

धर्मसन्देश Dharma Sandesh

a quarterly newsletter of Bharatiya Mandir, Middletown, NY

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः। Let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere. RigVeda 1.89.1

नमस्ते Namaste

ॐ – OM. With the blessings and grace of the Supreme Lord (परमात्मा), we are proud to present this issue of Dharma Sandesh.

Winter is here. The Arctic cold wind blows, making all people shiver and shrink. Very soon, it will begin snowing. The barren trees signal to us one stage of the Life Cycle of Births and Deaths, that is Samsara (संसार). But then again, it is a cycle, and soon the Winter will be over and Spring will arrive. And the cycle continues...

Very soon, the new calendar year will start, and we will worship Lord Ganapati to ward off any and all obstacles in our path to realizing our objectives. We will then be celebrating the harvest festivals of Lohri, Makara Sankranti, and Pongal. That will also mark the Sun's transit into Makara Rashi (मकर राशि) and the advent of Uttarayana Punya Kala (उत्तरायण पुण्यकाल).

We will also be performing the Srimad Bhagavad Gita Maha Yajna (श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता महायज्ञ), worshipping the Supreme Lord Krishna and reading all 700 shlokas of the Gita. Along with reading the Gita, we should remember to implement some of the Lord's teachings into our own daily lives.

We will also celebrate Vasant Panchami (वसंत पञ्चमी) and worship Mata Saraswati (माता सरस्वती). The highlight of this quarter will be devout celebration of Maha Shivaratri (महा शिवरात्रि) when all devotees will gather to worship and venerate Lord Shiva, the God of Annihilation and Purification.

In this issue, I write about Yaksha Prashna (यक्ष प्रश्न), the questions that Lord Yama, the God of Death and Justice, asks Yudhisthira, the eldest and the most

virtuous of the Pandavas. This is a wonderful and most thought-provoking question-and-answer session, where Lord Yama tests Yudhisthira on his sense of Dharma, righteousness and justice. Dr. Padma Sundaram writes about Devi Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, Music, and the Arts.

We hope that readers will continue to enjoy reading these articles and gain some insight into our Sanatana Dharma. Let us all pray to the Paramaatma (परमात्मा) to shower His blessings upon all His children!!

Sincerely,
Your Editorial Board
Web: www.bharatiyamandir.org
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सुभाषिता Subhaashitaa

In this section, we present a Sanskrit quotation and its interpretation/meaning.

विद्वत्त्वं च नृपत्वं च नैव तुल्यं कदाचन ।
स्वदेशे पूज्यते राजा विद्वान् सर्वत्र पूज्यते ॥

vidvatvam-ca-nrupatvam-ca-naiva-tulyam-kadaacana ।
svadeshe-pujyate-rajavidvaan-sarvatra-pujyate ॥

There can be no comparison between knowledge and royalty. The king is worshipped only in his own kingdom. However, a knowledgeable man is worshipped everywhere.

Knowledge always trumps wealth, power, and other attributes in the end. A knowledgeable man is always highly respected and adored the world over. We should always venerate knowledge and learning, and always strive to achieve more of the same.

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

साई प्रेरणा **Baba's Teachings**

In this section, we present a teaching of Sri Sai Baba.

Sri Satya Sai Baba spoke thus – “Some are born healthy and some others, unhealthy. Some lead prosperous and carefree lives, while others toil throughout their lives in dire poverty. Certainly, it can be argued that there are signs enough of the partiality that the Creation or Creator reveals. Such inference may even appear justified from the ordinary man's point of view. The pure stream of spiritual culture declares that this is not true at all! God is not the cause of either misery or joy, of good fortune or bad! Then, who brings about the evil and the good? The answer is—we ourselves! Rain falls equally on ploughed land as well as that which is not ploughed. But only the ploughed land derives benefit therefrom! The clouds are not to blame. The fault lies in the ignorant idler who lets his land lie fallow. The grace of God is ever at hand. It has no more or less, no ups or downs. We draw upon it, to a greater or lesser degree, or let it go by, or use it for our good. – Sathya Sai Vahini, Chap 10: "The Yogis".

Contributed by Dr. Vijaya Dasari

ज्ञानविहार **JnanaVihara**

In this section, we present articles on Hinduism, Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, and related philosophy.

