

Celebrating New Year at AVG Anaikatti is something many devotees have done for years. The New Year function started exactly at 10.30am. The occasion was graced with several Swamis and Swaminis, It was well attended. The 11 dravya abhisekham was offered to Lord Dakshinamurti to the clear chanting of rudram and camakam lead by our temple Swaminis Sharadanandaji and Vedarthanandaji. After the abhisekham, it was wonderful to see our Acharyaji, Swami Sadatmanandaji go all around sprinkling holy water with mango leaves on each and everyone who was present there. It was the compassion and love of Swamiji reaching out and blessing each one of us a very special new year. While the alankara was being done, Sw Sadatmanandaji addressed us.

Sw Sadatmanandaji's New Year Ashirvacanam -

Acharyaji wished everybody a happy New Year . He said, we have several New Years and we have a need for all of them. Because every now and then, we feel the need to start afresh and press the refresh button with the hope that this New Year will be a better year. This hope alone keeps people going. This hope needs to be combined with prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is my way to relate and connect to Isvara. Sastra presents 3 types of prayer -Kayika, vacika and manasa. Kayika means physical form of prayer like puja, homa, teertha-yatra. Vacika is oral form of prayer like chanting mantras, rudram, etc. Manasa is a mental form of prayer like japa, chanting the glories of the lord mentally, etc. One can adopt any of these 3 forms of prayer and do reaching out actions to attain Isvara's grace in the form of punyam (favorable invisible result).

Regarding payers there are some misconceptions which need to be clarified.

- Prayer is an action and every action has a result. So the result of prayer is the grace of Isvara which is called punyam. Prayer is not a bribe to Isvara, as many people think. Bribe is something you give to an authority figure, to do something out -of-the-way-favor for you. But here we are not asking for any extra favour. We are requesting Bhagavan for something along with some action. Moreover, Bhagavan is so great that he cannot be bribed.
- Prayer is not a replacement to an action. Prayer and action are complimentary to each other. Like one person prayed regularly to Lord Anjaneya and promised 1 kg oil. Every prayer he increased the amount of oil. But nothing happened. He got angry with Anjaneya for not listening to his prayer. Then Anjaneya came and hit him with his gada and said- "First go buy a lottery ticket!" . So action and prayer are complimentary. They go together.

Every prayer whether kayika, vacika or manasa will definitely give some positive favourable result, but there is no guarantee that you will get whatever you want. But at the same time, prayer will never go waste. So never think that a prayer failed just because you did

not get what you wanted. Like a sick person prays that he should be out of his disease. He may not get fully cured, but he may get some positive advise which will guide him.

- Prayers is said to be full-fledged when it is accompanied by some action prescribed in sastra for punyam. Like you can sponsor puja, yajna, homa, some reaching out action. Otherwise, it may still give some result by expressing your wish and remembering Parmatma, but it will not be a full-fledged result unless related activities are done.
- Another important thing is that prayer is an action and it has to be accompanied by the attitude of prayerfulness. It is an awareness of the fact that everything is given and the given is not separate from the giver, Isvara. Whatever situation that I get in my life is coming from the order of Isvara. Everything that comes is prasada. If attitude of prayerfulness is there in life, then only I can be an abiding devotee. Otherwise, I am only a spasmodic devotee. Then all my actions will become prayers and my life will be full of the blessing and grace of Isvara.
- Our form of prayer will also grow as we grow in our pursuit. In the beginning you pray for yourself and later your prayer slowly expands to encompass your family, then community, then entire country, then it expands to all living beings. Also there is a refinement in your prayer. Initially you ask the Lord to give you this or that or some particular situation in life. There is nothing wrong in this prayer and you need not feel bad about asking. But as you grow, your prayer will be - *yat iccasi tatha kuru.*- Whatever you think is good, you do . Because I know that whatever you do will be good for me. Further we grow and we pray to Bhagavan - *O lord grant me that vision to see that whatever happens is an expression of your blessing.* There is a gradual expansion and refinement of our prayer. Thus with prayer and prayerful attitude, we grow into a person who is ready to discover that me and the altar of prayer, Isvara are one. That is the final result of prayers and prayerful attitude.

We pray to Bhagavan. Lord Dakshinamurti and Pujya Swamiji for their blessing that may the year 2023 be full of prayer and prayerful attitude. Om tat sat.

