

SACRED SPACE

Fasting during Navratri

Give your body and mind a chance to break out of a pattern and give it a new direction. Fasting - a gift to an over-burdened body and an over-indulged mind.

Fasting is indeed a denial of the physical needs of the body and the emotional cravings of the mind. The tendency of the human mind is to draw patterns and get stuck to patterns. While following a pattern is a sign of self-discipline, it has its downside too. When it involves food and eating, it often makes us forget that we ought to be eating to live and not the other way around. The body needs only so much for sustenance and the stomach can hold only so much, but the senses continue to crave, and we continue to feed those cravings. So, fasting is a gift to an over-burdened body and an over-indulged mind. It gives a chance to the body and mind to break out of a pattern and give it a new direction.

Navratri Fasting the Ayurvedic Way

Ayurveda favors regular and short term fasting, depending on individual constitutions and cleansing requirements.

The ancient science of Ayurveda has spoken elaborately of the merits of fasting. According to this ancient discipline, fasting is an effective way to kindle the digestive fire and burn away accumulated toxins from the body and mind. It also eliminates gas, lightens the body, improves mental clarity, provides a clean tongue and fresh breath, and preserves overall health. However, it also does not recommend infrequent and long term fasting, that could deplete bodily tissues and create imbalance to the constitution. It favors regular and short term fasting, which could be on the same day each week or setting aside a few days each month, all depending on individual constitutions and cleansing requirements.

Benefits of Fasting the Ayurvedic Way

There is an increasing support for fasting by the

Fasting - A Feast for Body, Mind, and Soul

scientific community. There is an over consumption of salt in our diets today than the normal requirements of the body. This can be seen in the increased incidence of water retention in the body, a major factor for hypertension and cardiovascular problems. Fasting helps the body "desalt".

Fasting, done properly, has another major advantage. It is a kind of ritual that can purify the body and mind and develop the pure qualities of detachment and equanimity. Whether it is done as a part of a religious sacrament or a part of a penance or as a mark of worship, fasting can only give benefits. Fasting helps create an attunement with the Absolute by establishing a harmonious relationship between the body and the soul. It nourishes the physical and spiritual demands so necessary for our health.

Norms to Observe Fasting

However, fasting also has to be undertaken with an enormous

sense of responsibility. There are, of course, norms as to who should and should not be observing fast. The very young, the old and infirm, pregnant and nursing mothers should be extremely cautious when it comes to choosing to fast. Besides these norms, it is also important how fasting should be observed so that we are able to take away the most from the practice.

Tips for First-time Fasters

A cardinal rule, to absorb all the 'prana' (life-force energy) from the foods, is to drink fluids very slowly.

Just as there is a yogic way of eating, there is a yogic way of fasting. For many, fasting is a new and, hence, a very challenging exercise. It is best that the new initiates start with a single-day fasting just to test the waters. If they are used to three meals a day, they could start with one meal of grains and vegetables during lunch and then just restrict themselves to water and juices during the rest of the day. It's also important that those who want to fast choose the kind of fast - it could be a water fast, a fruit juice fast, or a vegetable juice fast. But to avoid dehydration, one should consume at least 7 to 8 glasses of fluids every day. A cardinal rule, to absorb all the "prana" (life-force energy) from the foods, is to drink fluids very slowly.



Fasting will be most beneficial if the food consumed is of the smallest quantity that the body just about needs and not a grain more. In fact, a few grains lesser, is highly recommended. Foods must be light and easily digestible. Fruits and nuts are ideal for the system during long fasting periods. Juices that are fresh and sugar free along with plenty of water is extremely important to prevent dehydration and constipation. It is advisable to consume simple carbs and easily digestible proteins like vegetable proteins, which are easy to break down by a slow-functioning metabolism. This will keep the mind light and easy and enable better quality of prayer. After 21 days of fasting, which Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi called "21 days of uninterrupted prayer", he said, "There is no prayer without fasting".

