

Charan Sparsh: A tradition of Spirituality

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Abstract

In the present paper, attempt has been made to explain, establish and experiment the impact of charan sparsh on various aspects of life and their scientific impact on body posture management, mental development etc. Explanations are being considered on the basis of Mindfulness, Emotions, Instinct, Heartbeat along with Positive and healthy aura. The impact has been analyzed extensively and represented herein.

A. Introduction

“Charan” means “feet” and “sparsh” means “to touch”. Together they mean “to touch one’s feet”. It has been a tradition since time immemorial to touch the feet of one’s father and mother, teachers and elders. They in turn bless the person touching their feet by placing their hand on or over the prostrating person’s head. Prostration is done daily, while meeting with elders and particularly on important occasions like the beginning of a new task, birthdays, festivals etc. In the Atharva Veda, great importance has been given to the way a person greets others when meeting them. Through “charan sparsh”, an individual exhibits the respect one holds for the elderly, the wise, and those with ideals and an outstanding contribution to society. It is a way of accepting their superiority. This promotes humility in an individual and also makes the other person feel important. Thereby a person learns to be humble, courteous and respectful. The physical effort involved provides useful exercise and promotes vigor, enthusiasm and concern for others, rids tension and is motivating. In the Mahabharata, the Yaksha asked Yudhishtir, “How can a person become great and powerful?”. Yudhishtir responded, “By devotedly touching the feet of the mother and

father, teachers and elders and by serving them until they are content to give blessings that make a person great and powerful.” Immediately preceding the war, the Pandavas sought the blessings of Bhishma, their elders and their teachers.

In life, one of the most difficult things to do is to repay the debt owed to one’s parents. In the Manusmriti, it is said that the problems faced by parents during childbirth and upbringing cannot be repaid even in a hundred years. It is also explained that the father is like Prajaapati and the mother is like Earth. Serving them has been described as penance. One who serves parents in real earnest can be said to have respect for all religions in the world. It is further stated that those householders who serve their parents regularly attain the three worlds. They achieve success everywhere. These people are blessed through glory and honor and find great contentment. It is also stated that whoever respectfully greets elders and teachers is blessed with strength, knowledge, honor and long life. Before beginning to learn the Vedas, and after the learning is complete, the student must regularly greet and touch the feet of his teachers. This is Brahmanjali—an ideal offering to them. Drawing close to the teacher one must

touch the right foot with the right hand and left foot with the left hand.

The traditions and conventions found in various countries and the religions of the world hold their own importance. Such traditions reflect the originality of a particular culture or mankind. Indian civilization and Indian culture are the most ancient in the world. Indian culture has impressed other civilizations and cultural groups in the world. The traditions and conventions established in Indian culture are founded on the strong base of scientific facts and in its core there are many cultural mysteries. Great ascetics (Rishis) of the ancient times founded these traditions. That Rishis have noted their attainments, research and observations in their sacred scriptures. In later time, those truths, facts and findings have become an integral part of religion and religious rituals. Perhaps, very few of us know about those hidden secrets garbed under the cloak of tradition or convention.

In Aryan culture there is a well-set tradition of touching the feet of our father, mother, guru, teacher, elders and honorable seniors. That is the way of saluting them. It is part of our conventional etiquette. But the new generation of this modern age hardly prefers it. They don't like it. Now a days we don't find people doing Namaskar – Pranam Vandan (kind of salute), when they meet. "Hi" or "Hello" is the modern way. We have discarded ancient conventions and ancient traditions considering them to be ancient culture. These days we are drifting away from our value oriented traditions and being swept away in the waves and currents of modern civilization. Modern life – modern civilization means to trail behind the western culture. Our life and philosophy are ruthlessly invaded by the ill impact of the western culture. We are copying their concepts without any logic. At times such acts and behavior neither have any meaning nor any benefit.

Let us come to the main point. Since thousands of years there exists the tradition of saluting. We salute in due respect by the touching of feet of our elders, our seniors. This tradition is still visible in many families. We should try to grasp the secret behind touching their feet. Our Rishis

have observed four beneficial factors present in such an act. An act of touching the feet of our elders gives strength, intellect, knowledge and fame. There is scientific reason to back and support this conclusion.

B. Impact of Charan Sparsh

It is extremely important to understand a few significant states of mind and emotions and their long standing effects on the body, how they are backed by science, before we delve deep in to Charan Sparsh.

Mindfulness is the basic ability to be fully aware of where we are, what we speak, how we behave and emote. This ability makes the body and mind take stock of any situation. Mostly, the mind gets distracted very soon and drifts away from the present, which we call distraction. This is the first step towards anxiety as we no longer are confident about what is happening around us. While we are physically present, we are mentally absent. Practices like meditation, sports, exercise of specific kinds have been established methods for improving this ability of mindfulness. Till, mindfulness is no longer a practice, but a way of life. Experience and experiments have long since demonstrated the benefits of mindfulness for our well being, happiness and relationships both at home and at work.

Emotions depict the subjective state of mind. An emotion is a reaction to any sort of stimuli and has a far reaching impact on our well being. This reaction is also backed by science. The limbic system in the brain release chemicals and hormones which incite reactions and emotions. In fact, there exist different hormones for different emotions. Impact of emotions can never be undermined as they impact the functioning and chemistry of the body. We are all aware that positive emotions bring smiles to our faces and negative emotions can manifest irrational behavior and disorders in our body, starting from unjustifiable body language and communication to atypical physical issues like sweating, etc. Counselors in this area have gained immense credence and they use therapeutic measures for individuals to

understand emotions and control them. The importance of enhanced emotional intelligence has also gained traction.

