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## Mystical Reflections in The Wake of Ayodhya

Stories of India's past and events of the present offer guidelines on how to create truly sacred shrines

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With much interest in the Hindu world these days about building a temple at Ayodhya, the Shree Ram Mandir, it is timely to also reflect upon building another temple, one that is closer to where every person on the planet lives. This is one's inner temple, the antar mandir, or the soul temple, atma mandir. A few years ago in Chennai, at the Kapaleeshvara Temple, I enjoyed a serene meditation one morning for nearly an hour inside the cool, granite sanctuary. When I returned to the conscious mind, a young man who had just finished darshan at the temple's shrines asked me why I had been meditating, as he had no concept at all about meditation. I explained that there is an inner temple inside each person in which he can have darshan of God and the Gods through yogic meditation, and this inner darshan is even more powerful than the outer darshan he had just experienced in the physical

temple of Kapaleeshvara. I continued, explaining that we worship in the outer temple to cultivate the devotion and humility that allow us to successfully meditate on God in our inner temple one practice naturally leads to the other.

What is this inner temple we are talking about? It is the soul or, even more specifically, the soul body, called anandamaya kosha or karana sharira, an immortal body of spiritual light inside each of us. It is this body of light that reincarnates from life to life. Therefore, from a deeper perspective, we are this body of light. We are not our physical body, our mind or our emotions; we are the immortal soul.

Darshan of God in the outer temple is generally dualistic; we are perceiving the Deity as separate from us. However, in the inner, soul temple, darshan may be dualistic, but is more often monistic, where we fully identify with God as all-pervasive consciousness or as the transcendent Absolute.

Building and worshiping in an outer temple, when done in the right spirit, also brings us closer to our inner temple, draws us nearer to our real self. This is because it deepens our devotion and humility. However, when an outer temple is built amid disagreements, arguments or worse yet—violence, it creates barriers, disturbing our peace of mind and preventing us from entering our antar mandir. The stones, brick and mortar of the temple are actually imbued with the disharmonious conditions, to live on and negatively effect the nerve system of everyone who worships there far into the future. Like spiritual DNA, those initial impressions determine the future impact of the edifice, be it benign or malignant—calling down divine blessings or conjuring up demonic curses. So, the way in which a temple is built is of vital importance.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami took this principle one step deeper, teaching that the inner temple comes first, giving rise to the external structure. On many occasions, in speaking of the construction of his own San Marga Iraivan Temple in Hawaii, he explained how the Iraivan Temple is being built on a spiritual foundation, the religious unfoldment of his devotees. Their progress in accessing the inner temple through personal purification, by additional sadhana and tapas, would manifest as additional construction on the outer temple. By sadhana and tapas, he meant religious discipline, inner striving, meditation, scriptural study, austerity and sacrifice. In other words, as each new stone is added to the inner temple, this causes a new stone to be added to the outer one. This mystical approach, he assured us, would result in a pristine, spiritually profound place of pilgrimage.

Nothing else would create such sanctity. One of Gurudeva's strictest rules, with this mystical law in mind, was "zero tolerance for disharmonious conditions" among those working together to build a Hindu temple.

Our great paramaguru, Siva Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, of our Kailasa Parampara, also stressed the importance of inner worship. For example, when an international conference on the Tamil language was being held in Colombo and there were banners and excitement everywhere for this Tamil festival—or Utsavam Tamil—he chided the delegates of the even greater importance of the inner festival—Utsavam Tamul—"the festival inside of you."

Let's now look more closely at the process of gaining access to our antar mandir, inner temple. To many people, the antar mandir is like a temple for infrequent pilgrimage, annually or even less often, that sits atop a high mountain in the Himalayas, while to others, it is as close as their nose is to their eye, the serene place they visit every day. Why the difference? It is caused by the amount of impurity in the subconscious mind as a result of past adharmic deeds actions, words and thoughts that conflict with the soul's innate, spiritual conscience. To individuals who are following a dharmic, virtuous life and have done serious sadhana and tapas to purify themselves, the antar mandir is as close as their nose is to their eye. To individuals who follow dharma but have not done much sadhana and tapas, it is a remote and distant pilgrimage destination. And to those who do not follow dharma and allow themselves to commit adharmic acts, such as hurtful words or actions, their inner temple may as well be on the Moon, and the distance is actually increasing as additional impurities are being added to their subconscious.

There is a traditional story that illustrates the importance of the inner, soul temple. It is about Pusalar, a great devotee of Lord Siva who lived in South India. For many years Pusalar wanted to build a Siva temple, but he was so poor he had to beg even to eat. So, he certainly could not get what he needed for a temple. But Pusalar did not give up. He decided to build a temple for Siva in his mind. He collected the granite stones, the wood and other supplies, all in his mind. He looked for a good day to start the project. Steadily, day after day, he carved the Deity icon and built the temple on the mental plane. He built the entry towers, the various hallways and chambers, the chariot and chariot house. Finally, after many years of meditative work, he finished and declared to himself, "Tomorrow will be the kumbhabhishekam." He prayed to Lord Siva, "O Lord, tomorrow you must come for the temple's dedication. It will be a grand event."

At the same time, the king of Kanchipuram was also building a Siva temple, spending lots of money on a massive edifice. Work went on day and night. Finally, he fixed the day for the dedication—the same day, it turned out, that Pusalar had set for his temple opening. The night before that day, Lord Siva appeared in the king's dream. "You must change the day you have chosen for the dedication. Tomorrow I am going to the temple that Pusalar has built." The king woke up with a start. He was shocked. He had never heard of Pusalar and certainly not of another temple being built in his kingdom. With royal indignation, the king set off with his ministers to find Pusalar and his temple. He asked the villagers, "Where is this man named Pusalar who is building a temple?" They laughed and said, "Pusalar is practically a beggar and far too poor to build a temple." They showed the king where Pusalar lived. Stunned to see the monarch at his humble abode, Pusalar rushed forward, bowed and asked how he could be of service.

The king, assuaged by the villager's genuine respect and kindness, asked Pusalar, "Where is your temple? I have come to witness the dedication." Then he told Pusalar of the dream. Pusalar's eyes filled with tears of devotion, and he cried out, "Lord Siva knows of my temple!" He joyfully shared with the king how he had built the temple in his mind. The king, realizing he was in the presence of a truly great devotee of God, prostrated at Pusalar's feet. Every day thereafter, Pusalar worshiped Siva in the temple he built in his mind. Conceived and assembled with great devotion, that temple was even more powerful than the king's big stone temple. That is why Siva came to Pusalar's temple first, before visiting the king's.

This story of Pusalar and the temple he built in his mind is in reality describing the inner temple, the antar mandir, the temple that is our own soul. This is the most important temple, and to be able to enter it and experience the ultimate darshan of God that it offers is the goal for which worship in physical temples prepares us. These days it is common for crowds in India to chant the Hindi slogan, "Ram Lala ham ayenge, mandir wahin banayenge," which means, "Dear Lord Rama, we will come and build the temple there." There, of course, refers to Ayodha. Hindus who share the perspective that the inner temple and the outer temple should both come up together can privately chant their own slogan, "Ram Lala hum ayenge, mandir man mein banayenge," which means, "Dear Lord Rama, we will come and construct the temple in the heart."