Yaksha Prashna (यक्ष प्रश्न)

Yaksha Prashna (Questions asked by the Yaksha) is also called Dharma Baka Upakhyana (धर्म बक उपाख्यान - the Story of Dharmaraja (Yudhishtira युधिष्ठिर) and the Crane). This story appears in the Mahabharata in Book 3 named Vana Parva (वनपर्व), chapter/sub-parva named Aranya Parva (अरण्यपर्व - sections 309 to 313).

In this story, the Pandava princes had almost completed 12 years in the forests (वनवास) and were about to embark on their 13th and last year of exile incognito (अज्ञातवास).

Once a Brahmana came to the princes and said that his Arani (अरणि - the pair of wooden blocks used to generate fire by friction) had gotten entangled in a deer's antlers and that the deer had run away into the forest. He was upset as he was not able to start the fire for his Yajna / Agnihotra (यज्ञ / अग्निहोत्र). The Pandava princes set out to catch hold of the deer and retrieve the Arani.

The Pandavas followed the hoof marks of the deer throughout the day and went deep into the forest. Yudhishtira, also known as Dharma Putra, the eldest of the Pandavas, became very tired and wanted to drink some water before continuing with the chase. He sent Nakula, his younger brother, to fetch water in his quiver from a nearby lake. Nakula agreed and set off. He spotted a beautiful lake with fresh crystal-clear water. The lake was bare of any living beings except a crane (Baka बक).

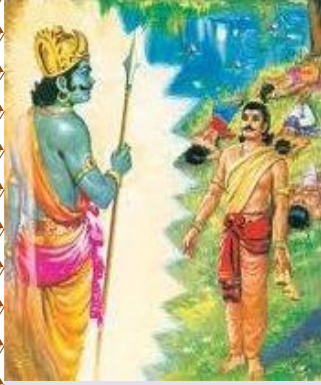
Nakula was very thirsty and he proceeded to drink the crystal-clear water. At that time the crane spoke to him, “Oh Nakula, the water of this lake will turn poisonous if you drink it without answering my questions.” Nakula did not heed the crane's words and he drank the water. Instantly he fell dead.

When Nakula did not return with the water, Yudhishtira sent Sahadeva to fetch the water. When he arrived at the lake, Sahadeva saw his dead brother on the banks of the lake. Since he was extremely thirsty, he proceeded to drink the water. The crane also warned him, but he ignored its words and drank the water. He also fell down dead.

In a similar manner, both Arjuna and Bheema died as well, one after another. Seeing all his four brothers missing, Yudhishtira came in search of them. Since he was very thirsty, he too tried to drink the water from the lake. But when the crane warned him, he stopped and decided to answer the crane's questions. However, he said, “as a crane, you have no power to kill my brothers who are great warriors. So reveal yourself to me before asking any questions.”

Then the crane revealed itself as a Yaksha (nature-spirit). The Yaksha asked Yudhishtira many questions, and Yudhishtira answered all the questions to the Yaksha's satisfaction. The Yaksha was very happy and told Yudhishtira, I will revive

one of your brothers. Whom, among your brothers, do you want to see alive?” Yudhishtira asked for Nakula’s life. The surprised Yaksha asked him, “Oh king, why did you choose Nakula, when you could have chosen Bheema or Arjuna?” Yudhishtira replied, “O Yaksha, my father had two wives – Kunti and Madri. Both mothers are equal in my eyes. I am alive; so my mother Kunti has one son. So, I want my mother Madri also to have a son alive.”



The Yaksha was very pleased and he imparted life back to all the Pandavas. Upon Yudhishtira’s request, he revealed himself as Lord Yama, the God of Death, Judgment and Justice (Yama is Dharma personified and the father of Yudhishtira).

Given below are the pointed questions asked by the Yaksha and the pithy and very direct replies given by Yudhishtira (*with due credits and respect to Shri P.R. Ramachander, who initially translated the entire set of questions and answers*).

Yaksha Prashna

Q: Who makes the Sun rise?

A: The Brahman (the formless, all pervading God, the Supreme Spirit) makes the sun rise.

Q: Who travels on both sides of the Sun?

A: Devas travel on both sides of the Sun.

