

CHINMAYA PRADĪPIKĀ

CMSD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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The key events in this issue include Swami Ramakrishnananda's week-long *Jñāna Yajña* on "Know Thyself and Live a Joyful Life", *Dīpāvalī* celebrations presided by Swamiji and *Śrī Tapovana* and *Gītā Jayanti*. This quarter commenced with *Navarātrī* celebrations including a workshop on "*Strī Śakti – The Power Feminine*".



THE MASTER SPEAKS

"A student of Vedanta must be a man of receptive and agile intellect, ready to catch every subtle idea thrown out by the Master and through a process of intellectual assimilation, get at its true significance."

Navarātrī Celebrations

The Legend of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī*



On October 15, 2023, Bala Vihar Grade 5 children presented the Legend of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī*.

Mahiṣāsura represents laziness, darkness and ignorance. *Durgā devī* is the destroyer of all negativities and evil tendencies.

Durgā devī fought with the demon *Mahiṣāsura* who was troubling the three worlds. She killed the demon using the weapons she received from *Bhagavān Viṣṇu*, *Brahmā*, *Śiva* and other *Devatās*.

In the same way one must destroy the enemy called laziness by invoking Mother's power and putting forth effort.

Laziness is the greatest enemy residing in the human body that must be destroyed like the demon *Mahiṣāsura*.



The victory of *Durgā devī* was triumphantly celebrated with the chanting of the *Mahiṣāsūramardinī Stotram* and *garbā*.

Navarātrī Celebrations

Symbolism of Navarātrī



Bala Vihar Grade 10 presented the significance of each day of *Navarātrī*. The presentation highlighted the importance of worshipping *Mā Durgā* - the Goddess of destruction, *Mā Lakṣmī* - the Goddess of spiritual wealth and *Mā Sarasvatī* - the Goddess of the Highest Knowledge. The three divine forms of *Śakti* are worshiped on these nine days to purify our minds and cultivate noble values to prepare ourselves for the Highest Knowledge.

Workshop on *Strī Śakti*



Interactive workshop on “*Strī Śakti – The Power Feminine*” was conducted on **October 15, 2023**, by **Lakshmi Sukumar**. A workshop to discover and manifest the “*devī*” powers symbolized by *Durgā devī*, *Lakṣmī devī* and *Sarasvatī devī*.

Devī Śakti is the epitome of infinite love and especially celebrated in *Navarātrī* as “Mother”. She destroys negativity, cultivates richness of virtues and imparts wisdom. In our *vaidika* tradition, God is worshiped as Mother symbolizing freedom which beautifully segwayed into multifaceted explanation of the three *devīs*’ potential and powers.

Shaili Sharma, Grade 9, expressed, “We learned that individuals possess two distinct energies: masculine (such as assertive, aggressive and reasoning) and feminine (such as creative, kind, loving and sacrificial). One must possess an equal balance of both to be a good, balanced and *dhārmik* human being.”

Navarātrī Celebrations

Devī Mahātmyam



On the eighth day of *Navarātrī*, **October 22, 2023**, CMSD members participated in the chanting of the *Devī Mahātmyam*. It was a beautiful experience with divine vibrations pervading *Praṇava Nilayam*. **Lakshmi Aunty** prudently guided all through the complexity of the language and rhythm.

Member Reflections:

“I felt as if it were a play of the Divine that got me to be part of chanting this year.” - **Madhu Bathija**

“As I am able to better understand the language by learning *saṃskṛtam* with Lakshmi Auntie, I get a step closer to connecting with the supreme.” - **Gira Pandya**

Śrī Sarasvatī Pūjā



Aṣṭottaraśatanāmāvali was performed on **October 23, 2023**, to Mother *Sarasvatī* with the chanting of *Śrī Sarasvatī-Stotram*, *Śārada-Stotram* and *Medhā Sūktam*.

The *pustaka maṇḍalam* representing *Śrī Sarasvatī devī* was divinely adorned with a heart shaped floral garland in white.

