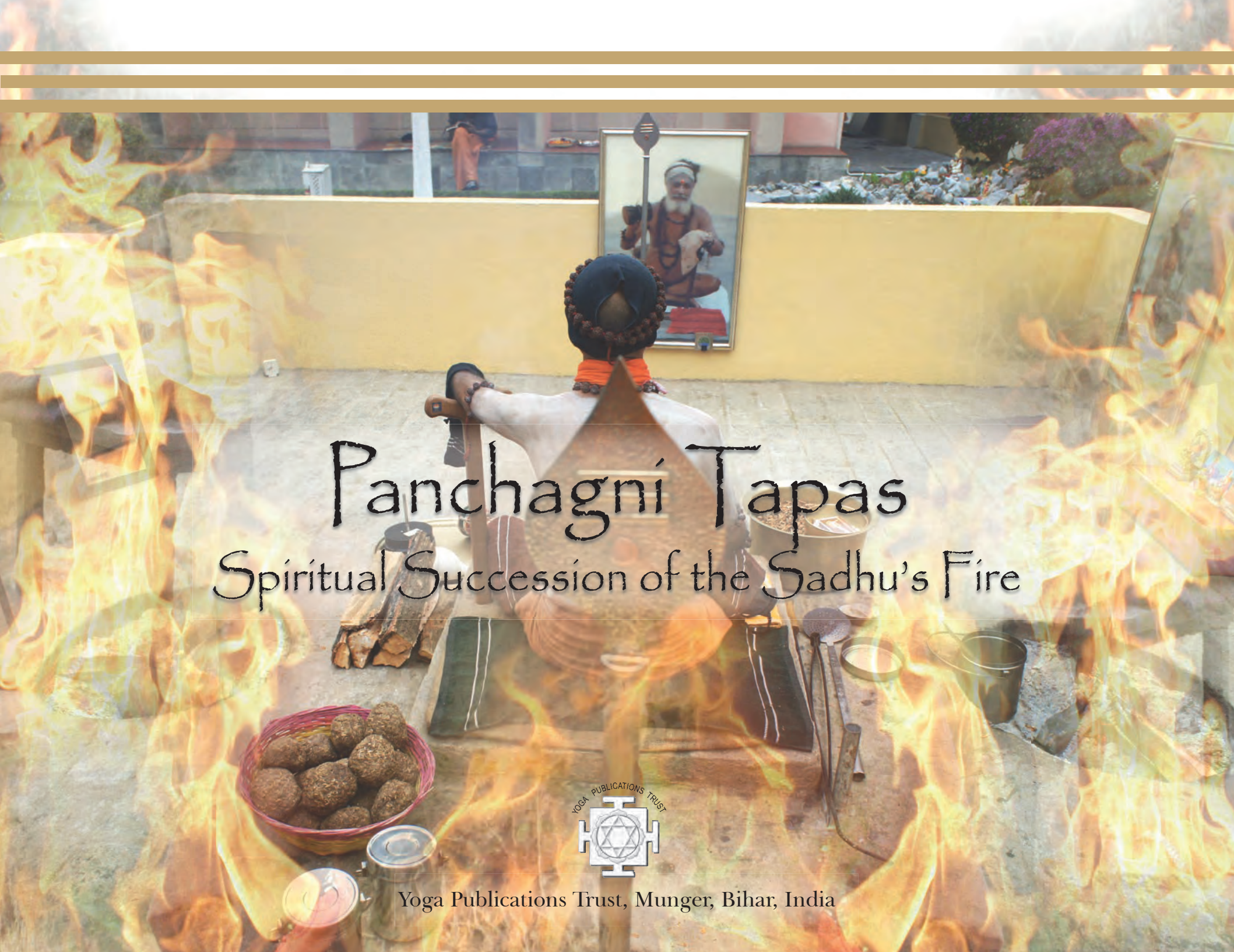
Panchagni Tapas

Spiritual Succession of the Sadhu's Fire



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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In humility
we offer this dedication to
Swami Satyananda Saraswati,
who is inspiring and guiding
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
to live as a sannyasin.



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Just as fire burns bright, so also the sage should be glowing
with the splendour of his knowledge and tapas.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

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Panchagni Tapas

Spiritual Succession of the Sadhu's Fire

The *panchagni tapas*, or austerity of the five fires, is one of the most arduous sadhanas prescribed in the vedic tradition for paramahamsa sannyasins. The purpose is to break human limitations and attain the experience of transcendence, and the tapas requires the sadhaka to sit surrounded by four blazing fires with the fifth fire being the sun above. He or she remains in the panchagni vedi from sunrise until sunset, for six months in the year when the sun arcs through the northern firmament in its most scorching form. The sadhaka enhances the intensity of the tapas gradually, whether by sequentially increasing the number of fires, the number of hours, or the number of months.

During the sadhana, the temperature in the panchagni vedi can rise up to 75 or 80 degrees. It is only with *atma shakti*, inner strength, that the sadhaka is able to endure this extreme condition. He must be able to disconnect from the body completely and maintain awareness of a higher perception with resolute one-pointedness. If he allows the mind to waver, the fires will consume him. In order to sustain this sankalpa of the sadhana, he forfeits travel, has minimal connection with the world, and observes many other strictures.

The panchagni is not a sadhana for the faint-hearted, and across the ages, the most daring and determined of sadhakas have undertaken it. The scriptures record the names of Ma Parvati, Sage Sutikshna and Ma Sharada among those who have performed the sadhana.

In the year 1990, the inspirer and founder of the Bihar School of Yoga, Sri Swami Satyananda, commenced this sadhana in the isolated village of Rikhia. He had always had the extraordinary ability to assimilate and apply ancient techniques, but now he took it to another level by undertaking this most exalted of tapasyas.

It was Swami Satyananda's instruction to his spiritual successor, Swami Niranjanananda, to perform the sadhana and continue the tradition for the wellbeing of all. Accordingly, Swami Niranjan commenced the sadhana in 2013, beginning with one month. He concluded it in 2017, when it went on for five months, from January to June. At the end of the sadhana, from 2014, a special yajna was conducted each year: the Pashupata Astra Yajna. Resurrected from ancient times through extensive research, this yajna was held upon earth after five thousand five hundred years. The last person to perform it in recorded history was Arjuna, prior to the Mahabharata war.

The panchagni is not a tantric sadhana, as many presume, since its origin and purpose lie in the Vedas and not in the tantras. The references to the sadhana are found in the Upanishads such as the *Kathopanishad*, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the practice may be common to both the Vedas and the tantras, since different spiritual traditions in India have continuously borrowed from one another. These include application of *bhasma*, sacred ash, and wearing of rudraksha beads, both containing properties that help protect the sadhaka from the intense heat.

There is a basic difference between tantric sadhana and vedic sadhana. In tantra, the entire focus is on the experience; the sadhaka undergoes an experience and that becomes the focus. In the vedic sadhanas, the knowledge and the awareness is as important as the experience itself. For example, in the practice of the tantric beeja mantras, one is required to focus exclusively on the vibration: if one is able to immerse oneself fully in the vibration, then something will change within. One is not concerned with the meaning of the mantras or the knowledge associated with them; one has to only maintain one's awareness in the experience which

is conveyed through the vibration, and that will bring about the change that one is seeking. The vedic mantras, on the other hand, are like *sankalpas*, resolves. When chanted, the purity of the Sanskrit language itself creates a corresponding vibration, but along with that the intent of what is being said is of paramount importance. The higher the auspiciousness and clarity of this intention, the more one changes oneself and also the environment.

Another important precept of vedic sadhana is that what one experiences should not remain limited to oneself as a sadhaka, it must also reach out to the environment and to everyone around. The vedic life always considered both the person and the environment, and there had to be harmony between the two. The wellbeing of all was the very basis of vedic life. This was Sri Swami Satyananda's philosophy and resolve when he performed the panchagni sadhana and it was also Swami Niranjan's philosophy and resolve when he performed the panchagni sadhana. The sadhanas were not done for any personal gain; they were not done to acquire siddhis or other attainments. They were for the sake of everyone.

The fruit of the sadhana in Rikhia was seen in the form of prosperity, wellbeing and health for the entire village and panchayat of Rikhia, which was previously a neglected, poor and backward region. In the process of achieving this, everyone who went to Rikhia was also taught to connect with the principles of serve, love and give. Swami Satyananda gave something to the people of Rikhia and he also gave something to everyone who went to Rikhia. Similarly, in Swami Niranjan's sadhana, the fruit was distributed through the Pashupata Astra Yajna. The principle behind the yajna was to overcome one's animal nature and connect with the higher awareness, which is seen by Swami Niranjan as the most important need for everyone today. Thus, Swami Satyananda worked for what was the need in his context and Swami Niranjan continues to work for the need in his context. Indeed, during a special initiation that Swami Satyananda imparted to Swami Niranjan in 1995, he said the following words to him:

> *Today, we pray to Devi, to the Goddess, to the Mother, that she may make you into a medium for her expression as she made me. I am now taking the connection wire from here and putting it into you. Now you remain in contact with the Mother and keep everybody else on the right path. Do it in your own way, not in my way.*

Swami Satyananda gave something to everyone by taking himself through the rigorous tapasya of panchagni and Swami Niranjan has done the same. They have shown a path and created an energy field for all to find the strength to follow that path.

This book provides glimpses of Swami Niranjanananda's panchagni tapasya across the five years from 2013 to 2017 and also of the Pashupata Astra Yajna.



The Imparting of Panchagni Vidya: A Story

Once upon a time there lived a sage by the name of Vajashravas. He was known for his erudition and wisdom, and many students came to learn from him from far and wide. He had a precocious young son whose name was Nachiketa.

One day Vajashravas decided to hold a *yajna*, a fire ritual to celebrate the connection between the human and the divine. It was a grand yajna to which thousands came. As part of the yajna daan, Vajashravas decided to give away everything he possessed. He gave away his household items, and then his cattle. First he gave the healthy cows, and then even the sick and undernourished cows. Watching this, his son Nachiketa approached him and said:

Nachiketa: कस्मै माँ दास्यसीति ? To whom will you give me?

This he repeated once, twice, thrice.

Nachiketa: कस्मै माँ दास्यसीति ? To whom will you give me?
Nachiketa: कस्मै माँ दास्यसीति ? To whom will you give me?

Then his father replied with anger:

Vajashravas: मृत्यवे त्वा ददामीति ! To death I shall give you!

Hearing his father's command, Nachiketa travelled to the realm of death: to mrityulok. And there he waited to meet the lord of death, Yamaraj.

There he waited, for he knew that his father, the venerable Vajashravas, had not cursed him to death, but had blessed him to seek the knowledge that no ordinary mortal had sought before . . .

For three days and three nights Nachiketa waited. And each day a new insight dawned on him, each day a new aspect of his existence became illuminated. . .

Finally, the lord of death appeared before him. And finding that the young boy had stood at his gates without food or water for three days and three nights, he asked him:

Yamaraj: किं प्रथमा रात्रिमाश्ना इति ? "What did you eat on the first night?"
Nachiketa: प्रजां त इति । "I partook of society."
Yamaraj: किं द्वितियामिति ? "What about the second night?"
Nachiketa: पशू ँस्त इति । "I partook of the individual."
Yamaraj: किं तृतियामिति ? "What about the third night?"
Nachiketa: साधुकृत्यां त इति । "I partook of ascetic-like action."

Nachiketa's answers were no ordinary replies. He told Yamaraj of the three different states of consciousness that he underwent, which are experienced by the dedicated aspirant on the path of sadhana: transcendence of the external world, transcendence of self-awareness, and becoming established in a higher reality. Pleased with his answers, Yama granted him three boons.

Yamaraja: "O Brahman, my salutations to you. Choose three boons, one in respect of each night."
Nachiketa: "O Death, as the first of the three boons, grant that my father may be cheerful and free from anger and anxiety concerning me.
Yamaraj: तथास्तु ! "So be it."
Nachiketa: "O Death, you know that fire sacrifice which leads to heaven. By that, the heaven seekers attain immortality. Tell it to me. This is my second boon."
Yamaraj: तथास्तु ! "So be it."

Saying this, Yama taught Nachiketa the fire sacrifice known as panchagni sadhana, the austerity of the five fires. He

explained its method and its rituals. Nachiketa, however, was not satisfied with merely learning the procedure, he aspired to know the essence of the sadhana. And therefore he asked Yamaraj:

Nachiketa: "O Death, tell me how does the panchagni sadhana bestow the state of immortality. Tell me what is death and what is immortality. This is my third boon."

Yama tried to deter Nachiketa from seeking this boon, by tempting him with riches and pleasures, for the knowledge that he asked for would become a destructive force if the receiver was undeserving. But Nachiketa was no ordinary seeker and no worldly pleasure could allure him. Impressed by his inner resolve, Yamaraj relented and said:

Yamaraja: All right, Nachiketa, I shall impart to you the knowledge that no ordinary mortal has received until now. Hear from me the essence of the all-powerful panchagni vidya.

The panchagni is the sadhana to attain Shivahood, the consciousness that is beyond the influence of creation and its fetters, the consciousness beyond death.

Death for a sadhaka is remaining bound in the lower nature, where the fires of kama, krodha, mada, moha and lobha continuously burn. And eternal life is attained when the sadhaka faces these fires, perseveres through them to understand them, and ultimately rises above them.

In the sadhana of panchagni, when the sadhaka surrounds himself with five external fires, endures them and transcends their influence, he transcends the five inner fires also. He realizes that he is not the body that feels the heat, he is not the senses that interact with the world of sense objects, he is not the mind that thinks thoughts, he is not the heart that feels emotions, he is not the intellect that applies understanding, he is not his memories, samskaras or karmas, and he is not his ego.

He reaches into his own essence, which cannot be burnt by fire or slayed by weapon – inner or outer. He realizes his cosmic nature, and the light hiding in the cave of his heart assumes the resplendence of a thousand suns. The jiva becomes Shiva.

Today, Nachiketa, I name these fires after you, for you have received their knowledge. Henceforth the panchagni fires will also be called Nachiketa fires.

Nachiketa, Adideva Shiva is the origin and the end of this vidya, he is the one who truly knows what it is. For the panchagni is part of the first teachings that he imparted at the beginning of time, which came to be known as Pashupata vidya.

Shiva has given this knowledge to the best and the bravest across ages. He gave it to his own aradhyaya, Vishnu, when he assumed the form of Sri Krishna on earth.

And I tell thee this, Nachiketa, in Kali Yuga there shall emerge exceptional beings who will meditate on the fires that I have named after thee. To them also this vidya shall be revealed.

In the 1911th year of the Shaka Samvat, a glorious tapasvi shall come to the land where Adishakti in the form of Sati was cremated by Shiva. He shall light the five fires and endure their blaze for nine years. Swami Satyananda Saraswati too shall attain control over Prakriti and ascend to the state of Shivahood.

When he has achieved the pinnacle of spiritual experience, he will transmit all his shakti to his most capable disciple who will emerge as a light unto himself.

Niranjan, the immaculate one, will be born of a sankalpa. He will be the child of truth and purity. He will be born for a purpose and every breath that he exhales will fulfil that purpose. His life will be a consecrated life. The joys and sorrows, the desires and passions, the fears and longings that drive ordinary men and women will come to his feet and turn to ashes. His prana will soar

above them, his white wings gliding on high, in harmony with the wind, sundrops dancing on his shoulders, cirrus clouds chasing his wingtips. He will be an instrument of divinity, a creature of the skies, come to show the wingless that they too can fly.

In the 1934th year of the Shaka Samvat, he too will invoke the five sacred fires. In the grounds sanctified by his own sadhana in the ancient kingdom of Anga, he will raise the flames in the four directions and seat himself amidst them.

For this beloved son, Prakriti herself will bend the laws: she will force the sun to soften and the waters to saturate the air while he tames the flames and realizes the fullness of the self.

When his dharana intensifies, the secrets of nature will become revealed to him and agni will surrender to become bhasma before his gaze. His tejas will shine brighter than the sun above him and his prana will expand beyond the periphery of his tapobhumi. From the panchagni he shall emerge victorious and splendid. Swami Niranjanananda will become the upholder of a tradition.





At the conclusion of his panchagni sadhana, he will revive another vidya imparted by Adiguru Shiva: the Pashupata Astra Yajna. It will become the medium to distribute the attainments of his sadhana to people. The mantras of the yajna will be heard upon earth after five thousand years through his endeavours, transforming everyone who receives their vibration. They will become the vehicle to provide a glimpse of the tapasvi's own experience: the piercing of the three granthis, the psychic knots that tie one down to a lower existence, and his emergence into an expansive consciousness.

The Pashupata astra is Shiva's own weapon, which he wields to master the pashu, the animal within. At the right moment in time, in one sweep its power pierces through tripura, the three demonic cities of iron, silver and gold, signifying the three granthis.

When the tapasvi's tejas has attained the vastness of the ethers, he too is able to wield this weapon. He breaks through every imperfection, and becomes one who is no longer limited by earth or sky. He becomes the knower of the Shiva tattwa, one who commands the dhumra lingam, the bana lingam and the itarkhya lingam, the three states of consciousness on the path of sadhana, and becomes established in the jyotirlingam, the illumined consciousness.

In its splendour, he attains devatwa. He becomes Sadashiva.



2013

The First Year of Panchagni Sadhana

On 14th January 2013, the day of Makar Sankranti, Swami Niranjanananda commenced the panchagni tapas, the sadhana of a paramahamsa sannyasin: the same, fiercely intense sadhana that his guru, Sri Swami Satyananda had undertaken over twenty years earlier in Rikhia.

The panchagni vedi was prepared as per traditional specifications by the Sri Peeth in the Akhara at Munger: the sadhana sthal dedicated by Swami Niranjan to Guru, Shiva and Shakti. Swamiji commenced the sadhana early in the morning of the 14th in the presence of Swami Satyasangananda, Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth, who had arrived from Rikhia for the occasion.

As Swamiji walked in wearing the panchagni attire: black cloth around the head, arms, neck and head adorned by rudraksha beads, all present let out a gasp. Their own Swamiji had become someone beyond them. The Shiva energy had unmistakeably come into him. As the sannyasins chanted the thousand names of the Cosmic Shakti in the form of Katyayani, Swamiji lit the fires. The moment became etched in space.

Sri Swamiji had once said, "I want sannyasins of steel", but the mettle that he chiselled out of his chosen successor was clearly even finer than steel. It was gold, which does not flinch under fire but emerges purer. This became evident when, surrounded by four burning fires on all sides and the blazing sun overhead acting as the fifth, Swamiji set every move and intention to the task of facing the fires that burned within. The ease and grace with which he endured the escalating heat was a reflection of the luminosity of the gold within, and also what was expected of those following the sannyasa tradition right to its end.











From the Panchagni Vedi . . .

Swamiji: Today is the day of Makar Sankranti, the day the panchagni sadhana has been commenced. It has had a most auspicious beginning.

As I reflect on the events that have occurred over the last few days, I see that God's grace, guru's grace, and their hand is behind everything that happens.

Over the last three days, the family of Shiva has been visiting Ganga Darshan; these are the Naga sannyasins, the unclad ones. They came here from the Kumbha Mela, saying, "Something is pulling us here. We have to give the blessings of Kumbha." Eleven of them have come, and eleven is the number of Shiva: *Ekadasha Rudra*, the eleven manifestations of Shiva in the form of Rudra. The Nagas are Rudras; if you mess with them, you are in trouble. Thus it seems that eleven incarnations of Shiva came from the Kumbha Mela to give their blessings.

Not only them. This morning I had gone to the Shivalaya, to seek the blessings of Lord Shiva before the commencement of the panchagni sadhana. On return, I received the news that five Jain sadhavis, who are on a pilgrimage through Bihar, have expressed their desire to stay in the ashram for a day and have a meal with me. As I thought about it, I realized that they also belong to the family of Shiva. There is a sloka in Shiva Purana: *Pancha kanya smarinityam mahapataka nashanam*. It means that if you worship the five kanyas, they liberate you from all sins. So the five sadhavis are coming to bless this process of spiritual development.

Today is also a special occasion as Swami Satsangi is here. Her presence is an enforcement of what is happening here, for Munger and Rikhia are one and the same. The organizations may be different, but the spirit that joins the two is the same. It is a privilege for me that she is here at the commencement of the panchagni sadhana, for she has been a witness and active participant in the panchagni sadhana of Sri Swamiji.





Darshan . . .














































The Blessings of Mother

Swamiji concluded the panchagni sadhana on 11th February, performing it for one month during the first year. The next day, 12th February, Swami Dharmashakti, Sri Swamiji's first disciple and Swamiji's mother, breathed her last after blessing Swamiji for the successful completion of the sadhana. Her departure was not a loss, instead, it enhanced the sanctity and power of the occasion. The Golden Jubilee celebrations had commenced in the ashram at this time with Basant Panchami, and the last rituals performed in Ammaji's honour became part of the auspicious energy that pervaded the whole environment.

Swamiji: Last year, I had told Swami Dharmashakti that as per Sri Swamiji's orders, I would be commencing the panchagni sadhana this year. She gave me her blessings and said, "Whatever you have been told to do by Guruji, you must surely fulfil even though you might risk your life in the process." When I completed my panchagni sadhana on 11th February, I went to her and said, "With your blessings I have completed my panchagni sadhana and am going ahead on the path that my guru's sankalpa has set before me." She blessed me and said, "I have been waiting for this very day." Perhaps she was awaiting the completion of the panchagni.

When I told her that from the next day the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of the ashram would begin, she replied, "My blessings are with all of you for these celebrations. I wish that the grandeur with which this year's Golden Jubilee is being celebrated, fifty years later the centenary will also be celebrated with the same pomp and glory."

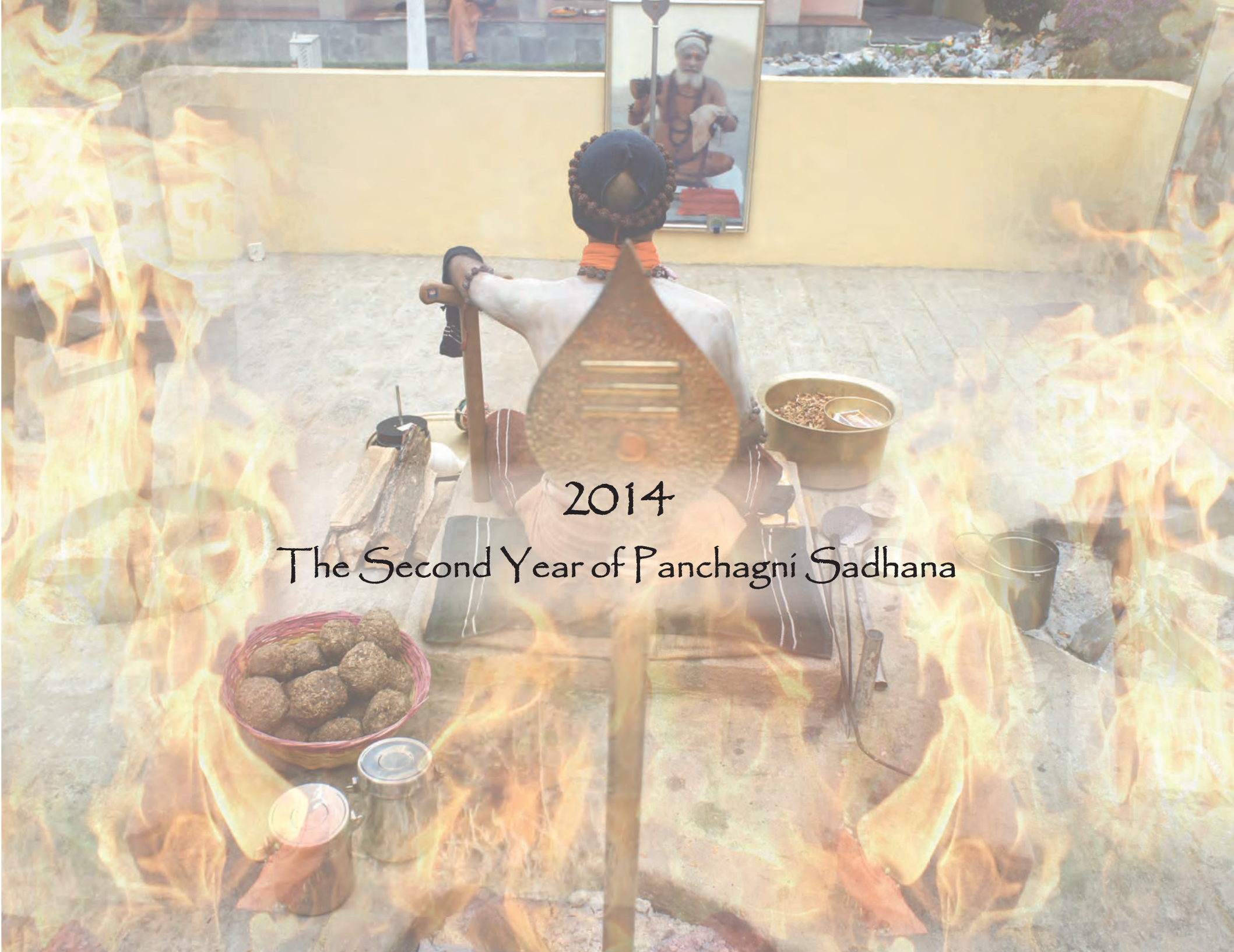
I was with her from about 11 am until 11.45 am, on 12th February. After that I continued with the rest of the Basant Panchami program. Exactly at 12 o'clock I received a phone call. Not a second before or after, but at exactly 12 noon she breathed her last with complete ease.



Swami Dharmashakti was born on Buddha Poornima and at the age of eighty-nine she left this mortal frame. I don't consider her as my mother, but I feel it is a great privilege that Guruji gave this soul an opportunity to be born from the womb of such a saintly and enlightened woman. This is why she is not my mother, but Devi to me, a Devi who ordained the gift of fearlessness in people through the strength of her love and compassion. She was someone who always gave protection and strength to others.

There would be few people on earth as fortunate as me to have a mother like her, to live the grace of such a guru, and to have found such good society like all of you present here. We end with the following sentiments:

Ya devi sarvabhooteshu maatri rupena samsthitaa;
Namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah.



2014

The Second Year of Panchagni Sadhana

The second year of Swami Niranjan's panchagni sadhana received an auspicious start with the consecration of Satyameshwar Mahadeva. This three-foot tall black Shivalingam had mysteriously arrived along with twelve other Shivalingams a few months before the commencement of Swamiji's sadhana, as if re-asserting the presence of Shiva. After resting for some time in the panchagni vedi, just before the commencement of the panchagni sadhana, he travelled to what would become his permanent home: Paduka Darshan, Sannyasa Peeth.

Swamiji's sadhana doubled in duration this year, spanning two months from Makar Sankranti, 14th January, to 14th March. Restriction on access to the Akhara tightened, yet Swamiji generously allowed residents and the three-year sannyasa trainees entry each morning to invoke the benevolent powers of Devi's grace in the form of the peace-bestowing Ma Katyayani havan, while he commenced the panchagni for the day.







Satyameshwar Mahadeva Heralds the Panchagni

Satyameshwar Mahadeva was installed on a special platform overlooking the Ganga at Paduka Darshan with the chanting of specific mantras, havan, abhisheka and pooja in a ceremony lasting three days from 12th to 14th January, by pandits who came from Kashi Vishwanath for this purpose. The new form of Shiva was introduced to everyone by Swamiji.

Swamiji: The spirit of Shiva in this Shivalingam is dedicated to the fulfilment and completion of Sri Swamiji's vision and sankalpa. It is his strength that will now guide the process, the development and growth of the third mission of Sri Swamiji: Sannyasa Peeth. This mahalinga is dedicated to Sri Swamiji, therefore his name will be Satyameshwar Mahadeva, Mahadeva who is the lord of Satyam. Sri Swamiji's ishta devata was Lord Mrityunjaya, and this is a mirror replica of Lord Mrityunjaya. The name also indicates the three qualities that Mahadeva has: Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram, and Satyam is also the name of our Guruji.

Swamiji also describing the process of invocation and installation.

Swamiji: Yesterday it was as if he took birth and the newborn baby was given a bath with eighty-one different herbs, with anna, grains, flowers, fruit and ghee. Then he was put to sleep; the bed was made, the pillow was kept in place, the covers were placed on him, and he slept like a baby. This morning he was woken up after a pooja. You know how children are always cranky when they wake up. A mirror was put before him so he could see his own cranky face, smile at himself and become happy. After that havan was performed for invoking the *shaktis*, powers that are inherent in Shiva. Thereafter the *sthapana*, *pratishtha*, or establishment, was completed. The touch represented the awakening of all the different senses. Finally, prana shakti was invoked in him, and now he is alive, he is awakened. To conclude, I have to tell him his name, by whispering it in his ear. *Hara Hara Satyameshwar!*



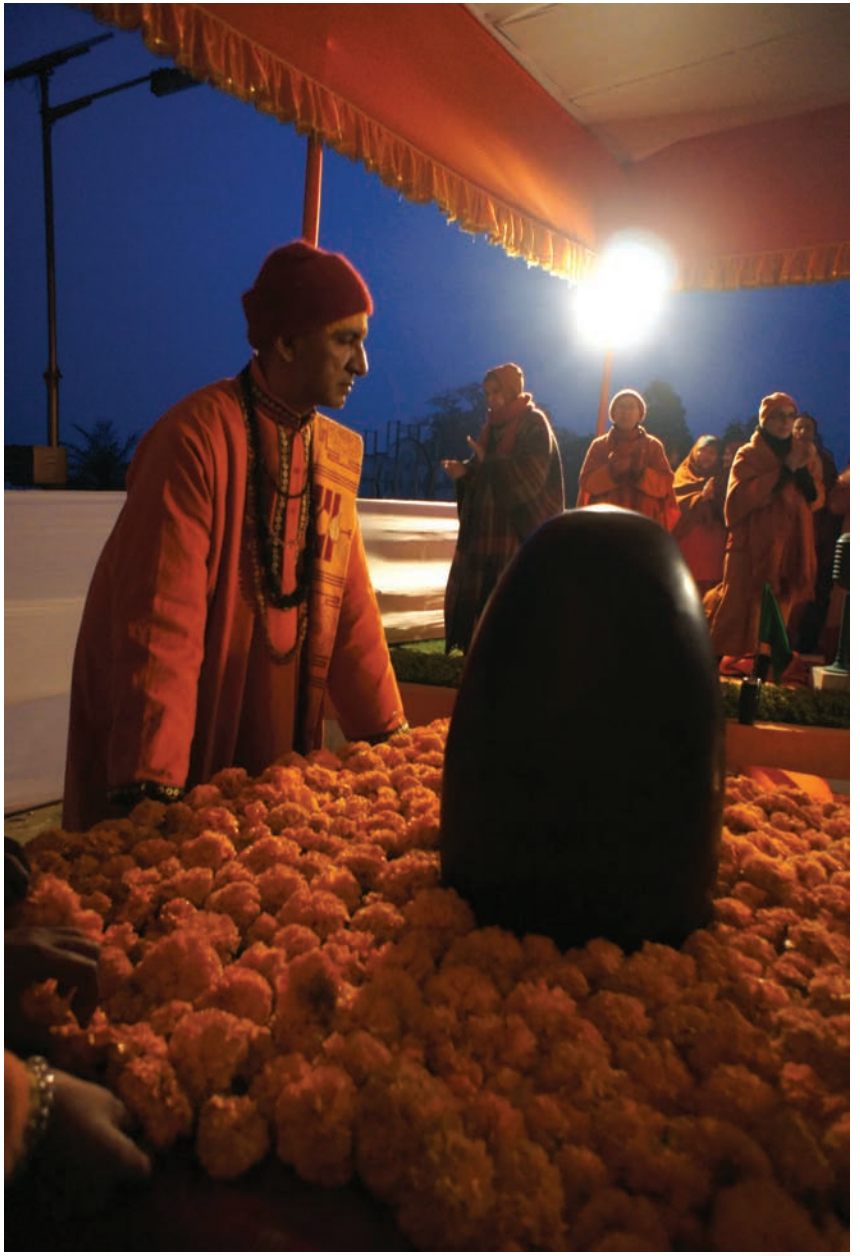












Sharing the Vidya

2014 was the year when, after the conclusion of the panchagni, Swamiji went on a Bharat Yatra to different cities of India. During this tours, many people asked him about the panchagni sadhana and in various satsangs Swamiji described different facets of the sadhana.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Swamiji: The second year of panchagni is over, and it has been a period of intense realizations. The clarity of mind that comes with panchagni is something I cannot explain or translate into words. The mind becomes so sensitive that the world seems to open up like a map in front of you, and you can see everything, every person, every event, every moment of time. It is a natural process of the sadhana.

—13 April 2014

A PARAMAHAMSA'S PATH

Swamiji: My life is that of sannyasa: that is my inheritance and that is the life I am living now. A part of that is the sadhana of panchagni, the sadhana prescribed for paramahamsa sannyasins. In our parampara, that is the tradition that paramahamsas have followed, right from the time of Dattatreya until today. Sick people do sadhana of asana and pranayama to get well, stressed people do sadhana of yoga nidra and meditation to de-stress themselves. In the same manner, sannyasins do the panchagni to merge with the guru tattwa.

The sadhana begins in the month of January and ultimately it should go on until June. However, it has to be built up gradually. I started with one month, this year it was two months, next year it will be three, then four, then five. Each year it will increase by one month. It is a tough sadhana no doubt. 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.

The debilitating effects of the sadhana have to be rectified with extensive yoga practice. When all that smoke is going into your lungs, a five-minute practice of pranayama is not enough; you have to practise pranayama for a couple of hours. Similarly, you need to do other practices to detoxify yourself on a daily basis. That is not easy.

This is a sadhana prescribed for paramahamsa sannyasins and it is said that only those who can control the inner fires can tolerate the heat from the outer fires. I am trying. Wish me luck. If I succeed, it will be your success too.

—11 April 2014





PRAYASCHITTA SADHANA

Swamiji: The panchagni sadhana is based on the concept of *prayaschitta*, atonement: prayaschitta for a sannyasi. Why does a sannyasi have to do prayaschitta? It is because even in the state of surrender, dedication, bhakti and tyaga, many times the thought comes: 'I am doing it.' With that, you lose the awareness that you are only an instrument and somebody else is playing the music. You begin to feel that you are the one who is creating the music.

The bhavana for a sannyasin has to be: *Naham karta, Hari karta, Hari karta hi kevalam* – "I am not the doer. The Lord is the doer and the only doer." Normally the bhavana is: *Aham karta, aham bhokta* – "I am the doer, I am the enjoyer." That is the social mindset, whereas the mindset that a sannyasi should have is: *Naham karta* – "I am not the doer, I am only an instrument which is being played." Saint Francis of Assisi said: 'Make me a channel



of your peace. Let me bring love where there is hate'. His prayer was also to become the medium of the grace.

If that grace comes through, many times the ego also raises the head and says, "Look, how lucky I am that the grace is flowing through me!" The moment you say, "How lucky I am", the ego comes in. You again identify with karma, and the success and failure of karma. The connection with God and guru is cut, and you become the important person: "I have done it."

In the life of a sannyasin, and especially in the life of a paramahamsa, the awareness must be there at all times that 'I am only a medium', like the flute of Krishna. Somebody asked Krishna, "Why do you love the flute so much?" He replied, "Because it is empty from within." If there is obstruction inside the flute, no music can be played on it. The music can only be played by the Divine if there is no obstruction in the bamboo.

If the bhavana of 'I am the doer' comes in, then again you subject yourself to the influences of the 'six friends'. Therefore Sri Swamiji used to say that only those who can manage and control their six friends inside, can manage the fires outside. If the mind is disturbed and dissipated, there is no way you can sit in between the fires for eight hours for months together. In one hour you will be out.

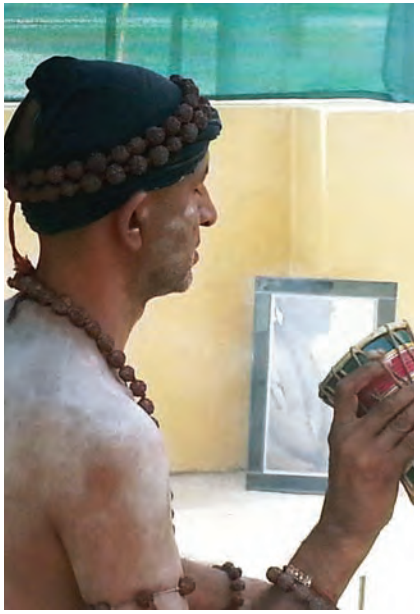
In this way, panchagni has many roles to play. First, awareness that the ego has raised its head and has identified 'me' as the doer. Second, control over the six states of mind. Once you are able to control the six, you become free from karmas. There is *karma kshaya*, dissolution of karma. When there is karma kshaya, you become *videhamukta*, one who is free from the limitations of the body. Then whatever you will, happens.

I am not saying that I will be able to attain all this, just as everybody who practises yoga does not attain samadhi. I don't know whether I have the strength or the ability to achieve that level of excellence in this sadhana, but definitely with the guidance and inspiration of my guru, I have embarked on the path, and with good wishes from all of you maybe I will be able to complete the journey.