Yoga Asanas and Meditation Help

For many, fasting brings about a psychological tiredness and reluctance to engage in any form of exercise. This is not a desirable attitude. Mild exercise is crucial during fasting. Gentle, flowing, meditative and ballet-like movements of yoga are ideal during fasting. Yoga has the proclivity to enhance the physical process of detoxing whilst also working on the mental and spiritual levels. Apart from rectifying physical, physiological and psychological disorders, yogic stretches, bends, twists and gentle inversions cleanses and rejuvenates the body, purges toxins and negativity caused by an irregular life style, and connects us back to our Self. The ability of yoga to activate the parasympathetic system through the asanas, accompanied by deep breathing and deep relaxation, helps to shift the stressed out autonomic nervous system into a state of calm, restorative, and healing mode.

During auspicious occasions of Navratri, let's observe fasting from a space of awareness, joy and giving and incorporate light exercise, yoga, and meditation everyday and enjoy its merits.

A great Kriya Yogi

Vivek Atray

One of the greatest gurus of all time was Lahiri Mahasaya, originally known as Shyama Charan Lahiri, who hailed from Banaras and was the exemplar of balanced living that could lead to the highest exalted states. Lahiri Mahasaya was a householder like most people are, but he was able to raise the levels of his consciousness to attain God realization, even in the midst of the humdrum of daily life.

Lahiri Mahasaya was the foremost disciple of the peerless deathless saint, Mahavatar Baba ji, and he himself was the guru of Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, who in turn was the guru of Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, author of the Autobiography of a Yogi.

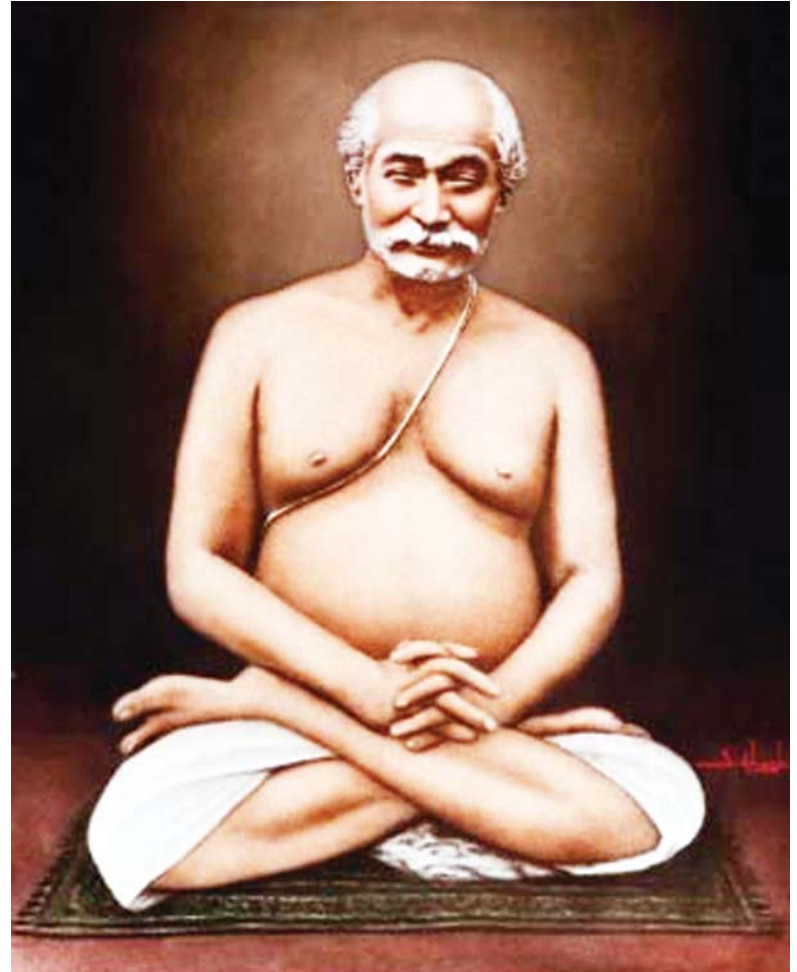
This classic Autobiography outlines in detail the main events in the life of Lahiri Mahasaya, one of which boggles the mind of readers even today. The 'wrongly sent' telegram which resulted in the transfer of Lahiri Mahasaya to Ranikhet and his aimless wanderings in the crags of the Himalayas which led to his astonishing encounter with Babaji, are now the stuff of legends. His interactions with Babaji are highly inspirational to all who have been fortunate enough to read the Autobiography of a Yogi.