Navarātrī Celebrations

Vijayadaśamī



CMSD celebrated *Vijayadaśamī* on **October 24, 2023**, with *Śrī Sarasvatī Aṣṭottaraśatanāmāvali pūjā* which was followed by the chanting of *Medhā Sūktam* and *Śrī Sūktam*.

Vijayadaśamī marks the ceremonious beginning of learning-*Vidyārambha*. The *pustaka maṇḍalam* was formally unveiled and the introduction portion from the text *Tat tvam asi* (notes on *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapter six) was offered. This was a beautiful beginning towards the anticipated *Jñāna yajña* by **Swami Ramakrishnananda** on the *Mahāvākya - Tat tvam asi*.

Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Pārāyaṇa



Continuing CMSD's tradition, two *adhyaṅgās* of the *Gītā* were chanted on all nine nights, from **October 15 to October 23, 2023**. **Sandhya Srinivasan** expressed, “*Gītā* chanting during *Navarātrī* has been the best celebration of the festival. I enjoyed the calming vibes in the *āśrama* everyday.”

- **Hema Subburaman, Smita Bhatia and Manasi Popat**

Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti*

The highlight of this quarter for CMSD members was a week-long *Jñāna Yajña* on “**Know Thyself and Live a Joyful Life**” by **Swami Ramakrishnananda** of Chinmaya Mission Nagapattinam.

Swamiji discussed the teachings from the sixth chapter of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* on the *Mahāvākya* “*Tat tvam asi*”. He also blessed the congregation with his presence during the *Dīpāvalī* celebrations on the final day of his stay in San Diego.

Jñāna Yajña, November 5 to 11, 2023



Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti*

Swamiji arrived at *Chinmaya Jyoti* in the cool evening hours of Sunday, **November 5, 2023**, and was ceremonially welcomed with a *pūrṇa kumbha* and chanting of Vedic *mantras*. Then, with members chanting *Guru Stotram*, he made his way to *Praṇava Nilayam* escorted by **Lakshmi Aunty** and **Sukumar Uncle** and lit the lamp commencing the program.

Thereafter in the enthralling courtyard, Sukumar Uncle and Lakshmi Aunty formally introduced Swamiji and recalled with joy his past three visits to our *āśrama*, noting his ease in connecting with members of all ages and versatility in his many contributions to Chinmaya Mission and the Hindu diaspora over the years.



Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti*



CMSD *Swarānjali* group set the tone for the evening with invocatory and lilting *bhajans*. The inaugural program, offering gratitude to Pujya Swamiji, was presented by the *Samskṛta Vihar* students.

A short presentation on '*Māheśvarī-Sūtrāṇi*' with various percussions was followed by two short skits - *Ekalavya* from the *Mahābhārata* and a teacher in *Kāśī* with his students.

At the end, Swamiji congratulated all the *Samskṛta Vihar* students and their teachers for a job well done.



Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti*

The entire congregation then followed Swamiji back into *Pranava Nilayam* to listen to his lecture. The audience included many Bala Vihar students, parents with infants, grandparents and other adults. With his astounding mimicry and jokes, Swamiji kept the entire audience in stitches for the whole time while effortlessly introducing *Veda Vyāsa*, *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads* and the topic covered in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* Ch.6. Everyone was eager to come back for more the next day!

The week-long lecture series culminated on **November 11, 2023**, when all the members received a book “A Sweeping Look at Vedanta” by Swami Chinmayananda as the *Yajña prasāda*. Swamiji concluded the *Jñāna Yajña* by saying that the audience henceforth is ready for ‘*mananam*’ of the sacred text. He also stressed the importance of ‘*sevā*’ for purifying the mind to attain Liberation. He pointed to the disciple *Śvetaketu*'s journey in this text to reveal the uniqueness of the Hindu tradition which is the freedom of intellectual exploration of the subject. Swamiji urged the audience to take pride in our roots to face today’s chaotic world by expanding our knowledge of it.