—11 April 2014

Darshan . . .





























An Ancient Yajna is Resurrected

The culmination of Swamiji's panchagni sadhana was commemorated this year by holding a powerful yajna resurrected from ancient times: the Pashupata Astra Yajna. This sacred ceremony was last performed 5,500 years ago during the age of Sri Krishna, and was part of Swamiji's ongoing effort to revive India's ancient spiritual practices to meet the needs of the modern world. Pashupata is Lord Shiva in his form as the master of animal instincts, and this yajna is performed to invoke his most fierce and destructive weapon. The Pashupatastra is a weapon of such force that, if aimed properly, it can pierce through the three gunas of tamas, rajas and sattwa. Descriptions of the yajna in the ancient texts are scant, and with only a few references to it in contemporary literature, Swamiji and the acharyas from Varanasi had to piece together the details and determine the best way to proceed with the aradhana.

The result of their experimentation was a magnificent and powerful event unlike anything the ashram had ever experienced. It was uplifting, awe-inspiring and intense, much like the Pashupata mantras themselves, which seemed to pierce straight through the psyche.





Satsangs during Pashupata Astra Yajna

ORIGINS OF PASHUPATA VIDYA

Swamiji: Many thousands of years ago, there lived a rishi named Upamanyu, who had received a special knowledge or *vidya* from Lord Shiva. Sri Krishna went to Rishi Upamanyu to learn this vidya with the aim of begetting a son. Taking him as a disciple, Rishi Upamanyu passed to Sri Krishna the Pashupata vidya, a powerful knowledge received directly from Shiva himself. By practising the Pashupata vidya, Sri Krishna was not only able to have the son he aspired for, but he also attained higher spiritual knowledge and benefits beyond what he set out to attain. This is the power of Pashupata vidya, the teaching of Shiva.

Emergence of spiritual traditions

The original idea of spirituality is always the same: moving from the gross to the spiritual. The journey from the gross and the material towards the spiritual is the basic idea, the foundation, the skeleton. This skeleton is known as the Sanatana dharma or the Bhagavat dharma, the attempt to discover the divine.

In this process of discovery, one person built his own philosophy according to his understanding and experience, another person built her own philosophy according to her experiences and realizations, and in this manner the schools, sects and traditions emerged, with their respective followings. The original skeleton was given the padding of muscles, nerves, ligaments, blood, and all the contents of the body, and the skeleton was filled out. Some made their skeleton fat, some made their skeleton thin. Whatever form became visible in the skeleton of Bhagavat dharma, became the next sect or tradition the future generations adopted. Once the future generations adopted one particular way of thought, again divisions took place. From that skeleton, many clones came out.

Within the one umbrella of Christianity, there are Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Seventh-Day Adventists,



Mormons, Quakers, and so many other groups, yet they have all come from the same person, belief and tradition. At the same time, each one is unique, since some aspect of their theory is different from the others. That is what happened with Bhagavat dharma; it was divided into many forms over the ages.

The Pashupata tradition represents one of the earliest offshoots of the Bhagavat dharma. If you read the book *Origin of Yoga & Pashupata Yoga*, you will find a reference to the Pashupata system. It was like the first evolute of the *moola*, the original, Bhagavat dharma.

Pashupata vidya's association with tantra and Shiva

The Pashupata vidya became associated with tantra, as the identity or the symbology used was the figure of Shiva. However, using the figure of Shiva does not make a tradition either vedic or tantric. Shiva's presence does not make a place tantric; it is just an aspect of understanding and realization that is being applied in a particular manner, in a particular tradition, through a particular form of sadhana.

The symbol of Shiva was used originally in Pashupata vidya as it answers a specific question that comes to the mind of

everyone and which is the basis of the Shiva-Parvati dialogue in the tradition. This question is: How do I understand the suffering and pain in life, and how do I overcome it? Buddha started his quest with questions: What is suffering? From where does pain come? How to eradicate it? The tantras also begin with these three questions: What is suffering? From where does it come? How to end it? When questions are pointed specifically towards suffering, it is an indication that the subject is related to your mundane life, not your spiritual life. That is the *vishada*.

Even the *Bhagavad Gita* begins with the suffering of Arjuna; even your yoga began with suffering of either some part of the body, mind, or some other part of yourself. The back was crook and you came to your yoga class; suffering brought you to yoga. You were stressed out, passing sleepless nights; you came to yoga to learn yoga nidra. That is the reality in the life of everyone. Some are sick mentally, some physically, some emotionally, and others are sick spiritually, so they all come. After all, when will the advancement in medicine take place? Only when there is disease and illness; if there is no disease or illness, what is the use of medication?

Beginning of spiritual journey

The focus of the spiritual traditions and sects is not to make you connect with God at the very beginning. The focus is to make you aware of where you stand in your life, to make you aware of what you are feeling, experiencing and undergoing, of what you call suffering and pain. Then to make you aware of how to overcome these. Once the mind is free from these, it can launch itself in spiritual life. As long as the mind is not free from suffering, then even in the highest states of meditation the deep anxiety inside, about the death of one's long gone friend will suddenly surface one day and there will be depression. This is one example.

Thus, whether it is the tantras or even the vedic philosophy, they begin with a question about suffering. Buddhist philosophy begins with a question about suffering. The *Bhagavad Gita* begins with a question about suffering, and symbolically, Christ also died due to suffering.

Suffering is what you are experiencing, and if the mind is gross then suffering will be permanent. If the mind is resilient and can flow around the obstacles, then suffering will be temporary, as you will be able to move on. Just imagine the Voyager spacecraft travelling through the solar system with all the planets in motion. When there are no planets in close vicinity and there is no gravitational pull, it flies straight. When it comes up beside a planet and there is gravitational pull, it goes through a catapult effect. The gravity captures it, and although the speed releases it, the gravity captures it and pulls it in. It is the same with the mind. The causes of suffering are like gravity pulling the planets in space, and they have to be eradicated. Unless and until that happens, you can be flying and when one of these gravity planets appears you are attracted to that. Due to the swing, your direction is diverted many times. You have to then rectify your direction and come back to the course.

Components of Pashupata vidya

Pashupata is a vidya that has many components. One of the important aspects of this vidya, as told in the *Mahabharata*, is the chanting of the *Shiva Sahasranama* mantras. The *Shiva Sahasranama* is the main ritual of the vidya. Another aspect is the use of *bhasma*, holy ash. Then of course there are the rituals of establishing the lingam, bathing the lingam and worshipping the lingam, which are part of every Shiva worship. Homa or havan is another component; *vrata*, which means following certain injunctions of sadhana, is another one. Mantra is another aspect: the chanting of the names as well as other specific mantras. In this manner there are different components. According to the need or the desire of the sadhaka, a particular form is used to fulfil what is needed. Sri Swamiji has said many times that if things are done in the right manner they give the correct result. If they are not done in the right manner, then do not expect the correct result.

After having learnt this vidya, Sri Krishna gave one of its components, vrata, to his wife. Vrata here does not merely mean not eating; there are other aspects involved too, such as how one

should live, what one should think about, what kind of routine one should follow while fasting, what one should focus on, what one should avoid and shun. Fasting is a process. The common understanding of fasting is 'do not eat'. However, in this context fasting has many connotations. Not eating through the mouth is one, and not consuming through the mind is another.

When Christ went to the mountain, Satan appeared before him and showed him the riches of the world. Do you know what Christ was doing at that time? He was fasting and praying. For forty days he was doing mental shankhaprakshalana. Then came the Devil and showed him the riches and said, "If you stop this, I'll give you all that you see before you." That is also the story of Pashupata.

Process of breaking through knots

Pashupati means lord of animals, controller of animals. All the behaviours of the mind are like animal behaviours. The master who controls and gives *sanyam*, restraint, to nature is Pashupati, and the process that brings you to this level is Pashupata. Pashupata is also the name of the astra, the weapon, of Shiva: a bow and arrow. According to the story, he used this bow and arrow only once in his lifetime and that was to pierce the three cities, *tripura*, which were created by Brahma the creator.

The three cities were akin to flying stations or satellites in space that moved around the globe. One city was made of iron, the second city of silver, and the third city of gold. These cities had to be destroyed, and this could only be done at a specific time, when all the three came into perfect alignment with each other after moving around for many years. This occurred for only a few moments in their rotation. When they were in perfect alignment, Shiva shot the missile, his arrow, and destroyed the three cities. That was the only time he used the weapon of Pashupata.

These three cities in the body are the *granthis*, psychic knots. Brahma granthi at mooladhara level is the satellite made out of iron. Vishnu granthi at the heart is made out of silver, and Rudra granthi at the level of ajna is of gold. For kundalini to ascend, all these three granthis have to be pierced.



Revival of an ancient tradition

Pashupata Astra Yajna is part of the Pashupata vidya, and so far in the Kali Yuga, no one has performed this yajna. We are the first to do so. The last recorded time this particular havan was done was at the time of Krishna, by Arjuna. You could say it was last performed about 5,500 years ago and now, five-and-a-half-thousand years later, it is being revived. That is the importance of this event.

Why is this particular havan being performed here? Today's society must be able to reap the benefits of these ancient teachings for its upliftment, redirection, and for removing the suffering in life. During the 2013 World Yoga Convention the Sudarshan Yajna was performed, which was another lost yajna that has been revived here. In the same manner, this yajna is also being revived. Pray that during the yajna Shiva shoots his arrow from mooladhara and pierces the Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi, so that all the blocks can be removed, and you may become the recipient of the higher grace.

—8 March 2014

PIERCING THE VEILS

When Swamiji first announced his intention to hold the yajna, someone had asked how this yajna would be different. Swamiji replied with a casual smile, "The rituals are the same, only the mantras are different." No one could have imagined at that time that 'different' meant extraordinary, supersonic. As soon as the pandits began to intone the ancient syllables, every spine in the Akhara straightened up, jolted into attention by the sheer force of the explosive sounds. The incessant repetition of the bija mantra *Phat – Om Krishna Pingalaya Phat! Vajrastraya Phat! Brahmastraya Phat! Shivastraya Phat! Aghorastraya Phat! Mahastraya phat! Sarvastraya Phat! Sarvoloka Phat! Sarvadeva Phat! . . . Phat! . . . Phat! . . . Phat! . . . Phat!* – over and over again, created a force that went straight through the psyche. Bypassing the mind, it pierced layer after layer, shattering thought patterns and distractions, until all that remained was stillness and luminosity.







POWER OF ASTRA

The unique aspect of the yajna was that the focus was not the deity but the *astra*, the weapon, of the deity. On the morning of the first day of the yajna, Swamiji placed a bow and a quiver full of arrows before an image inside the yajna vedi of Mount Kailash, the snowy residence of Lord Shiva. For the duration of the yajna, they would represent the physical manifestation of the mighty Pashupata astra, Shiva's most potent weapon. Clad in his panchagni attire – face and torso covered with bhasma, rudraksha beads adorning head, neck and arms – Swamiji was the very image of Rudra as he prostrated before the Lord and invoked the power in the astra. With this significant symbolic gesture, the proceedings of the yajna commenced.



FOUR ASPECTS OF PASHUPATA TRADITION

Swamiji: The Pashupata tradition or the subject of Pashupata conveys the teachings of Lord Shiva. The entire subject of Pashupata, like tantra and yoga, conveys another collection of the teachings of Shiva. Yoga is one collection of Shiva's teachings, tantra is another collection of Shiva's teachings. In the same manner, the entire concept of Pashupata represents yet another collection of Shiva's teachings.

Components of Pashupata tradition

There are four known aspects of the Pashupata system: 1. Pashupata vidya, 2. Pashupata yoga, 3. Pashupata sampradaya or sect, 4. Pashupata astra. These are the four components of the Pashupata thought.

Vidya: The Pashupata vidya, which is the first aspect, is a collection of various disciplines. Practices, systems, ideas, thoughts, lifestyle, morality, ethics, yoga and routines all constitute vidya. It is a collection of teachings put together.

Yoga: The second aspect is yoga; the process, the system, the discipline that helps you remove the dross in life, the *mal*, to attain purity and the state of Shivahood.

Sampradaya: The third aspect is the sect, although the theories of Pashupata existed before the sect came into being. The founder of the Pashupata sect is Sage Lakulisha who is said to be a contemporary of Sri Krishna. Sage Lakulisha eliminated all the rituals from the teachings of the sect and maintained only the internalized sadhanas, inner disciplines and disciplines of lifestyle.

Astra: The fourth aspect is the astra, the weapon. The weapon that people commonly associate with Shiva is the trident, which represents the manifestation and the order maintained by the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. However, the weapon of Shiva is actually the bow and arrow. 'Pinaka' is the name of his bow and 'Pashupata astra' is the name of his arrow.



Shiva used this weapon only once in his lifetime. He shot his arrow only once, and that was to pierce the three *puras*, the three cities. From the tantric perspective these three cities confine the consciousness in one particular experience or dimension. In spiritual life, these three cities represent the granthis within our body: Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi. These granthis are blocks. They are plexuses, and plexuses are a bunch or a collection of nerves, in physiological terms, and of nadis, in pranic terms. Thus a *granthi* is a block; it is a maze, and you are just revolving around in it from one side to another. Your movement in that maze of the granthi is what gives the experience of tamas, rajas or sattwa, and the weapon that allows for the opening of the maze is the Pashupata astra.

Significance of Pashupata astra

The bow and arrow are only symbolic; the real weapon is mantra. If the right upasana is adopted, if the correct technique is used, then these mantras become the tool to liberate one's soul. These mantras are powerful enough to alter and fine-tune the subtle mind. While participating in the yajna, and while the chanting by the pandits is taking place, you can also mentally chant the mantras *Om Namah Shivaya*, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra or your guru mantra continuously, either with the eyes open or with eyes closed, it does not matter. Whatever you do, keep your awareness on the repetition of the mantra.

The mantras of the Pashupata Astra Yajna contain a lot of 'Phat, Phat, Phat, Phat, Phat' and only at the end is one Swaha chanted. The utterance of Swaha indicates completion of one round of the mantra. This mantra is going to be chanted for five days.

Receiving grace

As the yajna progresses, the same procedure of chanting and aradhana will continue, though in a slightly different manner. Today being the commencement of the yajna, much time was dedicated to *sthapana*, invocation, installation, placement, and preparation of the elements involved in this Shiva aradhana. Once the sthapana has been completed and Lord Shiva is invoked, the aradhana can begin. Tomorrow in the morning, pooja and havan will start. Havan of the Pashupata astra mantras will be conducted twice daily. Sahasrarchana of Rudra, of Shiva, will also happen daily. In this manner, different mantras will be chanted over the following days. Along with the program of the pandits, the sannyasins will also be participating with the chanting of Shiva stotras and Shiva mantras.

You are not here to simply witness the event; you are coming as a sadhaka, as a participant in the culmination of this panchagni sadhana and the invocation of the first Pashupata Astra Yajna in the twenty-first century. Therefore, while you are here, participate by mentally chanting the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra or your guru mantra for a few minutes; for five minutes, ten minutes, one mala, ten malas for whatever time you want to spend in doing your mantra. Come here whenever you can and spend as much time as you want. While you are here, just sit, participate, observe, witness, join in, experience, and become the recipient of the divine grace.

If you want to benefit from this event, always keep a smile, not only on your lips, but in your heart and in your mind also. If you can do that, you will be a better recipient of whatever this yajna has to give you. If you come with a limited, restricted, negative mind and thoughts, you will not be the efficient receiver of the fruits of this yajna. It is your choice.

—9 March 2014

FLOWERING OF A DISCIPLE



Every yajna must have a *yajaman*, a host or patron whose generosity allows the event to take place. In this case the yajaman was nine-year-old Saptarishi Goenka, the youngest member of the Goenka family, whose uncompromising devotion to Sri Swamiji can be traced back to the earliest years of his mission. Sri Swamiji himself gave the boy his extraordinary name. Its meaning, said Swamiji, would reveal itself with the passage of time.

On the very first day of the yajna, Saptarishi received his upanayan ceremony, a powerful samskara that signals a boy's entry into adulthood. With this ritual it became clear that the seed of guru's sankalpa had finally begun to sprout. Through the course of the ceremony, which went on for several hours, he performed his role with the grace and worshipful respect of one who is keenly aware of the gravity of his duties. With this rite of passage it seemed he embodied a new level of awareness and maturity that belied his childlike nature. It was a most auspicious way to begin the yajna, the blessings of guru raining on everyone present as they watched his grace flower in the young disciple.

REVIVAL OF AN ANCIENT SPIRITUAL CULTURE

Swamiji: The commencement of this particular yajna has an interesting story. Sri Swami Satyananda had always made it clear that his inheritance to me was of sannyasa, the dharma of sannyasa that he followed in his life and inherited from his guru, Sri Swami Sivananda. He said, "I don't mind whether others follow the sannyasa dharma or not, because they don't know what sannyasa is, but I would wish you as my successor to inherit my dharma of sannyasa. Live that, experience that, and propagate that." He then gave instructions for Sannyasa Peeth and instructions on how to live sannyasa life. Until last year, the focus was on the organization of the World Yoga Convention and celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga. During the World Yoga Convention, a thought came to pay a fitting tribute to BSY, which is the carrier and the conductor of Sri Swamiji's yogic message and vision. To honour BSY in its Golden Jubilee, a unique and special havan of Maha Sudarshan Homa was conducted by the acharyas and pandits of Varanasi.

Upholders of a spiritual culture

The science, the subject, the theory, the practice and the understanding of the Maha Sudarshan Homa is lost to modern society. Thus, when that homa was conducted here during the World Yoga Convention, deep in my heart I felt that some ancient tradition was being re-enacted, revived and once again known to humanity. This brought to memory one of Sri Swamiji's instructions: a sannyasin is the ambassador of the spiritual culture, not just a teacher of physical exercises, not just a philosopher of some abstract spiritual theory. A sannyasin is connected with culture. A sannyasin has to live and revive that culture in life and become a living example of a spiritual culture.

In this tradition, the ancient sages who propagated their wisdom in the past did not only philosophize about a subject. They also gave definite guidelines, instructions, techniques, disciplines



and practices to beautify nature, the external nature, and one's own internal nature and spiritual nature. The outer, the inner and the spiritual. The vidya they gave was for the betterment and the upliftment of all humanity and not just for their own particular tribe or sect. Those vidyas that they lived, propagated and discovered, are today lost to humanity. Can the attempt be made to again understand the vidyas that our ancestors, the rishis and the seers, have given to all for the betterment of individual life, the community, society, and the world as a whole?

This Pashupata Astra Yajna is the result of that thinking. The answer is yes, make the effort. Make the attempt to revive the ancient spiritual culture and do not confine yourself to a contained physical awareness of only hatha yoga, raja yoga, dhyana, kundalini and chakra. Become a part of the whole spiritual culture that once permeated and gave direction to the entire human civilization.

Pashupati: lord of tamoguna

The Pashupata Astra Yajna being conducted here is one of the most ancient homas, belonging to what is possibly the first defined

philosophy of humanity. There may have been many fractured thoughts; however, the first proper and correct collection of these fractured thoughts, which became a philosophy, is the subject of Pashupata, and Pashupata is a subject of Shiva. Shiva is known as Pashupati; *pashu* means animal, and *pati* means lord or master. Everything that is created and visible, everything that is composed of the five grosser elements, the gross pranas and the gross consciousness, is subject to prakriti. Prakriti, which has form, is tamoguni. Our body is tamoguni, our life is tamoguni and nature is tamoguni. The tree is tamoguni, the building is tamoguni, the flower is tamoguni. Everything that has a form, a shape, an identity, an attribute, a quality, a nature, a behaviour and a response is tamoguni.

That which is not formed and remains in its pure luminous state is *sattwaguna*. The unformed, luminous self is sattwaguna, and the formed, contained, defined self is *tamoguna*. Shiva is the lord of tamoguna. He is the master who can liberate the animal tendency, who can free the spirit from the clutches of the animal tendencies of tamoguna and elevate the soul to realize its own transcendental nature. Therefore, Shiva is Pashupati.

In order to cut asunder the bondages that hold the individual bound to the gross plane, a weapon is needed. A weapon is always used to alter, cut or destroy something. Different attitudes are also used as weapons to change something. Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (15:3) talks of *asanga astra*, the weapon of detachment, used to cut the ties of attachment. Similarly, when you are cultivating pratipaksha bhavana within your mind, it is an astra: an effort to change, alter, cut that which you experience as restricting, limiting and negative at a particular moment in time.

Pashupata astra is a weapon used to cut those areas of your nature, mind, consciousness and energy that hold you down to this gross dimension and experience of the senses, the desires and the ego. These are the granthis in the body: Brahma granthi, representing the dimension of the senses; Vishnu granthi, representing the dimension of inherent desires; and Shiva or Rudra granthi, the identity of self. These three *granthis*, or psychic



knots, hold the human awareness down to the gross plane. With the invocation of the power of the Pashupata astra, by chanting the mantras and merging with the vibration of the mantras, you can experience the power of this weapon within you and cut all that is negative, detrimental and destructive to your spiritual life.

Each day, before the commencement of the yajna, the protection of Adideva Mahadeva shall be invoked by chanting the *Shiva Kavacham* to ensure that our faults and limitations are ignored, and our intentions, devotion and faith are accepted.

—10 March 2014

FIVE PHENOMENAL DAYS

For five magical days, the yajna continued within the sacred precincts of Akhara. The daily activities of the yajna started at sunrise with the Katyayani havan, to invoke Devi's benevolent grace and guidance. After a short break all returned to the Akhara for worship and aradhana that continued nonstop until sunset.

The sound of the pandits' voices intoning the Vedic Shanti Mantra signalled the commencement of the yajna proceedings every day. Offerings were made at the peeths dedicated to Guru, Sri Vyasa, Lord Shiva, Swami Sivananda, Sri, Tulsi and Shakti, to invoke their blessings for a successful yajna. At the yajna vedi, mandapa pooja was performed, to worship the yajna deities and request their constant presence during the five-day event. Finally, the bow and quiver representing the Pashupata astra received oblations and prayers.

The Dwadasha Jyotirlingams, newly installed in their glistening blue sea of bliss received daily sringara of fresh flowers and tripunda. Before beginning the havan each day, Swamiji chanted the Shiva







Kavacham. This prayer invoked the protection and forgiveness of Ashutosh Mahadeva for any shortcomings, or flaws that might occur during the resurrection event. Once the havan fire was lit, Swamiji offered obeisance to the Divine Mother by chanting the Devi Kavach. With this prayer the protection of Shakti was invoked.

The havan itself was performed by sixteen expert pandits and acharyas from Varanasi. Joining them was a resident sannyasin, selected by Swamiji to represent him during the yajna proceedings. *Sahasrarchana*, a thousand offerings, was performed every afternoon. Pandits, sannyasins and yajna participants joined in to chant the *Shiva Sahasranamavali*, the one thousand names of Lord Shiva. At the same time flowers and a thousand fresh bael leaves were offered to Yogeshwar, the black Shivalingam who resides in Shiva Peeth.

The afternoon havan was followed by the chanting of the *Rudra Swahakara*. Each day came to an end with the chanting of Shiva stotrams and mantras by sannyasins, followed by arati in the vedi. A final offering was made to all the deities and presiding forces of Akhara, thanking them for their grace and blessings during the day.







AIM OF PASHUPATA DARSHANA



Swamiji: Why is the Pashupata Astra Yajna conducted and what is the symbology of Shiva? One of the names of Shiva is Pashupati. *Pashu* means animal, and *pati* means master, and Shiva is the master of the animal *vritti*, the animal tendency, the animal samskaras, the animal karmas. When animals are left alone they are wild; when they are controlled, they become subdued and pacified, and follow the direction of the master. In the same manner, the element of animalistic tendency within each one is the pashu, and the untainted consciousness, which is able to remove the taint of the pashu nature, is Pashupati.

Recognizing one's pashuta

Mythology tells of a time when a group of beings called asuras, the demonical ones, created three satellite stations: one made out of iron, one made out of silver and one made out of gold. These were weapon satellites; they would circumvent the globe and attack the peaceful society down below. One day the devas came to Shiva and said, "You have to destroy these three *puras*, cities; they are creating havoc."

Shiva is not only a god; he is also the wisdom of consciousness, *chit*. He used this opportunity to indicate certain traits of human nature to the so-called pious, virtuous and enlightened devas. What did Shiva say to make them aware of this idea, this concept, this state, which is an integral part of their existence? Shiva said to the devas, "Before I can change, alter, destroy or kill anything or anyone, I need to become the master of the animal tendencies that exist. Therefore, you gods become animals first and I will control you; I will become your master, and only then will I be able to subdue the asuras and destroy the cities."

This is the story. Now, if you look closer at the story, you will find the teachings of the Pashupata darshana contained within it. People always see the evil existing outside of themselves and they do not acknowledge that what they are calling 'demonic' also contains grains of virtue. The asuras may have been labelled as demonic by the so-called elite society, yet their demonism did not mean that they were devoid of virtues. Similarly, the devas, who considered themselves to be elite, pious and enlightened, were also tainted in part by tamas.

If you read the shastras, the scriptures, you will discover that pashu or animalistic tendencies represent tamoguna, whereas the asura tendencies represent rajoguna. Therefore, Shiva is indicating something else here, something beyond the story. He is saying, "You want me to control rajoguna, but before I can control rajoguna, I have to master and control tamoguna. Therefore, you have to acknowledge the grains of tamoguna in yourself." Shiva acknowledges that the asuras must be destroyed; however, before he can do that he requires that the devas become animals to discover the idea that: 'We believe that we are good, but recognize that we too contain seeds of demonism within us. If we invoke Sadashiva, if we invoke Rudra, he will make us see this truth before he sets out to destroy the evil outside of us.'

Remember that for the devas to become pashus, the pashu tattwa must have been there within them in the form of tamoguna. After

all, tamoguna represents the *pashuta*, the animalistic tendency, and sattwaguna represents the enlightened tendency. Therefore, even though the devas are established in sattwa, they still have grains of tamoguna and rajoguna within them. Likewise, the demons are established in rajas, but they also contain grains of tamas and sattwa.

Attaining purity

Shiva represents the purity that surpasses even the purity of the devas, since devas are still subject in part to rajas and tamas while Shiva is *trigunatita*, free from the experiences and expressions of tamas, rajas and sattwa.

What then are the means to recognize the animalistic tendency? Understand all those conditions and states of mind that lead to delusion, wrong action and wrong behaviour, and recognize these pashus of life in the form of *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*: desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride or arrogance, and jealousy. These are the six 'friends', the six destructive qualities that you live with all your life, and you turn them into friends by allowing their expression in your life. It is these friends that turn you into an animal, and they are the qualities that Shiva must master.

The basic teaching of Pashupata tantra is that one must recognize the beauty and the virtue in others and honour it, respect it and be happy about it. It is this teaching that I have also been emphasizing this year. One must recognize the shortcomings, the demonical, the limiting, the destructive and the separating qualities within one's own self, and then make the effort to transform and transcend it. When there is balance between honouring the virtue and transcending the non-virtuous, purity is attained, and in that purity Shiva is realized.

Invoking Shakti in the astra

The yajna being witnessed here as part of the panchagni anushthana is an ancient one. Although it is the worship of Shiva, the worship of Shiva is incomplete without the worship and invocation of Shakti. So, although the guise is that of Pashupata astra, the invocation is of both. You have to remember who Shiva is and who Shakti is.

The story says that Shiva took up the bow and arrow called Pashupata astra to pierce through the three cities. This astra, this missile, represents Shakti, who symbolizes power and strength. The nature of Shiva is not shakti or power, the nature of Shiva is chit, sentient awareness. Therefore, from where did this power come in the sentient awareness, if not through the invocation of Shakti? When that power of sentient awareness has to transform and transcend the limitations of pashuta, the animalistic tendencies of tamoguna; *asurya vritti*, the demonical tendencies of rajoguna; and the *deva vritti*, the divine expression of sattwaguna, this sentient awareness requires the strength of Shakti to pierce and come to its own state of purity and effulgence. That is then the invocation and the symbology of using the bow and arrow.

Here the bow and arrow represents Shakti, and Shiva or consciousness is the wielder of that Shakti. To pierce the three granthis, Shiva has to invoke the Adi Shakti, the first, the primary Shakti, and concentrate the power of Adi Shakti at the tip of the arrow. He must focus and bring together all the energy, all the shakti, to one central point so that it becomes an atomic shakti, the *sukshma* or subtle shakti.

When that sukshma shakti pierces through the three puras, the three citadels, the three satellites, there is no resistance. In its atomic structure it is able to pass through any solid state, and nothing can stop it. That is the nature of Adi Shakti. Adi Shakti cannot be stopped by anything. Other shaktis can be stopped; other modifications, other evolutes of Shakti can be managed, altered, stopped or contained, but not Adi Shakti.

The weapon symbolizes the use of that Adi Shakti. Whether it be Narayana, Brahma or Shiva, whether they use a trident, a bow and arrow or a sword or spear, all these weapons in the hands of the devas represent the invocation and the application of the Cosmic Power. It is through the invocation of the Cosmic Power that the cosmic conditions can be altered.

Tamoguna is a cosmic condition, rajoguna is a cosmic condition and sattwaguna is also a cosmic condition. They exist everywhere. The whole of prakriti is subject to the three gunas, both in its

visible forms and in its non-visible forms: the gases, particles of light, gamma rays and X-rays, and many other waves and rays that cannot be seen, yet exist. What is visible and what is not visible, both constitute aspects of prakriti, as they create a specific and particular condition in existence, in life, in creation, in manifestation. This Adi Shakti is always used to transform, to alter, to cut an existing state, conditioning or dimension of experience. Pashupata Astra Yajna is the invocation of Adi Shakti in the form of this bow and arrow to overcome the pashu within each individual.

The Shaivite Krishna

Sri Krishna, who is considered to be the poorna avatara and the founder or propagator of the Vaishnava thought, was in reality a Shaivite, as he practised Pashupata darshana. He invoked Shiva, who was his deity, so the Vaishnava Krishna is in reality a Shaivite Krishna. Why did Sri Krishna invoke the power of Shiva? After all, he was an avatara, the epitome of the transcendental nature, of the transcendental Higher Self, and he could have easily invoked the shakti of Narayana since he was an avatara of Narayana. Why did he choose to invoke the power of Shiva and not invoke the power of Narayana?

The answer is simple. God does not manifest on earth to establish a religion, He comes to this earth to establish a precedence. God has never come to earth to establish a religion. No. God has always come to establish a precedence, and whatever precedence the Lord has created becomes dharma. What Sri Krishna speaks of in the *Bhagavad Gita* is dharma; the rules, the disciplines and the culture of life to awaken the virtues in life. What Rama has said has become a teaching to transform the limited nature of the self. It is another matter that people made those teachings into a religion and a sect later on. These luminaries did not come to establish or to found a religion, they came to put man on the track of righteousness.



Beyond self-identity

Even Sri Krishna had to transcend that vestige or the grain of self-identity. Tamas is not only a negative act, tamas is containment and conditioning, and an embodied spirit is always tamasic by nature, and is surrounded by tamas. It is the condition of human existence to be blocked from the transcendental experience in one form or another. Brahma granthi, for example, represents the activity of the senses, the karmendriyas and jnanendriyas. Vishnu granthi represents the activity of the mind: the *mahat*, the total mind, the greater mind, the *antahkarana*. Rudra granthi represents the identity of 'I am that I am' or *Aham Brahmasmi*.

That 'aham' is individual identity. It is not *sarvam*, whole, entire and referring to all, no. It is *aham*, or 'I'. When you say 'aham' you are identifying one particular item, one entity. You are not saying sarvam, you are saying aham, and that aham is the identity. When you say *asmi*, 'I am', you are acknowledging the existence of that identity, that 'I' as 'I am'. That is the effect of Rudra granthi.

This identity is a tamasic identity as it is containment, conditioning. I recognize myself as 'I am' or asmi. Even if I become Brahmasmi, the idea is aham or I. Where there is 'I', there is self-awareness, and even this must be transcended. Krishna as an embodied spirit, which is tamasic and surrounded by tamas, had to go through this. It is the realization of this effulgence and luminosity of consciousness that is the ultimate aim of the Pashupata darshana.

—11 March 2014

ENERGY FIELD OF DHARANA

Swamiji's one instruction to every resident, visitor and guest of the yajna was to maintain a constant flow of japa throughout the program. This, he explained, would ensure that an air of intense *dharana*, or concentration, pervaded the entire Akhara. Giving the options of *Om Namah Shivaya*, Mahamrityunjaya mantra, or one's guru mantra, he left it up to the individual to choose which mantra to chant, but made it clear that everyone was expected to follow the same guiding principle: "Whatever you do, keep your awareness on the repetition of the mantra."

During the afternoon sessions, Swamiji placed a select group of sannyasins at specific 'power spots' throughout the grounds of the Akhara to perform an exceptional anusthana of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, Lord Shiva's mantra to combat death, disease and limitations of the body. It started on the first day of the yajna with four sannyasins performing japa of five malas. By the fourth day there were thirty-two sannyasins, each performing nine malas of the mantra. Every day they sat under the searing midday sun for well over two hours, even as the constant roar of the pandits' powerful chanting echoed from the vedi. Such is guru's grace that not a single person stirred from their state of perfect stillness until the very last bead was turned.













IN THE EMBRACE OF A SANKALPA

In the mornings, Swamiji remained confined within the panchagni vedi and performed his anushthanas, while the oblations and invocations continued in the yajna vedi right beside him. Allowing all to witness and participate in what is a deeply personal sadhana, Swamiji appeared to be enfolding all of humanity in the embrace of a sannyasin's loftiest sankalpa: "O Bhikku, keep moving for many." The parikrama during these hours was a particularly moving experience, and an extraordinary act of grace. By offering darshan from within the panchagni itself, Swamiji allowed participants to be enveloped in the aura of a yogi engrossed in the highest of sadhanas.

Swami Satsangi joined the aradhana on the second day, raising the pitch of the yajna in her own unique way by performing abhisheka of a white Shivalingam. Seated just to the north of the vedi, and in view of Swamiji from his panchagni, she was the presence of Shakti that cooled the winds of Shiva's fiery sadhana.

In the afternoons, Swamiji and Swami Satsangi observed the proceedings from their place beside Guru Peeth. The flower-laden padukas of Sri Swamiji rested on a pedestal between them as a constant reminder of his eternal presence in our lives. From here, at the end of each aradhana, Swamiji gave insightful satsangs.



PEAK OF SYNCHRONICITY

It is a long-standing tradition in Ganga Darshan to chant the *Bhagavad Gita* every Ekadashi. A more recent ashram tradition is the chanting of the entire *Ramcharitamanas* by the members of the Ramayan Mandali on the 12th of every month to commemorate the life of Swami Dharmashakti, or Ammaji, Sri Swamiji's first disciple and the beloved mother of Swami Niranjan.

It seemed Lord Narayana was determined to make his presence known at the yajna, for the fourth day of the event fell on the 12th of March, which also happened to be the holy day of Ekadashi. With this synchronous turn of events, Sri Rama, Lord Krishna, and Ammaji were all able to attend the yajna and extend their blessings and love to all.

The atmosphere on this day was electric, as the names of the Lord resounded from every corner of the ashram and became concentrated in the Akhara. The mantra chanting of the pandits on the vedi acquired such a pitch and velocity on this day that the Pashupata astra seemed to strike the final barrier between mind and pure consciousness, transporting everyone present to a space of luminosity they had never before visited.











THE POWER OF SHIVA'S ASTRA

Swamiji: This yajna has been beautiful and inspirational, and befitting at the time of the culmination of panchagni. Panchagni is a sadhana; it is a higher vedic sadhana and tantric sadhana, both. It finds mention both in the *agamas*, the tantric literatures, and in the *nigamas*, the vedic literatures. It finds mention in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as well as in the Pashupata shastras.

The Pashupata darshan indicates the state of consciousness that a yogi, a spiritual aspirant, must have: control over the animalistic tendencies of life. Without this control, without this governance over the animalistic tendencies, one cannot attain the luminosity of Self. That is the whole idea of the Pashupata darshana. The last thing to go before you attain illumination is the self-awareness, identity of the self.

Ego removal: key to higher knowledge

The only recipient of the Pashupata astra in history is Arjuna. Shiva has never given this weapon to anybody except Arjuna; however, before he gave it to Arjuna, he ensured that Arjuna's ego had been removed. To kill Arjuna's ego, Shiva took the form of Kirata, a tribal hunter, and fought with Arjuna. Now, Arjuna believed he himself was the best warrior in all the three realms. When he was defeated by Kirata, he realized that he was standing before someone greater than him. His pride was humbled and in this way Shiva eliminated the ego of Arjuna. Only when Arjuna transcended his ego and became humble before the eternal divine presence did Shiva give him the secret of this astra to pierce the three cities.

What is the significance of this story? That without humility, without surrendering the ego, an aspirant cannot receive higher knowledge. The story says that Arjuna had been performing severe austerities in the forest with the

aim of attaining the knowledge, yet those austerities were of no avail if he continued to hold on to his ego. In his kindness, Shiva enacted an episode so Arjuna's ego was removed and he could become fit to receive the astra.

