

Śānti Mantra¹

om

**sa ha nāvavatu sa ha nau bhunaktu saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai
tejasvināvadhitamastu mā vidviṣāvahai**

May he (the Lord) protect both of us. May he nourish both of us (with knowledge).
May both of us make effort for the capacity (for knowledge to take place).
May what is studied by us be brilliantly clear.
Let us not have any misunderstanding.
Peace. Peace. Peace.

sa ha nāvavatu (saḥ ha nau avatu)

Saḥ means *Īśvara*, the meaning of the word *tat* in the statement, “You are that,” *tat tvam asi*. The meaning of the word *tat* is the Lord. May that Lord definitely, indeed (*ha*) protect, bless (*avatu*) both of us (*nau*). The word *om* is also from the same root as *avatu*, the root *av*. *Av* is used in the sense of protecting, the one who protects being a source of blessing. Thus, the Lord’s name is *Om*. You can also say he is the one who sustains everything. May that Lord bless both of us, teacher and student.

sa ha nau bhunaktu

May that Lord (*saḥ*) definitely, indeed (*ha*), nourish (*bhunaktu*) both of us (*nau*). That is also in the sense of protection. There is no meaning of eating here, for in that case, the verb would have to have different endings (*ātmane-pada*). The sense here is only of nourishing. May he nourish both of us with knowledge. May the Lord indeed, or may the Lord certainly, omitting all my omissions and commissions, being blind to them, bless us and nourish us both. Both student and teacher seek *Bhagavān*’s blessing.

saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai

May both of us together exert, make effort (*karavāvahai*). What kind of effort? With (*saha*) *vīryam*. *Vīryam* here is the capacity required to gain knowledge (*vidyā-sampādane sāmāthyam*). Whatever is required to gain this knowledge, may we make an effort for that. In gaining this knowledge a certain capacity, certain conditions are required. May we both cultivate those conditions. There are two types of conditions that have to be fulfilled here. As the teaching takes place the student is supposed to see the meaning (*grahaṇa-sāmāthyam*). That is a capacity, and it consists of lot of things. In giving the knowledge also, a certain capacity (*sāmāthyā*) is

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necessary. Your memory should help you, and you should also be able to see the condition of the listener, and decide what exactly will drive home the idea. There are a lot of things in the *śāstra*. If we tell all of them in the beginning it will be confusing. Also, you cannot make a statement which will have to be withdrawn. You have say the same thing in a form that is understood by the student at the stage that he is at. At one stage one thing is relevant, at another stage, a little more. It all depends on what you have already taught—and what the student has understood. This giving of knowledge (*vidyā-dānam*) is not easy. Especially if the *vidyā* has a certain intrinsic difficulty. You have to use words where words have no access, and cannot have access. But only through words you have to communicate. Therefore, you have to make sure you negate what is to be negated and take the student to a corner from where that student cannot but see. This is what they call the analogy of [seeing] the moon [through] a branch (*śāka-candra-nyāya*).

Nyāya is a conclusion, a particular fact revealed through an analogy, like an adage or proverb. This *śāka-candra-nyāya* is a very interesting *nyāya*. A person wants to communicate his experience of the crescent moon, the third day moon, let us say. They say it is auspicious to see the third day moon and this person wants to share his experience of seeing it with his friend who is by his side. He says, “Look at the moon.” His friend looks at the sky and is not able to see the moon. Here is a problem of communication. He can tell his friend to look up and scan the sky, but the sky is too vast to scan. So he follows a very simple method. He sees a tree and asks his friend to look at the tree, and find the branch projecting towards the left side of the trunk. The friend says, “Yes. I see it.”

“Do you see the branch forking into two?”

“Yes.”

“Now look through the gap.”

The friend looks through the gap. “Oh!” There is an expression of enlightenment in this “Oh.” He saw the moon. In the sight of moon, the branch, the trunk, the tree are not included. In this, what did his friend who wanted to show him the moon do? He made sure that by directing his sight through the forking branches, there was no way he could miss seeing the moon.

This is what teaching is. You drive a person to a corner from where he cannot but see. Whether it is elementary arithmetic, or higher mathematics if you have to really communicate, you drive the

person to a corner from where the person cannot but see. That is teaching. That is method. We have certain evolved methods for communicating this teaching, and if we change the methods we will commit mistakes. This is very peculiar knowledge, because the subject matter, or ‘object’ of knowledge is not an object. Yet you have to employ words. And you also have to make sure the person understands you. To do that, you have to negate all possible mistakes. It is something like the *reductio ad absurdum* used in mathematics. You extend the logic of a given argument to create an absurd situation, point out the absurdity, and that particular fallacious conclusion falls apart. All these are *vīrya* for a teacher. His memory (*smṛti*) must be functioning properly too. At the right time the right statement must come. It is not easy. Only *Bhagavān* can give this recollection. That is the prayer on the part of the teacher. May both of us have the blessing of *Parameśvara*, the Lord, so that you have the *sāmarthyam*, the capacity to receive and I have the *sāmarthyam*, the capacity to give. This is chanted before a class begins.

tejasvināvadhītamastu (tejasvi nau adhītam astu)

Whatever *śāstra* is studied (*adhītam*) by both of us—communicated by one and gained by the other—let it not be just mere words; let it be (*astu*) meaningful (*tejasvi*) for us (*nau*). *Tejas* means brilliant. Let the understanding not be vague, but brilliant like the sun not covered by the clouds. You cannot miss the sun even when the clouds are there. It is not like inference where through the silver lining you infer the existence of the sun. Here it is not a matter of inference. It is me. It has to be understood very clearly. Therefore, let what is studied be brilliantly clear, free from any vagueness, much less error.

mā vidviṣāvahai

A *dveṣa* is any kind of dislike or misunderstanding. May we not be subject to this misunderstanding. Let nothing come in between us, so that this communication is complete.

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

Three times we chant *śānti*. There are not three types of *śānti*. There is only one *śānti*, but there are three different types of problems that can deny *śānti*. From those problems let there be freedom, *śānti*. Let these problems not come—from the forces over which we have no control (*ādhidaivam*), from the beings around us (*ādhibhautikam*), or centered on ourselves (*adhyātmam*). *Ādhidaivam* is any set of problems which comes from sources over which we have no control whatsoever (*ādhidaivam*), like a cyclone. We can only protect ourselves from it. Let there not be obstacles from sources over which I have no control. That is one *śānti*. The

second source of *asānti* is from the people around us (*ādhibhautikam*). Any kind of disturbance from the external world—political, social, domestic—are all obstructions to our pursuit. We pray for *sānti* from these obstacles that we don't want to have. The third *sānti* is to take care of problems centered on oneself (*adhyātmam*). There can be physical problems, like an inability to sit comfortably for some time, physiological problems like indigestion and so on. Then the mind can be a problem, for the mind has its own agenda. I pray that all three, physical, physiological, mental (*deha prāṇa manah*), be available for me in a conducive manner so that I can pursue this knowledge (*vidyā*). From these three possible obstructions we are praying for freedom by chanting these three *sāntis*.