A Turning Point - The Third Generation
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Will the grandchildren of Indian Emigrants worship in the temples they built around the world? That's up to us.

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A few months ago we were honored to participate in a symposium on Hinduism at the Sri Venkateswara Temple (S.V. Temple) in Penn Hills, an eastern suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Its website shares the history of the temple. It was one of the earliest Hindu temples in the United States, constructed at an approximate cost of $925,000 with donations raised from six thousand devotees from around the country. Most donors were first-generation Indian immigrants seeking to maintain ties with their mother culture. There is no doubt Hindu first-generation immigrants to North America love to participate in the temples they build and often bring their children, the second generation, with them. But a question to ponder is: will we find the third generation present in those same holy sanctuaries? Why does this question arise? It arises because so many first-generation Hindus have shared with us their surprise and concern that their children have no interest whatsoever in the temple once they reach adulthood. And if they have no interest, certainly they will

not encourage their children to participate in temple worship.

Passing on Hindu traditions to the younger generation has always been a duty of parents. However, that duty seems to be more difficult to fulfill in today's world. A hundred years ago in India the temple hosted the most interesting activities in the village: dramas, dances, musical concerts and the pageantry of regular festivals all drew significant crowds, as the events had no competition. In our modern world, competition abounds. There are movies filled with stunning special effects, television, the Internet with its endless ramifications and computer games—all of which fill hours of many children's daily life, significantly influencing their values, beliefs and attitudes. Another factor is that many children are growing up in communities where Hindus are a small minority, so these children tend to take on the interests of their non-Hindu peers. Parents are also faced with an unprecedented number of questions about Hinduism. The younger generation, especially those educated in Western style schools, are taught to question and challenge, "Why do we do this? What does this mean?" Many of their parents were raised in the Eastern education system, in which questions are discouraged. Therefore, when asked why this and why that by their children, they often find themselves unequipped to supply the answers. They never asked the questions of their parents, so they simply do not know. Clearly there is a heightened need to teach children the benefits of regular worship at the Hindu temple when they are young so that when they are adults temple worship will be a strong habit treasured as an important part of their life.

Many of the great saints and sages of Hinduism have had visions of the Gods and shared them with their devotees, thus strengthening the devotees' faith and understanding of these Divine Beings. In his book, Loving Ganesha, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva), founder of this magazine, shared some of his mystical perspectives and experiences: "There are a great many liberal Hindus and/or Western-influenced Hindus who don't think of Ganesha as a real being. To them He is a symbol, a superstition, a way of explaining philosophy to children and the uneducated. But this has not been my experience of our loving Lord. I have seen Him with my own eye. He has come to me in visions several times and convinced my lower mind of His reality."

Teaching children that the Gods are real beings and that the purpose of going to the temple is to experience Their blessings is what transforms the temple from a cultural hall to a truly sacred place. For a child, going to the temple can then be like visiting the home of a grandfather or grandmother whose compassion and wisdom the child really enjoys. The child is happy to go to be with someone he or she

delights in spending time with.

Gurudeva continues: "Among all the wonderful Hindu Deities, Lord Ganesha is the closest to the material plane of consciousness, most easily contacted and most able to assist us in our day-to-day life and concerns." Focusing on education, he says, "We must teach the world's Hindu youth the greatness of their Hinduism. We must teach them that they need not leave their ancestral faith to enter into science, politics or any kind of intellectual pursuit. We must teach them to seek the able assistance of Lord Ganesha in all things. He is the first Ishta Devata, the chosen God, of all Hindus, regardless of their sectarian position. Worship of Lord Ganesha leads the devotee most naturally to the other great Gods."

Clearly, teaching children to worship Lord Ganesha is a natural place to start in introducing them to the Gods. This is most effectively done by showing how worshiping Him can help us, as Gurudeva stresses, in day-to day life and concerns. Here is a short list of benefits to focus on, and some approaches for teaching children that you can try for yourself.

Intellectual Control: When you start each day's study, or come upon a difficult subject, pray for Ganesha's clear mind. See and feel a bright yellow light around your head. Feel smart. Strongly desire to understand. When you have a problem in life, at school, home or work, Lord Ganesha will help you. Ganesha knows everything about you and everybody you know, from the past into the future. But you must ask for His help. See Ganesha's majestic face and with mental force ask for help and explain the problem. Lord Ganesha will send you ideas and thought power, introduce you to new attitudes, help you to understand other people, help you use wisdom and not emotions to face life's many experiences.

Emotional Control: Through the worship of Lord Ganesha, we feel better about life, rising above the lower emotions of insecurity, fear, anger and jealousy and instead experience peace and contentment. Tuning in to His shakti and being, through attending puja at the temple or even just visualizing Him in your mind, helps raise you up into the muladhara chakra and therefore out of anger and fear into a calm state of mind. In fact, you can slowly seal off these lower states of mind and keep awareness permanently lifted above the animal instincts of fear and anger through the regular worship of Lord Ganesha.

Good Timing: Games are also an effective way to engage young children in Hinduism and, with some creativity, interesting games can be developed to demonstrate good timing. Lord Ganesha's worship can enable us to tune in to the natural flow of events that allows us to be in the right place at the right time. For example, in giving advice to someone who had been looking for a job for a few weeks without success we suggested he worship Lord Ganesha at the temple before looking further. He did, and the first business they visited that day hired him on the spot.

Young Moothoosamy Devaraj Shankara's "In My Opinion" piece on page nine of this issue observes: "Very often we do not find religious activities and functions organized by the temples to be very interesting. More precisely, they are boring... Youngers should be given things to do during the activities and worship, like receiving or welcoming people attending the pujas or taking care of people's requests. There are many other ways through which temple societies can attract a greater participation of youngsters in religious activities."

In our fellowship, we have found that cultural events are an effective way for children of all ages to participate in temple activities. The children sing, play musical instruments, dance and perform a drama or skit. And there are the many rehearsals at the temple as well. This is great fun and very satisfying to all. For older children, forming one or more youth committees empowers them to take on certain responsibilities, such as organizing a festival, arranging for decorations and prasadam. This builds a strong sense that it is their temple, too, not just their parents' temple. All in all, it is crucial to not take for granted the interest of children in the temple but to carefully develop it over the years through a variety of interesting and fun, educational and cultural activities and responsibilities. The focus always needs to be on how temple worship benefits their life, helping them become happier, more successful and more cultured adults who value the temple as an indispensible part of their life.