Member Reflections:

“*Jñāna Yajña* was a profound experience that has encouraged our family to make a conscious effort to embark on an inward journey.” - **Vidhya Bharath**

“I felt that Swamiji came from India during the auspicious festival of *Dīpāvalī* and sparked the light in all our hearts.” - **Gira Pandya**

[Click here for more reflections](#)

Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti*

Bhikṣā during Swamiji's Visit



Bhikṣā is a wonderful opportunity to be in Swamiji's presence, to serve him and receive his blessings. About 33 families offered *bhikṣā* during Swamiji's visit, wherein a variety of cuisines were prepared and served with reverence.

Being in Swamiji's presence one could feel his love and warmth in the way he connected with everyone around.

The heartwarming experience of Swamiji personally serving *sevaks* and children is beautifully captured. The *āśrama* was indeed filled with festivities and celebrations during his visit!



[Click here for more pictures](#)

Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti**Satsaṅga with Seniors, November 8, 2023*

Satsaṅga with senior members commenced with each of the members sharing their initial involvement with Chinmaya Mission, while some expressing their memories with Pujya Gurudev. The topics varied from *Prārabdha*, Self-Realization and being a Hindu verses *Hindutva*. About 15 seniors attended this session.

Swamiji addressed some specific questions about the 'spiritual path' from members. How does *prārabdha* affect our *sādhana*? How long do we need the *śāstra* if we understand the gist of Vedanta? *Brahma vid Brahmaiva Bhavati* - How does one become *Brahman*?

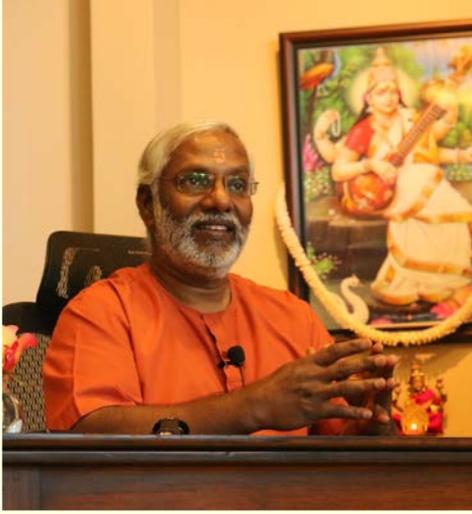
This was followed by a discussion of the need for all Hindus to understand the true meaning of the principles of *Sanātana Dharma*; this lack of understanding, Swamiji said, has created wrong and muted responses to aggressive attacks on Hindu religion.

In parts of South India, Kerala, Tamil Nadu etc., Christianity and Islam are being spread forcefully. Swamiji reinforced that having faith inside, one should work in the world outside to spread the word of *Sanātana Dharma*. Swamiji has personally taken initiative and gone from village to village in many areas in South India to revive Hindu temples.

“It was an honor and privilege for the senior group to be with Swamiji.” - **Meena Baluja**

Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti*

***Satsaṅga* with CMSD *Sevaks* and *Sevikās*, November 10, 2023**



During the CMSD *sevak* and *sevikās satsaṅga*, Swamiji highlighted four aspects of Chinmaya Mission. Pujya Gurudev broke all doors to spread the knowledge of Vedanta and made **the highest knowledge accessible** to every human being.

As a visionary, Gurudev established over 350 Bala Vihar centers globally, enabling the members to stay connected with Chinmaya Mission wherever they go. Being part of the **worldwide network**, we experience the feeling of one family sharing the same spiritual values. We are given an opportunity to purify **our mind (*cittaśuddhi*)** while working without expecting anything in return.

Lastly, as a Bala Vihar teacher, it is a **privilege to work on shaping the core values of the children**. This *sevā* is very important as teachers work on the revolutionary step that makes up the future wealth of the world.

Swamiji also spent time answering questions and shared creative ideas on how to keep Bala Vihar classes creative and interactive especially for high school children.

