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Church Name-Giving Sacraments Enter Devotees into Hindu Religion

The Namakarana Samskara, Hindu Name-Giving Sacrament, represents the formal entrance into the Hindu religion - the equivalent of the sacrament of Baptism in the Christian faith. Like Baptism in the West, the Namakarana Samskara is usually given to a child, around the tenth day following birth. However, for those who are born in the West, or outside of Hinduism, and who later through reflection and belief convert to this most ancient religion, the sacrament can be received as an adult. After years of study and preparation and having formally severed all previous religious affiliations, 41 Himalayan Academy students received their Namakarana Samskaras in Hawaii and formally entered the Hindu religion.

The ceremonies, held in the Kadavul Hindu Temple on Kauai, were solemn and joyous. Beginning with a puja to Lord Ganesha, whose benediction is prayed for at the outset of all tasks and changes in life, the sacrament proceeded as temple bhajans were chanted. After offering a tray of fresh fruits, flowers, a coconut, a note written for the devas and an offering, the devotee would kneel before the Siva Nataraja Deity which stands in the Kadavul Golden Hall. Vowing eternal faithfulness to the Sanatana Dharma, the devotee then offered prostrations at the shrines of Ganesha, Muruga and Lord Siva. The coconut was then broken at the Ganesha shrine and the pujari chanted the Ganapati Gayatri. The devotee then speaks, "Oh, Divine Ones, I beseech your blessings in this sacramental name-giving as I enter the Hindu religion. And I vow to be eternally faithful to the principles of the Sanatana Dharma. May my family name be known as (the new name is given), and my given name as (the new first name is given)." All present chanted three times, "May this devotee's name be established." There followed more arati (offering of the sacred flame to the Deity) and chanting of sacred mantrams, the final deepam was performed with the ringing of the two large temple bells and the blowing of the conch. Prasadam was then passed out.

Gurudev attended the ceremonies announcing at their completion, "The deed is done!" He had seen each one through the many months of preparation, including

the challenges of excommunication from former churches for some, and was joyous to see these Saiva souls embrace and embraced by the Sanatana Dharma. Gurudev carefully explained to those participating in the sacraments the esoteric nature of a holy event, how devas are attending in their subtle bodies and are assigned to the newcomer to guide and protect him on the path. "There are thousands of devas here at this temple, and at any sanctified place. I have seen them hovering above the inner sanctum, waiting for the soul to come forth into the religion at which time it has permission to associate with humans for their protection and for its evolution on the inner planes. Often these are devas from a previous life who have the continuity of this particular soul's unfoldment."

The Namakarana Samskaras have been held for years at the Kadavul Hindu Temple. This last series began on January 4th and continued through January 14th. Certainly all who attended felt especially blessed and look forward to their next step which is path-choosing, especially for single men and women. Other will be exploring the vast range of Hinduism and making a decision as to which of the several sects they may wish to be affiliated with and then which of the groups within that sect. Others may never join a formal group, for Hinduism encompasses both formalized and individual approaches to the spirit.