally depicted in the form of a cow symbolizing goodness and natural order, standing on all four legs. Satya Yuga is characterized by purity of intention and appropriate conduct. Purity of intention represents a connection to the positive, selfless and expansive human qualities and attitude. Appropriate conduct is based on an understanding and acceptance of duty rather than the assertion and dominance of individual rights. In Satya Yuga the attitudes and actions of people were conducive to the maintenance of harmony and order, at individual, social and environmental levels. Selflessness was the predominant quality and expression, not selfish-

ness. *Sanyam* or restraint and abandonment of all worldly desires were among the virtues shared by all. Cohesion and balance were the norm, not strife and inequity. There was no division between people, nobody was poor and nobody was rich. Everyone prospered and people were happy, content and peaceful. Compassion, tolerance, understanding and goodwill were the predominant qualities.



In the next age, the Treta Yuga, dharma stands on three legs only. This indicates the beginning of the decline in dharma. During the Treta Yuga the purity of mind and intention slightly diminishes. Consequently, as the purity and selflessness diminishes, the selfish and self-centred nature of ego along with the six negative conditions of mind, *kama*, desire, *krodha*, anger, *lobha*, greed, *moha*, infatuation, *mada*, arrogance, *matsarya*, jealousy, begins to influence the personality. Due to the influence of the six conditions, restraint of mind also lessens and the senses become more externalized. Externalization of mind leads to disconnection with the inner nature, peace and contentment. As a consequence of externalization of the mind and senses the spiritual connection weakens and people become more materialistic. When desire arose, people generally sought the means to fulfil that desire. However, the general conduct and behaviour of people was appropriate and in accordance with the natural order of life.

In Dwapara Yuga dharma is reduced to standing on two legs. The purity of Satya Yuga and the righteousness of Treta Yuga are gone. The influence of the six conditions or friends upon the individual mind is stronger, and people are under the sway of their own selfish natures and obsessions. Due

to selfishness, the inherent understanding and acceptance of the importance of duty and righteousness is lost. People are less able to discriminate and determine the appropriate action and conduct. What I want becomes the dominant motivating factor in life. Materialistic attitudes prevail, and the selfish nature of pleasure-seeking begins to dominate.

Numerous types of desires arise in the mind and the effort is made not to restrain the selfish tendencies but to fulfil the desires. In pursuit of sensorial fulfilment, actions are self-oriented and there is no restraint in regard to the appropriateness of conduct and behaviour. It is seldom that anyone is completely truthful. In this era, mental purity ceases to exist. As a result of lies, deceit and lust for power, there are wars. There are famines. People are plagued by ailments, diseases and suffering. To expiate the situation and correct the imbalances caused by unrestrained negativity, yajnas are conducted and daan is given. Daan and yajna become the means to re-establish peace and harmony.

Kali Yuga

The present yuga is the age of Kali. According to the *Surya Siddhanta*, Kali Yuga began at midnight on 18 February 3102 BCE. Not to be confused with the Goddess Kali, the yuga Kali is named after a demon. In Kali Yuga dharma stands on one leg only. Detailed accounts and descriptions of Kali Yuga have been given in the Puranas, *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which predict the decline of humanity, society and the environment. In Kali Yuga rulers will no longer see it as their duty to encourage and support spirituality, or to protect their subjects. Instead rulers and political leaders are themselves corrupt and become a danger to the world and a threat to their citizens. Law and justice are applied only on the basis of one's power.

In Kali Yuga, wealth alone will be considered a sign of a person's good character, behaviour and qualities. Even an individual's spiritual attainments and position will be ascertained merely according to external symbols, position



and fame. On the same material pretext people will change from one spiritual order to the next and it will be very rare that any sincere spiritual aspiration is seen.

In Kali Yuga materialism reigns supreme. The mind and senses are completely externalized and the connection with the inner spiritual self is lost. The positive qualities of truthfulness, restraint, tolerance, mercy, understanding, wisdom and memory diminish and disappear. Instead the six friends dominate the mind and the expressions in life. For the individual obsessed with material desires the predominant mental state is agitated, full of greed, fear and anxiety. Anger, aggression and wrath are common. People openly display animosity towards each other and are greedy, ill-behaved and merciless.

Due to societies' unrestrained greed and individual selfishness in the pursuit of pleasure the natural harmony and balance of the environment is lost. Biodiversity disappears from the earth and rivers dry up. The land is afflicted. Climatic extremes of heat, drought, cold, wind, rain and snow are predicted and as a consequence of these environmental catastrophes, humanity also suffers and society declines. The basic needs of life are not easily obtained



and there is poverty and famine. People will resort to eating leaves, roots, flesh, wild honey, fruits, flowers and seeds. People will start migrating, seeking countries where food is available. Wheat and barley form the staple food source. Physical health, strength and vitality decline and the maximum duration of life for human beings becomes fifty years.

The underprivileged of the world are a challenge to your spiritual life. People are suffering mentally, physically and economically. In the ancient vedic culture giving and sharing were mandatory. Ten percent of one's earnings was for those without an income. The purpose of spiritual life is caring for God's creation. Whatever you spend on your own pleasure and comfort for three days a month should go to the have-nots, who are the majority in society.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The detailed predictions of the Kali Yuga given in the scriptures are an accurate and terrifying description of the world we live in today. We live in societies where dharma is in decline. Across the globe we are living in a world of widening, not diminishing, economic inequality and the growing chasm between the haves and the have-nots threatens the security and stability of the entire planet. In the face of imminent crisis, it is increasingly important that we

learn how to live properly. It is only by living properly that dharma will return, and the balance and harmony of life, the environment, society and the individual can be restored.

Daan in the different yugas

Our ancestors, the rishis and the seers, who have thought about life have come to the conclusion, that there has to be balance and harmony between the material and spiritual. In order to develop and build up the material aspect of life, you need to undergo a process of discipline. In order to cultivate spiritual awareness, you also need to undergo a process of discipline and training.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The importance of daan for humanity and the maintenance of order and harmony in life is not something relegated to the ancient past. The current global predicament shows that a proper understanding of daan is more relevant and important today than ever. During the Satya Yuga, before performing daan the giver actually had to find someone to give to. This indicates a very high level of material, social and spiritual existence in Satya Yuga. The person intending to give would need to seek and approach a potential recipient. Before any item could be given, the giver would enquire as to whether or not the daan was suitable and would be accepted. Daan would only be accepted if it was appropriate according to the circumstances, station and lifestyle of the person. A cordial and respectful relationship between the giver and the receiver as well as a practical understanding of the need or requirement for all members of society was a prerequisite for the performance of daan.

In Treta Yuga daan could only be given after inviting the person concerned to receive. Daan would not be given unless the invitation was accepted. Again a high level of existence in all social dimensions is indicated. Daan is not something that people need to sustain their material needs and livelihood.

It is in Dwapara Yuga that the concept of soliciting and seeking daan comes in. In Dwapara Yuga it is said that daan is given to one who seeks. Interestingly it is also in Dwapara Yuga that the sadhana of daan as a means to overcome negativity and selfishness is given prominence. In the Vana Parva of the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma recommends that one must 'conquer the mean by charity, the untruthful by truth, the wicked by forgiveness, and dishonesty by honesty'. To restore dharma, daan is used as a method to correct social and environmental imbalance. Projects such as planting trees, building wells and providing for clean drinking water are all considered forms of daan and encouraged.

In Kali Yuga daan is given to those who follow the giver and beg. Although written thousands of years ago, this statement is an accurate description and reflection of the present situation of poverty existing in countries across the globe. The increase in personal greed and the decline in dharma and social harmony is at its most crucial in the Kali Yuga. Daan becomes a means of self-purification as well as the way to contribute towards the health, welfare and security of others. Those who have enough must share with others, and this has been the instruction of the spiritual luminaries of the modern age.

Give, give, give, by whatever means possible. It is this tradition of daan that has been honoured and continued through time, from the ancient seers to Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, who was daan personified and lived his life in service of others. The first step in his cardinal teachings were the instructions, 'Serve, Love, Give'. His disciple Swami Satyananda took up these instructions. Through the practical implementation of 'Serve, Love and Give', the neglected and ignored sector of a small rural panchayat of Rikhia in the state of Jharkhand was completely transformed. Everyone from pensioners and widows, to youth and children received what was appropriate and conducive to their peace, plenty and prosperity in life.

The revival of the ancient and classical tradition of daan is emerging through the activities of Sannyasa Peeth, Munger, under the inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda. The daan given at Sannyasa Peeth is in accordance with the instructions and system of daan outlined in the scriptures and taught by the rishis and sages throughout the ages. These teachings are important hints and guidelines on how to create a strong foundation of dharma in life, and imbibe spiritual samskaras.



Swami Satyananda has given us the mandate of daan, and daan is of two types. The one which he established in Rikhiapeeth is the teaching of his master Sri Swami Sivananda – serve, love and give. The one which is established in Sannyasa Peeth is the traditional and classical method of daan. There is a difference between the two. In Rikhiapeeth, Sri Swamiji established and upheld the teachings of Swami Sivananda, and in Sannyasa Peeth, he gave the instruction for daan to follow the traditional and the classical path. The concept of daan of Sannyasa Peeth and the concept of daan of Rikhiapeeth are two separate concepts, yet they are beautiful expressions of the dharma which Sri Swamiji established. They are incredible concepts we are fortunate to have received.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

2

System and Method of Daan

Daan is the original dharma of every human being.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Daan has two objectives. One is material and one is spiritual. When something is given in daan, the material objective is the benefit the recipient will derive through the item given. Whether it is clothing, food, water, the item of daan received is what is understood as the material benefit. The benefit of daan pertains not only to the material benefit, but also to the happiness and upliftment that is experienced by the person who receives the gift. The benefit of daan has individual as well as social applications. At the individual level, daan provides the items and resources needed to sustain and develop life. It alleviates suffering and provides sustenance and happiness in the life of the person who receives. At the social level, the material aspect of daan ensures the correct and appropriate distribution of resources in society, so that members of society can live in peace and happiness. At the environmental level, daan encourages the conservation and sharing of resources.

While a materialistic view will describe daan in terms of what is being given, the spiritual objective of daan is quite different. The spiritual objective has two aspects. The first is the *punya* or merit of the daan. It is said that everything good in life is secured by daan. Merit refers to the subtle,

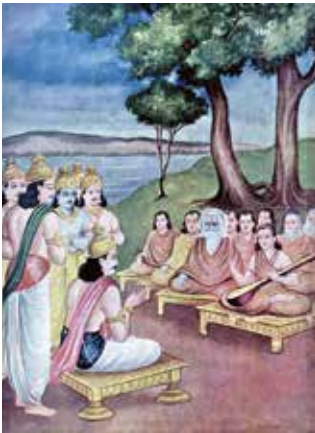
spiritual aspect of daan which is experienced by the person who gives. Different qualities or manifestations of energy are invoked by the daan of different items. The merit for each daan has been described in the scriptures. For example, the merit may be longevity, meaning that the person who gives the daan will have a long and healthy life. This merit is derived from a particular attribute of prana shakti. The merit may be happiness and freedom from misery. This is an attribute of chitta shakti. If the daan is performed correctly, these qualities are experienced in the life of the person who has given that daan. The merit, the enhancement, and the permanent or imperishable nature of that merit refer to different spiritual elements drawn from the reservoir of cosmic benevolence and grace by the act of daan.

The second aspect is the process of purification of mind and expansion of awareness that takes place when daan becomes a sadhana and a lifestyle. The sadhana element of daan accesses the spiritual dimension of life through connection with other people. This is the catalyst for the positive change that is experienced as spiritual merit of daan. From this connection with the positive selfless qualities, the awareness expands and the heart opens. When daan is performed correctly it removes the selfish inclinations of mind.



In the *Garuda Purana* greed and selfishness are likened to the friend who brings constant misery and unhappiness through their friendship, but cannot be warded off. *Lobha* or greed creates anger, malice and delusion. It gives birth to illusion, rivalry, competitiveness and false prestige. Therefore, the scriptures extol people to perform daan to overcome the self-centred nature and daan is held as the highest virtue which can counter the negative aspects of mind.

In the *Skanda Purana* the system of daan is explained to King Dharmavarma by Rishi Narada. The king wanted to learn the science of daan, understand the essential elements, and know how to ensure that daan was performed properly. To obtain this *jnana* or wisdom, he performed *tapasya*, or the practice of sadhana and austerity. At the end of his *tapasya*, he was rewarded with a sloka. The *akashavani*, or voice from another dimension, proclaimed, 'Daan has two hetu, six adhishthana, six anga, two paka, four prakara, three vidhi and three ways of nasha.' Unable to understand this, the king made an announcement that anyone who would explain this sloka to him would be rewarded with 700,000 cows, the same amount of gold coins and seven villages. Many came to try their luck, but none could give a satisfactory answer. Finally, Rishi Narada, who happened to be looking for some suitable land in the area, arrived at the King's court. He



explained the meaning of the sloka as follows. Daan has:

1. Two *hetus* or causes without which it will not occur.
2. Five *adhishthanas* or bases which are the different intentions of the giver.
3. Six *angas* or branches,
4. Two *paakas* or places of fruition,
5. Four *prakaras* or varieties,
6. Three *vidhis* or methods
7. Three *nashas* or destructive factors.

Two hetus or causes

The two hetus or causes of daan are *shraddha* or faith and *shakti* meaning power, energy and capacity. It is said that shraddha and shakti alone determine and are the causes of the merit, enhancement and imperishability of daan.

Shraddha

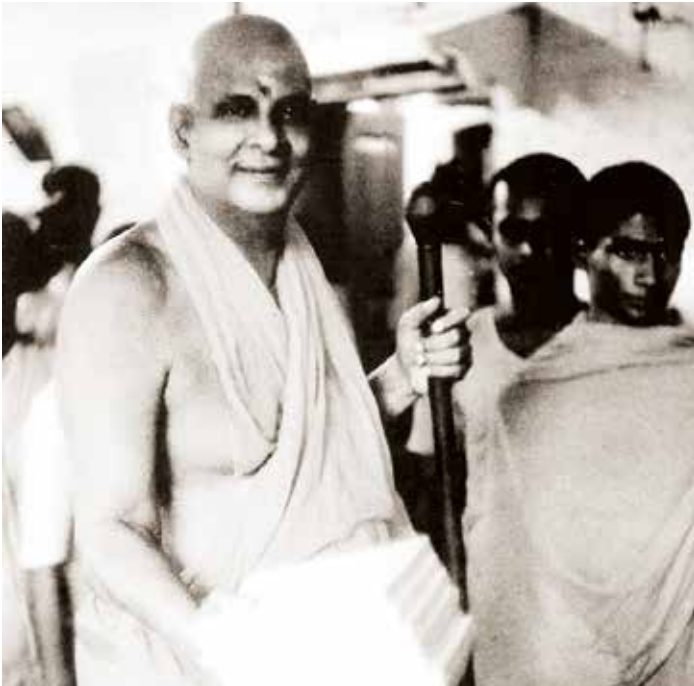
Shraddha is an innate quality of the heart. It is the substratum of life and the foundation upon which all the positive qualities in human nature develop. If shraddha is the cause of daan, this indicates that without shraddha, the connection with the positive qualities of one's own nature, positive intention and goodwill would not be possible. It is this shraddha which is utilized in the sankalpa made when daan is performed correctly, that becomes the causal element which creates the connection to the higher spiritual dimension and draws down the divine grace and benediction. Only one who is endowed with shraddha is able to practise daan in the true sense, because both daan and shraddha involve and influence all levels of existence from the physical to the spiritual. The *Skanda Purana* states that if one gives away everything including life itself, yet that gift is without shraddha, the daan will not be fruitful and no merit will be obtained.

One aspect of daan is shraddha, faith. Faith is not an intellectual process. It is an expression and experience of heart, which is pure and which is selfless. It does not crave and desire anything for itself but is open to that experience of the Divine. It can come from any side, from within and from without as well. It is that faith which is the quality, the *guna*, of the heart and not a subject of intellectual interpretation and discussion. Faith is something which is pure, simple and innocent and which connects you with the positive within you, with Guru and with the divine.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

In the scriptures shraddha is also said to be the cause of dharma. Dharma is achieved through shraddha. Dharma is not a material attribute, it is a spiritual quality which permeates every aspect and activity of life. It is a subtle spiritual essence which is not obtained solely through tapasya or wealth, but through shraddha itself. The life of a person who is moderate in wealth or poor and without income, can be a life of dharma if endowed with shraddha. If shraddha is a cause of dharma, then it must also be inherent in the performance of daan, as daan is considered to be one of the three branches of dharma.

Swami Sivananda had shraddha and therefore the daan he performed was unlimited. He would give away everything in the ashram, without any concern for how the ashram would function. Blankets, medicine, food, everything received was given, even to the despair of his disciples.



Swami Sivananda was a very generous and large-hearted man; his heart was completely open, without any doors or windows. He was not at all interested in accumulating wealth. He would say, “Spend more than you have. Feed the poor. Give them medicine. Give blankets to the pilgrims. Make arrangements for drinking water during the summer and extend all possible help to the sadhus and sannyasins.” Whenever anyone came to ask him for something, he would say, “Go on, give it to him.” Once he completely cleaned out the whole ashram. We had no blankets because he had given them all away.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Shakti

The second cause of daan is shakti, which pertains to the capacity of the giver. In order to give there must be shakti, there must be capacity, power and ability. This doesn't mean that one has to be a millionaire in order to practise daan. Rather daan should be given according to one's capacity. It does not matter if what is given is of small quantity. If the item is acquired by fair and justifiable means, and is given with shraddha, the daan can still attain fruition.

It is the surplus of life which should be shared with others. What is there that can be easily shared with others without causing hardship anywhere? Admonition is given against giving beyond one's capacity, and without ensuring that the needs of one's own family are satisfied. It is said that giving to others who are well off, when one's own people are suffering and in hardship, is like swallowing poison pretending it is honey. In this case there is no dharma, only the pretence and semblance of dharma, and the daan will be of no merit.



Along with faith, you need shakti, capacity. What capacity do I have to overcome this self-oriented nature? It is very important to know what is my capacity and to give according to that capacity. Sri Swami Satyananda used to say, “Give according to your capacity. When you buy shoes for your children, buy one extra pair. It won’t make any difference to the pocket. Instead of buying two T-shirts, shirts and pants for your children, buy three, one extra pair and give that to some unknown person who needs that intervention through you.” Maybe, you are the medium of God’s grace. But do it.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

In accordance with the requirement of shakti as an essential cause of daan, the scriptures prohibit the giving away of nine items. These nine items should not be given even in emergency or dire circumstances, and if given *prayaschitta* or the expiratory rites are to be performed. *Samanya*, property shared with others or jointly owned, *yachita*, what has been obtained by begging, *nyasa*, that which is deposited, *adhi*, property which is already pledged or mortgaged, *darah*, one’s wife, *darsanam* which is the bail amount, *anvahita* referring to a security deposit, *nikshepa* which is any amount held in trust, and *sarvasha* which pertains to the entire property and should not be given in entirety when family members remain alive.

God told me, “Swami Satyananda, as long as you are not amassing wealth for your own comfort and luxury you will get whatever you want.” Mother Lakshmi has issued a blank cheque, but it is not meant for my personal comfort. Be it the earthquake in Bhuj or the Orissa catastrophe, I can spend as much as I like on relief measures for people affected by the disaster. That divine gift is always there. It is a service to the nation. I wish to emphasize one point. The tendency to collect and amass property gives rise to wrong conduct;



it leads to undesirable thought processes and unholy attitudes. However, the tendency to sacrifice brings about a complete change in man's behaviour, way of thinking and expression. This is the statement of our sages and seers. If you fill a bottle with water and do not use it, the water putrefies. If the water continues to flow, it never putrefies. This should be the attitude of human behaviour.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Five adhithanas

Five adhithanas or bases for daan are distinguished according to the intention of the giver. This indicates that intention is an important aspect of the sadhana of daan and must be considered properly. The five different intentions or motivations for giving are: fear, profit, merit, compassion

and that which is without intention. These five levels of intention can also be analyzed through observation of the guna which predominates in each.

The motive of fear indicates the presence of insecurity in the giver. Therefore, the intention is governed by tamoguna and the prevalent desire is for security and stability which is expressed through tamasic lobha. The second is the desire of profit to be made from the gift in future, which indicates the presence of rajoguna, and rajasic lobha. The third is the desire of merit arising from the gift, and is in the transition between rajas and sattwa. If the merit one seeks is pure, then one's intentions are governed by sattwa, but if the merit one seeks is indulgent and selfish, then rajoguna remains predominant.

The fourth motive is that of compassion which is experienced and directed towards the person to whom one is giving. The motive of compassion indicates the beginning of an expansion of awareness in the giver. It starts with the understanding that this person is experiencing difficulties and distress in life. From this understanding the selfish constraints on the personality lessen, and an ability to connect with the feelings and experiences of another person emerges. This process of refining the intention and connecting with the most positive intention possible is the beginning of the sadhana of daan.

The final class of daan has no motive. This is called *dharmadaan*, that which is given freely, for the sake of giving, and is accompanied only by the desire to bring happiness and joy into the lives of others. Dharmadaan also refers to the daan based on dharma, which is given daily with the idea that to give is a duty that should be performed in life. Dharmadaan is given without any expectation of return, and only with the hope that it brings happiness and contentment into the lives of others; it is given by saints and sages, by gurus and sannyasins. This form of daan is also called *prasad* because the motive involved is a selfless intention to give happiness to others.

One who has not shared what he has with others has a poor heart indeed, though he may be a millionaire. Even the man who has nothing to eat is the richest man in the world if he has a large heart and shares what he has with others. Radiate thoughts of generosity and love.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

The six angas

The six angas or branches of daan are:

1. The *data* or giver
2. The *pratigrahita* or recipient
3. The element of *shuddhi* or purity
4. *Deya*, the item gifted
5. *Dharmayuk*, that which is associated with dharma
6. *Desha-kala* or the place and time of daan.

1. Data

The *data* or person who gives should be free from illness and in good health. Daan should not be given by one who is ill. There is a reciprocal exchange of energy that happens with daan. It is not just the material object that is given. Along with the item, the good wishes, sentiment, shraddha and intention of the data is also conveyed. This transfer should only be done by those who are healthy. The data should be of good character, a person who is pure and simple in conduct and attitude, who acts appropriately according to dharma. In vocation as well as attitude and interaction the data should be free from vices and reproach.

The children will distribute the prasad as we wish to banish meanness from our society. By and large people are very tight-fisted and you know that miserliness is the weakest point in man's character. Therefore, children should learn early in life how to share their pleasure with their fellow beings. They should imitate the habit of giving. Giving good samskaras in the formative years



will bring about changes in their attitude to life. To give prasad is a meritorious act and to offer prasad is a person's first duty.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Most importantly the data should have shraddha, and the desire to give. The data who is not simple and straightforward, who is without shraddha, and has a restless mind, plagued by the six friends is considered to be tamasic. The data who gives out of lobha, expecting the gain or profit which could be realized through daan is considered to be rajasic. The data who gives, as a spontaneous expression of their feeling to connect with and love others is sattwic.

Apply this test: Does your heart melt at the suffering of others? Have charity and generosity become your very nature? Your money belongs to the Lord. You have no business to keep more than you need. How can you accumulate wealth when your God in the form of a poor man is starving? How can you take food four times a day when, a beggar – Lord Narayana – is starving outside the door? These are the real tests of spiritual progress. Do you rush to the poor man walking along the street and offer him food? Do you rush to the aid of the sick or injured man lying on the roadside?

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

2. *Pratigrahita*

The *pratigrahita* or the recipient of daan should be deserving. Traditionally and according to the scriptures, this often referred to Brahmins, but it is important to note that it also means those people who were educated, of righteous conduct and good nature, who lived simply in accordance with dharma. Status acquired by birth alone does not make one deserving of daan. The *Agni Purana* lists the different possible recipients from all strata of society and the various merits involved in giving to each. Without good conduct, swadhyaya, kindness and goodwill towards all beings, a good birth is fruitless. Rather the person who practises truthfulness, restraint, tapasya, contentment, forgiveness, kindness, compassion and is straightforward in conduct and wise, is deserving of daan. Such a person called *patra*, meaning a deserving person, is like an empty vessel into which all the good qualities of life can be poured.

In the *Mahabharata*, after the Kurukshetra war, Yudhishtira asks Bhishma Pitamah to explain who is a worthy recipient of daan. Bhishma tells him that a worthy person has the following attributes: lack of anger, truthfulness, simplicity, lack of treachery and cunningness, lack of pride, modesty, tolerance, self-control, and restraint of mind.



Whether the person is well-known or is a new acquaintance does not matter. The person should not be engaged in undesirable activity or behaviour. Bhishma also says that a Brahmin should not be considered worthy of daan if he criticizes the Vedas, and relies on logic to dispute spiritual truths, is loud, noisy and abusive, is suspicious of everyone, behaves like a child or is idiotic in nature and bitter in speech.

The nature of the *pratigrahita* also affects the benefit and merit of the daan. When daan is given to a deserving person,

the material benefit and the spiritual merit which accrues is attained both in this world and the next. If daan is given to an underserving person, the material benefit and spiritual merit is restricted to the present circumstances only.

Sometimes my disciples would be alarmed when they observed me giving as much as one hundred rupees to a beggar. “Let him enjoy,” I would say. “He has never known what enjoyment is in life.”

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

3. *Shuddhi*

The anga of *shuddhi* or purity arises in relation to all aspects of the daan. Ideally, there should be shuddhi, not only the physical and mental shuddhi but also purity of heart in both the data and pratigrahita. The person who naturally exhibits generosity, hospitality and is free from malice is pure of heart. A data who immediately reacts with smiles of heartfelt pleasure and happiness when seeing the intended recipients of daan fulfils the requirement of shuddhi. The person who receives daan looking to the positive intention behind the gift and not to the expense or material benefit, is pure. The item itself should be pure. If anna daan is given, the food



or grain must be of good quality, free from bugs and fresh, not stale or old.

Always give the best things to others, only then will your heart expand. But some people want to keep the best things for their personal use and give the worst to others. Do not close the door and take first class coffee. As soon as you close the door, you should feel that God

is witnessing your action and that you should not act selfishly. The moment your stock is exhausted by giving to others, a fresh supply will come. Even if you do not desire prosperity, grace will come to you in this form. If one possesses charity, generosity and purity, these attributes automatically bring forth *bhukti* and *mukti*, prosperity and liberation. This is the unalterable law.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

4. *Deya*



Deya or the item gifted may be large or small in quantity. However, the purity of *deya* is enhanced when the item has been earned or produced without causing harm or pain to any being. If the *deya* is special, rare, not easily obtained or gifted out of season, then *daan* is said to have special merit. Similarly, if the *deya* is given when the recipient has a particular need of that item, it has a special merit. If the item has been produced by the effort of the *data*, the merit increases. This indicates that there is a connection between the item and the person giving also, and this connection can be utilized to increase the spiritual merit of the *daan*.

This was clearly seen in the *daan* given at Rikhiapeeth by Swami Satyananda. The items of *daan* to be given in the Sat Chandi Mahayajna were determined by him ahead of time,

according to the usefulness, practicality, appropriateness of the item, and the need of the people. Prior to distribution, all the items received would be kept in Raghunath Kutir, the place where Swami Satyananda lived, and through that proximity the items would be infused with his grace and sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity in life.

In reviving the tradition of Sankranti daan at Sannyasa Peeth, Munger, particular attention is given to the deya. According to the scriptures, there are certain items prescribed for each Sankranti. These are then assessed in terms of their utility, practicality, durability and appropriateness for the chosen recipients. Only then are items chosen by Swami Niranjanananda to be the daan for that particular Sankranti.



Know the need of the person. Daan is not just handing one chocolate to everybody regardless of whether they really need it or not. Know the need of the other person. Develop atmabhava. That has been the teaching of our master, Sri Swami Satyananda. Know what people require, find out what is lacking in the lives of others. Give them that which they need. Do not give them what you want to give but give them what they need.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

5. *Dharmayuk*



Dharmayuk refers to the purpose and association of the daan. If daan is performed in conjunction with yajna, sadhana, ritual, samskara or any dharmic activity, it is said to be dharmayuk. The daan given at Sannyasa Peeth, during the auspicious occasion of the Sankranti, or during the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna is dharmayuk. It is given in conjunction with the traditional dharmic activity of havan, katha, aradhana and satsang. Intrinsically linked to dharma, it will also carry forth the essence of dharma into the lives of those who receive the daan.

6. *Desh and kala*

Desh and kala refer to the place and time of daan. When daan is performed in auspicious places and at the most conducive time, it will provide both benefit to the pratigraha and merit to the data accordingly. For this reason, daan is performed when certain solar and lunar events or other astrological conjunctions take place, such as daan given at Sannyasa Peeth each month on the day of Sankranti.

Two pakas or modes of fruition

There are two modes of fruition for every daan. Daan is considered complete when it has been performed properly and the spiritual merit has been obtained. The merit is something that brings about a spiritual change in the life of the person who has given, just as the material benefit of daan brings about a change in the material life of the person who receives. In order for daan to be considered complete, the effect is seen on all levels, from the physical and material to the mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. The two modes of fruition refer to the present existence, or the next life. Merit can either be obtained in the present existence, in the future, or in the next world and life. When daan is performed correctly and all the requisites are fulfilled, the effect is felt and experienced not only in this world, but in the next. When daan is performed improperly, the material benefit is enjoyed in the present only.

Whatever you give should be useful. A poor man needs a lantern and a bottle of kerosene oil, not a transistor or tape recorder. In yajna the significance of a gift is that it is for the ordinary person. Rich people should be givers rather than receivers. A gift is not just to please someone, not just to pass on your emotion to someone. Gifts should have some practical purpose, to help a person in need, whether it is a blanket, a pashmina shawl, a pair of shoes, an umbrella, a satchel for a school child, a compass or a pencil case.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Four prakaras or varieties of daan

The four *prakaras* or varieties of daan are dhruva, nitya, kamya and naimittika. The gift of waterways, parks, lakes and land where everyone can enjoy and benefit from the abundance of prakriti was known in the vedic era as *dhruva*. That which was given every day without any motive or desire

is *nitya*. When daan is given with a desire to obtain progeny, victory, prosperity, fame and recognition it is known as *kamya*, being based on the desire of the giver. The *naimittika* daan is performed without *homa*, the ritual invocation performed through a havan or fire ceremony, yet is motivated by a particular desire.

Three desires are specified, arising from time, action or the gunas. *Kalappeksha daan* is motivated by auspicious times or other planetary conjunctions. The donor hopes to receive the merit obtainable by performing daan at a particularly auspicious time and following all the rules and requirements relating to that observance.

Kriyapeksha is daan necessitated by a particular ritual or *anushthana*, or motivated by a particular occasion such as *shraaddha*, the performance of the last rights, or the *shodhasa samskaras*, the sixteen rites of passage in life.

Gunapeksha is based on and according to the predominance of the gunas, whether it be sattvic, rajasic or tamasic. Here it is the character of the recipient, their knowledge, learning or other virtues that determines the daan.

Three vidhis or types of daan

The three vidhis or types of daan are *uttama* meaning the best or highest, *madhyama* meaning medium or mediocre, and *kaniyasa* which refers to the lower or inferior daan. The *uttama* daan is the gift of earth, *vidya*, or a cow. In addition to these three, the daan of *aushadhi*, medicine, food, or grains to those who are in need and is in effect giving life itself, is also *uttama*. The *madhyama* daan have been listed as grains or *anna*, food, clothing, vehicles, horses, and resting places. The *kaniyasas* are gifts such as footwear, umbrellas, vessels, honey, asanas, and precious stones.

Three nashas or destructive agents

The three nashas or destructive agents of daan pertain to the data, not the pratigrahit. In the science and system of daan, the causes, motives and destructive agents all arise in the

personality and mind of the giver. This makes sense when viewed from the perspective of sadhana. Daan engenders a process of mental, emotional and spiritual purity in the one who practises it. Consequently, the immense importance and benefit of daan as a spiritual practice and sadhana must be understood. Giving is one of the most important methods to break the bondage of the self-contained and self-oriented ego. All the saints and sages of all ages have advocated the path of daan, the sadhana of giving as the means to transcend the limited self. Therefore, in the traditional system of daan great emphasis is placed on the mental and emotional state of the donor.

Regret is one of the three nashas or destructive qualities of daan. If the data regrets having made the gift, the daan is devoid of all merit and will not be of benefit. The second nasha is lack of shraddha. If there is no shraddha present, if the data is without faith or sincerity the daan will be of no benefit. The third destructive agent arises if the data rebukes or reproaches the receiver. Any negative speech or conduct will render the daan fruitless. This implies that to obtain the spiritual merit the data must be of balanced and equipoised mind and conduct. If the mind is balanced and equipoised, then the inner experience is one of happiness, contentment and peace. This enables the connection of goodwill to be created between the data and the pratigrahi. It is this positive connection, which when given a specific form, focus and trajectory through the sankalpa, becomes the conduit for the spiritual merit and fruition of the daan.

Further, if the donor regrets making the daan, then it is known as *asura daan*, indicating that the data has a rajasic nature. The predominance of rajoguna will automatically taint and influence the fruition of the daan. If the daan is given without shraddha, it is known as *rakshas daan* indicating the presence of tamoguna in the data. When the receiver is scolded or told unpleasant things or is cursed afterwards, then the daan is known as *pishacha daan*, also indicating the predominance of tamoguna and darkness.

Six consequences of daan

According to the classical and traditional understanding, daan also has six consequences or *shat vipakam*. These have been identified as:

1. *Dushphalam*: The adverse consequence that follows when daan is given to an incorrect or unworthy recipient.
2. *Nishphalam*: Daan that is futile and does not bear fruit. This happens when daan is made in accordance with all the other prescriptions but is given without any care and devotion.
3. *Hinam*: Daan that does not bring any positive result, instead it has a negative impact on the lives of either the person giving or receiving. A result without any goodness happens when the daan is made by causing harm, distress or pain to someone. Even if the daan otherwise fulfils all requirements, because of the element of harm, it will be without goodness and not give any positive result.
4. *Tulyam*: When daan only resembles a true daan, but actually is made with an impure heart or the wrong motive, the result is also not real and only resembles fruition.
5. *Vipulam*: Daan that has an abundant or profound result, in both the material dimension of benefit and also the spiritual dimensions of merit is vipulam. This happens when the daan fulfils the requirements of all the six angas namely, donor, recipient, resource, time and place, faith and devotion.
6. *Akshayam*: The eternal or akshayam result happens when daan is given in the state and experience of pure compassion and grace.