A weapon that cannot harm

While giving the Pashupata astra to him, Shiva said to Arjuna, "This astra is so powerful that it should never be used against weak people. It should only ever be used against those who are equally powerful, if not more powerful, than the weapon." He gave the knowledge, yet he also gave restrictions for its use: everybody in the world is powerless before the Pashupata astra, therefore it can never be fired.

Pashupata astra is the symbol of the highest power of Shiva, and there is no power comparable to the highest power of Shiva or above the highest power of Shiva. Thus, the missile can never be used, as the rule is that it cannot be used against weaker powers. You do not use a cannonball to kill a mosquito, since the purpose of a cannonball is different; it cannot be used to kill a mosquito. In the same manner, the shakti that one is able to generate through Pashupata astra is used to attain the highest inner purity, and never to harm anyone else.

When people think of a missile, they think it is always to harm somebody. No. This missile cannot be used to harm anyone, this shakti, this power cannot be used to harm anyone; rather, it aids in the mastery of the animalistic tendencies to remove the vestiges and grains of tamas and rajas from the body of sattwa. The purpose and function of the Pashupata astra is to make sattwa even more effulgent and radiant, so that you become that transcendental self without any distinction and division of the gunas or even of time, space and object. You become the universal being.

—12 March 2014



THE FINAL ARROW

On the evening of the fourth day, the final oblations were poured into the yajna fire and the last mantras were uttered signifying the culmination of the yajna. For a few precious moments the entire Akhara seemed to be suspended in an awesome silence even as the ethers continued to vibrate with the echo of the thunderous chanting. Swamiji entered the yajna vedi and picked up the bow and arrow from its place before Mount Kailash and walked to Shiva Peeth. Standing by the glass altar, he assumed a master archer's stance and appeared ready to destroy Tripura once and for all. There was such electricity in the twilight air that it felt as if the celestial beings from all realms had gathered within the space of the Akhara to witness this moment and shower their blessings upon the veritable Rudra. With unmatched elegance Swamiji strung the bow and released the arrow into the darkening sky. What he was aiming for, no one present knew. Certainly, the arrow flew beyond anyone's expectations, through the open spaces, past all conceivable obstacles. It was the final piercing of the veil.

AN OFFERING TO GURU

Swamiji: Today we are concluding our havan of the Pashupata astra mantras, which is a part of the tradition of Pashupata darshana. Although 'darshana' is generally translated as philosophy, in relation to Pashupata darshana it means the vision of Pashupata, and not philosophy.

Who is Pashupati? It is Shiva, the lord of the lower tendencies. It is through his *anugraha*, grace, that the lower tendencies can be transformed, thus paving the path for higher realizations in life. Therefore, Shiva is Pashupati. This vision of Pashupati, the vision of Shiva, which relates to the journey of human life from nescience to knowledge, from *avidya* to *vidya*, is what is embodied in Pashupata darshana.

Four aspects of Pashupata vision

Pashupata darshana has four aspects: vidya, yoga, sampradaya and astra. The Pashupata vidya defines the aim, the path, the process and the disciplines. It is the aspect that gives the knowledge and understanding of the *jiva*, the individual; of *samsara*, the created universe; and of Shiva as being the highest element, the *Paramtattwa*.

The second aspect of this vision of Shiva is Pashupata yoga. These yogas are higher yogas that begin when the kundalini is awakened. There are different grades of yoga. The first level of yoga encompasses the ones that you practise in your daily life: hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, and so on. Everybody across the globe, in one way or the other, practises one of these yogas. The second range of yoga is what people call kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, laya yoga, nada yoga, mantra yoga, and so on. This is the psychic yoga, the internal yoga, leading to greater awareness, concentration and meditative contemplation of the inner self. The third aspect of yoga is what is defined in the Pashupata yoga, which begins after kundalini yoga and kriya yoga have been perfected. There are five yogas at this level, which are called mantra yoga, sparsha yoga, bhava yoga, abhava yoga and maha yoga. Mantra yoga here is not the kind of mantra practice



that you do; it is a higher form of sadhana, involving mastery of prana. In fact, all these are higher practices, culminating in maha yoga, which indicates the final merger with Shiva consciousness. This is the process of yoga sadhana in Pashupata yoga.

The third aspect of Pashupata darshan is the Pashupata sampradaya. *Sampradaya* means a tradition or sect that follows a specific routine, way of thinking, discipline, belief, worship, contemplation, mantra, and lifestyle. All these elements become a part of the sampradaya teachings, the sectarian teachings.

The fourth aspect is the *astra*, the weapon. This weapon is the highest weapon as it represents the Shiva tattwa in its pure essence. Since there is no other strength comparable to that pure essence of the Shiva tattwa, there is no comparable weapon to counteract the Pashupata astra. This astra was given to Arjuna by Shiva for the Mahabharata, but with one condition: that even in the war it should not be used. Therefore, although he possessed the weapon, it was like Arjuna did not receive it at all. Even in dire need he did not ever use it. He used the Brahmastra, he

counteracted the missiles shot at him with the Brahmastra, but he did not use Pashupata astra. No, it was prohibited.

If this astra is not used for warfare, killing or destruction, then what is it used for? It is used to break through the barriers of tamas, rajas and sattwa to attain transcendental purity and luminosity. Therefore, it is appropriate that this astra, this force, this power, is being invoked here. Through its invocation, one can cultivate and bring to life a spiritual tradition that can help the individual realize the true identity of the Higher Self.

Reviving sannyasa for humanity

The Pashupata Astra Yajna is part of the mandate and the mission given by Sri Swamiji. When Sri Swamiji gave the vision for the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth, he told Swami Satsangi and myself, "You may have any mission or institution, you may be mangalacharya, peethacharya, peethadhishwari or hold any other title, yet your real identity is that of sannyasa. That is what you have received from me and this is the inheritance that I am giving to both of you." Sri Swamiji has acknowledged this. People should know and realize this, for it is the tradition of sannyasa and the culture of the rishis that has to be revived for the survival of humanity.

Sri Swamiji has given the complete blueprint to attain this mandate. Many times the thought comes, 'What a farsighted vision Sri Swamiji had!' He was a true rishi of the age. People say Sri Swamiji educated me through yoga nidra, but what did he teach? History? Geography? Math? Science? Or did he give samskaras to live in my life, and with those samskaras help humanity to maintain traditions that benefit the individual for his or her own upliftment and development? I do not think that he has taught me geography, history, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana*, as many people believe and as I also once believed. On deep reflection and thought, I realize that what he has given is samskaras, and these he has given to everybody. When he gave you geru, he gave you samskaras. You took that to be a membership to a club. That is your understanding, yet what he gave you was a samskara. When he gave you a mantra, he gave you a samskara. When he



gave you a mandate he gave you a samskara, a direction and a vision for life to change, to follow and to fulfil.

An offering to guru's sankalpa

It is the vision of Sri Swamiji that is flowering here: the renaissance of the rishi tradition and culture, their teachings, and the application of their teachings for the development of human life, both externally and internally. This Pashupata Astra Yajna is an offering, it is an invocation of the most ancient mantras, last chanted on this planet 5,500 years ago. They are again being chanted in this invocation of Adideva Mahadeva, and it his grace that we are receiving.

This invocation is dedicated to our guru who has given us the vision, the strength, the mandate and the direction to achieve his will, in whatever way possible. This Pashupata Astra Yajna is dedicated to his sankalpa, not for the personal gain of an individual; it is for the welfare and benefit of the whole society.

—13 March 2014

PIERCING THE VEILS

Swami Satsangi: The Pashupata Astra Yajna being held here is most special, as it is an ancient yajna which hasn't been held in over 5,000 years. Perhaps it was not felt necessary to hold it again for another 5,000 years because of its power and intensity. This yajna is related directly to Shiva, the symbol of oneness and unity. We may have different paths and different levels of evolution, but we all have the same destination. We all must reach the same point, which is the point of unity, of oneness. To reach there, the awareness has to be able to pierce through the veils that cover the light. The awareness has to be made efficient, so that it can remove the veils and see what is behind them.

This Pashupata Astra Yajna is most effective in piercing through the layers of veils that cover the awareness. That is the importance of this yajna. When you sit and listen to the mantras, allow those mantras to become the launching pad for the awareness. Just as a satellite has a companion satellite to give it a boost to break free of gravity, in the same way, the awareness needs to ascend. Without a companion, a boost, it keeps dropping back again and again. These mantras are used as a launching pad for the awareness to gain flight, the flight towards oneness, the experience of Shiva.

When you connect your awareness to the sound of the mantra, there is a rhythm, a pace, a tone. You connect your awareness with that and you are able to launch your awareness into a higher level of experience. That is the aim of Pashupata Astra Yajna.

Within Pashupata darshana is the panchagni vidya, which is the vidya for connecting the gross awareness with the higher awareness. It is the vidya of connecting heaven with earth. That is how it was explained to Nachiketa in the story. How to connect heaven and earth; what happens there, what happens here, and how to know both. That is the vidya of panchagni, the vidya of removing the veils.

So, this is a very beneficial time for all to be present, to imbibe and bask in the energy that is allowing us to have a glimpse of the purity, the simplicity, and the beauty of the ancient traditions.

—13 March 2014



FROM PASHUTA TO PRABHUTVA

On the morning of the fifth day, the poornahuti of the yajna was performed. The yajna fire was ceremoniously worshipped one last time and all the deities invoked at the beginning of the yajna were bid adieu. The flag that had been hoisted on the first day was lowered and folded away. Participants performed the final parikrama of the vedi and received prasad of panchagni bhasma and a rudraksha mala. The feeling in the air was one of elation, gratitude and also sorrow at seeing this beautiful and inspiring program come to an end. It had truly been an experience of a lifetime.

Before departing, Swamiji asked everyone to make a sankalpa to keep the spirit of the yajna alive within themselves, and to make a pledge to walk the road of life with faith and conviction. With this resolve in their hearts participants made their way out of the Akhara gates, committed to making the journey of the Self, from pashuta to prabhutva, a living reality.





Anugraha of the Yajna

The yajna was a never-before experience for all, creating an altered state of consciousness that intensified at all levels over the five days. Reflections of some of the sannyasins . . .

When Swamiji asked me to sit at the yajna with the pandits, I took it on as any other duty given by guru. However, as the rituals progressed there were many extraordinary experiences.

I had never before performed *agni manthan*, kindling the fire in the traditional way through friction. I did as the pandits instructed and the fire emerged so naturally and easily that I couldn't believe it. During the mantra path, even though there were so many people around, it felt as if there was no one, not the pandits, not the people, not even myself. Everything had fused into the form of a Shivalingam. I saw nothing else – as if there was just one *tattwa*, one element.

While offering salutations to the Sun god, I felt that he was showering his rays inside the yajna vedi. During the worship of the sixty-four yoginis, it was as if Swami Sivananda, Sri Swamiji, Swamiji and Swami Satsangi were all there before me physically. I offered them pranam and their shakti seemed to enter my body.

On the last day when Swamiji shot the arrow, he instructed me to retrieve it. I deputed a few people for the job, but for two days they could not find it. Yet, there was a firm belief in my heart that it was at a safe place and would be found. Listening to this inner feeling I went to look for the arrow, and within seconds I had located it.

All these experiences indicate to me that there was a constant presence of the divine forces throughout the yajna.

—Swami Satyamurti



The experience of the yajna was like the arrow that Swamiji shot, which pierced through the spaces, reaching beyond anyone's expectation. In exactly the same way, before the yajna started we did not know what to expect from the event. However, when we experienced it, we found its force shooting through layers of our psyche, and so smoothly and seamlessly that we were left stunned. The words that Swamiji spoke during the yajna – the purpose of the Pashupata astra being to rise from pashuta to devatva through invocation of Shakti – became a living reality during these five days.

The most exceptional experience was the japa sadhana. For the two and a half hours that we performed the japa, there was one stream of consciousness. There were no random thoughts, no negative thoughts, unlike during our other attempts at meditation or japa. There was a special energy, a special grace here, which steered us away from becoming involved in any other thought or experience. We were in a different space, a different realm, surrounded by benevolent forces that seemed to have come down to participate in the resurrection of this unique event. It was a glimpse of the state that one can possibly become established in at some point of time. To have received that glimpse gives the hope that it is possible to overcome the random thoughts, the negativities, the limitations of the pashu. If we can draw on the memory of this state whenever the pashu overcomes us, and maintain it, even if in a much smaller degree, it may be possible to go one step beyond where we are. This understanding is the anugraha of the yajna we received.

—Swami Yogamaya

I am overwhelmed by the entire experience and, a month later, can still feel its powerful influence in my life. Tangible and subtle shifts continue to take place and fill me with deep gratitude and wonder as I become more aware of these precious gifts. The privilege of having been part of the japa sadhana stands out as a unique experience that empowered and was humbling all at once.





I was astounded when I found myself being able to sit still for that length of time, becoming gradually 'empty' of thoughts and feelings, my awareness totally focused and one-pointed on the mantra. Sensory inputs and physical discomfort did not feature in my consciousness and I found myself in a space of light and peace. Is this what it is to be in a state of grace? After the nine rounds of japa were complete, I had to force myself to open my eyes, get up from my asana and walk around the vedi to perform parikrama. The mantra was all that I could hear, and I had to use all my willpower to not give in to the intensity of an irresistible pull to return to that place of quiet emptiness and peace. I bow in gratitude and awe . . .

—Sannyasi Sivadhara



Mahāmṛtyuñjaya Mantra

Om tryambakaṃ yajāmahe sugandhiṃ puṣṭivardhanam.
Urvārukamiva bandhanāt mṛtyormukṣīya māmṛtāt.
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ. Hariḥ om

Om Mahā Astrāya Phaṭ!



2015

The Third Year of Panchagni Sadhana

This year, Swami Niranjan performed the arduous panchagni sadhana for three months, from 15th January to 15th April. By the end of the sadhana, the temperature in the panchagni vedi had gone beyond 60 degrees Celsius. For more than seven hours every day, Swamiji practised his sadhanas as flames of four fires danced around him and the sun from above tested the tapasvi's endurance.

Swami Satsangi arrived from Rikhiapeeth for the commencement of the sadhana, and as Swamiji lit the fires in the panchagni vedi, she performed the havan, signalling the commencement of her own panchagni sadhana as well. On this occasion, a new morning sadhana also commenced in the Akhara, dedicated to Lord Surya. This was the day of Makar Sankranti, when the sun begins its northward journey, and as if to announce his presence and bless the beginning of Swamiji's sadhana, the sun shone brightly after days of mist and cold. To welcome the sun god, all sannyasins and residents of the ashram practised twelve rounds of surya namaskara under a sparkling sky.









Pre-Panchagni Aradhana

The commencement of the sadhana was heralded with several aradhanas in the Akhara and in Paduka Darshan. There was consecration and worship of Satyameshwar Mahalingam at his newly-constructed peeth and morning anusthanas in the Akhara lasting three days. Acharyas and pandits from Varanasi conducted Rudrabhisheka and havan in the Akhara in the morning and in the afternoon abhisheka and havan for Satyameshwar. Along with this, a special anusthana was commenced in the Dasha Mahavidya Peeth overlooking the Akhara, seeking the protection and grace of the Cosmic Mother for the success of the sadhana.

Swamiji seemed to be absorbed in a different realm of consciousness as his satsangs were unique and full of inspiration during these days, and Swami Satsangi, who had arrived for the occasion, provided her own unique insights into the sadhana.





Pre-Panchagni Satsangs

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Swamiji: There is a difference between religion and spirituality. In the spiritual aspect you have to search for the truth within yourself, you have to discover the truth within yourself, and you have to realize your own luminosity. That is the spiritual perception. In the religious perception, you simply become part of what is happening without self-awareness, without any awareness of what you can do to become better, and you follow a belief, dogma or ritual. That is the big difference between the religious attitude and behaviour and the spiritual attitude and behaviour.

Beginning of religion: philosophy

All religions begin as an idea which becomes a philosophy and finally turns into a religion. Christ did not want to create a new religion. He lived his life. He followed a philosophy in his life, he followed a principle in his life, he followed a behaviour in his life, and that was it. Christ did not live a religion; he lived a life which was conducive to his attainment and realization of the higher self, which he called 'Father'. That was the connection he developed: "Me and my Father are one." How many of us can say that? We can't. He did because he had that realization, that awareness. Similarly, Buddha did not create a religion. He lived a simple, austere and spartan life and discovered himself. He discovered his own luminosity; he lived a principle, a thought, a philosophy, a behaviour. He did not live a religion. In this manner, if you look at the life of all the great people, they have lived the spiritual life. Religious concepts have emerged out of this spiritual life in the form of belief, dogma and ritual. Therefore, the origin of religion that the masses follow and the origin of philosophy that the masters have discovered and lived are two different things.

After all, when was Christianity formalized? Not during the lifetime of Jesus and not in Jerusalem or Bethlehem. It was



formalized in Rome fifty years later. When did the philosophy of Buddha become a religion? Not during his lifetime. After his death, in the congregation of his disciples, systems and disciplines were created. Therefore, religion is a created social custom and spirituality is an experience of your own luminosity. A philosophy becomes a religion when it interacts with social customs, with the result that the social customs are guided, rectified and managed. That is the difference between religion and spirituality.

False identity of 'Hindu religion'

People use the term 'Hindu religion'. That is a wrong identification of the spirituality that exists in India, for here we don't call yoga a religion, we don't call Vedanta a religion, we don't call vedic knowledge a religion. We call them systems of thought and philosophy, they are known as darshana. *Darshana* means something that you realize, encounter and discover, or see within yourself.

There have been six darshanas and they can be related to the idea of philosophy in the English language. These six philosophies were the basis of development of the Indian culture. They are Yoga, Vedanta, Vaisheshika, Nyaya, Samkhya and Mimamsa.

These six philosophical trends exist in India today also. People call all this a religion. They club everything together under one idea and that is the identity they look at. They look at the external aspect, therefore the outer behaviour, the outer ritual becomes a religion. Those who understand and realize, do not believe this collection to be a religious collection but a philosophical collection – philosophy that you can live, an idea that you can live, an understanding that you can live in your life.

After all, compassion is an idea that you live. Love is an idea that you live. To become good and do good is an idea, a behaviour that you live. If you are living a thought and expressing it, and that thought is bringing you peace, awareness and upliftment, so that you are changing within yourself, discovering your own spirit within yourself and associating and connecting with that, how can that be called a religion? It is a personal experience of growth and development.

Spiritual life: guided by symbols

In spiritual life everything is based on symbols. Symbols indicate the nature of invocation. The mind is energy, thoughts are energy, words are energy. When we speak, that energy creates a transformation in the mind. If I say you are very good and beautiful, you will feel happy and big-headed, and if I say you are ugly and horrible, your feeling will be different. Although words are words, how they are understood and responded to is unique to every person. Once somebody called me a dog. I was very happy, for a dog is man's best friend. If you call me a dog, it indicates that I am your best friend. If somebody else hears 'dog' they will think, 'How can this person call me a dog?' There will be aggression, anger, frustration and repulsion: a word, when spoken, can alter the behaviour and understanding of the mind.

Most words affect the intellect. Then there are certain vibrations and words that affect or access the emotions. There are certain words and vibrations that access the spirit. The transformation, the feeling comes within. Just as the mind responds to a good or bad word, the spirit also responds to the vibration of certain words. The vibration of the words to which the spirit responds is mantra. Of course, the intellect analyzes and compares the word instantly – did this person say a good thing or a bad thing to me. However, when the word accesses the spirit, it is not recognized by the intellect, it is recognized by the nature of the spirit itself.

When the nature of the spirit connects with the word, with the vibration, then you begin to feel something within which you can't really place, but you name it as peace, contentment, joy or happiness. What you are experiencing in your mind as peace, contentment, joy and happiness is an experience that is happening within your own spirit, within your own nature. Peace is not an intellectual idea, it is not an intellectual experience; it is knowing that 'I am at peace'. Happiness is not a spiritual or social idea; it is knowing that 'I am happy'. The vibrations of mantras elevate the mind from the intellectual and the emotional dimension to the spiritual dimension. In order to realize that dimension, you have to sustain the invocation, the discipline, the aradhana so that your mind eventually fuses with the mantra, and then you become a yogi.

Anything and everything in life begins with a thought. That thought turns into enquiry or questioning, and you look for answers. If an answer comes, generally it is based on a personal experience and perception which is your own discovery. In this manner people live their thoughts, which eventually become a philosophy, a way of life, a tradition. When this lifestyle, idea and philosophy merges with other ideas, customs and cultures, it turns into a dogma, it becomes a religion.

It is the thought that sustains through the ages and the thought can go both ways: towards religion or towards spirituality.

Inner experience and outer code of conduct

Spirituality is your own experience, conviction and commitment to what you believe in, how you live and what you hold dear. This leads to the enrichment of your life and you become fulfilled,

you discover a better you. It is the realization of the goodness that is in you. It is the realization of the beautiful that is in you. It is the realization of the harmonious person that you can be. That is spirituality. However, when different systems are created to enforce an idea, and regulations and disciplines come in, in the form of a moral code of conduct formed by social and cultural understanding, then it becomes a religion.

I gave the example that Christ was not Christian, he lived his own philosophy, belief and lifestyle. He did not have the intention to create a religion; he just wanted to inspire people to live a good life. It was the same with Buddha. He was not a Buddhist. He lived his life, happily, blissfully, looking at his shortcomings, improving them, becoming better, and ultimately reaching the state of nirvana. He felt the fullness and the completeness in his life. That was his sadhana, his experience, his accomplishment. He did not gather disciples to create a religion, rather to inspire them to see what he had seen and to become what he had become. All the saints and masters have lived their life in this manner, whether in the orient or the occident. It is only when the customs of different cultures are merged with a philosophy that it is seen as a religion.

The eastern thought and the western thought on this subject has been different on the levels of intellect and experience. Where people have spoken of experience, the western thought has always suppressed it. When Socrates spoke of the spirit, he was put in prison. His thoughts, his ideas were not accepted. When Galileo denied that the earth was flat and said that it was round, he was put in prison, for the ideas were not accepted. When Copernicus denied that the sun, the moon and the stars revolve around the earth and said that the earth revolves around something else, people did not believe that. Thus the intellect is a path which is arrogant and disbelieving.

If it was simple disbelieving it wouldn't be a problem: "All right, you don't accept my thought, I don't accept your thought, let us live in peace." The problem comes with, "If I don't accept your thought, I will put you in prison." That is what has happened in the past. There is always an arrogant assertiveness by every individual. Even in a debate between husband and wife, sometimes there is agreement and sometimes not. When they don't agree, what comes to the forefront? The arrogance and the aggressiveness. This is the intellectual field, the intellectual dimension.

In the experiential dimension, you simply become what you believe in. If Christ believed in love and compassion, he became that, he became love and compassion. If Buddha believed in contemplation and moksha, he became a living example of that. In spiritual life you become what you believe in. If you believe in simplicity, that is what you become – in life, thought, word and deed. If you believe in humility, that is what you become – in life, thought, word and deed. Every spiritual aspirant holds on to one ideal and becomes that. When you become that, that is known as yoga. That is known as the experience. There are people who become bad or negative or jealous too and identify with that. You don't necessarily only become good, you can also become bad when you identify with a quality.

The concept of dharma

There is another concept that guides us in this, that of dharma. Dharma in the Indian context is not religion, the definition of dharma is given as *Dharayate iti dharmah* – "What you hold in front of you in your hand, that is what you become." So what do you hold in your hand to become better? There are different qualities that constitute dharma and they represent your aspirations and efforts: kshama, dhairya, dhriti, sheela. *Kshama* means forgiveness, *dhairya* means patience, *dhriti* means firmness, *sheela* means a good character and a trait, good behaviour, not destructive and negative, but positive and uplifting. There are many things that you hold within yourself to become better, and that is your dharma. Dharma here does not mean belief. What are the qualities that make you spiritual? Think about that in relation to dharma. That dharma is not religion, it is your spiritual realization.

—12th January 2015

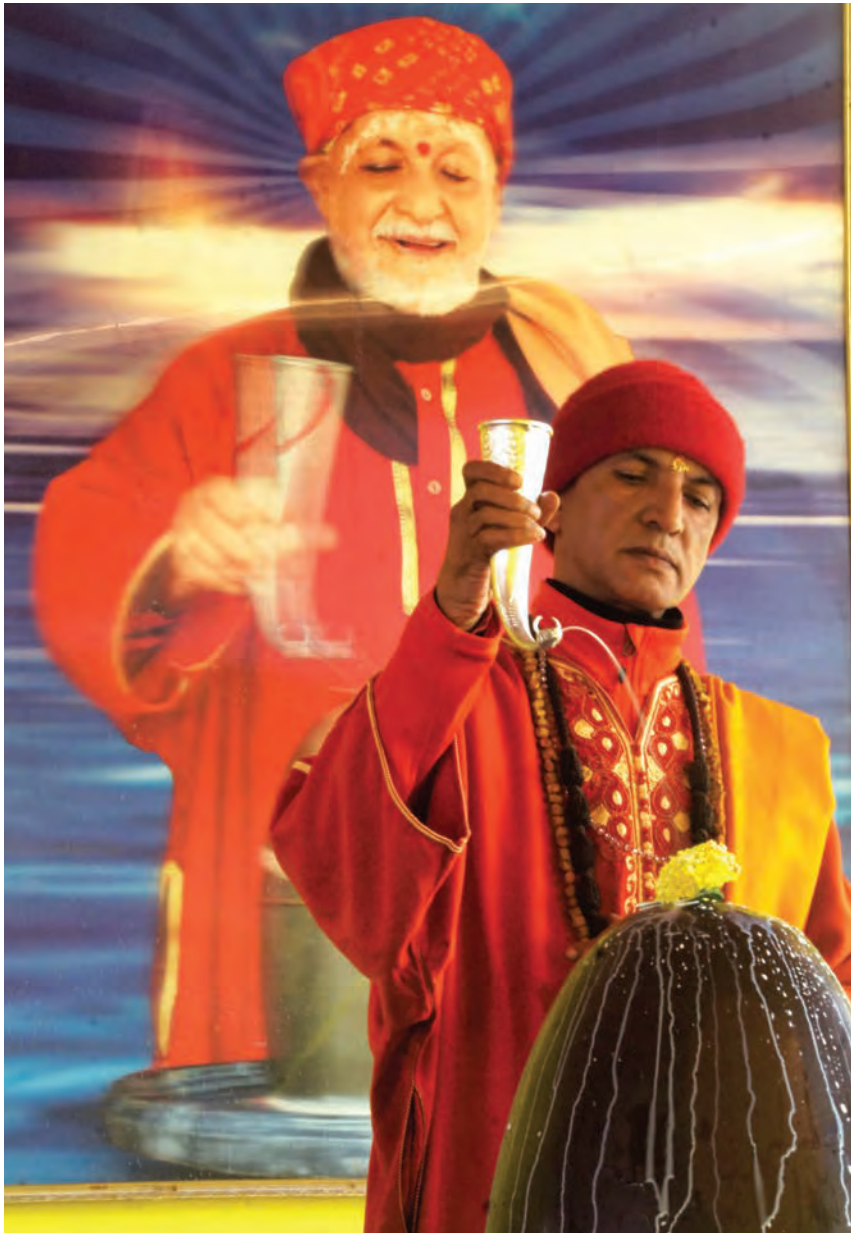
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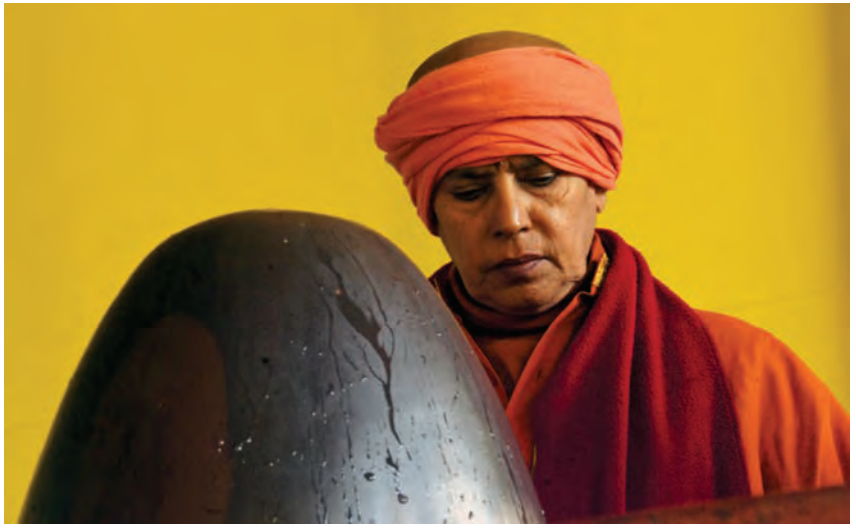
Swamiji: As I was doing the abhisheka on the Shivalingam, I was watching the flow of milk on the stone. The flow was one as it fell, but after hitting the stone it became hundreds of flows. Some flows were flawlessly smooth and some broke into droplets. Although the milk was falling on the one Shivalingam, depending on where the flow was smoother there was a better stream and where the flow was not smooth there were droplets.

Watching that, a thought came to mind, that nothing is uniform in this world. Although the flow is the same, falling in one place, after hitting the object it breaks into a thousand different currents. The same thing happens with us. Consciousness is one and it descends. As it is believed, the spirit enters the womb in the fourth month. Thus the consciousness descends and it is one pure flow. However, when it encounters this material body, it breaks. Just as the flow of milk broke when it hit the stone of the Shivalingam. The flow of energy, of consciousness, also breaks when it hits this material dimension, and therefore each one of us lives a different current of the same flow. Some are droplets, some are static in one place and do not come down, some are a beautiful smooth flow of milk from the Shivalingam. In this manner, we all live our life not in a uniform way, but in an individualistic way.

Even the thoughts, ideas, aspirations, desires and needs are all different. People in the same family have totally different personalities. The only connection is in terms of 'He or she is my son, daughter, father, mother'. Beyond that there is no connection of character or personality; there is no connection of consciousness. Or the connection that exists is gross and material and your personality is tainted by that.

Your personality expresses the gross and the material due to the breaking up of the consciousness upon hitting the material. There is also no uniformity in wisdom, understanding or knowledge. After writing the four volumes of the Vedas, the rishis said, *Neti, neti* – "Not this, not that." Whatever you have written





is your experience, but the truth is more than that. You are only seeing one aspect of it, one component of it.

It is like the four blind men who wanted to see an elephant and went to the zoo. One blind man grabbed the tail of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a rope." Another one grabbed the leg of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a pillar." Another grabbed the trunk of the elephant and said, "It is like a python." None of the blind men, who each grabbed a different part, had the full picture of the elephant. They only had a partial picture through what they had grabbed. Now, a person with eyes who is able to see the elephant will say, "The elephant is not like a rope, pillar or python. The elephant is totally different; it is a giant animal."

Everyone in life is blind and lives the experience of blindness. If you are negative and destructive, your life will always revolve around the negative and the destructive. If you are happy, your life will always revolve around happiness. If you are depressed, your life will always revolve around depression. If you are anxious, life will always revolve around anxiety. Whatever one thinks, that is what one becomes.

The nature of the world is tamasic. This has been stated in many literatures too. Even this body is tamasic. You have to learn how to express the goodness in your life, but you don't have to learn how to express the badness – it is natural and spontaneous. You want to learn how to become more compassionate and happy; you don't want to learn how to become more envious, greedy or jealous. You want to learn the better things of life, but the negative things of life are natural.

It is the confrontation with the limiting, the negative and the destructive, and making the effort to transform and transcend that and cultivate the better qualities that is the purpose of each individual's life. Nobody is born pure. Purity is acquired. If you go into a room that has been closed for many years, what do you do first? You clean it. Even if it is a neatly kept room. Even if you go there after one month, you will have to dust it; you will have to clean it. Something has to be done before you feel comfortable in a clean environment. Therefore, just as you clean even the neatly-kept room, you also clean the dirtily-kept room. Cleaning is important in both. In the process of cleaning one has to remove the negativities.

That is where spiritual aspirants have to struggle. How to change the traits and the character of human nature, which are negative and which you are living all the time? By identifying with the good. Once you identify with the good and try to cultivate that, it becomes possible for the thoughts to change – for the broken stream of milk falling on the Shivalingam to become an unbroken steam of flow. When the stream becomes an unbroken flow, you begin to live life. Until and unless the stream becomes an unbroken flow, you live the stresses, the anxieties, the insecurities, the fears, the jealousies and the anger in life. You live a negative quality if the flow is broken. When the flow is unbroken, you live the beauty; you identify with the beauty and begin to live it. Therefore, imagine yourself to be like a stream of milk falling on the Shivalingam and see whether you are an unbroken flow or a broken flow, and you will get your answer.

—13 January 2015

THE HEAVENLY FIRE

Swami Satsangi: At the commencement of the panchagni sadhana, I'd like to say one thing: I have seen panchagni first-hand, I have lived that life when the panchagni was being done by Sri Swamiji, and that is definitely a qualitative experience of my life. Nothing can compare with that.

Panchagni is a tapasya, and tapasya is something we don't like to do. Nobody likes to undergo tapasya, but here one is doing it voluntarily. There wasn't a compulsion for Sri Swamiji to do the panchagni; he did not need to do it, but he did it voluntarily. He wanted to do it. That makes a big difference. When you undergo tapasya in life, you don't do it voluntarily. Life gives you the lessons and you undergo what life is showing you. The agony, the difficulty – that is tapasya. You undergo it grudgingly, with fear, with anxiety. Here, one is voluntarily choosing a life of tapasya and undergoing it willingly; in fact, enjoying it.

The motive and the intention with which you do something make all the difference. A surgeon uses a knife but he uses it to heal, as opposed to a person who uses a knife to kill somebody. The intentions are different. Sri Swamiji's intention was to undergo tapasya to regenerate sattwic energy in the environment. Through tapasya, the sattwic energy is increased. That is the contribution of the people who do such tapasya. He did not do tapasya for himself; he did it for the universe. To attain anything in life, you have to increase the tapasya energy. Without that you cannot accomplish anything. The intensity of tapas has to be generated even if what you want to attain pertains to academics or business or profession. You have to undergo tapasya if you want to be successful.

The panchagni is a sadhana of tapasya and I lived that life in Rikhia when Sri Swamiji was doing it. There are many different experiences in life, but this is something that only the fortunate can have: to actually live there at that time. The beauty of it was that Sri Swamiji did it so naturally. It did not seem as if he was doing some great sadhana. He did it so effortlessly, so naturally. It is only now that I realize its enormity and profundity. Just living



there, watching, being present at certain times – not at all times as he did it in seclusion – I imbibed it. The teaching that he gave was how to endure, because panchagni is a sadhana of endurance.

We all have to endure. We have to endure the experiences of life, we have to endure ourselves, our thoughts, our actions, our feelings. Our whole life is endurance. Through panchagni we create the possibility of overcoming the agony of endurance. Swami Sivananda has said, "Bear insult, bear injury: highest sadhana." What is that? Endurance. Endure injury, endure insult, endure heat, endure the afflictions of mind, the *kleshas*. That is what we are doing. That is why Sri Swamiji used to say that we are all doing panchagni. All of you are doing panchagni. The only difference is, you don't know it and he knew it. We are all enduring the mind. What are the five agnis? They are: kama, krodha, lobha, moha and mada. We are constantly facing these. Eventually, these are the agnis that have to be dissolved, not the five external fires; they are the symbols of those five internal fires. That is how he explained panchagni.

The day on which the panchagni sadhana is started is also very important: Makar Sankranti, the day the sun commences its northward journey. The sun is the true symbol of a karma yogi. It shines on all equally. It doesn't shine more on you and less on me. It shines on all equally and it shines every day of the year. There is not a day that it says, "No, today I will come late" or "Today I am feeling lazy" or "Today I have a cold." Every single day, on time, the sun shines.

Makar Sankranti is also a transition period, when the sun is transiting Capricorn. That is significant too, as these cosmic movements, these *muhurats*, these moments in time, help one enter into tapasya. If you choose the wrong time, you may encounter difficulties.

This is the third year of panchagni for me also, and during this sadhana I discovered the truth of Sri Swamiji's words. It was in the panchagni that I realized how important it is for each individual to begin an inner journey. The journey that most people undertake in life is an outer journey, but each one must start an inner journey. That is the real life. I discovered that effortlessly as I was doing the panchagni. When I would sit down, immediately the awareness would get drawn inwards, whereas normally you have to struggle with the mind. It was a revelation to me because I did not realize that it would be so easy to go inwards at the time of panchagni. As soon as I would sit down there with the mantra, immediately my awareness would travel inwards.

Sri Swamiji called it the 'heavenly fire'. He said it links earth with heaven. It links this awareness with a different awareness. The fire is the medium of that: this is what I experienced. As soon as I would sit down, with the fires all around, I would enter into a different awareness, a different realm, where there were other sounds and other visions. But the fire was all around and I had to look after it, so each time I had to come back, open my eyes and make sure that the fire was okay. This would bring me to the external awareness. Then again close the eyes and go into the inner awareness. This practice of outer and inner, outer and inner, outer and inner is what panchagni is all about: to live with an awareness of both the outer and the inner.

