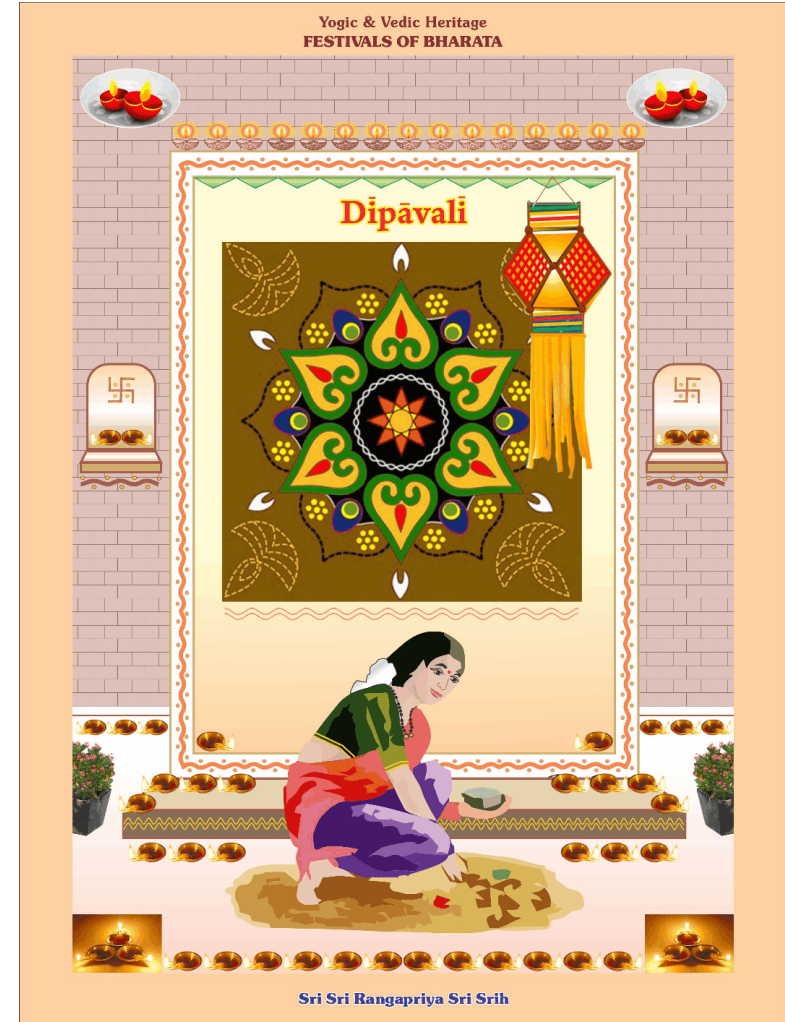




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We Dedicate this Sacred Treasure at the holy lotus feet of

Sriranga Mahaguru and SriMata

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अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	अं	अः
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ	e	ai	o	au	am	ah
क	ख	ख	ग	ङ											
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa											
च	छ	ज	झ	ञ											
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña											
ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण											
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa											
त	थ	द	ध	न											
ta	tha	da	dha	na											
प	फ	ब	भ	म											
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma											
य	र	ल	व	श											ष
ya	ra	la	va	śa	sha	sa	ha								

Example:

क	का	कि	की	कु	कू	कृ	कृ	क्लृ	के	कै	को	कौ	कं	कः
ka	kā	ki	kī	ku	kū	kṛ	kṛ	klṛ	ke	kai	ko	kau	kam	kah



Dīpāvalī

उपशमितमेघनादम्
प्रज्वलितदशाननम् रमितरामम् ।
रामायणमिव सुभगम्
दीपदिनं हरतु वो दुरितम्॥

Just as *Meghanāda* (*Indrajit*) who becomes quieted in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *meghanāda* becomes silent in this great festival. Like the ten faced *Rāvaṇa* who is burnt in *Rāmāyaṇa*, the tips of the wicks are lighted in this festival. As *Rāma* rejoiced in *Rāmāyaṇa*, *ŚrīRāma* and beautiful women enjoy here. This way let the day of *Dīpāvalī mahotsava* which is delightful like *Rāmāyaṇa*, ward off our your sins.

(*Bhaviṣhyottara purāṇa* 140-71)

Dīpāvalī is a great festival which is most popular among the *sanātana Āryabhāratīyas*. People of all classes celebrate this with grandeur

and enthusiasm in all parts of *Bhārat*. If it is celebrated with thoughtful happiness, the supreme light (*parañjyothi*) which is the source lamp of all knowledge, arts, and which is in the true form of the light of knowledge which is described by *jnānis* as “सत्तामात्रं निर्विशेषं निरीहं स त्वं साक्षात् विष्णुरध्यात्मदीपः” “हृदयकमलमध्ये दीपवद्वेदसारम्” (*Gurugītā, skāndapurāṇa*), will be pleased.

Dīpāvalī is the famous name of this festival. *Āvalī* means a row, (*vidhyālrāvalih paṅktih*). *Dīpāvalī* means a row of lights (lamps). As this festival has a series of such (lamps), it's name is *Dīpāvalī*. Rows of lamps are lighted in different places both inside and outside of homes and *mandirs* in the festivals of *Śivadīpotsava* and *Vishṇudīpotsava* (*kṛttikadīpotsava*) also, which come at the end of the month of *Kārtika*. Then, why is it that this festival (i.e. '*Dīpāvalī*') alone, which we have taken up (for deliberation), bears the special name? It is because this festival has rows of lamps lighted in a variety of ways, for many days and this festival will be a prelude for the celebration of lighting of lamps which is special in *Kārtikadīpotsava*.

The festival of *Dīpāvalī* is not limited to just one day, but is spread over four to five days, and lamps are lighted on all those days. Lamps are lighted in all the deliberations of the worships in

this festival pertaining to the killing of *Narakāśura*, *Balīndra Vijaya*, *Mahālakshmī pūjā*, *Mahādeva pūjā*, *Mahārātri pūjā*, *Kubera pūjā*, *Yamadharṃarāja pūjā*, *Go-pūjā* and *Govardhana pūjā* etc. *Dīpārati* is performed not only to God but also to human relatives and animals.

नीराजयेयुर्देवास्तु विप्रान् गाञ्च तुरङ्गमान् ।

ज्येष्ठान्मूज्यान् जघन्याञ्च मातृमुख्याञ्च योषितः॥

Lamps are lighted not only in different parts of houses, but also in *Aśramas*, *Maṭhas*, banks of rivers, seashores and town squares. A distinct type of sky lamp is lighted (during night). Not only the illumination from the lighted lamps with oil and ghee, but also the effulgence from fire crackers spread around. Gifting of lighted lamps is also done. Thus, the name *Dīpāvali* suits this festival best, as this festival is full of lights in all respects. This is the reason why this festival is also called by the names '*dīpālikā*', '*dīpotsava*' and *Dīpa*.

In addition to the above names, this festival is also being called by the names such as '*sukha rātri*', '*sukha suptikā*' '*yaksharātri*', '*kaumudīmahotsava*' '*balipāḍyamī*' (*pratipadā*) '*vīrapratipadā*', '*bhaghinīdvitīyā*', '*sodara bidige*' etc. corresponding to the special observations of the festival. This day came to be called *Sukharātri* and *Sukhasuptikā*, for, affectionate enquiries such as "Had you a good

sleep?" "Did you have a good morning" are made to greet each other by friends and relatives, who have spent the night with pleasant conversations, amusements and good sleep, after worshipping *MahāLakshmī*, the auspicious deity in the night. As *Kubera* the king of *yakshas* is worshipped and *yakshagāna* is enjoyed on that day, it is called '*yaksharātri*'. The day was named *narakacaturdaśī* to bring to memory the killing of *naraka* by *Nārāyaṇa*. The day on which worship is offered to emperor *Bali* the *vīrabhāgavata śiromaṇi*, came to be called as '*Balī*' and '*Vīrapratipadā*'. The last day on which the brothers visit the homes of their sisters, and enjoy exchange of honour and regard for each other is called '*sodara bidige*', or '*bhaginīdvitīyā*'. It is also called *Yamadvitīyā* to bring to memory the day on which *Yamadharṃarāja* visited his sister *Yamunādevī* at her residence.

Though *dīpāvali* is being celebrated by all classes of people, some call it specially as "The festival of *Vaiśyas*". It is because *Mahālakshmī* the Goddess of wealth (*Dhana devatā*), and *Kubera* the presiding deity of wealth are worshipped on that day.