Lahiri Mahasaya's life exemplified the virtues of a balanced, yet focussed, approach to God realization. He inspired millions also through his astounding miraculous feats which uplifted the lives of simple followers like Ramu, the blind devotee and Abhoya, a childless lady. A British gentleman who was his employer also benefited from Lahiri Mahasaya's spiritual prowess as his ailing wife recovered quite magically, though thousands of miles away.

Yet, the most compelling and path breaking contribution of the great saint's life was his pivotal role in the revival of the lost science of Kriya Yoga through the blessings of Mahavatar Babaji. Lahiri Mahasaya became the harbinger and the chief protagonist of the subtle spread of the all-important Kriya Yoga technique amongst truth seekers of the modern era.

Yoganandaji who founded YogodaSatsanga Society of India and Self-Realization Fellowship was unendingly inspired by his Paramguru, Lahiri Mahasaya. Even as a babe in the arms of his dear mother, he was blessed by the great guru who memorably stated, "Little mother, thy son will be a yogi. As a spiritual engine, he will carry many souls to God's kingdom."

Yoganandaji's teachings revolve around the philosophy of the great scriptures, the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible, and have been beautifully encapsulated in his How to Live Lessons as well as his numerous publications. His emphasis on the need for all human beings to ultimately attain a direct personal experience of God is the gist of his message for the masses. It was Lahiri Mahasaya who paved the way for these landmark teachings to find their way to the hearts of common men and women when he beseeched Babaji to allow him to impart knowledge of Kriya Yoga to all earnest devotees.



AVIRBHAV DIVAS

Lahiri Mahasaya's birth anniversary (Avirbhav Divas) falls on September 30 and his Mahasamadhi Divas on September 26.

The very fact that millions today follow the path of Kriya yoga in this modern era is a testimony to the life of the great Yogavata of India, Lahiri Mahasaya, who saw humble beginnings in the small town of Ghurni but became known as one of the most elevated saints to have ever lived on this earth.

HERITAGE

Dogri Heritage Bridge on Repair

Shikha Magotra, Dr. Ajay Kaul

Script is one of the greatest inventions of mankind. It is the sole medium for transferring cultural heritage from one generation to another. And once it gets obsolete, all the knowledge in the form of writings, scriptures is lost. Gap widens among generations as knowledge does not transfer. Finally, the bridge breaks and there is no way left to connect to the other side.

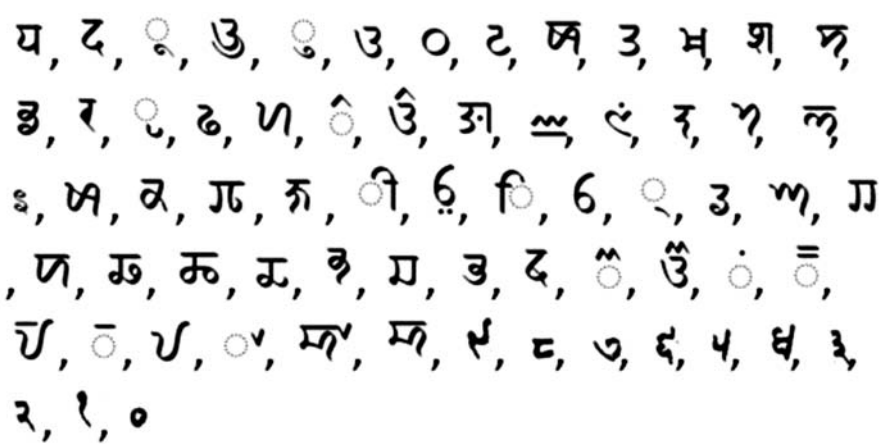
Same is happening with our culture too. People are drifting away from their mother tongue Dogri and its script too- Namay

Maharaja Ranbir Singh's rule. Ganmat was reformed during this period by Jyotshi Bishweshwar, Principal of Ranbir Pathshala of that time. He removed the script's ambiguity and introduced matras into it. So, the Ganmat was reframed and renamed as Namay Akhhar or, Dvigrith Akhhar by Maharaja.

Since then, Namay Akhhar served as official script of the state till after India's independence when the state adopted Devnagari for writing Dogri. That time, knowledge of Namay Akhhar was compulsory. No official not having knowledge of the script could be recruited. Maharaja himself signed in Namay Akhhar on local official papers.

