

Satsang Pragna 2 Essay 1

Ghar Sabha: Nectar of Values in the Family

The famous author of 'Rich Dad, Poor Dad', Richard Kiyosaki states that in today's age, parents are working extremely hard to provide everything for their children. This unfortunately reduces their time with their children in the process. The kids are raised having toys, mobile phones, iPads, and TVs but are usually alone or with babysitters. During the early years of life when children need love and nurturing from the parents, we are busy working. How strange is that? Children often come to an empty home after school only to find a note on the refrigerator where to find their food.

Previously in India, families used to live together so children learned values from family members such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Today we live in nuclear families where grandparents live in separate households. Our children have everything they need but they are missing the most important thing which is sanskar. Without proper guidance and a role model our kids are getting lost.

Often, we send our kids to private Catholic and Christian schools for good education. We also send them far away to expensive colleges in hopes to give them a great education. But we fail to see how the environment can impact our child. They are faced with many challenges and peer pressure. It is not easy to be far away from home and trying to adapt new ways. They make efforts to fit in with the new group and often become departed from their families as well as culture.

Our Guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, has given us a remedy for this difficult situation, in the form of ghar sabha. By sitting together with the entire family and discussing important topics of great sages, rishis, avatars, acharyas, Santos, and great bhaktas on a regular basis; we are instilling great values in our children and our family. With Swamishri's agnaa, there are thousands of families who regularly spare time for their families and provide values, wisdom, and sanskar through ghar sabha. Let us now look at a few examples of how ghar sabha has helped their families instill these values.

Dr. Hemantbhai Patel of Modasa initially had some difficulty trying to get the entire family together to do ghar sabha. But within a very short time, they started to do it regularly. And to his surprise, he saw amazing changes in his kids. Both boys started to observe Ekadashi and the older son went as far as doing nirjala upvas on Ekadashis. The younger son started to do a big chandlo on his forehead because that is how Mahant Swami does his chandlo. They introduced musical instruments in their ghar sabha and started to read Gujarati publications. This created a divine atmosphere in the house and helped the children get a stronger command on the Gujarati language. Ghar sabha instilled values of respect and unity in their family. Children also learned good habits such as bowing down to the parents, developing tolerance, and doing introspection.

Rahulbhai Dambhoya of Ahmedabad states he understands his mistakes because of ghar sabha. Before, he did not understand his parents' financial situation and would demand things such as a cell. Phone and motor bike – like his friends. One day, during ghar sabha, the topic of their finances came up and he realized that his father really wanted to fulfill his demands, but his financial situation could not allow him to do so. In this incident, both Rahulbhai and his brother understood their mistake and corrected their behavior.

Rajeshbhai Patel of Selvas states that even passing discussion of values in ghar sabha has left a lasting impact on his little son's mind. One day, his son had forgotten to do his homework, so his mom suggested he tell his teacher he forgot his books at school. The son responded by saying that it would be lying and Swami Bapa would not be happy with him if he lied. To test her son further, the mom suggested she would go to the school and speak to the teacher for him. The son instantly said Swami Bapa would not be happy with her either if she

lied to the teacher. So, he decided to tell the teacher the truth. With tears in his eyes he told the teacher that he forgot to do his homework.

Dhamjibhai Dhameliya of Vadodara and his family do ghar sabha without fail, no matter what the circumstances. On one occasion, the entire family came home late and were extremely tired, so they did a quick ghar sabha and went to sleep. At 11:30pm they all got up because they were not satisfied with their sabha earlier. They decided to redo their ghar sabha in the right fashion. This family would even do ghar sabha when travelling by train or even when attending weddings. Such was their dedication to do ghar sabha.

Bipinbhai Soneji of Rajkot states ghar sabha has strengthened their family harmony. They understand each other better and have eliminated the generation gap in their family. He also states ghar sabha has brought peace and happiness in their family.

Subadbhai Patel of Bharuch started ghar sabha in 1990 when his children were very young. This helped instill good traits in his sons and deepened his wife's understanding of Satsang. Ghar sabha allowed her to develop Sankhya and later inspire her youngest son to become a sadhu. He got his diksha at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In this way, many families have followed Pramukh Swami's agnaa of doing ghar sabha and have nurtured great values and wisdom in their families.