WHY IS KARNA CALLED DAANVEER?

Once Arjuna asked Lord Krishna why he called Yudhishtira, Dharmaraj, and Karna, Daanveer. Arjuna felt that Yudhishtira surely gave more in daan than Karna and was more deserving of such an accolade. To answer this question, Krishna disguised himself and Arjuna as Brahmins and went to visit both the kings. On visiting Yudhishtira they requested for sandalwood to cook food. It was raining heavily at the time and Yudhishtira couldn't find any dry sandalwood suitable to be used as a fuel. He apologized to both of them, and they returned empty handed. A little later, they went to Angadesh to visit Karna and asked for the same thing. Karna searched everywhere for dry sandalwood but he also was unable to find any. He was however determined to fulfil their wishes and did not want the Brahmins to leave empty handed. The front doors to his palace were made of sandalwood. He picked up his bow and arrow and destroyed the doors, collected the pieces of wood and presented the requested daan to the Brahmins who were really Krishna and Arjuna in disguise. Arjuna then understood the unlimited capacity of Karna to give.

Traditional method of daan

In the ancient texts the way to perform daan is explained in detail. Daan is a process that works on all levels, from the physical and material level to the pranic, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. The instructions and specifications given about how to perform daan were determined to ensure the best possible result in all these dimensions of experience. Following the correct process and method protects the donor and the receiver, and ensures the purity and sanctity of daan.

The first instruction relates to the directions. The *Agni Purana* explains that when daan is given, the data should face east and the pratigrahita should face north. Both of

these directions are cardinal and auspicious. Most spiritual activities utilize either the north or the east direction. It is said that when these two directions are used in daan, the longevity of the giver increases and that of the recipient does not decrease. The east is presided over by Indra, and is associated with the vayu tattwa. Indra is considered the king of *devaloka* or heaven, and he is the ruler of the devas. Indra is also associated with the mind and the senses or *indriyas* which are his agents.

When daan is performed correctly, it is not only a material act of giving, but a sadhana which expands the awareness beyond the self-centric barriers of mind and senses. Through this sadhana the negative and restricting conditions of mind can be transcended. By facing the east direction, Indra is invoked to assist in redirecting the sensorial inputs and mental reactions, beyond the gravitational pull of self-oriented observation and attitudes. If successful, an expanded awareness of other people and a feeling of goodwill towards all develops. Vayu tattwa, while not considered useful for material gains, is said to influence the mind, thoughts and mental processes. Vayu also relates to the *mahalo*, or the realm of the saints and siddhas of purified mind. By standing facing east the donor invokes this subtle essence of the vayu tattwa, which acts as a catalyst for the development of the positive qualities of mind, happiness, positivity, faith and goodwill.





The recipient should face north. The northern direction is governed by Kubera and related to the prithvi tattwa. Kubera is the deva who rules over artha one of the four *purusharthas* or efforts that are made in life. *Artha* relates to wealth, prosperity and material security in life. It is the material prosperity and security of the recipient which is improved by the daan, and therefore the receiver faces north in order to receive the

grace of Kubera. The prithvi tattwa is the most stable of the mahabhutas, and is related to the *bhuloka*, the physical plane. Prithvi tattwa when invoked brings stability, permanence and security in every aspect, physically, materially, environmentally and socially. By facing north, the recipient is correctly aligned to invoke and receive the subtle qualities and essence of the prithvi tattwa.

Two attitudinal components also contribute towards and determine the purity of the daan. Firstly, the senti-



ment of the giver which forms the adhithana or foundation of the daan, and secondly, the sentiment and attitude of the person receiving must also be correct and appropriate. To give a definite form to positive intention of the data, a sankalpa is taken along with the corresponding mantras. Water, the *apas tattwa*, indicates purity and potentiality. Water is held in the hand of the giver while the sankalpa is taken. This



water which is infused with the vibratory energy of the mantras and the sankalpa is then offered to the prithvi tattwa and poured on the earth.

The sankalpa connects the individual, and the intention of the individual with the benevolence of the cosmic energy. The intention which arises at the time of giving and the feeling of goodwill, compassion, connection and relationship are strengthened and enlivened by

the sankalpa. The sankalpa actually propels the positive intention beyond the gravitational pull of tamas and the selfish and self-orientated focus in life. Due to this alignment with the higher forces the individual is able to transcend the limitations of the senses and mind and connect with the positive energies of the cosmos. The item being gifted is imbued with the positive energies of the sankalpa. Once taken, the sankalpa is irreversible. If for any reason the daan cannot be given to the intended recipient, if they do not show up or do not accept the daan, the item must be submerged in a pond or river. The item of daan cannot revert to the donor or be reallocated to another person.

While taking the sankalpa the data should have the feeling that the daan being given is limitless; ‘even the ocean has its limit, but there is no limit of this daan’. This feeling of limitlessness connects one with the unlimited potentiality of daan. The presiding deities are also invoked and bear cosmic witness to the daan. The process of daan is not restricted to the material object which is being transferred. Beyond the material realm, the influence of daan can also permeate the subtle, causal and transcendental realms as well, provided those who are performing daan have sufficient mental, emotional and psychic receptivity.



The second requirement is the attitude of the pratigrahitā. It is said that daan should be received only after having undergone the physical and mental rites of purification which assist in the restraint of the senses, including *archaman*, sipping of water, pranayama and repetition of the Gayatri mantra. The pratigrahitā should understand that Lord Vishnu is the giver, and Lord Vishnu is the daan itself. Lord Vishnu as the energy which

sustains and maintains creation and existence is said to be presiding over all things. This indicates that the daan is to be appreciated both as imbued with the divine essence, and also as the source of support, sustenance, maintenance and preservation of life. The recipient should receive with humility and gratitude, understanding the value of what is being given. It is the reciprocal duty of the receiver to have a warm and pure heart which is expressed in goodwill and wishes for the welfare of the giver. This is said to confer the two fruits of *bhoga*, enjoyment or happiness, on the receiver and *mukti* or liberation on the giver.

Honouring the devas and devatas

In the puranic accounts, descriptions are given of the devas who preside over particular items. *Deva* means illumined, each deva is a particular manifestation of the all-pervasive cosmic reality. Certain items are linked to and associated with different devas, due to the primary tattwa existing in the item. When both are giving and receiving any item, the governing deity that presides over that item, should also be mentally invoked and honoured.

The daan of protection and freedom from fear, suffering, insecurity or persecution, known as *abhaya daan*, invokes all

the deities. Vishnu is the deity of the earth, Prajapati governs elephants, Vayu governs birds and all forest animals, while horses, buffalos and all the one-hoofed animals are governed by Yama. Nirrti is the presiding deity of the camel, Siva of the cow, Agni of the goat, Varuna of the ram, and Hari of the boar. Vanaspati governs the trees and vegetation. Varuna governs wells, vessels of water, pearls and corals from the ocean, Agni governs gold and iron, while Prajapati governs food, grains and all cooked food. All scents and fragrant materials such as sandalwood are governed by the Gandharvas. Ghee is governed by Agni. Sesame seeds are said to have sprung from the limbs of the great Rishi Kashyapa and in the matter of daan they are highly regarded and efficacious. Sesame seeds bestow prosperity and purify the giver and the receiver. That is why sesame seeds are used in havan samagri. Brhaspati governs clothing and dress items. Vishwakarma presides over any form of sculpture. Angiras is the deity of umbrellas, beds, vehicles, chairs, asana and sandals. Brahma governs knowledge and his shakti, Saraswati, governs books, scriptures and sacred texts.



KARNA AND INDRA

On the eve of the famous Mahabharata battle, Indra fearing that his son, Arjuna, may be defeated by Karna in battle, decided to deceive him into giving away his *kavach*, armour, and *kundal*, earrings, which gave him strength and protection. Indra disguised himself as an old Brahmin and asked Karna for his kavach and kundal in daan. Surya, the lord of the Sun and father of Karna, had forewarned him that Indra would attempt such a deceit. Yet Karna did not refuse the request for daan. Knowing fully well that Indra was playing a trick on him, he cut off the kavach and kundal which from birth were the source of his power and handed them to Indra. Indra was stunned and amazed. He said, "Karna, what you have done today, no ordinary mortal could have done. I am immensely pleased with your generosity. You can ask for any boon." Karna said, "If you are really pleased with me, then you may kindly give me your astra, the shakti that has the potential to destroy any enemy." Indra granted the boon, but with the condition that Karna could use it only once and thereafter the astra should return to him.



3

Daan and the Gunas

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna explains the influence of the gunas upon the performance of daan and accordingly classifies daan into three categories: sattwic, rajasic and tamasic (17:22):

Sattwic daan

दातव्यमिति यद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे ।
देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम् ॥

Dātavyamiti yaddānaṃ dīyate'nupakāriṇe;

Deśe kāle cha pātre cha taddānaṃ sāttvikam smṛtam

Daan that is given simply because it is right to give, without consideration of anything in return, at the proper time and in the proper place to a worthy person, that daan is held to be sattwic.

Sattwa is the condition, state and experience of purity, wisdom and effulgence. In order for daan to be considered sattwic, all the different aspects involved must reflect that purity. The person giving has to be selfless, without any personal motive. They give, simply because it is the right thing to do, without any anticipation or expectation of reward. They do not boast of their generosity, nor do they become egotistical in identifying with the good that has been done. The recipient should also reflect purity, wisdom and

effulgence, through their nature and conduct. While this includes people who have knowledge of the scriptures, it also means those who live according to dharma, those who live simply, in harmony with the natural order and rhythms of life.

Daan, when performed correctly is a systematic sadhana that can elevate the giver to great heights of spiritual attainment. A sincere person will realize that this is possible only because of the willingness of the recipient to receive. The donor should mentally honour and worship the recipient of daan, and be grateful to them. In this sadhana the giver and receiver are connected and bound together in a sacred reciprocal transaction, by sankalpa and invocation. The interaction between donor and recipient is one of respect, honour and compassion. The place of daan should be sacred, at tirthas such as Varanasi and Gaya, but also places of tapasya and sadhana, or where the light of spiritual endeavour and goodness dwells. Such places include the ashrams of sannyasins and tapasvis who have dedicated their lives to the service of others and spiritual realization. The daan performed at Rikhiapeeth is sattwic in nature and the





proof of this is seen in the extraordinary transformation that has taken place in the lives of those who have received and continue to receive.

The daan performed at Sannyasa Peeth under the inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda is also of the sattvic nature. The location of Sannyasa Peeth is on the banks of the river Ganga and any daan performed there is imbued with the purest vibration of that sacred river. Sannyasa Peeth is the place of the chaturmas sadhanas of Swami Satyananda, the tradition of which is being continued with different anushthanas, sadhanas and tapasya. The daan is infused with the *tejas* or spiritual force of those sadhanas and the sankalpa of Swami Satyananda for peace, plenty and prosperity in life.

Along with the intention and place, the time of daan is also important, and for daan to be sattvic it should be performed at the most auspicious time. The solar and lunar eclipses, and also the day of Sankranti are considered especially auspicious. In accordance with all the scriptural instructions on the performance of sattvic daan on the Sankranti day, this tradition has commenced at Sannyasa Peeth in 2019.

Rajasic daan

Describing rajasic daan Sri Krishna says:

यत्तु प्रत्युपकारार्थं फलमुद्दिश्य वा पुनः ।
दीयते च परिक्लिष्टं तद्दानं राजसं स्मृतम् ॥

Yat tu pratyupakārārtham phalam uddīśya vā punaḥ
Dīyate cha parikliṣṭam tad dānam rājasam smṛtam

But that daan given with a view to receive something in return, or in expectation of a reward, or reluctantly, is held to be rajasic.

When rajoguna predominates, there is dynamism, expansion and activity. The individual seeks to expand and assert themselves and their actions and behaviour reflect this selfish inclination and drive. Rajasic daan is performed when people desire some direct or indirect benefit in return. This benefit can be material, but it also includes the spiritual merit that comes from the daan. If the donor is giving to the poor and needy, in order to attain wealth, longevity or *punya*, merit, then this action and mentality reflects the condition of rajas. Self-interest is the primary motivation. Because of the predominance of self-interest at the moment of giving the item, there is a feeling of loss, pain or regret in the donor. If the giver is hoping for recognition and praise, the daan is rajasic. If daan is not spontaneous but the result of a feeling of compulsion, or given only after persuasion, it is rajasic. Rajasic daan is anything given begrudgingly, having been asked for a donation, or to regret later, “Why did I give so much?”

Tamasic daan

Finally, Sri Krishna describes the characteristics of daan performed under the influence of tamas, the condition of darkness, inertia, and ignorance.

अदेशकाले यद्दानमपात्रेभ्यश्च दीयते |
असत्कृतमवज्ञातं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥

Adeśa-kāle yad dānam apātrebhyaś cha diyate
Asat-kṛtam avajñātam tat tāmasam udāhṛitam

The daan that is given at the wrong place and wrong time to unworthy persons, without showing respect, or with insult is declared to be tamasic.

Any action performed in the wrong place and time is tamasic. Inappropriate places for daan are places where greed is dominant, where vices such as drinking, gambling and violence are pursued, where people without virtue gather and where illegal and unethical activities take place. Performance of daan in these locations has a destructive and negative effect. Instead of nurturing kindness, gratitude and compassion, the selfish nature is encouraged and the reactions of indulgence and greed are heightened. When daan is given without showing proper respect or in an insulting manner, then this indicates the predominance of tamoguna in the giver.

Once, a group of gods, demons and human beings went to the Creator to ask for guidelines so that they could live their lives in completeness and fullness. The Creator uttered only one syllable, “Da,” and said, “Da is the mantra to give happiness in life.” Humans, being self-oriented people, involved with their ambitions and desires, and in fulfilling their personal needs, considered the mantra to mean daan or charity, through which they could overcome their selfishness and self-centredness.

As we know, gods tend to live in a dimension where there is only total enjoyment and happiness. They took

the mantra to mean *daman* or restraint of the senses, saying, “We live in a world of happiness and enjoyment, but let us not go overboard. Let us maintain restraint of the senses and mind, and not fall prey to the negative effects of pleasure.”

The demons, who are the destructive beings, decided that the mantra meant *daya* or compassion. They said, “Destruction is our nature. If we want to attain fulfilment and happiness in life, then we should become compassionate, instead of giving pain and suffering to other people.” So, these three groups each gave a different meaning to the original syllable which the Creator had given to them.

If we analyze this mantra ‘*da*’, which can mean restraint, compassion or charity, we find that these three qualities are linked. Definitely, as human beings, we can experience some situations in life where we are attracted towards pleasures, and we tend to ignore the needs, lifestyles and aspirations of other beings. We become indispensable to ourselves. As human beings, we have also experienced the destructive quality in life, which is a reactive quality of our nature.

The demonic force within us is *tamas*. The desire for pleasure is *rajas*. We have to change these two natures. The moment we are able to change the demonic, negative force within us we become compassionate. The negative force is not only projected outside towards other people, but is also projected onto ourselves. We are destroying our own lives by wrong thinking, acting and behaviour, and we can never find the centre, the balance and harmony in life. If we are not able to find harmony in life, we destroy ourselves.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

4

Reciprocity

Share what you have with others by disseminating spiritual knowledge to one and all. This is the secret of abundance. If you give generously, the wealth of the whole world will come to you. This is the immutable, inexorable, unrelenting law of nature. Use the material wealth, knowledge and spiritual wisdom that you possess as a divine trust. Take delight in the joys of others and in making them happy.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Over the eons, spiritual luminaries from various traditions have extolled the virtues and benefit of daan. The teachings of the masters and the scriptures state that there is a dual benefit in all forms of daan; it is not a one-way transaction. Not only the person who receives, but also the person who gives will experience a positive change in life. You give something to someone. That person is happy because they have received the item, and because they feel that someone cares about them. However, you also feel happy and uplifted, not only because you were able to make a positive contribution in someone's life, but also due to the subtle reciprocal nature of daan. This reciprocal benefit of daan is the discovery of the saints and sages who practised and perfected the system and sadhana of giving as a method of self-transformation. They have said that there is no wealth



more precious than that which is given away, and what is given away returns to the giver. By giving, you receive.

The medium of reciprocity is the foundation of traditional daan as a means to bring about a qualitative improvement in all dimensions of life. Reciprocity is the causal element existing in and governing the subtle dimension of life. It is the basis of the old sayings such as ‘one good turn deserves another’, or ‘as you sow, so shall you reap’. The basic principle can be observed in daily life and interactions. If a person is greeted with a smile, a smile is returned. Laughter encourages laughter. The converse is also true. A frown is returned by another frown and seldom a smile. A cross, grumpy face and behaviour does not elicit responses of joy and happiness, but a similar grumpy response. Reciprocity works at the subtle vibrational level which is causal in nature, not mental.

In ancient times when the environment was pure, and the minds and hearts of people reflected that same level of purity in attainment and expression, it was easy to observe the flow of causal reciprocity in daily life. Good deeds in turn created other positive and good deeds, whereas negative conduct resulted in a negative and detrimental result.

The act of daan creates an emotional connection which creates a pranic link between the two people involved. This connection is given a shape and form according to the intention and the sankalpa of the data. According to this connection and the desired outcome and merit, different rules of daan will be applied. Generally, it can be said that, to obtain maximum benefit those of good character should practise daan, impelled by the motive that it is their duty to act that way, and not from any desire of reward. When daan is given free from any ulterior motive, then the recipient is also happy to accept, understanding that what is given is sanctified by devotion and faith. The entire system of daan is based on this principle of goodness and mutual benefit that determines the merit of the daan.

Merit refers to the subtle, spiritual aspect of daan, experienced by the person who gives. It is not the material benefit. It is the subtle benefit that has been called merit in the ancient texts. The scriptural and puranic accounts provide many examples of daan and the merit which comes from giving a particular item, at a particular time, in the correct manner. Merit is the *punya*, or the positive spiritual attainment, of the daan. Different qualities or manifestations of energy are invoked by the daan of different items. To receive the full attainment of merit possible from daan however, the entire sadhana and procedure must be followed correctly.

All items given in daan are forms of the mahabhutas or pancha tattwas. Every tattwa is a manifestation of *prakriti* or nature, which has physical and manifest qualities. A spiritual essence also exists in the subtle form of each tattwa, which is not perceived by the senses. It is this spiritual essence of each tattwa which returns to the giver of daan, and breaks through the different fetters which restrict and bind the energy in each level of existence. In the process of daan, both the manifest and the subtle qualities are active agents of transformation. The different merits attainable have been given in the scriptures.

Items, time and qualities

By gifting objects that are good and beautiful, one acquires a good memory and understanding. The reciprocal benefit of providing good clothes to others is the attainment of physical beauty. Gifts of fruits and flowers promote the faculty of wisdom and jnana in the giver. Gifts of scents enhance the reputation and fame of the giver. For the person who gives a beautifully decorated and adorned Kapila cow, all wishes are fulfilled. The person who give lamps, deepaks, or provides light in dark places acquires good vision. The person who gives silver, receives beauty. The daan of gold will bring lustre and longevity, indicating pranic activation. The person who gives a house, receives the same in return. The person who gives anna daan, the gift of food items, receives wealth and happiness.

The person who gives medicine, oil and food, receives good health, longevity and happiness. The person who gives umbrellas and shoes, receives protection and safe passage to the realms after death. The person who gives water, receives happiness and contentment. The person who gives oil, receives progeny, the birth of children in the family.



On the occasion of Vaishakha Poornima the person who donates a pitcher full of water along with anna and ghee becomes free from all kinds of fear. The gift of food given in the shukla paksha of Kartik ensures success in overcoming every difficulty and challenge of life. Gifts of ghee in the month of Ashwin confer personal beauty and protection. During the month of Vaishaka gifts of sesame seed will bring prosperity and merit.

The expression of positive qualities in life which benefit others is also a form of daan, and if performed with shraddha, the corresponding reciprocal merit arises. By serving others with reverence and humility, one attains to the state of kingdoms and sovereignty. By abstaining from cruelty towards others, one attains health and freedom from disease. The person who has perfected ahimsa and emanates peace to all creatures, attains the state of *mukti*, complete freedom. Through the practice of tapasya, the aspirant attains the states of Satyam, Sivam and Sundaram. By respecting and honouring one's guru, *vidya* or spiritual wisdom and knowledge is acquired. By making gifts of agreeable items, and behaving with others in a manner that is agreeable and pleasant to them, one succeeds in attracting favourable circumstances to oneself.



Boundless

This reciprocal principle operates across time as well. The future is determined by the acts of the past and the present. The future circumstances are determined by the actions and courses of conduct followed in life. The actions of today, shape and determine the future. Therefore, those who perform daan have contributed positively to their future, and generally it is in the future that the merit of their daan will be received in proportion to the actions taken.

The principle of reciprocity also extends to actions done by the person who receives the daan. For example, grain is given to a household. This grain can be used for their own requirements, but it can also be used to feed a hungry person who comes to the door. When the grain is also given to the third party, the benefit and the merit of this action also attaches to the person who gave the item initially. This denotes the importance given to the pratigrahitā as one of the angas of daan. They can extend and enhance the spiritual merit of the daan in accordance with their actions.

Daan is also lauded as a *prayaschit*, a corrective action, that can be performed to rectify an imbalance or correct a mistake. The *Agni Purana* explains that as dirt is cleansed from the body with water, so the darkness of negative action is erased by the act of giving.



I have understood that it is the foremost duty of man to learn to give, give in charity, to give in plenty, to give with love and without expectation of reward, because one does not lose anything by giving, on the other hand the giver is given back a thousand fold. This I understand to be equivalent to *jnana yajna*, the sacrifice of wisdom.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

5

Sadhana for Daan

There was a man, Daanveer Karna, who was born during the Mahabharata era, five thousand years ago. He was the greatest, most generous man in India of that time. He was the son of Kunti, who was also the mother of the five Pandavas who are central figures in the Mahabharata. When you saw Swami Sivananda, you could remember Karna. If anyone came to the ashram he would receive them unconditionally: not only a Brahmin, or a sadhu; not only a beggar, or a sweeper; not only a good man, but even those who came into the ashram to harm him, or to cause damage to the ashram. All would receive his blessings, assistance and support.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

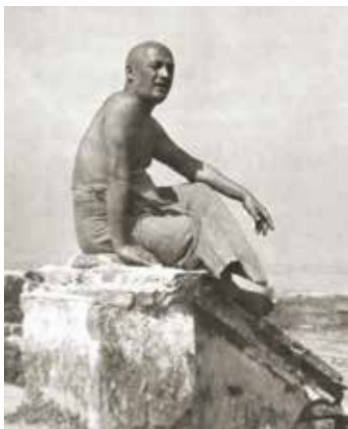
In ancient times, daan was a natural part of life. The importance of giving to others was accepted and understood to be an integral component of dharma. When declaring that daan was one of the foundations of dharma, the rishis were expressing their understanding of the interconnection and interdependence of social life and society. This understanding was not only material, but also spiritual, leading to an experience of the divine as the essential truth permeating the entire creation. Daan was a way to live properly. It was a practical method to develop positive connections between people and through those connections ensure a sustainable society.

The ability to perform daan was seen as an accomplishment in life. A generous nature was a positive quality recognized and held in high regard by others, in the same way that wealth, name and fame are highly valued in today's society. The notable historical example of this is Karna of the Mahabharata, who was known as *Daanveer*, the hero among donors, and is renowned for his generosity and heroism even today.

There is a special connection between Karna and Munger. Karna was king of Angadesh. The capital of Angadesh called Champapuri is the modern day Bhagalpur. Karna was the spiritual son of Surya, the deity of the sun. The sun is also related to daan and giving. Just as the rays of the sun shine on and illuminate all, no worship of Surya is complete without generosity towards others in the form of daan.

Sadhana

A practitioner of both Shakta and Saurya Tantra, Karna used to perform austerities and worship of Devi at Chandisthan, the Shakti peeth temple located in Munger. Part of this worship involved a form of *tula daan*, offering the physical weight of the body as a *bali daan*, or sacrificial offering to the deity. Pleased with this sincerity of sankalpa and tapasya,



Devi bestowed her grace upon Karna in the form of an equal weight in gold. This gold would then be distributed by Karna to his subjects from the *chabutra* or platform that forms the foundations of Jyoti Mandir at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yoga-peeth, Munger.

Not only is the campus of Ganga Darshan infused with this energy of tapasya and daan, but the entire region of

Munger has been the receptacle of the *shakti*, the power, that Karna invoked in performing daan according to the traditional systems and methods. It is said that Karna always gave daan after performing the *arghya*, the worship of Surya, and would never turn anyone away empty handed. Daan was not only the means by which he upheld dharma, it was also an integral part of his sadhana, tapasya and aradhana of his ishta devata and spiritual father, Surya. In reviving the tradition of daan through the activities, aradhana and yajnas of Sannyasa Peeth, this ancient connection between Karna and Surya is being rekindled. It is through tapasya and daan that an individual can connect with the Divine. Daan becomes a sadhana to bring about that transcendental realization and experience.

As a sadhana, daan becomes something that uplifts the individual, and it connects with the Divine. That is the teaching of Sri Swami Satyananda when he speaks of atmabhava. Learn to see that spark of the Divine in each and every one. That spark of the Divine can be seen through daan and not through meditation. Through meditation you try to imagine that spark in you. But when you are endowed with atmabhava, you are able to see the spark in others as a living experience and not just a theoretical understanding.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



At Sannyasa Peeth, the traditional and classical system of daan includes developing the understanding of daan as a spiritual sadhana, as a niyama and as a lifestyle. As a sadhana daan works at all levels. It utilizes the material dimension in order to give and provide help, support and a sense of community. Daan purifies the mental dimension by cultivating good and positive sentiments. It awakens the pranic dimension by creating emotional connections and experiences that soften the hardened prana and allow spiritual awakening to take place. On the psychic level, daan opens the door to the expansion of awareness beyond the confines of the senses and mind.

This one reality, both manifest and unmanifest, has one essence. This is the essential truth that underlies and permeates every experience and which connects all of life. If the Divine is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, it means that divine presence is in everything. All forms of life exist because of that essence. It is the same essential higher consciousness, which in its role as *maya*, the restrictive, binding force, has diverted the awareness of the mind into the senses. The connection with the higher consciousness is lost in the pursuit of personal desires and aspirations. To break the shell of selfishness and develop the spiritual awareness needed to connect with that transcendental experience, the sadhana of daan is given in spiritual traditions.

Niyama

Reflecting the vedantic principles and concepts of thought, daan is given as a niyama in the *Shandilya* and *Varaha Upanishads*, as well as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. As a niyama, daan is an action performed in order to expand the awareness and attain progressively higher states of consciousness. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna explains that daan, along with yajna and tapasya are the purifiers of the intelligent. The simple act of giving helps to purify the senses and the sensorial inputs, balance the associated

perceptions of raga and dwesha, and transcend the limited state of consciousness.

Swami Sivananda gave the teachings of daan to his disciples in his eight-fold path of yoga: Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Be Good, Do Good, Meditate, Realize. This was not just a philosophy. Life at the ashram of Swami Sivananda in the early days was based on the practical experience of these teachings, in order to purify the mind and heart and render the disciple fit for the higher spiritual experiences.

It is these teachings that Swami Satyananda established at Rikhiapeeth and daan given there is an expression of Swami Sivananda's teachings.

Swami Sivananda used to call in the sweepers and scavengers, wash their feet and feed them. I cleaned, cooked and fed the scavengers, but my heart was not in it. There were many lepers in Rishikesh lined up along the roads and pathways. Once Swamiji thought of settling these lepers in proper housing. He was given some land by Tehri Maharaj on which he had some houses built for the lepers. He gave each one a goat. I was given the duty of going amidst the lepers and the sick to read and teach them the *Ramacharitamanas* and *Ramayana*.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Connecting to positive qualities

The first step in the sadhana of daan is the connection you make with your own positive qualities. In order to give you have to connect with a positive feeling within. Whether that is simple friendliness, a desire to help, a feeling of generosity, goodwill, compassion or sympathy will depend on the circumstances and the individual. Daan is an act of kindness and uses the same neuronal pathways as empathy, the ability to sense or feel the emotions of others. Daan translates this information into action that promotes happiness and brings joy. Oxytocin and serotonin,

both important neurochemicals for happiness, positivity, connectedness, trust and love are also released during daan and simple acts of kindness.



Daan is not just an act of handing something over to somebody. There is an intent, there is a mentality of giving. The first step in this process is that you connect with your own positive qualities before giving. Connect with the benevolent, connect with the creative, and connect with the constructive sentiments. Connect with kindness, connect with generosity, and connect with the need for you to give. Connect with the positive qualities in you. That is the first requirement of giving.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

This is an important part of the sadhana of daan. It is for this reason that daan has been included as a niyama in the ancient texts on yoga, as well as in the hatha yoga scriptures. Niyama relates to performance and conduct in life. The small actions of daily life that form and create our routines and existence are niyamas. Habits are extremely powerful and are able to influence and control the mental states and emotional patterns. The cultivation of niyamas are a

way to reorganize the habits of life to create a positive and constructive lifestyle, one that leads to spiritual growth and evolution. Daan supports the development of the softer emotions and sentiments. It encourages the development of kindness, generosity, sympathy and the ability to think of others. The hardness of the self-obsessed ego is slowly eroded. Selfishness lessens and selfishness can begin to take birth.



What are little acts of kindness? Swami Sivananda's life was an example of this. The first thing he used to say was, "Namo Narayana, are you all right? Do you like chocolate?" The reply would come, "Yes Swamiji, I do like it." So he would say, "Okay Swami Satyananda, give him some chocolate." Then to another he would say, "Oh Buddhihi, how are you? I have a shirt for you."

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Connecting with others

The second connection is the one you make with another person. Daan has to involve another person. It is the other person who is going to receive something and benefit in the material sense, not you. By giving, a connection is created with the other person who receives the daan. In the modern world of digital isolation, creating and maintaining interpersonal connections is becoming increasingly important. It is not easy for people to connect with each other anymore. It is easier to communicate by sms and whatsapp than it is to talk. It is easier to send emojis to people rather than communicate and express genuine emotion, love and goodwill.

Through daan, you open up a conduit, a channel of connectivity created by positive emotions. Positive emotions form the basis of positive connections between people. These are the connections that provide support, care, respect, appreciation, friendship and love. Negative emotions are the basis of destructive and toxic connections between people. Positive emotions increase and gain in strength when reciprocated through connection with others. Positive connections create positive relationships, and positive relationships are the basis of dharma in life.



Swami Sivananda always used to think about others. Whenever he met people, he did not give spiritual lessons. He would always say nice things and he would give them clothes, food and medicine for their sickness and disease. He could remember the names of each one of his acquaintances from thirty-five to forty years back. If a man had become old, he would then ask, “How is your grandson? He was in the eighth class. Where is he now? What is he doing? He had a mole here. Is the mole still there?” You should know about the man whom you love. If I love you, I should know everything about you, especially your difficulties, problems, ambitions and desires. If I know nothing about you, if I don’t want to know anything about you, then I can’t care for you.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The sadhana of daan uses the power of positive emotions not only to create a connection between people, but also to create a different activity in the brain by engaging the mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are those neurons that fire when an action is performed, but also when it is observed. If someone pokes your hand with a pin, a group of neurons will respond and create the experience of pain. However, a subset of these neurons will create exactly the same experience in the brain when you see someone else being poked with a pin. Your brain can recreate the experience of another person, if you observe and connect with the person experiencing it. This explains why the first two steps in the sadhana of daan involve connection, firstly with your own positive emotions, laying down the basis for you to replicate and expand that positivity, and secondly with the other person so you can observe, feel and ultimately experience their joy as if it were your own.

The extent to which we are receptive to other people’s pranic and emotional states is also seen in daily life. For most people, when they see someone who is laughing and joyous, the natural and spontaneous response is to also feel happy. If someone is distraught and crying, the natural response is

to feel sympathetic and sad. This emotional contagion, the ability to be influenced by others emotional states happens in the brain because of the mirror neurons. Ask yourself, do you feel happier around happy people, and tend to feel down around people who are negative and pessimistic? Mirror neurons provide the neurological basis for empathy and the experience of *atmabhava*, the ability to feel what another person is experiencing as if it were your own experience.

Using daan as a sadhana develops the ability to feel the happiness of other people, and this not only creates greater happiness within, but it also expands the awareness. When the self-centred ego is predominant, the awareness and identity are limited. The individual views the world through the senses, the perception generated by the mind and the memories of different sensorial experiences. There is a greater recognition and assessment of separation and difference, rather than connection and integration. You feel separate to other people, especially those you do not know, or who are different to you. When you practise daan, awareness expands. The barriers of duality and the prejudices of caste, creed and class are broken down. Daan generates the ability to think of others. When this becomes spontaneous, expansion of mind, senses and awareness takes place. Connection and integration become the basis of the awareness and experience.



Expand awareness through expanding attachment

When the awareness is not bound by the gravitational pull of selfishness, it can expand. The teachings of the spiritual luminaries and masters are all instructions on how to break out of the bondage of selfishness and experience the world in a different way. The same instruction is given in various ways across the ages. Treat others as you wish to be treated yourself. Jesus of Nazareth said, 'Do to others what you want them to do to you.' Sextus, the Pythagorean, declared, 'What you do not want to happen to you, do not do it yourself either'. Isocrates, the ancient Greek philosopher, stated, 'Do not do to others that which angers you when they do it to you'. In Taoism, it is said that you should regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss. In the *Mahabharata*, while explaining dharma to Yudhishtira, Brihaspati tells him, 'One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This is the rule of dharma'.

The point is simple. Understand that other people are essentially the same as you, and treat them accordingly. Just as you wish to be happy and avoid suffering and misery, so also do other people. Just as you have basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, happiness, security and hope, so do others. Act in such a way that you do not harm or hurt others. In the first stage, self-identification remains, but there is the understanding that others exist, and they are like myself. The effort is to move beyond the confines of self-centredness and extend the sensorial activity to become aware of others. Now the senses are not only used to fulfil selfish desires and gratification, but also to generate awareness of other people. From this awareness, the understanding develops that essentially other people are the same as myself, and should be treated in the same way. Therefore, treat others as you would treat yourself, refrain from harm, and try to be good and do good towards all.

The second instruction is to expand the realm of emotional attachments. Extend your concern, care, sympathy

and love beyond just the family and near and dear ones. Swami Sivananda taught his disciples to love and serve all, regardless of caste and creed. He said, ‘Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all people you can, in every place you can, at all times you can, with all the zeal, strength, love, heart and interest you can, as long as ever you can’. Jesus told his disciples to ‘love your neighbour as you love yourself’.