A small initiative has been taken by the Aksharaya Organization of Mumbai for the revival of the script used for writing Dogri language. Regarding this, they have devel-

New Dogri Alphabet (Namay Akhhar)



Akhhar. The script Namay Akhhar was used for writing Dogri language in pre-independent time. It was the official script of the J&K state at that time, along with Urdu. Namay Akhhar belongs to the Takri class, descending from the Sharada family of scripts. Takri is a class of 13 scripts used for writing languages spoken in whole North-west India (J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand).

The form of Takri used for writing Dogri in Jammu has two generations:

* Before 1857- This represents the period before the rule of Maharaja Ranbir Singh in J&K. The script was called Ganmat that time. It was imperfect as matras or, vowel combinations was absent; and ambiguous too as single alphabet was used to represent more number of phonemes like same symbol was used to represent ja and ya.

* After 1857- This represents the golden era of Dogri in J&K during the rule of

oped a script converter tool- Aksharamukha, available online. Using this tool, we can type in Devnagari text to it and it will convert the text into Namay Akhhar script. You have to select "Dogra" in the Output field while using the tool. The link for the tool is given below-

http://aksharamukha.appspot.com/converter

It will help our youth to understand our mother script characters and relearn it too.

Besides, the Font for writing in Namay Akhhar script on computer has also been developed and available for all dogri lovers. The google font for Namay Akhhar is available as- NotoSerifDogra-Regular.ttf font name. All dogri lovers can visualize the text written in Namay Akhhar script now, after installing the font on your computer. The dogri writers of Jammu can make use of these tools for academic and documentation of novels, poetry in the script now.

Avtar Mota

Name of Book : Mein Lal-Ded
Author : Agnishekhar
Published by : Pralek Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. --- ISBNN ..978-93-55003591
Price : Rs249/-
Available on Amazon , Flipkart and E-book format.

Agnishekhar is a prolific writer . His prolificacy has never been a compromise either with the aesthetic standards or with the profundness of the content .The period of Covid-19 pandemic has been creatively utilized by Agishekhar for producing some amazing books that are bound to set newer landmarks in Hindi literature . The one that appeared very recently is a poetic master piece or what can be called an epic or a "Mahakavya" titled "MEIN LAL- DED" (I am Lal Ded).

Dedicated to towering women Bhakti poets like Andal (Godadevi) of Tamilnadu, Akka Mahadevi of Karnataka , Gangasati of Gujrat , Janabai of Maharashtra ,Meerabai of Rajasthan ,Chandrabati of Bengal,Atukuri Molla of Andhra Pradesh ,Bahinabai of Maharashtra and many more of the same clan, the book has eight Spandas (divine vibrations) spread over 175 pages .The author has named the eight Spandas as Sahan (endurance), Deshatan (travel), Teerthatan (pilgrimages), Kaayakalp (rejuvenation), samvedana (empathy), Sutra (thread), Vilaya (merger) and Shila-lekh (stone or rock inscription).

Though deeply rooted in Kashmir's Trika Shaivite creed , Lal Ded had risen much above the world of creeds or labels. One can safely call her a torch bearer of 'Mediaeval Mysticism' and 'Bhakti Movement' of the country .Ramanand (1400-1470), Kabir (1440-1518), Guru Nanak Dev (1489-1538) and Sant Tukaram (1577-1650) followed her . Like Kabir , she also makes symbolic use of swan (Raazhans), grinding mill (Gratta), washerman (Dhob), weaver (Vovur), lotus flower (Pamposh) to put forth her spiritual thought . Her frequent use of Prakaash Dhaam or Prakash Sthaan is synonymous with Kabir's Anahad Naad or "Baaje Anhad dol " or the musical chimes that are created when the seeker gets the glimpse of the reality transcending all worldly experiences. Through this epic , Agnishekhar makes a reader believe that Lal-Ded has not been engrossed in her spiritual pursuits alone . She has been a prime witness to the changes that were sweeping her native land apart from being intensely connected with pilgrimage centres , lakes , mountains, flora and fauna of her Kashmir .