“Today’s *satsaṅga* with Swamiji definitely energized and reinforced the purpose and importance of doing *sevā* at the mission.” - **Hetal Babla**

“It is always a joy to learn from Swamiji, especially on the topic of *sevā*. I must study sincerely and pass on the knowledge to the next generation.” - **Amarnath Puttur**

Swami Ramakrishnananda enlivens *Chinmaya Jyoti*

Satsaṅga with Senior *Sam̐skṛta Vihar* Students , November 11, 2023

Sam̐skṛta Vihar senior students were blessed to have an inspiring *satsaṅga* with Swami Ramakrishnananda. Swamiji emphasized on how senior students can carry forward the *Sanātana Dharma*. In particular, he expressed that these students were uniquely poised to correct the misconceptions about the scriptures as they understand the scriptures as revealed or passed and not through the lens of some other language which inherently carries forward the limitations of that language. He cited *Manusmṛti* as one such highly misconstrued text. The other example he cited was that of *caturvarṇa* and how the word *varṇa* cannot be translated correctly in other languages like English.

Satsaṅga with CMSD Highschoolers and CHYKs, November 11, 2023



One of the beautiful aspects of *Sanātana Dharma* is the ability to freely ask questions. During the High School and CHYK *satsaṅga* with Swamiji, children got an opportunity to seek guidance regarding student life and career roles. Some topics that came up were *Karma Yoga*, destiny and self-control. Swamiji took time to thoroughly explain each answer, all the while inserting funny anecdotes and jokes to engage the group.

- Rajasekar Vaidyanathan, Bhamini Gobiraj, Jayantibhai Patel, Nikhil Varaiya, Hetal Babla, Amarnath Puttur, Ravi Kulkarni and Aditi Puttur

Swamiji's Visit to EarthLab



On **November 9, 2023**, **Sukumar Uncle** arranged a tour at EarthLab for **Swami Ramakrishnananda**, Resident Acharya at Chinmaya Vidyalaya in Nagapattinam, to understand and possibly integrate some creative learning methods. EarthLab is a 4-acre open-air climate action park devoted to youth and family for informal learning through experiential science, environmental literacy and participatory climate action.

Kat Perkins, Education Program Coordinator, welcomed Swamiji and gave an informative tour of EarthLab.



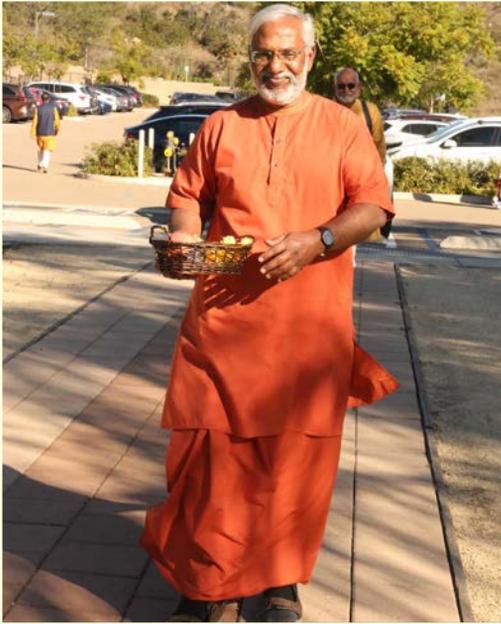
Swamiji keenly observed the various local natural plantations in the vicinity and engaged in some in-depth conversations to understand how to develop and integrate environmentally conscious approaches in the school curriculum.



Later, Swamiji met with **Leslie Reynolds**, Executive Director Groundwork San Diego, and exchanged the importance of value-based education with experiential learning through a nature inspired setting. This *Gurukula* way of learning concept has been incorporated at the Chinmaya Vidyalaya Nagapattinam.