Swami Satyananda gave his teachings on daan as a spiritual sadhana, and instructed people not to try to remove attachment but to expand the sphere of attachment. “The love and attachment you reserve for yourself and your family has to be expanded to include others. Instead of identifying with the limited self, and viewing the world around in relation to ‘me’, my friends, my house, my dog, my garden, begin to identify with other people through attachment.”



Your family and children are spread all over the world. They all are your brothers and sisters. Try to enlarge the scope of your family and get out of that little cage of husband, wife and children, ‘we two and our two’. Why not say, ‘Husband, wife, children and other children?’

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Daan as a sadhana expands the dimension of individual attachment and not only influences the mind and the mental conditioning, but also the pranamaya kosha by restructuring the flow of prana. Daan fosters and cultivates the soft sentiments of life. This is the pranic basis of daan, not the hardness of



arrogance and the rigidity of pride, but the softness of compassion, kindness and love. Daan prepares one for the awakening of anahata chakra by redirecting prana from the lower centres to anahata, and expanding the awareness from a selfish to a selfless orientation. Performance of daan awakens the anahata chakra by channelling the pranic energy generated through the process. The prana consolidated at anahata forms the basis for the progression into higher spiritual states and the experience of atmabhava.

My guru believed that those who think well of others have tender hearts. One who thinks ill of others cannot have a soft heart. One who thinks ill of others has a hard heart which needs to be pounded. Prakriti breaks hard-core hearts. Your heart should be so soft, so tender, so sensitive, that it should immediately respond to the cries of agony and pain from others. You should be able to feel the pain of other people, to feel the tragedy in another's life. Before you are able to experience Brahman or the Lord, to see the light or experience enlightenment, you must be able to feel the pain and agony of another person. If you can't feel or respond to another's agony mentally, it means you cannot attain peace, you cannot see the light. Such a compassionate and sensitive heart which feels and responds to another's pain attains knowledge effortlessly. The more distant

and unaffected you are from the suffering and distress of others, the further Brahman will be from you. God, Siva, Rama, Devi, all will be beyond your reach.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*



The experience of atmabhava is not just thinking that the other person is the same as me. It is a feeling of oneness: to have the same intensity of feeling and compassion for the suffering of others as you do for yourself. When this is perfected, the sorrow and pleasure of another person are felt as your own. This is the philosophy of Vedanta and the Upanishads. Saints and sages throughout the ages have

proclaimed this spiritual truth that all beings are part of the universal soul. If this is true, then why is there love and affection for one child that is related to you and not for the other who is a stranger? The heart will immediately feel the pain and suffering of one, but not the other. How does the feeling of oneness come? When the mind is purified and the pranas are awakened, the gross level of sensory input is transcended. The ability to perceive the subtler and higher levels of sensorial activity develops.

Give now, not tomorrow or the day after, but now itself.
Doing good and bringing happiness to others brings
goodness and happiness to you.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Sarvatmabhava

In the third stage, the awareness expands beyond atmabhava to the state of parambhava, in which the entire world is experienced as the manifest form of the divine. This is beyond the state of seeing and experiencing others as oneself. The concepts of ‘me’ and ‘you’ and ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ have no role to play in the state of sarvatmabhava. Here the senses, mind and emotions behold and perceive the universality of manifest creation as none other than ‘that’, which is the divine, in any form. Swami Sivananda lived this experience. In his ashram when prasad was to be given, he distributed food to all the inmates himself, because he recognized the divine in everyone and wanted to worship and honour that manifestation of divinity.

I distributed fruits and biscuits to all the inmates myself. These were not thrown into the rooms in the way in which haughty people give charity. I had the bhav that I served the Lord in that form. I did prostration first and then offered them.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

DAANVEER

One day Arjuna approached Sri Krishna and asked, “Why is Karna called Daanveer and renowned as the best of givers? I donate much more gold and wealth than he does, yet he is called the greatest.” Krishna smiled to himself and decided to teach Arjuna a lesson.

He took Arjuna to a mountain of gold and asked him to distribute it amongst the villagers. Arjuna asked his assistant to tell the villagers to gather at the base of the mountain, and that he, Arjuna would distribute the gold to them from that place. Arjuna distributed gold for more than twelve hours and yet the remaining mountain was enormous. Night had fallen, it had become dark, and Arjuna was exhausted. He said to Sri Krishna, “I can’t do anymore today.”

The next day, Sri Krishna said, “Let’s call Karna.” Krishna gave the same task to Karna. Karna’s assistant gathered the villagers. Karna announced to the villagers that he would like to donate this mountain to them and the villagers could come and take as much as they wanted. After the announcement, Karna did namaskar and bid farewell to Sri Krishna and left. Arjuna was in shock. He had been giving for more than twelve hours without completing the task, yet Karna did it in just one minute.

Sri Krishna simply smiled and told him, “Arjuna, you identified with yourself, not with the act of giving. Your motive was selfish, you wanted everyone to know that you were giving in the hope of praise, recognition and remembrance. Karna had no such motives, his only motive was to give without any expectation in return. This is the reason why he is called Daanveer.”



6

Times for Daan

All things in this vast creation function upon definite laws. There is always a beautiful system and sound rationale governing every phenomenon and process, mundane or mystical. Just as the gross elements and physical forces operate differently under different states and conditions, so also the subtler and higher forces respond and react in the inner mystic planes, and in the purely spiritual processes like meditation, prayer, worship, and daan. Therefore, you will find definite injunctions for performing certain types of activities. Some observances are meant to be performed during certain phases of the moon, some when a particular star is in the ascendant, or at the time of a particular conjunction of planets.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

When the ancient seers were devising the methods and systems of daan, they gave special consideration to the timing. There is an optimal time for every action, to ensure the highest and most positive result. At the individual level, for the physical body, the optimal time for sleep is at night, whereas the best time for digestion is at midday. Sleeping at midday and trying to digest food at midnight will not give the same result. The same is true at the cosmic level. For different actions, specific periods of time are identified as

the most beneficial and conducive to a fruitful attainment. An action initiated during an auspicious time-window will bring positive results, but the exact same action started during difficult conditions will most likely fail. Therefore, in the ancient texts very precise instructions are given detailing what action should be performed when.

The most auspicious time-window, the *muhurta*, has been identified, and these favourable astrological conditions are then correlated to the type of daan to be given, according to the merit sought after. To attain a particular merit and to ensure the fruition of the daan in all respects, the specified items should be given at the correct time. But when the daan is necessary to help someone, such as *abhaya daan*, giving protection, or *aushadhi daan*, the provision of medicine, it should be given immediately.



The practice of daan is inherently linked and related to Surya, the solar force. Therefore, daan is performed in the daytime and rarely at night. Specific solar events have been identified in the scriptures as auspicious, indicating that daan performed on this day will achieve the maximum benefit for the receiver and provide conditions conducive to the attainment of particular types

of merit for the donor. These are the sankranti days, the equinox and the eclipse. Various lunar dates have also been identified as likely to bring the most merit. According to the vedic calculations of time, a *tithi* is a lunar day. There are fifteen tithis in the waxing cycle of the moon, known as the *shukla paksha*, and there are fifteen tithis in the waning cycle or *krishna paksha*.

The tithi is based on the relationship between the sun and the moon. The first tithi is twelve degrees of the moon away from the sun after *amavasya*, the new moon, or

poornima, the full moon. The second tithi is the next twelve degrees of the moon away from the sun, between twelve to twenty-four degrees. A particular day is ruled by the tithi at sunrise, but the tithi can change anytime of the day or night as it is not based on the solar day. Tithis vary in duration from approximately nineteen to twenty-six hours, according to the movement of the moon. The moon is generally understood to exert a strong influence on mood, emotion and perception. Each tithi also has a name, a ruling planet and a deity. Accordingly, every tithi has a particular quality of energy that can influence the individual and also the outcome of actions performed on that day. This is taken into consideration when determining what daan should be given on the different days.

SANKRANTI

Sankranti is a period, the transition from one zodiac sign into the other, which in Saurya Tantra is considered very important, as the influence on human psyche changes, as the sun transits from one sign into the other. Light plays a vital role in the body, exposure to sun plays a vital role for the body and following certain disciplines on specific days also brings health and removes disease.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The word *sankranti* is comprised of two words, *san* meaning good and *kranti* which comes from *kraman* meaning movement or transition. Sankranti is the transition that occurs when the sun moves from one *rashi* or constellation of the zodiac to another. During Sankranti the forces of continuity and order, as well as the power of transition involved with leaving one condition or state and moving into another are activated. These forces also connect the individual with *prakriti*, the manifest creation, and the ancient cycles of nature. While the ceremonies traditionally performed on

Sankranti are invocations and aradhana of Surya, the solar force, the main activity of the day is daan.

Daan given on the Sankranti is aligned with the cosmic solar prana and restores the balance and harmony necessary for the continuation of life. It brings health, good eyesight and spiritual wisdom, longevity, pranic vitality, lustre and good fortune. The sankalpa made at the time of giving is strengthened and its power intensified by the grace of Surya, the deity of the sun. That is why it is said that the merit of daan on Sankranti is eternal and imperishable.



At Sannyasa Peeth the tradition of Sankranti daan is being revived under the guidance and inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda. Each month, different groups are called from the local community to receive the Sankranti daan. These groups of people represent the sections of society that are easily ignored and forgotten, from coolies to ricksha drivers, thelawalas, farmers, fishermen and those who have nothing at all. It is their contribution to society and the services they perform for the benefit of others that is honoured and respected at Sannyasa Peeth. On the



Sankranti day they are welcomed, greeted with namaskara, invited to participate in the rituals and aradhana, and finally honoured with daan.

According to the ancient scriptural references, the items indicated as most auspicious according to each Sankranti are given. Not only the material item is given, but also the blessings of Sri Swami Satyananda are invoked. It is his sankalpa for the peace, plenty and prosperity of all, that is the spiritual force illuminating every action of daan at Sannyasa Peeth.

There are twelve Sankranti's in a year and these twelve are divided into four categories: Ayan Sankranti, Vishuva or Sampaat Sankranti, Vishnupadi, and Shadashiti Mukhi Sankranti. For each Sankranti the muhurta, or most favourable and auspicious time-window, has been identified and this is called the *punya kala*, the time of optimum positive result. Within that duration, there is the most auspicious interval, called the *maha punya kala*. These are measured by a specific number of ghatis either before or after the actual moment of transition of the sun into the zodiac sign. One ghata is a duration of twenty-four minutes. Forty



ghatis is equal to approximately sixteen hours. All activities of the Sankranti, yajna, havan, anushthana, or mantra sadhana, daan, and *bhoj*, feeding of those present, should be performed during this muhurata. If the muhurata falls after sunset, the Sankranti activities should be performed the following morning after sunrise. To attain the maximum merit, daan should be performed in the maha punya kala.

Today we are giving daan to some people who have been our neighbours since 1963, the first foundation of the ashram. These people live a neglected life, they don't have many opportunities, and some people even consider them outcast. They are human beings just like you and me. They have their needs just like you and me. Every human being has their basic needs. They have the same spirit of God in them that is there in you and me, so what is the difference? There is no difference, it is all created by mind. It is all created by the human mind.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

AYAN (अयन) SANKRANTI

Makar Sankranti मकर संक्रांति

Makar Sankranti, when the sun moves into the zodiac of Capricorn, is one of the most important days for daan. This day marks the beginning of *uttarayana*, the six-month period where the sun is in the northern hemisphere. The punya kaal muhurta given in the ancient texts is forty ghatas after the actual moment of transition. Daan given during the punya kaal muhurta on the uttarayana Sankranti is said to provide one million times the spiritual merit of daan performed on a normal day. For this reason, daan performed on Makar Sankranti is an eternal or punya karma.



Traditionally, *agni daan*, the gift of fire and wood, or *deep daan*, the gift of light, would be given on Makar Sankranti. There are three levels of the agni tattwa and all are governed by Surya. On the physical level agni represents light, warmth, protection and security. In the ancient times, fire dispelled darkness, kept away wild animals, and was a fuel for warmth and cooking. On the subtle level, agni represents manipura chakra, the centre of dynamism, willpower and achievement.



Manipura is the dimension of *tejas*, spiritual endeavour and aspiration. In the spiritual dimension, agni is *prakash* or light that dispels ignorance. The *jiva*, the individual consciousness after taking birth, is subject to the conditioned form of *tamas*. *Tamas* is the dark night of the soul, where

the consciousness is in darkness, engrossed in the selfish confines of the individual ego. Agni represents the light of spiritual awareness. An offering of agni as *daan* invokes the power and lustre of Surya for the benefit of the donor. So it is said in the scriptures that the person who gives agni becomes bright, radiant and happy.

Makar Sankranti coincides with the winter harvest in India, and if rice has been harvested, it should be given as *daan*. *Daan* on Sankranti redistributes the bounty of nature so that the basic needs of all are met. Present-day items commonly given are food, especially *khichari*, a preparation of rice, dal and vegetables. Other foods given are those which are heating in nature, such as til, jaggery or mustard



oil. The surplus of life should be shared with others, and not only humans. No one should go hungry. Fodder and water should be given to cattle and other animals. To Brahmins, scriptural and spiritual books should be given, along with *asana* or carpets to sit on. Other items that provide heat and warmth are also given like clothing and blankets.

By giving daan the devotee's heart expands slowly during the course of the celebrations, first embracing with its long arms of love the entire household and neighbours, then the servants and the poor, then the cow, and then all other living creatures. Without even being aware of it, one develops the heart and expands it to such proportions that the whole universe finds a place in it.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Kark Sankranti कर्क संक्रांति

Kark Sankranti is the transition of the sun into the Kark rashi, the zodiac sign of cancer on 16th July. This day also marks the beginning of the dakshinayana, the remaining six-months when the sun moves into the southern hemisphere. During these six months it is said that the devas go to sleep, and while they are sleeping, it is Lord Vishnu who maintains and preserves all of creation. For Kark Sankranti the punya kaal muhurta takes place thirty ghatas before the sankranti. Daan given during this time gives one million times the spiritual merit of daan performed on a normal day. Any daan performed on Kark Sankranti is an *akshaya karma*, an action resulting in eternal merit.

Kark Sankranti coincides with the monsoon season, the four months of rain in India. Traditionally, items that would assist people in navigating the rivers and crossing water were given in daan. Due to the difficulty in travel to obtain supplies, daan was given to rectify any particular shortage or need. Those who were hungry were given food, those who were unwell would be given *aushadhi*, medicinal herbs,



and those without clothing were given clothes. Milk and ghee were given. Any kind of daan can be given on this day, especially any item related to Lord Vishnu.

Be charitable. Be generous. Treat your servants as your bosom-friends and brother workers. This is the keynote of the Sankranti festival.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

VISHUVA (वषुव) OR SAMPAT (सम्पात) SANKRANTI

The Vishuva or Sampat Sankranti are Mesha and Tula Sankranti. These days are conceptually equivalent to the vernal and autumnal equinox. The word equinox is derived from the Latin *aequus* meaning equal and *nox* meaning night. The equinox occurs when the centre of the visible sun is directly above the equator. On the day of an equinox, day time and night time are of approximately equal duration all over the planet. The equinoxes are the only times when the solar terminator, the edge between night and day, is perpendicular to the equator. As a result, the northern and southern hemispheres are equally illuminated.

Mesha Sankranti मेष संक्रांति

On this day the sun enters Mesha rashi, or the zodiac sign of Aries. If the sankranti occurs after sunset but before midnight, then the latter half of the day is correct for the

observance. If the sankranti occurs after midnight then first half of the next day is considered correct. Ten ghatis before and after the transition of the sun are considered to be the punya kaal muhurta and the most auspicious time for sankranti activities and daan. Traditionally, sheep are shorn around the time of Mesha Sankranti, and it is very auspicious to give a sheep in daan. The modern-day alternative is to give wool, blankets, or woollen clothing. Daan items appropriate for the heat of the season are also given during this sankranti such as fans, shoes and umbrellas. *Gharas*, pots full of water, are given. Juices of seasonal fruit such as *nimbu* or lemon, bael, and green mango are also given. *Sattu* or ground chickpea flour is also a recommended daan item, due to its nutritional benefits during the hot season.



Today on Mesha Sankranti daan is being given to people who have been invited from Munger town and they are all drivers of three wheelers, the auto rickshas, who take their passengers from station to home, from Munger from Jamalpur, here, there and everywhere.

In the hottest of the days, in the coldest of the days, sometimes in the worst weather and conditions possible, they have to work in order to eat two rotis a day and provide for their children. These people provide the support to society and through their labours people are able to go about their daily business in comfort. I am very happy to invite them to the Sankranti program to receive their prasad. Today they will be receiving daan according to the traditional guidelines for Sankranti written in the scriptures. This daan is given with the sankalpa of Sri Swami Satyananda for their peace, plenty and prosperity in life.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Tula Sankranti तुला संक्रांति

On this day the sun enters Tula rashi, the zodiac sign of Libra. Depending on the texts, either fifteen or ten ghatas before and after the transition of the sun are considered to be the punya kaal muhurta and the most auspicious time for Sankranti activities and daan. Different aradhanas and poojas are performed to invoke the grace of Lakshmi, to protect the farmland from floods, drought, insects, and pests and bring a successful harvest. Where there is Lakshmi's grace, there is prosperity, plenty and contentment. There will be plenty of food for all, and no one will go hungry. The appropriate and auspicious items of daan during the Tula Sankranti are items of wealth symbolizing Lakshmi, but also rice paddy and ghee. Around the time of the sankranti, the weather changes and becomes cooler. This is the time to construct and provide *gaushalas*, areas for the shelter and feeding of cows as daan, to provide for their welfare in preparation for the winter.

When you celebrate the sankranti in this manner, your sense of value changes. You begin to understand that your real wealth is the goodwill and friendship of your relatives, friends and neighbours; that your wealth is



the land on which your food grows, the cattle which help you in agriculture, and the cow which gives you milk. You begin to have greater love and respect for them and for all living beings – the crows, the fish and all other creatures.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

VISHNUPADI (वष्णिपदी) SANKRANTI

The Sankranti of *Vrishabha*, or Taurus, *Vrishchik* or Scorpio, *Kumbh* or Aquarius, and *Sinha* or Leo signs are known as Vishnupadi Sankranti. For all Vishnupadi sankrantis sixteen ghatis before the actual transition is the correct and most appropriate time for auspicious activities such as daan. Daan performed in these muhurtas is said to give 100,000 times the ordinary merit. It is inexhaustible and eternal in that the spiritual merit is not extinguished after death but remains with the donor birth after birth. It is said that the donor will not suffer from cold if cloth is given in the cold seasons. Prosperity does not abandon the person who gives grains, cloth, shelter, a dwelling place or asana. The person who

gives red cloth and grains according to his capacity becomes healthy and is prosperous. His mind is pleased, balanced and happy.

Vrishabha Sankranti वृषभ संक्रांति

This Sankranti takes place around 15th May when the sun enters Taurus. May is the hottest month in India and the items that gave protection from the scorching heat of the sun were considered the most appropriate and auspicious, such as shoes, umbrellas, fans, sandalwood and water. Daan of water is extremely auspicious and full of spiritual merit. During the Sankranti even the trees should be given water, especially the Peepal tree. *Dahi bhat*, a preparation of curd and rice, which is cooling and beneficial to eat in the hot season, should be given. This Sankranti is also an important time for *go daan* or the daan of cows. Traditionally *go daan* is considered one of the most auspicious forms of daan, generating the highest spiritual merit. Cows provide milk, ghee, cheese, and *goita* or fuel for fires. These items can be given as a modern alternative.



Vrishchik Sankranti वृश्चिक संक्रान्ति

Vrishchik Sankranti occurs when the sun enters the zodiac sign of Scorpio around the 17th November. During this sankranti the traditional daan is *deep daan*, or the gift of light. Light removes darkness, and the merit associated with the giving of light relates to increased lustre, vitality and improved eyesight at the physical level, awakening of prana and tejas at the subtle level and the dawn of spiritual luminosity and jnana at the spiritual level. It is said that the person who makes the gift of a lamp for the benefit of others, shall make the lamp of perfect knowledge blaze within themselves. The first preference should be for deepaks made with ghee, and the second from oils such as sesame or mustard. The deepak should remain with the flame leaping upwards, to ensure the refulgence of the person who has given it. The burning deepak should never be removed from the place where it is kept, nor should it be destroyed, or the flame extinguished by hand. Deepaks can be decorated with saffron and sandalwood paste. Other items that are traditionally given in daan include cotton clothing, urad dal and salt.





Kumbha Sankranti कुम्भ संक्रांति

Kumbha Sankranti occurs when the sun enters the sign of Aquarius around the 14th February. Bathing in the sacred river Ganga especially in Triveni where Ganga and Yamuna converge is performed on this Sankranti. During Kumbha Sankranti any offering made to cows is considered highly auspicious. Grass, hay, fodder and water for cows is offered in daan.

Sinha Sankranti सहि संक्रांति

When the sun enters the sign of Leo around the 18th August, it is Sinha Sankranti. During this month, fields are covered with green lush grass and cattle graze freely, producing maximum quantity of milk. Traditionally gold and silver was given in daan on this Sankranti. Items made by hand, whether wrought from iron, or made from metal, sculptures or handcrafts are given on this day. Anna daan especially *kheer* or rice pudding, honey, ghee, salt, gur and dahi is recommended. Any anna daan given on this day will attain the maximum merit.

SHADASHITI MUKHI (षडशति मुखी) SANKRANTI

The Sankranti of the following signs *Dhanu* or Sagittarius, *Mithuna* or Gemini, *Min* or Pisces and *Kanya*, or Virgo is called Shadashiti Mukhi. For all these four Sankrantis, sixteen ghatis after the actual Sankranti moment are considered for auspicious activities. Daan given on this day gives 86,000 times the ordinary merit.

Dhanu Sankranti धनु संक्रांति

When the sun enters Sagittarius around the 17th December it is called Dhanu Sankranti. It is considered very auspicious to take a *sankraman snan* or the ritual bath in sacred rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna, Tungabhadra and Cauvery. This is the winter season and often coldest time in the year. On this day, daan of clothing, particularly woollen clothing and blankets is auspicious. Food items include ghee, coconuts and lemon.



Mithuna Sankranti मथुन संक्रांति

When the sun enters Gemini around the 16th June it is called Mithuna Sankranti. The month of Mithuna is related to prakriti and the powers of creation, in particular *prithvi*, the earth, as *Bhudevi* the mother goddess. The activities of the Sankranti invoke the fertility of the earth in a primordial worship of Shakti, the cosmic creatrix. At this time, the nurturing power of the earth as Devi is accessible and her grace flows forth. On Mithuna Sankranti, the traditional items of daan are clothing and vehicles. Due to the heat in the month of June, umbrellas and shoes are given. *Anna daan* and *jal daan*, the gift of grains and water, along with salt, is also highly esteemed, as there may be difficulty in obtaining adequate food and water due to the weather. During this Sankranti *vidya daan*, the gift of knowledge, is highlighted. Scriptures including the eighteen Puranas, *Ramacharitamanas*, *Mahabharata*, and other dharma shastras are traditionally given.



Meen Sankranti मीन संक्रांति

Meen Sankranti occurs when the sun enters the zodiac of Pisces around the 13th of March. *Bhumi daan* or the gift of earth is traditionally given and is considered the most auspicious form of daan during this Sankranti. In place of earth, plants or seeds can be given, as these also represent the *prithvi tattwa*, or the earth element. Other items given are also of utility in general household use, beds, water vessels, cooking pots and utensils, water, grains especially wheat, bael fruits and flower malas.



Today on Meen Sankranti, we give prasad to our people from the Munger town, who work very hard. They carry the load of all those people who can't carry their own load. They carry the body of all those people who cannot carry their own bodies, who are looking for some help. These people are the rickshawalas and the thelawalas of Munger. Every Sankranti we call different groups and give them daan. Daan is the gift which removes the absence or the vacuum from life. It is not charity. Daan given on this day has a definite purpose and meaning and is endowed with a different positive sankalpa to bring peace, plenty and prosperity to the life of everyone. It is the sankalpa of our Gurudev Sri Swami Satyananda also. It is my pleasure and honour

to welcome the hard workers of Munger and today they will receive their daan, with the blessings of Sankranti, to make their life full of light, peace, and prosperity.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Kanya Sankranti कन्या संक्रांति

Kanya Sankranti occurs when the sun enters Virgo around the 17th September. This day is also known as *Vishwakarma Jayanti* or the birthday of Vishwakarma. In the *Rig Veda*, Vishwakarma is the deity of the creative power that holds the universe together. He is the *devashilpi* or divine architect of the universe from before the advent of time. Vishwakarma is revered by those who work with their hands and machines, including the engineering and agricultural communities, tradesmen, architects, artists and sculptors. Traditional food preparations such as khichari and kheer are made, and distributed to all. Other food items given on this day are til, sattu, ghee, dahi, fruits and sweets. The daan of clothing and also of housing or shelter is traditionally considered auspicious and will bring maximum merit. Special attention is given to those who need medical care, and daan of *aushadhi*, or medicinal herbs, medical treatment, nutritious food, shelter and care for the ailing and sick are all important forms of daan on Kanya Sankranti.

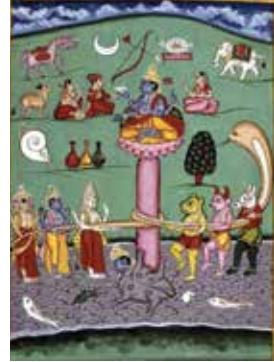


ECLIPSE

According to the ancient histories, the eclipse is related to the churning of the ocean by the devatas and asuras.

RAHU AND KETU

In search of the *amrit*, the divine nectar that gives immortality, the devas and asuras joined forces in this quest. When Dhanvantri emerged from the ocean with a pot of amrit, there was a mad rush for it and a fight broke out. To protect the devas, Lord Vishnu took the form of Mohini, the most beautiful woman ever seen. Mohini charmed all present into sitting in two separate rows, promising them she would distribute the amrit to all. Intending to give all the amrit to the devas, Mohini started distributing to them first. An asura called Rahu guessed what was happening. Disguising himself as a deva, he sat at the end of the devatas' line. Mohini poured the last of the amrit in Rahu's hands and he drank it. Surya and Chandra, who were sitting next to Rahu realized what had happened and told Mohini.



Immediately, Vishnu cut off Rahu's head with the Sudarshan chakra, separating his head from his body. Due to the immortality given by the amrit, he did not die. His bodiless head lived on as Rahu, and the headless torso became known as Ketu. Eventually, a compromise was agreed upon and Rahu and Ketu were given the status of planets. On full moon and new moon days, Rahu and Ketu were allowed to torment the sun and moon to have their revenge. This causes the eclipse during which Surya and Chandra lose their rays and become powerless.

From the modern perspective, a lunar eclipse occurs when the earth stands between the moon and the sun, cutting off the light of the sun from the moon. The moon has no light of its own, it simply reflects the light of the sun. Here the moon basically disappears. A lunar eclipse is always a full moon and usually marks the ending of something or a culmination point in life. A solar eclipse occurs when the moon stands between the sun and earth, cutting off the light of the sun. Solar eclipses occur at new moons. During this time, the moon can block out the sun's light. The solar eclipse which falls on Sunday, and the lunar eclipse which falls on Monday are the most auspicious and provide maximum merit for daan. Any kind of daan is considered to be highly auspicious during an eclipse, any item can be given.



Astronomically speaking, when the sun, the moon and the earth are all in line, with the moon or the earth at the centre, a solar or lunar eclipse takes place respectively. At the time of the eclipse, people bathe in the sacred rivers. They do charitable acts. They give cows, money and gold. The day after the eclipse they feed the poor, the Brahmins and the sadhus.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

AMAVASYA

Amavasya is the dark night, at the end of the krishna paksha when the moon is not visible. This tithi is considered especially auspicious for daan, as well as *tarpanam*, the traditional offerings to the departed ancestors. Any amavasya falling on a Monday is known as Somavati Amavasya and is also considered highly auspicious. Daan of cloth items or clothing,

gold, iron, cows and land all accrue the highest merit during amavasya. However, the main focus is anna daan, especially til, kheer, grains, rice and water. The *pitru paksha* or fourteen-day period dedicated to the worship of the ancestors also relates to anna daan and highlights the importance of giving food in life.

KARNA AND YAMA

Karna, who had performed and perfected daan in his lifetime, ascended to the higher worlds after his death, where the merit of his daan was returned to him hundredfold. But everything offered to Karna was made of gold and silver. There was no food or water. Struggling to survive, Karna eventually understood the reason for his predicament. During his lifetime he had neglected to perform anna daan. Desperate and humbled, Karna prayed to Yama, the Lord of death. He was allowed to return to earth for fourteen days, to make up for this deficiency. For fourteen days, Karna fed Brahmins and the poor. He offered water for drinking and also performed *tarpanam*, offering oblations of water. On his return to the higher regions, he had food and water in plenty. It is these fourteen days that are commemorated in the Mahalaya Paksha. The last day of this period is called Mahalaya Amavasya. Due to the grace of Yama, it has been ordained that offerings made during this period benefit all the departed souls, whether they are connected to you or not.



Daan in the form of food is important during this observance. Life depends upon food. You cannot preach religion to empty stomachs. This human body is the most important vehicle for realizing God. How precious must food be which keeps the body fit for yoga! The gift of food is the greatest gift. Therefore, give food in plenty, not only during the Mahalaya fortnight but all through the year.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Mauni Amavasya which falls in the lunar month of Magha, around mid-February, is considered highly auspicious for daan. On this day it is said that the river Ganga turns to amrit. It is known as amrit yoga. The punya kala muhurta varies from year to year, but generally the entire day from sunrise to sunset is considered to be conducive for daan. Giving of anna daan, vastra daan and items made of gold are said to bring eternal and imperishable merit.

Diwali is the festival celebrated on amavasya during the month of Kartik. Kartik is associated with *deep daan*, the gift of light, or the daan of the agni tattwa in any form.



Diwali literally means a row of lights. It falls on the last three days of the dark half of Kartik. There are various origins attributed to this festival, the marriage of Lakshmi with Lord Vishnu, the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, and the defeat of the demon Narakasura by Sri Krishna. Diwali symbolizes the triumph of sattwa in life, and the daan given on this day is also considered to bring the maximum merits associated with sattwic daan. Items given are vastra, deepaks, as well as sweets and other items of anna daan.

Everyone forgets and forgives the wrongs done by others. There is an air of freedom, festivity and friendliness everywhere. This festival brings about unity. It instils charity in the hearts of people. Everyone buys new clothes for the family. Employers, too, purchase new clothes for their employees.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

POORNIMA

The day of poornima is the lunar day or tithi in each month when the full moon occurs. The poornima marks the division in each month between the two lunar fortnights, or *paksha*. The shukla paksha is the fortnight before the full moon as the moon is waxing. The krishna paksha is the fortnight after poornima as the moon is waning. Poornima occurs when the sun and moon appear separated by 180 degrees. As the full moon reflects the light of the sun, poornima represents a time of auspiciousness and spiritual





illumination. It is generally considered favourable for new beginnings and all poornima days are considered auspicious for daan, however Ashadha, Chaitra and Kartik Poornima are of special significance. On Kartik Poornima it is said that the devas come to earth and reside in the sacred rivers. Daan performed on this day is considered to give merit equal to one hundred Ashwamedha yajnas. The important types of daan are anna daan, vastra daan, go daan, and deepak daan. Daan of tulsi plants is recommended on this day.

AKSHAYA DAAN

Akshaya means imperishable, eternal, the never diminishing, and daan performed on these days is called akshaya daan. It is said to have eternal merit. The two most important days are Akshaya Navami and Akshaya Tritiya. Akshaya Navami is observed on the ninth day of the shukla paksha in the month of Kartik. Akshaya Navami is also known as *satya yugadi*, as it is said that Satya Yuga began on this day. It is extremely significant for any daan or charitable activities. Akshaya Tritiya is known as *treta yugadi*, the day when Treta Yuga began. Akshaya Tritiya is associated with Lord Vishnu, the force that protects and sustains life. It is the day when

Lord Vishnu incarnated in the form of Vamana, Parusharama and Rama. Daan of gold items is recommended on Akshaya Tritiya due to the connection with Lakshmi and also Kubera, the deity of wealth who attained his post on this day. Other items traditionally given in daan are water, buttermilk, wheat, clothing, beds, umbrellas, and shoes. Sandalwood, kumkum, betel nut and other pooja items are also auspicious.

Yugadi, Akshaya Tritiya and Vijay Dashami, which is the last day of Ashwin Navaratri are three days that are considered to provide eternal merit for any daan performed. On these three days, daan can be given at any time. There is no requirement of a particular muhurta, as the entire day is considered auspicious and without malefic influence. The Tritiya or third day of shukla paksha of the month Magha in November–December, is called Manvantar tithi, and is also considered to be a day in which any daan is eternal and indestructible.



A muhurta indicates a specific time when one can perform a specific act. It is determined by examining what the nature and the quality of the time is, according to the conjunction of the zodiac symbols; whether it is the period that one is in for the next fifteen minutes, half hour or for the next three or six hours. These muhurtas, these times as indicated by the planets, are conducive for a specific act. When you perform the right act at the right time it will give fruits; it will give results, better fruits, better results, sweeter fruits, greater results. If you do the wrong act at the wrong time, nothing is going to grow. If you do the wrong act at the right time, it will have a specific type of impact on the human psyche, on the human mind. If you do the right thing at the wrong time, it will have another impact on the human psyche and the human mind.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

NAKSHATRA

In Jyotish astrology, the *nakshatras*, meaning that which does not decay, are the constellations through which the moon moves in its orbit. Just as there are twelve constellations based on the solar transition, which is seen in the twelve Sankranti days, there are lunar constellations or mansions also. The moon takes approximately 27.3 days to complete its orbit of 360 degrees. The moon moves approximately 13 degrees and 20 minutes per day, therefore nakshatras are known as the lunar mansions, as the moon resides in one nakshatra per day. The older traditions list twenty-eight nakshatras including Abhijeet, whereas in the other scriptures like *Vedanga Jyotish* and *Surya Siddhanta*, there are twenty-seven nakshatras.