Q: Who makes the Sun set?

A: Dharma makes the Sun set.

Q: Where does the Sun establish himself?

A: Sun establishes himself in truth.

Q: How does a man become learned?

A: He becomes an expert by studying the Vedas.

Q: How does a man become great?

A: Man becomes great by Tapas (austerities).

Q: How does a man become secure?

A: Man becomes secure by courage.

Q: How does a man becomes wise?

A: He becomes wise by living with learned wise men.

Q: What is godliness to Brahmanas?

A: Learning of Vedas is Godliness to the Brahmanas (Brahmins – people with knowledge as vocation)

Q: What is Dharma (duty) of Brahmanas?

A: Tapas (austerity) is the Dharma of Brahmanas.

Q: What is the human attribute of Brahmanas?

A: Their liability to death is their human attribute.

Q: What is sinful action for Brahmanas?

A: Finding fault with others is sinful action.

Q: What is godliness to Kshatriyas?

A: Weapons are Godliness to Kshatriyas (fighters and defenders of the nation).

Q: What is Dharma (duty) for Kshatriyas?

A: Carrying out Yajna is the Dharma for Kshatriyas.

Q: What is the human attribute of Kshatriyas?

A: Fear is the human attribute of Kshatriyas.

Q: What is sinful action for Kshatriyas?

A: Not giving protection to those who seek it from them is sinful action for Kshatriyas.

Q: What is the Sama Veda of Yajna?

A: Life is the Sama Veda (song) of Yajna.

Q: What is the Yajus (Yajur-Veda) of Yajna?

A: Mind is the Yajus (formula) for Yajna.

Q: What is the refuge of the Yajna?

A: Rig Veda is the refuge of the Yajna.

Q: What does Yajna always obey?

A: It always obeys the tenets of Rig Veda.

Q: What is of foremost value for farmers?

A: Rain is of foremost value for farmers.

Q: What is of foremost value for those who sow?

A: Quality seed is of foremost value for them.

Q: What is of foremost value for those who want to live stable lives?

A: Having good cows is of foremost value for that

gives stable wealth (In earlier times, cows were the preferred form of wealth for many people).

Q: What is of foremost value for one to bring forth?

A: Offspring is of foremost value to bring forth.

Q: Which strong, rich and clever man is considered to be not breathing, even if he breathes?

A: The one who does not look after Gods, guests, servants, ancestors, and his own self is considered as not breathing, even if he breathes.

Q: Which is heavier than earth?

A: Mother is heavier (more important) than earth.

Q: Which is higher than the Heavens?

A: Father is higher (in importance) than the Heavens.

Q: Which is faster than wind?

A: Mind is faster than wind.

Q: What outnumbers the number of blades of grass?

A: Thoughts and worries outnumber grass.

Q: What does not close its eyes even while sleeping?

A: Fish does not close its eyes while sleeping.

Q: What does not move even after birth?

A: Eggs do not move even after birth.

Q: What does not have a heart?

A: A stone does not have a heart.

Q: What swells with its own impetus?

A: The river swells with its own impetus.

Q: Who is the friend for one going to distant lands?

A: Education is his only friend.

Q: Who is the friend for the householder?

A: The wife is his friend.

Q: Who is the friend for the sick person?

A: The physician is his friend.

Q: Who is the friend for the one who is going to die?

A: Charity is the only friend for such a person.

Q: Who is the guest for all creatures?

A: Agni (Fire) is the guest to all.

Q: What is the eternal duty?

A: Following the laws of Sanaatana Dharma.

Q: What is Amrita (nectar)?

A: Milk of the cow is nectar.

Q: What is the Universe?

A: Air is the Universe (space is considered waterlike).

Q: Who travels alone?

A: Sun travels alone.

Q: Who takes birth again and again?

A: The moon takes birth again and again.

Q: What is the antidote for cold?

A: Fire is the antidote for cold.

Q: What is the vessel that can contain everything?

A: Earth is the vessel that can contain everything.

Q: Where does virtue (Dharma) normally reside?

A: Dharma normally resides in broad-mindedness.

Q: Where does fame normally reside?

A: Fame normally resides in charity.

Q: Where does Heaven normally reside?

A: Heaven normally resides in truth.

Q: Where does pleasure normally reside?