Not being able to balance the two is the mistake that all yoga practitioners make. They are either too much externalized or too much internalized, mostly too much internalized. They only think about the inner life: 'What am I thinking, how am I feeling, what is happening inside me, what is my mood today', and they lose contact with the external life. It is so easy to get lost in the inner darkness. And there are people who live only an external life, they have no knowledge of the inner life. The panchagni provides the possibility to train yourself in the outer and the inner at the same time. Both have to go on side by side with the same intensity. When I go inside I should not lose contact with the outer, and when I am in the outer I should not lose contact with the inner. The inner is the base. That was the experience when I did panchagni, and I found it very helpful for training in this balance.

These are the sadhanas that are prescribed for sannyasins, for paramahamsas, and it is a privilege to be able to do them. You don't get a chance to do these sadhanas. Even if you get a chance,

you may not be ready for them. To be able to receive the blessings to do it and that too in such a beautiful environment, can only be the result of good karmas.

So, all of you sitting here today should wish Swami Niranjan and me the best. Wish us well, wish that we are able to do this sadhana, for it is a tradition that Sri Swamiji started and we have to see that it is not lost. It should continue, and not just with the two of us. It should continue with all the people who wish to live sannyasa life. They should also think along those lines: not just the exoteric sadhana but also the esoteric sadhana. There is exoteric life and there is esoteric life. We don't have to over-emphasize either, but we have to prepare ourselves so that we can do these sadhanas in the course of time. Maybe not in this life, but prepare yourself so you can offer yourself for this sadhana.

This is a sadhana in which you have to be absolutely transparent. If you are not transparent then it will be difficult. What does transparency mean? I am not talking about the transparency of Facebook; I am talking about the transparency through which the energy can pass through you. Usually energy comes towards you and it hits you; it doesn't pass through. When you do panchagni, you also enter other dimensions, psychic dimensions, and you have to encounter energies. If you are not transparent they can affect you, harm you. Therefore that transparency has to be there. Without that you cannot do this sadhana. Sri Swamiji used to say that it is only by the grace of God that one can do this sadhana, otherwise it is not possible, because we are not transparent. We have many vices, prejudices, obsessions, neuroses, beliefs, opinions, perceptions, and that's natural. We have to have them as human beings, but gradually we have to make ourselves more and more transparent. That is the preparation. Ultimately, with the sincerity of preparation, the grace descends and we are able to do this sadhana, which is, I would say, a very high quality sadhana for any person who is interested in going inwards.

So, on the eve of Makar Sankranti, it is most auspicious that we sit here listening to the beautiful mantras being chanted by the pandits. I've been hearing the same mantras for one and a half



months in Rikhia, continuously. In fact, it is one of my dreams to hear mantras all the time. Even at night, in my sleep I keep hearing these mantras. They are so energizing and full of light. They make the environment so light and you can perceive many things when the mantras are chanted.

I feel very honoured to be in Munger today, the place where I was born, to take the blessings for my panchagni. Tomorrow we start the ceremonies here and then I will go to Rikhia and start the panchagni. *Namo Narayana.*

—14 January 2015



From the Panchagni Vedi

Swamiji: This year, I enter into the third year of panchagni. Last year when I concluded in the month of March, the temperature in the panchagni vedi used to be forty-eight degrees. This year I'll be doing one month more, until April, and I am preparing for the temperature to go up to sixty. It is definitely a sadhana of endurance.

The panchagni finds mention in one of the major Upanishads, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, which describes it as the sadhana of atonement. Ultimately it is atonement of the ego. You atone for egotistical behaviour, not for good behaviour, not for pious, charitable and loving behaviour. You atone for actions or thoughts that highlight your egocentric nature. So atonement is for identifying with doership: 'I am the doer', 'I am the enjoyer.' That is what everybody thinks. We all think that 'I do', 'I enjoy.' Even pain and suffering are enjoyed, and there are times when people don't want to leave the experience of pain and cling on to it, as somehow it gives them solace. So, ultimately, atonement is for identifying with this egocentric behaviour, action and thought. That is the final atonement for a sannyasin, and so say the Upanishads.

—15 January 2015





Darshan . . .
























Pashupata Astra Yajna

To conclude Swamiji's panchagni sadhana, from 10th to 14th April the Pashupata Astra Yajna was held in the grounds of the Akhara. This ancient yajna, revived from history and held for the second year now, invoked ancient mantras meant to pierce through the granthis, the blocks that hold us back from realizing our true nature. Certainly, everyone present felt the intense energy of the mantras, which seemed to receive additional energy through Swamiji's panchagni.

Acharyas from Varanasi conducted the yajna led by Sri Kailash Pandit, and thirteen-year-old Saptarishi, the youngest member of the Goenka family, was the host of the yajna. During the performance of havan, sannyasins performed japa in different places of worship in the Akhara, adding to the one-pointed energy of the event.

Even as the temperature in the panchagni vedi rose steadily during the yajna and the Akhara swelled with people, Swamiji sat still and equipoised, a veritable Shiva. In the afternoons, Swamiji observed the yajna proceedings from his asana by the Guru Peeth and shared thoughts with everyone in brief satsangs. He spoke on the different aspects and experiences of the panchagni sadhana including the significance of bhasma, how the state of dharana allows one to remain tranquil despite the heat, the significance of the five panchagni fires, and the relationship between panchagni and Pashupata vidya.

A massive thunderstorm during the afternoon session of the 12th appeared to bless the conclusion of the panchagni sadhana and the Pashupata Astra Yajna. Swami Satsangi had arrived the same day and said that the fruit of a yajna is rain, and if it rains during a yajna it means it has been successful.

On the concluding day, Swamiji shot an arrow, symbolizing the Pashupata astra, into the sky. With that final act the yajna came to an end. On 15th April, the poornahuti of the panchagni sadhana was held with a havan and abhisheka conducted by the pandits of Shivalaya, Munger.





Satsangs during Pashupata Astra Yajna

BLESSINGS OF TAPASYA

Swami Satsangi: We are all gathered here for the culmination of the panchagni sadhana that Swami Niranjan has been performing for the last three months, and I would like to thank him for making this day possible.

The torrential rain today is a very auspicious sign. The shastras say that the fulfilment of a yajna can be measured through different parameters, and one of them is the descent of rain. When we offer oblation in the fire, it goes up in the form of smoke into ether, *akasha*, and then it is returned in the form of rain to earth. The moral of the story is that whatever you offer, you receive it back in abundance. So, rain is always considered a special blessing in any yajna, as it nourishes and nurtures the land, the seas, the sky, and brings new possibilities into our life.

Rain represents new potential. In the evolution of the tattwas, out of *agni*, fire, is born *apas*, water. And apas is the element in which there is enormous possibility. It is matter yet to be formed, but the matter is inherent in the apas tattwa and it can take any shape. Therefore, rain is a sign of the enormous possibility in our lives. Rain also helps in uniting one another. We are all sitting close together now while in the morning we were all sitting far apart. That is what we have to strive for: unity, not separation. We should not allow the feeling of separateness, or individuality, to grow too much in us. There has to be a balanced awareness of individuality and universality. When you experience unity, you are experiencing universality, and when you experience separateness, you are experiencing individuality. Both experiences have to take place, they don't contradict each other; however, it is up to you how you develop each one.

The purpose of the Pashupata Yajna, being conducted here as a symbol of the panchagni sadhana, is to defeat the enemy. The enemy is not outside, it is inside. It is inside each one of us in the form of *kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada*, passion, anger, greed, delusion, arrogance. Each one of us is obliged to vanquish these enemies that afflict us in life, and the Pashupat Yajna enables us to do that.

Sri Swami Satyananda used to say that everybody is doing panchagni, the only difference is that they don't know it. The flames of kama, krodha, lobha, moha are burning us. They are igniting in us desire, passion, greed, envy, hatred, negativity, and we are trying to diffuse them. Panchagani is not just the five external fires, it is the five fires within. And the benefit of attending this yajna is that each one of us can go a little further in our journey to overcome those enemies.

—12 April 2015





ASPECTS OF PANCHAGNI SADHANA



Swamiji: Panchagni is a sadhana that heats up the body. In the month of April the temperature inside the panchagni vedi was more than 62 degrees Celsius. What protects the body at such high temperatures is *bhasma*, the ash which is smeared on the body.

Power of bhasma

After all, what is ash? It is the leftover product after something has been consumed by fire. Fire destroys every form and object, and what is left of that object and form is the imperishable bhasma. You cannot destroy bhasma.

Bhasma comes out of fire and it also protects one from fire. That is because it does not contain any oxygen, and therefore it does not burn. If I smear oil on my body, I will get cooked when the temperature rises to 60 degrees. However, when I smear bhasma on my body I don't even feel the heat, for there is nothing to burn in bhasma. It acts as a protection and allows one to tolerate the heat. Bhasma literally means disintegration. *Bha* means *bharatsanam*, to destroy, while *sma* implies *smaran*, remembrance. So bhasma is a reminder of the ephemeral nature of life.

The way bhasma works also has a lot to do with the human mind. It has been my observation that when the mind is focused on the fire, there is no sweating no matter how high the temperature. If the mind is not focused on the fire and is instead distracted and dissipated, then sweating begins and the bhasma gets washed away and one feels the heat.

There is a peculiar connection between the state of mind and bhasma. At 62 degrees, if the dharana on fire is perfect there is no problem. If the mind is disturbed, even at 45 degrees there is profuse sweating and discomfort. At that time the mind has to be again brought back into the state of dharana. The moment that is achieved, the sweating stops and the heat is not felt any more. Of course, mind over matter is the principle in any austerity.

Science of panchagni

The panchagni sadhana is, in fact, dharana on five fires: four fires are lit around you and the fifth is on top in the form of the sun. The physical aspect is that it is an austerity: it develops the stamina and resistance of the body and therefore it strengthens the willpower. It also makes the senses extremely sensitive, the whole body becomes like an antenna.

At the mental level, the five fires represent the negativity and tamas that is expressed in life: passion, anger, greed, infatuation and the ego. The fire that is above, the sun, is the ego. We live under the fire of ego all our life, it shines above us all the time. The other four fires also burn and consume us. Dharana on these fires is the science of panchagni and it helps to lessen the spikes that prick one when these negative emotions are high. The dharana creates greater equipoise, peace and harmony, so there are more smiles and less frowns.

Pashupata vidya

The Pashupata Astra Yajna is also a part of the panchagni sadhana, for it forms a part of pashupata vidya, knowledge of pashupata: the original knowledge transmitted by Shiva of which yoga was also a part.

The knowledge transmitted by Shiva had five parts:

1. *Pashupata darshana*, the philosophy of Pashupata.
2. *Pashupata sampradaya*, the sect of Pashupata, a community where everyone lives the same discipline.
3. *Pashupata astra*, the weapon of Pashupata: the mantra or the power used to attain the aspirations defined by the Pashupata philosophy.
4. *Pashupata yoga*, which includes five yogas which in turn were modified to be recognized as hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga and mantra yoga.
5. *Panchagni*, the austerity of five fires.

They all form part of one complex system of spiritual discovery.

—13 April 2015



PASHUPATA VIDYA

Swamiji: At the Pashupata Astra Yajna, a bow and a quiver of arrows is placed at the yajna vedi, symbolic of the weapon of Shiva called 'Pashupata astra'. Shiva is the cosmic consciousness, while the weapon represents energy, shakti. Thus Shiva's weapon is actually imbued with the shakti of the Cosmic Mother.

The word 'pashupata' has many connotations. *Pash* means noose, something that is used to control an animal, *pashu* means an animal, and *pat* means master or lord. Shiva controls all of us and he is the lord of all animals.

The Pashupata astra is the weapon of the lord of animals, and he uses it to pierce the three psychic blocks in human beings known as Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi. They are the three barriers in the path of human evolution. Once these blocks are removed, union with the spirit is experienced, and that is an experience of peace, harmony and bliss.



Revival of an ancient vidya

The Pashupata Astra Yajna represents the culmination of the panchagni sadhana. It is a yajna that has not been performed in India in the last five thousand years. It was only last year here at the Akhara that the ancient mantras of the yajna were heard for the first time after so many centuries.

The Pashupata Astra Yajna was last performed before the Mahabharata war by Arjuna at the insistence of Sri Krishna, to propitiate Lord Shiva. Pleased with Arjuna's sadhana, Lord Shiva gave the celestial weapon to Arjuna but placed a restriction on its use. He said, "I am giving you the weapon, but you can never use it." It was like saying, "I am giving you a gun, but don't ever shoot with it, don't even hold it in your hands."

What is the use of having a weapon if you cannot even touch it or use it? Whatever the significance, that was the condition placed by Shiva upon Arjuna, saying, "This is the most potent weapon and there is no countermeasure to negate its effect. This weapon is the ultimate Shakti and there is no other weapon that can stand up to the ultimate Shakti. I am giving it to you as a boon of goodwill, but it is not to be used in war for death or destruction. If you use it, nothing will survive, everything will be finished, you and me included." So Arjuna had this weapon but he never used it in the Mahabharata war. Other celestial weapons were used, such as the Brahmastra and Narayanastra, but not the Pashupata astra.

It is a historical achievement that such an ancient yajna has been revived. This is the second year of the yajna and the acharyas and pandits who conduct it are also becoming experts in this Shiva vidya. They hail from Kashi Vishwanath, or Varanasi, which is the abode of Lord Shiva, and they are also becoming *jnana pracharaka*, exponents of the knowledge. I offer my gratitude to them and also to our youngest yajaman, Saptarishi Goenka, for making this a beautiful and inspirational event in which all of you have participated.

—14 April 2015



The Next Journey

This was the year Swamiji introduced the 'second chapter of yoga': a new phase of the yogic journey where the focus is no longer on propagation of yoga but on experiencing the yoga vidya, the essence of the yogic science. This new path became revealed to him during the panchagni sadhana.

Swamiji: The years 2014 and 2015 were spent in finalizing the course of action for BSY for the next five decades. In 2015, I was clear on the next chapter of yoga. The whole thing became clear after I completed the panchagni sadhana in the month of April. It was as if the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fell into place in relation to yoga and development of yoga. I formulated a revised yoga syllabus that would be taught here at BSY, keeping in mind the future aspirations of people and also not losing the aim for which we are working.

We are not here to fulfil the whims of people but to develop the subject of yoga and for that, we have to look into the scriptures and the traditions, into the lifestyle, the different aspects of tapasyas and sadhanas practised by yogis in the past. Both aspects have to be maintained: the investigative/experimental and the teaching/propagative. The year 2015 revealed a balance between the two. Many other thoughts consolidated as to the direction of yoga, and we started to experiment with a novel approach to understand and practise yoga.

In fact, 2015 has been an inspirational and crucial year, as from 2016, from day one, the entire activity, the training methodology, the approach to yoga will be changed. It will be more refined and defined than ever before in the history of fifty years of our existence. This new chapter will begin from January, a completely fresh chapter with no reflection of the past. The intention is clear: we are moving into a new area of yoga. It is the new beginning for BSY.

—October 2015







2016

The Fourth Year of Panchagni Sadhana

On the auspicious day of Makar Sankranti, when the sun begins its northward journey for the year, Swamiji commenced his fourth year of panchagni sadhana. Like the previous years, a three-day invocation of Satyameshwar Mahadeva heralded the commencement of Swamiji's panchagni sadhana. Swami Satsangi arrived from Rikhiapeeth, bringing the blessings of Sri Swamiji at the commencement of the sadhana.

On this occasion, a morning sadhana dedicated to Lord Hanuman commenced in the Akhara. Indeed, nothing other than the strength of Hanuman would see Swamiji through the escalating heat as the sun traversed the months of April and May. Many other devatas arrived at the Akhara around this time, including Surya, the Navagrahas, aspects of Devi – as if all cosmic forces were ensuring protection and grace.

The sadhana continued for four months up to 15th May. Throughout this period, the entire ashram seemed to be imbued with a special sattwic energy, while Swamiji endured the steadily rising temperature with infinite grace and equipoise. In the last week of the sadhana, the mercury shot up to 72 degrees in the panchagni vedi.









Pre-Panchagni Satsangs

THE PATH OF THE SUN

Swamiji: Makar Sankranti is the day when the sun becomes northbound. From its journey through the southern arc, it now makes a northward arc. That is the meaning of Sankranti. According to the vedic astrology, during the period of the northward journey of the sun, the paths clear for the spiritual development of an individual.

At the end of summer, on the day the sun becomes southbound, that is known as Karka Sankranti, and that path of the sun is known as dakshinayana. It is the period when the ancestors, the manes, are honoured and remembered. In this way, in the vedic science, two periods are defined: *uttarayana*, the path of the northbound sun, and *dakshinayana*, the path of the southbound sun.

For sannyasins, especially those who follow the paramahamsa 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 paramahamsa sannyasins; now and in the future, both. Due to the mandate he gave, I am following this path.

There is a theory about the sadhana: the five fires represent the five tamasic conditions of mind, the five rajasic conditions of mind, and the five sattwic conditions of mind. They are all perceived in the form of fire, and fire is an extension of the sun.

In the vedic lore, sun is considered to be the first teacher, the first guru, and Hanuman was the first disciple of the sun. Sunlight is equated with knowledge. Just as sunlight does not differentiate between high and low, superior or inferior, animal or human, insect or reptile, but shines equally on everyone, in the same



manner, knowledge is to be shared equally with everyone. There are no limitations or restrictions for receiving knowledge.

In the presence of the sun, the senses become active. They begin to perceive, cognize, see, hear, feel, taste, touch. The experiences that become the foundation of our evolution and development are formed in the presence of the sun: the awareness, the consciousness, the luminosity, the knowledge, everything. The absence of the sun, darkness, is equated with *avidya*, ignorance. The sun represents the luminosity, understanding, awareness, cognition of the tamasic, the rajasic and the sattwic. It represents understanding of the five predominant aspects of these three gunas and transcending them. Once you overcome the limitations of the physical and the mental which bind you to this plane, then a new birth, a new understanding takes place. It is the death of the material and birth into the spiritual. That is how people have viewed spiritual evolution: from tamas to sattwa, from darkness to luminosity.



The lotus takes birth in mud and grows in water. It is rooted in mud, but it is untainted by the water. Similarly, life is born in mud, in tamas; life is rooted in water, rajas; and the luminosity and the flowering of sattwa is unaffected by the influences of tamas and rajas. One who has the ability to become the *drashta*, witness, of this lotus is known as a siddha.

Everyone's root is in tamas, yours and mine, everyone's included. Nobody is free from that. Everybody feels the pangs of anger, jealousy, hatred, irritation and anxiety. That is tamas. We are rooted in that and they are the natural expressions and behaviours of the mind. We live in the world of rajas: always striving, wanting, desiring, needing, demanding, seeking. There is no letting go of that, and the peace and wisdom of sattwa eludes us. One who is able to observe all the three together is a siddha living in the *trigunatita* state, the state of transcendence of the gunas.

This is the philosophy of panchagni, and it is definitely an arduous and difficult path, but attainable by human beings. If it was non-attainable, it would not be described as a technique, a vidya, a process, a sadhana, a sequence, a progression. In fact, what one needs to look for at each stage of the sadhana is also defined in the tradition: what one needs to destroy and what one needs to cultivate.

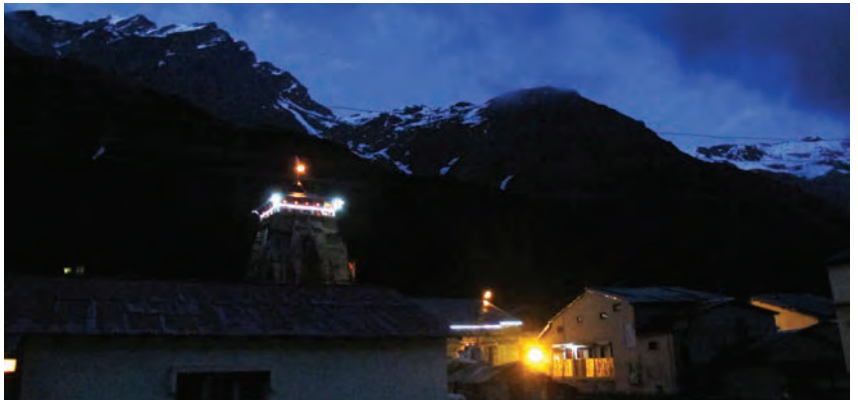
—12 January 2016

THE STORY OF SATYAMESHWAR

Swamiji: There is a story about how Satyameshwar came to be here. Two years ago, I had visited Kedarnath on one of my pilgrimages. The day I left from there, a big tragedy took place in Kedarnath: the entire town was wiped out in a mountain tsunami.

I was there for three days, and accompanying me were Swami Sivaraj and Swami Satyamurti. I was engaged in anusthana, Swami Satyamurti was helping me and Swami Sivaraj was the overall manager. From where I sat for the anusthana, I could see this mountain in the distance. From the first day, every time I glanced at the mountain, the thought would come to my mind, 'What if that mountain comes down and everything is destroyed?' I have been to so many difficult places, in South America, in the Alps, in the Himalayas, and I have never had such a feeling.

On the third day, Swami Sivaraj said, "Swamiji, I am going to walk up to that mountain." Hearing this, I felt a sense of foreboding, but he insisted, so I said, "Okay. If you are to return, you will return; if you are to go, you will go." So off he went. I was doing my japa, looking at the mountain and thinking, 'Swami Sivaraj is walking there. What if it falls down?' Then, watching my thoughts, I laughed at myself. After some time, there was a storm in the mountain, and I could see it from where I was, and I became even more worried. Anyway, he came back in the evening looking



all white. He said, "Swamiji, I have been saved." Then he told me his story, how he was caught in the storm and lost the way, and nearly died in the freezing cold glacial region.

When I finished the japa, I said, "We will do abhisheka and tomorrow we will march from here." We were the last people in the temple who performed the abhisheka on Sri Kedarnath. When we finished, it was past midnight. We came to our guesthouse, and I heard a voice in my head, "The purpose for which you have come is over, leave now." Three times I heard this.

I told Swami Sivaraj and others that we should make a move. They all looked aghast and said, "Now? Let us sleep now, tomorrow morning we will stroll down in the sun. Why the rush?" I said, "No, I feel that we have to leave." We left by four in the morning, and started walking. We walked for about two hours to Ramban, a tiny hamlet midway, where we stopped for tea. It was there that we received the news that the entire town of Kedarnath was washed out, including our guesthouse. There was complete devastation. Had we continued to stay, we would have become part of that devastation.

We quickly had our tea and came down as fast as possible. We reached the base of the mountain, Gauri Kund, and received the news that Ramban had been washed down into the river. We got into the car, crossed a bridge, and five minutes later the whole bridge collapsed. As our car sped on, behind us peaks were falling, landslides were taking place, roads were disappearing into abysses. We were playing the Hanuman Chalisa in the car and the driver said, "Swamiji, for the first time in my life I have not felt afraid. I feel as if my hands are being guided by something."

During the return journey, as people heard about what had transpired, many said that they feel that Kedarnath is going with us, since we were the last to do the abhisheka and pooja on him. When we reached Munger, that night a truck arrived. It contained thirteen Shivalingas. It was a gift from somebody and we had no idea who. We placed twelve of them in Akhara and the big one, the three-footer, came to Paduka Darshan. His name is Satyameshwar and he is a replica of Kedarnath.

—12 January 2016



AN UNBROKEN TRADITION

Swamiji: There is a reference to panchagni by Kalidasa in one of his poems, and he has taken this reference from an ancient Ramayana. There are about twenty-four versions of Ramayana within India and also in Cambodia, Thailand and Burma.

The reference to panchagni is in the context of Sage Sutikshna, a disciple of Sage Agastya. When Rama was returning to Ayodhya from Lanka in the Pushpak viman with Sita, he pointed out to Sita all the places that he had been to in the forest. At one point, he said, "Look at the four fires burning down there. In the middle sits Sutikshna, the disciple of Agastya. He is practising the tapasya of the five fires."

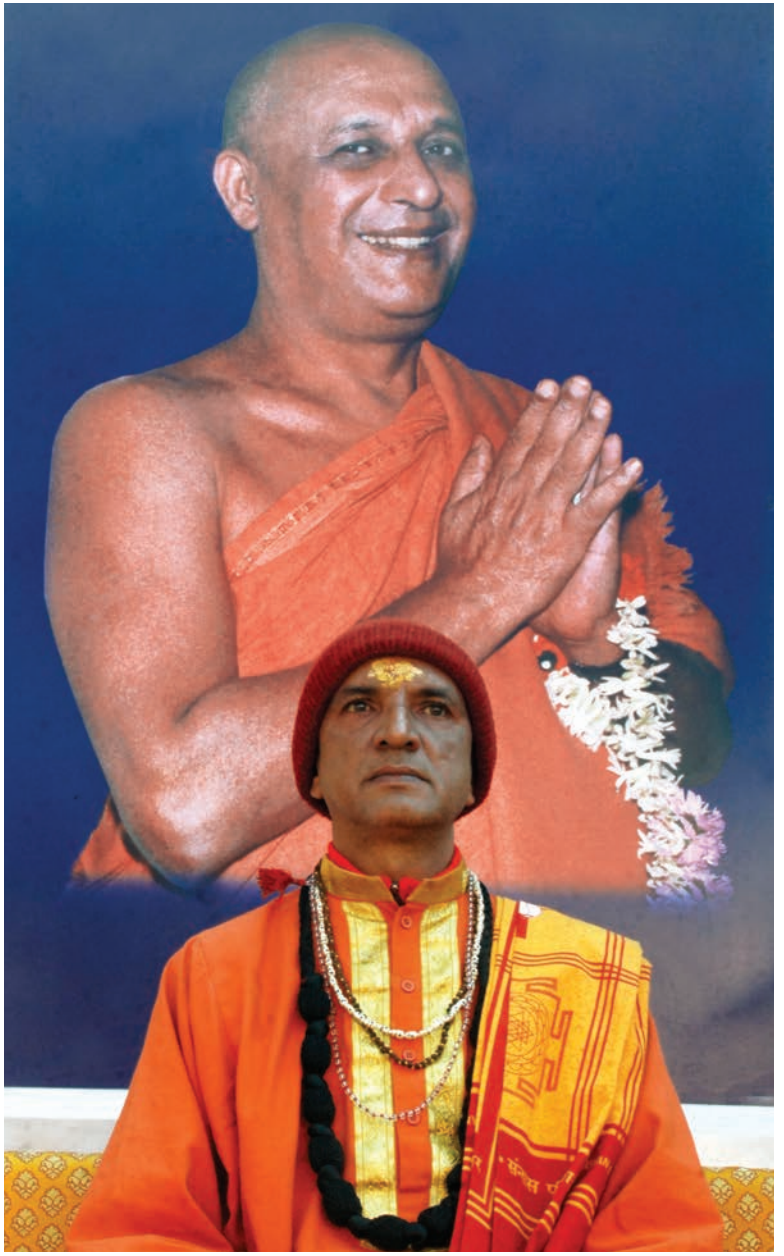
Traditionally, it is said that Yamaraj gave the knowledge of panchagni to Nachiketa in *mrityuloka*, the material plane. Parvati did panchagni in the astral plane for the attainment of Shiva. However, Sutikshna was doing panchagni in the age of Rama, which means that the concept and sadhana of panchagni was prevalent at that time.

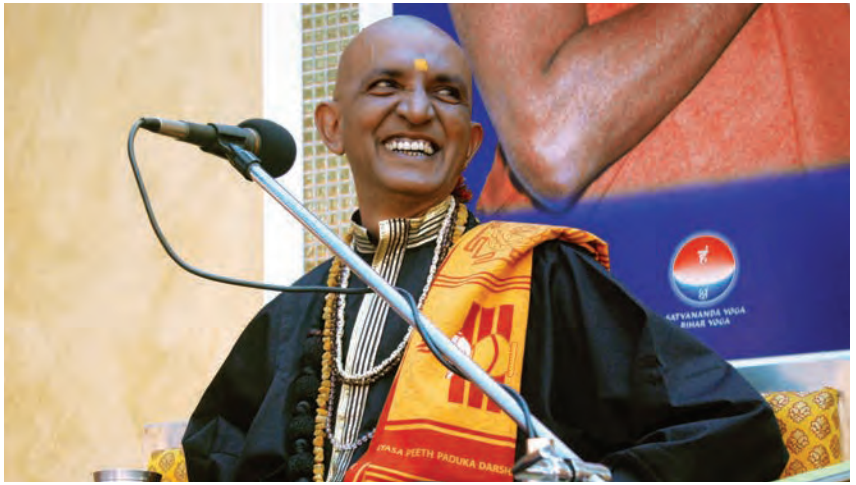
There is another reference to panchagni in the Ramayana. When Rama became king, a person born in the low caste named Shambhuk, wanted to attain Brahmanhood and started to perform austerities. He began to do the panchagni. The term used is *agnisevan*, meaning partaking of fire, which is another term for panchagni.

Even in the Kumbha Mela or during the Kalpavas in Allahabad in the month of Magh, there are many sadhakas who do symbolic panchagni: lighting one or two gointhas and sitting surrounded by them. All this indicates that the vidya has continued to exist.

—13 January 2016







LETTING GO

Swamiji: Before commencing the panchagni sadhana, Sri Swamiji had been to Mount Abu to see his vidya guru to ask him what he should do next in his life as a sannyasin. Sri Swamiji's vidya guru told him, "In order to live the life of a paramahamsa, you have to leave all identities of being a guru and a teacher. You have to break all connections." Therefore for ten years, while Sri Swamiji was doing his sadhana, he lived a life of complete seclusion. The notice was put up at the door: 'Don't come again.' He used to say very frankly in his satsangs that when people come, they expect him to entertain them and talk to them. If he does that, it is time taken away from the aim he is pursuing.

I have to follow the same rules. However, it is not practical for me to go that far at present, given that I have to play a double role. Nevertheless, in order to isolate myself and live more in solitude, I have decided to renounce two things this year during the panchagni: the mobile phone and e-mail. These two identities will be dropped. Leaving a few items at a time is good rather than everything at once, though eventually one has to leave everything, even clothes.

—14 January 2016





INVOKING HANUMAN

Swamiji: Since the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth, different anusthanas have been continuously going on during the morning havan in Akhara. The first was the Durga anushthana, started in January 2011. That continued for a year. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, we did the Katyayani anusthana, another form of Durga. In 2015, we did the invocation of Surya and that finished today. Tomorrow, we start the next anusthana dedicated to Lord Hanuman. Surya is guru and Hanuman the disciple, so it is appropriate that after the Surya anusthana, we do the Hanuman anusthana.

Hanuman is one personality in whom nothing is lacking, whether intelligence, strength, humility, power, divine aishwarya or grace. There is nothing that Hanuman is incapable of. He is one of the most versatile personalities, and there is nobody comparable to him, not even all the superheroes put together. He is a personality that has remained constant. In all the written legends about him, it is the same story. The same qualities have been highlighted again and again: how he was the same in old age, youth and childhood. He was the epitome of perfection; he was excellence personified in every respect.

—14 January 2016





Transported in Time

Despite the rigorous sadhana, Swamiji made time to meet with residents every Tuesday and Thursday. During these gatherings, Swamiji's insights on various dimensions of yoga were full of light and sparkle. All present seemed to be transported to an ancient age when the rishis would emerge from their deep sadhanas and share the yogic vidya with their students. Hatha yoga was one of the subjects of discussion during these sessions, and the ideas explored now would become the basis of the new trainings that would commence later in the year. (It was also around this time that Hari and Aryan, the two 'boys' born to Rudra and Jwala of Rikhia, came to Ganga Darshan and became Swamiji's little bhairavas.)

Swamiji: There are some texts that mention that the ancient munis like Kapila, Vyasa, Vasishtha, Vishwamitra, Dattatreya and others practised only hatha yoga. They did not practise raja yoga or kundalini yoga, only hatha yoga. That is understandable, as the times and society in which they lived and the lifestyle that they followed was not a distracted social lifestyle but a balanced, disciplined and spiritual lifestyle. They would involve themselves in havans, yajnas and discourses in the gurukul environment, which would require them to spend a lot of time sitting. Therefore, the main emphasis for them in the practice of yoga was the physical aspect, to counterbalance the sitting.

I am doing panchagni, sitting most of the day, and there is little physical movement. The time of sitting, from a practical perspective, has to be compensated with the time of motion and exercise. It was the same with those rishis. Therefore they used hatha yoga as their primary yoga practice. The proper application of hatha yoga was beneficial for them, as it would lead to purification, to physical wellbeing, to pranic activation, to the experience of concentration, samadhi and laya, and that was their aspiration in life. It was a lifestyle that matched the aspiration and the discipline that they were living.





Sharing the Vidya

Many people were wondrous about how Swamiji manages such an intense tapas. It was not often that Swamiji spoke about his sadhana publicly, yet sometimes, he helped people understand what it is all about and revealed the intricacies of the sadhana.

MANAGING THE EFFECTS OF PANCHAGNI

Q: Swamiji, may I ask you a question? What is the watch you are wearing?
Swamiji: It is a little device gifted to me by well-wishers like you. It allows me to monitor my body during the panchagni sadhana. For example, last week the temperature in the panchagni went up to fifty degrees centigrade. This watch tells me about the effect of the heat on my heart and other systems, so I can monitor and take the necessary steps. Technology is good for modern yogis!

Q: What do you do when if something is not going the right way?
Swamiji: I have to assess what I need to do. It may be some movement, some exercise, some pranayama. The sadhana involves a lot of sitting. From Monday to Friday, I am in panchagni from morning to afternoon. There is no movement at that time, therefore before starting, I go for an hour of walk and do asana, pranayama, all that. When I finish the sadhana, I do some more asana and pranayama. One inhales a lot of smoke, so that carbon monoxide has to be expelled and fresh oxygen injected into the body. That is why a lot of pranayama has to be done. One has to also mobilize the body, so rounds and rounds and rounds of asanas have to be done afterwards. Then, by five o'clock, there are people here wanting guidance and direction, so I meet with them also. In this way, my routine goes on until eight o'clock at night. Saturday and Sunday are the two days I keep free, and that is when I meet guests who come to the ashram.

The body has to adjust to the routine, and it is not easy. For example, after the first fifteen days, I had lower back pain from all the sitting. Then it finished. The body has its own laws and it reacts.



Once the body becomes adjusted, then you don't think of it anymore, and something else happens.

Definitely, it is an intense routine. The heat causes dehydration; you sweat and lose a lot of water, so that has to be counterbalanced. The heat builds up acidity in the stomach, that has to be neutralized. Even if you drink ten glasses of water and other liquids, still heat is heat. The effect will be there. Due to the smoke, the eyes are bloodshot all the time. Plus, if the mind is disturbed, you can't tolerate the heat. When I am in the panchagni, I have to be absolutely fixed-minded. Even if there is some loud noise, I have to remain quiet. The moment my attention shifts, I become aware of the flames and the sparks hitting the body. At the same time, I have to look after the fires, fan them, maintain them. So I have to maintain dual awareness: of the fires and of my own concentration. It is a good practice of dharana with open eyes.

Last year, when I finished the panchagni, the temperature went up to 62. This year I expect that by mid-May, when I am finishing, the temperature will be around 70-75. This is my fourth year. Next year, it will continue for one more month. The sadhana is increased by one month every year. This is my fourth year, so four months. Next year it will be five months.

Q: Swamiji, do you feel the effects of the panchagni for months after the sadhana, as they say?
Swamiji: For many months after I finish, the body is still hot inside, like burning embers. A fire can go out but the embers remain. In the same way, for at least three months after, there is a feeling of heat in the body. It is an interesting experience.