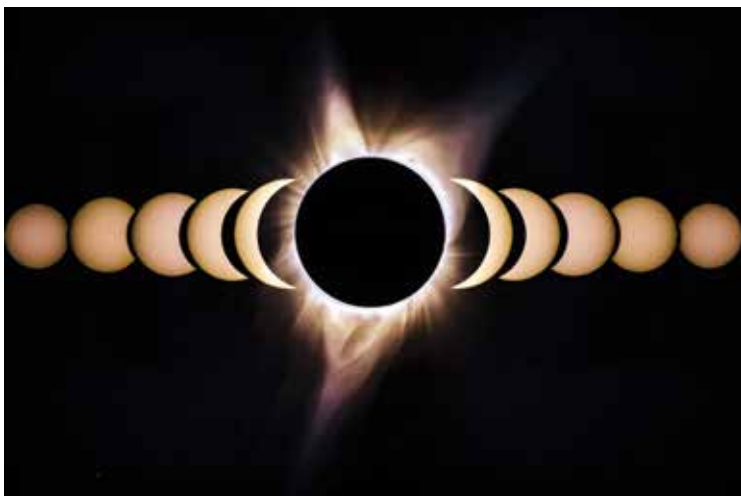
THE WAXING AND WANING OF CHANDRA

The nakshatras are the twenty-seven daughters of Daksha Prajapati. Chandra, the deity of the moon, married all twenty-seven nakshatras. Rohini was incredibly beautiful, artistic, a great dancer and also quite skilled in the conjugal arts. As a result, Chandra fell totally in love with her and did not pay enough attention to his other wives. The other wives became very jealous and complained to their father. Daksha told Chandra to treat his wives equally, but Chandra disregarded his advice. Again the other wives complained to their father. Daksha chided Chandra again, to no effect. Chandra continued to stay only with Rohini. When his daughters complained to him a third time, Daksha got angry and cursed Chandra that he would get consumption and waste away. Chandra tried to cure himself by conducting yajnas, but nothing could overcome the curse. On Earth also the curse had a devastating effect. Many people contracted consumption, the trees and plants were losing their lustre, the sap would not flow in their veins, and the *aushadhi*, or medicinal plants, stopped growing. In despair Daksha went to Brahma, the creator. Brahma told him that the only solution was to pray to Siva. Chandra went to Prabhasa tirtha and after installing a lingam on the banks of the river Saraswati, he performed a *japa anushthana*, the repetition of the *Mrityunjaya mantra*.

Finally, Siva appeared before Chandra and offered to grant him a boon. Chandra explained his problem and the curse. Siva replied that Daksha's curse could not be entirely revoked, but there was a solution. He said, 'Let us have a compromise. During *krishna paksha*, the dark part of the lunar fortnight, you will wane.



During *shukla paksha*, the bright part of the lunar fortnight, you will wax. That should satisfy everybody.' Chandra was immensely relieved to be somewhat restored to his former glory. For thirteen nights the moon moves from the direction of sun to behind the earth, spending one night in each palace. As he travels towards Rohini, his beloved who lives behind the earth farthest from the sun, his happiness increases his light and with her he shines the brightest on full moon night. As he moves away from her he loses his light slowly again. Then he goes to Kailash and rests on the matted *jata* or dreadlocks of Lord Siva on Amavasya.



Each nakshatra has a significant influence on life, and accordingly particular items have been specified for daan to be performed during each nakshatra.

Nakshatra	Daan	Merit
अश्विनि <i>Ashwini</i>	horse carriage or chariot	rebirth in a wealthy family
भरणी <i>Bharani</i>	cattle, sesame seeds,	great fame and abundance
कृत्तिका <i>Krittika</i>	ghee, kheer, milk products	attainment of the divine state of consciousness
रोहिणी <i>Rohini</i>	ghee and milk	attainment of the divine state of consciousness
मृगशीर्षा <i>Mrigasiras</i>	cow with a calf, milk	freedom from debt
आर्द्रा <i>Ardra</i>	sesame seeds	overcoming all difficulties
पुनर्वसु <i>Punarvasu</i>	malpua fried in ghee, anna daan	prosperity, fame, beauty
पुष्य <i>Pushya</i>	gold or yellow metal	grace, beauty, freedom from negativity
आश्लेषा <i>Ashlesha</i>	bull silver	freedom from fear, affluence and prosperity good looks, freedom from fear, knowledge of the scriptures
मघा <i>Magha</i>	sesame	attainment of children and cattle for oneself
पूर्व फल्गुनी <i>Purva-Phalguni</i>	anna daan, mare	attainment of the divine state of consciousness
उत्तर फल्गुनी <i>Uttara-Phalguni</i>	ghee, milk, gold	great merit, removal of obstacles, attainment of the divine state of consciousness
हस्त <i>Hasta</i>	gold elephant	attainment of the divine state of consciousness
चित्रा <i>Chitra</i>	bull	company of apsaras

Nakshatra	Daan	Merit
स्वाती <i>Swati</i>	wealth, or any item of attachment	fulfilment of desires and great fame
विशाखा <i>Vishakha</i>	bull and cow, or bullock cart, clothes, grains	gratification of the pitris, ancestors, inexhaustible future merit
अनुराधा <i>Anuradha</i>	cloth, clothing, warm blankets	attainment of the divine state of consciousness
ज्येष्ठा <i>Jyeshtha</i>	herb called Kalasaka, seasonal root vegetables	<i>samipyra</i> , proximity to the divine
मूल <i>Mula</i>	fruits and vegetables	gratification of the pitris, the ancestors
पूर्वाषाढा <i>Purvaashadha</i>	dahi	prosperity and children
उत्तराषाढा <i>Uttaraashadha</i>	jugs of barley, water and sugarcane, gur	fulfilment of wishes and desires
श्रवण <i>Shravan</i>	<i>Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana</i> , Vedas, sacred books and scriptures	wisdom and <i>samipyra</i> , proximity to the divine
धनिष्ठा <i>Dhanishta</i>	plough and bullocks, or cows	respect, fulfilment of desires
शतभिष <i>Satabhisha</i>	perfumes, aguru, sandalwood	company of apsaras
पूर्वभाद्रपदा <i>Purva-Bhadrapada</i>	anna daan, especially urad dal	great happiness and prosperity
उत्तरभाद्रपदा <i>Uttar Bhadrapada</i>	clothing	gratification of pitris, attainment of paradise
रेवती <i>Revati</i>	cow with bronze milk pail	gratification of all desires
अभीजित <i>Abhijit</i>	milk, ghee, honey, gur	attainment of the divine state of consciousness

TITHI

Specific items are also prescribed for daan to be given according to the tithi. The merit accruing for each daan when correctly performed has also been revealed. This daan is usually performed in connection with different poojas for relief from the influences of the planets or other astrological factors. It can also be used as a *prayaschit* or corrective form of daan.

Day	Tithi	Daan	Merit
1st	<i>Pratipada</i>	gold lotus	fulfilment of wishes
2nd	<i>Dwitiya</i>	gold image of Agni along with jaggery and ghee in a copper pot	attainment of the divine state of consciousness, freedom from effects of past negativity
3rd	<i>Tritiya</i>	gold image of Radha with salt in a copper lota	attainment of the divine state of consciousness, all worldly desires fulfilled
4th	<i>Chaturthi</i>	gold elephant with sesame	removal of obstacles
5th	<i>Panchami</i>	gold snake in copper lota filled with ghee and kheer	happiness in this world and future
6th	<i>Shasthi</i>	gold image of Kartikeya on peacock placed on pile of rice	success and good fortune
7th	<i>Saptami</i>	gold horse decorated with ornaments	attainment of the divine state of consciousness
8th	<i>Ashtami</i>	white bull decorated with ornaments and cloth	attainment of the divine state of consciousness, benefits of vidya daan
9th	<i>Navami</i>	gold lion	fulfilment of desires, protection, Devi loka

Day	Tithi	Daan	Merit
10th	<i>Dashami</i>	golden images of the devatas of ten directions with salt, jaggery, milk, rice, ghee, dahi, urad til	attainment of the divine state of consciousness, freedom from fear
11th	<i>Ekadashi</i>	gold image of Garuda with ghee in copper pot	attainment of Vishnu loka
12th	<i>Dwadashi</i>	twelve items: cow, buffalo, ox, gold, sheep, mare, goat, sapta dhanya, flowers, jaggery, fruit plants, incense	fame
13th	<i>Trayodashi</i>	sweets and gold with recitation of 13 names of Yama	freedom from illness and relief from suffering in death
14th	<i>Chaturdashi</i>	a bull decorated with bell and ornaments	attainment of attainment of the divine state of consciousness, freedom from illness
15th	<i>Poornima</i>	release of bull for public benefit, silver image of moon	to be surrounded by beauty and benefit

Times for go daan

While go daan can be performed on any of the Sankranti, Poornima, or eclipse dates, there are also several auspicious tithis identified. The entire month of Vaishakh, from April to May is suitable for performing go daan. Other dates generally fall on Ekadashi, the eleventh day in the lunar month.

1. *Vijaya Ekadashi*: Krishna paksha ekadashi in Phalgun falling around 20th February.
2. *Amlaki Ekadashi*: Shukla paksha ekadashi in the month of Phalgun, between Maha Sivaratri and Holi, around 10th March.
3. *Papmochani Ekadashi*: Ekadashi in the Krishna paksha of Chaitra, which comes between Holika Dahan and Chaitra Navratri, around 20th March.



4. *Kamada Ekadashi*: Chaitra Shukla paksha around 5th to 10th April
5. *Varuthini Ekadashi*: Observed during Krishna paksha of Vaishakha month, around 20th April
6. *Gau Vatsa Dwadashi*: the twelfth day in the Krishna paksha in the month of Kartik, last week of October.
7. *Gopa Ashtami*: the eighth day of the shukla paksha in the Kartik, usually in the first half of November. On this day Lord Krishna lifted the Govardhan mountain to save his people and cows.
8. *Gau Triratna Vrat*: occurs in Shukla paksha of Bhadrapad from 13th to 15th, around first week of September.

In sharing, there is joy and peace. Sharing generates cosmic love and destroys greed. Sharing removes selfishness and creates selflessness. Sharing purifies the heart and develops oneness. Share with others whatever you possess – physical, mental or spiritual. This is real sacrifice. You will expand your heart and experience the oneness and unity of life. Be on the lookout to do charitable acts daily. Do not lose any opportunity. Create new opportunities. There is no sacrifice greater than pure spontaneous charity.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

7

Scriptural Daan



Every good act is daan. Giving water to the thirsty is charity. An encouraging word to a man in distress is charity. Giving a little medicine to the poor, sick man is charity. Removing a thorn or a piece of glass on the road is charity. To be kind and loving is charity. To forget and forgive some harm done to you is charity. A kind word said to a suffering man is charity. Charity is not confined to giving in terms of dollars, rupees, or shillings. Think well towards suffering people. Pray for their welfare.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Daan is a process and a method of improving life, both for the giver and the recipient. Different types of daan have been defined in the scriptures and ancient traditions. These vary according to the capacity of the donor and the purpose of the daan. According to the traditional understanding and classification of daan, it can be made in order to:

- attain a certain merit
- complete a ritual or ceremony
- affect and improve an astrological condition
- offset a negative action or influence in life.

SHODASHA MAHA DAAN

These traditional forms of daan are described in the *Agni Purana* and *Matsya Purana*. *Maha* means great, and each daan is named after the main item that is donated. Lord Vishnu himself revealed sixteen different methods and types of maha daan, for the removal of all obstacles and to secure the protection of the devas. This indicates that performance of maha daan is intended to rectify any shortcoming of the personality and align the donor with the power of positive and righteous action. These sixteen forms of daan bring great merit to the donor, enhancing longevity and purity of emotions, mind and psyche. The texts state that the person who performs maha daan will not suffer from nightmares, which indicates that mental and psychic purity is possible through this daan. To attain maximum merit, these should be performed on an auspicious day, in particular the solstice, Sankranti, the first day of the yuga or manvantara, chaturdashi, shukla paksha panchami, ashtami, or dwadashi.

Maha daan can also be performed on the occasion of shraaddha, or when yajna, weddings or other festivals are being conducted. In the puranic accounts it is also suggested to perform maha daan after receiving bad news, or having had bad dreams, to clear the accumulated negative impressions from the mind and emotions. The location should be an auspicious and sacred place, such as a temple,

goshala, beside a river or water source, or in a beautiful garden. After the daan is given, Brahmins and all present are fed and any remaining items should also be given. Nothing is to be kept by the donor.

1. Tula purusha daan



This is the highest and most auspicious of all maha daan. *Tula* means scales, and in this daan the donor offers an item in quantity equivalent to the weight of his body. Gold is the most auspicious item to offer, and in the ancient history of Munger there is the example of King Karna, who received his weight in gold from the Devi Chandi after his upasana. This gold Karna then distributed

every day to his subjects from the location of the modern-day Jyoti Mandir at Ganga Darshan. Tula daan can also be made with gems, silver, camphor, bronze, copper, brass, lead, rock salt, clothes, fruits, wood, supari or betel nut, flowers, honey, ghee, milk, curd, grains, gur, oil, sugar, sandalwood, kumkum, betel leaves, or til.

The preparations for each maha daan take two days to complete, and the daan is given on the third day. Firstly, a vedi is constructed, according to the guidelines in the shastras. In the centre of the vedi, scales are made, using the wood of sacred trees such as bael, sandal, sala, or sripani. The deities Ganesha, Navgrahas, Lokapalas, Ashtavasu, Adityas, Maruts, Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Surya and the Vanaspatis are all invoked with their specific mantras. Brahmins perform the abhisheka of the donor, who then dresses in white. After parikrama three times around the vedi, the donor using the specified mantras invokes the power of the scales as Jagadhatri, the goddess who

permeates and supports the entire creation. The donor sits on one side of the scales, and Brahmins fill the other side until the weight is equal, or more than that of the donor. For kings who are desirous of prosperity, it is said they should fill until the scales touch the floor, meaning they must give more than their own weight in daan.

While remaining on the scales, the donor again prays to Devi, as the witness of all creation, as *Vishwadhara*, the holder of the entire micro and macrocosmic creation, to accept the daan. The donor alights from the scales and gives the item used to the poor, the needy, the Brahmins and all present. Nothing should remain ungiven. Correct performance of tula daan purifies the mind, awakens the prana and the donor becomes radiant and illuminated like the sun.

2. Hiranyagarbha daan

Hiranyagarbha is the source of all creation, the golden womb of potential. This daan is said to remove the accumulation of all negative thought, speech and action. The initial preparations of vedi construction and invocation are similar to tula daan.

In Hiranyagarbha daan, a golden vessel, large enough for a person to sit inside is placed in the vedi, representing the divine womb. One third of the vessel is filled with milk and ghee. Various golden items traditionally involved in the birth of a baby such as needles, sickle, jewels, gold and weapons are also required. A golden staff and kamandalu is placed on either side of the vessel, and a lotus is drawn around the entirety. Accompanied by vedic mantras, abhisheka of the donor is performed, who then sits, either actually or symbolically in a foetal position in the womb, with the head between



the knees, and practises pranayama, taking at least five yogic breaths. While in this position, the *garbhadhana samskara*, inviting the soul into the womb, the *pumsavana samskara*, given at the first movements of the foetus, and the *simantonnayana samskara*, given at the birth of the mind, are performed by the pandits.

Then the donor stands up and the remaining of the shodasha samskaras are symbolically performed. The donor gives all the golden items to the guru, and with the associated mantras invokes hiranyagarbha, the divine source of creation, to bless him with a new birth, endowed with purity, virtue and truth. Afterwards, all items used in the daan are gifted, as well as sandals, umbrellas, asanas, utensils, houses and land according to the capacity of the donor. Hiranyagarbha daan not only purifies the donor, it can also liberate one hundred relatives of the donor.

3. Brahmanda daan

Brahmanda literally means the egg of Brahma. It refers to the cosmic egg of potential, the macrocosmic universe. This daan involves creating a symbolic model of the universe made out of gold. Depending on the donor's capacity the size can be from about eight inches to six feet. The replica is created with Brahma in the centre, surrounded by the lokapalas, Siva, Surya, Parvati, Lakshmi, the Vasus and Maruts. These are placed on golden pedestals, covered with gur and wrapped in red cloth. Ten jars filled with water and covered with cloth are also required. The eight auspicious grains are placed around the entire brahmanda. After the havan and other ceremonies, while making a parikrama around the brahmanda, the donor chants mantras invoking the grace of Lord Vishnu, for the removal of negativity, fault and defect. At the completion of this invocation, the brahmanda is divided into ten parts, of which two are given to the guru, and the rest to other Brahmins. All remaining items are given to all present.

4. Kalpapadap or kalpa vriksha daan

Kalpa vriksha is the divine wish-fulfilling tree that emerged from the churning of the ocean. This daan involves making a gold replica of the tree, with five branches upon which sit Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Surya and Kamadeva. The tree is decorated with fruits, birds, ornaments and garments. Four



smaller trees, representing the mandara, parijata, hari-chandana and santanaka, are also made of gold and placed in the four directions. A mandap is made, and the eight auspicious grains are also placed in the four directions. Invocation and installation of all the devas is performed as well as homa and then abhisheka of the donor. During parikrama, the donor invokes the kalpa vriksha with mantras of protection, purity and liberation. At the conclusion, the kalpa vriksha is given to the guru and the four smaller trees to the pandits. This daan liberates the donor from selfishness, greed and avarice. Properly performed it accrues similar merits as the Ashwamedha yajna.

5. Go sahasra daan

Sahasra means one thousand, and this daan refers to the giving of one hundred or one thousand cows. The preparations are the same as for tula daan, including homa and abhisheka. First, a bull bearing all the auspicious markings is brought into the vedi area, followed by one thousand cows with gold plated horns and silver plated hooves. All are decorated with cloth, flowers, bells and garlands. Pooja is performed of all the cattle, and in the middle of the vedi a golden bull is placed on a mound of salt, and invoked as Nandikeshwara. The donor must fast and drink only milk during the three-day ceremony.



The Brahmin pandits perform abhisheka of the donor with water mixed with medicinal herbs, and the mantras of the Vedas are chanted invoking the cow as a sacred and benevolent force and the abode of all the devas. The donor performs nyasa by installing the mantas in various parts of the body to purify the body as an instrument of dharma. Chanting the specific mantras, the shakti of the cow is invoked to protect and preserve dharma. After the homa, all the cows are given in daan, and each person may receive at least five cows.

6. Hiranya kamadhenu daan

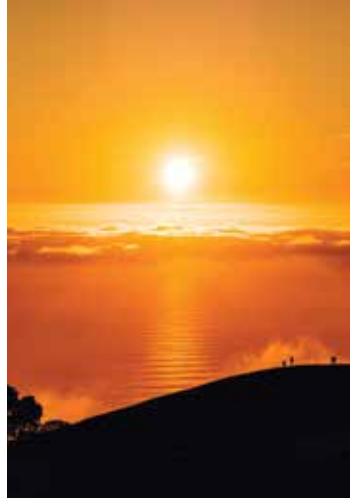
Kamadhenu is a divine cow, the provider of all material wealth and desires, who emerged at the time of churning of the ocean. As preparation for this daan a mandap is constructed, the lokapalas are invoked and homa is performed. A model of kamadhenu, along with a calf, is made of gold and gems and decorated with gold and crystal ornaments, silver hooves, and silk cloth. One thousand fruits are also required, however this can be reduced to two hundred and fifty fruits depending on the capacity of the donor. Eight vessels of water containing jewels and flowers are also placed along



with a bronze milking bucket, stool, honey, and sugarcane. After abhisheka the donor invokes the kamadhenu with Ganga jal and kusa grass, chanting mantras for the liberation of all suffering and the attainment of final bliss and liberation in life.

7. Hiranya ashwa daan

Hiranya means gold and *ashwa* means horse. For this daan, a golden horse is placed on a mound of sesame seeds in the centre of the vedi and covered with a silk cloth. The other items required are sandals, shoes, umbrellas, chamara, asana, utensils, eight vessels of water, sugarcane, fruits and an image of the sun made in gold. After abhisheka, the donor invokes Surya, the deva of the sun, as divided into seven parts, representing the seven *chhandas*,



meters, and illuminating the chakras of the donor, and the cosmic lokas. The donor prays for the protection and grace of Surya, and gives the golden horse as daan to the guru. Afterwards all the other items are given to those present. The donor must abstain from eating anything cooked in oil for the entire day, read the Puranas and feed Brahmins. By doing so, the donor becomes pure and illumined like the sun.

8. Hiranya ashwa ratha daan

Ratha is a chariot, and this maha daan involves a set of four or eight horses and a chariot with four wheels, all made with gold and decorated with gems. This is placed on a black deerskin in the vedi, and accompanied by four vessels of water, eighteen kinds of grains, and other items of daan including umbrella, chamara, red cloth, ghee and a bed. After abhisheka, the donor wears white clothing, and while doing parikrama through mantra invokes Surya as the destroyer of fear and negativity, and the bestower of virtue, purity and peace. After completion, all the items are given in daan.

9. Hema hasti rath daan

Hasti means elephant and this daan is similar to the above, but uses a gold or *hema* chariot drawn by four gold elephants. The chariot should be made in the shape of *Pushpaka*, the divine airplane of Kubera, god of wealth, and the four elephants should be decorated with pearl strings and tied to the chariot. Along with these four gold elephants, two real elephants should also be given. After the abhisheka and homa, during parikrama the donor invokes the chariot as the means to bring deliverance to those entangled in the mire of samsara. All items assembled and used in the ceremony are then given in daan. It is said that even a person who is by nature adharmic and unrighteous can be purified by the performance of hema hasti ratha daan.

10. Panch langalak daan

This daan involves land, which depending on the capacity of the donor can be one mile of fertile land or even extend to a large village with crops ready for harvest. Five ploughs of wood, five ploughs of gold, ten oxen ornamented with gold, pearls, silver and silk are also given. After the abhisheka and homa, the first daan is to the guru. A cow and other items including a ring, red cloth and a bed are offered to the guru as daan. The donor then does parikrama of the mandap, and invokes all the devas present on the body of the ox to sanctify the daan. After the invocation, all items assembled and used are given. This is said to purify the intellect and awaken dharma in life. Correct performance can also purify the donor of the effect of all past negative actions and thought.

11. Dhara daan

After the vedi is constructed and the invocations and other preparations are completed, a gold model of the earth as *jambudwipa*, the island representing the entire Indian subcontinent, surrounded by the *sapta sagar*, the seven oceans. This replica is intricate, with Mount Meru in the centre, and including representations of the eight lokapalas, eight Vasus, Rudra and Surya. The jambudwipa is then placed in the vedi on a mound of sesame, encircled by salt and the auspicious eight grains. Eight vessels of water, as well as fruit, coconuts, white clothing and garlands are also required items for this daan. Mantras are recited to invoke Devi in specific forms and with protective attributes and qualities. She is worshipped as Vishwambhara, Dhiti, Sthiti, Kshama, Kshauni, Prithvi, Vasumati and Rasa. Her protection and grace is sought. At the conclusion, all items are given in daan. Properly performed this daan leads to the attainment of bliss in this life itself.

12. Vishwachakra daan



This daan should be made when the sun enters the equinox. From gold, the divine chakra is created, consisting of eight concentric rotating wheels, joined by sixteen spokes. Vishnu is placed in the centre, seated in a yoga asana. Around him on each of the wheels in eight circles are all the

devas, rishis, matrikas, Vasus, tattwas, adityas, the Vedas, lokapalas, and diggijas. After abhisheka and homa, through mantras the donor invokes Vishnu as the controller of the cycle of the universe, remover of all difficulties, and the highest tattwa of existence. Merits associated with this daan are attractive physical appearance, freedom from suffering and enemies, attainment of wisdom and the experience of peace associated with proximity to Lord Vishnu.

13. Kalpa lata daan

Kalpa lata are the ten divine creepers that fulfil all material desires. A replica of these creepers is made of gold, and decorated with fruits, birds, siddhas, devas, lokapalas and other divine beings. Beneath the creeper on a mound of salt is the devi Brahmi and the shakti of Ananta. In each of the ten directions a different devi is installed, along with vehicle and weapons. For each devi a cow, water vessel and vastra are also required. After the preparatory rituals, the donor invokes the shaktis of the ten directions, and then gives them in daan, as well as the creepers. Performance of this daan satisfies all desires, liberates one hundred generations of ancestors and the donor attains to Nagaloka.

14. Sapta sagar daan

Sapta is seven and *sagar* means ocean. This daan calls for the symbolic gifting of the seven oceans. After the construction of the vedi and accompanied rituals, seven small golden pots are filled with salt, milk, ghee, gur, dahi, sugar and the sacred waters of tirthas. Golden images of deities are placed in the corresponding ocean. Brahma resides in the salt, Vishnu in milk, Siva in ghee, Surya in gur, Chandra in dahi, Lakshmi in sugar and Parvati in the tirtha waters. Gems and grains are placed in each pot and are also spread encircling the mandap. All the ceremonies are as for the other maha daan, except the homa is specific to Varuna, the vedic deity of water. After the homa, the donor invokes the oceans to provide and sustain his house in the same way as they provide and sustain the three worlds. This daan brings happiness and the attainment of material prosperity in life.

15. Ratna dhenu daan

Ratna means jewel, and for this daan a cow made from gold and studded with jewels and gems is given. The cow is placed in the vedi and encircled by the other items required, including chamara, milking pot, grains, sugarcane, fruits, cloth and vessels of water. The donor maintains a fast throughout the ceremonies and after abhisheka and havan invokes the divine shakti of the cow for protection. The body of the cow is said to contain the three worlds and be the resting place of all the devas, including Lakshmi who resides in the goita. Invoking the divine energy and grace of the cow equates to the entire divine cosmos. After parikrama, the cow is the first daan that is given to the guru. All other items are then given in daan to those present. This daan confers liberation and attainment of the realm of Vishnu,



indicating a state of peace, contentment and prosperity in life.

16. Mahabhuta ghat daan

The *mahabhuta* are the five elements that are the essence of all of creation. This daan uses a golden water pot in which golden images of the pancha devas and lokapalas are placed. Beside the golden vessel are replicas of the Vedas, and around these are placed the other items including chamara, grains, mirror, sandals, ornaments, a bed and five different types of decoration. After the rituals, through the specified pooja and mantras, the donor invokes the mahabhutas, extolling the elements as the support of all existence, the universe and the devas. All items are then given. This daan brings peace and prosperity.

TEN MAHA DAAN

After the shodasha maha daan, another set of ten forms of daan is traditionally identified as maha daan, the great and auspicious items intended to bring a special merit. These are much simpler and involve less preparation than the sixteen maha daan. The ten maha daan are:

1. Suvarna maha daan

Generally, gold or *suvarna* is regarded as a symbol of prosperity, auspiciousness and illumination. Any amount of gold can be given in maha daan, depending on the donor's capacity. Giving of gold at different times of the day generates different kinds of merit. Daan given in the early morning helps destroy nightmares, before noon it purifies, and after midday, it nullifies the effect of future negative action.

2. Ashwa maha daan

The horse is an auspicious and regal animal, related to the divine and material realms. The horse is often the vehicle

of devas in celestial realms, but also decisive in battle in the material world. Ashwa daan is recommended for those desiring victory, prosperity and advancement. Daan of a white horse decorated with jewels, silks, and silver, yields ten times the merit of the daan, especially if performed while invoking Lord Surya.

3. Til maha daan

Til or sesame is a very important item in many forms of daan and can be given regularly. Til daan is highly recommended throughout the month of Magha (January–February), especially on Shathtila Ekadashi and Til Dwadashi, in the Magha Krishna paksha, the 11th and 12th day of the dark half of



January–February. Makar Sankranti, when the sun moves from the southern to the northern hemisphere, is another auspicious occasion for til daan. Sesame can be given in a pot, covered with white cloth, or it can be given with gold, honey and ghee. Til daan provides nutritional value, enhances looks, lustre, and attractiveness, indicating it activates the prana and frees one from negative states of mind and experience.

4. Gaj daan

Gaj daan is gifting of an elephant. Ideally a real elephant is given in daan, along with ornaments, implements and saddle. Alternatively, the value of an elephant can be given in gold.



5. Dasi daan

This form of daan involved the gift of a servant or *das*, along with their clothes and personal ornaments. Traditionally, a dwelling house along with independent wealth and other

necessary household items were also given along with the servant.

6. Ratha maha daan

Daan of a chariot complete with horses and required accessories, such as bridles umbrella, and flagstaff is *ratha maha daan*. Other types of ratha daan involve giving of a bullock cart, oxen and grains, or a *palki*, a covered palanquin.

7. Mahee daan

This refers to *bhumi daan*, the gift of land. The land should be fertile, and earned with one's own efforts. Bhumi daan is powerful enough to purify and liberate a person from the cycle of worldly existence. It is said to release eleven generations from negativity and suffering.

8. Grih daan

Grih refers to a dwelling place, or home. This daan includes any provision for shelter, which is given according to the donor's capacity. The house is the abode not only of the family, but also of all the virtues, appropriate conduct and dharma of the family and the grihasta ashrama. From this perspective, grih daan is considered important not only for the individual, but for society as a whole. Therefore, traditionally cows, cooking utensils and pots, rice, grains, ghee, gur, and even beds were included in the daan.





9. Kanya daan

This is the daan given by the parents of female children, when consenting to the marriage of their daughter to a suitable groom.

10. Kapila daan

Kapila is a special type of cow, native to India. Named after Rishi Kapila this cow has a yellow, white or reddish coat. Although smaller in size than other cows, the milk of a Kapila has special health promoting properties, which is possibly the reason daan of this particular cow is considered highly auspicious. When given in maha daan the cow's horns should be covered with gold, its hooves with silver and the tail adorned with pearls. A bronze pot for milking is given along with the cow. The merit attained from this daan is equal to that of ten normal cows.



MERU DAAN

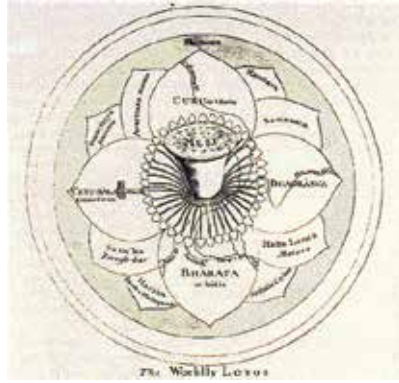


Mountains have a special significance in ancient thought and spirituality. Regarded as sacred beings, mountains are the homes of the divine, imbued with their own powers and spiritual consciousness. Mount Meru is the most sacred object in the universe supporting both the heavens and the gods. Geographically, Mount Meru exists at the centre of the universe, in the waters of life, surrounded by seven concentric seas. The gods reside in heavenly realms, on the top of the mountain, surrounded by sages, *gandharvas*, celestial beings and apsaras or heavenly damsels. Mount Meru reaches the heavens and Dhruva, the pole star, shines directly

above it. Ganga, the celestial river representing energy and supreme consciousness, descends upon Mount Meru and flows in four different directions, purifying the earth.

Meru daan is performed as part of the Meru Vrat, and is said to bring both *bhukti* and *mukti*, pleasure and liberation. Meru Vrat is observed during the month of Kartik (October–November), and it is especially auspicious if performed during Kartik Poornima, or it can also be made on any Sankranti day.

First a lotus motif is drawn on the ground and the item for each type of daan is made into a pile symbolizing Meru, the central mountain in the pericarp of the lotus. This mountain should have three peaks, symbolizing Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Around the central Meru, twelve petals are drawn and in the centre of each petal, daan is placed representing Malyavaan, Bhadra and Ashvarksha in the east, Nishadha, Hemakuta and Himvaan in the south, Nila,



Shweta, Shringi in the north and Gandhamadana, Vaikangta and Ketumala in the west. The donor should fast, and after bathing invoke the grace of Lord Vishnu or Siva to perform the daan. The daan is always given with the sankalpa and prayer to attain freedom from negativity and liberation.

Twelve different forms of meru daan and associated merits are given in the *Agni Purana*:

Name of daan	Main item	Merit
<i>Ratna Meru</i>	Jewels	Fulfilment of all material desires in life
<i>Swarna Meru</i>	Gold	Attainment of the divine state of consciousness. Live as a king on earth and enjoy all the pleasures of life.
<i>Rajat Meru</i>	Silver	As above
<i>Bhumi Meru</i>	Land	As above
<i>Hasti Meru</i>	Elephants	Infinite benefit and happiness
<i>Ashwa Meru</i>	Horses	Fulfilment of all desires and attainment of comfort in life
<i>Gau Meru</i>	Cows	Live as a king on earth and enjoy all the pleasures of life.

Name of daan	Main item	Merit
<i>Vastra Meru</i>	Cloth	Undiminishing benefit and attainment of desires
<i>Ajya Meru</i>	Ghee	Attainment of all desires. Attainment of the divine state of consciousness
<i>Khaand Meru</i>	Sugar	As above
<i>Dhanya Meru</i>	Grain	Benefit in all aspects of life
<i>Til Meru</i>	Sesame	Attainment of the divine state of consciousness for donor and relatives also

DHENU DAAN

In the *Varaha Purana*, dhenu daan is described by Sage Vasishtha as a means to attain complete fulfilment in life. *Dhenu* means cow, and this daan uses a symbolic representation of a cow, made from different items that have their own specific utility. As described in the *Purana*, there are thirteen different forms of dhenu daan based on the items used to create the motif. The preparations for each daan are similar; the ground must first be thoroughly cleaned and covered with goita, an antiseptic, antibacterial agent that ensures the purity of the environment. A deerskin is placed with the head facing east and kusa grass is spread on top of the deerskin. This creates the base for the dhenu motif, and a similar base is made for the calf, about one quarter of the size. Both cow and calf face east and their feet towards the north.

After completion of the design and decoration, the invocation and worship is performed of the cow as the abode of all the devas, as the shakti of Vishnu, as the swaha of all sacrifices and the removal of all negativity. After the invocation, all the items used in the creation of the dhenu are

given in daan, through sankalpa, avahan and offering of all to Vishnu. Dhenu daan is best performed at the time of Sankranti, equinox, solstice or eclipse. Each daan provides specific merit.

1. Til dhenu

The body of the cow and calf are made with til, and the scriptural quantity is sixteen *prashta* of til for the cow and four *prashta* for the calf. *Prashta* is a vedic measurement equivalent to 160 grams. The nose of each is made from sandalwood and the tongue is made from gur. The tails should be adorned with bells and the horns should be made of gold. The hooves are made of silver.

2. Jal dhenu

Jal means water, and here the cow is symbolized by water in a pot. On the antelope skin one pot is placed in the centre, filled with water, perfumes, camphor and sandalwood paste, precious gems and jewels. This pot is decorated with durva grass and flower garlands. The auspicious grains are placed on all sides of the pot. This represents the cow. A smaller pot with the same contents represents the calf. Four additional pots filled with ghee, dahi, honey and gur are kept in the four directions. The face of the cow and calf should be made from gold, horns from lead and the eyes from pearls. The feet should be made from sugarcane with sandal paste and flowers.