‘पूजनीया तथा लक्ष्मीर्विज्ञेया सुखसुप्तिका’

“सुखरात्र्यां प्रदोषे तु कुबेरं पूजयन्ति हि”

But it is not just a festival reminiscing one of making money only. *Mahālakshmī* is not merely the goddess of material wealth, as lay people think. All forms of auspiciousness (prosperity) are the forms of *Lakshmī* only. It should be remembered that she is one who is called ‘*Maṅgala devatā*’ being the source of all auspiciousness, and being *asṭalakshmī rūpiṇī* (possessing eight divine forms) of wealth, grains etc. also happens to be *Dhanalakshmī* and *Mokshalakshmī*. Therefore it is the worship of *Lakshmī*, which is celebrated for the attainment of all the wealth of all the *Purushārthas*. The wealth of (grains) and money etc acquired in the parameters of *Dharma*, is desirable indeed. Merchants begin to keep a new trade account related to their business, after *Lakshmīpūja* on that day.

The time of the celebration of the festival is the last four or five days of the *Kṛṣṇapāksha* of the *āśvayuja māsa*. ‘आश्वयुक् कृष्णपक्षस्य चतुर्दश्यां विधूदये’. Why then this has been called a festival of the *Kārtika māsa* in some treatises? ‘कार्तिकेकृष्ण चतुर्दश्यामिनोदये’. Because, it will be *Kārtika māsa* according to the calculation based on the end of the month with full moon day (*pūrṇimānta*). But, according to *amānta māsa* calculation (the month ending with new moon day), it is *āśvayuja māsa* only. Though the names of the months differ, there is no change in the day of the festival.

Though the manner of observation of *Dīpāvalī* differs a little in different parts of the country, the *dīpotsava* is in vogue in all the traditions of all the provinces (states). Not only people belonging to *vaidik* traditions, but people belonging to *Jaina* and *Bouddha* traditions also observe the worship and *dīparādhana* at that time.

In Tamilnadu, the day of *caturdaśī* only is called *Dīpāvalī*. In *Karnataka* both *narakacaturdaśī* and *Balipādyami* are called *Dīpāvalī*. *Bhaginīdvitīyā* is observed in *Karnataka*, *Andhra*, *Maharashtra* and all over North India.

The festival of *Nīrutumbuva habba* falls on the previous night of *narakacaturdaśī* and (in that festival) all the vessels used for bathing are cleaned, and pure water is filled in them. Afterwards, taking oil bath very early in the morning (*Brāhmi muhūrta*), inviting sons-in-law and others, and having a happy conversation with them at home, children and grownups bursting crackers together, worshipping of *Balīndra* on *Balipādyami* on the day next to *Amāvāsyā*, wearing of new clothes and ornaments, feasting, hospitality etc., are observed. These deliberations and pomp are more in *Karnataka* and *Andhrapradesh*.

The celebration of *Dīpāvalī* as described in

purāṇas, *Itihāsas* and *pūjākalpas* may be summed up as follows:

Skānda purāṇa says that a lamp should be lighted outside the house on the night of *trayodaśī*, to ward off untimely death and to please *Yamadharṃarāja*. This is called *Yamadīpa*.

कार्तिकस्यासिते पक्षे त्रयोदश्यां निशामुखे।
यमदीपं बहिर्दद्यात् अपमृत्युर्विनश्यति ॥

May *Yamadharṃarāja*, the son of *Sūrya*, who is accompanied by *Mṛtyu*, *pāśa*, *danḍa*, *Kālapuruṣa* and *shyāmādevi*, be pleased by the gift of this lighted lamp, (done on) this *trayodaśī*.

मृत्युना पाशदण्डाभ्यां कालेन श्यामया सह।
त्रयोदश्यां दीपदानात् सूर्यजः प्रीयतां मम ॥ (स्कान्द, पद्मपुराण)

All should take oil bath in the early morning of *caturdaśī* of *Kṛṣṇapākṣa*. Even ascetics should have this auspicious oil bath on that day. *Nārāyaṇa*, the *narakāntaka* (slayer of the demon *naraka*) will be pleased with this, and the fear of hell vanishes. The bath should be taken at the time of moonrise.

चतुर्दश्यां इनोदये॥

In addition to the above, one should have the have small twigs of *Uttaraṇe* (*apamārga*) tied around the body. This also redeems one of the sins. “हरपापमपामार्गं भ्राम्यमाणः पुनः पुनः (भविष्योत्तर 140-9) There is also a precept of offering *Tarpaṇa* with

gingelly seeds to *Yamadharṃarāja* by uttering his fourteen sacred names.

यमाय धर्मराजाय मृत्यवे चान्तकाय च ।
वैवस्वताय कालाय सर्वभूतक्षयाय च॥
औदुम्बराय दध्नाय नीलाय परमेष्ठिने ।
वृकोदराय चित्राय चित्रगुप्ताय वै नमः॥

Lamps should be lighted on that night in temples, *maṭhas*, shrines, *brndāvanas*, court yards of the homes, armoury, rivers, forts, gardens, wells and important roads, horse stables and elephant stables to avoid hell. And, in memory of *Narakāśura*, a lamp with four wicks should be lighted.

Sāstras state that those who take bath early in the morning using oil and water, will escape from *Yamaloka*, as *Lakṣmī* and *Gaṅgā* dwell in the oil and water respectively and *aLakṣmī* (misfortunes) also get warded off.

तैले लक्ष्मीर्जले गङ्गा दीपावल्याश्चतुर्दशीम् ।
प्रातःकाले तु यः कुर्यात् यमलोकं न पश्यति ॥ (पद्म 4-1224)

अलक्ष्मीपरिहारार्थं अभ्यङ्गास्नानमाचरेत्। (नारद संहिता)

We come across a good tradition of greeting those who take bath early in the morning in the above said manner with the words "had you a good bath in *Gaṅgā*?"

After this, there is a custom of crushing a bitter

fruit by name '*kāriṭa*' by trampling on it, in some provinces.

There is also a practice of consuming fourteen different vegetables.

अत्र आचारात् चतुर्दशशकभक्षणं च कर्तव्यम् ॥

And then, path should be shown to some departed *pitṛs* on the nights of *caturdaśī* and *amāvāsya*, by holding burning firewood in hands.

There is a custom of showing the lamps of those fire-brands and installing them at different places, uttering the following words:-

"Let the *pitṛs* in our family, either cremated or uncremated, attain *paramagati*. Let this (fire-brand) be the guiding light for their journey.

उज्ज्वलज्योतिषा मार्गं प्रपश्यन्तु ब्रजन्तु ते॥

Then, after worshipping *MahāVishṇu*, *Śiva* and *Mahārātridevatās*, one should take food only in the night. Sweets should be distributed.

On the day of *amāvāsya* also one should take oil bath early in the morning and worship *Goddess Lakshmīdevī*. By this, poverty and ill luck (misfortune) will get warded off. The barks of *araḷi*, *atti*, mango, banyan and *plaksha* trees should be added to water kept for taking bath. There is a custom of having the *Ārati* by women after the bath. Along with the worship of Gods the worship of *pitṛs* also should be done either by *pārvaṇaśrāddha* or at

least in the form of offering *tarpaṇa*. On that day, one should enjoy dance, vocal music and, instrumental music, and new clothes and ornaments should be put on, and happiness should be experienced. Lamps should be lighted all over the house. *Maṅgaḷārati* should be had. It is better to keep wakeful in the night. Women should frequently keep beating *Mora* and drums to prevent sleep, and should drive away misfortunes. Houses and shops should be cleaned and decorated. The night of this *amāvāsya* is called *sukhasuptikā*.

We see the custom of merchants and traders worshipping their books of accounts during this night and distribute sweets and *tāmbūla* to their customers and begin new accounts. As *Goddess Lakshmīdevī* keeps awake during this night, we should also keep awake and worship her. There is also a custom of worshipping *Kubera*, the Lord of wealth, along with *Lakshmī*.

The *Kārtikaśuddhaprathamā* itself is the famous *Balipāḍyamī*. It is the most significant day among all the days of *Dīpāvali*. If *svāti nakshatra* combines with it, it is considered most auspicious. One should have oil bath early in the morning on this day also. The worship of *Balīndra* is the most important *vidhi* of that night.

A picture of *Balīndra* having two arms should

be drawn using five different coloured powders, or an idol of *Balīndra* should be installed. His queen *Vindhyāvalī* and the *rākshasās* in his entourage such as *Bāṇa*, *Kūshmāṇḍa* and *Mura* should figure in the picture or the idols. *Balīndra* should be decorated with a pair of ear rings, crown and other ornaments. He should be worshipped with varieties of lotuses, sandal unguents, *dīpa* and *naivedya*, by the king and all the subjects. He should be worshipped with flowers made of gold, or flowers of good colors. Among such flowers *Honnāvarike* (*Āvaraka*) (a shrub with clusters of yellow flowers-cassia auriculata Lin) is best. There is a custom of greeting *Balicakravarti* by strewing *Honnāvarike* flowers in his honour in the court yard of worship, and uttering the words *Honnu Honnu*. Some also prepare an idol of emperor *Bali* with cowdung.

The *purāṇas* say that one should pray and worship him saying "O King *Bali*, great son of *Virocana*, I prostrate before you. O Lord, you are a great soul who is going to be the 'Indra' in future. O King of demons, accept this worship. Bless us to obtain the *sānnidhya* of *Vishṇu*."