A: Pleasure normally resides in good conduct.

Q: What is the soul for man?

A: Son (Atmaja-born out of soul) is the soul for man.

Q: Who is man's companion bestowed by God?

A: Wife is man's companion bestowed by God.

Q: What aids man in making a living?

A: Rain helps man in making a living.

Q: What is the place where man ultimately reaches?

A: Charity is the place where man ultimately reaches.

Q: Which is the best giver of wealth?

A: Tireless effort is the best giver of wealth.

Q: What is the best among all possessions?

A: Knowledge is the best among all possessions.

Q: What is the best among blessings?

A: Good health is the best among blessings.

Q: What is the best among pleasures?

A: Contentment is the best among pleasures

Q: What is the highest Dharma?

A: Non-violence is highest Dharma.

Q: Which action always gives good results?

A: The Yajna of the Vedas always gives good results.

Q: By controlling what, will man have no regrets?

A: By controlling his mind, man will have no regrets.

Q: Friendship with whom lasts forever?

A: Friendship with godly persons will last forever.

Q: By renouncing what, will man become amenable?

A: By renouncing pride, man will become amenable.

Q: By renouncing what, will man have no regrets?

A: By renouncing anger, man will have no regrets.

Q: By renouncing what, will man become rich?

A: By renouncing desires, man becomes rich.

Q: By renouncing what, will man will become happy?

A: By renouncing avarice, man will become happy.

Q: Why should we give to Brahmins?

A: It is to do "just and fair action".

Q: Why should we give to dancers and actors?

A: It is for attaining fame.

Q: Why should we give to servants?

A: It is to support them and make them obey you.

Q: Why should we give to the king?

A: It is to avoid fear.

Q: With what is the world enveloped?

A: The world is enveloped by ignorance.

Q: What is the world?

A: The soul is the world.

Q: Why does the world not shine?

A: World does not shine because of bad behavior.

Q: Why do friends leave and go away?

A: Man's greed causes friends to leave and go away.

Q: Why cannot man reach Heaven?

A: Man cannot reach Heaven due to attachment to this material world.

Q: For want of what, is a man considered dead?

A: For want of wealth.

Q: For want of what, is a country considered dead?

A: For want of a good ruler.

Q: When does a Shraadh yield no results?

A: When it is performed without a learned pundit.

Q: When does a Yajna yield no results?

A: When no compensation is given to the Brahmins.

Q: What constitutes "the way"?

A: The way of "Godly men" is the only way.

Q: What is water?

A: Space is water.

Q: What is food?

A: Whatever the cow gives (milk-yoghurt-butter-ghree). *These are used in Yajna, which results in rains, which help crops grow and yield grains.*

Q: What is poison?

A: Begging from others is poison.

Q: What is the proper time to perform Shraadh?

A: When you get a learned Brahmin. *This is one of the most important requirements of the Shraadh.*

Q: What is the grammar for austerity?

A: Standing in one's own Dharma is austerity.

Q: What is true restraint ("dama")?

A: Controlling the mind is true restraint.

Q: What constitutes forgiveness?

A: Forgiveness is in not enduring enmity.

Q: What is shame?

A: Not withdrawing from unworthy acts is shame.

Q: What is Jnana (true knowledge)?

A: Jnana is knowing the real Divinity and Truth.

Q: What is tranquility (“sama”)?

A: Being peaceful within one’s mind and heart.

Q: What is the best mercy?

A: Wishing happiness for all is the best mercy.

Q: What is simplicity?

A: Having the same right attitude towards everybody.

Q: Who is the enemy that cannot be defeated by man?

A: Anger is that enemy.

Q: Which is the disease that has no end?

A: Avarice is the disease that has no end.

Q: Who is considered a holy man?

A: He who loves all and does good for all.

Q: Who is considered “not holy”?

A: He who does not have mercy.

Q: What is ignorance?

A: Not understanding one’s duty (Dharma).

Q: What is honor?

A: The pride in oneself is called honor.

Q: What is laziness?

A: Not doing one’s duty (Dharma) is laziness.

Q: What is sorrow?

A: Ignorance is sorrow.

Q: What is steadiness?

A: Standing in and following one’s own Dharma.

Q: What is courage?