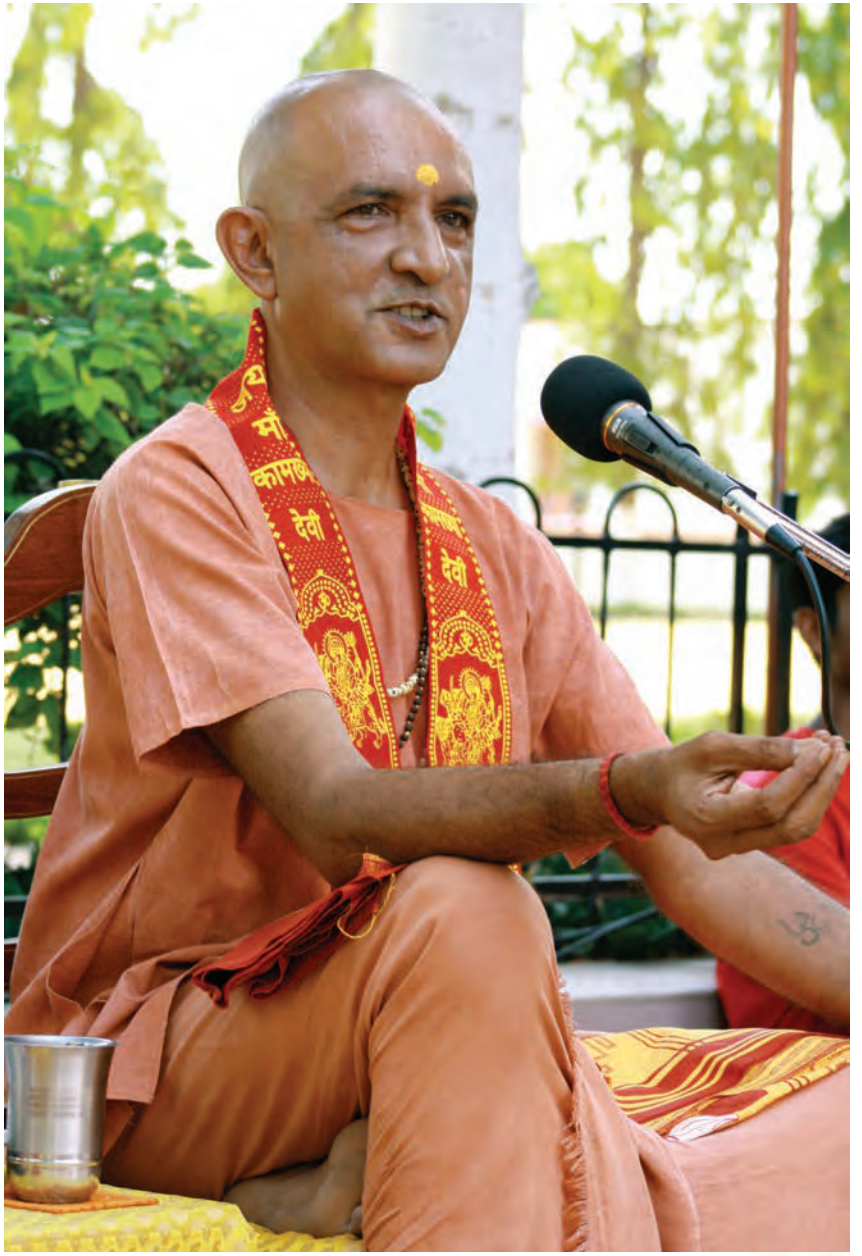
—Satsang with French group, 21 February 2016

TAPAS, NOT SADHANA

Swamiji: There are two concepts in yoga: the concept of sadhana and the concept of tapasya. Sadhana is for having a grip over the mind. Tapasya is for self-purification. Sadhana does not lead you to self-purification, it only leads you to victory and mastery over the mind, while tapasya leads you to self-purification. For example, when you put gold in the fire and melt it, the impurities are separated and can be extracted. At each level, the gold can be purified more. That is shuddhi, and that is the purpose of tapasya.

People fail in sadhana, therefore they cannot even conceive of doing tapasya. In sadhana you have to be regular. If you follow the whims of the mind, forget it. The mind is always anti-discipline, and the sadhana component is used for correcting this mental deficiency. Yoga is a sadhana. Doing one mala of mantra every day is a sadhana. Maintaining the positivity of mind every moment is a sadhana. Tapasya is a totally different thing. In order to do it, there has to be previous training where you are able to control the mind and bypass it. Otherwise, you cannot do it.

—Sunday satsang, 20th March 2016



BHASMA VIJNANA

Swamiji: Bhasma is used by sadhus when they are involved in tapasyas. When I sit in my panchagni, I put bhasma all over my body as it acts as an agent against the heat and the sparks. It is like a *kavacha*, armour, on the body.

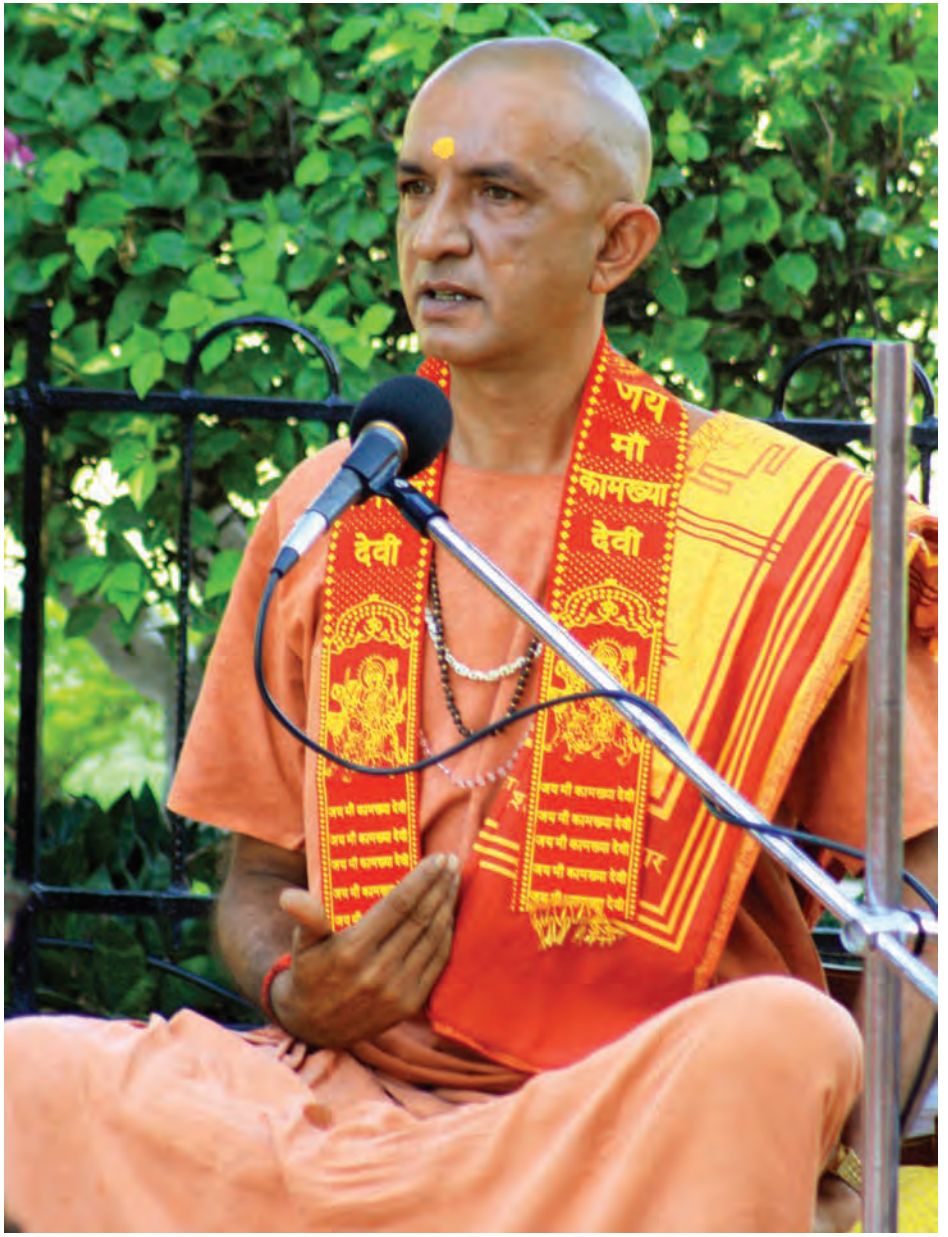
A lot of research has been done on bhasma. Recently, there was news that the government of Peru in South America has officially accepted the practice of havan. They are encouraging the farmers to do havan and use the ash as fertilizer to increase crop output.

Bhasma is a useful substance as it is the burnt essence. If you put it around trees, it stops bacteria and bugs from eating into the roots. It is anti-bacterial and anti-fungal. When mixed with seeds and strewn on fields, it helps increase crop output. This has been proved in experiments done under stringent conditions.

There is a way of preparing bhasma and there are different grades of purity in bhasma. When you burn the wood once, the ash is not bhasma, it is merely ash. It becomes bhasma when the same item is burnt about twenty times over through a specific procedure. Ash is the first product and bhasma is the final product. Each time the ash is collected, made into a ball and burnt again. If you do that twenty-seven times, it becomes mahabhasma. However, if you just light a bonfire and burn it to cinders, it becomes ash. There is a difference and there is a whole science behind it.

Bhasma can be therapeutic too. Many yogis infuse bhasma with mantras and use it for healing. I have met people who, after taking a little bit of bhasma, got up from their sick-bed within hours and started walking. That is possible, as bhasma, being the pure stuff, is a good medium to conduct the prana shakti of the mantras.

Due to its different effects, many people think of bhasma as a miracle powder. Many people think of bhasma as the



appropriate ingredient to enrich the soil and increase the crop output. Others use bhasma for protection from heat and cold. In this way, there are different uses and there is a whole science of bhasma, *bhasma vijnana*, which is an intricate, interesting and wide topic.

—Sunday satsang, 20th March 2016



. . . BECAUSE I LIKE IT

Swamiji: People ask why am I doing such a hard sadhana. Well, because I like it. I have been asking myself too, and the only answer I can come up with is that I like it. If I did not like it, I would not be doing it.

Why do I like it, when it is such a hard sadhana? Because it keeps the mind positive. You see, when do something you like, the mind remains clear, positive, active and optimistic. If you have to do something that you don't like, then that activity becomes a big burden. There is no pleasure or happiness in it.

There are two ways of perceiving things: one, in an optimistic manner; two, in a pessimistic manner. The first way believes in faith and the other believes in fate. The pessimist will always see the dark and the optimist will always see the bright. The world is still the same, it is neither bright nor dark, but it is the individual perception that makes the world look either bright and happy or dark and dull.

What you see outside is a reflection of what you are inside in your mind. If you see the world as dark and dull, that is what you are in your mind inside. If you see the world as happy, then that is what you are deep down. The world is a reflection of your own mental state, the mental mood.

Now, if the world is only a reflection of my mental mood, then I choose to live it in a happy manner. I choose to not live in a dull, depressive, critical and negative manner. That is my choice.

—Guru Bhakti Yoga, 6th May 2016



Darshan . . .








































Pashupata Astra Yajna

To conclude Swamiji's panchagni sadhana, from 10th to 14th May the Pashupata Astra Yajna was held in the grounds of Akhara. This ancient yajna, revived from history and held for the third year now, invoked ancient mantras meant to pierce through the granthis, the blocks that hold us back from realizing our true nature. The yajna also became the medium to distribute the fruit of Swamiji's panchagni sadhana to all.

During the five-day event, the invocations, havans and the extraordinary mantras of the yajna created a most auspicious and charged energy in the whole ashram, and transformation was experienced at various levels. On the first day of the yajna, the temperature at the panchagni vedi rose to seventy degrees and yet there was not a flicker of unease in Swamiji's demeanour and he radiated only auspiciousness. Later he remarked, "Rudra announced his arrival with his teja."

During the satsangs at the yajna, Swamiji revealed a new facet of the panchagni sadhana, sourced from the Taittiriya Brahmana, *in which the Yamaraja-Nachiketa dialogue indicates the three levels of panchagni sadhana – understanding one's environment and society, understanding oneself, and understanding the transcendental reality.*

Swami Satsangi also arrived from Rikhiapeeth for the poornahuti program. In her address she said that the panchagni is a sadhana that enhances one's endurance at every level, and it is only with this that the granthis are pierced. She also mentioned that Sri Swamiji used to say that it is a sadhana to 'connect earth with heaven'. At the conclusion of the yajna, Swamiji shot the symbolic Pashupata arrow into the sky, indicating the successful completion of the aradhana.







Satsangs during Pashupata Astra Yajna

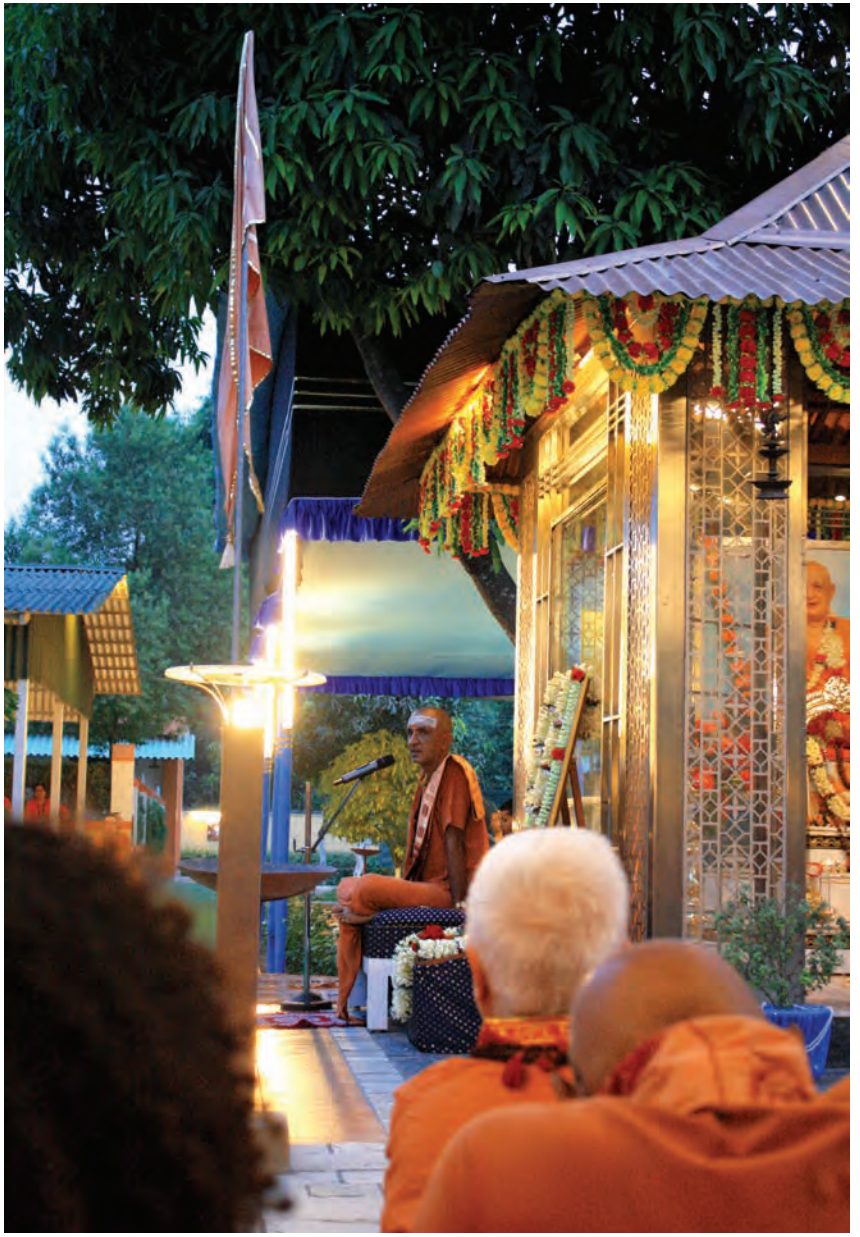
NACHIKETA'S THREE BOONS

Swamiji: Many thousands of years ago, there was a sage by the name of Vajashravas. He was one of the famous sages of ancient India who had dedicated and devoted his life to the propagation of spiritual knowledge. He belonged to the Shaivite tradition and was one of the masters of the tradition. He had a family, including wife and children, and they all lived together in the gurukul, serving society. They were a very happy family.

One day, the sage decided to perform a yajna. As part of the yajna ceremonies, he was required to give alms of cows and wealth. A grand yajna was performed, and a lot of wealth was distributed and many cows were given. However, there were more people than items of alms, so the rishi said, "We have given away all the best that we had. Now, let us bring out the second-grade items." The second grade consisted of animals that were undernourished, sick, or old. Nonetheless, the second lot was brought out to be given away.

While the animals were being distributed, one of the rishi's sons, whose name was Nachiketa, felt disturbed and went to his father and asked, "Father, why are you giving the sick cows in charity?" The father did not have the time to explain what was happening, so he did not answer and continued giving. After some time Nachiketa again asked his father, "Why are you giving away the old and the sick cows?" Again his father did not answer. Nachiketa felt a bit annoyed at not receiving any reply. Now he asked, "To whom will you give me away?" His father was enraged. He said, "I will give you to Yamaraj, the god of death."

According to the story, Nachiketa went to the realm of Yamaraj, the king of death. There he spent three days and three nights waiting, as Yamaraj had gone out to collect souls from the world and was not at home. During his absence, Nachiketa just stood at his door. When Yamaraj returned, he was informed that a young



brahmin boy had been standing at the gate, wanting an audience with him. Yamaraj went out to see who the boy was, and found Nachiketa standing quietly at the gate.

According to the version of this story in the T*aittiriya Brahmana*, Yamaraj asked him, "How long have you been here?" Nachiketa replied, "Three days and three nights." Yamaraj next asked, "What have you eaten and drunk during these three days?" To this Nachiketa gave a beautiful answer. He said, "I did not take any grains or food or water, but the first night, *prajam ta iti* – I partook of society. The second night, *pashu-gvam ta iti* – I partook of myself. And the third night, *sadhukrityam ta iti* – I partook of ascetic-like action." This indicates an interesting progression of thought, which is also the foundation of the panchagni sadhana.

Nachiketa is just a young boy of nine or ten years. He lives in the gurukul with his father, who is a rishi, a saint, a sage. They follow a daily routine of discipline, sadhana, worship and invocation, a discipline of life. Nachiketa is not an average boy living a conventional social life; he is a disciple of a guru. He is the son of a master, who learns from his father all the knowledge and practices of spiritual life. Nachiketa knows the tradition, the sadhana and the lifestyle followed in the Shaivite tradition.

Now, having taught all he knew, Vajashravas told his son, "I can lead you up to a certain point with my knowledge, beyond that you need guidance from the gods." Therefore, when Nachiketa spent three nights at the door of Yama and was asked the question, "What did you eat?" and replied, "Prajam ta iti", it was not an ordinary answer. What does the word *prajam* mean here? The community, family, parents, friends, associates, all form part of one's society. The first night, Nachiketa had thought, 'What is happening to my father? I hope he is not sad for having sent me to the door of Yama. I hope people are not cursing him for giving old and infirm animals in charity. I hope people pardon him. I hope there is no grief.' All Nachiketa's thoughts on the first night were in relation to his people. They were not about himself, but about his people: parents, friends, associates, members of the



family, all those who had come for the yajna. Therefore he said, "The first night I partook of society."

Then he said, "The second night I partook of myself." On the second night he started to think, 'Was I at fault? Did I say something wrong? Did I do any wrong to give grief to my parents? Did I not ask the right questions? Did my actions bring pain and suffering to my parents? Did my absence create queries in the minds of people?' Thus, on the second night his thoughts were about himself, trying to figure out the best course of action that he could have taken, trying to understand what is correct and appropriate. That is what was meant when he said, "The second night I was consuming myself, I was eating myself, I was seeing myself."

The three nights of Nachiketa represent three states of mind: the first state of mind was in relation to society and the world of senses, the connections out there; the second was in relation to himself; the third was in relation to higher pursuits in life. From society, to the individual, to higher pursuits, these are the three states that he experienced during these three nights.

Yama said to him, "I will give you one boon for each night. What will be your first boon?" Nachiketa said, "Let my father be happy, let him not feel that he has done anything wrong by sending me to you, let him be free of all criticism and comments from other people. There should be peace and happiness in the family, in society, in everybody who has come to participate in my father's yajna." For the first boon, his thoughts were in relation to society.

Yamaraj agreed and said, "What do you want as your second boon?" Nachiketa said, "I want to know from you the way to live the correct life, the way to think and act appropriately." Yamaraj imparted to him the relevant teaching, and said, "What do you want for your third boon?" Nachiketa said, "I want to know how to attain the imperishable state of consciousness, which goes beyond death and decay." As a result, Yamaraj taught him the panchagni sadhana. Thus another name for the fires of panchagni is *Nachiketa agni*, the fire of Nachiketa.

—10 May 2016









THE PATH OF NACHIKETA

Swamiji: We were talking about the story of Nachiketa. He spent three nights at the gate of the kingdom of death, and when Yamaraj, the lord of death, was informed that a young boy was waiting at the gate to enter his kingdom, he went to see Nachiketa and asked him, "How long have you been here waiting to enter?" Nachiketa replied, "Three days and three nights." Yamaraj said, "You have been waiting here for three days and nights without food and water. How have you survived?" Nachiketa said, "I have consumed. I have partaken of certain things which have filled me up." Yamaraj asked him, "What did you partake of the first night?" Nachiketa answered, "*Prajam ta iti* – I partook of society. I took bites from society." "On the second night, what did you eat?" He said, "I took a bite of the animal." "And on the third night, what did you eat?" Nachiketa said, "I took a bite of the actions of a sadhu."

These are clever answers. The first answer, 'Prajam ta iti', indicates that although being an individual, the human being is part and parcel of the human society. The destiny that each one lives is individual, yet the ideas that are imposed on every individual are a reflection of society. Anything that you live in your life is a gift to you by society; it is *bhoga*. What was the society of Nachiketa that he was thinking of? His society included those involved in his father's work, those to whom alms were given, those who were grieving for him, and so on. In his mind, he saw this society all around and its reactions: some experiencing grief at his absence, some angry to receive old cows in charity, some disappointed, some agitated. He saw all that as bhoga, something that you receive and consume. He was able to observe and witness the entire social environment and yet be separate from it.

Nachiketa's second answer was: "*Pashu-gvam ta iti* – I partook of the animal." The animal is 'me', the individual. An animal recognizes *sambandh*, relationships. In understanding this animal, one has to ask, "Where is my sambandh?" Your connections and relationships are with your father, mother, family, friends, and

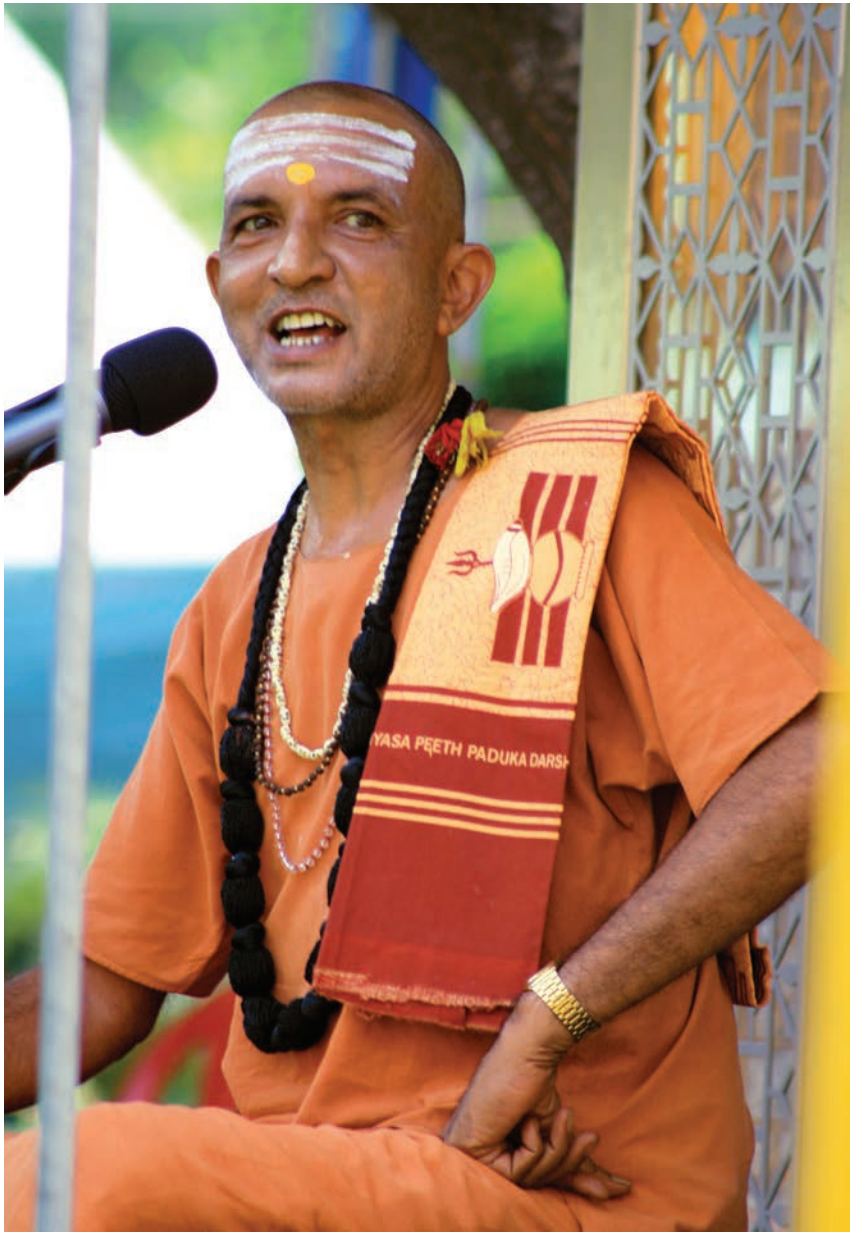
a few other people in society. What has been achieved through your connections? Have you achieved the satisfaction, fulfilment, happiness, enjoyment and wholesomeness that you crave in life through your connections? Or have you only received expectations, demands and criticism? If so, there must be something wrong in your relationships and connections. Nachiketa was observing all this. He was observing the animal, the 'me and my connections'.

Nachiketa's third answer was: "*Sadhukrityam ta iti* – I ate the actions of the sadhu." What is the main action or focus of a sadhu? Many people will say *paropakara*, helping others. That is a limited understanding. Any good person can help another person. You don't need to be a sadhu for that. Even a donkey helps by carrying the load of others. Doing good work is not the ultimate action of a sadhu. The ultimate as well as the first action of a sadhu is renunciation.

When you become a sadhu, then the main idea is to renounce, *tyaga*. You become a sadhu with the idea that you will renounce your family, friends, society, your ego identity, hatred, jealousy, greed, happiness, and remain free from the grip of pain and suffering. Therefore, for a sadhu, the main action is letting go. Helping others is a personal choice, but the principle a sadhu has to live by is letting go. On the third night, this was the idea Nachiketa dwelled upon. He partook of *sadhukrityam*, renouncing, letting go.

Nachiketa gave beautiful answers about himself and what he was experiencing. If you analyze the three states of mind that Nachiketa went through, the first day he experienced the world and the chatter of the world. On the second day, he experienced himself and his connection to the world. On the third day, he began to release his associations and attachments to the world and became free. Hearing his answers, Yamaraj said, "I am pleased with you. I will give you three boons. Ask."

For the first boon, Nachiketa said, "Let there be peace in society. Let nobody have any grief or frustration or irritation or anger. Let peace prevail. *Sarvesham swastirbhavatu, sarvesham shantirbhavatu, sarvesham poornam bhavatu, sarvesham mangalam bhavatu*." The god



of death said, "Granted. Your father is happy; he is not grieving any more. Your family is content; they are not missing you any more. Your friends are happy; they are not disturbing anything any more. Your society is content; there is no complaint against anybody any more. There is peace and harmony prevailing in your society."

For the second boon, Nachiketa said, "Teach me how to do the right thing at the right time, the correct thing in the correct manner. Tell me ways to improve myself, so I am more useful in doing good work and not a barrier." To that also Yamaraj said, "Granted. Your life will be full of goodness."

For the third boon, Nachiketa said to Yamaraj, "Tell me how I can overcome death." Yamaraj said, "Sorry. Not possible. In this material world death is inevitable and there is no way that you can avoid death, no matter who you are. In this world of duality nobody can escape death, not even God. If He were to come into this world, even God would have to die at the end of His or Her life." Nachiketa said, "I don't agree with you. I think there is something more permanent and constant than this fleeting awareness and momentary life in the span of eternity." Yamaraj said, "Yes, there is. However, that is not a path everybody can tread." Nachiketa said, "I am willing to tread that path. I want to know this *vidya*, this knowledge, this system, this way. Whether everybody is able to do it or not does not matter. The way exists and I want to learn it." Yamaraj relented and said, "Okay, I will teach you the way." He then gave Nachiketa the knowledge of panchagni, the five fires, and therefore these five fires came to be known as *Nachiketa agni*, the fire of Nachiketa.

The knowledge of the five fires represents the death of the lower nature of the individual, so that a new birth can take place. This new birth is in jnana, in vidya. The five fires represent the five chains that hold you down to this plane: *kama*, passion; *krodha*, anger; *moha*, infatuation; *mada*, arrogance; and *lobha*, greed. The moment you transcend these five lower tendencies, your mind becomes universal. The mind becoming universal is the attainment of immortality. It is awakening in the spiritual



dimension, not death. It may be death of the material dimension, yet the consciousness remains constant and the same in that transcendental state. That is the state of identifying with the permanent tattwa of existence in the divine transcendental realm and overcoming the lower tendencies that are the catalysts for decay and death.

This is the story of Nachiketa and the beginning of panchagni.

—11 May 2016

THE THREE KNOTS

Swamiji: One of the purposes of the panchagni sadhana is to break through the *granthis*, psychic knots. Society, individuality and maya – these three create knots in the life of every individual. Knots created by society are related to enjoyment: the cravings, the desires, the need for satisfaction and happiness. That is Brahma granthi, the knot of bhoga. The second knot is related to the individual's self-perception, self-image, self-esteem, self-projection and self-assertiveness, which define one's connections. That is Vishnu granthi, which sustains 'me' and gives 'me' its identity. The third is Rudra granthi, which is in relation to leaving and attaining – leaving the old, attaining the new; leaving the bad, attaining the good.

Nachiketa realized this when he gave his answers to Yamaraj. He said, "First, I partook of the society," representing the bhoga in life, the Brahma granthi. One's interactions in society with family, friends, relatives, they all represent bhoga. What everyone is searching for with their connections is support, encouragement, satisfaction and push from others. It is bhoga that everyone is looking for.

The second state of mind Nachiketa experienced was self-awareness, the Vishnu granthi. The third was renunciation, the Rudra granthi. In this third state of mind he was letting go of all that could bind and hold him in the realm of maya, in order to experience the unlimited aspect of himself. These three states of mind of Nachiketa represent, according to the yogic system of thought, the concept of the granthis: Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi.

Brahma granthi is the social or the outer input. Vishnu granthi is the individual output. Rudra granthi is the change of the social and the individual, both the input and the output, to move into a universal experience. These are identified as the three main conditions of mind or states of consciousness of an individual. When you are in the material consciousness, you are at the Brahma granthi level. You are enjoying everything: the sun is nice, the wind





is nice, the moon is nice, the stars are nice, the people are nice, the movie is nice, the food is nice, the cloth is nice. That is bhoga.

When you become aware of yourself, 'This is my need, this is what I want to do, this is what I hope to do, this is what I wish to do', that is Vishnu granthi. The only reason you express the sentiments of anger, frustration, irritation, jealousy and hatred is to assert your identity. You take the help of all the negatives in life to assert yourself, prove yourself and satisfy yourself.

If you take the help of the positives in life, then there is no 'self' awareness; the awareness becomes broader and universal. It is not limited to oneself; it is not limited to self-perception or self-projection. This universal awareness is attained when one rises above Vishnu granthi and pierces through Rudra granthi. The drive to change the negative 'me' into a positive 'me' is Rudra granthi, for the negative connects you to the world, and the positive frees you from the world.

Thus the granthis represent the states of mind that are present in your life all the time. The negatives restrict, confine and limit your actions, responses, knowledge and behaviour; whereas the positive always expands your perception, knowledge, responses, attitude and behaviour. The world is guided by the negative forces while the positive forces are only inspiration. You feel inspired, yet you are guided by the negative. In spiritual life, the negative has to be dropped and the positive has to be adopted. The granthis, the psychic knots that create a particular condition within you, have to be broken. That is where the challenge lies.

Different traditions have defined different methods for breaking the knots. In hatha yoga, for example, to break the granthis you need to do specific practices, whether pranayama, bandha or kumbhaka. In raja yoga, the granthis are transcended with the practice of yama and niyama. In jnana yoga, you can overcome and transcend the granthis with viveka and vairagya. Each yoga has defined, according to its nature, a system by which you can transcend and pierce these granthis. No matter which yoga you take up, you have to be systematic, and through sustained effort it is possible to break the granthis.



The main theme of spiritual life is to pierce through the granthis; only then will luminosity dawn. That is why all the traditions of spirituality ask you to work to overcome the limited, the defined and the tamasic self, and connect with your higher nature. That is how you can be free from the limitations that you face in your life.

—12 May 2016

GRANTHI BHEDAN IN DIFFERENT TRADITIONS

Swamiji: Granthis represent limitation: limiting, blocking, defining or restricting something. When you restrict the free expression or free-flow of something, you are blocking its freedom; that is known as granthi. You create a condition, a limitation, you create boundaries, defining the area in which that quality or condition can move, function, work, act and exist in. The creating of the conditioning is known as granthi, not only at the individual level, but at the cosmic level as well – affecting the individual. Granthi is in fact the cosmic conditioning, the cosmic knot, the cosmic block that is reflected in you. The granthis define where you live, express, experience and die. They define the nature that you express in your life.

Yoga defines three granthis – Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi – and relates them to the chakras. According to kundalini and kriya yoga, the first granthi is at the level of mooladhara chakra, the second granthi is above manipura chakra, and the third granthi is at ajna chakra. Every branch of yoga speaks of granthis and defines a particular method by which they can be tackled in one's body and personality.

The three questions that Yamaraj asked Nachiketa, and the three answers that Nachiketa gave, indicate the conditions created by the granthis. In the first answer, 'prajam ta iti', Nachiketa said that he observed the nature of Brahma granthi, the social and external inputs that he received. Everything that you receive from outside, that which is external to you, the sensorial, the mundane, the material, is 'praja'. That is what he witnessed.

Vishnu granthi indicates interaction with one's own self: 'my self-image, my self-prestige, my self-perception, my self-expression, my needs, my desires'. This self-oriented awareness is Vishnu granthi.

The transformative condition is Rudra granthi, which changes the old to create something new; it is the catalyst for change. This change always happens in one direction, from the material to the spiritual. Thus, *praja*, the social, is the first aspect – Brahma granthi. *Pashu*, the self, is the second aspect – Vishnu granthi.



Sadhuta, the pious, the good, is the third aspect – Rudra granthi, the changed form.

Although all yogic scriptures recognize the existence of granthis, each system or branch of yoga has devised a particular method to transcend these limiting conditions that bind one's nature to the world of the senses and sense objects. Every spiritual aspirant, no matter which path he or she follows, has to break through the granthis. No matter how advanced you think you are, whether you have been meditating for years, whether you have gone through the sequence of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, finally you have to work on the granthis, as they represent the shift of consciousness from the gross to subtle to transcendental. All practitioners of yoga have to remember that the basic conditioning has to change, without which, even twenty or thirty years of meditation will not give the final result. These basic conditionings are the attractions and the pulls, the expression of samskaras in your behaviour, your desires, needs and aspirations in life.

In hatha yoga, pranayama, bandha and kumbhaka are used to open the granthis: pranayama for Brahma granthi, bandhas for Vishnu granthi, and kumbhaka for Rudra granthi.

In raja yoga, yamas are used for Brahma granthi, as they lead you to restraint in your interaction with the outside world. Niyamas are used for Vishnu granthi, as they take you to the state of discipline where you are able to contain and control yourself, the pashu. Pratyahara is used for Rudra granthi, as the gradual withdrawal from the outer into the inner leads to *tyaga*, renunciation, leaving behind.

Jnana yoga says that Brahma granthi is tackled through *viveka*, discrimination, in what you do and how you do it. There has to be viveka in how you think, act and live, in how you eat, walk and talk. In relation to oneself, there has to be *vairagya*; one has to learn how to detach from oneself. In relation to sadhukritya, there has to be jnana. The awareness, the knowledge, the understanding, the wisdom has to be there.

Tantra uses visualization of the symbol of the Shivalinga and the corresponding mantras. You visualize the dhumra lingam



in Brahma granthi: the cloudy and hazy lingam, indicating the condition where you are caught up in many things and immersed in *ajnana*, ignorance. You visualize the bana lingam in Vishnu granthi: the red or gold lingam, indicating the desire for self-fulfilment as well as a subtle form of self-awareness. You visualize the itarkhya lingam in Rudra granthi: the black lingam with a clear outline, indicating the state where there is one-pointedness and clarity. Then finally you visualize the jyotirlingam, the luminous lingam, in sahasrara, indicating the state achieved through the piercing of the granthis. In this way, tantra aims to purify and pierce the three granthis by using symbols and mantras, and to experience the state attained thereafter.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also indicates the way to transcend the granthis. It says that the tendency to accumulate, which relates to the Brahma granthi, has to be transcended through charity, by learning how to give. By developing the state of mind where you do not wish to take or accumulate, instead you let go and give, you can overcome the effects of the Brahma granthi. For the second block, Vishnu granthi, the statement in the *Gita* is to practise tapas, so that you recognize yourself, your limitations and negative conditions, and make a conscious effort to change them into a positive condition. For the third, Rudra granthi, Sri Krishna recommends yajna, as yajna connects you with everything around you.

In this manner, many masters, scriptures, paths and traditions have each provided a particular approach to overcome the blocks and achieve *granthi bhedan*, the piercing of the granthis. Through all these different methods, it is possible to overcome the effects of the granthis on your mind at present.