The 'Mahakavya' is the story of the 14th century Kashmiri saint poetess Lal-Ded (the protagonist) who is narrating it to her own Deva (God) with magical intertwining of the events of Kashmir. This poetic narration of 'Mein Lal-Ded' is apt , gripping and evocative . In this 'Mahakavya' we come face to face with Lal Ded , the first progressive poet of Kashmiri language . We learn much about Lal Ded the originator of 'Shunyata' or 'Emptiness' in Kashmiri poetic thought and we know the Lal Ded for whom 'Shiva is not only the destroyer from the trinity of Brahma , Vishnu and Mahesha but the essential supreme ruler of 'Shunyata' or emptiness . This Shunya is similar to the vast "Emptiness" of the primordial ocean mentioned in the Rig Vedic hymns of Nasadiya Sukta. Once an Individual realizes that the final truth or reality is "Emptiness", he carries a different outlook on qualms of mundane existence . This enlightenment also enables him to rise above the painful concerns of routine life . And

BOOK-REVIEW

Revisting Lal Ded

accordingly , this concept of "Emptiness " comes up with a positive transformative power.

The first Spanda of Agnishekhar's Mahakavya begins with Lal Ded's marriage ceremony under the delightful ambience of Vanvun singing or the Samaveda chimes as Agnishekhar rightly calls it . Lal Ded is dumb like a Kamdhenu (cow) while her friends and relations are happy .She asks her Deva "Why this separation ?" The first Spanda has twenty seven poems that describe Lal ded's marriage , the conduct of her heartless inlaws, her renunciation of Grihista and the beginning of her spiritual journey . Agnishekhar makes delightful use of phrases , idioms and

da has seventeen poems . She travels to the Mahadeva mountain and listens to the soulful sounds of Rishi Vasugupta's Shivasutras all around . She goes to Dachhigaam to see the hide and seek of Hanguls around her .She goes to Harwan and listens to the chant "Dhamam Sharnam Gatchhaami" . At this place the lessons of Shunyata or Emptiness was revealed to the followers of Buddha by illustrious Nagarjuna . She visits the sacred Shila of Sharika temple . She is also reminded of the untold sufferings heaped on residents of Shrinagari (Srinagar) by the alien invaders and the sacrifice of Queen Kotrani . She visits the ancient Kulvageshwari Teertha of Kulgam and in search of her Shiva , she moves to Har-mukh peak and Gangabal lake . Rowing her boat in Mahapadmasar or Wular lake , she keeps moving and arrives to see the Ice Lingam inside the Amarnath cave . In the meantime the Sufis start trickling in her Shrinagari and the noise of conversion to new faith begins .

The fourth Spanda has nine poems reflecting Lal-Ded's transformation to Lalleshwari after her spiritual journey . The fifth Spanda has thirteen poems that convey the Tejaswini and Tapaswini Swroopa (personality) of Lalleshwari .The Sixth Spanda contains sixteen small poetic threads that give pipe into her Vaakhs or poetic compositions .The seventh Spanda has one poem that conveys the merger of her entity with the limitless Shiva with and the consequent emancipation of Lalleshwari . The protagonist or Lalleshwari ends her submissions and story that she has been conveying to her Deva at the seventh Spanda . The last and the eighth Spanda is the Shila- Lekh or the stone or rock inscription in the shape of a single mini poem .The poem is a timeless message for the posterity .The message reads this :-

" So passed many centuries ,
neither Lal Ded ,
nor her story
or her Vaakhs
ever turned old .
She keeps laughing on us ,
who we deserve pity ,
can't see face to face with her

Yet,
since ages ,
like a compassionate mother ,
She keeps her hand of care
upon our heads "

Lal-Ded has indelible impact on Kashmiri psyche . It has remained unabated inspite of a time lapse of about seven hundred years.This is a fact that we have failed to place Lal Ded on ground geographically . She belongs to Pampore yet there is no visible spot either in Sempur or Pampore or Laltraagh (that had more than 60 Kanals of land) to place her geographically. The Lal- traag spring where the great saint poetess used to visit frequently stands completely encroached upon . She is yet to find a place in her own land . Does she also face exile ?

I recommend the book to every person who is a lover of Kashmir and believes in the message of Lal-Ded. Agnishekhar has surely revisited Lal-Ded with a study that is profound , exceptional and amazing.