“It was wonderful to observe how Swamiji took sincere interest in his surroundings and interactions with different people. Relatability and humility certainly are the key aspects of his personality that made everyone around him at ease!” - **Manasi Popat**

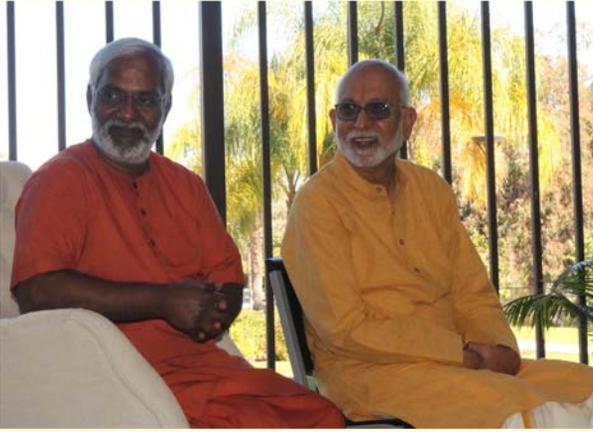
Swami Ramakrishnananda presides over *Dīpāvalī* festivities



The blissful week reached its peak with the grand *Dīpāvalī* celebrations on the final day of Swamiji's visit in San Diego. With palpable fervor and joy, the CMSD families came together to celebrate *Dīpāvalī* on **November 12, 2023**.

Swami Ramakrishnananda presides over *Dīpāvalī* festivities

The Goddess of spiritual and material wealth, *Lakṣmī Devī*, was ritualistically welcomed and worshiped. The *Aṣṭalakṣmīs* performed *kumkumārcanā* as the *Lakṣmī aṣṭottaraśatanāmāvalī* was chanted.

Swami Ramakrishnananda presides over *Dīpāvalī* festivities

The *satsaṅgis* proceeded to sing *Dīpāvalī* songs and *bhajans* with devotion.

The *paurāṇik* and spiritual significance of the stories associated with *Dīpāvalī* were presented by children. Both the stories - Killing of demon *Narakāsura* by Lord *Kṛṣṇa* (by Grade 7) and the return of the *Śrī Rāma parivār* to *Ayodhyā* were enacted with a lot of spirit.

Swami Ramakrishnananda presides over *Dīpāvalī* festivities



Sukumar Uncle and **Nikhil Varaiya** honored **Swami Ramakrishnananda** with a shawl. Swamiji shared his experiences of *Dīpāvalī* growing up and brought to light how in a diverse land like India, *Dīpāvalī* is one of the festivals that is celebrated across the whole country.

As expressed by **Chitra Ramu**, “When adding Swamiji's wisdom, humor and his precious smile, it makes us light up inside! I truly enjoyed the mini lecture by Swamiji about why *Dīpāvalī* is celebrated and found it interesting to know how we celebrate it for different reasons in different regions, with a common element of light and happiness.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda presides over *Dīpāvalī* festivities



This was followed by joyful *garbā* and *ārati*.

In keeping with CMSD tradition, continuing families prepared and served a potluck *Dīpāvalī* lunch to welcome new families that joined this year.



Even though the week-long *satsaṅga* with Swamiji came to an end, all the hearts will carry the love and warmth of his presence. It was truly a blessing to have **Swami Ramakrishnananda** preside over the festivities!

- Akhila Koneri

[Click here for member reflections and pictures](#)

Kṛtajñatā on Thanksgiving Day



On Thanksgiving day, **November 23, 2023**, after *Guru Pādukā Pūja*, **Lakshmi Aunty** explained Pujya Guruji's composition - *Kṛtajñatā Stotram*. *Kṛtajñatā* in Sanskrit means gratitude - to acknowledge what has been done.

One of the wonderful aspects of *sanātana dharma* is that we can use this dynamic knowledge to infuse our daily lives and holidays with more meaning, significance and magic.

Aunty brought to mind the *pañcaṛṇa* (five debts) that we owe everyday: *Deva* (Gods), *Ṛṣi* (the Great Seers), *Pitṛ* (ancestors), *Bhūta* (Nature and other beings) and *Nṛ* (other human beings). Accordingly, we should act in the *yajña* spirit by carrying out *pañcamahāyajña* and cultivating gratitude. These debts can never fully be repaid. By using this map of five debts and offerings, we acknowledge and establish our connection with the entire universe - all that is, was, and will be!