Instinct – When we are good at understanding ourselves and our emotions, then we use emotions as instincts. Instinct has been widely accepted as an unlearned yet auto response to specific stimuli. This can be comprehended as stereotyped and associated with genetic behavior patterns. Instincts are affected by our inner selves. Hence, while we are working on positive thoughts and positive emotions, we are automatically graduating to gut feelings and instincts which tend to enhance our inner selves toward better mental well being.

Heartbeat – Emotions and emotional processes impact changes in heart rate. This is well recorded through scientific methods. Negative emotions can manifest into palpitations and hyper ventilation if not kept under control. Prolonged negative emotional states can lead to anxiety and bouts of depression. This corroborates the importance being accorded to therapeutic measures to control emotions. Science has established that hostility and belligerence are risk factors for cardiovascular events. There is a direct relationship between hostility and intensity of cardiovascular diseases. The more one can tune in to their heartbeat, the better chances the person has to be calm and relaxed, which is ultimately the aim.

Positive and healthy aura – A positive and healthy aura reflects a healthy body and mind. Ailments can be diagnosed by analyzing changes in aura. In fact, they can be detected much before the actual onset of the ailment. Emotional states of mind can be evaluated through aura. We have always liked a certain set of people more than the others, based on the aura they have exuded. Furthermore, we have also been deeply affected and influenced by people with positive aura. Amidst many other measures which can be practiced to inculcate a positive aura, lingering and hanging on to stressful thoughts and instances can be detrimental to a person's well being.

Mindfulness, specifically by living fully in the present moment goes a long way towards improving the state of mind and positive energy. While we speak about positive energy, it is appropriate to add that if the energy level in the body can be brought to a certain level of vibrancy and intensity, we shall understand that hands are great instruments. For example, Yoga professes that the ring finger can control the universe and is the key to fundamental human energy system. Different hand gestures also insinuate different messages. Science has established use of specific hand “mudras” to distress and relax anywhere and anytime.

C. Discussions

After analyzing the above states of mind and emotions, it is pertinent to state that we do every thing for a reason. Five decades back, remuneration and desire for learning were the two undisputed motivators for pursuit of any profession. This has given way to physical and mental well being, which became overtly visible during the pandemic. From ages, consciously or otherwise, people have been emoting and behaving in ways that are believed to add to their happiness, which now we refer to as physical and mental well being – terms which are commonly accepted and hence used. That includes the act of Charan Sparsh, which is the topic under study. Whether it is this act or the use of hand gestures or “mudras”, people have adopted these gestures in view of the profound health benefits.

In the epic Mahabharata, the Yaksha asked Dharmaraj Yudhisthir, the eldest of the Pandava brothers; as to how a person can become great and powerful. Dharmaraj Yudhisthir had replied that this can be achieved when we start serving our parents, our teachers and our elders with an act of Charan Sparsh. This is also known as “Brahmanjali” – an ideal offering.

D. Concluding Remarks

Charan Sparsh – an age old tradition which has been handed down over the years, ever since the Vedic period (1200–1000 BCE), when the Vedic culture had started setting in. The vedic scripture, Laws of manu (the legendary lawgiver) and the Holy Gita have mentioned

several times the benefits and way of performing touching feet. This has been an unquestioned gesture and a very common practice of showing utmost respect towards elders, older family members and even to people who hold significance in our lives. The purpose has been to show respect and elicit blessings for a long life and good fortune. This practice owes its origin to tradition, however, the typical style of gesticulation has been backed by scientific reasons:

1. In the earlier days, “Sashtang Pranam” was the mark of paramount respect shown to elders. This gesture stretched the body and the back and helped in easing back pain.
2. This “Pranam” witnessed a change in posture and the gesture was called Charan Sparsh. The person showing respect sat on his knees and bent forward to touch the elderly person. This was helpful for the joints of the body.
3. Then came Charan Sparsh in the form of touching the feet, without bending at the knees. One school of thought attributed the establishment of unified electric circuits in the human body when the left hand of a person touches the right foot of the elderly person and vice versa, based on the premise that the left side of the human body carries negative current and the right side of the human body carries positive current.
4. Nerves end at the fingertips of hand and feet. Over the years, it has been believed that the touch of the fingertips to the opposite feet creates a transfer of energy to the person doing the Charan Sparsh.
5. Further, the elderly person accepts the mark of respect and out of compassion passes on positive vibrations through one hand which goes to bless the person showing respect; and also through the toes which have been touched. The touch induces the transfer.

This is similar to transfer of a celestial energy which gets transferred during a hug or a warm handshake.

The creation and quality of thought has a longstanding impact. Thoughts invoke feelings. While it is natural to think negative in extraneous circumstances, it is important that one has to consciously make negative thoughts fleeting. Every thought affects every cell of the body.

In 2018, a very interesting book was published – “Kalyug Me Ramayan – Sri Ram Charan Sparsh”. The use of the word “Charan Sparsh” in the title showcased that even in this age, the reference to these two words speaks volumes about the implications of this gesture. This gesture is so powerful that the recipient becomes bound to pass on blessings and good wishes. This promotes humility in the person extending the gesture.

In India, this gesture’s power can be perceived during its practice when a person is dead. Aggrieved family members and friends perform Charan Sparsh to pay their last respects to the departed soul and elicit blessings in return. Even at such times, a good vibration and positive aura is produced and benefits all present. When we offer prayers, it is believed that Charan Sparsh creates a bridge between God and us. While in the Vedas, it has been mentioned that women being considered Devi “Shakti Rupa”, are not required to touch feet; however, general practice and belief about its impact on wellness have dominated and women also believe in this act of respect.

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