बलिराज नमस्तुभ्यं विरोचनसुत प्रभो।
भविष्येन्द्र सुराराते विष्णुसान्निध्यदो भव ॥
पूजेयं प्रतिगृह्यताम्

And keeping wakeful at night, plays that depict stories of heroic *kshatriyas* should be enacted. *Dānas* in the name of emperor *Bali* should be made. "Those *dānas* will become *akshaya* and please Lord *Nārāyaṇa*" say the *purāṇas*.

बलिमुद्दिश्य दीयन्ते बलयः कुरुनन्दन।
यानि तान्यक्षयाण्याहुः मयैवं सम्प्रदर्शितम् ॥ (भविष्योत्तर 140-57)

Purāṇas also say "*Śiva* played the game of dice with *Pārvatī* on this day. So it is auspicious to play dice on this day. If one wins on this day, he will win throughout the year."

तस्मात् द्यूतं प्रकर्तव्यं प्रभाते तत्र मानवैः।
तस्मिन् द्यूते जयो यस्य तस्य संवत्सरः शुभः॥

Brahma purāṇa states that *Pārvatī* had victory on that day in the game of dice.

जितश्च शङ्करस्तत्र जयं लेभे च पार्वती॥

Cows and oxen should be given complete rest on that day. And they should be bathed, decorated, fed well with good food and worshipped. The *Govardhana* hill should be circumambulated and *GopalaKṛshṇa* should be worshipped. Those who cannot afford to go to *Govardhana* hill should worship a picture or an idol of that hill, prepared from cow dung or (cooked) rice.

This worship of *Govardhana* hill is called '*anna kūta*'. *Naivedya* should be offered with grandeur to

Lord *Govardhanagopāla* and mass feeding should be done.

At noon on that day, a rope made of *darbhas* should be tied around a big pillar standing in the earstern direction, and the pillar should be worshipped. This is called '*Mārgapālī*'.

After that, people belonging to different classes should play the game of tug of war with the rope of *kuśas* tied around that tree. If the lower class of people win in that game, the king will attain victory, they say.

All the three days of *Dīpāvali* viz., *caturdaśī*, *amāvāsyā* and *prathamā* are called *Kaumudī mahotsava*. These three days are the dark days of (*Kṛshṇa paksha*). '*Kaumudī*' means moon light.

चन्द्रिका कौमुदी ज्योत्स्ना।

One may wonder how come the festival of full moon (is celebrated) on *amāvāsyā*? But here the meaning of '*Kaumudī*' is, "the one which causes joy to the world." The *purāṇas* say that this is the day which bestows a variety of joys to the people in the world.

कुशब्देन मही ज्ञेया मुदी हर्षे ततः परम्

Balipāḍyamī is also specially called *kaumudīmahotsava*. The reason is not just that it is the day that causes joy to everyone in the world, as

said above. But, on that day special worship is performed to emperor *Bali* with *Kumuda* flowers.

कुमुदानि बले येस्मादीयन्तेऽस्यां युधिष्ठिर ।

अर्थार्थे पार्थभूमौ च तेनैषा कौमुदी स्मृता॥

Kārtikaśuddhadvitīya is a very joyful festive day. It is also called *bhrātradvitīyā*, *Yamadvitīyā*, *bhaginīdvitīyā* or *sodarabidige*. On that day *Yamadharmarāja* went to the house of his sister *Yamunadevi*, received her hospitality and honoured her. Therefore, gents should not eat their meals in the afternoon in their (own) homes on that day. Which means, they should go to the houses of their sisters and have their happy meals served by their own hands. And they should give their sisters excellent gifts and honor them. Both the sisters and brothers should offer *arghya* to *Yama*, *Yamunā devī* and *Citragupta*, and worship them.

यमं च यमुनां चैव चित्रगुप्तं च पूजयेत्।

अर्घ्यश्चात्र प्रदातव्यो यमाय सहज द्वयैः॥

One should also praise *Mārkaṇḍeya* and other seven *cirañjīvis*.

(*Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Bali*, *Vyāsa*, *Hanumān*, *Vibhīṣaṇa*, *Kṛpa*, *Paraśurāma* and *Aśvatthāma* are the eight *cirañjīvis*)

One should worship *Yama* and *Yamunā* and should pray "O *Sūryaputra*! *Pāśahasta*! *Yama*, *antaka*!, and *Kāla*! accept the worship offered by me

on this *sodarabidige*. Receive the *arghya*. I offer my salutations to you, O God! O sister of *Yamadharma*! *Yamuna*! *Sūryaputri*!, *lokapūjite*! my salutations to you. Kindly bless me with boons".

It is very auspicious to take a bath in the river *Yamunā* and worship her on that day.

If one does not have a sister of his own, he should visit the house of a woman who is almost his sister. Then he should go to one of the houses of like paternal cousins (i.e. daughters of uncles, aunts etc.), daughter of a friend etc and observe the above said festival.

A question may arise whether these practices, which are either prescribed by the *śāstras* or the ones which have come down in the tradition, carry any meaning at all, or whether they are being continued just blindly. When this is taken up for an evaluation we should be free from prejudices, and should not try to somehow justify that everything in practice is right. One need not hang himself to a banyan tree with the sentimental feeling that it was planted by his father. (This adage means is one should not blindly cling to a religious practice just because it has come down in the family for a long time). One should also not give scope to the prejudice that everything old is wrong and everything new is correct. Accepting the conclusions

arrived at, only after evaluating with an open mind, is the path of the wise. Therefore, to make it easily understood, we are presenting the matter hereby in a question - answer format.

Question 1: In some parts of our country there is a custom of crushing a bitter fruit called *Kārīṭa* by trampling on it during *Dīpāvalī*. What is the reason for this practice?

Answer: Though we do not find any evidence in the *śāstras* for this practice, it is indeed a meaningful one. This bitter fruit indicates the misfortune of suffering in the hell. It symbolizes the incident of Lord *Nārāyaṇa* trampling the power of *Narakāśura* and killing him. Here, the devotees also, remembering the Lord, trample on the bitter fruit that symbolizes hell.

नमो नरकसन्त्रासरक्षामङ्गलकारिणे।

वासुदेवाय शान्ताय कृष्णाय परमात्मने॥

(Our salutations, again and again (*namo namah*) to the most peaceful *paravāsudeva Śrīkṛṣṇa paramātmā* who provided the auspicious protection from the fear of hell). Remembering Lord *Kṛṣṇa* with gratitude, we honour this as a sacred practice which is symbolic of his divine deed. This practice is akin to the divine actions such as *Vāmana* trampling the pride of *Bali*; *ŚrīKṛṣṇa*

crushing the *Kāliṅga* serpent under his feet and Lord *Naṭarāja* trampling on the demon *apasmāra*.

Question 2: Why should lamps be lighted on *Dīpāvali*? Is it not a waste of oil and ghee which are commodities of food, and also a waste of very precious time?

Answer: The lighting of lamps as per the modalities of the *śāstras* is helpful in the attainment of the four fold values of life. It is wrong to assume that it is a waste of materials. "What benefit is obtained by that practice? Is it *Dharma*? Is it *artha*? Is it *kāma* or Is it *moksha*" The answer is, yes. It will be useful in the attainment of all these *purushārthas*.

It is a feast to the eyes to see the rows of lamps lighted in the darkness of the night of *amāvāsyā*. When darkness vanishes, we enjoy the pleasure of light. The light also provides mundane benefits. By lighting the lamps both inside the house and in the streets outside, and also on lamp posts, as *ākāśadīpas*, we are helped and so also the passers by. As the light of the lamps is useful to all the people of the town, it is delightful to the the eyes and is welcomed undoubtedly by the virtuous people. It is disliked only by thieves, people with eye diseases and insects like mosquitoes, bugs etc, and birds like owls. Though it (i.e. the lamp) is abhorred

at the time of going to bed, it will be welcome after waking up from sleep. Though these rows of lights are indeed welcome on all nights, they are of special importance during the pitch darkness of the nights of *Kṛṣṇapakshas*.

And the use of these lamps lighted on that day is not limited to only the mundane benefits. If the benefit is to drive away only the outer darkness it is best to light ghee lamps. That too, lighting a lamp using the cow ghee only is much better. The lighting of the lamps using gingely oil wards off afflictions. Some questions arise here. "When rows of electric lamps that can blind the eyes with dazzling lights are there, why use lamps which require oil, ghee and wicks and other fuels which produce very little light? Also, in these days when electric lamps are easily available, why use the lamps of oil and ghee, which were unavoidable in those days when electric lamps were yet to come?" But when viewed spiritually, this row of lamps, as described by *jnānis* is indeed

ज्योतिषामपि तज्ज्योतिः तमसः परमुच्यते

(It is the light of the lights that is shining beyond the *tamas*).