Satsang Pragna 2 Essay 2

Concept of the Mantra: 'Aksharamaham Purushottama-dasosmi'

On January 25, 2018, Pragat Brahaswarup Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj gave diksha to forty youths in Gondal, India. At that time, to each one of the ordained youths, he gave the diksha mantra – “Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi”, which means “Akshar evo hu Purushottam no daas chhu”, or, “being Akshar I am Purushottam’s servant.” Later, addressing the entire satsang congregation, He wrote a letter explaining, the elemental notion of the mantra in a nutshell. Let’s understand the essence of Akshar Purushottam Darshan which embodies this mantra.

Human life is filled with both happiness and sadness. People generally tend to choose to be unhappy, over any kind of problems, then be happy. Obviously, life is not always a smooth sail and problems and dilemmas are a part of it which disturbs one’s inner peace. Life is surrounded by problems and man is constantly trying to solve it. In order to tackle distressful problems, one can learn to attain positive understandings to make life more pleasant and peaceful. He is constantly trying to introspect to try changing himself, to be disciplined, to be abstemious, to be humble, to serve God with a pure heart, to please God, to please the guru, and to lead a blissful spiritual life. Among the many positive understandings, the imbibing of the mantra, “Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi”, is the ultimate solution to bring end to all the problems of life. This mantra has power to accomplish both atma realization and unconditional happiness. To be Akshar and serve Purushottam is the essence of the Swaminarayan philosophy.

There are three main elements of this mantra -Aksharam (Aksharbrahma), Purushottam (Parbrahma Purushottam) and Aham (Mumukshu Atma).

Let’s understand this mantra in two parts – Aksharam Aham and Purushottam-dasosmi.

Aksharam Aham means I am Akshar. By attaining the divine virtues of Aksharbrahma and applying to one’s self is known as creating oneness with Aksharbrahma. Shreeji Maharaj has also mentioned in various Vachanamruts, namely Loya 12, G I-21 and Ahmedabad 2, that creating oneness with Aksharbrahma is actually creating oneness with the Gunatit Satpurush. Aksharbrahma is above maya, hence when one gets to understand Akshar, he gets above maya as well and gains all the merits of pleasing Maharaj. Here it also implies, that Akshar is our Gunatit gurus-meaning we have to accept our gurus as our ideals. ‘Aksharam Aham’ means to develop oneness in our guru. TO understand our guru as our atma and to sacrifice our whole self for the guru is the key to understanding this concept. Maharaj further explains that by having oneness with Satpurush it is to understand as the Satpurush understands, to act like the Satpurush acts, and to surrender your life in the devotion of Purushottam like the Satpurush does. In addition, Vachnamrut G II-31 says when one associates with brahma through constant contemplation, the jiva acquires the virtues of the brahma. Thus, one’s life becomes like the life of Aksharbrahma and one can affirm that I am Akshar aham.

In order to understand the mantra and develop oneness with Akshar, one has to understand the virtues of Akshar. Complete surrender to God, stability in respect and insult, thorough understanding of doer ship of God, lust free life from materialistic pleasures, one who observes the vows of non-egotism, non-avarice, non-lust, non-taste or non-attachment, etc. are some of the mindful properties of Akshar.

Purushottam-dasosmi means I am the Paramatma’s servant. This words depicts our relation with God. To humbly follow God is the implied meaning here. Swaminarayan Bhagwan is Purushottam himself and I am his humble servant- is the concept to understand. We are all devotees of Swaminarayan Bhagwan and hence we are constantly serving him is the theme for this mantra.

Swaminarayan Bhagwan Himself is Purushottam and no one is able to be like Him, not even Aksharbrahma. Aksharbrahma is above jiv, ishwar and maya but not above Purushottam and He always serves Purushottam as servitude. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has always emphasized on practicing servitude. Therefore,

this mantra is the constant reminder that I am Purushottam's servant. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also proclaimed the mahima of being Purushottam's servant in various Vachnamrut namely, Loya 1, 10, G. II-3 and G. II-69.