A: Controlling the five senses is courage.

Q: What is a good bath?

A: Cleaning the mind of the accumulated dirt.

Q: What is the best charity one can do?

A: Saving the life of another creature.

Q: Who is a scholar?

A: He who knows Dharma is considered a scholar.

Q: Who is an atheist?

A: He who is ignorant and unaware is an atheist.

Q: Who is ignorant?

A: An atheist is ignorant.

Q: What is the source of desire?

A: Objects that a person possesses cause desire.

Q: What is passion?

A: That which leads to birth and death passion.

Q: What is considered as unhealthy competition?

A: Unnecessary turmoil of the mind.

Q: What is pride?

A: Insensitive ignorance is pride.

Q: What is hypocrisy?

A: Setting a religious standard is hypocrisy.

Q: What is the grace of God?

A: The fruit of our own charitable actions.

Q: What is wickedness?

A: Speaking ill of others and enjoying it.

Q: When will the contradictory notions of wealth, passion and Dharma come together?

A: When your wife and Dharma agree with each other, then these concepts come together.

Q: Which man will reach the indestructible hell?

A: He who tempts a poor Brahmin with charity of wealth, but does not give will go to everlasting hell. He who imputes falsehood to the Vedas, the scriptures, the Brahmanas, the Gods, and ancestors will go to everlasting hell. He who has wealth, but does not give in charity or stop being greedy will go to everlasting hell.



Q: By what, O king, birth, behavior, study, or learning does a person become a Brahmana?

A: Neither birth, nor the learning of Vedas, nor the knowledge of science are necessary aspects of Brahmanism. It is all due to one’s own character. A person

with good character never becomes bad and one with bad character is always considered bad. Only the person who is engaged in Vedic rituals and who has full control over his senses is the real Brahmin.

Q: What does one get when one speaks sweet words?

A: He gets friends.

Q: What does one get when he plans well?

A: He attains success.

Q: What does one get when he has many friends?

A: He lives happily.

Q: What does one get when he is devoted to Dharma?

A: He attains salvation.

Q: Who is truly happy?

A: He who is not in debt, who can cook a simple meal by himself, and who does not, unnecessarily, go out of his house, is happy.

Q: What is surprise?

A: The fact that people think of themselves as immortal, in spite of seeing people die every day.

Q: What is the path of Dharma?

A: The path trodden by the godly and great.

Q: What is the event that happens daily?

A: The earth is a very big cooking vessel. The sky is the lid. Night and day form the firewood. The Sun forms the fire, and the seasons and months form the ladles. The cook called "Time" puts all movable and immovable things into this vessel and keeps stirring.

Q: Who is called "Purusha" among the living?

A: He who does good deeds and seeks nothing in return is Purusha. His fame spreads all over by itself.

Q: Who pervades in everything?

A: He who considers desire and hatred, pleasure and pain, what is coming and what is being lost, etc. with equanimity is called "Brahma Jnani" (knower of Brahman) and he is the one who pervades everything.

Sources: The Mahabharata; Dharma Shastra at

<http://www.dharmasastra.net/yaksha.htm>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/maha/>

<http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Yaksha-Prashna--An-Encounter-between-Dharma,-the-father-and-Yudhishtira,-the-son-1.aspx>

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

Devi Saraswati (देवी सरस्वती)

Mata Saraswati is the Hindu Goddess of Arts and Sciences, Music, and Knowledge. She is the consort of Lord Brahma. The scriptures state that Lord Brahma created the Universe with Devi Saraswati's knowledge and with the help of Devi Lakshmi and Devi Parvathi. The Devis form a Trinity and help Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva in the creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe respectively.



In different parts of India, Devi Saraswati is known by different names. In Karnataka, she is known as Sharada (शारदा one who loves autumn), Sharadamba, Vani (वाणी – speech), Veenapani (वीणापाणी one who plays the Veena). In Tamilnadu, she is known as

Kalaimagal (Mother of fine arts), Kalaivani, and Sharada. She is also known as Veena-Pustaka Dharini, Vakdevi (one who gives speech), and Varadanayaki (one who bestows boons). She is known as Chaduvula Talli (mother who gives the ability to read) in Andhra.