Although there is not much description of the granthis in the texts and you may not be able to have direct perception of the granthis, what is relevant is that a spiritual aspirant advancing on the path has to eventually face the challenges that arise from within. After all, you cannot expect to attain peace, inner fulfilment and contentment only by practising asana for twenty years. You cannot expect to attain peace and tranquillity by practising pranayama, ten rounds every day, for ten years. The practices have their purpose, and once they fulfil their purpose you have to move on to the next stage. No one has attained moksha, jnana or realization through the practice of asana and pranayama alone. Every positive change took place when the asana and pranayama fulfilled their purpose and you started to work with yourself, with your nature, mind, emotions and consciousness. That is pratyahara, that is dharana, and that is dhyana.

It is when you face the conditionings that block your growth, and work to remove those blocks, that you advance in spiritual life. The adherents of hatha yoga have followed one path to achieve this, as it was part of the hatha yoga teachings. Similarly, the adherents of raja yoga, jnana yoga, other yogas or tantra have each followed their own method. Therefore, depending on your path, you have to follow the principles and precepts that give you the means to overcome a condition, a block, a state of mind that binds you, that holds you to this dimension. From the Shaivite perspective, the panchagni sadhana is a potent method to overcome these blocks, and the Pashupata Astra Yajna complements it.

—12 May 2016



PASHUPATA VIDYA

Swamiji: The Pashupata Astra Yajna is an ancient invocation. The anusthana was last conducted by Arjuna during the time of Sri Krishna. After the Mahabharata war, the knowledge receded into the background, and for all these centuries people in society did not feel the need to revive it.

When our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, gave instructions to commence the panchagni sadhana, to explore and experience the real essence of sannyasa and spiritual life, he also instructed us to revive the traditions now becoming lost to humanity. The purpose is to remember what was given to us by our forefathers for our peace and wellbeing. Thus the Pashupata Astra Yajna was resurrected from the ancient systems.

It has become a natural conclusion for the panchagni sadhana as they both belong to a specific spiritual tradition called the Pashupata sampradaya. This is the oldest spiritual tradition in the world. Earlier than the advent of any rishi, muni or seer, it was propounded by Lord Shiva himself, when he gave instructions on yoga and spiritual life. These instructions are encapsulated in the Pashupata vidya.

The concept of 'pashupata' concerns mastering the animalistic tendencies within oneself. *Pashu* means animal and *pati* or *pat* means to master: to become the master of the animals and demons that control your life. By trying to master them, you become purer, more luminous and sattwic, as opposed to becoming more involved in the world of senses and sense objects and losing awareness of the spiritual dimension, which is what happens when you do not control them.

The Pashupata vidya has five components. One, the *Pashupata sampradaya*: the community that follows the precepts, thoughts, principles and ideas of the Pashupata tradition, where a lifestyle is lived according to the precepts of the Pashupata system.

The second is *Pashupata darshana*: the philosophy and understanding of the Pashupata vidya. It includes the aspiration of the tradition and the path to attain that aspiration; the methods, the practices, the pitfalls, the achievements, the successes and failures. To know the successes along with the failures is important.





Everybody talks about the good that can happen to a person in life, but few people talk about what one has to watch out for in order to attain success. Swami Sivananda did tell. He said, "Be observant of your mental states, your thoughts, criticisms, doubts, all that you go through." Yet, it is a rare aspirant who comes to this point.

Thus, in the philosophy, the darshana, not only are the successes and achievements enumerated, but also the pitfalls and the impediments that do not allow you to progress. They have to be overcome as well. Merely learning new things, as is the tendency, is not enough. Everyone asks, "What is the new thing I can learn today? What is the new thing that I can learn tomorrow?" No. Instead of learning new things, apply your learning to the old pitfalls you already know about and become better at crossing them. Instead of learning new things, look out for the blocks that have held you back so far and not allowed you to progress, and manage them. This is covered in the darshana.

The third component is *Pashupata yoga*, the means to attain the goals set by the darshana. The Pashupata yoga is the original yoga, and is comprised of five yogas: sparsha yoga, bhava yoga, abhava yoga, mantra yoga, and maha yoga. In the course of time, from these five yogas emerged hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, mantra yoga, nada yoga, laya yoga. Every yoga that we know today is an evolute of the original five yogas of Pashupata. That indicates the vast scope of Pashupata yoga.

The fourth component of Pashupata vidya is *panchagni*, the sadhana of the five fires, intended for people who are able to renounce the attachments and attractions of the world.

The fifth component is *Pashupata astra*, the weapon of Pashupati or Lord Shiva. As the culmination of panchagni, the final invocation of Lord Shiva is done through the Pashupata Astra Yajna, which invokes Shiva's power. This is the anusthana you are all witnessing, and it is being performed on earth after a gap of about 5,500 years. The mantras that were heard during Sri Krishna's age are being heard again on this planet today, in the city of Munger, now for the third year.

—14 May 2016



Conclusion of Panchagni Sadhana

On the morning of 15th May, the panchagni sadhana was concluded for the year. After the final ahutis, oblations, Swamiji put the four fires to rest, and offered his thanks to the cosmic forces for the grace received during the sadhana. The conclusion came with Swamiji's heartfelt chant:

Sri Harim Sarva Lokanaam
Sri Gurum Sarva Lokanaam
Sri Shivam Sarva Lokanaam
Sri Harim paramanandam
Upadeshtrarameeshwaram
Vyapakam Sarva Lokanaam
Kaaranam Tam Namamyaham
Om Shanti Shanti Shantih Hari Om







THE TRADITION CONTINUES

Swamiji: Panchagni is a beautiful sadhana. It is difficult. It is not easy or simple. It is not meditation, it is not mantra japa; it is the act of just sitting in-between the four fires, with the fifth fire above in the form of the sun. In order to succeed in this sadhana, you have to like the sadhana, as it affects you at various levels: the physical, the psychological and the spiritual.

Water and fire

During this panchagni, I understood the complementary actions of fire and water. Although the focus is on fire, it is the water you have to maintain, as in the absence of water, fire is going to burn you completely. Interestingly, in the *Apas Sukta*, the verses on water in the Vedas, it speaks of panchagni. It says, "Through you, may the fire in the body be balanced." There is a whole description of how water balances the fire. This led to another thought. If a log is burning, how much water would be required to douse the fire? One glass? Not enough. One handful? Not enough. Potent cause and potent action, both have to be equal. If you put a few drops of water on a log, it will only create more smoke and sparks. Therefore the amount of water required has to be known. You can have either result: positive or negative; the fire may be doused, or the smoke and sparks can increase.

You experience this in your life also, in a different manner. For example, you are angry, the fire is burning inside. How do you calm yourself? If somebody tells you, "Become quiet", it is like throwing a few drops of water on the fire; it sizzles more. You respond with, "What do you mean, become quiet?" In order to douse the anger you need to double the amount of water, to ensure that the anger is completely doused. That is the principle in panchagni, too.

When the body has to endure heat, it is water that assists it by covering the body in a film of sweat, which keeps the body cool. Similarly, when you are not able to articulate, you drink some water and articulation becomes easier. Therefore, when there is a proper amount of water in the body, when there is no dehydration, then



anything coming from outside is manageable. When there is water in the air, it is easier to breathe. You cannot breathe in dry air; your throat will just burn. When there is heat in the atmosphere, rain balances it out.

People do not realize the importance of water as an element. They think water is only needed to quench thirst. In fact, nowadays many people don't even drink water; they don't even know the taste of water, especially children in big cities who only know the taste of fizzy drinks. In such people, the internal system is absolutely destroyed.

I once saw a picture of the internal body of a person who used to drink a lot of cold drinks. This was a picture taken by the Quantum machine, and the parameters that the machine gave were all on the negative side: bad health, bad digestion, bad smell in the body, bad perspiration, bad wind, everything bad. There was no clean water in the body for *prakshalana*, cleaning. This person, who was suffering from twenty different types of illnesses, was advised, "Drink only water for one month." He followed that advice and became healthy.

Water represents life. It supports life, it nourishes life, and that is something people don't realize; other things tend to become more important. Even in my mind during panchagni, previously it was fire that was important, yet this time I realized that water is more important than fire. Different revelations do come when you are exposed to a situation.

Our spiritual inheritance

People in India say that our ancestors were sages and rishis. The saptarishis were seven sages who brought knowledge to the world. Their job was to establish knowledge. We are the offspring of those rishis. Even science has now discovered that the entire humanity descended from seven males and seven females. That has been established scientifically, indicating that we are descendants of people like us.

These rishis were not only concerned with their own mukti, moksha or emancipation, they were also concerned about



the welfare of the society in which they lived. The society was dependent on them for knowledge, for learning the skills to survive. The seven rishis were the first teachers of humanity. They were spiritual by nature and what they did always had far-reaching consequences on human society and the civilization of which they were a part. Through their contribution, the society gradually developed and evolved from tribal to rural to urban.

Today if you think, 'What have I inherited from my forefathers? What are the samskaras that I have inherited from my forefathers, the rishis?' what will be your answer? Can you name at least one thing they have given to you and that you are living right now? This was the question I asked myself: 'What is the actual gift or contribution they have given to us?'

I found that there are many things they have given to us. Even so, I have to start with something, so I chose invocation of the three astras: Pashupatastra, Narayanastra and Brahmastra. They indicate the three powers of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, invoked and awakened through different types of yajnas. At the conclusion of panchagni, the power of Shiva is invoked through Pashupata Astra Yajna.

The power of Vishnu is invoked through Narayana Astra Yajna held during the Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna. In this anusthana, the mantras are whispered and are not to be heard by anybody other than those who are part of the rituals. So while you are sitting there, you hear the kirtans, bhajans, satsangs and watch the havan, but you don't hear the mantras as they are being whispered. That is the method. The public cannot hear them; they are only to feel the effects of the mantra. Similarly, we will also be performing Brahma Astra Yajna, invocation of the shakti of Brahma.

All this is a process of sadhana and research. Besides these yajnas, other aspects that were given to society by the rishis will also be looked into. Before I leave this planet, I would like to leave behind the revived traditions of the rishis, and that will be one of the tasks of Sannyasa Peeth.

—15 May 2016











2017

The Final Year of Panchagni Sadhana









The concluding year of the panchagni sadhana was certainly the most intense. Even as early as March the temperature in the panchagni vedi started going up to 50 degrees. Every day the residents of Ganga Darshan looked up to the sky and prayed earnestly for the wellbeing and protection of their Swamiji. Would the sun god not relent? Would Indra, Varuna and Ganga, the shakti of water, not come to aid? Everyone held their breaths as the temperatures continued to rise. However, no one need have worried. For Swamiji's resolve and the grace that follows him proved to be stronger than the laws of nature.

Mother Prakriti cast a mantle of love, and the elements bowed before the tejas of the tapasvi. Possibly for the first time in the history of Munger, there was rain and cloud almost every day through May and June. The protective hand of the Mother became evident to all when Swamiji revealed a specific occurrence at the conclusion of the sadhana (see below).

The sadhana was completed on 15th June. Even as everyone felt grateful to simply know that Swamiji was safe and well, the auspiciousness that pervaded the spaces was like the coolest water and the freshest air. In these times of strife and pain, an ancient tradition had been upheld. A balance had been created in the energy field of earth. Hope, joy and truth were still alive and would continue to be so. For those who wished to walk it, a path had once again been carved out in the ethers.

Pre-Panchagni Satsangs



PREPARING FOR TAPASYA

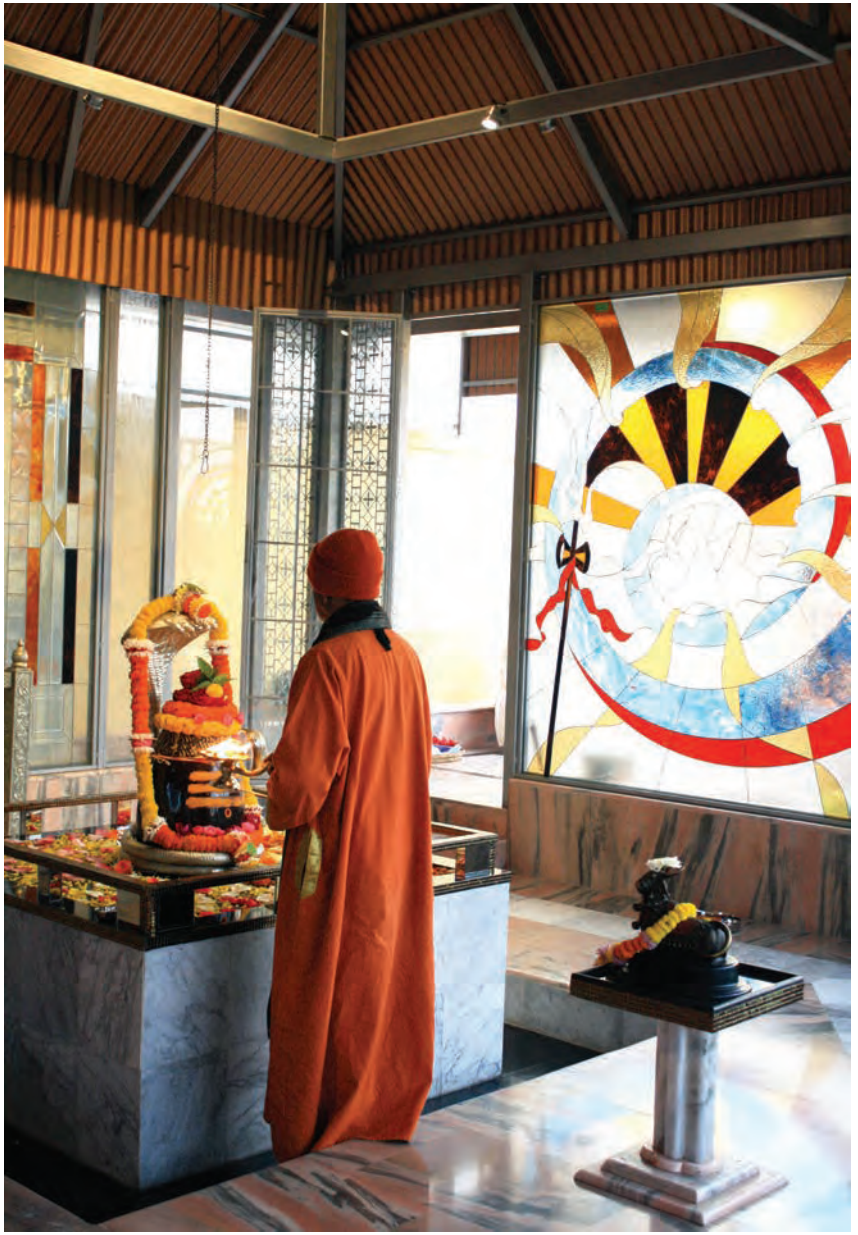
Swamiji: Today we start the proceedings of the panchagni. This year will be the final year with all the five fires for five months. That will last until June, therefore it will be an intense period, for which preparations have started from today.

This preparation is taking place in two parts: the first part is private and it happens during the morning hours in Akhara. The second part is open to all who wish to connect with the feeling, the inspiration, the motivation and the spirit of tapasya, with auspiciousness and goodness, with the Shiva quality and the guru quality. This is the Satyameshwar aradhana, which takes place in the afternoon. Even this is not a publicized event. Only those who have an old connection with the tradition or those who understand the path come to it, and then we talk, participate and connect.

The panchagni is a sadhana of isolation, *ekanta*. That is why the morning aradhana is a closed sadhana. If you wish to participate, let the only participation be that of sending good wishes and thoughts of support so that this fragile human being can walk this difficult path.

—12 January 2017





THE PATH OF DESCENT

Swamiji: Satyameshwar is one of the names of Shiva. *Satyam* means truth and *ishwar* means lord; therefore Satyameshwar is lord of truth, master of truth. Each year, before the commencement of panchagni, we do an invocation of Satyameshwar.

Where the Shivalinga is, the ground is indented and many people ask, "Why is the floor not level? Isn't it dangerous? Somebody can fall in." That indentation in the ground is purposeful. In order to reach the Divine, you cannot climb up, you have to climb down. You have to climb down from the ego level, from the self-awareness and self-identity: me, I, mine. If you ascend from this 'me', then you go into 'super me'. If you descend, there is no me. Then who is there? 'Me' without ego, without a self-identity, and that is the state of humility. This is the reason why in the temples of India the *garbha griha*, the sanctum sanctorum, is always at the lowermost level. You have to climb down the steps to access it. The reason is simple: instead of ascending, you descend. As you descend, you lose your self, you don't boost your self-awareness.

When you boost the self-awareness, you become from normal to super normal; but when you lose the awareness of 'me' then you are not even normal, you become ego-identity-less. In that state of humility, in that state of letting go and surrender, one experiences and realizes a higher knowledge. Thus, the purpose of Satyameshwar Aradhana is to connect with the idea of descending and not ascending.

This is the understanding of the sadhus. If it is a lecture on yoga, one might say 'ascend', as there one is talking of a system, a process, the stepping stones to reach an end. That is in relation to yoga. In yoga you ascend and in sannyasa you descend.

The understanding of this descent is about losing the self-identity. If you see the masters and saints in any culture, any tradition, have they gained or have they lost? They have lost. They lost the arrogance of ego, the hardness of the heart, the stiffness of understanding, the rigidity of knowledge. They

became more open, kind, sympathetic and compassionate. They arrived at the state where they could embrace one and everything. Therefore, the descent is where the identity of 'I know', 'I realize' and 'I identify' is gone. You live the life of a sadhu. Normally the spiritual aspirants meditate, feel good, and they ascend; their egos become more and more bloated until they can't see the beginning or the end. That is the super-ego.

Sannyasins who are trained in yoga follow the path of yoga. My mandate is to follow the path of sannyasa, as instructed by my guru. Therefore, I have to move in the direction of sannyasa, of losing, of letting go. In that process, all the strings that hold one down have to be broken. That awareness has to come that these strings can be released, and the sadhu nature knows that. The stiffness can definitely be made soft. The hard potato can become soft and edible if it is put through a process. Similarly, the hard people can be made soft if they are put through a process.

—13 January 2017







INHERITANCE OF SANNYASA

Swamiji: Today the sun has entered the sign of Capricorn, *makar rashi*, and embarked on its northern path. This is an important event in Asian countries, and in the past it was an important event in many ancient cultures, as it represents the waning of winter and the coming of spring: new life. In the ashram, this day of Makar Sankranti is celebrated with the performance of twelve rounds of surya namaskara, representing the twelve months or the twelve aspects of the sun. Then everybody has a meal of dahi-chooda with *gur*, jaggery. This tradition has been going on for thousands of years.

This is the day that I commence the panchagni sadhana. It is a sadhana of sannyasa; it is not a sadhana of yoga. It is not part of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, nada yoga, bhakti yoga, laya yoga or any yoga that you may know of or invent in the future. It is not part of any yogic tradition, practice or culture; it is part of the sannyasa tradition. Even in sannyasa there are different stages; everyone who wears geru is not at the same level. Just as in school you have first grade, second grade, third grade, in sannyasa also there are grades. These are: kutichaka, bahudaka, hamsa, paramahamsa, turiyatita and avadhoota.

The sadhana of panchagni was done by paramahamsas in the past, as sannyasa has two areas: education and experience. The area of experience is for sannyasins of the third and fourth category, hamsa and paramahamsa, through tapasya. That is the personal journey into experience. For kutichaka and bahudaka the practices and aspirations are different, for avadhoota and turiyatita the aspirations are different. Therefore, sages like Dattatreya, Atri, Vasishtha, Agastya have done tapasya in the past.

Even in the present times there have been sannyasins of that calibre. Swami Sivananda was a sadhaka and tapasvi in his personal life. Swami Satyananda was a sadhaka and tapasvi in his personal life. In his guru ashram he was sadhaka, in Munger he did karma, and in Rikhia he did tapasya. However, today there are few traditions and sannyasins who perform such austerities, for it is not that easy. Austerities are to be performed in isolation, as they demand

complete sanyam: not maximum sanyam but complete sanyam.

The other aspect of sannyasa life is educational. Swami Sivananda educated people in yoga and Vedanta. He gave samskaras, both spiritual and vedic. Swami Satyananda educated people in yoga at Munger and in Rikhia he gave the samskara of atmabhava. That was the external expression. One has to perfect yoga if one wants to advance to sannyasa life. *Bahudaka* means community life, living the disciplines of the gurukul. To pass that stage one has to perfect yoga, as yoga is a path of regulation. The aspiration of a *kutichaka* is also yoga related. It is the stage where you can be alone and be comfortable in your loneliness. Loneliness can drive people crazy. The state of mind where you appreciate seclusion can be acquired gradually through the practices of yoga. In this way, there are different aspirations, approaches and paths.

In 2008 Sri Swamiji said in a satsang, "Everything that I have received in my life is to benefit others. When I started on my journey, nobody knew who I was, yet everybody supported me, so I am grateful to everybody. What you see is not my creation, it is the contribution of so many people, therefore everything has to be returned to them." He gave guidelines on how to do that: through service, through giving, and so on. He also said, "I am not leaving anything behind for the sannyasins either. In fact, I tell them that if they need money, they can even sell the ashram, but they should continue to give back to society, serve society." Then he looked at me and said, "As my inheritance, you are only going to receive my langoti." *Langoti* is a loin cloth, and that was the symbol of handing over the sannyasa aspiration. That was the indication that I have to maintain and develop the sannyasa culture.

In order to follow this mandate, I started the first year of panchagni in 2013. This is 2017, the fifth year, which involves a lot of rules: maximum isolation, make your own meals, etc. Today the first fire was lit in my panchagni kitchen and the first offering was made. It took ten minutes to make the meal on a Stone Age stove made out of mud which uses cow-dung for fuel. In this way, the fifth year of panchagni has started.

—14 January 2017





Tapas Taller than Tribute

On 26th January 2017, the twelfth day of Swamiji's sadhana, special news reached the ashram: 'Swami Niranjanananda has been nominated for the Padma Bhushan award'. This is the third highest civilian award in the country, which is conferred upon recipients by the President of India, and is given for distinguished and exceptional achievement in a particular field.

All ashramites were overjoyed, thrilled, exultant, moved to tears to hear this news – their inspirer-guardian-guru, their friend-philosopher-guide, their most beloved Swamiji was today recognized by the whole nation! When Swami Niranjan received the news, however, he displayed characteristic sthita prajna, simply smiling in acknowledgement. After completing his panchagni sadhana for the day, Swamiji shared his inner feelings on the occasion with the residents:

Swamiji: Since the announcement of this award, there has been a stream of phone calls, news reports and emails. I want to share with you all that it is not because of Swami Niranjan, for Swami Niranjan is the most unqualified person: skill-less, education-less, jobless, penniless. These are my qualifications. After all, what knowledge do I have except being a yoga teacher!

The recognition has been given to the work, which was inspired by Swami Sivananda and by Swami Satyananda. We have simply continued in their footsteps. What has been recognized is that it has been and is good work. This has been acknowledged by people at large, as the award has been a public decision based on merit.

What is especially heartening is that everybody associated with us has felt that the award has been given to them. Everybody has felt that they have personally received this award. Definitely it does not belong to an individual, but to everyone who has worked for yoga. And all of you are recipients of the award too, so congratulations to you.







महानगर टाइम्स
सजग प्रहरी

देश का तीसरा सर्वोच्च सम्मान भी नहीं तोड़ पाया स्वामीजी की साधना, घर पर दिया गया पद्मभूषण सम्मान

बिहार के मुंगेर योग विद्यालय के परमाचार्य परमहंस स्वामी निरंजन नंद सरस्वती को राष्ट्रपति की ओर से जिलाधिकारी ने रविवार को पद्मभूषण सम्मान भेंट किया।

जिलाधिकारी उदय कुमार सिंह ने यहां बताया कि यह सम्मान महामहिम राष्ट्रपति प्रणव मुखर्जी की ओर से नई दिल्ली में सरस्वती को दिया जाना था, लेकिन पंचाग्नि साधना में लीन रहने के कारण वे दिल्ली नहीं जा सके।

सरस्वती को यह सम्मान योग के प्रचार-प्रसार के लिए दिया गया है।

पद्मभूषण से सम्मानित किए जाने पर सरस्वती ने कहा कि यह सम्मान के हकदार हमारे गुरु स्वामी सत्यानंद सरस्वती जी हैं जिन्होंने जीवन की नश्वरीली जमीन को उर्वरा बनाने का कार्य किया।

The investiture ceremony of the Padma Bhushan awards was held on 30th March 2017 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. Swamiji, however, chose to not break his sadhana and thereby to forego the public honour of the occasion. In a heartening move, the Government of India decided to respect the tradition of tapas and sent the award to Munger to be bestowed upon Swamiji at his convenience. Not only the government, the media was also able to appreciate the sankalpa of Swamiji's tapas, signifying a nationwide reawakening to the values that have upheld the spiritual culture of the country. Many newspapers reported glowingly of the adherence of a yogi towards his calling.

Many dignitaries also came visiting Ganga Darshan during this period to offer their felicitations, among them being the Governor of Goa, Srimati Mridula Sinha, the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Dr Raman Singh, and Acharya Mahashraman, the eleventh acharya and head of the Jain Shwetambar Terapanth Sharam Sangh.



Satsangs with Residents

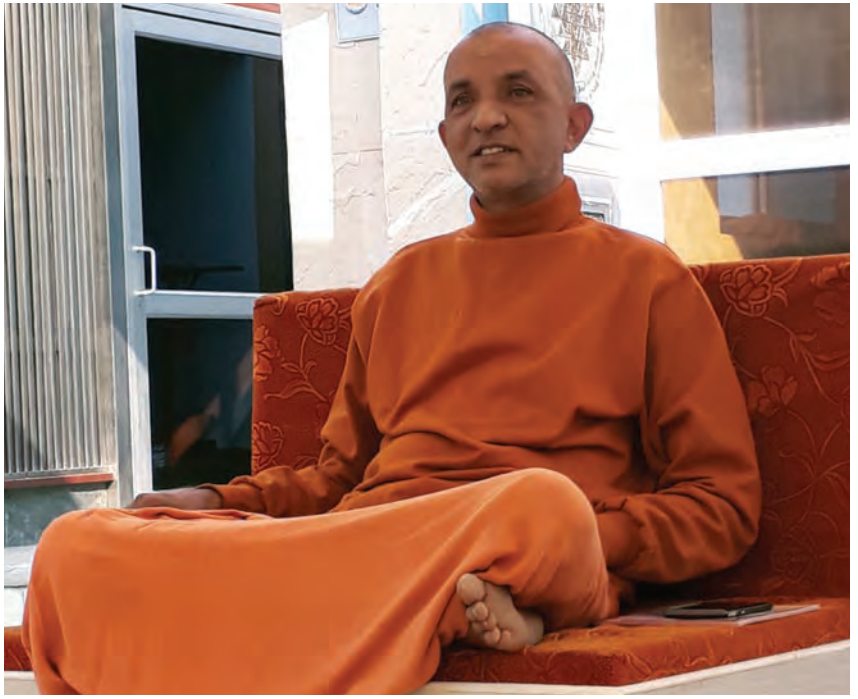
Throughout the months of March and April, every Friday afternoon Swamiji met the residents and shared his insights on varied subjects, from ecology to world trends to aspects of sadhana and much more. Holi fell during this period, and after the conclusion of the daily havan in Akhara, which was performed at midday this year, Swamiji placed the blessings of colour on everyone's forehead. The warm gatherings with Swamiji were full of light and depth, but more than any intellectual consumption, it was a blessing for all present to witness a tapasvi's altered state of perception.

SAPTAVADHANA

Swamiji: There is a word in Sanskrit, *saptavadhana*, which is used to mean 'attention'. *Sapta* means seven and *avadhana* means things that you are aware of. Therefore in Sanskrit being attentive means being aware of seven things. You have to develop the mind in such a manner that from one thing you can do two things, then three, then four, and eventually reach the capacity to do seven things at the same time.

With proper training, a sadhaka can focus in seven areas without experiencing any disturbance. That is the significance. It requires training of the senses. If we place a circle in the distance and you are given a stone to hit the circle with, will you be able to do it? Your eyes may be looking at the bull's eye, but when you throw the stone, it will go here or there; it won't follow the eye. That is because the two are mismatched.

If the eyes and hands are merged, wherever you look that is the target: everything merges at that point. You can then hit a tiny stone at the bhrumadhya of a person. That is saptavadhana. It is by practising this that I do not have difficulty in the panchagni. I am training myself to throw the ahuti in the fires with eyes closed. I focus the awareness, visualize that the ahuti is falling right in the middle of the fire, and it happens. It makes sure that one can maintain a one-pointed awareness even while doing many things at the same time. It is training for the mind.





Experiencing Pratyahara

During the yoga trainings this year, the focus of many of Swamiji's talks was pratyahara. As Swamiji revealed many facets of this stage of yoga, it became a living experience for all – due to only one reason: it came from the depth of experience of the yogi himself. This was particularly evident when Swamiji explained the concept of skin pratyahara.

Swamiji: There is a statement in the *Gheranda Samhita*:

शीतं चापि तथा चोष्णं यन्मनस्सस्पर्शयोगत:। तस्मात्प्रत्याहरेदेतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत् ॥

Cold and heat affect the mind through the sense of touch; therefore withdraw it and put it under the control of the self.

If we turn off the fan, what will you feel? Hot. Now, can you disconnect from the experience of heat in your mind? That will be pratyahara of skin. It is possible. I have done the panchagni, I can tell you. Normally, 45 degrees is too much for anybody. In the panchagni vedi, the temperatures used to range from 40 degrees in the coldest period to 74 degrees in the hottest period. Is it humanly or physically possible for anybody to sit in that heat for hours on end? But I did it. Does that make me inhuman? No.

The experience of heat is a mental experience, as I discovered. If my attention came to the body, I would try to ease the heat by wiping the sweat or something of that sort. However, if I could remain focused on what I was doing, the mantra or other sadhanas, then the heat was not experienced. It was only when the mind used to divert from the sadhana that the heat experience would return.

The other factor I realized was that the skin or touch sensation does not connect you with manas or buddhi, the rational and intellectual aspects of the mind. It connects you with chitta. As long as you are able to hold an unfluctuating state of chitta, everything is fine. The moment a memory comes up and the associated thoughts appear, you lose your concentration and the heat is experienced. Both heat and cold have to be dealt with by removing the mind from



the experience of the sensation and all memories. If the sensation is, 'I am feeling hot', the awareness has to move away from the idea of 'I am feeling hot.' It is the same with cold.

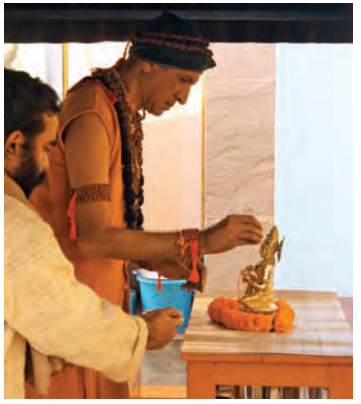
You have to begin with observing the body and all the touch sensations you are experiencing at a given moment: clothes, the other textures, the heat. You feel the heat on the surface of the skin, you feel it in the deeper parts of the body and find a level of comfort. Then remove yourself from the experience. That is skin pratyahara, and that is what I did during panchagni. If the skin pratyahara was not there, I'd be always conscious of the heat on my body and be uncomfortable. Since this pratyahara was possible, extreme heat did not disturb the focus, the concentration and the stability of mind.

This is not something which will happen instantly, it will take time, but it is attainable, and I am the living proof of that!

—October 2017, Satsang during Progressive Yoga Vidya Training

Darshan . . .



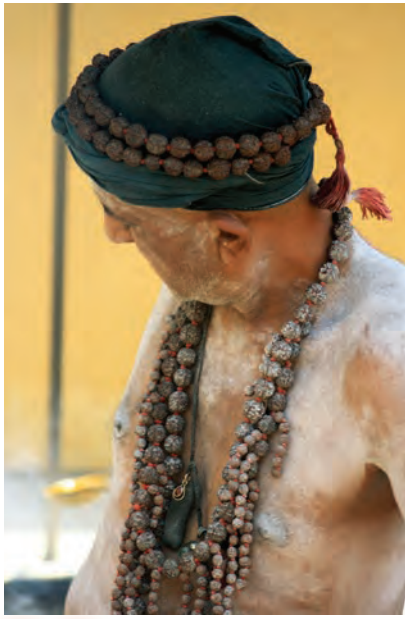
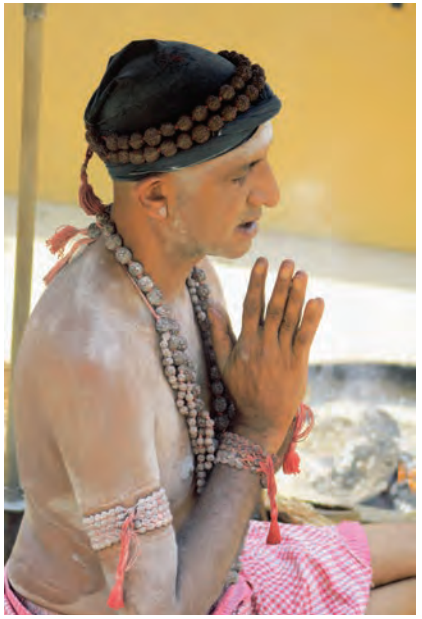



















BYB Students, After Darshan . . .

My first step into Akhara and I forgot everything and just switched my inner recorder on. There were no thoughts, no emotions. My eyes only saw Swamiji. Nothing else did I register. So far I had only seen pictures of Swamiji during panchagni sadhana. But seeing him for real was something else. He looked intense, fearful and divine at the same time. Though it was just a short glimpse of him, it felt like a lifetime. There was a strong shift of emotions, something inexplicable. I was in a daze, dizzy and my body felt heavy. Straightaway I went to my room, remembered him and did my mala. After that it was all bliss, happiness and strength. I don't know what transpired, but I know I absorbed a drop of something very precious.

—Ipsita Varma, Kolkata

There was a deep inner silence that stayed with me after our darshan. I could have just sat there and observed and wondered without becoming involved, without trying to resist distraction.It is Swamiji's personal sadhana, but we feel it. He does not do it for Padma Bhushans or awards but for his and our evolution. That is an inspiration for any drashta.

—Utkarsh Mishra, Mumbai

It was a very touching and intense moment when I saw Swamiji doing the panchagni sadhana. I feel blessed and grateful for this darshan. Swamiji is doing such an intense sadhana. He does so much for others; can't I at least do something which will make him happy? All he wants from us is to be good human beings, to be happy and to spread love, laughter and happiness all around, to share with others what we have and make this world a better place to live in. To do a bit of all this is the least we can do for him.

—Tarika Taneja, Warangal

There he was, Swami Niranjanananda, sitting silently in the middle of fires. Covered by ashes, he was motionless, with his eyes closed.

As I slowly walked through the Akhara, I knew this last vision of him in panchagni sadhana will always remind me of what I have experienced in the four months at BSY. I see the whole Ganga Darshan as a centre of panchagni. Just like fire that transforms any object to its purest form, to me this traditional yoga ashram is designed to purify human minds.

Whenever I feel like I am in the middle of an overwhelming challenge, I will remember the message that I have received at the panchagni in January 2017. Sit still. Breathe. Observe.

—Jade, Australia







Pashupata Astra Yajna

To conclude Swamiji's panchagni sadhana, from 10th to 14th June the Pashupat Astra Yajna was held in the grounds of Akhara. Despite the escalating heat, Swamiji spoke to all from the panchagni vedi and explained the precepts of the sadhana. He clarified how the important aspect of panchagni is not tolerating the heat but balancing the heat, and therefore it is not only a fire sadhana but also a water sadhana. He also spoke of the ultimate purpose of the sadhana as given in the Kathopanishad: attaining immortality. Swamiji explained that immortality is not the deluded idea of living forever but attaining the knowledge and understanding of the atma, the self which is immortal.

Swami Satsangi arrived from Rikhiapeeth for the poornahuti of the yajna. In her satsang she spoke on the relationship between grace and effort. At the conclusion of the yajna, Swamiji shot the symbolic Pashupata arrow into the sky, indicating the successful completion of the aradhana.









Satsangs during Pashupata Astra Yajna

THE FIFTH YEAR OF PANCHAGNI

Swamiji: The Pashupata Astra Yajna is part of the panchagni sadhana. Every year when I conclude the panchagni sadhana, this yajna is performed. This combination emanates from the first spiritual tradition which evolved in the world: the Pashupata tradition, whose teacher was Lord Shiva himself.

There are five aspect of the Pashupata tradition: *Pashupata darshana*, the philosophy of Pashupata; *Pashupata sampradaya*, the community of those who follow the Pashupata tradition; *Pashupata yoga*, the practices of yoga to reach the state of Pashupata; p*anchagni sadhana*; and *Pashupata Astra Yajna*. Therefore, it is fitting that at the conclusion of the panchagni sadhana this yajna is performed.