Pujya Gurudev worked relentlessly and unattached by dedicating his life for the upliftment of the society. Pujya Guruji offers all his successes at the feet of Pujya Gurudev. Guruji paves the way for us to pay forward by living up to the great Mahatma's teachings. Gurudev's life and Guruji's work are inspiring examples for us to serve with humility and thankfulness!

- **Monali Varaiya and Sumathi Iyenger**

Śrī Tapovana Jayanti and Gītā Jayanti



BV Grade 8 presented on *Gītā Dhyānam* during the Sunday assembly on **December 17, 2023**. The *Gītā Dhyānam* praises the greatness of Mother *Gītā*. Children focused on the verse, “*Bhīṣma droṇataṭā,*” which compares the battlefield to a river. The river, which symbolizes our lives, filled with obstacles, is difficult to cross. This *śloka* shows us what a person must do to cross such a river successfully. One of the *sevaks* shared, “*kaivartakah keśavaḥ* is my most beloved word, and I want the Lord to be the boatsman of my life.”



Śrī Tapovana Jayanti and *Gītā Jayanti* were celebrated on **December 22, 2023**. *Śrī Tapovana-Ṣaṭkam* was chanted followed by *aṣṭottaraśatanāmāvali pūjā* to bestow upon us the qualities of a sincere *sadhakā*. This was concluded by offering *Tapovana āratī*.

Śrī Tapovana Jayanti and Gītā Jayanti



Thereafter, *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā aṣṭottaraśatanāmāvali pūjā* was performed followed by the chanting of all the 18 chapters and the *Gītā māhatmyam*.

CMSD members, youth and children took turns to lead the chanting of each chapter. **Mamatha Puttur** shared, “It was a blessing to see children and youth participate and lead the reciting of the divine *Gītā!*”



The program culminated with *maṅgala ārati* to Mother *Gītā* and sumptuous *prasādam*. Everyone departed with beautiful vibrations of the divine song of the Lord as a shield to bless and protect always.

- Nagesh Nookala

CMSD Ongoing Events

Monthly *Sundarakāṇḍa Pārāyaṇā*



October 21, 2023



November 18, 2023



December 16, 2023

Shishu Vihar Corner

SV3 in-class activities



[Click here for more pictures](#)

Bala Vihar Corner

Pre-K in-class activities

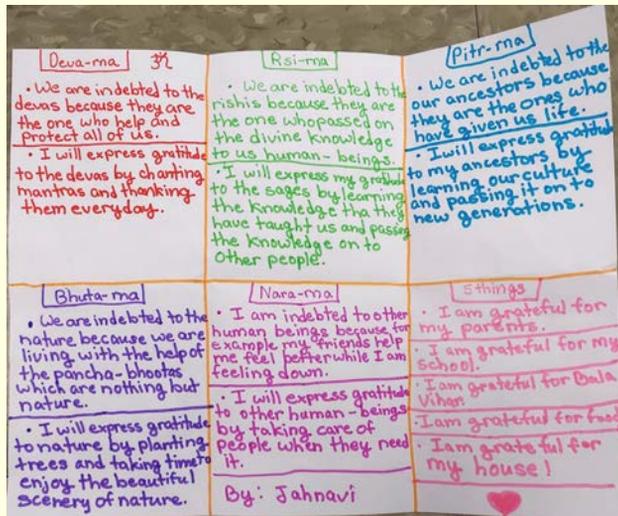


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BV Grade 3 children celebrate Śrī Sītā-Rāma Kalyānam



BV Grade 4 Thanksgiving break project “The Attitude of Gratitude”



[Click here for more pictures](#)

Bala Vihar Corner

BV Grade 5 children behind the scenes during the Legend of *Mahiṣāsūramardīnī*



[Click here for more pictures](#)

BV Grade 10 children undertake an activity of molding the Unreal from the Real



[Click here for detailed write-up](#)

Chinmaya Pradipika Team: Parag Kelkar, Ritu Chandiramani, Akhila Koneri, Smita Bhatia, Manasi Popat and CMSD Photography Team