History: In Rig Veda, Saraswati is a river as well as the personification of a Goddess. In post-Vedic era Devi Saraswati became increasingly associated with literature, arts, and music. In Hinduism, She represents Cosmic knowledge, intelligence, creativity, consciousness, education, music, arts, eloquence and power. She is the Mother of all Vedas. That is why it is customary to recite Saraswati Vandana at the beginning and end of all Vedic lessons and discourses. Saraswati Devi bestows not only academic knowledge, but also Divine knowledge. Like the river, Saraswati represents the free flow of knowledge.

According to some old mythological works, it is noted that Saraswati is the daughter of Lord Shiva and Devi Durga. In that article, She is depicted as having four arms representing the four aspects of human personality in learning— mind, intellect, alertness and ego. She has sacred scriptures in one hand, and a lotus in the second hand, symbolizing true knowledge. With her other two hands, she plays the music of love and life on the Veena, a string instrument.

Characteristics: Devi Saraswati is associated with flowing water in her role as the Goddess of knowledge. She is depicted as a beautiful woman with four arms, wearing a pure white saree, seated on a lotus flower, or riding a swan. She is holding a Veena in her arms and has a book in her hand. According to the writer Sailen Debnath, there are seven characteristics that symbolize Goddess Saraswati as the Goddess of knowledge:

- [1] Her feminine aspect signifies creativity (as only a woman can create a human being in her womb).
- [2] White color signifies spotless character and immaculate mind.
- [3] She is seated on an inverted Lotus, which means “to be in search of light of knowledge.”
- [4] White Swan is Devi’s vehicle, and this signifies inquisitiveness.
- [5] Goddess Saraswati plays the Veena, which signifies harmony in all aspects of the human mind.
- [6] The Goddess is worshipped with a red odorless flower called Palasha Pushpa, indicative of being free from preconception and prejudice.
- [7] Ink pot, books, pen are all symbols of learning.



Devi Saraswati is worshipped all over India. Different regions celebrate the festival of the Devi at different times. In South India, and some parts of North India it is celebrated on the 7th or 9th day of Navaratri. In East India, Devi Saraswati is

worshipped on Vasant Panchami (in February). Everywhere, at the time of the Puja, books, pens, musical instruments, and tools of the trade are placed in front of Devi Saraswati and are worshipped. Children take the books out on the next day and read a chapter in front of the Goddess.

People recite this shloka and request Devi Saraswati to bestow knowledge upon them.

सरस्वती नमस्तुभ्यं वरदे कामरूपिणी ।

विद्यारम्भं करिष्यामि सिद्धिर्भवतु मे सदा ॥

Saraswati-namas-tubhyam-varade-kamarupini
vidyaarambham-karishyami-siddhir-bhavatu-me-sada

References: David Kinsley, “Hindu Goddesses,”

S. Shankaranarayanan, “Glory of Divine Mother,”
Wikipedia

Contributed by Dr. Padma Sundaram



Our grateful thanks to Mr. Raj Ravilla, P.E. for the generous donation of \$10,000.00 to India Temple Foundation (Bharatiya Mandir). Mr. Ravilla, who acquired an Engineering & Land Surveying business in Circleville, NY recently, plans to move with his family to Orange County soon. We welcome him and his family.

Some Upcoming Special Mandir Events

New Year – Vedic Havan and Bhajans	Wednesday, January 1
Lohri	Monday, January 13
Makara Sanskranti / Pongal / Uttarayana Punya Kaala	Tuesday, January 14
Srimad Bhagavad-Gita Maha Yajna	Sunday, January 19
Vasant Panchami	Tuesday, February 4
Maha Shivaratri	Thursday, February 27

Mrs. Nayana and Mr. Ajay Patel have generously sponsored the printing of copies of this issue of Dharma Sandesh. Devotees may note that all the writing of the content and the editing of the newsletter are strictly voluntary.

Our quarterly newsletter is called “**Dharma Sandesh**” (धर्मसन्देश). “Dharma”, in simple terms, refers to righteousness, conduct, a sense of duty, virtue, and the ultimate truth. “Sandesh” means a message or news. So, Dharma Sandesh refers to a message of Dharma.

Dharma Sandesh Newsletter Editorial Board:

Dr. Narasim Banavara

Dr. Padma Sundaram