

Satsang with Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Saha nāvavatu

*saha nāvavatu | saha nau bhunaktu | sahavīryaṃ karavāvahai |
tejasvi nāvadhītamastu | mā vidviṣāvahai ||
oṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||*

This is a very famous prayer from the Vedas. It is traditional to chant a prayer before starting any activity, particularly before starting the study. This prayer is traditionally recited both by the teacher as well as by the student.

Saha nāvavatu, may the Lord protect us both. What is meant by protecting with reference to the study? When the teacher is unfolding something, he is trying to communicate, and the student is making an attempt to listen and understand. When this process of communication takes place, it is necessary that our mind should be free from other distractions. Sometimes it is difficult for us to keep our mind free from distractions because there may be many things that are weighing on our minds, and therefore both the teacher and the student pray that the lord protect them. May He protect us from any disturbing thoughts, or any negative tendencies!

Our mind needs protection. Often our mind is compared to a garden. A gardener cultivates flowers and very nice plants in his garden. He needs to protect these plants from the animals which may come in and perhaps disturb and destroy the plants. Particularly, in a country like India, you could have cows or goats or other animals which may enter your garden and perhaps destroy the plants. Therefore it is necessary to have fencing around the garden to keep them away. Similarly our mind is like a garden where we want to sow and cultivate beautiful flowers in the form of thoughts and this garden needs protection from the negative thoughts which can come and disturb them. Therefore it is necessary to have fencing. That is why we pray that our mind be protected from the assaults of any negative thoughts or negative tendencies.

Saha nau bhunaktu, may He nourish us both, the teacher and the student. What is meant by nourishing with reference to the study? In order to cultivate the plants and the flowers in the garden, in addition to the protection from animals, we also need to provide nourishment with the right kind of soil, fertilizer, water etc. Similarly in addition

to the protection from the assault of negative thoughts, our mind needs the nourishment of good thoughts. So we pray *saha nau bhunaktu*, may He nourish us both with good or positive thoughts, and with a frame of mind which is conducive to learning.

Sahavīryam karavāvahai, may we both strive together. The teacher should make a sincere attempt to communicate in a manner that the student can grasp. That communication should be with care and compassion and concern for the student. On the part of the student also there is an attempt to give benefit of doubt to the teacher, and have a positive or open mind to receive, appreciate and accept the knowledge. Thus in order for the communication to take place effectively, it is necessary that the teacher should have certain attitudes, and the student also should have certain attitudes. Therefore, both the student and the teacher pray, may we both strive together! May we have this right kind of attitude in order that the communication can effectively take place!

Tejasvi nāvadhītāstu, may we become brilliant! May whatever we study reflect in our understanding, in our own life! That is the way the study becomes brilliant. When I understand what is taught by the teacher, I see the relevance of that teaching in my own life. I need adequate understanding, commitment and strength to put the knowledge into practice so that my life becomes a process of learning and growing. There should be a recognition that the human being is here primarily to grow -- grow our personality, and grow our good qualities. The scriptures explain to us that there is a treasure of all the goodness within every living being. May our life become a process of invoking and bringing to manifestation that goodness or wholeness which is the inherent nature of our self! May what we learn here help us in living our life properly so that our life becomes good, bright and brilliant!

Mā vidviṣāvahai, may we not have any misunderstanding with each other. The teacher and the student both are praying that they may not have any misunderstanding about each other. When the teacher communicates, he or she is trying to present a certain view point. When the student receives the teaching, it is possible that he perceives it from a different view point and perhaps interprets what is said in a manner different from what was meant by the teacher. When communication takes place between two individuals through words, it is possible that what is understood by the listener is

different from what is meant to be conveyed by the speaker. Sometimes the students feel hurt. Sometimes they feel being targeted. These kinds of feelings sometimes arise in the mind of the listener and let this not happen. Let the teacher have that kindness, compassion, care and concern for the student or the listener. The students or listeners, in turn, have a respect or reverence or openness with reference to the teacher, so that a right kind of atmosphere is created for the communication to take place effectively.

Oṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ. Let there be peace, let there be peace, let there be peace. Let there not be any disturbances to the peace of our mind. We recognize that the peace of our mind can be disturbed from three possible sources. I myself can be a source of my own disturbance. Perhaps there maybe some physical pain, or there may be some emotional difficulty and these can disturb the composure of my mind, and then it is difficult for me to listen and to grasp. There may be disturbance from the environment, such as noise, other people. Or there can be disturbance from unknown sources too. So we pray that there be no disturbances from within, from without and from unknown sources. May the mind of both the teacher and the student, enjoy that peace and tranquility.¹

¹Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj and KK Davey.