This is the fourth year of the yajna, and the fifth year of panchagni. This has been the most difficult year of the sadhana, as it went on for five months, up to June. Sitting amid four fires in the month of June, with the fifth fire being the sun – the grey matter in the head does begin to boil. Today the temperature in the panchagni vedi had gone up to seventy-two degrees. My body has adjusted up to sixty-five; up to that I feel quite comfortable, just as you feel comfortable in thirty degrees. After sixty-five I begin to feel the sparks of heat. I am using the word 'sparks', as there is a feeling of sparking throughout the whole body, like static electricity. Maybe it is the feeling of the blood boiling, as panchagni makes everything boil: the grey matter, the blood, the waters in the body, everything. Therefore after seventy it becomes a bit uncomfortable. Nevertheless, I am sure that with practice even this will pass. I have been able to come up to sixty-six, maybe next year I can go up to seventy, the year after eighty, after that ninety, until I just bubble away into the universe.

The helping hands

The sadhana of panchagni, or any austerity for that matter, is not a simple affair. If one had to perform austerities in isolation in a forest, like the yogis used to do in the past, then how much time would one spend in tapasya? From morning until breakfast one would be scrounging for berries and nuts, then gathering wood to light the





fire, then organizing lunch, then keeping an eye that the milk is not boiling over. So it is not easy to do austerities alone. Therefore I am thankful and grateful to the sannyasins here who have assisted in the sadhana. They come and prepare everything and by the time I come out the fire is raging and I only have to sit down. So the time which I save on preparation is spent in panchagni. In this way, I can devote the maximum hours for panchagni, more than the yogis would have been able to do in the past due to their routine. Maybe they were able to do panchagni for only two or three hours, whereas I am able to do it for up to eight hours. That is only possible because of the help that I have received.

This year I made my own food, as per the tradition of panchagni, which requires one to be *swapaki*, 'self-cook', in the fifth year. Even then, one of my friends from Goa decided to be here for the five months of panchagni and helped with the preparations, so again I saved time. The food has been very simple: boiled vegetables, or khichari, or baked vegetables, or air-fried potatoes – without oil, without masala. For five months I have had an absolutely masala-free diet.

When Sri Swamiji was doing the panchagni sadhana, KKji (Sri KK Goenka) who is present here today, used to send him vegetables and fruit every week. Every Wednesday they would be there, on the dot, and that was used in the swapaki food of Sri Swamiji. This year, spontaneously, KKji's daughter Vinita started sending vegetables and fruit every week, and that has also helped, since in summer the Munger market is rather dry, and to have some good quality vegetables and fruit during this intense period is a big help. And of course Arunji (Sri Arun Goenka) leaves no stone unturned to ensure that nothing is lacking. In this way, there have been many supporters who have helped me in this sadhana, and to all of them I am grateful. It is due to their help that I have been able to successfully complete the panchagni.

The grace from Above

Of course, the help from Above must be remembered: the help of guru and God. Without their help and grace, this would not have been possible. And how did they help? You will be surprised. January, February, March, there was no problem, the weather was perfect: cool. Come April, the hot wind begins to blow, and that is tolerable. Come May, the heat starts crossing sixty-six, and that is when every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday it began to rain. So every week, the first three days of panchagni were cool, and the last two days, Thursday and Friday, were sunny with the temperature and humidity soaring. It was as if God was saying, "I have given





you three days of cool, now endure two days of heat." Come June, in the morning time the sky would be clear, and in the afternoon just as I would blow the conch and play the damaru to terminate the panchagni for the day, raindrops would start falling. There was a thunderstorm every afternoon, the sannyasins are witness to that.

That was the pattern until yesterday. Today, Guruji said, "Okay, I have done my part. Now Shivaji is here and so let him decide what is appropriate for you." So today there is no rain. Definitely, there has been cooperation from all sides: human and cosmic, both.

Not tolerance but balance

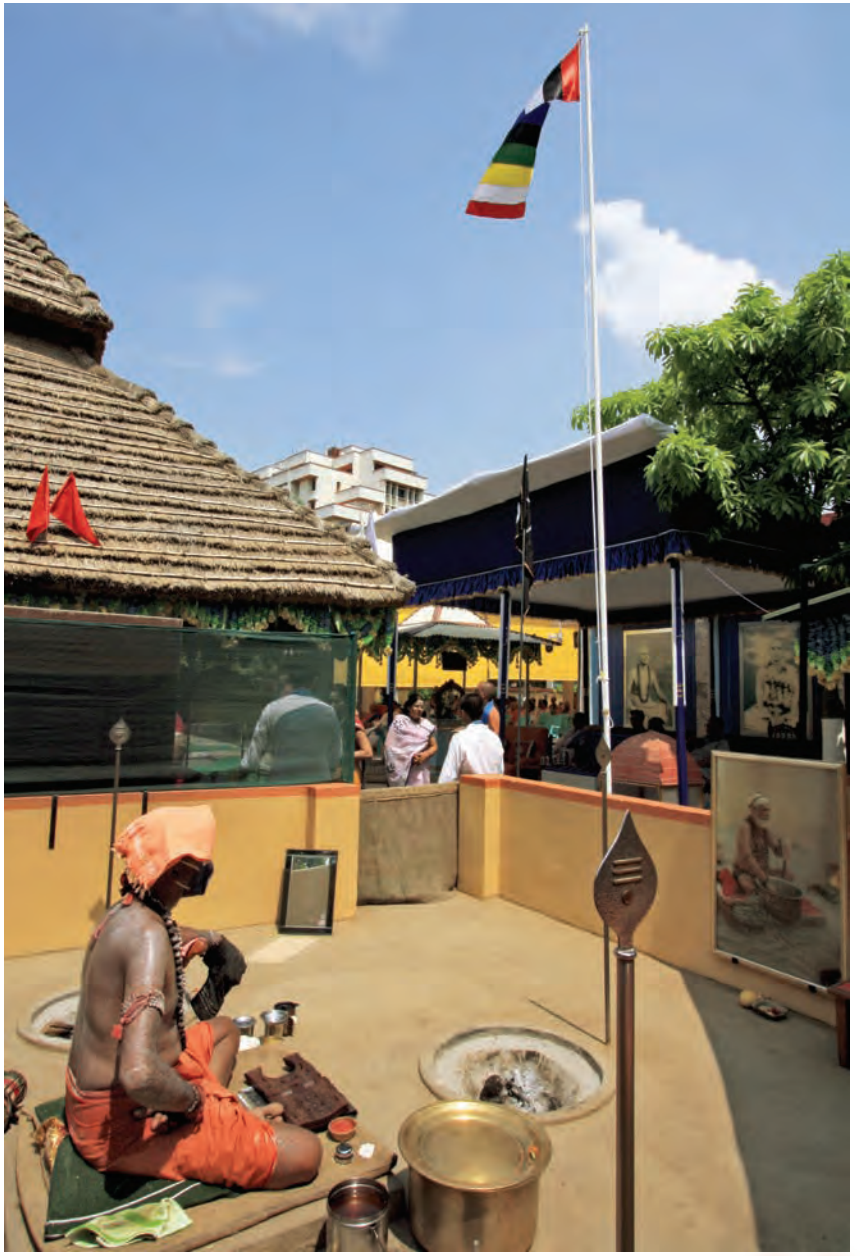
What I have realized is that the important part of panchagni is not tolerating the heat but balancing the heat. You can 'tolerate' something only up to a point, beyond that you can't; the body will rebel. Therefore never think that I am tolerating heat during panchagni. That is wrong. I don't tolerate heat. I balance heat.

How is the heat balanced? By using its antidote. What is the antidote to fire? Water. Fire and water both go together. In the Vedas, there is a hymn, *Apas Sukta*, the hymn to water. Addressing water, it says: "You are the one who can balance the fire." You don't douse or repel the fire; you balance the fire. That is an important understanding.

If you have to control fire, you throw water on it. Now, if you throw only a little water, the fire will not be doused. It will just go down for some moments and again the flames will rise up. If you put some more water, it will douse the fire, but the smoke will make your life intolerable. Therefore, you need the right amount of water to ensure that the fire is balanced. Along with panchagni, one has to practise *apas sadhana*, water sadhana, also. Both have to happen together. Panchagni alone will kill a person in less than a week's time, it will dry up the body completely; it is the water which balances the fire.

Environmentally, God helped to balance the fire. Physically, the sannyasins helped to balance the fire by providing adequate liquids. Every half hour, some liquid has to go in. You cannot take in any solid; it becomes too heavy. It is the liquid that balances the effect of the fires.

—10 June 2017



FIRE AND WATER

The relationship between fire and water is an interesting one. They are complementary to each other. For example, a tree has fire and it has water; they both exist together and balance each other out. If you try to set fire to a tree and there is a lot of water in it, it will not burn; if the tree is dry, it will burn fast. Water is the antidote to fire; not earth, not air, not ether; yet fire and water coexist.

Shiva is fire and Narayana is water. There is a beautiful sukta in the Rigveda which speaks of the glory of water (*Apas Sukta*, v. 7):

आपः पृणीत भेषजं वरूथं तन्वेऽ मम ।
ज्योक्च सूर्यं दृशे ॥

O Water! You are abundantly filled with medicinal herbs. Please protect my body so that I can see the sun for a long time.

This is a reference to panchagni: consume water during panchagni so that you can be in the sun for a long time. Further on it says (v. 8):

इदमापः प्र वहत यत्किं च दुरितं मयि ।
यद्वाहमभिदुद्रोह यद्वा शेप उतानृतम् ॥

O Water! Please wash away whichever wicked tendencies are in me, and also wash away the treacheries burning me from within and any falsehood present in my mind.

Here, the prayer asks water to cleanse the mind. The question is: how do you control the fires of your mind? The anger, the passion, the greed, the hatred are all in the form of fires that burn the individual from inside. How do you deal with them? You have to develop the qualities of the water to deal with the fires that are inside.

—11 June 2017







THE PLAY OF SHIVA AND NARAYANA

Although the panchagni is a sadhana of fire, equally it is a sadhana of water. As the heat increases, the output of body-water increases correspondingly in the form of sweat. Water is the protection against heat, against fire. The hotter it becomes externally, the more sweat the body produces.

Heat represents the Shiva tattwa and water represents the Narayana tattwa. These two elements are continuously active within us. The energy of Shiva in the form of the sun, heats the environment and the body. As long as the body is able to tolerate the heat, you are comfortable. Once the heat level crosses the toleration point then, in order to protect and preserve you, to protect and preserve the cells of the body, water production begins. Sweat comes out. First it is a thin film, enough to deal with the heat of that moment, but as the heat increases so do the size and frequency of the drops. This outflow of water from the body balances out the external heat, and allows you to tolerate the heat according to your level of balance. Water is Narayana and fire is Shiva, and in panchagni, although surrounded by fire, the body is protected by water. It is a play of both water and fire.

I mentioned yesterday that in a tree, water and fire elements co-exist. During my journey to Kailash Mansarovar, I discovered that in that high altitude no vegetation grows except for one shrub. The peculiarity of this shrub is that if you squeeze it, water comes out in abundance; it is just filled with water. Yet, if you light a match to it, it burns as if it was full of kerosene. That is what the Tibetans use in that altitude to warm their home and cook their food. What a miracle of nature! With the same plant you can quench your thirst and light a fire. You see the presence of both fire and water in that plant.

These are the two important tattwas which control the ascent of consciousness. The active tattwas are fire and water, Shiva and Narayana. In panchagni, you light the fire to activate the water: to bring about a balance. Therefore I said that I am not enduring the fire; I have to balance the fire. As the temperature increases, it has to be balanced.



The presence of apas

Another important point is that panchagni can only be done in a place where there is plenty of water. What was the name of the village where Sri Swamiji did his panchagni? Not Rikhia, but the original name of the place where the Akhara is was called Paniapagar, which means 'abundance of water'. When there is enough underground water, the precipitation in the air allows the panchagni to be performed, as it balances the fires of panchagni. Try doing panchagni in Rajasthan or in the Sahara Desert. Where there is no humidity in the environment, the body will just shrivel up, shrink and kaput.

In Munger there is the Ganga, due to which there is a lot of underground water. The precipitation here in the environment allows the panchagni to be performed. Thus water supports the panchagni sadhana. I am giving you this understanding as until now people have been thinking that panchagni is enduring the five fires. The idea of 'five fires – five fires – five fires' has been prominent in everyone's mind. The reality is that it is also an activity of the water element along with the fire.





Nachiketa agni

The sadhana of panchagni was taught by Yamaraj, the lord of death, to Nachiketa who was a young boy. In the vedic tradition, panchagni is also known as 'Nachiketa agni', the fire of Nachiketa. Panchagni means five fires. There are the five outside fires: four around you and the fifth above you in the form of the sun. First you have to endure these. Then there are different fires inside, at each level of the granthis. They have to be endured also. Therefore, it is the balancing of the fires of the granthis which is the purpose of panchagni, and eventually transcending them to experience the higher reality.

—12 June 2017

THE ESSENCE OF PANCHAGNI SADHANA

The purpose of the panchagni sadhana is given in the *Kathopanishad*, in which Yama teaches Nachiketa the panchagni sadhana. Yama is the king of death and Nachiketa is a nine or ten years old boy. The king of death becomes the teacher, the master, the guru of Nachiketa and imparts the method of the panchagni sadhana to him. Nachiketa, however, is not satisfied by only knowing the procedure of the sadhana, by only learning how to do it. He aspires to know the essence and purpose of the sadhana, and how it bestows the state of immortality. Yama tries to deter Nachiketa from seeking this knowledge. He tempts him with riches, comforts, luxuries, prosperity, property, pleasure, saying that this higher knowledge can become a destructive force if the receiver is undeserving. But Nachiketa is not an ordinary seeker, and no block can deter him, no pleasure can allure him. Impressed by his resolve, the king of death tells him the purpose of the panchagni vidya.

The purpose of panchagni, as mentioned by Yamaraj, is attaining *atmavidya*, knowledge of the self, and through this knowledge, attaining *amaratva*, immortality.

What truly is immortality

Immortality is not the deluded notion of living forever. No. The body has to follow its own dharma, its own nature. One can be long-lived, but every mortal, when the time is over, has to die. Thus immortality is being established in the knowledge, the understanding and the experience of the atma, which is eternal and immortal. Yamaraj says to Nachiketa that the performer of the panchagni can attain this knowledge as he endures the intense austerity only by separating himself from the body and the senses, and remaining fixed in the awareness and experience of atma. Outside you have to endure the heat, and inside you have to remain fixed, focused on the awareness, knowledge and experience of atma.



Necessity of unbroken awareness

I have mentioned to you in the past that as the heat increases, the concentration has to deepen. If the concentration is not deepened and is only superficial, eyes-closed awareness, then the mind will be distracted. When the mind is distracted, the body cannot tolerate the heat. For a person to balance the heat, it is important that the mind remain fixed and focused. Yamaraj says (1:3:1):

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्धे ।
छायातपौ ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति पञ्चाग्नयो ये च त्रिणाचिकेता: ॥

There are two in this body who are the enjoyers, lodged in the cavity of the heart, the seat of the Supreme. The knower of Brahman and the performer of the fivefold fires and the threefold Nachiketa fire sacrifice call them light and shade.

There are two types of awareness in this body. They are the witnesses and enjoyers of everything that happens around them in the world, and they are lodged in the cavity of the heart, the seat of the Supreme. One is the knower of the Brahman, which is internal, and one is the performer of the five-fold fires externally and the three-fold Nachiketa fire sacrifice internally. What this verse indicates is that you have to keep your attention, awareness, focus and concentration absolutely unbroken, unwavering and fixed in the experience of the atman. Thus one can endure the fires outside and this gives control over the senses, balances the senses. Managing the fires inside gives control over the mind. The internal fires have to be guided by the mind. They disturb the mind, so the mind has to be pacified.



Piercing the three blocks

The external fires and the internal three-fold fire sacrifice is the path of breaking the blocks of the personality, the granthis. With the breaking of the granthis one experiences and realizes *atmavidya*, the nature of the real self within this material body and within this gross, experienceable mind.

Your identification with the material, gross body and the gross mind is what makes you aware of your existence in life. You can experience the body, you don't experience the soul. You experience the mind, you don't experience the spirit. By transcending the body and the senses, by enduring the five outer fires, and simultaneously performing the three-fold fire sadhana in the inner self, one is able to break through the blocks and attain the Shiva nature. This is the path that Yamaraj pointed out to Nachiketa.

The three-fold inner fires indicate a sequential change of awareness. At the first level, at Brahma granthi, the awareness is of attachments with the body, with the senses and sense objects, with the world, with those one considers one's kith and kin. It is the realm of asakti, attachment, association, identification. In Vishnu granthi, one experiences the drive, the determination, the motivation, the aggression, the desire. All the rajasic qualities manifest in the Vishnu granthi and become the fires of Vishnu granthi. In Rudra granthi, different qualities manifest which lead to change, to realizing the *swabhava*, one's nature, and attaining transformation. Thus self-contained awareness is Brahma granthi, spread-out awareness is Vishnu granthi, and transforming awareness is Rudra granthi. These three are pierced through the panchagni sadhana to experience the atman. This is the teaching of Yamaraj to Nachiketa, as given in the *Kathopanishad*.

—13 June 2017





ETERNITY IN A GRAIN OF SAND

The Pashupata Astra Yajna is complementary to the panchagni sadhana. Panchagni sadhana leads the practitioner from the experience of the material to the experience of the transcendental, the unchangeable, the real, by overcoming the attractions of the senses and the sense objects, by overcoming the attachments of the mind and its associations, by discovering the unifying factor of life in the diversity that we live on a daily basis. It leads one to the awareness of the transcendental in the world, to developing the ability to see the microcosmos in the macrocosmos and the macrocosmos in the microcosmos, to be able to see both in a grain of sand. That is the vision acquired by the adept of the Pashupata vidya.

The Pashupata vidya is the most ancient of the vidyas, propagated and expounded by Adiguru Mahadeva, Lord Shiva. It involves invoking the agni, fire, as agni is the medium through which oblations offered in the material world are taken to the higher dimensions.

Just as thoughts have the ability to you make you act in the physical dimension and also inspire and uplift you in the mental dimension, in the same way, the sadhana of panchagni is the external act to direct the senses to their place of repose and relaxation and also to develop an unwavering and unbroken concentration. It is a state of concentration which cannot be disturbed by anything, including the chanting, mantras and invocations taking place all around.

Nothing can disturb and distract the one-pointed awareness of the mind since the senses are balanced and harmonized. This is the sadhana of panchagni, while the Pashupata astra is the medium to break through the gravitational pulls of Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi. Only when one is free from their pull is one able to cultivate spiritual awareness and experience the transcendental life in this material life.

—14 June 2017

GRACE AND EFFORT

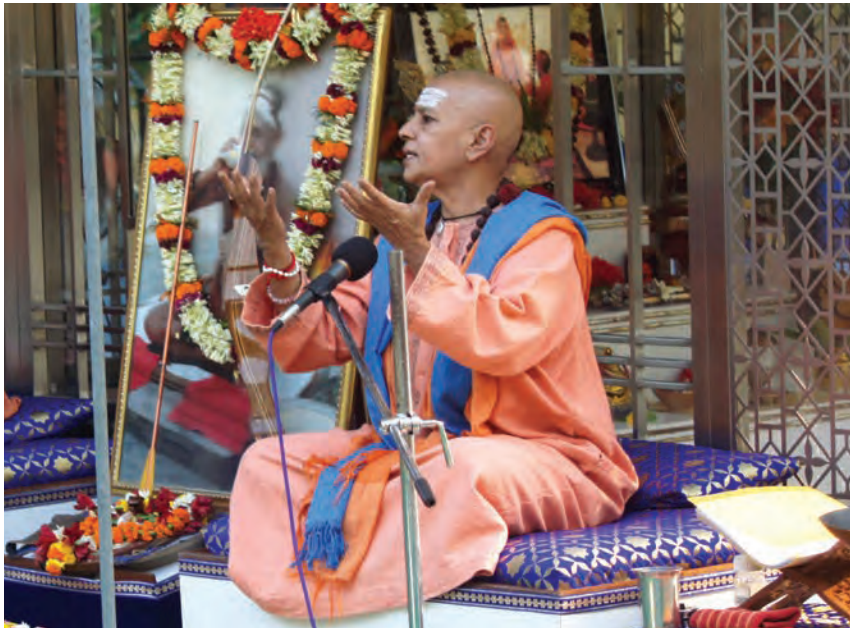
Swami Satsangi: First of all, I want to express my appreciation and thanks to Swami Niranjan for allowing us to be part of this. There is deep appreciation of this event and all that led up to it. It has been a journey; it is not just an event of today. For five months, the fires were lit and Swami Niranjan was seated amid them with the temperature going up to 75 degrees.

All this is only possible if there is grace. Where there is grace, you can move mountains. Is it possible for anybody to humanly sit amidst the four fires and the sun, day after day, in this heat, without special grace? So, thank you Swami Niranjan for this event. We are all very blessed to be here. Truly blessed. This is not only a special moment, it is also a historic moment. The Pashupata Astra Yajna is a historic event of our land and it is being enacted here after five thousand years.

The Pashupata astra was last invoked at the time of the Mahabharata war, and now it is being commemorated. People say that the Pashupata astra is invoked to avenge the enemy. Of course that is true, but who is our enemy? The enemy is kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada. These are the enemies. And where are they seated? Within you. And you have to defeat them. That is the whole challenge of life. Everything may be wonderful, you may have a lovely house, lovely friends, a lovely life, but these five enemies keep attacking you. *Kama*, desire; *krodha*, anger; *lobha*, greed; *moha*, attachment; *mada*, intoxication. We are all intoxicated – with ourselves, and what we have and what we own.

In order to vanquish these enemies, what is required? That is indicated in the story of Nachiketa. The only thing that is required from your side, the human side, is effort. Grace is divine, but how to earn it? Here comes the principle of effort; effort from the human side. There is absolutely no substitute for that. You have to put in your effort.

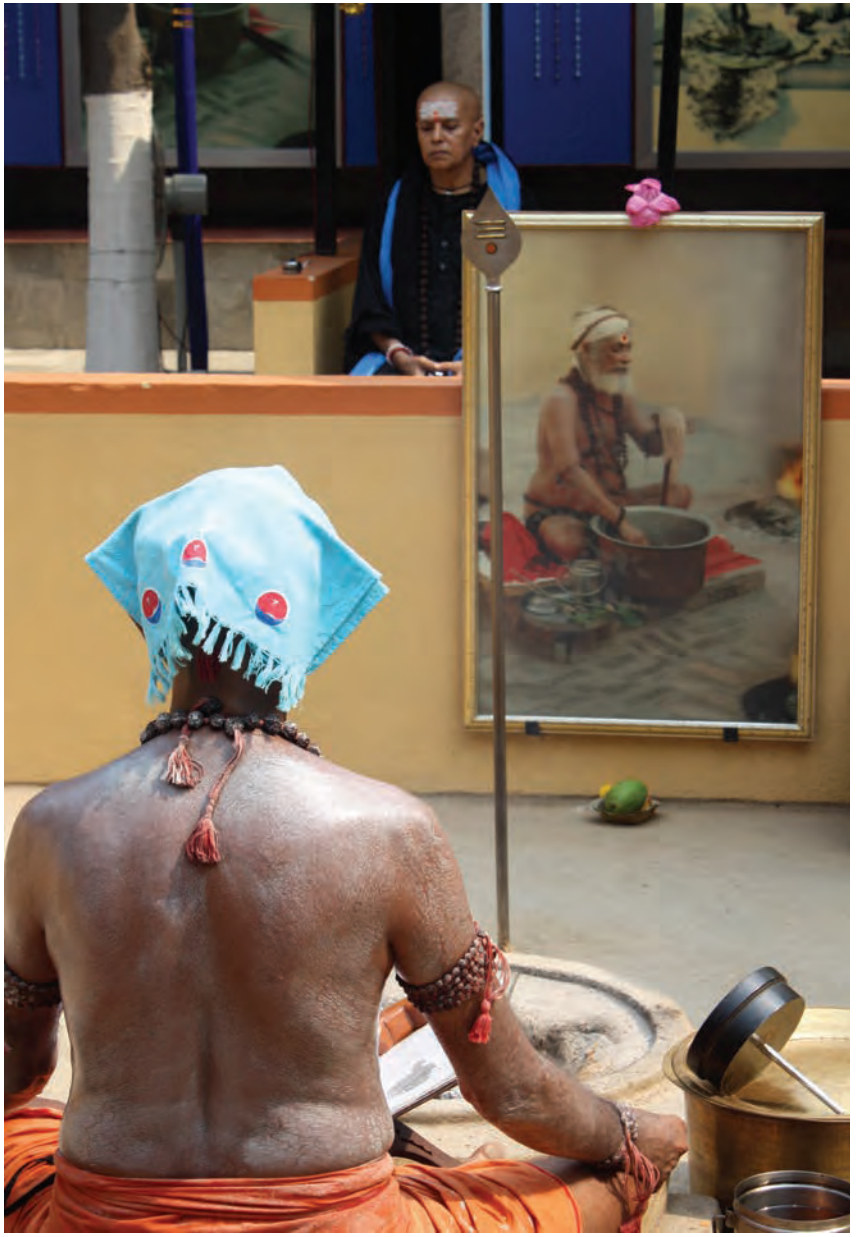
In the *Bhagavad Gita*, karma is defined as having five qualities: *karana*, the cause; *karta*, the doer; *sthana*, the place where you perform that karma; *cheshta*, effort; and grace. Without grace



nothing is possible. But what will earn you that grace? The effort, the human effort. We see that in Nachiketa and we see that in Swami Niranjan. These five months that Swami Niranjan has performed the panchagni, has involved tremendous effort, requiring a lot of willpower to remain seated in the heat and doing the mantras. You too have been making an effort to sit here in this heat, and that is what will earn you the merit: the effort.

Five requirements of a sankalpa

When one does the panchagni, or for that matter anything in life, it has to be like a sankalpa: 'I will do this.' Whether you do panchagni or run your business, there has to be a sankalpa. Your sankalpa may be: 'I will make my business successful'; Swami Niranjan's sankalpa was: 'I will do the panchagni.' Now, what do you need to fulfil that sankalpa, what can see you through it? That is beautifully defined in the *Panchagni Stotra* which we chant. The first is Shiva, but not Shiva with the matted locks with the Ganga



flowing down his head and the crescent moon adorning it. That too is beautiful and you can definitely have it, but here Shiva is experienced as *vishwas*, belief, strong belief. The second is Gauri, not the beautiful form of Gauri that you see seated beside Shiva, but Gauri as *shraddha*, faith. Vishwas and shraddha, these are the things that you need to succeed in life: belief in what you are doing and steadfast devotion in that. If you don't have these, you will not be able to fulfil what you want to do.

The third is intensity. Panchagni, as you have seen in the last three days, is so intense. There has been an intense energy around here; you can feel it. You have to bring that intensity into every act that you perform. That intensity that you feel here was created through the sadhana, but you can also create intensity in all that you do, whether business, study, or any other karma. If there is no intensity, half way through you leave it, which happens so often. But in this intensity, there is a difference. It has to be a detached intensity; not indifference or carelessness, but there is detachment, objectivity and intensity. That is the type of intensity which has to be brought into the karmas that you perform, into the effort that you make.

Without effort, nothing is possible. Everybody wants to receive what they want on a platter. You come and say, "*Swamiji sir par hath rakh dijiye* – Swamiji, please put your hand on my head", expecting that will make everything okay. That may happen, but this too becomes possible only if there is effort from your side. The grace can flow through only if the disciple is qualified for that. So there is no replacement for effort. Effort is the most important thing in life. If we don't make effort, then we begin to stagnate.

The fourth important thing is to bring freshness into what you do, like *vayu*, air. Air is always fresh; it is never stale. You cannot say that the air that was here five minutes ago is still here. No, it has moved on. It's gone. There is new freshness. In the same way, in your mind too, there has to be freshness, there has to be newness: new ideas, new hope, new aspirations, new inspiration. These too you have to bring into your effort. When you are doing something with intensity, you have to bring in an inspiration, a joy. Without inspiration, what is the use of doing

anything? Then it is just mechanical. Many people lead that kind of life: mechanical, no inspiration, no joy. In order to fulfil your sankalpa, however small it is, you need to have some inspiration. The fifth need is the sun, which is *prana*, vitality. Without prana you cannot even blink an eyelid, forget doing panchagni. Without prana you are a corpse.

Examine yourself

These are the things that you need in order to fulfil a sankalpa that you have made according to your karmas, which guide you to behave, think and speak in a certain manner. Whatever you do is defined by that. How do you speak? How do you behave? How do you think? The mind is the most important factor in fulfilling a sankalpa. It is the mind which betrays you every time, therefore you have to also examine your mind. You get up every morning and examine what is trending on the social media and pick out what you like and you go after it. In the same way, you have to get up every morning and ask what is trending inside you. What is trending in your mind today? And list all the negative and all the positive. Is there anything positive trending today in your mind? Ask yourself this when you get up in the morning and when you go to sleep. That is important. That is also a part of panchagni, where you are able to manage your mind and understand your mind. Only such a person can do the panchagni. That is what Gurudev said.

So, we have to perform our karmas with sincerity, with intensity, with inspiration, with joy and with vitality, and the effort always pays. It may take time. It's not that you will receive instant results. It can take time, but that does not matter at all, for that is the journey, that is the learning and that is the teaching.

Love

Sitting here, I see so many joyful faces that I am sure this is a most special occasion for all of you. It makes me go back to the time when Sri Swamiji was doing panchagni. That is the feeling that I was getting here today as I was sitting here and watching Swami Niranjan dripping wet.



You know, Swami Niranjan has turned bronze and gold. Golden Swami Niranjan! He already had a golden heart, but now it's showing. Sri Swamiji declared Swami Niranjan to be the 'father', and in his own words:

Kaun sa sukha shanti ka aagaar
tumse maangtaa hoon
Tum pitaa ho isilieye mein
pyaar tumse maangtaa hoon

Not the treasures of peace and prosperity
do I ask of you.
You are my father, therefore,
it is love that I ask of you.

I said that on behalf of all of you seated here. So, Swami Niranjan, as the father, give us your love.

—14 June 2017

Conclusion of Panchagni Sadhana



On the morning of 15th June, as soon as Swamiji completed the sadhana, the skies opened up and a torrential rain came down with a grand display of lightning and thunder. It was a fitting finale indeed. After putting the fires to rest, Swamiji spoke to everyone.

BLESSINGS OF DEVI

Swamiji: I have to give you some news, which has been the biggest blessing of my life. The news is that now we officially conclude the panchagni sadhana, and this order has come from somewhere else.

One of the sannyasins had gone on a special errand to a temple in the East. I will not disclose which one, but this is a temple with which we have had no particular connection, except that we have visited it for darshan maybe once or twice in the past. At the commencement of the panchagni, a phone call came from there that during the period of the panchagni, a special pooja would be performed at the temple, and they wanted my mala for the purpose. I could not understand why this temple, but some inspiration came and a mala was sent. That was in January and I forgot all about it.

A few days ago, a phone call came asking us to send somebody to receive the mala. A sannyasin was sent and she returned today after travelling the whole night. During the journey, while she was carrying the mala from the temple to here, she was under strict instructions of mouna and fasting, as if Devi herself was coming to bless the occasion. Before she got in the car, it was purified with mantras. The whole process was done with all the rigours and rituals that such an act demands: the act of transmission.

I have been informed that the mala used to be on Devi's vigraha twenty-four hours. Even when she used to go to sleep, she had the mala on. It came off her neck only for a couple of hours every day, when the main pandit of the place, an elderly man who doesn't speak to anybody and who is not seen by anybody, did japa on that mala for two hours, then it used to go back on Devi's neck. For five months, this ritual was performed.

I was under instructions not to terminate the panchagni until the mala came back to me. Now that the mala is here, I officially conclude my panchagni sadhana. This is the grace of Devi.

—15 June 2017



AN AUSPICIOUS CONCLUSION

Swamiji: *Jai Ho! Jai Ho! Jai Ho!* After the heat comes the cool, after the storm comes the silence. Most certainly, this has been a most auspicious year for the panchagni sadhana. Of course there were difficulties and one had to struggle, but behind everything there was a feeling of completeness, fulfilment, contentment and pleasantness. Pleasantness is important. If there is pleasantness, then everything becomes auspicious and good. If there is no pleasantness, even the best can become the worst. During this panchagni, it was the pleasantness that came forth.

At the conclusion of the panchagni is also pleasantness, full of grace from guru, from father, from mother, and from all the invisible brothers and sisters up there. Guruji, his blessings, his inspiration, his strength is there. The Father and Mother are watching over everything. Then all our brothers and sisters, such as Ganesha, Kartikeya, Indra, Varuna, have all been extremely helpful and auspicious during this year of panchagni. Even our dogs, Hari and Aryan, learned to sing along with the conch during this panchagni! Even the five birds were my companions for five months in front of the panchagni vedi. They were there daily, in rain, cold, heat, wind, storm, watching me in panchagni and doing their own.

The resident sannyasins were all here every day at 12 noon for the havan. Even when asked if they would rather do it in the morning during the cool hours, they all said, "We want to do at noon. It is not hot. We are sitting with Swamiji." Many of them come from the lands of igloos, and for them to be here without melting and to be able to sustain the havan for five months at twelve noon is no small feat. Therefore congratulations to all of you also, and thank you for keeping me company in my panchagni. There are families in Munger who saved on their air-conditioning this year. They said, "Swamiji is sitting in panchagni, so why should we have our air-conditioning on?" And of course, tremendous support from Swami Satsangi. This year has been the year in which she has travelled the maximum number of times to Munger. So to everyone, thank you for your support, love and companionship. *Hari Om Tat Sat*

—15 June 2017



Witnessing, experiencing, feeling…at the conclusion of the panchagni sadhana

THE EMBODIMENT OF SWAMI SIVANANDA'S ITIES

As we feel the clouds gathering around us, ready to pour out rain and water, which is a sure indication of the success of the culmination of Swamiji's sadhana, I'd like to thank Swamiji for this opportunity. It is a great privilege and honour for all of us to be here and participate in the culmination of Swamiji's sadhana.

On the first day, he said that he could manage sixty-five degrees easily, that he had managed to acquire the ability to handle the heat at sixty-five degrees, and he said it so lightly while we were all sweltering in less heat than that. To my understanding, he made light of the austerities and the tapasya he has been going through. The intensity of the heat that he has been enduring takes enormous resilience, tenacity, endurance and fixity of mind.

In fact, I think that all the ITIES of Swami Sivananda had to be present in him throughout the sadhana. We are fortunate that he allowed us to do parikrama and receive a glimpse of him undergoing the sadhana. So I'd again like to say, thank you Swamiji. Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity of being here with you and to undergo a part of this experience with you.

—Swami Sivamurti, Greece



IN THE PRESENCE OF A PURE BEING

At the conclusion of the Pashupata Astra Yajna and Swamiji's panchagni sadhana, there are many thoughts coming in the mind but mostly it is feelings. Feelings of gratitude, of being fortunate to be present during this program and to witness Swamiji's dedication and connection to Swami Satyananda, to the guru, and to the tradition. To be witness to the expression of the purity of his intention, his unbroken concentration and focus of mind.

It felt that everything was one: Swamiji, the yajna, the mantras. It was all one thing. There was no separation. There was a connection with everything around. We were all connected with the yajna, with the mantras, with Swamiji, with the panchagni, with nature, with the birds, with everything.

Swamiji has given us an example: an example of a sadhaka, of a sannyasin, of a guru, of a pure, perfect human being. This is what I will treasure the most and take back. I hope that the encouragement and inspiration that I have received will help me sustain my connection and my spiritual life.

—Swami Anandananda, Italy



GURU IS SHIVA, LORD OF ALL

I was in the ashram when Swami Niranjan started the panchagni sadhana in 2013. I could never forget the glowing body and eyes, the strong energy field around him . . . and I wanted to see him again during this sadhana, especially at its culmination. So I was delighted when I received the permission to come for this event.

When I reached Munger, it was unbearably hot for me. Walking barefoot inside Akhara, it felt that the soles of my feet were on fire. And inside the Akhara, I saw Swamiji sitting calmly, in complete equipoise amidst the fires and under the sun. I wondered how he feels in temperatures thirty-five degrees more than what we were experiencing! He was in full control of mind and body and what's more, everything was going smoothly under his guidance. At one time, he signalled for the mike to be given to him. I wondered: is it possible for him to speak at this moment! But not only did he speak, he laughed and made everybody laugh and the atmosphere was filled with lightness and joy.

As the Pashupata Astra Yajna started and the sound of the mantras pierced through us, echoing in the mind and soul, I felt that something very special was happening in front of our eyes. It was a glimpse of another reality, another epoch, a scene from another world – yet, our world. An extraordinary being, above the human dimension, was doing an extraordinary sadhana. I thought, how much courage is needed for this, how much endurance, concentration and willpower! I felt humble and speechless. I could not understand how Swamiji was managing the tattwas, I could not understand how all this miracle could happen, I could not understand the state of consciousness he was in. The only thing I knew was that at this moment, a great yogi, a siddha, an enlightened person is in front of our eyes.