Once again, Aksharbrahma is the ideal being that can aid us in attaining this servitude. Aksharbrahma is beyond kaal, karma and maya and is extremely capable and adheres divine virtues yet remains as Purushottam's servant. We have seen this servitude in our guru parampara too, starting from Aksharbrahm Gunatitanand Swami to the present guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj. Similarly, when we attain this servitude in the true sense, we will have understood the real meaning of Purushottam-dasosmi.

This manta, Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi, always keeps us on high alert to control and overcome our panchvishayas like anger, ego, lust, greed, and taste as well as makes us bold and fearless. It helps us introspect within and attain true joy of bhakti without any obstacles.

Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi mantra is proclaimed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan Himself and it is the elemental principle of Aksharapurushottam Darshan. It is the source of high thinking, atma-realization and the giver of brahmi sthiti.

Use: 'Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi' is not just a mantra, but it is one the highest level of understanding. This mantra cleanses the heart and makes it pure. This mantra has to be used in our routine life. Our past gurus have lead their lives keeping this mantra in the forefront at all times. For e.g. if someone insults us with curse words, it would seem unbearable and the heart would fill with anger and anguish. In such times, thinking about what would my guru do? And realizing that 'Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi', one would immediately start feeling taken back, if not completely pacified. WE will be forces to think that 'I am atma, I am brahma, and so no insult can touch me. In this way, this mantra will help in calming any insults, harsh words, materialistic cravings, etc. Even in case of student life, if a student wants to increase his memory, focus and efficiency, he should think about his gurus, their discipline, their focus, their memory and their writing-reading proficiency and the great ability of Purushottam, he should think for himself as 'Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi'. By doing so, he would definitely start feeling the difference in himself. Good virtues would indefinitely be instilled in him and he would also experience bliss. Thus, with this mantra one would stay away from black magic, spells and any kind of bad omens.

We are extremely fortunate that our guru Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj gave us this mantra. So let us follow his agnaa and consider ourselves as Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi...Aksharamaham Purushottam-dasosmi and always remain humble, servant of servants.

Satsang Pragna 2 Essay 3

Nitya Puja: Thanking God for His Endless Gratitude

Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave His devotees The Shikshapatri, a scripture of codes and conducts to live by, for their happiness and wellbeing. In The Shikshapatri, He also ordained his devotees to do nitya puja every morning after showering.

As per The Shikshapatri, a devotee should sit facing either east or north and commence the nitya puja by first placing a tilak chandlo on one's forehead and then offering mansi puja. Thereafter one should place the murti of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj and the murtis of the guru parampara on the aasan and do mala and pradakshina while chanting the Swaminarayan mahamantra. Lastly, one should offer dandvat pranam and read The Shikshapatri.

Nitya Puja is a unique time every day to repay and offer our heartfelt appreciations to God for His endless gratitude upon us. He gave us this priceless human body through which we are able to enjoy the pleasures of this world. He gave us free air, water and energy in form of sun for our sustenance.

Nitya puja is a special time to rekindle our bond with Shreeji Maharaj and our gurus. As per Yogiji Maharaj it is a personal meeting with Bhagwan and our gurus. It assists us in strengthening our kinship with them. Our life is so entangled in daily worldly deeds that it hardly leaves any time to think about Bhagwan otherwise. Yet Bhagwan is so great that he considers our small offering and prayers as huge and always showers His divine blessings upon us. Therefore, by simply performing nitya puja our connection with Bhagwan becomes stronger and our moksha becomes certain. It creates oneness with Bhagwan and our guru.

Along with doing nitya puja Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also strongly commanded to place a tilak chandlo on one's forehead. Bhagwan dwells in our atma, which is the form of Akshar. The tilak chandlo symbolizes the relationship between atma and Parmatma as well as create the sense of respect that one is a bhakta of Bhagwan. Tilak chandlo is also a constant reminder of our niyam-dharma and helps us to stay on track. It protects us from any wrongdoing and it portrays one's loyalty.

Shreeji Maharaj is the all doer and omnipotent. By doing nitya puja with tilak chandlo and by attaching ourselves with Bhagwan, our lives will be peaceful, content and joyous. He will always protect us and help us get through difficult times and remove any obstacle before it harms us. By praying to Him on a daily basis we can attain His divine blessings and at the same time take the opportunity to repay our debts for his greatness and gratitude.