“हृदयकमलमध्ये दीपवद्वेदसारम्”

It is the *paramātmā*, the essence of the *Vedas*, resembling the light in the middle of the heart lotus

अन्तर्ज्योतिः किमपि यमिनामञ्जनं योगदृष्टेः

(It is the indescribable inner light of the *yogis* and an unguent for the vision of *yoga*). “दीपप्रकाश शरणागति दीपिकाख्याम्” (This is the praise of the lamp, which can cause the *śaraṇāgati* in the lord who shines like light) So, the *tattva* to be understood here is, the row of lamps, as expounded by *jnānis*, is indeed the one which represents the *parañjyothi paramātmā*, the deities who are his *amśas*, and the *vidyādīpas*. For this reason only, the lamp of God is lit first and then the other lamps are lit.

"God is a *svayamprakāśasvarūpi* (self-effulgent form of light.) He dispels the darkness of all the three worlds. Is it not futile to light a lamp for him?"—Some may ask. **In this regard Śrīraṅgamahāguru had expounded thus: "We do not light the lamp in front of God to drive his darkness away. It is a special *upacāra* we offer to God with devotion.** That is why it is uttered with the submission—“भक्त्या दीपं प्रयच्छामि”—I am offering this lighted lamp with devotion". Not only this. The lighted lamp becomes a representative of God who is full of light also. Chanting “दीपज्योतिर्नमोऽस्तु ते” we offer a salutation with hands folded, even to the bare (lighted) lamp. There is a tradition of folding the hands (in the posture of salutation) when any lamp is lighted.

But, to enhance the ability to represent God, the length of the flame in the *dīpajyoti* should be of the size of the of the thumb (about one inch). The shape of the flame should resemble the bud of jasmine. The flame should have the colour of topaz. It should be still and should not waver when air moves around. It should be placed in a triangular shaped niche in the wall and lighted. The smell emanating from the oil and ghee used for that should be conducive to *Ātma sādhana*. As evident from the statement “मनोकूले न तु चक्षुषीडने” in *yogaśāstra*, the light should be pleasant to the mind and should not cause irritation to the eyes: (The present day trend of installing electrical blinking lights or dazzling lights in the sanctum sanctorum, or at its entrance which make our eyes close and open and vice versa causing much irritation to the eyes, is the result of ignorance (darkness) of the above said *Dīpatattva* in the mind indeed!)

Thus the lamp that is lit according to precepts, helps to meditate upon the supreme soul and cross the (cycles of) birth and deaths. It's very sight wards off afflictions. It wards off untimely death. (*Mṛtyuvīnāśano dīpah - Gautamadharmasūtra - kriyākāṇḍa*).

If one looks at that light intently and properly, the inner centers in the body that cause untimely death get closed. The inner centers that bring good

fortune open up. Above all, it helps in the realization of the *paramātmadīpa* which wards off all afflictions and sorrows.

To begin with, a lamp which is a representative of God should be lit in the *pūja* Room. Afterwards, another lamp from it should be lighted. Another one from the second one. Like this, several lamps should be lighted. The lamps of enlightenment should be lighted from the lamp of *Adhyātmavidya* and the radiance of the lamps should be made to spread both inside and outside the house.

The whole universe, as is evident from the *śloka*—

जले विष्णुः स्थले विष्णुः विष्णुः पर्वतस्तोमके।
ज्वालामालाकुले विष्णुः सर्वं विष्णुमयं जगत्॥

is filled with the supreme soul “सत्तामात्रं निर्विशेषं निरीहं स त्वं साक्षात् विष्णुरध्यात्मदीपः”, God himself is the lamp of spirituality. *Jnānis* brought into practice this custom of lighting many lamps, to drive home the idea that the *vibhūtis* of God viz, the *devatās* and many *vidyās*, have manifested from HIM and the whole universe is filled with *vidyā*. **This reminds us of the glorious words of Śrīraṅgamahāguru who said “विश्वविज्ञानमन्दिरे दीपमालासहस्रं उद्दीपयाम”**

Question 3 - Why is it laid down that *Ākāśadīpas* should be lit in the month of *Dīpāvalī*?

Answer:- This (practice) is also one which serves the purpose of proclaiming the glory of *Paramātmadīpa* said above. The *śāstras* say that the sky lamps should be lit on the (top of) pillars, to represent or symbolize God who shines in the *jñānākāśa*, *daharākāśa* and *Hṛdayacidambara*. "Since the lamp post which bears the lamp is the human body itself, the pillars also should be of the size of a man", say the *śāstras*. The above said concept is made clear by the rules such as "The niche in the pillar where the lamp is lit should have eight petals. The light of the lamps should emanate through eight openings. At the centre, at the point of *Karṇikāsthāna*, the central lamp should be placed," The eight petals of the heart lotus (eight spokes of the *anāhata* wheel and the form of God to be meditated upon at its *Karṇikāsthāna* are well known in the *yogaśāstra*. It is indeed Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, the supreme soul and the killer of *Narakāśura* that should be specially meditated upon and worshipped with the ‘*asṭaksharmantra*’ endowed with eight petals on *naraka caturdaśī* (Each letter of this *mantra* is related to each petal) “ध्यायन्ति ये विष्णुमनन्तमव्ययं हृत्पद्ममध्ये सततं व्यवस्थितम्”

Question 4 - Is the lighted lamp dear only to supreme deities like *Vishṇu* and *Śiva*?

Answer:- The lighted lamp is dear to all the deities. Because all the *devatās* are forms of the

effulgent light only. But the word *parañjyothi* applies only to the supreme God (*Paramātmā*).

“नारायण परोज्योतिरात्मा नारायणः परः”

It may be remembered here that *Kaṭidāsa* the enlightened poet has stated “स हि देवः परज्योतिस्तमसःपरमुच्यते”, with reference to *Nārāyaṇa* and *Śambhu*.

Thus, just as the lighted lamp is dear to *devatās*, it is disliked by the *Āsurīśaktis*, *Bhūtās* and *pretās*. That is why people who worship the *Asurās*, *bhūtās* and *pretās* follow the methods like worshipping in darkness and putting off lamps etc. The moment they (the *asurās*, *bhūtas* etc) see the lamps, they run away from the place.

Question 5- What is the reason for the supposition that by walking around in the field or open space holding a torch on the day of *Dīpāvalī* amounts to showing *uttamagati* to the *pitṛs*?

Answer: That supposition is correct. *Yamadharṃarāja* is the great *devatā* of the *pitṛs*. It is proper to worship him with lights, just as the *pitṛ devatās* who are his subjects are worshipped. (*Pitṛs* belong to the class of deities (*devavarga*), so they are called *pitṛ devatās*. They do not belong to the class of *bhūtas* and *pretās* that hate lighted lamps).

The sight of lighted lamps is also dear to those who live in the hell without attaining *sadgati*. The

purport that the *darśan* of the torches shown by *jñānis* and devotees who meditate upon the meaning of the *Śrutivākya* “लोकस्य द्वारमर्चिम् पवित्रं, ज्योतिष्मत् भ्राजमानं महस्वत्” (This is the door for the entry into the superior worlds. It is sacred. It is shining forth with effulgent light. It is glorious.) will be the (guiding) light in the path to superior worlds for (the souls of) the deceased, is indeed appropriate.

Question 6- Should *Ārati* be performed only to God? Or can it be done to humans and animals too?

Answer:-If one considers the *dīpa* as the representative of the effulgent light of God and performs *Nīrājana*, it becomes a service to God and it redeems the sins. For God who is beyond the torments of *Puṇya* or *pāpa* there is no need of *Pāpaparihāra* at all.

When *Nīrājana* is performed in front of humans or dear animals with the feeling that the light is the representative of God, it becomes a worship of *parañjyothi* the *Antaryāmi*. The torments of those persons and animals get removed. By the sight of the lighted lamps, the tormenting evil forces that harass them either internally or externally, get expelled. The faith that the lamp of the *Nīrājana* is a representative of God should be firm and sincere.

Question 7- Modern critics say - "In the beginning there was a mere feeling that the lamp

should be lighted outside the house for warding off hell. And, when the story of ŚrīKṛṣṇa slaying *Narakāśura* became widespread a new practice was developed by appending story with the above said opinion. Is this modern criticism correct?

Answer: Whether the criticism is modern or ancient, it can be honoured if it preaches the true meaning. Now, if one argues that the above said appended matter is merely an imagination and the story also is fictitious, why can't it be said that this supposition by the critics also is imaginary. There is no evidence to establish which is ancient and which is recent the two, viz the sentiment involved in the lighting of lamps to escape hell and the story of the killing of *Narakāśura*. No benefit is accomplished by dextrous criticisms to determine the chronology. Whether the hell is just a supposition or a form of demon *Narakāśura*, ultimately it is indeed ŚrīKṛṣṇa the *Yogeśvara* who destroys it! It is *SriKṛṣṇa* indeed, the *Yogacārya* and God of Gods, who vanquishes *Naraka* and uplifts the forces that were held captive by him (i.e. *Narakāśura*) and makes them revel in their own selves! When this *tattva* is meditated upon, the story of *Narakāśura* does not merely end up as some historical event of the distant past, but becomes an everlasting, universal truth.