The donor must fast and take only water for one day, and the receiver for three days. This daan should only be given to one who is pious, learned in the Vedas, has a family and is dutiful. The merit of this daan is said to be the same as an Ashvamedha yajna, the donor is freed of all negativity



and attains a divine state of consciousness. Not only the person who gives but also the person who receives are said to become merged in the state of Vishnu, the all-pervading consciousness.

3. Ras dhenu



This daan uses a pot of sugarcane juice to represent the cow and a smaller pot for the calf. The feet of the cow and calf are made with sugarcane sticks, face and tongue of gur, horns of gold, tail of cloth,

udder from butter and teeth from fruits. Both should be well decorated with sandal paste and flowers. Four pots containing sesame, and deepaks are placed in four directions. The saptadhanya are placed all around. Both giver and receiver should fast for a day before the daan. They attain the result of drinking the soma juice if performed properly. Even those who see this daan being made attain bliss and freedom. This daan liberates ten generations of ancestors and descendants.

4. Gur dhenu

In this daan, the cow is made from *gur* or jaggery. Replicas of cow and calf are made from gur, and placed on the kusa grass, along with a bronze milking bucket. The cow and calf are created using gold for the face, pearls for the teeth, horns of agaru sticks, feet of sugarcane and hooves of silver, tail of silk, velvet cloth for the body. The cow and calf are decorated with bells, flowers and different kinds of fruits are placed around.

The donor must face east, reciting the mantras and taking the sankalpa. The recipient must be deserving of the daan, and the daan must be both given and received with sincerity. If this is performed properly, all adversity is

overcome, and the donor will not experience any distress in life. This daan is so powerful, it is said to remove all negativity incurred through thought, word and deed, and remove all falsehood from the individual, rendering them completely pure and sanctified. Ideally this should be performed during the equinox, eclipse, solstice, amavasya or poornima days.

5. Shakar dhenu

The body of the dhenu is made from sugar or *shakar* and surrounded with the sapta dhanya on all four sides. The face of both cow and calf should be made with gold, eyes of pearls, tongue of flour, ears of



grass, feet of sugar cane, hooves of silver and udder from butter. Once the sugar motifs are created, they are covered with five types of gems and covered with cloth. Then it is decorated with sandalwood paste and flowers. This daan should not be given to anyone who is negative or jealous.

Shakar dhenu daan should be given on the solstice or equinox, and made with the donor facing east or north. The daan is given with the prescribed mantras, and the data must not look in the face of the recipient. After completion, the data must fast for one day and the recipient for three days, both eating only sugar. This daan removes all negativity, nullifies the effects of past negative actions and brings fulfilment in life.

6. Madhu dhenu

This daan uses sixteen pots of honey to make the cow, and four pots for the calf. Both motifs are then embellished with faces of gold, horns of agaru, ears of brass, lips made from flowers, teeth of fruit, hair of darba grass, feet of sugarcane and hooves of silver. The daan is then covered with a cloth,

and decorated with ornaments, flowers and bells. The saptadhanya are placed around both cow and calf, and four pots of til are placed in the four directions. A bronze milking vessel is also placed. After daan of the entire madhu dhenu, umbrellas and footwear should also be given. The donor must fast for one day and the recipient for three days, both taking only milk and honey. The merit of this daan is said to purify the place where it was performed and fulfil all desires. Ten generations of the donor's ancestors are benefitted.

7. Kshira dhenu



In this daan the body of the cow is made with a vessel of milk or *kshira*, and the calf is represented by a smaller vessel. The motif of both cow and calf are then created with faces of gold, horns of sandalwood,

ears of brass, mouth of gur, tongue of sugar, teeth of white seeds and eyes of pearls. The feet are made of sugarcane, hair of darbha grass, udder of butter, hooves of silver. Both cow and calf are covered with a white cloth, and decorated with sandal paste, flowers and garlands. Vessels of til and the saptya dhanya are placed on all four sides. After pooja, the kshira dhenu should be given to a Brahmin, along with clothes, earrings, shoes and umbrella. Coins should also be given, either one thousand or one hundred depending on the capacity of the donor. If properly performed the donor attains a divine state of consciousness.

8. Dahi dhenu

Dahi means curd, and this daan uses a vessel of dahi as the cow, and a smaller vessel for the calf. First, the saptya dhanya are spread on top of kusa grass. Upon these are placed the pots. On top of the pots clothing is kept. After the pooja is performed with sandal paste and flowers, the donor gives

the dahi dhenu to a person of good family, who is endowed with patience. Coins, earrings, footwear and umbrellas are also given. The donor must fast for one day and the recipient for three days eating only dahi. It is said that even those who see this daan being performed will attain liberation from all negative deeds and thought.

9. Navanita dhenu

The body of the cow is represented by ghee or butter in a pot and the calf by a smaller vessel. The motifs of both cow and calf are then made with horns of gold, eyes of pearl, tongue of gur, lips of flowers, teeth of seeds, udder of butter, feet of sugarcane, and hooves of silver and hair of darbha grass. Four pots of til are placed around the motif along with deepaks. After the pooja and mantras invoking the navanita as the divine amrit that arose from the churning of the ocean, the daan is given. The donor must fast for one day and the recipient for three days eating only butter. It is said that even those who see this daan being performed will attain liberation from all negative deeds and thought.

10. Lavana dhenu

Lavana refers to salt and this daan is created making a cow of salt from sixteen prashta and a calf one fourth of this size. The motifs of both cow and calf are then made with faces and horns of gold, eyes of jewels, mouth of gur, nose of sandal paste, ears of leaves, teeth of fruits, and udder of butter. The tail is made with silk and the hair from darbha grass. A milking pot made of bronze is also kept, and then both cow and calf are decorated with bells and jewels. After pooja the daan is given, along with clothing, woollen shawls and money according to the capacity of the donor. It is said that this daan is especially useful to ward off negative effects of planetary influence and can be performed at any time. However, eclipse, solstice and Sankranti days are especially suitable. It brings peace, prosperity and freedom in life.

11. Karpasa dhenu

Karpasa is cotton and this daan uses cotton to form both cow and calf. The detailing of both is made using gold for the horns, silver for hooves and teeth of different fruits and gems. Both are adorned with cloth and sandal paste. The pooja is performed and the dhenu invoked with full concentration and given in sincerity to a worthy recipient. The mantras used at the time of worship invoke Devi as the protector of all the devas and request her to raise the donor from the ocean of samsara. This daan should be performed in a temple, sacred site or an area where there are cows. It should be performed during the equinox or solstice, but also when the planets are unfavourable or when the donor is having bad dreams, nightmares and there are bad omens. Karpasa dhenu daan brings protection and positivity to life.

12. Dhanya dhenu



Dhanya is grain and this daan uses any of the auspicious grains to make both cow and calf. The motif is then decorated with horns of gold, hooves of silver, feet of sugarcane, tail of silk, nose of sandalwood, ears of leaves, teeth of pearl and mouth made from dahi and honey. This should be covered with gems and seasonal fruits. At the auspicious time, the donor must bathe, dress in white cloth and then do parikrama three times around the recipient.

Then the daan is given, along with footwear and umbrella. The mantras chanted invoke all the devas who reside in the cow, including medha, or intelligence, and all the munis and sages. This daan gives prosperity, long life, and health. It is said to bring the merit of ten cows. The negativities of life are nullified and one is free from the taint of past actions.

13. Kapila dhenu

This daan involves a Kapila cow along with the calf, both decorated with gems and cloth. Horns can be fashioned from gold or silver; or gold and silver is simply placed in the recipients hand. While the pooja is being performed the tail of the kapila cow should rest in the recipient's hands, while the sankalpa is taken. The merit of this daan is control of the senses, complete purification of mind, the removal of all negativity and enhanced faith in the divine. This daan can be made at any time, but especially on the Dwadashi day in Shukla paksha of Shravan, as well as the panchadashi, poornima or prathima in the month of Kartik

GO DAAN

In the tradition of daan, it is said that there are three forms of daan which all equate to the gift of life. These three are all called go daan, they share the same Sanskrit name, and are considered to bring equal merits. The word 'go' in Sanskrit can refer to the earth representing the gift of life, to the cow representing the sustenance and maintenance of life, and to the senses which allow one to experience life.

The purity of the cow benefits both giver and receiver, and brings liberation in this world itself. Go daan can turn enemies into friends. Even Surya, Chandra, Varuna, Agni, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva respect and pay obeisance to the person who gives a cow with faith and pure intention. The scriptures tell us that 33 million devatas reside in the cow. When Lakshmi arrived to take her place also in the body of the cow, there was no space left. The only place available was in the *goita*, the cow dung. Due to the sacredness of the cow, Lakshmi





happily accepted the position. Lakshmi is present wherever the earth is purified by the presence of goita, and her own presence and grace brings prosperity to life.

The cow is a mother, the giver of life. She has all the qualities of maternal love, selflessness and purity. Cow's milk is the closest to a human mother's milk. Apart from the milk which is not only nutritional, but also promotes sattvic and purifying qualities of body and mind, cheese, butter, ghee, and dahi are also provided. Ghee, because of its pure and sattvic quality, is used in all forms of pooja, havan and yajna, creating positive vibrations in the environment. Goita is a natural, ecologically sustainable and cost-effective fertilizer. It is also used as a disinfectant, and when burnt, the smoke is an excellent anti-pollutant and air purifier. Cow's urine also has medicinal properties and is used in ayurveda.

From a spiritual perspective, the cow is associated with and symbolizes the senses. For this reason, go daan is traditionally made by taking a sankalpa to purify and control the senses and associated reactions of mind. Here daan is an attempt to generate mental detachment. Daan is the medium whereby the donor makes a concerted effort to maintain *sanyam*, restraint of the mind, and achieve control over the senses. A balanced, purified and harmonious mind can face and overcome any challenge of life with positivity and optimism. The person who performs go daan will be liberated from the cravings of the mind, and the cycle of sensual attractions and afflictions experienced in the form of raga and dwesha. Go daan is considered a surrender of the lower mind, in particular the attachment to sensorial experience. Traditionally the cow was gifted to Brahmins, and those who lived according to dharma and applied the



wisdom of the seers in daily life. Such a person was deemed to be in control of the senses.

Five different forms of go daan are described in terms of the merit associated with each:

1. *Pap dhenu daan*: Removal of negativity and the residue of improper and adharmic conduct;
2. *Karj mukti dhenu daan*: Freedom from debts and attainment of financial security in life;
3. *Moksha dhenu daan*: Attainment of liberation, freedom from the lower mind and the transcendence of the self-oriented ego;
4. *Prayaschit dhenu daan*: To correct or rectify any mistakes or shortcomings in life and obtain forgiveness and purity in life;
5. *Vaitarni dhenu daan*: Daan performed in the last days of life as a method of purification, liberation from the influences of past negative action, thought, expression and a method to attain the highest state of eternal bliss.

Related to go daan is the daan of *gaushala* or cow shed and *grih daan*, gifting of a dwelling place. Instructions on the provision of a gaushala state that it should be constructed on flat, even land with soft soil. It should be large and spacious,

and provide shelter from heat, cold, wind and rain. It should have separate compartments for fodder, and wells and adequate provision for providing water to the cattle. The gaushala must be properly ventilated and provide protection against mosquitos and other insects. Daan of gaushala is recommended for health and good fortune.

Grih daan includes construction or provision of a house, gaushala, dharamshala, or even a boundary wall. Depending on the economic situation of the donor, the house can be a simple mud kutir, but it should be equipped with the necessary items for household life. Important items are beds, copper and bronze vessels for cooking, grains, jaggery, ghee, sugar, and if financially possible, cows to provide milk, ghee and goita.

In the grihasta ashram of life, maintenance of the family house is of great importance. Stability is provided by the home, and it is the repository of all the virtues and positive qualities. Love, compassion, support and understanding must come from the home. The joys of life flow from the home and nurture those who live there. The construction should be according to the *Vastu Shastra*, the proper invocation of the 54 deities before construction, and the vastu pooja is to be performed before the house is given as daan and is opened for use. Those who construct these dwelling places for others attain the heavenly realms.

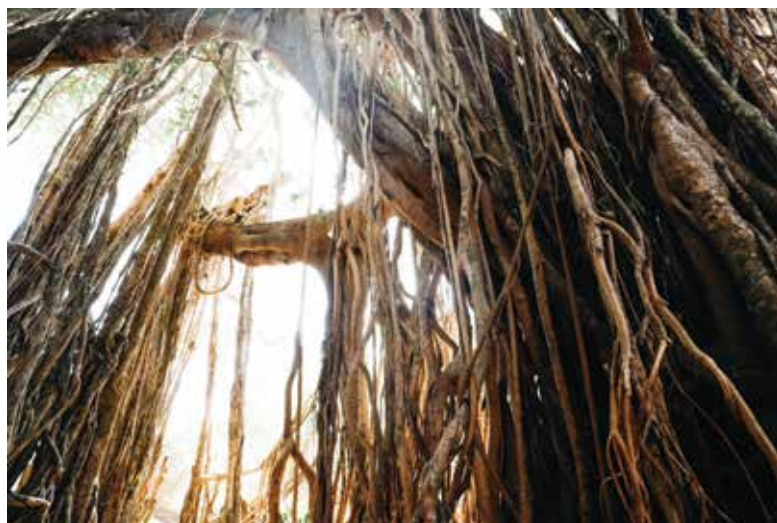


VRIKSHA AROPAN



Vriksha aropan or the planting of trees is also a form of daan. In the tradition of daan, trees were planted for a social, public, environmental and spiritual purpose. Trees support not only human and animal life but also engender a sustainable, balanced environment in both the material and spiritual dimensions. The planting of trees to create orchards, parks and forests has been praised in most of the puranic literature and the *Mahabharata*. Trees and vegetation are categorized into six different types: trees, shrubs, climbers, creepers, bamboo and grasses. Important trees include peepal, bargad, gular, neem, ashok, champaka, arka, siras, aam, katahal, banana, jamun, bael, and anar.

Planting of trees provided flowers for worship, and shade for all beings. All kinds of beings, including divine spirits, live in and take shelter under trees. Planting trees near a water source to ensure their growth and survival is said to provide one lakh more merit than planting trees in an unsuitable area. Trees planted on the banks of a lake provide unending fruit, especially the *ashwatta*, known as the peepal or fig tree. Birds freely eat the fruit of ashwatta, and therefore this tree is said to give inexhaustible merit. At the roots of the tree resides Vishnu, in the middle part resides



Siva, and the top of the tree is the place of Brahma. Once planted, the ashwatta tree fulfils all desires and attainments in life.

The procedure for vriksha aropan is outlined in the *Matsya Purana*. Ideally, trees should be planted near a pond, lake or water source. The plants should be watered and then Ganga jal is sprinkled for purity, followed by rice and curd. The saplings are decorated with flower garlands and clothes. Two leaves of each plant should be pierced with a gold needle to symbolize *karna bheda*, the traditional samskara of piercing of the ears. Kohl is also applied. A



kalash, or brass water vessel, is placed near each tree, or by minimum of eight trees if many are planted. Water, rice and a gold coin are kept in the pots. In the evening havan is performed. The next morning a cow, preferably covered with white cloth and golden decorated horns, should be

released to wander free among the trees. Following the release of the cow, abhisheka of the donor is performed with the kalash water accompanied by the traditional mantras. The daan concludes with dakshina to the pandits. The havan continues daily for the next four days, and after the fifth havan, a *bandhara* or feeding of the members of the public is conducted and daan is given.

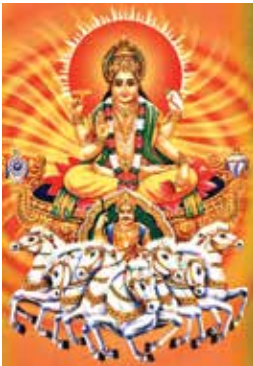
It is said that fulfilment of all desires and endless merit accrues to the person who provides an orchard or garden following the traditional *vidhi* or method. Even by planting one tree in the above manner, the heavenly realms can be attained. Trees are like sons for the person who plants them, and like sons, they ensure happiness and satisfaction not only in this world but also after death. This is the concept of *taruputra*. In order to have a better life, one should plant a tree and take care of it like one's own son. It is even said that trees are more precious and useful than a son, who are selfish by nature and never follow the scriptures. One generation of the donor is said to be liberated for each tree that is planted, which indicates the traditional understanding of symbiotic environmental relationships and sustainability. Happiness, health, good luck and heroism all come from the planting of trees.



NAVAGRAHA DAAN

Nav means nine and the word *graha* indicates the power to influence, control, grasp or cognize. The nine grahas are the seven celestial bodies represented by the planets plus Rahu, the north or ascending lunar node, and Ketu, the south or descending lunar node. The word *graha* has different applications. The Upanishads describe the senses as grahas, since they are the grasping or *grahnam* agents that exert an influence over the consciousness of the individual. In the same way, at the macrocosmic level the nine forces exercise their influence on the entire created universe, the unravelling of collective karma as well as the fate of the world. At the microcosmic level, they influence every living being and facilitate the working of individual karma.

Each navagraha is associated with a day in the week, indicating that they are also manifestations or aspects of *kala* or time. Depending upon the placement of the planets at the time of a person's birth, the possibilities and potentialities of life are determined well in advance. Of the nine planets, seven are considered as devas. The other two, Rahu and Ketu, are *asuras* or demons, compared to comet-like forces, having a shadowy influence upon the destinies of people. The deities that preside over the navagrahas are called *atigrahas*, or their controllers.



Surya

1. *Surya*: The Lord of the Sun, also called Ravi. In the company of the other planets, he generally stands in the centre facing east, while the other planets stand around him in eight different directions, but none facing each other. He rides a chariot pulled by seven white horses. The seven horses symbolically represent the seven colours of white light, the seven chakras, lokas and the days of



Mangala



Budha



Brihaspathi

the week. The Sun is the lord of the planets, so he is also known as *grahapati* or *graharaj*.

2. *Chandra*: The Lord of the Moon, known as Soma. Due to his waxing and waning quality, usually only his upper body from the chest upwards is seen. He is holding one lotus in each hand and riding upon a chariot drawn by ten horses.



Chandra

3. *Mangala*: The Lord of Mars, also called Angaraka, has four hands. In two hands he holds weapons, generally a mace and a javelin, while the other two are in abhaya and varada mudras. The ram is his vehicle.

4. *Budha*: The Lord of Mercury is depicted with four hands, riding upon a chariot or a lion. Three of his hands hold a sword, a shield and a mace respectively, while the fourth is in varada mudra.

5. *Brihaspathi*: Jupiter is the guru or teacher of the celestials. He has two hands, and is seated in a chariot driven by eight horses representing the eight branches of vidya.

6. *Shukra*: Shukracharya or Venus is also related to vidya, as he is the



Shukra



Shani



Rahu



Ketu

guru of the asuras and the author of *Shukraniti*. He rides upon a golden or silver chariot drawn by eight horses. In his three hands he holds a staff, a mala and a vessel of gold, while the fourth hand is held in varada mudra.

7. *Shani*: The Lord of Saturn rides upon a chariot, a buffalo or a vulture. In three hands he holds an arrow, a bow and a javelin, while the fourth one is held in varada mudra.
8. *Rahu*: He is generally shown riding a dark lion, in contrast to the white lion of Budha. He carries the same weapons, a sword, a spear and a shield in his three hands, while his fourth hand is held in varada mudra.
9. *Ketu*: He has the tail of a serpent as his body, matching his connection to the image of a comet, however he is often shown with a pock-marked body, riding upon a vulture and holding a mace.

Navagraha	Items offered	Timing
<i>Surya</i> – Sun	Copper, ruby, red cloth or flowers, sandalwood, khand, saffron	At sunrise on Sunday
<i>Chandra</i> – Moon	Rice, milk, silver, pearl, curd, <i>mishri</i> , a type of sugar, white cloth, white flowers, sandal wood	Monday evening
<i>Mangala</i> – Mars	Copper, wheat, channa dal, ghee, red cloth, red flowers, sandalwood, masoor dal	Tuesday within 48 minutes before sunset

Navagraha	Items offered	Timing
<i>Budha</i> – Mercury	Green vegetables, green cloth, flowers, moong dal	Wednesday within 2 hours before sunset
<i>Guru</i> – Jupiter	Gold, topaz, gram dal, salt, <i>haldi</i> or turmeric, gur, brown sugar, honey, yellow cloth, besan or chickpea flour, sattu	Thursday evening
<i>Shukra</i> – Venus	Ghee, camphor, dahi, silver, rice, sugar, white cloth, white flowers, white cow	Friday at sunrise
<i>Shani</i> – Saturn	Iron, black nails, black cloth, flowers, black cow or horse, til	Midday on Saturday
<i>Rahu</i>	<i>Sarson</i> or mustard, <i>mooli</i> or radish, black blankets, til, lead, anna daan, salt, coal	Sunday morning
<i>Ketu</i>	Til, blankets or cloth in black or grey colour, sugar, lead, saffron, anna daan, feeding of black dogs, ants or fish.	Sunday morning

SHRAADDHA

Daan is given during *shraaddha*, the ritual traditionally performed on the death anniversary of an individual, or in memory of deceased ancestors, especially parents. Shraaddha is also performed for the entire ancestral community on the *pitru paksha*, the sixteen days beginning on Bhadrapada poornima (full moon of August) and concluding on Sarvapitri Amavasya (September–October).





Pinda daan is one of the main forms of daan. A *pinda* is a ball made of cooked rice and barley mixed with ghee and black sesame seeds. Til or sesame, either white or black, is accorded special significance in daan, due to its origin and properties. Til originated from the body of Vishnu, the sustainer of all creation, or from the perspiration of Rishi Kashyap, the *manas putra*, the mind-born son, of Brahma. Til is included in pancha-dhanya and sapta-dhanya, the auspicious groups of five and seven grains respectively. Nutritionally, til is a source of copper, manganese, calcium, magnesium, iron, phosphorus, vitamin B1, vitamin B6, thiamine, folate, niacin, zinc, molybdenum and selenium. The *Vayu Purana* gives details on other items that can be offered in daan at the time of shraaddha, along with the corresponding merit for each item.



Jal and anna daan are generally given as an offering to the *pitrs* or ancestors. In the rainy season or when the Magha constellation is in the ascendant then dahi, milk, milk products and cooked rice are recommended. Kheer or payasa, a cooked sweet rice and milk, ghee, honey, fruits, root vegetables, fresh vegetables and grains are all suitable items. Brahmins should be fed with ghee, but a little ghee must be poured on the ground also. When giving anna daan, the food should be well cooked and served without restriction to the hungry. It is said that the gift of food is the gift of life in all the three worlds. Food is Prajapati himself and all the worlds are pervaded by it. Therefore, no higher daan exists than anna daan.

Vastra daan, or the gift of clothing, is also especially significant during *shraaddha*. Clothing, especially silk or cotton fresh from the loom, brings the benefit of longevity, wealth and beauty. Beautiful woollen and silk garments, blankets, cotton and velvet cloth bring about the fulfilment of all desires. Without cloth, it is said that no sacred action, *yajna*, *tapasya*, nor study of the Vedas can be undertaken. Therefore, one who gives *vastra* in *daan* receives health, *jnana* and spiritual illumination. All negativities and obstacles are removed like the darkness at the time of sunrise.

The person who gives *daan* of water vessels, *janeu* or sacred thread, beds or houses to Brahmins at the time of *shraaddha* enjoys fulfilment of desires and attains the heavenly realms. The person who gives gold or silver vessels, good foods and beverages to those in need will experience good fortune and the attainment of desires. One who gives ghee and firewood to Brahmins will attain a good memory and intellect.

DAAN AS PRAYASCHIT

An explanation of *daan* as a *prayaschit*, a means of correction, is given by Sri Krishna himself in the *Garuda Purana*. From the traditional understanding, that which is adharmic in life acts as an obstacle to spiritual evolution, whereas actions, thoughts and expressions that are dharmic will accelerate evolution. *Daan* is a dharmic action, it is powered by a good intention and it brings happiness and upliftment in life. *Daan* is considered one of the greatest virtues in life, and the scriptures state that everything good in life can be secured through *daan*. For this reason, *daan* is utilized to offset the effect of negative and adharmic action performed by the donor.

It is said in the *Dharmasara* chapter of the *Garuda Purana* that everyone sinks into misery due to greed and bad association. Greed generates anger and malice, greed causes delusion, false pride, prestige and rivalry. Therefore, perform *daan* as a way to become free from greed, delusion

and arrogance, to calm the senses, become calm and tranquil and see all beings as equal. Truthfulness, restraint, tapasya, purity, contentment, forgiveness, straightforwardness, wisdom, tranquillity, mercy and generosity are eternal virtues which can be inculcated through daan.

The most important forms of daan recommended as prayaschit are go daan, bhumi daan and anna daan. After these, daan of an elephant, horse, carriage, and jal daan are also given. Ten items are listed: the cow, earth, til, gold, ghee, vastra, grains, sugar, salt and silver which should be given to Brahmins by a person who is dying. Eight different forms of daan called *pada* are also listed: umbrella, shoes, clothes, gourd vegetables, ring, asana, *patra* or vessel, and grains. Often these forms of daan are undertaken before death, as a way to purify the mind, pranas and psyche, and prepare for a favourable rebirth.

Salt is said to be produced from the body of Vishnu. When the soul of the dying person does not leave the body but lingers due to attachments and lack of proper preparation, salt should be given in daan, as it opens the doors to the heavenly realms and facilitates the transition of the atma. It is said that whatever a person has given in daan throughout their life stands in their favour at the hour of death.



DAANVEER UNTIL THE END

After the battle of Kurukshetra, Karna lay dying on the battlefield. The pandavas were victorious, yet Sri Krishna lamented the death of Karna, as he was such a heroic and generous person. However, Arjuna was not convinced of Karna's qualities, and remained unmoved. To prove to Arjuna that Karna was indeed noble and worthy of respect, Sri Krishna disguised himself as a poor Brahmin and approached Karna, asking for daan. Karna advised the Brahmin to visit Angadesh instead and ask his wife who would give him anything he desired. He was lying on the battlefield, wounded, nearing death and had nothing left to give. The Brahmin pointed out that Karna still had some gold in his teeth. Karna requested him to take out his gold teeth. When the Brahmin was not prepared to do this, Karna dragged himself to a nearby stone and smashed out his own tooth with that stone, removed the gold, and gave it to the Brahmin. The Brahmin, who was really Sri Krishna, then complained that it was dirty and impure. It should be purified before being given as daan. Accepting this rebuke without complaint or reaction, Karna found a solution. Not able to move in order to find water, he shot an arrow into the ground, and a spring of water emerged. Karna washed the gold in the water and offered it to the Brahmin as daan with all faith and sincerity. Pleased with his heroism, unflinching sacrifice and true generosity of spirit, even in the last hours of life, Sri Krishna revealed himself to Karna. Sri Krishna blessed Karna with eternal fame, that he would be remembered for his great qualities of daan and veer, generosity and heroism, and live in the hearts of people until the end of time.

8

Anna Daan

One of the highest forms of daan is *anna daan*, the giving of grains or food. So important is the performance of anna daan that the *Mahabharata* declares ‘the day in which food is not given, is lost and is without merit’. Each morsel of



food given to a hungry person has been considered in the scriptures to give the benefit of a whole Ashwamedha yajna. Even daan of horses, bulls, jewels, precious stones and lands is not equal to even a sixteenth part of anna daan.

In the *Ramacharitamanas*, anna daan is said to be extraordinary and beyond compare. Comparing anna daan to ordinary daan is like comparing *amrit* or ambrosia to plain water, or the Ganga to an ordinary river. The *Bhavishya Purana* declares there is no greater *punya*, or righteous action, than truth, no greater happiness than contentment, and no greater daan than anna daan.

For affluent people, this point may be difficult to understand, but for anyone who has known poverty, hunger and starvation, the importance of anna daan needs no explanation. That is why it is said that the merit of anna daan increases exponentially when food is given to those who are tired, hungry and in need, or even simply those who ask for it.

Right now, more than 1 billion people suffer from hunger. This means that 1 in every 6 people on Earth do not get enough food to live a healthy life. In 2019, 36 million of these people died of hunger. Yet the world produces enough food to feed everyone. In the world as a whole, per capita food availability has risen, but many people do not have the resources or the money to eat every day. The World Bank places the poverty line at \$1.90 per day, and in 2018, 10.9 percent of the world's population are living below the poverty line. One third of the global urban population is living in a slum. While a billion people experience hunger, others who have ample access to money and resources are wasting food. About 17 percent of the entire world production of food is simply thrown out as waste, by conglomerates, exporters, supermarkets, restaurants, shops and households. Over 600,000,000 tons of food have been wasted in 2019. The problem is not scarcity of food. The problem is distribution, poverty and waste.

If this society cracks and breaks, then there will be chaos. Therefore, it becomes our duty, your duty, everyone's duty to sustain this society. Society does not depend on us. We are the load, not the load-bearers. We are a burden on society, not the bearers of the burden. It is our duty in every society – Eastern or Western, African, Chinese or Russian – to care for the common folk, because their needs are very few. The oxygen, food and water they consume in one year, an American or European consumes in one second. We all have a duty, a compulsory obligation to look after the common people, the supports of society.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*



Is it any wonder then that the ancient spiritual scriptures, place such importance on developing the ability to share with others? In the *Rig Veda* there is a whole *suktam*, a vedic hymn, dedicated to describing the necessity of sharing what you have with others. The *Dhan Anna Daan Suktam* says that one, who refuses to give a hungry person food, while eating himself and having enough to spare, can never be happy. The person, who gives food to those who need it, is a real data and receives the benefit of a yajna. This type of person will find friends even amongst enemies. To a person who has everything, and is not generous, even his eating is pointless. Eating food alone, without offering to the divine, or to friends or family has been likened to death. What is referred to is a spiritual death, the death of awareness, the death of selflessness and compassion, the death of the positive qualities in life.

अन्न सूक्तम्

न वा उ देवाः क्षुधमिद्वधं ददुरुताशितमुपगच्छन्ति मृत्यवः ।
उतो रयिः पृणतो नोप दस्यत्युतापृणन्मर्दितारं न विन्दते ॥

य आध्राय चकमानाय पित्वोऽन्नवान्त्सन् रफितायोपजग्मुषे ।
स्थिरं मनः कृणुते सेवते पुरोतोचित् स मर्दितारं न विन्दते ॥

स इद्भोजो यो गृहवे ददात्यन्नकामाय चरते कृशाय ।
अरमस्मै भवति यामहूता उतापरीषु कृणुते सखायम् ॥

न स सखा यो न ददाति सख्ये सचाभुवे सचमानाय पित्वः ।
अपास्मात् प्रेयान् न तदोको अस्ति पृणन्तमन्यमरणं चिदिच्छेत् ॥

पृणीयादिन् नाधमानाय तव्यान् द्राघीयांसमनुपश्येत पन्थाम् ।
ओ हि वर्तन्ते रथ्येव चक्रान्यमन्यमुप तिष्ठन्त रायः ॥

मोघमन्नं विन्दते अप्रचेताः सत्यं ब्रवीमि वध इत्सतस्य ।
नार्यमणं पुष्यति नो सखायं केवलाघो भवति केवलादी ॥

कृषन्ति फाल आशितं कृणोति यन्ध्वानमप वृत्ते चरित्रैः ।
वदन् ब्रह्मावदतो वनीयान् पृणन्नापिरपृणन्तमभि षयात् ॥

एकपाद भूयो द्विपदो वि चक्रमे द्विपात् त्रिपादमभ्येतिपश्चात् ।
चतुष्पादेति द्विपदामभिस्वरे सम्पश्यन्पत्कीरुपतिष्ठमानः ॥

समौ चिद् धस्तौ न समं विविष्टः सम्मातरा चिन्न समं दुहाते ।
यमयोश्चिन्न समा वीर्याणि ज्ञाती चित्सन्तौ न समं पूर्णीतः ॥

—ऋग्वेद 10:117

Anna Suktam

Na vā u devāḥ kṣudhamid vadhaṃ dadurutāśitam-
upaghachanti mṛtyavaḥ.
Uto rayiḥ prṇato nopa dasyatyutāpṛṇanmardītāraṃ na vindate.

Ya ādhrāya cakamānāya pitvo.annavān
sanraphitāyopajaghuṣe.

Sthiraṃ manaḥ kṛṇute sevate purocit sa mardītāraṃ
na vindate.

Sa id bhojo yo ghṛhave dadātyannakāmāya carate kṛśāya.
Aramasmai bhavati yāmahūtā utāparīṣu kṛṇute sakhāyam.

Na sa sakhā yo na dadāti sakhye sacābhuve
sacamānāyapitvaḥ.

Apāsmāt preyān na tadoko asti prṇantamanyamaraṇaṃ
cidichchhet.

Prṇīyādin nādhamānāya tavyān drāghīyāmsam-
anupaśyeta panthām.

O hi vartante rathyeva cakrānyam-anyamupa tiṣṭhanta rāyaḥ

Moghamannaṃ vindate apracetāḥ satyaṃ bravīmi
vadha it satasya.

Nāryamaṇaṃ puṣyati no sakhāyaṃ kevalāgho bhavatikevalādī

Kṛṣannit phāla āśitaṃ kṛṇoti yannadhvānamapa vṛṅktecaritraiḥ.
Vadan brahmṛvadato vanīyān prṇannāpirapṛṇantamabhi ṣyāt.

Ekapād bhūyo dvipado vi cakrame dvipāt tripādamabhyetipaścāt.
Catuṣpādeti dvipadāmabhisvare
sampaśyanpañktīrupatiṣṭhamānaḥ.

Samau cid dhastau na samaṃ viviṣṭaḥ sammātārā cin
nasamaṃ duhāte.

Yamayościn na samā vīryāṇi jñātī citsantau na samaṃ prṇītaḥ.

—*Rig Veda* 10:117



Of all types of daan or charity, anna daan is considered to be the most superior. It is believed that this type of daan ties the giver and receiver with such a strong bond that it is hard to extract oneself from the *rin*, or debt, of anna daan. In India the daan of anna is so significant that there is a special term coined for one who gives food in charity. He is known as *anna data* and worshipped as a benefactor. Not only that, there is a special abuse coined for the person who betrays his anna data! From this it is easy to understand how revered the person is who feeds others.

—*Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati*

What to give?

Even the smallest amount of food given to someone can make a world of difference. Nobody needs five-star cuisine. If you want to make a positive change in your life and in the lives of others, it is very easy. Give simple, nutritious food to those who need it. Swami Satyananda has given a very clear instruction. If you require two loaves of food to feed your family, buy three loaves and give one to someone in need. The *Mahabharata* contains a beautiful story called Nakulaakhyan.

