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Moksha through Seva

Neither a blood drive nor a bone marrow drive has been held at my Mandir, but there have been focus groups where the ideas of blood drives and bone marrow drives have been discussed. Educating the community about these drives is important to growth of the Hindu community and of the future generations. The importance of these drives is presented in the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and in everyday values we teach our children. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna discusses the importance of the three yogas—karma yoga, bhakti yoga, and jnana yoga—and how they will help us attain moksha. Karma yoga, best described, is the idea of “inaction in action and action in action.” Karma yoga requests us to take action without any attachment to results. Bhakti yoga is a path of worship which comprises of remembering God at all times, regardless of what action is being performed. Jnana yoga is the path to wisdom that comprises of accepting the idea that the Brahman is the ultimate reality. These yogas are the fundamental pillars on which Hinduism rests as they provide a firm foundation to base our lives upon. They teach us to do well to others without ulterior motives, remember the Lord that gave us the opportunity to prove ourselves in this world, and remember that one should not live life with materialistic intentions. A blood drive or bone marrow drive takes into account each of these yogas, and teaches the community the pillars of Hinduism while enforcing the values that elders have been preaching.

Karma yoga is a mode of worship that asks to take action for others without any ulterior motives or benefits for oneself. The act of giving blood is one in which there is no individual benefit. Giving blood requires a good heart where benefit is indirectly felt in the form of happiness. In this inaction is seen through action, and action through inaction. Many healthy people who are capable of donating blood have a material connection to their blood, where they feel that a loss will make them feel incomplete or they will have a medical problem when donating blood. This feeling prevents them from fulfilling their karma yoga as they are presented with the opportunity to save another's life while hoping for nothing more than contentment in the process, yet they let this opportunity pass by because of their attachment to material objects. Blood drives positively affect the community as they show people of all ages, from children to elders, saving another's life by letting go of our desire on material objects is a firm path to happiness.

Bhakti yoga and jnana yoga are also achieved when seen through the eyes of Ramanujacharya. Ramanujacharya preached that God is not a being that sleeps on a snake or has a third eye, but in fact he is the good will in all of us. He presents himself in every action that we perform with a good heart and a strong mind. When blood is being given, we may not be thinking of God, but we are performing an action that will help save the good will and generosity in someone. We are feeding the God in us with the good will that we perform to others. We fulfill our bhakti yoga by not only performing a good action that enforces our godly nature but we also fulfill our jnana yoga by forgetting our attachment to the material world and remembering that selflessness is a value of the Brahman. By forgetting the material self to help another survive is forgetting oneself to become one with God. This idea of interacting with God through actions helps the community grow, and instead of each person trying to attain salvation

on their own, they work together. These blood and bone marrow drives form a sense of commitment and dedication within the community, forming a stronger and more loving family.

While the community grows, I also grow. In addition to spiritual growth, I also attain knowledge through blood and bone marrow drives that foster my intellectual growth. Although there not have been blood or bone marrow drives at my Mandir, I have participated at some in my university. While walking past the blood and platelet center there would be posters advertising “Donate blood, save a life!” I did not understand how donating my blood would save a life until I participated in one and learned where this blood goes, how it is process, screened, and then utilized in a hospital setting. The kindness that people show during these drives is enough to save a person’s life and maybe a million more.

Having participated in a blood drive and being an active member of my Mandir when back home, I hope to hold more discussions in focus groups relating to blood and bone marrow drives and hopefully organize one at the Mandir. This service does not only help the community grow spiritually and intellectually, but it brings people together for a good cause. A blood drive would help teach the values of giving, compassion, selflessness, sharing, and generosity that are emphasized when every discussion groups or balvihar session are held. It is said that children follow their parent’s example, and when parents follow the values they teach their children, it will pave a path for good morals. When good people with good values are brought together for a good cause, a strong community with good values where future generations can thrive is created.