Lord ŚrīKṛṣṇa is *pratyak Jyoti (antarjyoti)*.

Narakāśura was the king of the city of *Prāgjyotiṣa* (dependent only on the external light). ŚrīKṛṣṇa along with *Satyabhāma* went there riding on *Garuḍa* the bird of *pranava* who is indeed “वेदात्मा विहगेश्वरः” “ताक्ष्यः श्रुतीनां निधिः”. He slayed the five headed *Narakāśura* which are the five gross elements. On the way he broke the five forts consisting of the five elements of the *naraka* city with his divine missiles. In the end he destroyed *naraka* with his divine disc *Sudarśana*, which is the divine *manastattva*. He uplifted the sixteen thousand *nāḍi (nārī)* forces that were agonized by *Naraka*, and married them. He married and will be marrying them in future also. When this *tattva* is brought to the mind and God is worshipped, then it will be realised that it is not just a conjecture of critics, but will become an experience of truth only. Any imagination that helps (to realize) truth is also praiseworthy. It is not impossible that such an event to have taken place also in history.

Question 8- How can the oil bath taken early in the morning of *Narakacaturdaśī* bestow a merit equivalent to a bath taken in the holy *Gaṅgā* River?

Answer: - We see a statement in the *śāstras* that during the period of eclipse, all waters become equally holy as the water of *Gaṅgā*. **Śrī Gurudeva had established this scientifically and had demonstrated to us that the power possessed by**

***Gaṅgā* in redeeming sins and providing bliss will also be in all waters, due to the (exceptional) circumstances present in nature during eclipses.**

This is well understood by people who are knowledgeable in the science of ‘*nāḍī*’. On all *caturdaśīs* of *Kṛṣṇapakṣa*, a *dharma* exists in nature which nourishes *Śivaśaktiyoga*. This (power) will be greater on the day of *Kṛṣṇacaturdaśī* which is a *parvakāla* called *Narakacaturdaśī*.

As a result of that, a special power happens to occur in the water and oil used for the bath, and the redemptive power prevails there. If one meditates upon the *tattva* of the story of *ŚrīKṛṣṇa* slaying *Narakāśura*, and if oil bath is taken with the feeling that the day is of the joyous celebration of the victory against *naraka*, the effect of *jñānagaṅgāsnāna* is certainly produced. This adoration of the victory against *Naraka* is dear to ascetics too. Therefore it is laid down that even the *yatis* should have oil bath on that day, and should obtain the benefit of taking a holy bath in the *Gaṅgā* river.

Question 9: The purpose of lighting sky-lamps during the night in the month of *Dīpāvalī* is only to facilitate people at a distance to see the illumination. When this simple reason is natural, why should philosophical meanings like ‘the light of *Jñānakāśa* etc be attributed?

Answer:- First of all, It is wrong to attribute imaginary meanings. In that case, it will be nothing but a commentary made out of one’s own imagination. We should comprehend the natural meaning of the matter. If the purpose of the sky lamps were to be just what is stated above, there would be no need for the *śāstraic* dos and don’ts in that regard. Then, what indeed are those precepts? They are as follows: The pillar of the *Ākāśadīpa* should be fixed near the house only and should have the shape of a pillar of a *yajna*. The pillar should be the one made from either the wood of flame tree, peepul, *kaggali*, *banni* or of other trees that are related to *yajna* only. In the place of the head of the pillar, a lamp machine in the shape of a lotus of eight petals made from four strips wood, each measuring the length of two hands, should be made. The lamps have to be placed in it in such a way that light should emanate from the openings, in eight directions. In the centre, in the *karnikā sthāna*, the important lamp with higher luminance should be placed. Those eight lamps should be offered to *Dharma*, *Hara*, *Bhūdevi*, *Damodara*, *Dharmarāja*, *Prajāpati*, the great *pitr devatās* and the spirits of dead bodies that keep grieving in the darkness. The important light should be offered to *Dāmodara* with the *mantra* which carries the meaning "I am offering this lamp along with a swing to you in the

month of *Kārtika*. I offer my salutations to *ananta* who is *Brahmasvarūpi*" These are the *vidhis*.

दिवाकरेऽस्ताचलमौलिभूते गृहाददूरे पुरुषप्रमाणम् ।
 यूपकृतिं यज्ञियवृक्षदारुमारोप्य भूमावथ तस्य मूर्ध्नि ॥
 यवाङ्गुलच्छिद्रयुतास्तु मध्ये द्विहस्तदीर्घा अथ पट्टिकास्तु ।
 कृत्वा चतस्रोऽष्टदलाकृतीस्तु याभिर्भवेदष्टदिशानुसारी ॥
 तत्कर्णिकायां तु महाप्रकाशो दीपः प्रदेयो दलगास्तथाक्ष्वौ ।
 निवेद्य धर्माय हराय भूम्यै दामोदरायाप्यथ धर्मराज्ञे ॥
 प्रजापतिस्त्वथ सत्पितृभ्यः प्रेतेभ्य एवाथ तमः स्थितेभ्यः ॥

“दामोदराय नमोऽनन्ताय वेधसे” इति मन्त्रेण दामोदराय निवेदयेत्
 ॥ Says the *Āditya purāṇa*.

When we study all these meanings, it becomes clear that (it) is the representative of the (*tattva*) of *jnānākāśa* only. As the *puruṣa* himself is the pillar of divine knowledge (*jnānastambha*), the rule says that the pillar should be of the size of a man. As it is the form of a *yajna* of divine knowledge (*jnānayajnarūpa*), the scriptural rule states that the pillar should be made of only the trees that are prescribed for *yajnas*. The sky referred to here is *jnānākāśa*. The eight petals are the forms of the ‘*anāhata cakṛa*’ and the eight letter - petals of the great ‘*asṭākṣharamahāmantra*’. The main lamp is the spiritual lamp (*ādhyātmadīpa*) which is representative of *Nārāyaṇa* the *Parañjyoti*, eulogized as “स त्वं साक्षात् विष्णुरध्यात्मदीपः” in *Śrīmadbhāgavata*. The other seven lights represent

his retinue dieties viz. ‘*Dharma*’ etc.(P. 448) So, it naturally leads to the conclusion that the last lamp is for the *pretas* who keep suffering in darkness, anxious to go to the worlds full of light praised by the vedas as “‘लोकस्य द्वारमर्चिमत्पवित्रम्’”, viz the path full of light. So the philosophical answer given by us to the third question is obviously very natural. There is no trace of exaggeration at all in that. But, the above *mantra-tantras* can yield the desired *tāttvik* result only when they are performed meaningfully and with (full) knowledge of them. Otherwise, i.e. when performed mechanically, only little benefit is obtained.

Question 10: "Gambling and hunting etc. are big vices. Those who are addicted to them are sure to suffer.—"say the *śāstras*, citing the examples of the kings *Nalamahārāja*, *Pāṇḍu*, *Dharmarāja* and *Parīkṣhidrāja*". When such is the case, why indeed the *purāṇas* prescribe playing the game of dice on that auspicious day, though gambling is a prohibited indulgence? “तस्माद्युतं प्रकर्तव्यं प्रभाते तत्र मानवैः Let alone the human beings, even *Śiva* and *Pārvatī*, the parents of the universe, played the game of dice on that day and *Pārvatī* won the game", say the *purāṇas*. Is it not ridiculous on the part of the *purāṇas* to say so? Is it correct to attribute the vices of human beings to divinities also? (“कार्तिके शुक्लपक्षे तु

प्रथमेऽहनि सत्यवान्; जितश्च शङ्करश्चात्र जयं लेभे च पार्वती” -
ब्रह्मपुराण) "

Answer: There is nothing wrong in playing the game of dice just for fun. Neither is it sinful to enjoy the game of dice with relatives and friends, that too in a festival of joy. Only if the game crosses the limits and ends up as a gamble causing the players to lose wealth, honor and reputation, it gets dangerous. So, without exceeding the limits one may play the game of dice on that auspicious day.

"Human beings play this game for pleasure O.K. But why should the infatuation of this worldly game be attached to *Pārvatī* and *paramēśvara*, the parents of the universe?"—Actually speaking they have no infatuation. They have obtained all enjoyments and revel in the supreme bliss. But if we, while playing the game, remember God and play with the feeling that the game is HIS and not ours, it will bring *śreyas* to us.