IN SEARCH OF GOLD

After the eighteen-day war at Kurukshetra, Yudhishtira was eventually crowned King, with all the ceremony and rituals. After becoming King, he performed the Rajasuya Yajna and as part of that yajna, he gave daan to all present. After some time Vedavyasa persuaded him that he should also perform the Ashwamedha yajna. The yajna was a success due not only to Arjuna's conquest of Chedi, Kashi, Kosala and Gandhara, but also because of the daan given. Kings and guests were provided with great hospitality. There were heaps and heaps of rice, jars filled with ghee, streams of sweet liquid and lakes filled with drinks. The quantity of food served there was unmatched. Yudhishtira gave huge amounts of gold and gems in daan to everyone who attended the event. Vedavyasa declared that the yajna would be remembered as the Golden Ashwamedha, because of the amount of gold that was given. On the last day of the yajna, Yudhishtira thought with pride, is there any other person in the entire world who has donated like this? Lord Krishna understood what Yudhishtira was thinking about.

All of a sudden, a mongoose came out from a hole. It was not an ordinary mongoose. Half of its body from the head to the tip of its tail was golden. The mongoose started rolling



in the water, rice and flowers on the ground where pooja and daan had been performed. The mongoose cried aloud, and started making a huge noise that sounded like thunder. He then looked over his body, and muttered in disappointment. Then, it started

speaking in a human voice and said, “Dear Kings! The yajna that has just been performed cannot match the daan of a handful of flour that this Brahmin did in the past!” The people assembled there asked him who he was and what was he talking about. The mongoose started narrating its tale.

There once lived a poor, simple Brahmin who made a living by collecting nuts and beans. He lived with his wife, son and daughter-in-law. Once, he was not able to find any nuts fallen around which he could pick up. He returned home empty-handed. There was no food at home and his family had to starve that day. The next day, he roamed around many places and finally managed to collect some amount of barley flour. From this meagre amount, his wife managed to prepare a meal, the first they had had in days. Just as they sat down to have their meal, a guest appeared at their doorstep.

The Brahmin welcomed him, offered him water and gave him his share of the flour. As the guest was very hungry, the food offered to him was not sufficient. The Brahmin host then requested his wife to offer her share. That did not suffice either. He served the guest with the share of his son and daughter-in-law. With this, the guest’s hunger was satiated. The guest had eaten all the food, yet all the family members were happy that their guest was now contented.

The guest then said – “Sir! The daan that you have made is of the best kind. You have offered whatever you had earned in a dharmic manner. Your forefathers will be rightly rewarded because of your good deeds. The devatas

are happy because of the tapas you have performed. Hunger hampers the intellect and can weaken righteous and appropriate thoughts. Wisdom is lost and courage is dampened. Conquering hunger is like conquering the heavens. You hardly cared for your own comfort and even did away with the comfort of your beloved ones for the sake of dharma. You considered dharma to be the supreme value and performed this daan. A person who donates to the right person at the right time will certainly reach the highest place. The quantity does not matter, it is the feeling with which daan is performed that matters the most. It is said that even if a drop of water is offered with pure heart to a person in need, the donor will reach the heavens. The small courtesies and little deeds of goodness that a man performs during his lifetime win the heart of Dharma. The daan of today is unmatched even by the greatest of Kings.

The stranger was none other than Dharma, who had come to test the Brahmin, and pleased with their generosity, he assumed his divine form. Rejoicing, the family left their meagre impoverished existence and went with Dharma to the divine realms in his golden *vimana*, or chariot. After they all flew away, I came out of my burrow. My body came in contact with the left over flour that was fallen there. Blessed by that daan my head and half my body turned golden. I have been trying to make the rest of my body golden. I have been roaming everywhere and am present at all the yajnas. When I heard that Dharmaraj himself was performing a yajna, I came here with great hope, but my body did not turn golden. Therefore, this yajna is not equivalent to the daan offered by the simple Brahmin family who had nothing. With these words, the mongoose left the place.

The mongoose went to hundreds of places in search of a comparable daan that would turn the rest of his fur golden, but nowhere did he find anything equal to the anna daan of the poor family.



This story is a message to each and every one. If you bake four loaves of bread, one loaf is for society. You have to share your joy, your booty, your money. You have to share your happiness with everyone. Everyone should ponder over the plight of that section of society that has been kept deprived for so long. If you don't give to others how will you get anything back.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Grains

Traditionally there are either five, seven, or nine grains considered to be highly auspicious as well as nutritious. The five grains or *pancha dhanya* are *gehoon*, wheat, *dhaan*, rice; *til*, sesame; *mung*, green lentil and *sarson*, mustard. Alternatively, *urad* or black lentil is used in place of *sarson*. The *sapta dhanya* or seven grains are *jau*, barley; *til*, sesame; *dhaan*, rice *kangani*, millet *mung*, green lentil, *gehoon*, wheat; *channa*, chickpea; and *bajara*, millet. Alternatively *urad* or black lentil is used instead of *kangani*. The *navdhanya* or nine grains are *urad*, black lentil; *mung*, green lentil, *toor dal*, or pigeon pea; *gehoon*, wheat; *channa*, chickpea; *rajama*, kidney beans; *bajara*, millet; *dhaan*, rice and *til*, sesame.

Grains, especially whole grains, are highly nutritious, providing carbohydrate, fibre and to a lesser degree, protein,

as well as minerals such as manganese, phosphorus and copper. Beans and lentils are complex carbohydrates that provide protein, fibre, antioxidants and important minerals like folate, manganese, phosphorus, thiamine, potassium, and iron.

Grains are sattvic food that is not only simple to prepare, but easy for the planet to grow and support. The grains selected and given in anna daan represent a lifestyle of sattwa and simplicity that is balanced and in harmony with the earth. Currently, the world's food and agricultural systems produce more than a quarter of man-made greenhouse gas emissions and nearly two-thirds of those emissions are linked to animal products. If people switched to a plant-based diet, or even cut their consumption of animal products in half, it could have substantial environmental benefits.



Just one grain of rice

Grain has a special significance, for each grain is itself a seed, containing within it not only the possibility of sustenance but also of creation. This concept is beautifully explained by a story in the *Mahabharata*.

MORE THAN A GRAIN OF RICE

During the Pandavas' exile in the forest, rishi Durvasa, who was famed for his anger and temper arrived, at Hastinapura, the home of the Kauravas. Duryodhana managed to gratify the sage and Durvasa was pleased enough to grant him a boon. Duryodhana knew of the *akshaya patra*, the inexhaustible vessel, given to Yudhishtira by Lord Surya, and he was jealous of this great boon that had provided for the Pandavas and all their guests throughout their exile. Duryodhana knew that the *akshaya patra* would only become exhausted once daily, after Draupadi had finished her meal.

Wanting Durvasa to curse the Pandavas, he asked the rishi to visit his cousins after Draupadi had eaten. Durvasa and his retinue of disciples visited the Pandavas in their hermitage in the forest to fulfil Duryodhana's request. Draupadi had already eaten by the time Durvasa arrived that day, and there was no food left to serve him. Draupadi was terrified and in desperation prayed to Krishna, while Durvasa and his disciples were away bathing at the river.

Krishna immediately appeared before Draupadi saying he was extremely hungry, and asked her for food. Draupadi fell into despair and said she had prayed to Krishna



precisely because she had no food left to give. Krishna then told her to bring the *akshaya patra* to him. When she did, Krishna showed her one lone grain of rice remaining in the vessel. Draupadi gave that one grain of rice to Krishna, and with a smile, he ate it. After eating, Krishna told

Draupadi it was the most delicious meal he had ever eaten, and declared himself to be satiated.

Krishna is none other than Narayana, who pervades and sustains the entire universe. When Narayana became full, the hunger of others was also satiated. This shows the importance of a single grain of rice. If offered to the divine with love and humility, that grain of rice becomes the *bija*, or primordial seed, that feeds and satiates the whole universe.



Even while bathing rishi Durvasa and his disciples began to feel heavy and full, and knew they would be unable to eat a morsel. Rather than risk the Pandavas' wrathful reaction at their impolite refusal of food, they left immediately without returning to the hermitage.

The ability to see the importance of one grain of rice, to behold infinity in a moment, and to feel the happiness of the divine in the smile of a stranger, is the indication of the expansion of awareness that comes through daan. This is the vedantic conceptualization of the entire creation as manifest forms of the one divine essence. The microcosm and the macrocosm are essentially one and the same, therefore divinity can be worshipped and invoked even through a grain of rice.

It is this same spiritual awareness and teaching that underlies the giving of akshaya patra as prasada to one and all during the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna conducted by Sannyasa Peeth. The akshaya patra is a small pot containing rice, which is packed and placed ready in the vedi area before the yajna begins. Throughout the five

days of invocation to Sri Lakshmi, the abode of prosperity, and Sri Narayana, the one who preserves and maintains not only the entire universe but every creature in it, the akshaya patra remains in that energy field, absorbing the vibrations, benedictions and benevolence. It is this patra that is then given as prasad to all who attend, whether they be rich or poor, young or old, irrespective of caste or creed. That patra is given with the sankalpa for peace, plenty, and prosperity, with the hope and prayer that none should go hungry in the house where that patra is placed.



As prasad of this yajna a sankalpa has been taken for the welfare, happiness and fulfilment of each and every individual, to eradicate and overcome distress and suffering. Along with the other items you will receive as prasad, you will be given a *kalash*, a pot, which contains rice. This kalash is known as akshaya patra, the ever-full vessel, and the rice contained within it is sanctified rice, filled with the sankalpa of sannyasins and the grace of

God. Whenever you cook your meal, just add five or six grains from this pot into your meal, and in that way, derive the benefit of the yajna and the sankalpa of God and guru. Before you finish the pot of rice, add more rice to it so that it becomes a continuous process of mixing, whereby you will always receive the grace of Lakshmi and Narayana.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Anna daan as cooked food

Anna daan may consist of grains or of cooked food. Cooked food is regarded as superior as it is food that sustains and nourishes. It is food that can cure illness and revive the ailing. When cooked food is given as daan, both the items being offered and the people being served must be honoured and treated with respect. When cooked food is offered as daan, the food also must be treated with respect, not wasted, spoilt due to neglect or carelessness, or over-eaten due to greed. Food is to be shared appropriately with all. Cooked food takes the form of *bhiksha*, or alms, received from the divine. The person receiving it should also be humble and appreciative, without demanding more than is received and never complaining if it is not tasty and satisfying.





When I eat, I think of the hungry and starving and send food to such houses. When the cold hits me, the first thought that crosses my mind is whether others have protection. Thinking about the poor is like thinking about God. Before eating have you ever thought, “Is there someone close to me who has no food to eat?” If I can help somebody, give some comfort or facility, even if it causes me a little unpleasantness, it is a worthwhile sacrifice. This is what spiritual life is about. Be generous in thought, word and deed.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Anna and the tattwas

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* explains the relationship between Brahman, the absolute consciousness, and the world of material reality composed of the five physical elements. Each of these elemental manifestations contain within the unmanifest absolute, which is Brahman. Earth is a combination of all five material elements and the food produced by the earth is also suffused by Brahman. This external shell of manifestation is created by food, in a cycle of creation, preservation and transformation. Anna daan is equated to the gift of earth, because anna springs forth from the earth, and in the same way that the earth sustains life, so too does food sustain life.

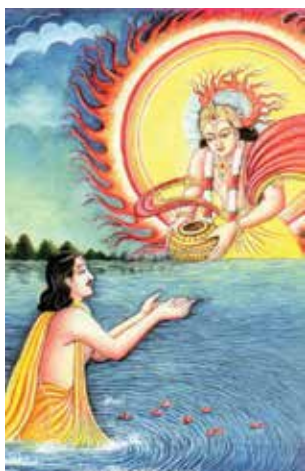
The earth is able to produce and provide anna according to the particular combination of the tattwas prevailing in each season. Earth and the sun, rain, air, all the ecological conditions of the environment have combined in anna. Within each grain of rice is the entire ecosystem in microcosmic form. Often anna daan is given on occasions when worship of the sun and rain is performed. This connection between anna and the tattwas is indicated in the story of the akshay patra from the *Mahabharata*.

INVOKING SURYA

When the Pandavas were exiled to the forest, naturally their friends and supporters wanted to accompany them. Seeing this Yudhishtira was distressed, and approached his priest Dhaumya saying, "The brahmanas wish to follow me into the forest but I do not have any means of sustaining them. Tell me what should I do?"



Dhaumya thought for a moment and replied, "In the days of old, all living beings that had been created were afflicted with hunger. Lord Surya, seeing their plight, drew up water by his rays. The moon converted those vapours into clouds and showered rains which created plants that sprouted. Thus the Sun is said to be the father of all creatures. You should meditate upon Surya to deliver you from this predicament." Saying this, Dhaumya taught Yudhishtira the *Surya Ashtotarashatanamavali*, the 108 names of Surya. With



faith and devotion Yudhishtira performed the *aradhana*, the worship of Surya, not for himself, but for others.

Seeing the sincerity of his prayers, Surya appeared before Yudhishtira and gave him a *tamba patra*, a copper vessel. He said, "This vessel, or *akshaya patra*, will feed an inexhaustible supply of food each day, until Draupadi partakes her portion of the food. The vessel will feed you for twelve years henceforth."

Annamaya kosha

Anna is the support and base of the physical body, known in yoga as the *annamaya kosha* or the sheath composed of food. Plentiful, wholesome, nutritious food creates a healthy body that is strong and vital. Annamaya kosha is the vehicle through which one interacts in the material world, but it is also the medium through which one can practise sadhana and perform tapasya to ultimately connect with the divine. Therefore, the food given in anna daan should always be sattwic. Sattwic food is of good nutritional value, simple and wholesome, pure and without chemicals, preservatives

and processing. In the absence of food, the five tattwas that constitute the physical body cease to exist in a state of union. In the absence of food, the strength of body, mind and emotions fail. In hunger and starvation, there is misery and despair. It is said in the scriptures that even the Vedas disappear when there is no food. From food comes happiness and delight. Food is *amrita*, the source of immortality.

Anna and life

Anna is revered and held sacred, in the same way that life is held sacred. Anna daan is considered equivalent to *prana daan*, literally the giving of prana, or saving someone's life. By giving the gift of food, one gives the gift of life itself. The pranas are dependent on anna. Not only is anna the basis for the *sapta dhatu*, or seven elements of the body, it is said to be the essence of agni and soma, the source of life, energy and strength. Any gift of anna is a contribution towards the life and prana of another living being. Making gifts of food is providing a refuge for living creatures by giving energy and sustenance to others. The pranas, strength, vitality and splendour of the physical body as well as the positive qualities of mind such as valour, righteousness, fortitude, wisdom, memory all derive from food.



The *Taittiriya Upanishad* proclaims that food is Brahman, because from food all living beings are born, having been born they are sustained and nurtured by food, and at the end they enter into food again. Everything is established, and sustained by food. Everything is food to something else in the universe at the empirical level of existence, either at a given time, or over a period of time. Due to food, birth and sustenance are possible. Upon death, the external shell becomes the food that sustains another cycle of creation. Proper understanding of the importance of food gives the knowledge of the chain of material existence and the interdependence of all life. Therefore, understanding and appreciating anna is considered to be a vidya.

When I used to cook for Swami Sivananda, let us say a South Indian dish, or roti or rice, first he used to keep some chapattis and dal separately on another plate and tell me, “Give it to that swami.” First, that was the order, and then he used to eat. He had a very simple process before eating. When the food came to him, he took a little piece of rice, roti, dal and vegetables, and put them on the ground, as an offering to the gods, to divine beings. So, he used to do that first and then keep something aside for some swami or some person.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Feed man – feed God

Anna daan is the most simple form of daan and yet it is one of the highest because it encapsulates the highest realizations of Vedanta. When someone is thirsty and hungry, it is the divine inside that person who is thirsty and hungry. By feeding humanity, one is also feeding God. By bringing happiness to humanity through the simple act of providing food, one is able to bring happiness to God. This has been proclaimed by saints, sages and rishis across the ages and it is a tradition being revived at Sannyasa Peeth. During



the Chaturmas Anushthana conducted by Sannyasa Peeth, anna daan is given through the medium of Narayana bhoj. Throughout the Chaturmas period, the most auspicious dates are selected for the giving of anna daan, and on these dates Narayana bhoj is conducted.

Narayana bhoj is essentially an aradhana of Narayana, the divine essence existing in each and every being in creation. People from all strata of society including the poor, underprivileged and neglected are invited to attend the bhoj. They are welcomed and worshiped in the manner befitting a divine guest, Narayana himself. When they arrive, they are greeted with namaskara and the mantras *Jai Ho*, in salutation to the divinity residing within. *Jai Ho* is the mantra of Sannyasa Peeth, said in greeting as a recognition of the pure and victorious divinity residing within each and every person.

For Sannyasa Peeth Sri Swamiji gave the mantra *Jai Ho*. This is the victory of the effulgent self. Once you become effulgent through your own effort and conviction, faith and motivation, then this mantra will represent your achievement and attainment.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

The feet of all those attending the bhoj are symbolically worshipped and washed, with *jal parokshan*, the sprinkling



of *Ganga jal*, the sacred water. Tika is given. They are guided to their seats, and once the pandits have chanted the mantras and invoked the divine and auspicious forces in blessing, the food is served, with a smile. This is important, because food given with a cheerful heart is purified and imbued with positivity. Everyone who is seated to eat is treated equally, and honoured with dignity and respect befitting the representative of Lord Narayana himself. The significant element is the sentiment with which all actions are performed. The feeling of those performing seva during the Narayana bhoj is – the Lord himself has come to be fed, so let me offer him the best that can possibly be given.

Man is the only creature who knows God. Therefore, when a man dies of hunger, in actual fact it is God who dies. By feeding man you feed God; by serving man you serve God and by honouring man you honour God. Especially the man out on the street whom you do not know, with whom you are not related, who is in dire need and distress.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

God also resides in the person who comes to your door. God is the guest, and the person who enters your house is to be honoured and treated as the divine. This beautiful concept is stated in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (11:2):

मातृदेवो भव । पितृदेवो भव । आचार्यदेवो भव । अतिथिदेवो भव ।

Mātr̥devo bhava, pit̥r̥devo bhava, āchāryadevo bhava, atithidevo bhava

Your mother, father, teacher and guest are also divine. This is more than just an ethical instruction on behaviour. This is an example of what Swami Sivananda referred to as 'practical Vedanta'. The spiritual ideals have to be converted into a practical reality in life. Cultivate the highest understanding, feeling, and sentiments in your daily life. Feel that everything is divine. Open the doors of your home to a stranger and you open the doors of the heart. It is said that the person who gives food to those in need, never faces distress in life. The gift of food immediately and visibly produces happiness in both the giver and the receiver.

In India, giving is a very ancient tradition from the vedic era. Once everybody used to give. If a stranger came during meal time, he would be invited to share the food even if it was only two dry rotis, and not told to come back later. This is also the tradition in the Christian teachings. A beggar would not be turned away from the door empty-handed. He could collect all that he required for the day by going to only three houses, not have to sit by the roadside all day as is the case today.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Anna daan and Narayana bhava

For one who is able to experience divinity in everything, the spiritual element is not restricted to human beings, rather animals, plants and all of nature's beings are also experienced as divine. This expansive connection with life is seen in the lives of saints and spiritual luminaries. Swami Satyananda has spoken of his life with Swami Sivananda, and how he would feed the monkeys that came into the ashram and the fish in the Ganga. This is also anna daan.

There used to be a lot of monkeys in those days in the ashram, and they were rowdies, not gentlemen. They were very shrewd. There used to be a very big kitchen with a hall. We used to close the door and eat, and the moment we opened the door, monkeys with great speed used to go into the kitchen and take up twenty rotis. We used to carry the tiffin for sick people from the kitchen which was on the Ganges bank. On the way the monkeys used to attack and take away the rotis, vegetables and all kind of things. But Swami Sivananda fed them every Friday morning, and this was the duty of the swamis. On Thursdays, so much horsegram was soaked in water, and on Friday morning on the terrace, some swami used to go, "Oh, oh," and the monkeys used to come. Because Swami Sivananda said, "Monkeys represent the great Hanuman, the monkey god." He thought like that. I am sure that when Swami Sivananda did these things, he did them without any thought of self. The only thought that was in his mind was, "God is in every form." That was his view. The monkey is God, and these boys, these ladies who are here, these ashramites, they are all God, our guest who has come is God. Therefore, if anybody is sick or if anybody is unwell or unhealthy or in trouble, if anybody is in this way or that way, I am not helping him for my gain, and I am not even helping him for his gain but I am worshipping God.

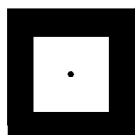
—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

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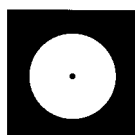
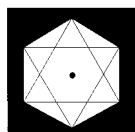
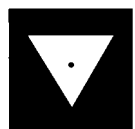
Mahabhutas in Daan

The traditional system of daan involves the three organic processes of creation, maintenance and transformation in the life of an individual, the environment and the cosmos. These three processes are activated by using the *mahabhutas*, the building blocks of material existence. Through daan the physical, material, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of each individual can be met, creating a balanced and integrated society based on the principles of connection and reciprocity. To really connect with the essence is a simple and pure experience, which any individual can have. Yet this experience is also extremely profound and has the power to change and transform the consciousness of the experiencer.

According to ancient philosophy and systems of thought, all matter is composed of a combination of five elements, called the *mahabhutas* or *panchatattwas*. The five elements are *akasha* or space, *vayu* or air, *agni* or the element of fire, *apas* or the water element and *prithvi*, earth. Together they form the basis for material existence and represent the progressive stages in evolution whereby energy is condensed into matter. Each tattwa evolves out of the one preceding it. Akasha is the first tattwa in which matter is undifferentiated and still conjunct with energy in a dormant state. Vayu tattwa emerges from this state of spacious potentiality in the form of air and all-pervading motion. Motion and mobility gives rise to heat, which manifests the agni tattwa or the fire element.



The cooling of agni tattwa evolves into the more stable motion and flow of water, the apas tattwa, which holds within the creative potential for life. Apas gives rise to the final element, prithvi, the earth element representing the grossest manifestation of matter, solidity and form.



Everything from a single-cell amoeba to the galaxies and multiverses is formed by the combination and permutation of these five elements. The sun, stars, planets, earth, atmosphere, forests, mountains, streams, rivers and also the human body and mind are all created by these same elements. The mahabhutas are the substrata of life. Life exists due to these elements and is dependent upon them. When matter decays or disintegrates, the individuated combination of the tattwas reverts back to the source. The mahabhutas are an integral and important part of most spiritual systems for the simple reason that understanding and experience of the tattwas engenders awareness of the interconnectedness of life. This interconnection exists between each

and every individual and the whole, between the one and the many, between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between the individual and the divine. The mahabhutas are also an integral part of the sadhana of daan given in the traditional scriptures.

EARTH

Bhumi daan, or the daan of earth, is considered one of the highest forms of daan. Ancient cultures and systems of thought have long regarded the earth as the Divine Mother who provides for her children and sustains life through the attributes of nature. Indian traditions refer to earth as *Bhu Devi*, the goddess of earth, who is prosperity herself,



Ratnagarbha, the womb of jewels, and *Sagarambara*, the one who is surrounded by oceans. She is depicted as seated on a platform which rests on the back of four elephants, representing the four directions of the world. Her four arms hold a pomegranate, a water vessel, a bowl containing healing herbs and another containing vegetables, signifying the bounty which she provides and distributes.

No element can compare with the earth and her innate fertility. Mountains, plains and valleys, rivers and lakes, trees and forests, flowers, fruits, all are existing due to the earth. The earth freely yields all things required to sustain life. From the vegetation sustained by the earth, oxygen is produced, food is given, herbs and medicines are provided, crops grown, animals fed, and shelter can be built. From the earth herself, minerals and metals are given. All things arise from the earth and merge in the prithvi tattwa when they disappear. Without the environment that is created and sustained by the prithvi tattwa life would not be possible, and for this reason the earth is seen as the mother who gives life to all beings.

This gift of life is given freely. When new life emerges through birth, the earth is ready to receive and provide in the same way a mother nurtures and sustains the life of her



infant child. In recognition of this selfless quality which is continually giving, the scriptures hold prithvi to be the first and foremost daan. In ancient times it was the duty of the king to make gifts of earth, especially to those in need who had no means of support. The daan of earth assists in the purification and management of the negative tendencies of personality. These negative expressions arise from the activity of the *shat-ripu*, the six enemies in

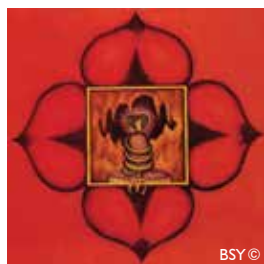
the mind, kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada and matsarya which colour the attitudes, perception and expression in life. In the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma tells Yudhishtira that kings who dominate and rule by cruelty, anger and greed should be educated in the science of daan as a method to overcome these weaknesses and thus manage the negative states of mind.

This concept of daan is still accepted and practised today in different forms. Prior to commencement of a yajna, the land of the yajna mandap is measured, and the value of that land is given to the Brahmins. For the duration of the yajna, that land belongs not to the yajaman, but to the pandits who are conducting the yajna. This symbolic bhumi daan is performed to ensure the auspiciousness and success of any yajna. Tapasya, tyaga, jnana, good behaviour and righteous conduct, absence of cupidity, greed and miserliness, respect and truthfulness are the qualities said to reside in one who makes a gift of earth. The purity of intention required to correctly perform the daan of earth ensures that the yajna can be conducted in an environment that is pure and untainted.



In land the other tattwas are also present. All the five elements present in land become the cause of creation and development of what you desire. It can become a jungle, it can become a garden, it can become a farm, land can become a home. It can become a place you plant trees. Whatever you desire, you can use that piece of earth for. During Vamana Avatar, even God wanted the gift of land, and he asked for three steps. In those three steps God covered the entire universe, all the three dimensions. Daan of land is considered one of the highest gifts and this is the symbolic act of yajna. That you are being given this earth, soil, the land, in which you cultivate the pious, the benevolent, the beautiful, the inspiring, the uplifting and care for it, maintain it, nurture it and allow it to grow into a beautiful plant which brings joy to you, happiness to you. That is the bhumi daan given during the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna – the daan of purity, the purity of Narayana, pure emotions, pure feelings, pure sentiments, pure thoughts, pure intentions.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



At the individual level, the prithvi tattwa is associated with stability, weight and cohesion. In the physical body, it is associated with the structural solidity of the anatomy, and is located at the base of the body between the toes and the knees. Mentally it is related to the conscious

and the subconscious mind. The corresponding psychic location is mooladhara chakra, which is the root chakra and the basis of material existence, yet contains within it the potential for absolute transcendence. The prithvi element therefore brings stability and permanence in every aspect of life, physically, mentally, emotionally, psychically as well as socially and environmentally.

There is a verse in the Vedas, sung by Bhu Devi herself, which says, 'Receive me in gift. Give me away. By giving me away, thou, O giver shall receive me again'. In the *Manusmriti*, the data of prithvi is said to receive earth in return as the merit of the daan. The *Bhavishya Purana* explains that the one who gives earth, receives wealth, or a stable income in return. These are indications



that the essence of prithvi is that which provides stability, security and permanence in life. It is this essence which is received in different forms as the merit of the daan. When given, the subtle qualities of selflessness, sustenance and creative potentiality are also transferred.

The person who makes a gift of earth supplies the means of subsistence. The earth given represents life and prosperity itself. The stability

and security of the tattwa is inherent in the gift. The prithvi tattwa also contains the ultimate potentiality. That creative power is the essence that devolves as merit in prithvi daan, and according to the scriptures, can bring *moksha* or liberation in life. The merit of the daan is linked to the fertility of the earth and the ongoing sustenance provided. In each season when the earth given provides crops, the merit of the gift increases. Therefore, it is said that when even a small piece of earth is given away, the purity of the earth and the action of daan purifies the giver of misdeeds from the past. This indicates the transcendence of the conditioned state of *tamas* and the associated negativity of mind and attitudes.

Revival of prithvi daan

The benefits and merit of prithvi daan are highly praised in the traditional texts, but it is difficult in today's modern world for anyone to perform. At Sannyasa Peeth during the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna, this daan is performed in a symbolic way, with the gifting of tulsi plants. Tulsi being regarded as a devi herself, as well as the queen of aushadhi, is given complete with earth, contained in a jute pot. The daan is entirely natural, without any man-made item. It represents the purity, the fertility, the sustenance and the healing powers of earth. Given by Swami Niranjanananda with the sankalpa for peace, plenty and prosperity in life, this daan becomes a powerful medium for inspiration and upliftment in the home in which the tulsi resides.



The daan of tulsi is the most precious prasad given in the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna. Tulsi represents the purity of Narayana. Tulsi, the plant comes not alone but with some mud with it and that is the symbolic act of bhumi daan, giving of land, representing the element earth, prakriti. It is the beautiful daan of Tulsi that is given and if you respect it, if you honour it, if you cherish it, you will also experience this grace of Tulsi in your life. Then you will realize that what I used to believe to be a plant is nothing but a living entity who has protected me, who has nourished me, who has nurtured me and who has brought me to this path of prosperity and benevolence and purity.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

DAAN OF THREE STEPS

Once upon a time there was a king named Bali. He became so powerful that he even defeated Indra, the king of heaven, and ruled over the entire universe, including this world and the others beyond it. Indra rushed to Lord Vishnu and appealed for help. Meanwhile, Bali decided to perform the Ashwamedha yajna. Vishnu saw his opportunity to help



Indra and the devas regain what had been taken from them. Manifesting himself as a young Brahmin boy, Vishnu became the avatar Vamana, and presented himself in the yajna hall. All who saw him were enchanted by his divine beauty, so much so that King Bali himself came out to greet him accompanied by the pandits conducting the yajna. Bali invited Vamana avatar to sit and washed his feet. Bali performed namaskar and

said, "By your presence alone, my whole lineage has been purified, and this yajna has become successful. By washing your feet, I have washed away all my sins. O Brahmin, please ask for whatever you want. Take gold, elephants, land, wealth, anything you desire is yours for the asking."

Hearing these words of King Bali, full of dharma and humility, Vamana answered, "Dear King! I know that generosity flows in your veins. Your ancestors too were similarly generous. You are merely following the glorious tradition of your ancestors. You are truly blessed to have been born in such a noble lineage." Vamana replied, "Even though you are the lord of the whole world, I do not ask much from you. What I merely want is a small piece of land, measured by three paces of my feet." Hearing this King Bali laughed out aloud saying, "I am the king of the three worlds and can gift you a whole continent. Anyone coming to me to ask for something never again has to ask for anything in his whole life. Reconsider your request and ask for more." Vamana replied, "All the wealth of this world cannot satisfy a discontented man. While a contented person lives happily, with whatever comes his way. The wise say that contentment leads to moksha. Hence, I request you to only give me the land measured out by three paces of my feet."

Also present in the sacrificial hall was Shukracharya, the guru of King Bali. Shukracharya realized that Vamana was no ordinary human and sensed that his disciple was about to lose his wealth. He advised him against making any such pledge to Vamana. Yet the King replied, "Having made a promise to this Brahmin to give, how for the greed of wealth can I now go back on my word? Great people like Dadhichi have given their lives in the service of others. What then is there to think about mere wealth? The most powerful of kings have ruled this world before us. Time has swallowed them all, yet only their reputation and dharma remains. Rare is the donor who when approached by a worthy

recipient respectfully gives away his wealth. If one has to suffer poverty and affliction as a consequence of charity, then these sufferings are to be welcomed as adding to one's glory. Hence, I will definitely fulfil the wish of this young Brahmin."

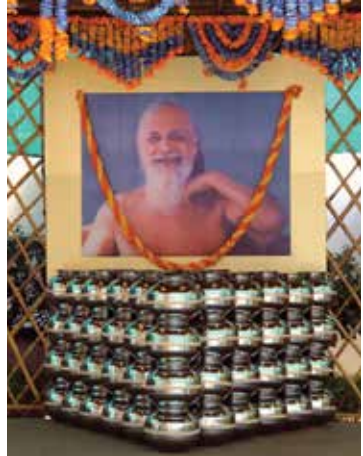
When Bali requested Vamana to take his three steps, the form of Vamana expanded until it encompassed the whole universe. In this cosmic form Vamana took his three steps. With the first step he mapped out the Earth. His second step strode across the worlds beyond the Earth, and reached the Brahmaloka. There Brahma worshipped Vishnu's foot and washed it with water. This water, offered in worship, fell down to the earth and became the river Ganga, retaining the potency to purify all beings with its sacred waters. Now came the third step, but there was nowhere remaining upon which it could be placed. Seeing that Bali had not fulfilled his promise, the great bird Garuda immediately tied him up with the *varuna pasha*, the noose of Varuna, Lord of the oceans. Immediately Bali asked, "Oh Lord, do you consider me a false person? I request you to kindly place your third step on my head, then I too will be yours." With this gracious response, Bali offered himself to the Lord.

So impressive was his sacrifice that Brahma descended from his loka and requested for mercy. Vishnu replied, "Brahma, I take away the wealth of those on whom I wish to bestow my grace. When a man becomes infatuated with money and power, he loses humility and starts disrespecting the world and even me. King Bali has been dislodged from his position of power, deprived of his wealth, insulted, tied down by his enemies, abandoned by his kith and kin and reproached by his own guru. Still, he remained firm in his vow and did not deviate from the truth. Therefore, I am giving him that position obtained only with great difficulty, even by the devatas. During the next cycle of creation, he will be the Indra and will live under my gaze and protection."

APAS

In ancient philosophical and spiritual traditions, *apas* or the water element, has been revered and held an important role in many rituals. Apas is associated with the manifestation of fluids in the body like blood, lymph, and mucus. The human body contains from 55% to 78% water, depending on body size. To function properly, the body requires between one and seven litres of water per day to avoid dehydration. Not only humans and animals, but all beings are said to be dependent on water for life. Amrita, sudha, and milk as well as aushadhi are all supported by the existence of the water element. Life itself is in essence water. It is not surprising that Puranic accounts declare water to be the support for all beings and extol the importance of the daan of water.

Specific instructions are given regarding different methods for daan of water. *Jal* or *udak daan* refers to the gift of water, or any means by which water is made available, including giving of a vessel to hold or carry water. Traditionally this form of daan had a social and environmental applicability. Water was something to be provided and made available for all who needed it. For this purpose, the construction of water tanks and wells was recommended and written instructions on the location, method and availability were given in the scriptures. Those who were able to do so performed *jal daan* in this way.



