

A Time of Gifts

Start with Meditation

HH: *The Creator is the basis of the tradition of Meditation. He meditated and created the universe manifested in creation. He evolves, supports and dissolves creation; only He is the beginning and end of it. He does all this by meditation and also exists without it. He also inspires human beings to meditate in order to rise to higher consciousness; to enable them to enjoy activities of the world and at the same time to exist within themselves, to retreat from it all. (1962)*

HH: *For every deed to be performed, it is essential to create the spirit of the deed.....The ceremony is designed to help to create an atmosphere which should make it possible for the new initiate to get ready in body and spirit for this important moment in his life. Ceremony is not the way, it only creates momentum for the action to get on the way. There could be different forms of ceremony, but the one which you and we use is the traditional ceremony.*

The Shankaracharya tells us that the offerings we make at the initiation ceremony are meant as representations. They represent the idea that whatever we have we offer to Param-Atman. When we use these offerings in life we treat them as Prasad – a gift from Param-Atman. In the ceremony we are being shown how to make an offering of ourselves.

A new candidate being advised about what happens during the ceremony is asked to bring some flowers – usually about six stems (and without prickles). He (or she) is also asked to bring a few small pieces of fruit, a white handkerchief and some money in an envelope. The amount of money is left to the discretion of the candidate but it is not intended to cause the candidate hardship or difficulty.

The candidate enters the room and the initiator takes the gifts of fruit, flowers and white piece of cloth and places them on the table. The following prayer is said in Sanskrit:

Let the impure become pure. All that is within and all that is without is purified by keeping the Divine in mind.

As each gift is offered the initiator says in Sanskrit: 'I offer (naming the gift) with salutations to the lotus feet of Shri Guru Deva.

The Shankaracharya in an early audience explained the meaning and significance of each gift

Snanam *I offer water to wash the lotus feet of Guru Deva*

Vastram *Is the cloth (or handkerchief which the candidate brings). The cloth of the handkerchief represents 'my ignorance'. We say that which is a curtain between You and me – the curtain of ignorance – let that be removed. We offer this curtain which is hiding me by virtue of my ignorance. I am offering to You so that I may be able to see the light and become one with You*

Chandanam *Is sandalwood, which is used to remove bad particles from the atmosphere. It helps in removing bad particles by its smell and it attracts good particles.*

Aksha-tan Is rice and means that which does not get finished – that which is eternal – is perennial. (Aksha – has a root meaning 'imperishable'). When the initiator says 'aksha-tan samar payami' at that time we offer pieces of rice and we are expecting that the bliss of Param-Atman will never finish, will continue for all time.

Pushpam Means flowers. We offer flowers to Param-Atman because we want from the Universal Cosmos fragrance of life. The flowers represent fragrance. They are offered to Param-Atman in expectation that we will get back Samashti by way of prasad - fragrance from our own life.

Phal Means fruit in Hindi it also means 'result'. By offering fruit it is expected that Param-Atman will reward our efforts appropriately.

Dhoopam Incense is offered and it represents the earth (gandh) and we expect that everything beautiful on earth will be given to us.

Deepam Is light and when we offer light we say that the light of the samashti and the candle light are one. We want to establish the similarity between the two lights.

Nai vedyam Means sweet. We want everything to be sweet in our lives, we do not want bitter things. 'Nai vedyam' means only sweet things are offered to Param-Atman.

Acha maniyam Means water. After every action we offer water to Param-Atman. It is just to wash our hands.

Tamboolam Is betel leaf. It purifies one's mouth – cleans it. The idea is that whatever we have offered to Param-Atman to eat, after eating the mouth needs cleansing again. Fragrant things are considered to be pious. The object of offering this is that we may be able to pronounce the mantra correctly.

Shri phalam Is cocoanut and represents wealth. We get wealth back when we offer shri phalam.

Arati kyam Is the camphor flame. The same applies here as to light (deepam). It means that we as small light offer ourselves to the bigger light.

The candidate and the helpers and initiator will all be holding a flower. At this point the initiator takes the flowers from the candidate and the helpers and holds them up with both hands as an offering. He places the flowers before the portraits of Guru Deva and the Shankaracharya. The helpers leave the room and the initiator and candidate kneel down with their hands in an attitude of prayer. There is silence for a few moments and then the candidate then receives the mantra. The candidate and the initiator then sit down and spend a little time together in meditation.

Pause

The initiator tells the new meditator that they will meet again in the following week so that the mantra can be checked and to meditate together. Finally the new meditator receives a parting gift from the initiator of fruit and a flower folded in the white cloth.

The Shankaracharya reminds us:

The word or Mantra has always existed and will exist All mantras are incorporated in one's being but they are asleep. One has to be reminded and awakened to find what belongs to him.

Meditation