Also, the game of dice animated as the one played by the parents of the universe has a philosophical meaning. They (i.e. the parents of the universe) play the game dice on the chequered board of *triguṇas*. The pawns used in this game are the various *jīvas* of the world. The *karmas* of *Jīvis* comprising of sins and *pūnyas* are the dice. The parents of the universe play the game by casting the

dice. They move the pawns with dexterity as per the score of the dice. Some pawns are struck out and placed again. (i.e. they die and take birth again) In the end all pawns should become ripe (successful). Some ripen quickly. Some ripen slowly (attain salvation). Thus a divine sentiment is hidden in this *śāstra* permitted game, which is played with a prayer to them with the words — "You are playing this divine game in your *Līlāvibhūti*. Bless us so that our pawns ripen early"

पश्यन्तीषु श्रुतिषु परितः सूरिबृन्देन सार्धम्
मध्येकृत्य त्रिगुणफलकं निर्मितस्थानभेदम् ।
विश्वाधीशप्रणयिनि सदा विभ्रमद्यूतवृत्तौ
बद्धा जीवा दधति युवयोरक्षशारप्रचारम्॥

(The words of *Śrī Stuti* quoted above may be remembered here which mean - "*Vedas* along with the divine scholars are witnessing the divine game of dice, played by both of you. Placing the dice board of *triguṇas* in the middle, you two are playing the game sportfully. O Mother of the universe, the *jīvas* caught in the worldly life become pawns in your sportful play of dice" The *purāṇas* say—

"*Pārvatī* won the game of dice played on *Balipāḍyamī*. So, whoever wins in the gambling in the morning of that day will be victorious through the year". (ततोऽहं शङ्करो दुःखी गौरी नित्यसुखोषिता । तस्मात् द्यूतं प्रकर्तव्यं प्रभाते तत्र मानवैः । तस्मिन् द्यूते जयो यस्य तस्य संवत्सरः

शुभः'). What is the purport of this? The purport is as follows: In the sportful game of protecting the devotees played by *Śiva* and *Śakti*, it is Lord *Śiva* who bestows the attainment of divine knowledge and *śakti* bestows the attainment of worldly prosperity. So if one wins in the game played in the morning on the day of *balipāḍyamī*, is an auspicious omen which indicates attainment of worldly prosperity.

As our tradition states, *purāṇas* are *Mitrāsammīta*. Like a friend they teach *Dharma* and *tattva*, by relating stories, parables and illustrations. We may note here that the sportful game of dice played by *Pārvatī* and *Paramēśvara* preaches many *tattvas*.

Question 11: In some places there is a tradition of stealing certain things on the day of *Dīpāvali*. The custom of hiding the stolen things and cooking food from the stolen vegetables and provisions, and dining with joy etc is prevalent. Is this right?

Answer: This is a game of stealing with skill, for pleasure and amusement. It is not wrong if this game is confined to the houses of relatives and friends for mere fun. As everyone (in this game) has the right to steal, and if everyone exercises that right, the question of accusing anybody of stealing does not arise at all, as everyone is a "thief". Not

only this. The person who steals with skill gets, a prize also.

But care should be taken to see that this fun does not exceed the limits.

Question 12: On the day of *Balipāḍyamī* a rope is made of *kuśa* or *kāśa* (elephant grass) and is tied to a pillar or a tree in the eastern direction, in the afternoon. This is called '*Mārgapālī*'. A custom is followed here. Everyone salutes this, and the king along with Brāhmins and other classes of people and elephants, horses and cows, pass below this. This rope is tied to another tree, and the king along with prominent subjects play the game of tug of war by pulling or drawing the rope. If the subjects win, it is said it indicates auspiciousness to the king. Is this custom meaningful?

Answer:- *Kuśa* is a holy grass having the presence of *Brahma*, *Vishṇu* and *Rudra*. The custom of passing below the rope made of that grass reminds them of the sentiment that they are devotees and servants of the trinity. Therefore the *śāstras* state that only the *kuśa* grass or the *Kāśa* which belongs to same family (if *Kuśa* is not available) should be used. By this ritual, torments get warded off.

There is a lot of fun in the second one (i.e. the tug of war). The people who participate in the tug of

war are the king and his subjects. The relationship between the two happens to be a most friendly one. In this game both the parties rejoice no matter who wins or loses. If we happen to lose and relatives and friends win in the game, it is a thing of special delight to us indeed.

Question 13: Some *śāstras* say that *Nārāyaṇa* killed *Narakāśura*. The story that *ŚrīKṛṣṇa* killed him is also famous. We see a statement in *mahābhārata*, that after *ŚrīKṛṣṇa* killed *Narakāśura*, *Naraka* entered *Karṇa*'s self and made him work against *Nara* and *Nārāyaṇa*.

हतस्य नरकस्यात्मा कर्णमूर्तिमुपाश्रितः।

तद्वैरं संस्मरन् वीर योत्स्यते केशवार्जुनौ॥ (वनपर्व 252-20)

What is the purport of these statements?

Answer: - *Naraka* is an evil demonical force that causes sorrow to humans. (नरान् कायतीति नरकः). It is full of sin (*pāpasvarūpa*). The philosophical meaning that *Nārāyaṇa* the holiest of the holy himself destroys that force and causes joy to devotees, is true for all the times. The purport of the first statement is that sins get redeemed only from the supreme soul.

The purport of the second statement is, when that evil force incarnated in the form of *Narakāśura*, *Nārāyaṇa* incarnated in the form of

ŚrīKṛṣṇa, and killed him and rescued the world. This is in the form of an historical event.

The gist of the third statement is that *Narakāśura* with the element of wickedness still remaining in him entered into *Karṇa*'s entity and nurtured enmity against *Nara-Arjuna* who was a (friend) of *Nārāyaṇa*. When *Arjuna* killed *Karṇa* the hellish force in him fled. And *Karṇa* attained heaven. The story of *Naraka* referred to in the *narakacaturdaśī* relates to the incident of the second statement.

Question 14: The story of *Vāmana* and *Trivikrama* is related to the festival of *Balipāḍyamī*. Emperor *Bali* was a great soul, truthful and magnanimous. Disregarding the advice of *Śukrācārya* his *guru*, he gifted a measure of three steps of earth to *Vāmana* - *Vishṇu*. Does not the trampling of such a great man and stealing his kingdom amount to an act of ingratitude and deception? How can this be a divine *Vyāpāra*? Should such a *Vishṇu* be worshipped on that day?

Answer:- The story of *Vāmana* and *Trivikrama* is actually a *tāttvika* story. Even if one thinks that the series of incidents of the story did happen, it is clear that, only the grace of Lord *Vishṇu* becomes evident there, and not even a trace of *adharma* is there in that. The incarnation of

Vāmana-Trivikrama is only an incarnation of divine grace. *Bali* had usurped the kingdom of *Indra* and had committed *Adharma*. Lord *Trivikrama* cleverly took it from *Bali* and returned it to *Indra*, the rightful owner of the kingdom. This is a grace extended to *Indra* his devotee. By placing his divine foot on the head of *Bali* he (crushed) the demoniacal disposition in him and made him a pure soul. This was a great grace bestowed upon *Bali*. As *Bali* cherished the kingdom of *Indra*, he granted him the kingdom of the nether world which had greater luxuries and pleasures than that of the kingdom of *Indra*, and the Lord a *Bhakta Parādhīna*, as is evident from the words “बलेर्द्वारि गदापाणिः”, blessed him greatly by becoming his gate keeper. *Purāṇas* say that during *Trivikramāvātara*, Lord *Brahma* washed the foot of *Vishṇu* as it ascended to the *satyaloka*, with the holy water of his *Kamaḍalu*, and it became the divine *Gaṅgā*. *Śrī Śankarabhāgavatpāda* praises this episode of the birth of *Gaṅgā* as “आदावादिपितामहस्य नियमव्यापारपात्रे जलं पश्चात्पन्नगशायिनो भगवतः पादोदकं पावनम्”. Thus both *Brahmadeva* and the whole universe came to be blessed thereby. Thus, *Vāmana-trivikrama* incarnation is indeed an incarnation of a chain of blessings. The subjugation of *Bali* done cleverly though, resulted only in his *śreyas*.

When it is so, why should we unjustly accuse

Vishṇu of injustice? The emperor *Bali* himself, thus blessed by *Vishṇu*, eulogized the divine blessings with joy, and came to be considered as one of the *parama bhāgavatas*. When it is so, why should others condemn that divine act? It is indeed auspicious to worship on that day both that God who blessed *Bali*, and the blessed emperor *Bali* the best of the *bhāgavatas*.

Question 15: Let us agree that *Vishṇu* subjugated emperor *Bali* and returned the kingdom seized from him, to *Indra*. But he could have directly fought a battle, and on vanquishing him, he could have done well to return the kingdom to *Indra* who had the right to it. Is it not great injustice to push down a donor, after begging him and receiving a gift?

Answer: The story of *Bali-Vāmana* is only a divine allegory to drive home the *tāttvika* aspects, and not a description of a historical event. Therefore the yardstick used to decide justice or injustice pertaining to a historical story does not at all suit here. Even if one were to take it as an episode that took place actually, there is no injustice in the above act of *Vāmana*.

Question 16: How can it be said that it is not injustice? Is it not wrong to push down the benefactor who was a great soul?