Prapa daan or *pausara daan* was the establishment of stalls providing water to people in need, particularly during the summer months. Detailed instructions were given. The stall should be erected in the beginning of summer and

be maintained for four months. Suitable locations are the centre of a village, beside a temple, road or under a large tree. A shade-giving mandap should be set up with places to sit. Clean pure drinking water should be provided, in vessels covered with cloth. One person should be engaged to provide water to all who request, regardless of caste, status or position in life. Also included in this daan is the provision of water for animals by digging wells or drinking troughs. Those who are unable to perform prapa daan, can offer one vessel of clean drinking water daily to a Brahmin household in the summer months. Those who are unable to give even one vessel of water are advised to water the Ashwattha tree every day during the summer months.

In particular, the construction of wells and establishment of resting places for the distribution of drinking water were understood to be a very high form of daan. The well or a tank full of water available to all is considered as agreeable and beneficial as the house of a friend. A well of water brings sustenance, purity and life to animals, cows, and people alike. This form of daan was considered especially beneficial for the receiver and the giver both. The merit from whatever measure of water is drunk from one's tank or well, or is taken and used by others, returns to the data who will enjoy the same for unending days in the next world.

Construction of dams is also jal daan. Traditionally the flow of water from a stream, river or waterfall would be collected and diverted along channels to carry the water to fields or to the village. Gates may be added to regulate the flow of water. These dams or *dwari bandha* were also categorized as *uttam*, highest, *madhyam* medium and *adham*, lower depending on the amount of water collected. Parks and orchards may be provided around the *dwari bandha* for public use, along with ponds and wells. The merit accruing from this daan is said to be higher than that of the Ashwamedha yajna.

Survival not only in this world but also in the next, depends upon water. Many instructions are given about pro-

viding water for the devas, ancestors and those who have died. Water is declared to be exceedingly scarce in the next world and therefore by providing water in the present, the merit which arises is said to be eternal happiness. This indicates that if the daan is correctly performed, the positive phenomena of happiness that is activated, is not restricted to the present moment, but will be felt and experienced in the future also. In the social and environmental context, daan of water restores harmony and balance. The giver of water is said to receive freedom from fear, happiness, joy and contentment.



The creative potentiality of the water element is emphasized in many scriptures along with the idea of the primal waters. In the same way that the human baby is surrounded by embryonic fluid, the earth is also surrounded by the water element in the atmosphere, which creates the environmental conditions vital for all known forms of life. According to early vedic tradition, the water element is presided over by Varuna. The name Varuna comes from the Sanskrit root *vr*, meaning 'to surround'. Varuna, or the one who encompasses the whole world, therefore is the keeper of the celestial waters. Varuna is associated with water that flows from the openings in the sky in the form of rain clouds, with water, rivers and oceans.

Interestingly, Varuna inhabits the kingdom of *Sukha*, or happiness. It is said that the gift of water produces eternal happiness, which indicates that the essence of the *apas tattva* is associated with and integral to the development of positive and harmonious mental and emotional states.

Manusmriti upholds the importance of water and states that the simple act of providing a drink to someone in need is the highest of daan. The water element is associated with harmony and order. Varuna is the one who upholds truth or *satya*, and is the keeper of *rita*, divine law and harmony. This is achieved through sanyam and the application of the appropriate activity and response in both mind and body. Varuna is lauded for his knowledge of countless medicines to heal any affliction, which signifies the importance of the water element at individual and social levels.



Physically the apas tattwa is located in the area between the knees and the navel. It relates to the subconscious and unconscious mind, and correspondingly the psychic location is swadhisthana chakra, where all the mental and emotional impressions exist in a potential state. When daan of the apas tattwa is correctly performed,

it is the essence of the tattwa that is returned to the data as a specific positive phenomenon. Apas daan provides happiness, joy and contentment, as well as health and longevity. The merit indicates the essence of the tattwa as that which can purify the mind and emotions. Apas is that which sustains life and prevents illness, and therefore it is said that the data of water attains prosperity and long life in return. One who offers water becomes in effect the giver of everything on earth, as water sustains life. The person who gives water does not experience disrespect or grief. He is never reduced to poverty, nor will he suffer from disease. In merit, the act of providing water for the benefit of any living being, is considered equal to the performance of any Ashwamedha yajna or Atiratra sacrifice.



Revival of apas daan

The increasing scarcity of pure, clean water brings a modern context to the wisdom of the sages who extolled the importance of apas daan. Not only is the provision of water the gift of life to those who are without access to water, but other forms of apas daan address the wider social and environmental issues also. Provision of bore wells, rain water harvesting and different methods of water conservation all constitute important forms of apas daan that can be performed in the modern world. At Sannyasa Peeth, the traditional ghara, water containers, made of clay are given during the hot seasons, so that available water may be kept cool and free from contaminants.

AGNI

Agni or the fire element refers to the intermediary stage of manifestation wherein form is first perceived. Existing between the invisible elements of akasha and vayu and the visible elements apas and prithvi, agni is the transition between the unmanifest and the manifest. As an expression of two kinds of energy, that of light and heat, the agni tattwa symbolizes life and activity. Heat, combustion and energy



represent the realm of agni which symbolizes the transformation of the gross to the subtle. Agni tattwa contains the ability to increase, consume and destroy. Yet within destruction, there is also a process of refinement and purification, which leads to transformation.

The agni element is present in the digestive fire of the stomach, the cooking fire in a home, the sacred fire in a yajna, the fire of cremation, the fire of rebirth, the fire in the energetic saps concealed within plants, the atmospheric fire in lightning and the celestial fire in the sun.

The traditional texts extol the gift of agni and give instructions on different methods. Through agni daan one is providing light, warmth and energy.



The first is *deepak daan*, the lighting of lamps and deepaks. Deepak daan is recommended in temples, ashrams, rest houses and dharamshalas, or on crossroads, roads, and lanes or under a peepal or banyan tree. Ghee lamps are considered the best, after which come those using *sarson tel*, or mustard oil, and other vegetable oils. A *mashal*

or fire torch can also be lit and kept on the tops of hills and riverbanks. Deepak daan is especially beneficial in the month of Kartik.

The second is *agnishtika daan*, provision of a fireplace or stove in a public area, crossroads, temple or road. This cooking facility is to be kept stocked with plenty of dry

firewood, and lit through the winter providing warmth to the general public, especially the poor and needy. The third is providing firewood to households during the winter, so they may cook food and be warm in the cold months.

In the early vedic literature, Agni is represented as a god who is imbued with the primordial powers to consume, transform and convey. Depicted with one to three heads, two to four-armed, red-complexioned, standing next to or riding a ram, Agni has a dramatic halo of flames leaping upwards from his crown. Seven rays of light or flames emit from his body,



so he is known as *Saptajihva*, the one having seven tongues. Agni is considered as the mouth of the gods and goddesses, and the medium that conveys offerings to them. He exists at three levels, on earth as fire, in the atmosphere as lightning, and in the sky as the sun. This triple presence connects him as the messenger between gods and human beings in vedic thought. *Jataveda* is the fire that carries offerings to the gods, linking the element of fire with knowledge and with Brahman. In the *Jataveda* form, Agni is the intermediary between the divine and the human realms.

The role that Agni plays as an intermediary or messenger between the divine and the human realms is linked to the power of the agni tattwa as a vehicle of transformation. Agni represents the means to approach or enter the divine realm. By utilizing the agni tattwa, the individual can come into contact with the different manifestations of spiritual energy that permeate everything in the universe. This must be understood in context of a spiritual process and transformation, not merely as religious symbology. It means that by using the agni tattwa, one can come into contact

with the positive qualities of the inner nature and access the power of dormant creative potentials. Agni symbolizes the energy or knowledge that allows or facilitates this transformation by consuming and dispelling the state of darkness, or *tamas*. Agni transforms and procreates an enlightened state of existence.

Agni relates to form, and the ability to perceive form through the eyes. From the perception of form, come the selfish reactions of kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada and matsarya. It is when the object is seen that the negative mental reactions arise in the form of attachment. Yet the role of agni is twofold – it is not only the power to destroy, but to transform. Although linked to the reactions of kama, krodha, lobha etc, agni contains within its essence the antidote to these negative expressions of mind. Through daan, the light and energy of agni which is given on the material level benefits the pratigrahi, providing warmth and security. The spiritual merit that accrues to the data utilizes the essence of the tattwa to catalyze transformation, dispel the dark influence of the six friends and radiate internal light, energy and positivity. This is the transformation from *tamas* to *sattwa* that is possible through agni daan.



Physically agni tattwa is located between the navel and the heart, and is related to the activities of digestion, appetite, energy, thirst and sleep. The corresponding psychic location is manipura chakra, the seat of energy, vitality, dynamism and willpower. The essence of agni is a transformative energy manifesting as radiance which gives one strength to see clearly, discriminate, overcome obstacles and experience success in life. This potential for transformation forms the basis for the spiritual merit that manifests in the life of the person who correctly performs agni daan.

It is the essence of the agni tattwa which contains the power to reveal, transform and liberate. That is the merit

which accrues to the giver usually in the form of increased tejas and prana. Through daan of the agni tattwa, the data receives inner radiance, longevity, good eyesight, good fortune, progeny and longevity. The spiritual merit is seen in the positive development that occurs in the life of the data, who is said to meet with success in all endeavours and projects of life. The agni tattwa has a special relationship with the realm of the ancestors also. Giving of lamps and providing light and radiance in the darkness by lighting a deepak enhances the visual power of the deities, the pitris and oneself.

The person who provides ghee to Brahmins, in order that they may conduct the rituals of homa, or yajna through offering ghee as the oblation to the fire, is said to take a sixth part of the merits of those rituals himself. Therefore, providing the means by which the agni tattwa can be experienced in the lives of others, results in success and freedom from strife and difficulty for oneself. The *Agni Purana* states that this act itself confers enjoyment, happiness and ultimately *moksha* or liberation.

Revival of agni daan

The modern revival of agni daan is seen at Sannyasa Peeth in the gifting of solar-powered technology. On the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti, celebrating the transition of the sun into the Makar zodiac sign, as well as the beginning of the northward path of the sun, agni daan is performed. This links the daan with the optimal astrological and practical conditions. Makar Sankranti falls in January, the coldest month of the year when there is a real need for provision of warmth





and heat. Makar Sankranti is also the day on which both Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda commenced their panchagni sadhana. Agni daan on this occasion links the invocation, worship and tapasya of the panchagni sadhana with the punya of the daan, making it an extremely effective vehicle for transformation at the physical, material and spiritual levels.

Modern options are solar-powered lights, torches and batteries of sufficient capacity to provide light and cooking facilities in rural and underdeveloped areas. Including solar panels in *grih daan*, the construction of houses and gifting of solar lights that can be used on rural walkways can be considered. More simple options are the daan of oil, ghee and deepaks. Provision of gas connection and gas cylinders can also be considered as agni daan.

Through the first three tattwas, prithvi, apas and agni, the basic needs and requirements of material existence are fulfilled. If these tattwas are plentiful, there is no experience of hunger or thirst and no lack of shelter, clothing, warmth, light and protection. These are the basic requirements of a simple, healthy and sattwic lifestyle.

VAYU

Vayu tattwa pertains to the mind. Nourishment of the mind occurs through education, which is *vidya daan*, the gift of knowledge, the awakening of wisdom and understanding in life. *Vayu* is translated as air, and refers to anything in gaseous form, including atmospheric gases and wind. The state of energy in the vayu tattwa is kinetic and constantly moving.

In early vedic references, Vayu as a deity is either white, smoky or green in colour, has either two or four arms, one of which is holding a flag, and the other the vajra. His other two hands are in abhaya and varaha mudras. Vayu is seated on a deer, an animal renowned for its fleetness of foot, and symbolic of the air element and anahata chakra. Vayu is invoked to wake intelligence, and through this awakening, illumination of heaven and earth takes place. This refers to the illumination of the human consciousness that is possible when the connection with vidya is established in the mind and experienced in the heart. It is then that heaven and earth are illuminated and the dawn of spiritual understanding shines in all its glory.



Vayu is said to be the breath of the Purusha, who presides over *prana*, the energy and life force of all beings. The importance of prana and the vayu tattwa is explained in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The gods who controlled the senses and bodily functions once engaged in a contest to determine who among them was supreme. One by one, the deities took their turns leaving the body to see the result. When the deities of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell departed the body, the man remained alive, though successively impaired in various ways. When the deity of sight left, the body was alive but blind. When the deity of hearing left, deafness was the result. Yet, when prana started to leave the body, the other deities were also dragged from their stations, just as a powerful horse yanks out the pegs in the ground to which it is bound. The other deities realized that only due to the existence of vayu, or prana, were they able to function.

In the form of prana, the air element supports and sustains the functioning and activities of the physical body

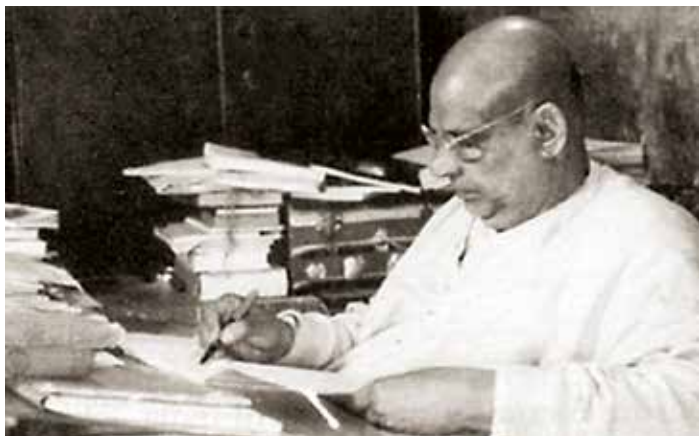


and also the mind. This is the dual role of prana as prana shakti which supports the physical, and chitta shakti which fuels the mind and the mental capacity. The practice of pranayama is used as a method to manage the mind, which indicates that through vayu the mind is influenced. Vayu daan is that which improves the mind and creates a positive mental state. This happens through vidya. Everyone wants to be happy. Yet instead of being an innate condition of mind, happiness is becoming something elusive, which has to be pursued. The methods to establish and maintain a state of happiness and contentment of mind are known as vidya.

Teachings of saints and sages who have transcended the limited ego and mind are given as vidya daan. Through vidya daan alone one can hope to be able to manage the six enemies that control and dominate the responses and attitudes in life. The gift of knowledge, the imparting of vidya is crucial to the development of life and the progressive evolution of humanity. The merit of vidya daan reflects the transformative role of vidya in life, and bestows mental contentment and spiritual liberation. One who copies and provides scriptures for people such as the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, Puranas, receives both *bhukti*, material prosper-

ity and *mukti*, spiritual liberation. By imparting knowledge, one receives the benefits of a thousand Vajapeya sacrifices. Knowledge is the kalpataru. Even the simple act of reading the scriptures and spiritual books for others is considered as vidya daan and renders the giver worthy of all merits.

The Puranas state that by imparting vidya daan, the data becomes pure and attains the state of Brahman. Although related to the mind at the mental level, psychically vayu corresponds to anahata chakra. Therefore, it is said that the physical location of vayu in the body is from the heart to the eyebrows. Daan that corresponds to the vayu tattwa softens, balances and sustains the prana, thereby influencing the mind and the heart.



For the guidance of so many struggling souls I release my experiences, classify the lessons and publish the same in pamphlet and book form. Let me work as long as my eyes are good, as long as I have new messages and lessons for seekers after truth. My love to serve mankind is so great that I will continue the publication work with the help of able stenographers and secretaries even if I lose my eyesight.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Revival of vayu daan

Traditionally the period of Chaturmas, the four months from July to October, the time of the monsoon rains when it is said that the devas are sleeping, is dedicated to vayu daan. During this period, sannyasins remain in one place, undertake different anushthanas, perform tapasya and give satsang and discourses on dharma. Chaturmas was an annual opportunity for householders to imbibe the teachings of sannyasins, saints and sages, to purify their minds and hearts of the accumulated stresses of social life, and revive their spiritual inspiration. During Chaturmas householders received instruction in the performance of different vrats and anushthanas that could be practised at home for the upliftment of the individual, household and society. This tradition of vayu daan, the giving of vidya or knowledge, is being revived at Sannyasa Peeth under the inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda.

During the months of Chaturmas, daily yoga classes are conducted. These classes are open to all, without restriction. The vidya of yoga is given freely in a systematic and pro-



gressive series of classes designed so that the practitioner may experience the qualitative improvement in physical health, mental peace and emotional balance. During the month of Shravana, a daily mantra anushthana is conducted, and through the collective chanting which is guided by the sannyasins, an experience of the transformative power of mantra is given. Abhisheka and havan are performed daily, and each month the *maas parayan* or monthly recitation of the *Ramacharitamanas* is chanted. Satsangs are given daily by eminent sannyasins, interpreting various traditional scriptures revealing ancient wisdom and teachings in a simple yet profound way that the ordinary person can grasp. *Kathas*, the recitation of traditional texts such as the *Bhagavad Purana*, along with *pravachan*, explanations and commentary, are conducted by respected kathavahchak, and pandits. The *kala vidya* or knowledge of the arts is also given, through different classical dance, music and singing performances. All these activities represent an effort towards the upliftment of all people no matter in what station of life they may be, by giving positive, creative and beneficial input in the form of vidya.





Chaturmas at Sannyasa Peeth is a two-month period of intense activity in sadhana, personal life and social life. It starts from Guru Poornima, the full moon of July, and goes on to the full moon of September. This is the period of the Indian monsoon, and it is the tradition for all sannyasins to stay in one place during this period and focus on their own spiritual sadhana and contribute to the welfare of society. For the first time in my life, after having retired from the administration of BSY, I am conducting Chaturmas, and the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna is part of this Chaturmas sadhana. During Chaturmas, we have had exposure to various spiritual traditions of the country.

There have been several programs in which many artists and exponents were invited. We have had satsangs where respected sannyasins from different places spoke on spiritual subjects and scriptures. Musicians and singers from different parts of the country have sung and played spiritual music, as the tradition of music in India has always been spiritual. The western influence has come only in the last thirty years or so, but prior to that music was not pop or rock or jazz; the music in India was always spiritual and classical. Even the dances are an offering to God and not meant for self-entertainment. During this period, the people of Munger and everyone else can have a glimpse of the spiritual culture and the discipline that this requires. There is an effort to understand and incorporate the cultural ideas that are presented in life, to make one's own life more beautiful.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

AKASHA

The akasha element in daan relates to the spiritual dimension and confers grace, *anugraha*, blessings, goodwill and sankalpa shakti in the form of prasad. Of all the mahabhutas, akasha is the subtlest and cannot be perceived by the senses. Akasha is beyond the senses of smell, taste, sight and touch and accessible to the sense of hearing alone. It is the substratum of the quality of sound. It is within akasha that mantras exist in the *para*, or transcendental state. Akasha is unlimited and pervades the entire cosmos. It is the one, eternal, and all-pervading imperceptible reality. In the Vedas this is known as *Kham Brahman*. *Kham* means space and *Brahman* means the all-pervasive reality comprised of consciousness and energy. It is this Brahman that is identified by the attributes of *satchidananda*, truth, consciousness and bliss. When the limited nature is transcended and the expansive state of being is attained, the experience is one of *ananda* or bliss.



This state of ananda is not a fleeting experience, it is a constant reality that is the inherent birthright of all people. This is the truth of existence proclaimed by yogis, rishis and saints through different teachings and traditions.

The prime essence of the space tattwa is consciousness and energy; consciousness and energy become Brahman, the all-pervasive reality. Consciousness + energy = all-pervasive reality, which is known as Brahman. The essence is inherent in space, and space is infinite, without any boundaries. Just as a fire flame is not separate from its heat, consciousness and energy are not separate from the space element.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Akasha daan is that which activates and accesses the inherent bliss existing in each individual.

This form of daan is also known as prasad. Prasad is given in temples, after the items have been offered to the deity. Through the prescribed process and mantras, the item is offered to the deity, and the deity in turn accepts and receives the item, which then becomes prasad. This process indicates the existence of an interaction between the one who is offering and the divine. It is beyond the realm of the senses and therefore cannot be perceived by the senses, but something definitely happens. What takes place infuses the object offered with the vibration of the divine. That highly charged spiritual vibration permeates the akasha element, the substratum of the object. Prasad is the form of daan which utilizes the akasha tattwa to connect the individual with the qualities of Brahman.

Anything given by the guru, a saint or a spiritually awakened person is also prasad, by virtue of the spiritual vibration infused in the item. In the example of prasad given by the guru, the akasha element acts as the conduit





for the energy of the guru tattwa to pass to the recipient. The energy of the divine and the energy of the guru tattwa are one and the same. There is no difference. Both are forms of the unlimited, all-pervasive and transcendental consciousness. It is through transmission of this spiritual tattwa, that an ordinary item is transformed into a vehicle for the transmission of happiness, joy and contentment in life. This is the meaning of prasad.

Prasad literally means that which brings happiness. Prasad means happiness and joy. Where does every day happiness and joy come from? The happiness that one experiences in daily life is a small fragment of the bliss of Brahman. Prasad given by a sannyasin carries with it the spiritual sankalpa and shakti of that person. Swami Satyananda gave prasad through the medium of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna with the sankalpa for *sukha*, *shanti* and *samriddhi*, happiness, peace and prosperity in life. The prasad given at the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna is also given with the same sankalpa taken by Swami Niranjanananda to invoke the grace of Sri Lakshmi and Sri Narayana to bring both peace and contentment into the lives of all.

Prasad is the highest of all gifts, and should always be taken as a blessing and received with reverence. The *anugraha*, the grace, which has been imbued in prasad is unlimited. It is not restricted. The extent to which one receives and becomes aware of the grace depends solely on the recipient, not the giver. It is determined by the receptivity, humility, and capacity of the receiver. This is beautifully illustrated by the story of Indra and the flower mala.

INDRA AND SRI LAKSHMI

One day Durvasa, the rishi who is famous for his bad temper, bestowed upon Indra a flower garland, which had been given to him by Sri Devi herself. In his arrogance, Indra felt that such a gift was beneath him. Surely as the ruler of the devas he should be given mountains of gold and jewels. In the state of greed and arrogance, he did not recognize the divine shakti which imbued the gift and hung the mala upon Airavata, his elephant steed. When Airavata got agitated and threw off the garland onto the ground, Durvasa became incensed. Furiously he told him, "Idiot, intoxicated with power, you did not respect the garland I presented, which was the dwelling of prosperity herself. For this arrogance and disrespect, your dominion over the three worlds shall be ruined and all prosperity shall leave you."

Deprived of the shakti of Sri, the three worlds began to decline. All vegetation withered and died, devout practices and observances were ignored, there was no charity or kindness, and social obligations went unfulfilled. Wisdom, clarity and contentment vanished, and in their place, desire and ignorance held sway. Those with minds already agitated by desire and ambition became stronger and put forth their strength against the gods. When the power of the asuras became unstoppable, the tormented devas and Indra ran to Lord Narayana for refuge.

After Narayana explained the method to overcome the asuras, the devas are victorious and Indra is again seated on his throne. Overcome with gratitude he eulogizes Goddess Lakshmi and says, "I bow down to Sri, the mother of all beings, who is seated on the person of Narayana. Abandoned by you, the worlds were on the brink of ruin, but have now been saved. Only by your propitious gaze do men obtain wives, children, dwellings, friends, harvest and wealth. Prosperity and happiness will disappear from life and all merits and advantages become worthless if you avert your gaze." Pleased with Indra's devotion the Goddess fulfils his wishes. Lakshmi promises, "I will not abandon the three worlds again. Nor will I ever turn my face away from the one who sings my praises morning and evening as you have done."

In this story, Indra refers to the mind, saturated with the influence of the senses, limited and unable to perceive the spiritual shakti. Indra can only see the external object. He is unable to connect with the subtle element of grace and sankalpa contained within the akasha tattwa of the prasad. Due to kama, lobha, moha and mada the actual benediction is tossed aside. When receiving prasad, the reactions of the mind and the senses should be restrained, and prasad should be received by the heart with the experience of gratitude, happiness, joy and contentment. The outcome of grace is seen in the quality of contentment in life. The poorest man in the world is richer than a king if he has contentment, yet the man who has every material possession available will never be at peace unless and until his mind rests content. Without contentment, peace is impossible and prosperity is a mirage. But when grace comes, contentment grows in the heart. It is then that peace, plenty and prosperity become established in life.

Taken together, daan of the five mahabhutas corresponds to each dimension of individual existence. For the receiver of daan, the requirements of life are provided: food, water, shelter, sustenance, light and warmth, education and grace. For the giver of daan, the first tattwa prithvi provides stability and security, apas promotes happiness, contentment and purity, and agni provides the power of transformation. Vayu allows for expansion of awareness, and purification of the senses and mind that culminates in the awakening of vidya in life. The last mahabhuta, akasha, is prasad of the divine. The ultimate purpose of prasad is to ignite the spiritual awareness and connect one with the experience of the divinity existing in all of life.



10

Sanatana Daan

Daan does not have to be the giving of a material object. There are many types of daan that are not physical but attitudinal. These types of daan are *sanatana daan*, meaning they are examples of the eternal principles and truths of life. Sanatana daan reflects the consciousness of the giver, and when that consciousness is established in a higher reality then sanatana daan is possible in the truest sense, for it reflects the spiritual qualities of the giver. Sanatana daan is not dependent upon the wealth or material capacity of the donor, but on compassion, love, understanding and feeling for others.

Bhisma in the *Mahabharata* explains the ultimate daan as love, non-aggressiveness or *ahimsa* and kindness. He says the highest daan is an assurance unto all creatures of love, affection and abstention from any kind of injury. This expresses as small acts of kindness and favours to a person in distress. Gifts are made to those in need, without the giver's thinking of them as gifts. Living properly and acting according to dharma is also a form of daan. Daan is anything that creates a positive connection not only between individuals, but also between all living things and the environment. Sanatana daan supports and fosters life, in the material dimension and also in the spiritual dimension.

Three types of sanatana daan are of paramount importance in the current scenario of escalating insecurity, fear

and isolation that is the reality of modern urban life. These are abhaya daan, prem daan and seva daan. No restrictions apply to these forms of daan in regard to the time, place or occasion. Sanatana daan should be given whenever and wherever it is needed. There is no benefit gained by waiting for an auspicious occasion. Everyone can practise whenever possible and make a contribution, no matter how small, towards a safe, happy and peaceful society.

ABHAYA DAAN

Providing sanctuary, safety and freedom from fear or insecurity is abhaya daan. *Abhaya* means to be without fear, so anything that contributes to a person's feeling of security, safety and freedom is abhaya daan. In the scriptures, abhaya daan is held in very high regard. Abhaya daan is equivalent to the gift of life itself, and no daan is higher than life. It can and should be given by all and by any means possible. Included in abhaya daan is the practice of ahimsa, the state and experience of non-violence and love. The practice and experience of ahimsa is daan. The merit accrued is more fruitful than feeding one thousand Brahmins, or



donating one thousand cows with gold ornaments. In the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma says that the daan of the entire Earth surrounded by four oceans is also not as valuable as abhaya daan. In the *Ramacharitamanas* it is said that one who seeks asylum should always be protected, even at the cost of one's own life. Abhaya daan extends not only to people but also to animals and insects.

It is easier to find people who can give cows or gold than it is to find someone who can give protection from fear. The ability to provide abhaya daan depends not on external material resources, but on the inner self. It is determined by the qualities of the heart. Without selflessness, without the soft and compassionate sentiments, and without the ability to feel another person's suffering as one's own, abhaya daan is difficult to perform. While previously this daan was the duty of kings and rulers, today abhaya daan is given by saints, sages and sannyasins. It is the spiritual luminaries of the world whose presence alone gives solace from the tension and strife of life. This daan can take many different forms according to the need of the time, but it is always impelled by the desire to help others, and remove suffering from life.

Darshan

Darshan, which refers to even the mere glimpse of a spiritually illumined person, is a form of abhaya daan. Just to see, or have a glimpse of the guru, or spiritual master, is to be in the presence of embodied spiritual truth and wisdom.



The spiritual wisdom that emanates from such people is abhaya daan. It is like the rays of the sun that penetrate even the darkest clouds and can lift one up from the depths of despair and fear, and provide hope, inspiration and courage to face the world. To have darshan is to be in contact, not with an individual, but with a higher state of consciousness, a spiritual vibratory field that can bring about profound change in the mind, consciousness and lives of those who are able to make that connection. It is for this reason that darshan is given, whether in physical or digital form.

In 2020, the entire world was in the grip of the coronavirus pandemic. Many countries were facing a crisis of proportions never seen before. In the effort to contain the pandemic, nations enforced lockdowns, and people were confined to their homes, unable to see family, friends, or have any social interaction. The uncertainty of the situation and the escalating tension was taking its toll. Fear, anxiety, panic attacks, loneliness, and depression were common experiences while everyone was isolated.

During this period, Swami Niranjanananda announced that while physical distancing was important to maintain physical health, maintaining robust social connection was important for mental health, positivity, optimism and hope. For all who were in need of support and solace, the satsang given on the day of Guru Poornima was streamed live. This was abhaya daan. From that darshan and satsang, thousands of people were inspired and uplifted, wherever they were in the world. In the time of crisis and uncertainty, this form of abhaya daan provided spiritual wisdom and yogic teachings that helped manage the negative conditions of mind and brought hope and happiness. Most importantly, it was a connection to the grace of the guru tattwa, from which flowed inspiration, love and support that was so desperately needed.

Yogic teachings can become a form of abhaya daan, when applied to address a particular need of an individual or society. To apply yoga as abhaya daan for the human

society requires the ability not only to objectively understand the difficulties, anxieties and stresses of life, but also to feel immense love, compassion and kindness towards others, both known and unknown. In the spiritual and yogic masters, these qualities of objective understanding, love and compassion are always present, and when combined with the wisdom and vidya of yoga extraordinary things can happen.

In 2020 under the inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda, the *For Frontline Heroes*, or FFH App was released. During the pandemic this app was specifically designed to help those who needed it most, and in doing so help the whole world. The Frontline Heroes targeted through the app were the people facing the onslaught of the pandemic, and yet were able to remain active to provide much needed service to others. Despite great personal risk to their own health and safety, they battled the external onslaught of the pandemic, yet they also faced anxiety and loneliness if alienated from their community. They worked for the welfare of all humanity, and the future of humanity depended upon their efforts and faithful commitment.

The FFH app was created to help doctors, nurses, police, central and state government departments and administrators, volunteers and municipal workers, farmers, traders and even the rickshaw and thela walla who deliver food and necessary items. It was designed for people who attended upon isolation wards, provided medical treatment and made every effort in the most adverse conditions to give their best in the service of others.

The app was a collection of simple yoga practices to alleviate physical, mental and emotional stress and allow one to manage situations with a calmer, clearer and more positive response. Understanding



the immune system, promoting mental and emotional balance. The simple practices and principles were designed to bring happiness, harmony, contentment, positivity and creativity into life. The program was flexible, and people could incorporate different components of this lifestyle sadhana to their daily routine. Included in the program were asana, pranayama, shatkarma, yama, niyama, relaxation, mantra, swadhyaya and meditation. Along with the practices, specific instructions were given in regard to diet, meal times, hygiene and sleep.

PREM DAAN



Prem daan, or the daan of love, is the unconditional giving of the positive, uplifting and uniting sentiments in life. Without love, kindness, friendship and support life is a meaningless and miserable struggle for existence. No human being can exist alone, isolated and without love. Love and affection are vital for the proper emotional development and evolution of life, not only in children but also in adults.

Prem daan can be performed by anyone, anywhere at any time. A smile, a comforting word, encouragement, support and understanding can all be forms of prem daan. The ability to perform prem daan depends not on any external capacity or material wealth, but on the internal capacity to connect with and generate the positive emotions of life. The practice of prem daan creates the experience of positivity and goodwill. When this positive experience is sustained, it becomes a state of awareness that transforms the personality.

Love is an expression of purity that manifests when you become very strong within your own heart. That is why the saints have always emphasized love. True love is the expression of your inner self in the language of purity and effulgence of heart. What Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Zoroaster and other saints and sages have said about love is not easy to practise. In love there is just giving, not taking. Love is an act of giving and giving and giving. In love, duality is fused into unity, two become one.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Love does not diminish through giving, rather love grows when given to others. Prem daan ultimately leads to a state of unconditional and universal divine love that emanates from the depths of the being. The state and experience of pure love is seen in the attainment of few people who are the sannyasins, saints and sages of this world. Simply being in the presence of such a person is to receive prem daan. Prem daan softens the pranas of the individual, it brings about a different perspective, understanding and experience. Prem daan can completely transform a life and influence the destiny of an individual.

Conducted at Sannyasa Peeth, Munger, in the months of Chaturmas, the citizens of this town have the daily opportunity of darshan and satsang; and the joy that is



experienced is indescribable. For two months, everyone basks in the warmth of happiness and love they experience just by being in the presence of their beloved Swami Niranjanananda. Each day they take this positive emotional state and experience back to their homes, workplaces and society and share it with others. Their interactions and relationships are improved and enriched. Life is better, happier and more fulfilling. In this way, the tradition of prem daan is upheld.

You prepare yourself for love by little acts of kindness.
The elementary training in love, the ABC of love, is
little acts of kindness.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

AROGYA AND AUSHADHI DAAN

Arogya daan is giving that which supports health and promotes wellbeing. Caring for the sick and infirm by providing medicines and medical treatment is *aushadhi daan*. There is unlimited scope for the performance of these two forms of daan, as the concept of wellbeing is not restricted to physical health but includes mental and emotional health also. Emotional support and counselling are also included. Traditionally arogya daan was the provision of medicines, oil, massage, food and water to the sick. Construction and operation of *arogyashalas*, or hospitals, were recommended in the scriptures. Instructions were given on how to stock the hospitals with the correct medicines, ensure that the staff were fully trained and knowledgeable not only in treatment but also in the preparation of *aushadhi*, the herbal medicine. According to season, time and place the treatment would be determined and administered after evaluating the patient from the perspective of ayurveda and the three doshas, kapha, pitta, and vata. The tradition of aushadhi daan continues at Sannyasa Peeth with the annual daan of the Tulsi plant to all who come for the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna.





