



The Amazing Potency of Vishnu Sahasranama

An active nonagenarian recounts the personal and social benefits of chanting this *mantra*-cum-hymn.

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As one who has personally experienced the miraculous effects of reciting *Vishnu Sahasranama* for close to 75 years, I wish to share with **Tattvāloka** readers my views on this universally acclaimed prayer.

In spiritual *Sadhana*, *Vishnu Sahasranama* (VS) stands next only to *Sandhya* or *Gayatri* worship. As readers may know, VS occurs in the *Mahabharata*, which has yielded the treasures of both the *Bhagavad Gita* and VS.

While the quintessence of *Upanishads* is spelt in the *Gita*, the efficacy of mantras is found in VS,

which embodies the *nama sankirtana* of the Universal God as the most potent means of spiritual benefit.

VS contains epithets repeating the noble concepts of the Supreme Being as given in the *Upanishads*, the *Samhitas* and the *Brahmanas* of the *Vedas*. It is thus an epitome of *Advaitic* teaching, with the description of the immanent force that pervades every created being. It praises the master of the past, present and future, the creator and destroyer of all existences, one who supports, sustains and governs the universe.

This is why *Adi Sankara* chose

to write a beautiful commentary on VS first. According to the life history of Sankara, while he proposed to first write a commentary on *Lalita Sahasranama*, the thousand names of the universal Mother, and asked his students to fetch the manuscript, they kept bringing the VS manuscript three times in a row. Then Sankara decided to take up the commentary of VS first as a divine injunction.

In his classic devotional poem *Bhaja Govindam*, Sankara entreats all to chant the *Gita* and VS every day, “*geyam Gita namasahasram...*” to find the ultimate solution to the cycle of human births and end all forms of suffering. (I recall the advice by Sri Abhinava Vidyathirtha Mahaswami, the 35th Jagadguru in the Sringeri *parampara*, to devotees approaching him with their worldly issues, asking them to chant the *Gita* and VS. Incidentally, the 97th birth anniversary of this *mahatma* was celebrated on the Deepavali day recently).

Group Chanting

While I have been reciting VS almost from my childhood days, I find the efficacy of chanting grows manifold when it is done in groups and in the company of like-minded persons.

While chanting or reciting a

prayer is fundamentally a matter of self-exploration, the coherence in a group chanting makes it more powerful personally and socially. There are numerous studies to show that a large group of people engaged together in meditation or chanting has a measurable effect on a wider population segment.

In fact, group chant brings into vivid effect the *mantras* in VS that proclaim universal benefit, such as *Svastidah svastikrut swasti svastibhuk svastidakshinah*, (901-905), meaning the Lord is the promoter of well-being as well as the enjoyer of well-being. In my experience, this recitation helps to promote communal harmony and universal peace.

Likewise, to alleviate the sufferings during drought-like conditions and natural adversities, the chanting of “*Mahahradah mahagartah mahabbhutih mahanidhih*” (802-805) in groups is found to have produced miraculous effects. These epithets praise the Lord as the great lake of bliss, the great chasm and the great abode.

It is with this objective, a few like-minded persons decided to come together in Delhi back in the decade of 60s, in 1968 to be precise, to form the *Vishnu Sahasranama Satsangham*. The

group chanting of VS every Sunday that we had started at various locations in Delhi is continuing till date, and growing in strength and extending to other cities.

Inexplicable Cure

A few years ago when I was well past 80, despite my years of sound health, I suddenly developed a medical condition with my legs shaking involuntarily. Diagnosed in medical parlance as Restless Legs Syndrome, a neurological disorder that intensified during quiet wakefulness, it became a matter of concern for me and my children.

The US doctors diagnosed this as associated with old age with no cure in sight, beyond indefinite medication. Though feeling distraught, I decided to entrust myself to the well-being under the custody of VS, and intensely started chanting the final verse beginning:

*Artha vishanna sithilascha bhitaha
Ghoreshu cha vyadhishu vartamanaha
Sankirtya Narayana sabda matram
Vimukta dukkah sukhino bhavantu.*

This is a powerful prayer *mantra*, meaning “May all in distress and sorrow, broken, scared and miserable in dire disease, just utter the name of Narayana to free themselves from sorrow and beam with joy”.

It was a miracle that in just a few

weeks, the syndrome disappeared. It looked as though the condition had evaporated on its own. I felt perfectly all right to resume my daily walk and other active routine.

This and other personal episodes have deeply influenced my children who all believe in the amazing power of VS.

Note for Youngsters

In our *satsangh* group in Chennai at present, we promote annual VS chant competitions for youngsters. I am happy that for the latest year there were as many as 200 entries from students, from kindergarten to senior secondary level, competing to chant immaculately this *hymn* and win recognition. It is heartening to see more youngsters realising the value of prayer, especially through the powerful medium of VS.

We close the regular chant with a rendition of *Hanuman Chalisa*, hailing the glory of Hanuman. As we chant the line, “*tum rakshaka kahu ko dharna...*,” many in the group become misty-eyed. After all, when there is a 24 by 7 protector around you, why fear for anything?

As narrated by B.V. Eswaran (92), and his wife Yogam (85), who both live in Chennai. After retiring from service in Delhi years ago, Eswaran leads the Vishnu Sahasranama Satsangh in Besant Nagar since 1981.