Answer: Only lay persons think that *Vishṇu* pushed him down. But in reality *Bali* was elevated. His demonical disposition vanished and he was lifted up. Emperor *Bali* himself has acknowledged that he has been redeemed. There is no need of a greater proof than the words of the experience of his own *Antahkaraṇa*. If it is branded injustice by people who have nothing to do with that and who have no experience in that regard, it is injustice in itself.

Question17: Let us agree in principle that it was the elevation alone of *Bali*. But why *Vishṇu* did not follow the royal path of waging a direct war against *Bali* and take the kingdom?

Answer: Here the question of challenging for a war does not arise at all. No one has declared a war here. *Bali* who usurped the kingdom of *Indra* is an offender and the kingdom stolen by him has to be recovered from him by awarding him the due punishment. There is no rule that the guilty must be first defeated in a war and then be punished. The king (who holds the authority to punish) may choose any appropriate method. Here *Bali*, who himself knew justice, has no objection for the method adopted and does not charge that he (ie. *Vishṇu*) should have fought a war. So, it cannot be said that the method used by *Vishṇu* was unjust.

Not only this. It is also possible to conclude from the results also whether the method adapted was right or wrong. In case a war had been waged, no doubt the task would have gotten accomplished, but at the cost of huge casualties on both sides. But without any (such casualty) all have been greatly benefitted. *Indra* has got back his rightful kingdom. The pride of *Bali* has been crushed and he has obtained *Ātmalābha*. He is made the Lord of 'Sutalaloka' which surpasses even *Indraloka* in opulence. “सुतलं स्वर्गिभिः प्रार्थ्यं ज्ञातिभिः परिवारितः”. He has been assured by the very Lord that he would get the position of *Indra* in future. At present, God himself has become his door keeper to see that he is not touched even a little by the demonical forces. *Sudarśana* is in the rear guard to see that his rules are not violated by the demons. So, it is certainly not correct to conclude that the acts of *Vishṇu*, which have provided him all this extraordinary happiness as wrong.

Question 18: Even then, is not the method adopted by *Vishṇu* a deceitful one?

Answer: Even if it viewed as a deception itself, it is indeed praiseworthy, like the "deception" adapted by physicians to cure a disease. Suppose a doctor promises a sweet medicine to a patient but gives instead bitter tablets coated with sugar, it is deception no doubt. But, as it proves greatly

remedial to the patient, it becomes praiseworthy only.

Question 19: This answer is satisfactory. But begging is indeed a disgraceful act. A beggar is deemed lighter than even grass and cotton. Can *Vishṇu* the Lord of the universe, take to such a mean act?

Answer: No doubt it is very difficult for the Lord of the world to indulge in such a low task. But, it is only possible for the highly pious and great persons to shed selfishness, and generously wish for the welfare of the world. Those who give up selfishness in the form of fame for the sake of interests of others, are indeed preeminent even among the virtuous.

This is an answer given from the wordly point of view of morals. But in reality, it is not at all correct to measure with the yardstick of worldly justice and morals, the will and acts of the Lord, who is *Lokottara*. We have to bow our heads to the will of God.

“सुतलं स्वर्गिभिः प्रार्थ्यं ज्ञातिभिः परिवारितः”

“एते सत्पुरुषाः परार्थघटकाः स्वार्थान्परित्यज्य ये”

Question 20: Which *tattvarahasya* is purported in the story of *Bali-Vāmana*?

Answer: ***Maha Yogi Śrīraṅga*** who

resuscitated our souls used to explain this as follows:

Emperor *Bali* thought "I am giving refuge to thousands of *Āsurī* forces. If this *Vishṇu* asks for a little space, why should I refuse? I shall give some little space to him also," and deciding so, he gave a promise to *Vishṇu*. He imagined the (the measure of the) steps of *Vishṇu* to be of some size similar to his own steps. *Vāmana Vishṇu* immediately transformed himself into a *trivikrama* and occupied the three worlds i.e. *-bhūrbhuvassuvarloka*s with his huge feet and treaded upon the head of *Bali*. Our heart itself is the place of the sacrificial altar of emperor *Bali*. “श्रद्धापत्नी शरीरमिधमुरो वेदिः”. The *jīva* with *Āsurī* forces which should have remained in the lower regions in the *Mūlādhāra* has occupied the heart and has made the whole body below the level of heart demonical. It has given a little space for God *Vāmana* who measures the size of a thumb, in the middle of the heart. (“मध्ये वामनमासीनं विश्वेदेवा उपासते”). The moment the power of God gets a little space, it goes on growing, and occupying the entire realm and making it *Vishṇumaya*, vanquishes the *Āsurī* forces and drives it to its own abode. The effulgent *Jyoti* of God happens to be the gate-keeper to the king of *Āsurī* forces in the *Mūlādhāra*. Though *Bali* is in the frame of a demon, now, by the grace of God, has lost the demonical disposition, and

is thrilled with Joy at the sight of the *Jyoti*. In the past, without the sight of that *Jyoti* he was only a demon. Thus, the principle of this story is, if God is given even a little space in one's heart, he will grow by the meditation (of the *Sādhaka*) and makes the whole body *brahmamaya*, and vanquishing the demonical forces, he fills the entire body with divine glories. This *tattva* can also be experienced by you."

Question 21: After all *Bali* is a demon. He belongs to class of *Āsurī* forces. Why can't we worship God himself on *Balipāḍyami*, instead of worshipping him?

Answer: It is proper to worship (God), on that day. But worshipping of emperor *Bali* also on that day pleases God very much, because, though *Bali* was born in the class of *Asuras*, he has rid himself of all the *Āsurībhāvas*, even since God stamped his graceful foot on his head, and has become a holy soul. Like *Prahlāda* he has become a *bhāgavatottama*. As God himself has declared in the words "ज्ञानीत्वात्मैव मे मतम्" and "Tanna Bhaktara jīvanave tanna jīvanam tanna bhaktara tiliye tām bereyalla, tanna bhakta hr̥daya kamaladoḷ pratyakshanāgi Tānirutirpenu, " those devotees who attain oneness with God and become full of divinity are indeed the very soul of God. By their worship, God himself will be extremely pleased. The worship of devotees is even greater than the

worship of God himself. *Śāstras* say 'विष्णोराराधनात्प्रोक्तं तदीयाराधनं परम्'. In the *śloka*, where *Bali* is considered as the best of great devotees and deemed a *Bhāgavatottama*,

प्रह्लाद नारद पराशर पुण्डरीक व्यासाम्बरीष शुकशौनक भीष्म दाल्भ्यान् ।

रुक्माङ्गगदार्जुन वसिष्ठ विभीषणादीन् धन्यानिमान् परमभागवतान् स्मरामि॥

there is a version which reads *Balīndra* in place of *Vasishṭha*. The *purāṇas* also state that he is a *Paramabhāgavatottama*.

Great devotees who are in *Bhaktiyogasamādhi*, should not be discriminated as high or low, citing the reasons of caste, lineage etc. Whatever may be their lineage, *Varṇa* or *Āśrama*, they are indeed highly worshipfull. Bonds such as class (caste), shame (shyness) and fear cease to exist in them. Therefore it amounts to *Bhāgavatāpacāra* if *Bali*, the *Bhāgavatottama* is slighted just for the reason that he belongs to the class of *Asuras*. It is most appropriate to worship that great soul on the day of the festival which bears his name. The tradition of sentimentally feeling that he on that day, comes to the earth which was his kingdom in the past, and people should earn *punya* and *purushārthas* by offering a royal worship to that emperor who arrive as a guest, is indeed very delightful.

Question 22: It is good to invoke him in a *Kalaśa* or on idol and worship him, which happens

to be a part of the modalities of worshipping *Balīcakravartī*. But in some traditions, a seven circled fort is made of cowdung and inside that, cowdung in the shape of a tower is placed and that cowdung is worshipped as *Balīndra*. Is it not wrong? imagine a lump of cowdung as the great *Balīndra*, the king of kings and a *Bhāgavatottama*?

Answer: The feeling that *Rājādhirāja Balīndra* is welcomed in a place inside the seven circled fort, is indicated here. It is indeed very appropriate. The cowdung there is not worshipped as emperor *Balīndra*. In a distinct shape of the cowdung he is invoked and worshipped.

Question 23: Why should a filthy material like cowdung be used for the construction of the fort and *Balīndra's pūjābimba*?

Answer: The fresh cowdung is a sacred substance. Its sight, touch, smell, application and consumption in stipulated quantities are all sacred. Unlike in the droppings of other animals, germs cannot flourish in cowdung. It is a disinfectant. Being an ingredient of the *Pañcagavya* it is endowed with a great property (power) that can remove the sins (blemishes) of the skin, bones etc., which is evident from the *śloka*:

यत्त्वगस्थिगतं पापं देहे तिष्ठति मामके ।
पञ्चगव्यप्राशनं तत् दहत्यग्निरिवेत्थनम् ॥

Śrīdevī is worshipped in it with the hymn 'gandhadvāra' So, there is nothing wrong in building the fort or preparing the image of *Balīndra* with such a sacred material.