Many days after returning home, I still felt elated and full of energy. To be a witness and somehow part of this unique event is a very, very rare opportunity. Thinking of all that I have seen in Munger, in my mind came the beautiful melody of the song: 'Guru is Brahma, Guru is Vishnu, Guru is Shiva – Lord of all, Lord of all'.

—Swami Yoga Gnana, Bulgaria



THE SHIVA CONNECTION

What is happening here is not an achievement of Swamiji; it is an achievement of Shiva. It is not humanly possible for anybody to do this, but it is being done.

I have seen Swamiji's connection with the Shiva installed in the Shivalaya at Munger. Every time he has been there, something unusual has happened. Once the bilvapatra on the Shivalinga got transferred to Swamiji's cap and he was not even aware of it. This year, during mid-panchagni I enquired, "When are you coming to Shivalaya?" He said, "I have received instructions; I will tell you when I will come." So, there is a link. And with that link, anything and everything is possible. That is why while we are itching to go into an air-conditioned room, Swamiji is comfortable in seventy degrees.

When Shiva is here, anything is possible, and that is what we feel in the vibration of the Akhara, in the energy that is floating around here. It is not easy to absorb the energy which is here, and my personal experience is that nonsensical thoughts don't come into your mind when you are here, particularly during the period of panchagni. The mind is free, relaxed and void of thoughts.

I am very grateful that I have witnessed the panchagni and have had Swamiji's darshan while he performed the sadhana.

—Arun Goenka, Delhi



SWAMIJI IS PARAMAHAMSAJI!

The very fact that we were witness to the ancient Pashupata Astra Yajna was a blessing. As the proceedings began, I looked up at the sky, expecting to see the gods, devas, rishis and munis smiling down at the Akhara, but was blinded by the ever-smiling sun. I winked at its brightness, or perhaps it was the sun that winked at me!

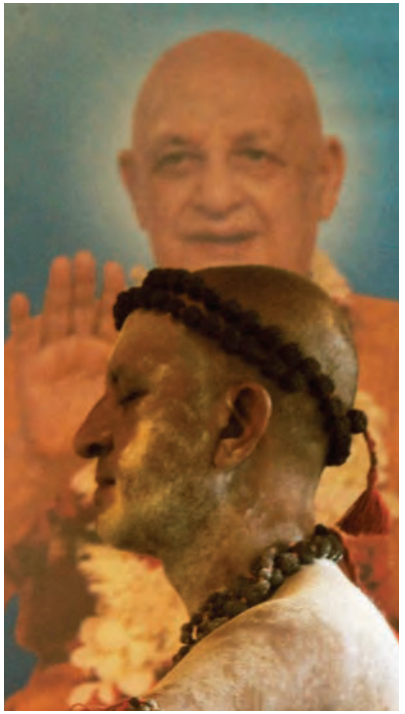
When the parikrama of the panchagni vedi started and the sannyasins, guests and others were walking around Swamiji, I stole a peek at him. Swamiji sat with the four fires burning around him and the sun above, a gentle smile on his face. What struck me was the thought that he is in some other realm, some other world. The aradhana proceeded and we were told to connect with the energy of the yajna by doing japa.

The world outside faded, and the ancient mantras filled the environment. We were swept to another world. With almost unfailing regularity, the tree laden with mangoes would drop a mango, as if participating in the events. The benign energy of the ashram set up a melodious rhythm.

Late in the afternoon, Swamiji spoke briefly to those present. His words sounded simple, but were pregnant with meaning. He said that as the temperatures soar, he balances the fires. Hence, the fire is not to be endured or tolerated, but balanced. He further said that the tattwa which counters fire is water, indicating that we should manage the fires of our



mind and life with the right quantity of water. Water has the quality of bypassing obstacles, polishing and smoothening the hardest of rocks, ever flowing and full of vitality. Can we, like water, bypass the fires of our mind?



When on 12th June, I sat down to do the japa, a great sense of rhythm, positive energy and happiness filled me. I do not know for how long I did the japa, but when I opened my eyes and turned my head to look towards Swamiji, what I saw was not Swamiji but Paramahamsaji sitting in panchagni sadhana! Overwhelmed, I rubbed my eyes and again I saw Paramahamsaji. Then, slowly, as if a veil was lifting, Swamiji's face re-emerged, sitting in the sadhana.

Twice more I saw Paramahamsaji doing panchagni sadhana. Every time I did parikrama and had a glimpse of Swamiji, something within me would say that he is far-far away from me, and it would make me a little unsettled, but I received a message.

Just before leaving the ashram, out of the blue, someone said to me, "Swamiji is now Paramahamsaji." Then, while I was waiting to catch my flight home, a senior disciple of Swamiji walked in. We sat beside each other and he related several anecdotes of his years of association. In the course of the conversation, he said, "You must be thinking that Swamiji has gone far away from you with this panchagni sadhana. No, he has not gone away. He has gone deep inside you. Just close your eyes and you fill find him." He added, "As I speak, Paramahamsaji is present and witness to these words."

—Sannyasi Dharmaprem, New Delhi



TWO IN ONE!

Has any other, like him,
Felt the lick of the flames,
And the burn of the Sun
Yet still not complained?
We know only one,
Who, before Niranjan,
Conquered fires outside and inside.
With fierce discipline
Our radiant Satyam –
Who left such a great legacy
for Niranjan.
It is fulfilled as we see
And so it has been proved,
Through all they have done
That they are not two
But really are One.

—Sannyasi Sitamurti, Ganga Darshan













The Imparting of Panchagni Vidya: A Story

Once upon a time there lived a sage by the name of Vajashravas. He was known for his erudition and wisdom, and many students came to learn from him from far and wide. He had a precocious young son whose name was Nachiketa.

One day Vajashravas decided to hold a *yajna*, a fire ritual to celebrate the connection between the human and the divine. It was a grand yajna to which thousands came. As part of the yajna daan, Vajashravas decided to give away everything he possessed. He gave away his household items, and then his cattle. First he gave the healthy cows, and then even the sick and undernourished cows. Watching this, his son Nachiketa approached him and said:

Nachiketa: कस्मै माँ दास्यसीति ? To whom will you give me?

This he repeated once, twice, thrice.

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Then his father replied with anger:

Vajashravas: मृत्यवे त्वा ददामीति ! To death I shall give you!

Hearing his father's command, Nachiketa travelled to the realm of death: to mrityulok. And there he waited to meet the lord of death, Yamaraj.

There he waited, for he knew that his father, the venerable Vajashravas, had not cursed him to death, but had blessed him to seek the knowledge that no ordinary mortal had sought before . . .

For three days and three nights Nachiketa waited. And each day a new insight dawned on him, each day a new aspect of his existence became illuminated. . .

Finally, the lord of death appeared before him. And finding that the young boy had stood at his gates without food or water for three days and three nights, he asked him:

Yamaraj: किं प्रथमा रात्रिमाश्ना इति ? "What did you eat on the first night?"
Nachiketa: प्रजां त इति । "I partook of society."
Yamaraj: किं द्वितियामिति ? "What about the second night?"
Nachiketa: पशू ँस्त इति । "I partook of the individual."
Yamaraj: किं तृतियामिति ? "What about the third night?"
Nachiketa: साधुकृत्यां त इति । "I partook of ascetic-like action."

Nachiketa's answers were no ordinary replies. He told Yamaraj of the three different states of consciousness that he underwent, which are experienced by the dedicated aspirant on the path of sadhana: transcendence of the external world, transcendence of self-awareness, and becoming established in a higher reality. Pleased with his answers, Yama granted him three boons.

Yamaraja: "O Brahman, my salutations to you. Choose three boons, one in respect of each night."
Nachiketa: "O Death, as the first of the three boons, grant that my father may be cheerful and free from anger and anxiety concerning me.
Yamaraj: तथास्तु ! "So be it."
Nachiketa: "O Death, you know that fire sacrifice which leads to heaven. By that, the heaven seekers attain immortality. Tell it to me. This is my second boon."
Yamaraj: तथास्तु ! "So be it."

Saying this, Yama taught Nachiketa the fire sacrifice known as panchagni sadhana, the austerity of the five fires. He



explained its method and its rituals. Nachiketa, however, was not satisfied with merely learning the procedure, he aspired to know the essence of the sadhana. And therefore he asked Yamaraj:

Nachiketa: "O Death, tell me how does the panchagni sadhana bestow the state of immortality. Tell me what is death and what is immortality. This is my third boon."

Yama tried to deter Nachiketa from seeking this boon, by tempting him with riches and pleasures, for the knowledge that he asked for would become a destructive force if the receiver was undeserving. But Nachiketa was no ordinary seeker and no worldly pleasure could allure him. Impressed by his inner resolve, Yamaraj relented and said:

Yamaraja: All right, Nachiketa, I shall impart to you the knowledge that no ordinary mortal has received until now. Hear from me the essence of the all-powerful panchagni vidya.

The panchagni is the sadhana to attain Shivahood, the consciousness that is beyond the influence of creation and its fetters, the consciousness beyond death.

Death for a sadhaka is remaining bound in the lower nature, where the fires of kama, krodha, mada, moha and lobha continuously burn. And eternal life is attained when the sadhaka faces these fires, perseveres through them to understand them, and ultimately rises above them.

In the sadhana of panchagni, when the sadhaka surrounds himself with five external fires, endures them and transcends their influence, he transcends the five inner fires also. He realizes that he is not the body that feels the heat, he is not the senses that interact with the world of sense objects, he is not the mind that thinks thoughts, he is not the heart that feels emotions, he is not the intellect that applies understanding, he is not his memories, samskaras or karmas, and he is not his ego.

He reaches into his own essence, which cannot be burnt by fire or slayed by weapon – inner or outer. He realizes his cosmic nature, and the light hiding in the cave of his heart assumes the resplendence of a thousand suns. The jiva becomes Shiva.

Today, Nachiketa, I name these fires after you, for you have received their knowledge. Henceforth the panchagni fires will also be called Nachiketa fires.

Nachiketa, Adideva Shiva is the origin and the end of this vidya, he is the one who truly knows what it is. For the panchagni is part of the first teachings that he imparted at the beginning of time, which came to be known as Pashupata vidya.

Shiva has given this knowledge to the best and the bravest across ages. He gave it to his own aradhyaya, Vishnu, when he assumed the form of Sri Krishna on earth.

And I tell thee this, Nachiketa, in Kali Yuga there shall emerge exceptional beings who will meditate on the fires that I have named after thee. To them also this vidya shall be revealed.

In the 1911th year of the Shaka Samvat, a glorious tapasvi shall come to the land where Adishakti in the form of Sati was cremated by Shiva. He shall light the five fires and endure their blaze for nine years. Swami Satyananda Saraswati too shall attain control over Prakriti and ascend to the state of Shivahood.

When he has achieved the pinnacle of spiritual experience, he will transmit all his shakti to his most capable disciple who will emerge as a light unto himself.

Niranjan, the immaculate one, will be born of a sankalpa. He will be the child of truth and purity. He will be born for a purpose and every breath that he exhales will fulfil that purpose. His life will be a consecrated life. The joys and sorrows, the desires and passions, the fears and longings that drive ordinary men and women will come to his feet and turn to ashes. His prana will soar

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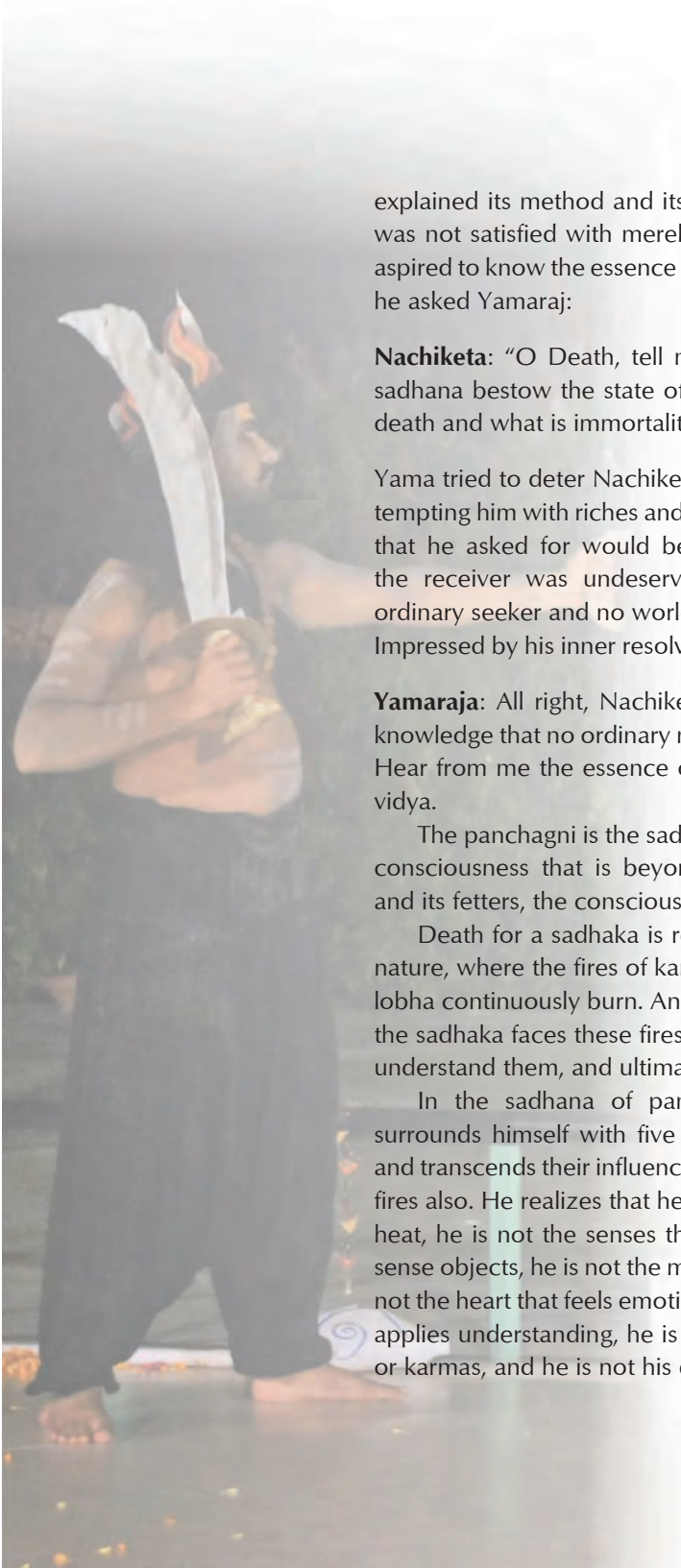
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Yamaraj: तथास्तु ! "So be it."

Saying this, Yama taught Nachiketa the fire sacrifice known as panchagni sadhana, the austerity of the five fires. He



explained its method and its rituals. Nachiketa, however, was not satisfied with merely learning the procedure, he aspired to know the essence of the sadhana. And therefore he asked Yamaraj:

Nachiketa: "O Death, tell me how does the panchagni sadhana bestow the state of immortality. Tell me what is death and what is immortality. This is my third boon."

Yama tried to deter Nachiketa from seeking this boon, by tempting him with riches and pleasures, for the knowledge that he asked for would become a destructive force if the receiver was undeserving. But Nachiketa was no ordinary seeker and no worldly pleasure could allure him. Impressed by his inner resolve, Yamaraj relented and said:

Yamaraja: All right, Nachiketa, I shall impart to you the knowledge that no ordinary mortal has received until now. Hear from me the essence of the all-powerful panchagni vidya.

The panchagni is the sadhana to attain Shivahood, the consciousness that is beyond the influence of creation and its fetters, the consciousness beyond death.

Death for a sadhaka is remaining bound in the lower nature, where the fires of kama, krodha, mada, moha and lobha continuously burn. And eternal life is attained when the sadhaka faces these fires, perseveres through them to understand them, and ultimately rises above them.

In the sadhana of panchagni, when the sadhaka surrounds himself with five external fires, endures them and transcends their influence, he transcends the five inner fires also. He realizes that he is not the body that feels the heat, he is not the senses that interact with the world of sense objects, he is not the mind that thinks thoughts, he is not the heart that feels emotions, he is not the intellect that applies understanding, he is not his memories, samskaras or karmas, and he is not his ego.

He reaches into his own essence, which cannot be burnt by fire or slayed by weapon – inner or outer. He realizes his cosmic nature, and the light hiding in the cave of his heart assumes the resplendence of a thousand suns. The jiva becomes Shiva.

Today, Nachiketa, I name these fires after you, for you have received their knowledge. Henceforth the panchagni fires will also be called Nachiketa fires.

Nachiketa, Adideva Shiva is the origin and the end of this vidya, he is the one who truly knows what it is. For the panchagni is part of the first teachings that he imparted at the beginning of time, which came to be known as Pashupata vidya.

Shiva has given this knowledge to the best and the bravest across ages. He gave it to his own aradhyaya, Vishnu, when he assumed the form of Sri Krishna on earth.

And I tell thee this, Nachiketa, in Kali Yuga there shall emerge exceptional beings who will meditate on the fires that I have named after thee. To them also this vidya shall be revealed.

In the 1911th year of the Shaka Samvat, a glorious tapasvi shall come to the land where Adishakti in the form of Sati was cremated by Shiva. He shall light the five fires and endure their blaze for nine years. Swami Satyananda Saraswati too shall attain control over Prakriti and ascend to the state of Shivahood.

When he has achieved the pinnacle of spiritual experience, he will transmit all his shakti to his most capable disciple who will emerge as a light unto himself.

Niranjan, the immaculate one, will be born of a sankalpa. He will be the child of truth and purity. He will be born for a purpose and every breath that he exhales will fulfil that purpose. His life will be a consecrated life. The joys and sorrows, the desires and passions, the fears and longings that drive ordinary men and women will come to his feet and turn to ashes. His prana will soar

above them, his white wings gliding on high, in harmony with the wind, sundrops dancing on his shoulders, cirrus clouds chasing his wingtips. He will be an instrument of divinity, a creature of the skies, come to show the wingless that they too can fly.

In the 1934th year of the Shaka Samvat, he too will invoke the five sacred fires. In the grounds sanctified by his own sadhana in the ancient kingdom of Anga, he will raise the flames in the four directions and seat himself amidst them.

For this beloved son, Prakriti herself will bend the laws: she will force the sun to soften and the waters to saturate the air while he tames the flames and realizes the fullness of the self.

When his dharana intensifies, the secrets of nature will become revealed to him and agni will surrender to become bhasma before his gaze. His tejas will shine brighter than the sun above him and his prana will expand beyond the periphery of his tapobhumi. From the panchagni he shall emerge victorious and splendid. Swami Niranjanananda will become the upholder of a tradition.





At the conclusion of his panchagni sadhana, he will revive another vidya imparted by Adiguru Shiva: the Pashupata Astra Yajna. It will become the medium to distribute the attainments of his sadhana to people. The mantras of the yajna will be heard upon earth after five thousand years through his endeavours, transforming everyone who receives their vibration. They will become the vehicle to provide a glimpse of the tapasvi's own experience: the piercing of the three granthis, the psychic knots that tie one down to a lower existence, and his emergence into an expansive consciousness.

The Pashupata astra is Shiva's own weapon, which he wields to master the pashu, the animal within. At the right moment in time, in one sweep its power pierces through tripura, the three demonic cities of iron, silver and gold, signifying the three granthis.

When the tapasvi's tejas has attained the vastness of the ethers, he too is able to wield this weapon. He breaks through every imperfection, and becomes one who is no longer limited by earth or sky. He becomes the knower of the Shiva tattwa, one who commands the dhumra lingam, the bana lingam and the itarkhya lingam, the three states of consciousness on the path of sadhana, and becomes established in the jyotirlingam, the illumined consciousness.

In its splendour, he attains devatwa. He becomes Sadashiva.

On 14th January 2013, the day of Makar Sankranti, Swami Niranjanananda commenced the panchagni tapas, the sadhana of a paramahamsa sannyasin: the same, fiercely intense sadhana that his guru, Sri Swami Satyananda had undertaken over twenty years earlier in Rikhia.

The panchagni vedi was prepared as per traditional specifications by the Sri Peeth in the Akhara at Munger: the sadhana sthal dedicated by Swami Niranjan to Guru, Shiva and Shakti. Swamiji commenced the sadhana early in the morning of the 14th in the presence of Swami Satyasangananda, Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth, who had arrived from Rikhia for the occasion.

As Swamiji walked in wearing the panchagni attire: black cloth around the head, arms, neck and head adorned by rudraksha beads, all present let out a gasp. Their own Swamiji had become someone beyond them. The Shiva energy had unmistakeably come into him. As the sannyasins chanted the thousand names of the Cosmic Shakti in the form of Katyayani, Swamiji lit the fires. The moment became etched in space.

Sri Swamiji had once said, "I want sannyasins of steel," but the mettle that he chiselled out of his chosen successor was clearly even finer than steel. It was gold, which does not flinch under fire but emerges purer. This became evident when, surrounded by four burning fires on all sides and the blazing sun overhead acting as the fifth, Swamiji set every move and intention to the task of facing the fires that burned within. The ease and grace with which he endured the escalating heat was a reflection of the luminosity of the gold within, and also what was expected of those following the sannyasa tradition right to its end.











The mantras of the Pashupata Astra Yajna contain a lot of '*Phat, Phat, Phat, Phat, Phat*' and only at the end is one *Swaha* chanted. The utterance of *Swaha* indicates completion of one round of the mantra. This mantra is going to be chanted for five days.

Receiving grace

As the yajna progresses, the same procedure of chanting and aradhana will continue, though in a slightly different manner. Today being the commencement of the yajna, much time was dedicated to *sthapana*, invocation, installation, placement, and preparation of the elements involved in this Shiva aradhana. Once the sthapana has been completed and Lord Shiva is invoked, the aradhana can begin. Tomorrow in the morning, pooja and havan will start. Havan of the Pashupata astra mantras will be conducted twice daily. Sahasrarchana of Rudra, of Shiva, will also happen daily. In this manner, different mantras will be chanted over the following days. Along with the program of the pandits, the sannyasins will also be participating with the chanting of Shiva stotras and Shiva mantras.

You are not here to simply witness the event; you are coming as a sadhaka, as a participant in the culmination of this panchagni sadhana and the invocation of the first Pashupata Astra Yajna in the twenty-first century. Therefore, while you are here, participate by mentally chanting the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra or your guru mantra for a few minutes; for five minutes, ten minutes, one mala, ten malas for whatever time you want to spend in doing your mantra. Come here whenever you can and spend as much time as you want. While you are here, just sit, participate, observe, witness, join in, experience, and become the recipient of the divine grace.

If you want to benefit from this event, always keep a smile, not only on your lips, but in your heart and in your mind also. If you can do that, you will be a better recipient of whatever this yajna has to give you. If you come with a limited, restricted, negative mind and thoughts, you will not be the efficient receiver of the fruits of this yajna. It is your choice.

—9 March 2014

FLOWERING OF A DISCIPLE



Every yajna must have a *yajaman*, a host or patron whose generosity allows the event to take place. In this case the yajaman was nine-year-old Saptarishi Goenka, the youngest member of the Goenka family, whose uncompromising devotion to Sri Swamiji can be traced back to the earliest years of his mission. Sri Swamiji himself gave the boy his extraordinary name. Its meaning, said Swamiji, would reveal itself with the passage of time.

On the very first day of the yajna, Saptarishi received his upanayan ceremony, a powerful samskara that signals a boy's entry into adulthood. With this ritual it became clear that the seed of guru's sankalpa had finally begun to sprout. Through the course of the ceremony, which went on for several hours, he performed his role with the grace and worshipful respect of one who is keenly aware of the gravity of his duties. With this rite of passage it seemed he embodied a new level of awareness and maturity that belied his childlike nature. It was a most auspicious way to begin the yajna, the blessings of guru raining on everyone present as they watched his grace flower in the young disciple.

all, tamoguna represents the *pashuta*, the animalistic tendency, and sattwaguna represents the enlightened tendency. Therefore, even though the devas are established in sattwa, they still have grains of tamoguna and rajoguna within them. Likewise, the demons are established in rajas, but they also contain grains of tamas and sattwa.

Attaining purity

Shiva represents the purity that surpasses even the purity of the devas, since devas are still subject in part to rajas and tamas while Shiva is *trigunatita*, free from the experiences and expressions of tamas, rajas and sattwa.

What then are the means to recognize the animalistic tendency? Understand all those conditions and states of mind that lead to delusion, wrong action and wrong behaviour, and recognize these pashus of life in the form of *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*: desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride or arrogance, and jealousy. These are the six 'friends', the six destructive qualities that you live with all your life, and you turn them into friends by allowing their expression in your life. It is these friends that turn you into an animal, and they are the qualities that Shiva must master.

The basic teaching of Pashupata tantra is that one must recognize the beauty and the virtue in others and honour it, respect it and be happy about it. It is this teaching that I have also been emphasizing this year. One must recognize the shortcomings, the demonical, the limiting, the destructive and the separating qualities within one's own self, and then make the effort to transform and transcend it. When there is balance between honouring the virtue and transcending the non-virtuous, purity is attained, and in that purity Shiva is realized.

Invoking Shakti in the astra

The yajna being witnessed here as part of the panchagni anusthana is an ancient one. Although it is the worship of Shiva, the worship of Shiva is incomplete without the worship and invocation of Shakti. So, although the guise is that of Pashupata astra, the invocation is of both. You have to remember who Shiva is and who Shakti is.

The story says that Shiva took up the bow and arrow called Pashupata astra to pierce through the three cities. This astra, this missile, represents Shakti, who symbolizes power and strength. The nature of Shiva is not shakti or power, the nature of Shiva is chit, sentient awareness. Therefore, from where did this power come in the sentient awareness, if not through the invocation of Shakti? When that power of sentient awareness has to transform and transcend the limitations of pashuta, the animalistic tendencies of tamoguna; *asurya vritti*, the demonical tendencies of rajoguna; and the *deva vritti*, the divine expression of sattwaguna, this sentient awareness requires the strength of Shakti to pierce and come to its own state of purity and effulgence. That is then the invocation and the symbology of using the bow and arrow.

Here the bow and arrow represents Shakti, and Shiva or consciousness is the wielder of that Shakti. To pierce the three granthis, Shiva has to invoke the Adi Shakti, the first, the primary Shakti, and concentrate the power of Adi Shakti at the tip of the arrow. He must focus and bring together all the energy, all the shakti, to one central point so that it becomes an atomic shakti, the *sukshma* or subtle shakti.

When that sukshma shakti pierces through the three puras, the three citadels, the three satellites, there is no resistance. In its atomic structure it is able to pass through any solid state, and nothing can stop it. That is the nature of Adi Shakti. Adi Shakti cannot be stopped by anything. Other shaktis can be stopped; other modifications, other evolutes of Shakti can be managed, altered, stopped or contained, but not Adi Shakti.

The weapon symbolizes the use of that Adi Shakti. Whether it be Narayana, Brahma or Shiva, whether they use a trident, a bow and arrow or a sword or spear, all these weapons in the hands of the devas represent the invocation and the application of the Cosmic Power. It is through the invocation of the Cosmic Power that the cosmic conditions can be altered.

Tamoguna is a cosmic condition, rajoguna is a cosmic condition and sattwaguna is also a cosmic condition. They exist everywhere. The whole of prakriti is subject to the three gunas, both in its







IN THE EMBRACE OF A SANKALPA

In the mornings, Swamiji remained confined within the panchagni vedi and performed his anusthanas, while the oblations and invocations continued in the yajna vedi right beside him. Allowing all to witness and participate in what is a deeply personal sadhana, Swamiji appeared to be enfolding all of humanity in the embrace of a sannyasin's loftiest sankalpa: "O Bhikku, keep moving for the welfare of many." The parikrama during these hours was a particularly moving experience, and an extraordinary act of grace. By offering darshan from within the panchagni itself, Swamiji allowed participants to be enveloped in the aura of a yogi engrossed in the highest of sadhanas.

Swami Satsangi joined the aradhana on the second day, raising the pitch of the yajna in her own unique way by performing abhisheka of a white Shivalingam. Seated just to the north of the vedi, and in view of Swamiji from his panchagni, she was the presence of Shakti that cooled the winds of Shiva's fiery sadhana.

In the afternoons, Swamiji and Swami Satsangi observed the proceedings from their place beside Guru Peeth. The flower-laden padukas of Sri Swamiji rested on a pedestal between them as a constant reminder of his eternal presence in our lives. From here, at the end of each aradhana, Swamiji gave insightful satsangs.



Science of panchagni

The panchagni sadhana is, in fact, dharana on five fires: four fires are lit around you and the fifth is on top in the form of the sun. The physical aspect is that it is an austerity: it develops the stamina and resistance of the body and therefore it strengthens the willpower. It also makes the senses extremely sensitive, the whole body becomes like an antenna.

At the mental level, the five fires represent the negativity and tamas that is expressed in life: passion, anger, greed, infatuation and the ego. The fire that is above, the sun, is the ego. We live under the fire of ego all our life, it shines above us all the time. The other four fires also burn and consume us. Dharana on these fires is the science of panchagni and it helps to lessen the spikes that prick one when these negative emotions are high. The dharana creates greater equipoise, peace and harmony, so there are more smiles and less frowns.

Pashupata vidya

The Pashupata Astra Yajna is also a part of the panchagni sadhana, for it forms a part of pashupata vidya, knowledge of pashupata: the original knowledge transmitted by Shiva of which yoga was also a part.

The knowledge transmitted by Shiva had five parts:

1. *Pashupata darshana*, the philosophy of Pashupata.
2. *Pashupata sampradaya*, the sect of Pashupata, a community where everyone lives the same discipline.
3. *Pashupata astra*, the weapon of Pashupata: the mantra or the power used to attain the aspirations defined by the Pashupata philosophy.
4. *Pashupata yoga*, which includes five yogas which in turn were modified to be recognized as hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga and mantra yoga.
5. *Panchagni*, the austerity of five fires.

They all form part of one complex system of spiritual discovery.

—13 April 2015



all white. He said, "Swamiji, I have been saved." Then he told me his story, how he was caught in the storm and lost the way, and nearly died in the freezing cold glacial region.

When I finished the japa, I said, "We will do abhisheka and tomorrow we will march from here." We were the last people in the temple who performed the abhisheka on Sri Kedarnath. When we finished, it was past midnight. We came to our guesthouse, and I heard a voice in my head, "The purpose for which you have come is over, leave now." Three times I heard this.

I told Swami Sivaraj and others that we should make a move. They all looked aghast and said, "Now? Let us sleep now, tomorrow morning we will stroll down in the sun. Why the rush?" I said, "No, I feel that we have to leave." We left by four in the morning, and started walking. We walked for about two hours to Ramban, a tiny hamlet midway, where we stopped for tea. It was there that we received the news that the entire town of Kedarnath was washed out, including our guesthouse. There was complete devastation. Had we continued to stay, we would have become part of that devastation.

We quickly had our tea and came down as fast as possible. We reached the base of the mountain, Gauri Kund, and received the news that Ramban had been washed down into the river. We got into the car, crossed a bridge, and five minutes later the whole bridge collapsed. As our car sped on, behind us peaks were falling, landslides were taking place, roads were disappearing into abysses. We were playing the *Hanuman Chalisa* in the car and the driver said, "Swamiji, for the first time in my life I have not felt afraid. I feel as if my hands are being guided by something."

During the return journey, as people heard about what had transpired, many said that they feel that Kedarnath is going with us, since we were the last to do the abhisheka and pooja on him. When we reached Munger, that night a truck arrived. It contained thirteen Shivalingas. It was a gift from somebody and we had no idea who. We placed twelve of them in Akhara and the big one, the three-footer, came to Paduka Darshan. His name is Satyameshwar and he is a replica of Kedarnath.

—12 January 2016



AN UNBROKEN TRADITION

Swamiji: There is a reference to panchagni by Kalidasa in one of his poems, and he has taken this reference from an ancient *Ramayana*. There are about twenty-four versions of *Ramayana* within India and also in Cambodia, Thailand and Burma.

The reference to panchagni is in the context of Sage Sutikshna, a disciple of Sage Agastya. When Rama was returning to Ayodhya from Lanka in the Pushpak viman with Sita, he pointed out to Sita all the places that he had been to in the forest. At one point, he said, "Look at the four fires burning down there. In the middle sits Sutikshna, the disciple of Agastya. He is practising the tapasya of the five fires."

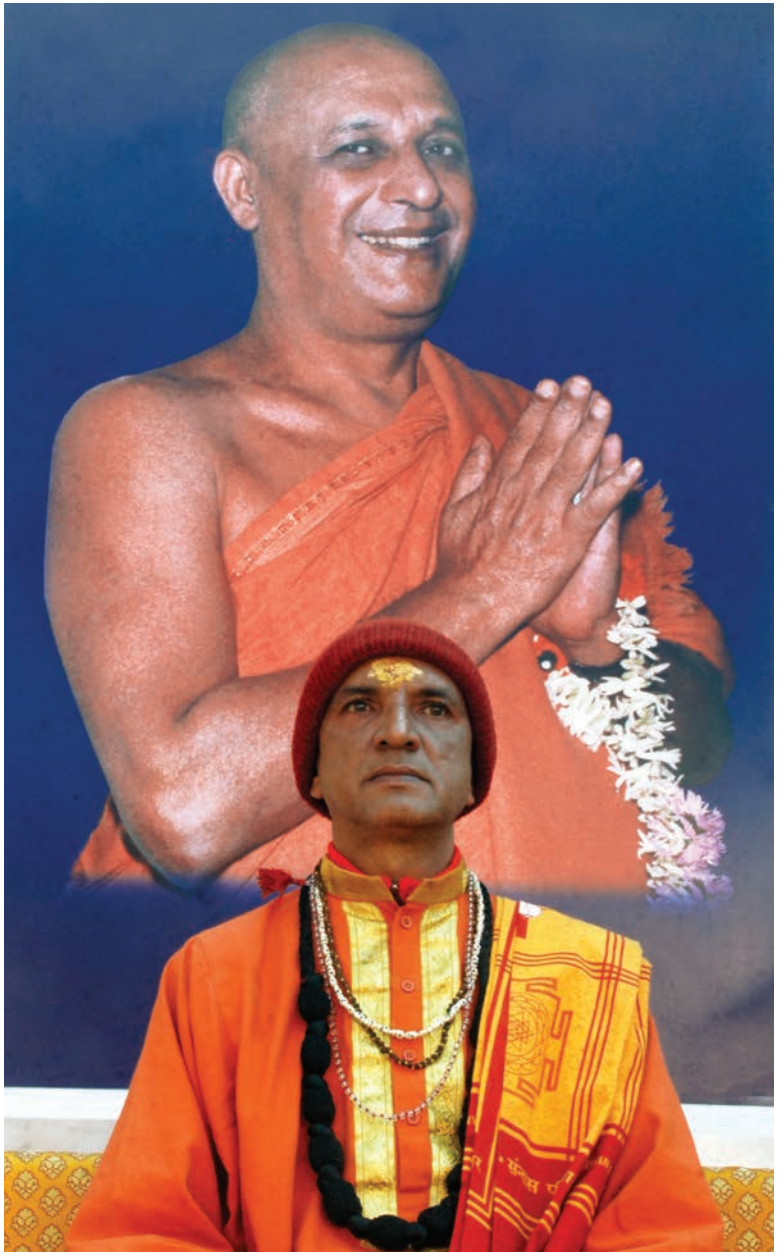
Traditionally, it is said that Yamaraj gave the knowledge of panchagni to Nachiketa in *mrityuloka*, the material plane. Parvati did panchagni in the astral plane for the attainment of Shiva. However, Sutikshna was doing panchagni in the age of Rama, which means that the concept and sadhana of panchagni was prevalent at that time.

There is another reference to panchagni in the *Ramayana*. When Rama became king, a person born in the low caste named Shambhuk, wanted to attain Brahmanhood and started to perform austerities. He began to do the panchagni. The term used is *agnisevan*, meaning partaking of fire, which is another term for panchagni.

Even in the Kumbha Mela or during the Kalpavas in Allahabad in the month of Magh, there are many sadhakas who do symbolic panchagni: lighting one or two gointhas and sitting surrounded by them. All this indicates that the vidya has continued to exist.

—13 January 2016





INVOKING HANUMAN

Swamiji: Since the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth, different anusthanas have been continuously going on during the morning havan in Akhara. The first was the Durga anusthana, started in January 2011. That continued for a year. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, we did the Katyayani anusthana, another form of Durga. In 2015, we did the invocation of Surya and that finished today. Tomorrow, we start the next anusthana dedicated to Lord Hanuman. Surya is guru and Hanuman the disciple, so it is appropriate that after the Surya anusthana, we do the Hanuman anusthana.

Hanuman is one personality in whom nothing is lacking, whether intelligence, strength, humility, power, divine aishwarya or grace. There is nothing that Hanuman is incapable of. He is one of the most versatile personalities, and there is nobody comparable to him, not even all the superheroes put together. He is a personality that has remained constant. In all the written legends about him, it is the same story. The same qualities have been highlighted again and again: how he was the same in old age, youth and childhood. He was the epitome of perfection; he was excellence personified in every respect.

—14 January 2016





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