This was followed by a New Year message from Swami Shankaranandaji –

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride! If I just wish you a ‘happy New Year’, does that become a happy New Year? Does the wish we make always get fulfilled or do we have to do something? In our tradition, it is not just making a wish, but we should deserve what we wish for. And one has to be at the right place at the right time. So, what do we expect when we say ‘happy New Year’? Do we anticipate that the new year will bring something better? Time is a factor in our life. There is *Jyotiśśāstra* which tells of more favourable times for various things. But then more than time, we have to deserve what we want. For that we need to understand that there are at least two things — effort and grace.

*yathā hyekena chakreṇa na rathasya gatihbhavet |
evam puruṣakāreṇa vinā daivam na siddhyati ||*

(Like a chariot does not move with a single wheel, so also *daivam* does not bless unless there is adequate human-effort)

Daivam means grace, *Daivam* is the hidden factor which can prevent me from getting what I want. But what's in my hand is — my effort, my thinking, my values, my attitude, my understanding. Before I wish for something, I should ask myself - Is this what I really want? Is happiness something that is out there that I am trying to get or is happiness or contentment centred on me? What am I really expecting? What is it that makes a person happy? What makes us unhappy? If I accept a situation which is a fact, then I am comfortable being myself. If I do not accept it, then I am uncomfortable. The same situation makes one person happy and the other unhappy. Why? Because one accepts it and the other does not. The fact is I cannot change any situation, any fact. So rather than just say happy New Year to you, I would rather like to say - think about it. If there is a fact, what can you do about it? I have to learn to accept a fact, whether it is in the past or it is the possibility of what may come in the future. One can be anxious about the future. Or one can be crying about the past. Neither of which can be changed by me. Let what has to come, come. We can do what we can with proper thinking and proper attitude with a prayerful attitude.

To pray we need to understand what is *Īśvara*, As Pujya Swamiji always says - *We have to see that 'what is, is Īśvara'*. *Īśvara* is why something happens. Fire is hot and ice is cold. This is ordained. It is not in our hands. All this, everything which is here, is knowledge of *Īśvara*. If we understand *Īśvara* as the order then we will understand that we don't get anything other than what we deserve. To deserve something, we need to do what needs to be done. Right effort, right thought, right attitude, right values are to be cultivated. I pray to *Īśvara* that all of us are able to grow in terms of our understanding and make our understanding the basis of our actions. And that we are able to overcome our own likes and dislikes, do what we need to do, understand *Īśvara* as what is, and gracefully accept *Īśvara* as *Īśvara* is. Om tat sat.

This was followed by a New Year message by Swamini Brahmaleenananda—

She spoke in Tamil for the benefit of those who were not too familiar with English – Once Pujya Swamiji started his talk in Salem with this opening sentence, “*Everything is given.*” This is better expressed in Tamil as “*Ellam koduthu arulappattulladu*- Everything is given, given as a blessing by Isvara.” Whatever should be given to us according to what we deserve, Isvara blesses us by giving it to us at the right time. Generally we pray to Bhagavan and ask him for something. We expect that he should give me what I prayed for because I have prayed for it intensely. If He gives me what I asked for we think that God has acted justly and correctly. Based on the same idea we also say that when he has not given us what we wanted, we say he has made a mistake, he is not just. Thus we say that God is infallible when he answers our prayers and is fallible whenever he doesn't. But it is not so. We have to say it the other way round as “What is infallible, what can never go

wrong is Isvara-tattvam.” In His master computer nothing ever goes wrong. It is not our present actions alone that decide a result but also our past actions, even done long, long ago. They also influence the result. Sometimes we pray for something, while there are others praying for just the opposite. Whose prayers will He answer? If he answers our prayer, He will be infallible, but by not answering the prayers of others He would become fallible. Sometimes we pray for something which we think is best for us based on our limited knowledge. But it may not be the best for us in the long run. Therefore, Bhagavan with His sarvajnatvam, all-knowingness, looks at the present and previous actions of all and gives the result which will be for the good of the majority. His judgement never goes wrong though we judge Him based on our limited knowledge.

Therefor let us begin the new year with this prayer, “Oh Lord, I pray for something according to my limited knowledge. Please give me the maturity to accept whatever is given with the understanding that you know what is best and what I deserve.” Om tat sat.

The alankara to Lord Dakshinmamurti done by our priests Bhatji and Krishna was as always wonderful. You just keep on looking again and again at the Lord who glowed with all the decoration, flowers and jewellery. This was followed by prasadam and sumptuous lunch in the dining hall. Mahabhisekham at the temple, blessings of the Lord, satsang and new year message with several positive thoughts for the year from our swamis & swaminis, followed by nice prasadam and lunch. What better way to start the New Year!! One can only feel grateful, blessed and recharged to start 2023 !

- Report by Ms. Padma