Question 24: There is a custom of scattering *Honnāvarike* flowers on the streets with the uttering of the words 'Honnu Honnu' ('Gold Gold') to welcome *Balīndra*. why is it that only this flower is offered?

Answer: This custom is very good. As a service to that great Lord, flowers made of gold may be offered. It is the best option. If it cannot be afforded, *Honnāvarike* (a flower of pleasant colour) is offered as a representative of golden flowers. It is considered a great substance in *Āyurveda*. The color of that flower, like gold itself, is pleasing to the eyes and the mind, causes a cooling effect on the body and has the potential to remove both heat and sins. Not just by color, but also by property, it is invaluable like gold. It removes bile. Removes the heat of the body and acts as a coolant. Its consumption removes *Ādhivyādhis* and brings about nourishment. It provides peace and contentment. Offering of this *Honnāvarike* which is endowed with an invaluable form and a bunch of qualities to that emperor in the form of an offering of golden flowers on the streets, and praying him to

walk on them and thus welcoming him, is indeed highly appealing and worthy.

Question 25: In some homes, there is practice of turning the head of the idol of *Balīndra* backwards after his worship and shouting "*Balīndra* returned to his world, *Govinda*, *Govinda*". Is it not a great offence to break the neck of that idol and turn it backwards?

Answer: There is nothing wrong if the face is turned backwards with right feelings and in a refined manner. The principle of spirituality itself gets expressed by that. It is enough if the idol is just turned backwards without breaking the neck. It is a symbol of the sacred send off (*udvāsanā*) to the invoked deity. The sending off is performed with the sentimental feeling “शोभनार्थं पुनरगमनाय च” "Let your return journey be auspicious, May you arrive again for worship, when requested by us"

Not only this. Emperor *Bali* is a great devotee who keeps meditating upon God with his mind turned inwards. "All this time, he stayed (here) with his mind turned outwards (facing east), only to bless us. After this (worship) got completed, he went back to his abode again. That means he again has turned inwards. (In the terminology of *Yogaśāstra* he turned to the west. To indicate this, the idol is placed facing backwards.) *Brāhmīsthiti* itself is the

own abode and the own world of *Balīndra*, the *Brahmajnāni*. It is supposed here that he returned to that place. It is appropriate indeed to utter the holy name of *Govinda* at that time. Here the name of *Govinda* is not uttered in the sense of death here.

“अश्वत्थामा बलिव्यासः हनुमांश्च विभीषणः ।

कृपः परशुरामश्च सप्तैते चिरजीविनः” ॥

Bali is one among the *ciranjīvas* mentioned above. He has conquered death by the power of his divine knowledge also. How can such a great *yogi* die?

Question 26: On the following day of *Balipādyami*, there is a custom of visiting the sister's place and having food there. No doubt, it is a very good practice that fosters good relationships. The joy of the getting together of the brothers and sisters atleast once a year is accomplished by this. This is O.K. But, what is the role of *Yama* and *Yamunā* in this? Why should they be worshipped on that day? It is fine that it is '*sodara bidige*'. But how come it is '*Yamadvitīyā*'?

Answer: *Yama* visited the home of his sister *Yamunā devī* on that day and received her hospitality. He gave her presents. In memory of this meeting of the divine brother and sister and honoring each other, the above festival is celebrated and it became '*Yamadvitīyā*' also. This has been

explained earlier. The *tattvārtha* of this needs to be comprehended.

Question 27- This custom has been brought into practice to make somehow the brothers and sisters meet at least once a year. If someone is asked to visit his sister for no reason, excuses may be put forth, citing problems and difficulties. So, this is termed as a "*Dhārmika Vidhi*", so that people will follow it with some fear, and this rule has been made. This happens to be the simple answer. Even without the concept of the meeting of *Yama* and *Yamunā*. this precept can be explained, isn't it?

Answer: This is not just a social custom. It is a religious precept. A religious precept has nothing to do with fear. It is an observance done with joy for warding off misfortunes and for the attainment of desires.

If *sodarabidige* were to be only a social custom, people (*jnānis*) would have told that brothers should visit their sister, enjoy a feast, give presents to them, and return. The sages would not have reminded the event of the meeting of *Yama* and *Yamunā*. This event is delightful and also full of *tattvārtha*. The meeting of brothers and sisters some day after a long time is a joyful occasion which carries with it a feeling of happiness. If one were to ponder who this *Yama* and *Yamunā* are, the

tattvārtha of that becomes clear and one will be filled with spiritual happiness also.

Yama and *Yamunā* are the worthy son and daughter of the great God *Sūrya Nārāyaṇa*, who is a *trimūrti svarūpa* and the one who grants good health “आरोग्यं भास्करादिच्छेत्”. They have to go to different worlds to perform their religious duties. Though *yama* who stays in the *pitrloka* looks ferocious in his work of punishing the sinners, he is carrying out a sacred duty only. *Yamunā* resides in the *Brahmaloka* as a deity and keeps doing divine service there, and also flows as a river on earth, washing the sins of devotees, who take a bath and drink her water as per precepts. She protects them by granting long life, health, prosperity etc. This job is as tender as a flower. The job of the brother is the cruel job of torturing the *jīvas* in the hell which (the job) is as hard as a diamond. The job of the sister is a flower like gentle job of granting pleasures and riches. They meet once a year, with the feeling that both of them are the children of the same father, and are the extensions of the family of *Sūrya Nārāyaṇa*.

The son and daughter, who are the progeny of their parents, remember their origin on that day. They remember *Sūrya Nārāyaṇa*. Even *Devatās* remembering their origin, keep themselves engaged in their duties. Even though they are engaged in

their diverse duties, they keep remembering whence they have come from and why are they engaged in these diverse duties. This is the deep *tattva* that is hidden here.

Though the job of *Yama* appears ghastly, it is also a service to God, as it is an implementation of Lord *SūryaNārāyaṇa's* will and instruction. The gentle profession of *Yamunā devī* of granting pleasures and riches is also of divine origin and the implementation of the will and instruction of God. Here, just as *Yama* and *Yamunā* bring to their mind the *tattva*, that though their jobs viz. *Nigraha* and *Anugraha* are different, both are essential duties that have to be performed as a command of God, and we are also reminded of this *tattva*. By following this *vidhi*, we are also made to understand an important *tattva* i.e. whether it is men or deities, they should not forget their origin in the zeal of performing of their duties, and a duty, whether harsh or tender has to be compulsorily observed, if it happens to be a command of God. By observing this on that day, two (important) things are accomplished. i.e. a prayer to *Yama* to bless all so that the minds do not get engaged in sinful activities which lead to hell, and a prayer to *Yamunā* to redeem the sins and grant happiness, which result from *punya*. The precept that brothers and sisters should honour each other, meditating

upon the inspiring story of *Yama* and *Yamunā*, is indeed highly meaningful.

Question 28: Is not *Yama* a deity with a dreadful disposition and a ferocious appearance? Is he not the one who mercilessly gives indescribable tortures to the *jīvas*? Is not the worship of such an unkind and fierce natured deity based only on fear?

Answer:- Though *Yama* is terrible to sinners, he is indeed pleasant to *Dharmishṭhas*. He is the Lord of *Dharma* and an embodiment of justice, free from any kind of partiality and the one who dispenses justice, based on *punya* and *pāpa* of a person. He is an embodiment of kindness too. Because, he executes the punishment only with compassion, with the intention that the sinful *karmas* of sinners may get withered and may they get inclined towards *satkarmas* in future.

Śrīmadbhāgavata tells us that he is one of the *paramabhāgavatas*. *Kāthopanishat* tells us that he is a *Yogācārya* who instructed the *para tattva* to *naçiketa*. For this reason, he should be considered a great deity, and worshipped with devotion.

On that day, both brothers and sisters should remember the *chirañjīvis* such as *Yama*, *Yamunā*, *Bali* and *Mārkaṇḍeya* (and pray to them) to grant long life, *Dharmabuddhi*, pleasures, riches and *Bhagavadbhakti*.

Question 29: There is a criticism that the story of the festival of this *Yama dvitīyā* is based on the conversation between *Yama* and *Yamī* appearing in the tenth *sūkta*, in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛgveda*. There, even though *Yama* and *Yamī* are brother and sister, they broach the matter of marriage between them. Here is an indication that marriages were taking place between brothers and sisters among the ancient Hindu *Āryans*. Is this remark correct?

Answer: Certainly it is not correct. Because the said conversation tells us only about the incident of deliberation by the *devatās* who were discussing whether a particular observation was right or wrong. All the observations of deities are not models for human beings. ‘न देवचरितं चरेत्’. In addition to this, it should be noted that this *sūkta* actually condemns the marriage between a brother and a sister, in the form of a conclusion.