Tulsi is the queen of medicinal herbs, the ultimate empress of medicine. She is the ruler and in her presence diseases go away. The application and use of Tulsi is known to everyone. If you pray to her, even the physical body regains health. Sri Swamiji during his panchagni used to pray to Mother Tulsi and worship Mother Tulsi every day, with only one prayer, 'Keep me healthy so that I can accomplish this sankalpa of panchagni'. For the entire duration, the decade that he practised panchagni, not one day did he have cold or hot or fever or blocked nose or gas or bile or cough mucus and he attributed that to the grace of Ma Tulsi. When I did my Panchagni, I also prayed to Mother Tulsi and I found that she was alive and she helped me. Otherwise, who am I? Sitting in 80 degrees, the heat criss-crossing the whole body from back to front, left to right, right to left, front to back. Yet not a single day was there any dehydration, not a single day was there any heatstroke, weakness or fever. At that time, I realized the grace and the value of Tulsi, of invoking the power of Tulsi as the mother of all therapies and healing.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Health for Everyone series

When the traditional principles, philosophy and vision of sanatana daan is given a contemporary focus according to the needs and requirements of society, the potential for benefit is unlimited. In the year 2020, the tradition of arogya daan was given a new focus, direction and application by Swami Niranjanananda. Prompted by the severity of the corona pandemic and the escalating numbers of infections and mortality rates across the globe, three new yoga programs were released as arogya daan. The approach of these yoga programs was an innovative and original perspective that drew on the principals and perspective of arogya daan.

Arogya is the state of being free from disease. Arogya is the ability to withstand the negative and detrimental influences of life, not only at the physical level, but also the mental, emotional and pranic levels. To give arogya daan means to provide something that is beneficial at all levels, to give a positive input in all dimensions of life. To perform arogya daan requires a different understanding and a holistic perspective. Arogya daan addresses both the immediate short-term requirement, which can also be curative, and also the long-term requirement and necessary support to maintain a state of balance, harmony and health. Arogya daan is giving people a method, a system, or a technique that they can use in life to maintain themselves in an optimum condition of body, mind and emotions, without being dependent upon medical treatment, drugs and intervention.

In the arogya daan programs, the focus was developing the capacity to maintain health and be free from disease, rather than treatment of symptoms and ill health. Immunity rather than cure became the objective, and boosting pranic vitality was the goal. Two programs were given. The first program *Breathe for Healthy Lungs* originated from the yogic understanding and experience of the importance of breath for life. The lungs and the breathing process that are largely ignored by most people until something goes wrong, became the subject of attention during the corona pandemic.

However, for thousands of years yogis have yoked their awareness to the breath and developed an entire science and vidya based on this phenomena. Yogis not only experienced the connection between the breath and prana, they revealed the breath as the link between energy and consciousness, and ultimately between the individual and the divine.

Yet in the spirit of arogya daan, although drawing on the highest wisdom and vidya of yoga, *Breathe for Healthy Lungs* was not a program only for yoga practitioners. It was for everyone. Swami Niranjanananda distilled the essence of the yogic teachings and presented them in a simple, accessible form. The program began with a theoretical introduction that combined the medical and scientific perspective with the



yoga vidya. This was followed by simple breathing practices that could be done by anyone at any time, to improve the physical condition of the lungs, purify the body of toxins, invigorate the circulatory system, boost immunity and charge the pranas.

The second program called *Cardiac Care Through Yoga* was designed to promote the health of the heart and circulatory systems. From birth to death the heart expands and contracts continuously, one hundred thousand times a day, forty million times a year and up to three billion times over an average lifespan. The heart pumps blood throughout the body, carrying oxygen and nutrients to every cell and sustaining life. Promotion of a healthy heart and circulatory system is an essential component of developing physical health and robustness.

The program included simple physical postures to promote the efficient and effective functioning of the heart and circulation, as well as breathing techniques to regulate and recharge the physical and pranic systems. Simple relaxation practices were also given that can be performed daily to release the accumulated stresses on body, mind and emotions. When the heart is healthy life can be lived to the fullest, and the capacity for joy, happiness and love also increases. A healthy heart is key for mental and emotional stability. It is from the strength of the heart that we connect with and share the positive emotions in life and it is also the heart that gives the ability to withstand the shocks of grief, sorrow and despair.

Both programs were made available online in English and Hindi as arogya daan. In under one month of release, there were 20,000 users worldwide and the programs were utilized by many different sectors of society as well as individuals. Continuing in this effort of arogya daan, the series includes programs *Yoga for High Blood Pressure*, *Eye Care through Yoga*, as well as simple yet comprehensive programs on neti and kunjla.

SEVA DAAN

Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda have given clear instructions regarding the effort every person can make towards this attainment. Swami Sivananda gave the instructions ‘serve, love and give’ to his disciples. Serve comes before love, because it is not easy to develop the state of love. The preparation for that is *seva daan*, service of others. Seva daan is any effort made towards the improvement and upliftment of others. Seva daan is also the effort towards a positive change and the contribution towards qualitative improvement in life, in society and in the environment. In seva daan, you give your time, effort, expertise and education to help others. It is a contribution towards a better life for someone else.



Seva is not service with expectation, seva is service without expectation. What do we need in our lives? When we are distressed, we need somebody to put their hands on our shoulders. When we are alone, we need a stranger to come and give us a nice smile. When we have fallen, we need somebody who can come and help us get back up.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

YOGA DAAN

Swami Satyananda followed the instruction of his Guru Swami Sivananda and dedicated his life to yoga daan. The instruction was to take yoga from shore to shore and door to door. In his time in Munger, Swami Satyananda was actively engaged in the propagation of yoga, or yoga daan. It was the ancient history of Munger and Daanveer Karna that provided the inspiration for this incredible attainment.

In ancient days, there lived a great yogi known as Maharathi Karna. He was born more than 5,000 years ago, but history ignored his spiritual existence. The *Mahabharata* speaks of his performance, qualities and accomplishments, but very few people remember him as a mahayogi, a master of the art of yoga. According to mythology, he used to offer his body to 64 yoginis. The mythology also has it that he was one of the greatest men of his time. He was outright, generous and charitable. He always gave whatever was asked of him, and nobody who went to him came back disappointed. He was therefore known as Daanveer Karna. So, this man was at once Maharathi, Daanveer and Mahayogi.

Karna ruled over a kingdom known as Anga. At present, that region includes Bhagalpur and Munger in the state of Bihar. However, Munger was the capital of this kingdom. In that ancient city on the bank of Sri Ganga, he established his seat, now known historically as Karna Chowra.

I first came to Munger in 1956, and it so happened that I stuck to that place. Finally, I established myself there, not to found an ashram, to create a tradition, or to teach and preach, but to live and to understand myself. I wanted to experience the totality of existence beyond body and mind, name and form.

During this period between 1956 and 1963, I developed an understanding of the vibration of that



place, which seemed to have been forgotten for the last 5,000 years. On the hillock of Karna Chowra, which was desolate, deserted, barren and solitary, I sat for hours, days, weeks and months. I did not know what exactly I was assimilating, what exactly I was understanding. I knew, however, that Maharaja Karna was a man of great magnanimity who used to give gold in charity and alms to all the people who came to him.

I realized that in this age gold had no relevance to mankind's real eternal existence. Of course, wealth is necessary in life to give us a notion of security, though that security is after all a delusion. Although gold is not the ultimate means of obtaining peace, freedom and perfection in life, still I knew very well that I could not discharge the responsibility of that great man unless I was able to deliver some form of wealth to the people. So that seat was not really for me. He gave gold, and I could not give even a morsel of food, because I had nothing but two dhotis, and that was my wealth.

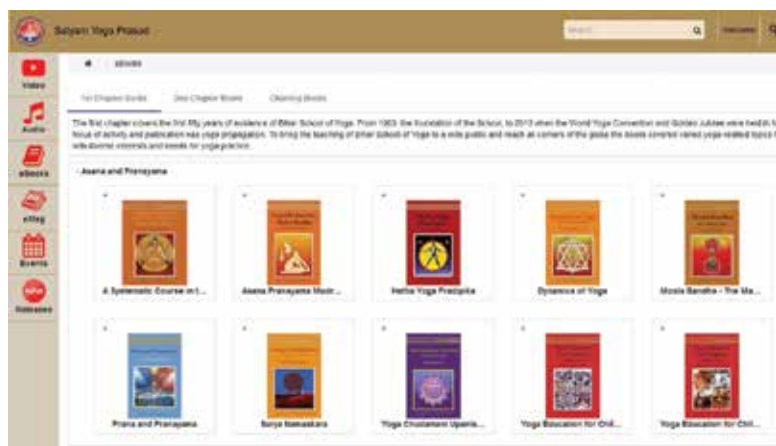
Ultimately an idea dawned – I would dispense yoga. After all there are so many religions, not just sects. Every religion has its own authority based on revelations directed from the topmost, yet these great religions have not been able to illumine the inner being, the inner fountain of man's experience. They have always been walking around the periphery of man's existence.

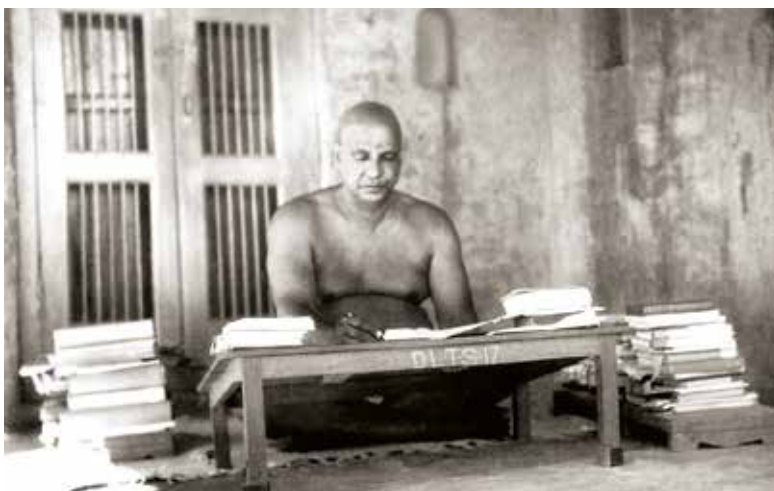
They have only touched the external, social, modern and affluent man, not the effulgent, complete man, the *poorna purusha*. All these religions teach and preach about the poorna purusha, but they do not provide the way to reach it. For example, if you tell a child to climb up a tree, and he cannot, you will have to provide him with the perfect means to climb the tree, a ladder. In the same way, it is very important that we provide humankind with the correct means to reach the true and innermost experience, which is the basis of all our experiences.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Satyam Yoga Prasad

The feather in the crown of attainments and accomplishments of yoga daan is *Satyam Yoga Prasad*. Created in 2018, under the inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda, Satyam Yoga Prasad represents the modern application of yoga daan in the digital age. Satyam Yoga Prasad is a digital library of the entire collected publications of the Bihar Yoga tradition. This digital library continues the vision of Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati who believed that the dissemination of spiritual knowledge was the highest mission in life.





For the guidance of so many struggling and seeking souls, Swami Sivananda recorded all his experiences and insights, and distributed his letters, pamphlets and books to those near and far. In the early 1930s, without any of the technological advances of today, he managed to arrange for the publication and distribution of his spiritual teachings, thoughts and inspiration. In the early days, he had no money to buy a lantern. An empty inkbottle with a wick and kerosene served as a lamp. He had no money to buy paper. He used to collect used envelopes, and cut them on three sides and use the inner side for writing. No handicap was too big for him to overcome. Any opportunity was seized to preserve his invaluable spiritual guidance for the benefit of future generations.

In his lifetime, Swami Sivananda wrote more than 300 books in a very simple and easy-to-understand style, addressing the reader directly as if he were giving personal guidance. He had the knack of bringing the highest knowledge within easy reach of everyone. He never tried to exhibit his scholarship or to impress anyone, but he came easily to the level of the reader. He even wrote a book called *Yoga for Businessmen*, in an effort to appeal to all stratas of

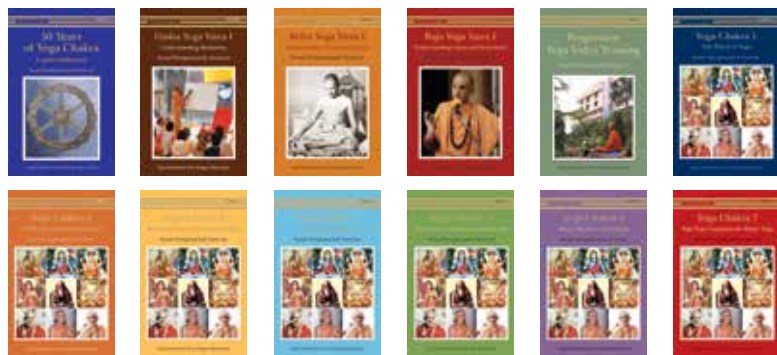
society. As a result, his inimitable spiritual writings could kindle spiritual awakening in millions of readers all over the world, and inspired them to tread the path of spirituality.

Sitting in a small Kutir in the Himalayas on the banks of the Ganga, I have published hundreds of very useful books in all languages for circulation throughout the world. This was possible, because I have not entertained any mercenary motive. When copies are received from the press, I give away all the copies free to the inmates, visitors, pilgrims and, by post, to all devotees, branches of the Divine Life Society and all religious and educational institutions. Daily I empty all the almirahs in the office, and yet I find fresh stock continuously coming from the press.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Just as Swami Sivananda looked always to the spread of spiritual knowledge, so too did Swami Satyananda. Publication of yogic works was a vital foundation of his mission. The very first tasks he undertook included writing and printing brochures and booklets, followed immediately by the *Yoga Vidya* magazine in Hindi, and subsequently the *Yoga* magazine in English. These were accompanied by a stream of seminal works on all aspects of yoga, including texts on yoga practices, techniques, teachings and philosophy, and on yoga practices for health improvement. Swami Satyananda took the ancient scriptural knowledge and developed the integral yoga of his guru Swami Sivananda, presenting the branches of yoga as a complete scientific system. He elucidated the yogic principles, brought to light previously unknown practices, fully systematized the practices for the first time, and made available simple practices that everyone can do.

Through this form of yoga daan, Swami Satyananda cast the yoga vidya far and wide across India and the world, to guide and uplift all yogic aspirants and those in need. His works are authentic, scientific and systematic, easily



When I came to Munger in 1983 to take over the management of the Bihar School of Yoga, as Sri Swamiji was stepping down from being the head of the institution, he told me, “Yoga is a vidya, and it should be shared with all.” He told me to propagate this vidya freely to everybody. An instruction that he gave in 1983 is being fulfilled today.

Satyameva Yoga Prasad is part of the jnanayajna initiated by Sri Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh, which was the method to disseminate spiritual knowledge. At first Swami Sivananda used to write small pamphlets, have them printed and distribute freely. Then he started writing small booklets on every conceivable topic and distributed them freely. Then, with the advancements in the ashram, books written by him began to be printed. But he had a nature: nothing was ever sold. He would give everything freely to the aspirants, to the libraries, to the departments of human resources where people could read and understand about human life and spiritual life, about what our tradition says on evolving in life.

Sri Swamiji also followed in the footsteps of his guru. Prior to coming to Munger, during his travelling days he would publish five-page or ten-page booklets of chants, kirtans and spiritual anecdotes, and distribute them to everybody in the Yoga Fellowship.



In the early days, the books became the means through which Sri Swamiji would help yoga aspirants deepen their understanding of yoga. It was his wish that the spiritual knowledge, the jnana yajna that was initiated by Swami Sivananda, should continue as a tradition of the Bihar School of Yoga, the centre which he dedicated to his guru and walked away from, for it was the mandate of his guru, not his own creation.

Bihar School of Yoga is proud and pleased to present Satyam Yoga Prasad as a continuing tradition in the lineage of Sri Swami Sivananda and Sri Swami Satyananda. Through this effort, the entire library of yoga books and teachings are now available on the internet.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

To date, well over 350 of books have been published, along with hundreds of CDs and DVDs. Through Satyam Yoga Prasad, the entire collection is available online, for all. The tradition of yoga daan, the giving of yogic knowledge that began with Swami Sivananda continues unbroken. This tradition of daan is honoured through Satyam Yoga Prasad and in the true spirit of daan, it offers much more than just the publications. Every visit provides a new flame of inspiration, a new inner connection, a new experience, a new understanding, and a new opportunity to develop the spiritual qualities in life.

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Panchagni Daan

Panchagni tapas is the tapasya of five fires. Prescribed in the vedic tradition for paramahansa sannyasins, the panchagni tapas is one of the most challenging and difficult to perform. The word tapasya comes from the Sanskrit root, *tap*, meaning to heat, to radiate heat, to blaze like the sun. The panchagni tapasya is the process of enduring the heat of five fires. The sadhaka sits surrounded by four fires, and the sun above is the fifth.



There is a difference between tapasya and sadhana. The purpose of sadhana is the management of the physical, mental and pranic experiences. The purpose of any tapasya is *shuddhi*, or purification. It is only through purification that transcendence takes place. Daan is also a process of shuddhi. Daan when performed correctly is a process of mental and pranic purification that complements and reinforces the shuddhi of tapasya. For this reason, the shastras and scriptures state that daan is an *anga* of tapasya, indicating that daan is a separate but integral aspect of tapasya.

Panchagni is also a vidya. The word *vidya* refers to the means and methods by which spiritual knowledge can be realized and experienced. The path of vidya is not an intellectual process of education, it is an experiential process of inner purification. The connection to vidya purifies the mind of gross and material identifications and directs the prana inwards to illuminate the inner spiritual nature, culminating in the direct realization of the Supreme Reality. The different spiritual vidyas are subtle and intricate processes that have been tried and tested over thousands of years within a spiritual *parampara* or tradition.

The concept of a spiritual parampara evolved to preserve and propagate these different vidyas. Paramparas are formed by individuals who dedicated themselves to perfect different aspects of experience, and reach the apex of understanding and realization. The level of expertise attained in a particular realm of vidya, develops into a body of knowledge, methodology, philosophy and practice. The luminaries of traditions are visionaries endowed with the ability and the experience to further enhance and develop the vidya.

A vidya cannot be simply learnt through books, or from the internet. Education is the way of knowledge, but connecting to vidya is the path of realization. Only a person who has attained a state of spiritual realization can impart this wisdom on the strength of personal experience. For this reason, vidya is only taught or transmitted within a parampara or tradition. Only the person who is an adept,

an authority and competent can teach or transmit the vidya. Similarly, only one who is a capable and worthy recipient, traditionally described as a *patra*, or empty vessel, can receive the vidya. In this way, the sanctity, integrity and veracity of different vidyas are maintained by the parampara entrusted with their protection and propagation.

The spiritual parampara defines the process, stages and development of learning according to the capacity and aptitude of the individual. Those who become part of the parampara do so on the basis of their own merits and by following that system, faithfully, without trying to adjust it to their own personal likes and dislikes. There are different prerequisites for different vidyas, depending upon the origin and intent of the vidya. The panchagni vidya originates from the vedic literature. Panchagni is one of the Brahmanvidyas, which are a total of thirty-two different upanishadic methods and instructions on how to realize *Brahman*, the ultimate state of consciousness. The panchagni vidya is also referred to in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (Chapter 5:3–10), the *Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad* (Chapter 6:2) and the *Kathopanishad*.

Life in the vedic era was socially, philosophically and spiritually different from the society of today. Vedic culture and society reflected a different way of thinking, acting and living that emerged through collective effort and dedication to developing a spiritual understanding and experience of life. Dharma is the essence of the vedic approach to life and the heart of dharma is goodness. Dharma is the manifestation of goodness in life. In any situation, dharma is the effort made towards improvement, positivity and upliftment. Dharma is the correct, righteous and constructive participation in life in accordance and harmony with the natural flow of life.

For a paramahansa sannyasi only

According to the vedic parampara, panchagni tapas is to be performed by paramahansa sannyasins. This criterion has been established over thousands of years for the

transmission of the panchagni vidya and the performance of the tapasya. The reason for this is also clear. A paramahansa is a sannyasin of the highest calibre, who lives not for their individual ambitions or desires but according to dharma. The life of a paramahansa sannyasin is identified by two qualities. The first quality is an internal awareness and state of consciousness, and the second is the external expression of dharma. Externally in all aspects of participation and involvement, there is total dedication to dharma in life.

These two attributes make panchagni possible. Without dedication to spiritual illumination and dharma it is not possible to endure the five fires at the physical, subtle and transcendental levels. Panchagni begins on Makar Sankranti in the middle of January and continues until Kark Sankranti in the middle of July. It is only performed during *uttarayana*, or the northern path of the sun, when the power and heat of the sun is the most intense. The temperature in the panchagni vedi can increase up to ninety degrees. It is not possible for the human body to withstand prolonged exposure to this intense heat. The smoke of five fires constantly burns the eyes and fills the lungs, increasing the inhalation of carbon. Sparks from the flames burn the skin. To endure this day in and day out without falling sick, becoming dehydrated, or having a heart attack requires complete mastery over not only the physical body, but also the pancha pranas and the tattwas.

When you are sitting amid four fires with the sun overhead, and the temperature in winter is going up to 60 degrees and in summer up to 80 degrees, can that be comfortable and relaxing for the body? Dehydration takes place, you can have a heat stroke or heart failure. You are inhaling carbon monoxide all the time and you can faint and fall into one of the fires on your left, right, front or back any time. That is the intensity of the sadhana.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

The subtle level of panchagni relates to the mental and emotional dimension of existence. It is said that only the person who has subdued the five internal fires raging within: *kama* or passion, *krodha* or anger, *lobha* or greed, *moha* or attachment and *matsarya* or jealousy, can survive panchagni. How can an ordinary person who cannot even manage and restrain their irritation, frustration, impatience and anger sit calmly in the middle of five raging fires? If it is not possible to peacefully face and subdue the internal burning of jealousy or anger without reacting negatively, how is it possible to face the external fire?



These are the five fires inside the subtle body which dry up a person's being. To avoid these fires and to face these fires are two different things. I did not avoid them; I faced them and faced them strongly. However, sometimes I felt as if I would slip. Only a person who can face these five inner fires can face the five external fires – the south fire, east fire, west fire, north fire and the fifth fire of the sun overhead. Otherwise a sannyasin who does panchagni sadhana is committing suicide. You

sit surrounded by four fires and above you is the sun. All the water in the body dries up. A heart attack will definitely take place. The best way to die is in panchagni sadhana.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

The transcendental aspect of panchagni relates to the process of purification known as prayaschitta. In panchagni, *prayaschitta* is not just atonement, it is *karma kshaya*, a total dissolution of the karmas. Everything is purified, reduced to nothing, in the same way that agni reduces everything to *bhasma*, the purified ash. This prayaschitta can only take place if the conditions are right. Panchagni is not something an ordinary person can do. It is only possible when all the conditions established in the scriptures are fulfilled, otherwise it should not even be attempted.

The first condition is the intensity of the tapasya. This will only be attained when panchagni is performed by the correct person according to the instructions and mandate given by the guru. Unless that mandate and instruction is given, the tapasya will be incomplete. It may yield some benefit, but the ultimate stage of shuddhi and the transcendental attainment will remain beyond reach. Following the parampara, the mandate and the vidhi is transmitted from guru to disciple, according to the capability of each individual.

For sannyasins, especially those who follow the paramahansa tradition, the period of uttarayana is devoted to tapasya, austerity. That is why the panchagni is performed in this period. Sri Swami Satyananda, our guru, performed the panchagni for nine years in Rikhia. Before his mahasamadhi, when he gave the instructions of Sannyasa Peeth, he also gave personal instructions on how to develop in this path, and said that the panchagni tapasya has to become the hallmark of sadhana for paramahansa sannyasins; now and in the future, both.



In accordance with the mandate he gave, I am following this path.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The second condition is dharma. Only a person who has dedicated themselves to the path of dharma, not just in this life, but for lifetimes, can withstand this prayaschitta. The qualities and attributes of such a person are different. The selfish ego has no role. Some people may attempt panchagni out of self-oriented desire and ambition, but the person who performs panchagni simply to fulfil the mandate given by the guru has no such ambition. Instead of ego, there is a perfected state and experience of *samarpan* or surrender. There is no individual will, rather that person simply lives to follow the divine will, and ultimately merge with the divine. All selfish inclinations and attitudes are already transcended, and because of this selfless nature, a beautiful and extraordinary thing happens which in simple language is known as grace.

The panchagni tapasya creates a pure and direct connection or conduit between the individual and the divine, and that manifests as a relationship. It is a relationship of *bhakti* or love, love that is pure and without the taint of attachment. In panchagni, the sadhaka has surrendered everything, not even the vestiges of attachment to the physical body remain. There is only the sankalpa of the tapasya. Whether he succeeds or fails, whether he lives or dies will be determined by the grace of guru and the divine will. The sadhaka is like the small child sitting on the lap of the divine mother, or the faithful and devoted servant waiting to hear his master's instruction, or the lover listening for the call of the divine flute. Samarpan opens the door, and bhakti creates the channel through which the transcendental experience takes place. Panchagni is not possible without grace and grace descends only when there is love.

The gift of panchagni

Described in the *Kathopanishad* is an interaction between a young boy, Nachiketa, and Yama, the Lord of Death. Nachiketa was granted three boons to atone for the three nights he waited outside Yama's door without food or water,

or any of the hospitality that should be accorded to a guest. To atone for these three nights, Yama granted three boons to Nachiketa. For the first boon, Nachiketa asked that his father would overcome his anger and be able to greet his son with love. Yama replied that he would grant this boon, and that his father's mind would be at peace. The second boon was more difficult. Nachiketa asked to be taught the way to attain the state in which there is no death, neither old age nor hunger, thirst or pain. Here Nachiketa is asking how to attain a state of spiritual transcendence. He is asking this of Yama, because as the Lord of Death, Yama knows how to transcend the different states of consciousness.

Agni is the means to attain this transcendence, and therefore Nachiketa asks to be taught the panchagni vidya. Yama agrees to teach him the vidya that leads to transcendence and tells him that this transcendental state is concealed in the heart.

Then Yama begins the detailed process of instruction in panchagni, the requirements, the invocation and the process of the tapasya. This is the process of transmission. Transmission is not just being told something and forgetting half of it, or misinterpreting the instructions, or having to write them down. Transmission is based on the receptivity of the individual. What is said has to be imbibed and understood immediately. Those who are capable will get it immediately, and those who are not capable will never understand. Nachiketa is able to repeat the vidya verbatim, and this pleases Yama so much he tells him that henceforth this vidya shall be called the Nachiketa agni.

Yama then adds the conditions necessary for success. It is not enough to simply perform the tapasya. The sadhaka must live according to dharma and fulfil the duties of dharma accordingly. Yama states that the basis of dharma is threefold: swadhyaya, daan and tapasya (1:1:17).

त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रिभिरेत्य संधिं त्रिकर्मकृत् तरति जन्ममृत्यू ।
ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवमीड्यं विदित्वा निचाय्येमां शान्तिमत्यन्तमेति ॥

Triṇāchiketastribhiretya saṁdhiṁ trikarmakṛt tarati janmamṛtyū.
Brahmajajñam devamīdyaṁ viditvā nichāyyemāṁ
shāntimatyantameti.

One who performs the Nachiketa fire sacrifice thrice with full dedication, and performs the three duties, (of renunciation, austerity and daan), overcomes birth and death. When he has realized this radiant, omniscient and worshipful fire of the Brahman, he achieves the highest peace.



Tapasya, tyaga and daan constitute the three duties of the panchagni vidya as given to Nachiketa. Daan given during panchagni takes many forms. It is not restricted to the material transfer of items. During the time of tapasya, anything the sadhaka does is daan. Just as the tapasya of panchagni utilizes the tattvas to transcend the material dimension, in the same way, the daan given during panchagni uses the different elements to transfer the benefits and blessings of the tapasya for the benefit of others. The sadhaka performs the tapasya without any selfish motive or intent, simply to fulfil the sankalpa and establish peace, plenty and prosperity in life. The grace that descends in response to the call of the pure and untainted heart is then transferred to others through the medium of daan.



To have darshan of the panchagni tapasya is a form of daan. Darshan of panchagni is the glimpse of the transcendental realms; it is the vision of grace, proof of the ever-present but unrecognized connection between the material and the spiritual, the human and the divine. Darshan of panchagni is a direct and tangible experience of the great spiritual vidyas and teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads and Tantras. To receive darshan of panchagni tapasya is to come into contact with the energy field that is created between the individual and the divine, through the medium of agni. It is entering another realm of existence. It does not matter whether the darshan lasts for one second, one minute or one hour, the experience is transcendental and not determined by time or space but simply by the receptivity of the individual.

During panchagni the words spoken by the sadhaka are not ordinary words, they are *vakya*, that speech which is infused with the energy, power and divine grace. Normal speech at that time becomes mantra. The words uttered are permeated by *vak shakti*, the energy of Saraswati, and have the power to remove the darkness, the dross, the material conditioning and identification. The purpose of speech during tapasya is to inspire, encourage, provoke and awaken the spiritual awareness and experience. Any instruction given



during that time, any direction or guidance carries the energy of that tapasya and has the potential to remove the obstacles and impediments of tamasic conditioning, to redirect the arrogance and aggression of the rajasic interaction and to awaken and establish the purity, light and effulgence of sattwa. It is for this reason that anything spoken by the rishis, munis and sannyasins of ages past who performed these great vedic tapasyas was understood as vakya.

Experience of vibhu

In 2021, while performing panchagni in Munger, Swami Niranjanananda gave a very simple instruction, “*Hamara panchagni ke dauran logon ko kuch dena chahiye* – During my panchagni, something should be given to people.” From that simple sentence, a two-month program of daan commenced in Munger. Every week different groups from the town were called to receive the daan of panchagni.





The program began with the frontline medical workers who served the local community. The staff of different hospitals were all given panchagni daan in the form of items that were useful to them in their professional and daily life. Face masks, face shields, sanitizers as well as towels and linen were given, along with saris, shawls and blankets. The staff of the town post offices, courier companies, newspaper wallas were all presented with items useful for them, which they had never received before. Post and courier staff were able to wear masks and face shields as they went about their deliveries. Petrol pump stations, gas agencies, electricity offices and departments were also recipients. The social and charitable agencies of Munger who are active in local seva such as the Lions Club and Rotary Club were also given.

Children of orphanages, re-mand homes and juvenile centres received new clothing, stationery supplies, colouring books, teddy bears and the favourite of children across the globe, the *Satyam Tales* books as daan. Teachers of the local schools received personal and household items such as face masks, shields, hand towels, saris, shawls, bed linen, *Yoga Vidya*

magazines and assorted publications. The staff and all the prisoners of the local jails were given clothing, yogic literature, magazines and linen. The police departments as well as the district administration received daan intended to assist them in the performance of their duties and seva to the nation, including clothing, face masks, shields, yoga magazines and literature, yoga nidra CDs, and neti pots. The sabzi walli, the ladies who sell vegetables on the streets, carrying their baskets from house to house and the aayas of Munger town, those who carry out the domestic work of households were given anna daan, vastra daan and grih daan, or items for the home including water jugs, buckets, stools and cooking utensils.



Panchagni daan was not only given in Munger but also across India. Daan was dispatched to all the different Satyananda Yoga centres and ashrams for distribution among the yoga aspirants, students, devotees and well-wishers.



The simple daan of panchagni bhasma, locket, angavastra, souvenir and photo touched the hearts of all who received it, as it carried with it the grace of tapasya and the blessings of their beloved Swami Niranjanananda.

The entire daan project was executed smoothly and efficiently, without any difficulty or shortcoming, as if it was happening by itself. Devotees from across the country, not knowing anything about the panchagni daan project, spontaneously came forward wanting to donate items for distribution. Panchagni daan became the medium for positivity, happiness and prosperity for all who were involved, whether recipients or not. From the ashram residents and sannyasins who managed the packing and distribution, to the local people who liaised with the different groups of people, to all the yoga aspirants and devotees across the country, something was connecting everyone together. That something was *anugraha*, the grace, blessings, good wishes and sentiments of one exceptional sannyasin performing an ancient vedic tapasya for the benefit and wellbeing of all.

Panchagni daan became the physical and material manifestation of the great spiritual teachings of the Vedas, that in essence we are all one, that we are all connected. That experience is known as *vibhu*, the interconnectedness of everything that the vedic seers and rishis revealed to humanity. It was an effulgent and illumined expression of vibhu that manifested through the anugraha of panchagni and the process of daan. What took place became much more than the simple packing, distribution and receiving of items, it was the experience and connection with vidya, the transmission of spiritual knowledge and experience. What else could have permeated across all the limitations and barriers of caste, creed, gender, nationality and cultural identity, connecting the policeman with the criminal, the doctor with the labourer, and the sannyasin with the sabzi walla.

Just as sunlight does not differentiate between high and low, superior or inferior, animal or human, insect or



reptile, but shines equally on everyone, the light of tapasya that is given through daan also illumines the darkness and transforms the awareness, understanding and experience of life. This is the role of daan in the spiritual evolution, to take one from tamas to sattwa, from darkness to luminosity.

Apart from our own aspirations to experience peace and the possible understanding of illumination, whatever it may mean to all of us individually, we are also connected in the idea of seva. We are also connected with the idea of making ourselves, our environment better, purer, cleaner and more luminous. If we are able to do that and fulfil this aspiration, then we shall be able to live the mandate of the seers of our human civilization who stated *atmodeepobhava* or 'Know Thyself'. By that you will know the universe and attain balance and peace. You will become happy and cooperate in the plan of nature and the divine.

In this manner, when people connect with the goodness of their heart to bring about a change in their own life, in the lives of others, interact with and inspire each one to tread the path of *dharma*, righteousness and correctness, then that is the idea of vibhu.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Swami Ratnashakti Saraswati

has been a resident sannyasin of Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth since 2002. She was initiated into Poorna Sannyasa in 2011 by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. Based in Munger she continues to participate in yoga and sannyasa training.



It is the mission of Paduka Darshan Sannyasa Peeth to bring alive the culture, customs and lifestyle as defined in the classical scriptures and traditions of India. Under the inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, the ancient tradition of daan is being revived through the activities of Sannyasa Peeth.

Daan is the system and sadhana of giving, which is one of the foundations of human dharma. *Daan: Path to Positivity and Purity* presents this ancient tradition from the classical and scriptural understanding. The different facets, aspects and attributes of daan are explained giving both the traditional and the modern perspectives and methods of implementation.

The rishis, sages and saints of the past and the present have taught that the way to purify oneself is to give to others. *Daan* is unique in that it benefits not only the person who receives. The act of daan purifies the mind, sentiments, and emotions of the giver. The method, means and occasions to perform daan are explained so that all aspirants can practise according to their inclination and capacity.



ISBN : 978-81-949328-4-0