

[Bangalore Gurus Crisscross the West](#)

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It was a little awkward, at the start. The three South Indian swamis, clothed in kadi cloth veshtis and shawls, took their posts on elegant divans in the family room of the Krishnappa home in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. A self-conscious squadron of teens nervously lined up in front of them. For once, these TV remote control masters couldn't switch the channel. Face-to-face with India's "old guard" for two hours! Their parents lurked in the background, trying to be transparent, but conspicuously hoping their offspring would uncannily unlock these three treasure chests of spiritual jewels only an arm's length away.

Finally, with a little no nonsense nudge from unflappable 16-year-old Sharada Krishnappa, frozen lips thawed and blank stares erupted into an animated, intelligent stream of questions to the visiting gurus. The swamis' flawless repertoire of Vedic insight landed most of the high-flying queries, but their reference to the idea of getting rid of all desire noticeably solicited more smiles than surrendering acceptance. (See sidebar.)

This spirited evening was only one memorable chapter in a May/June odyssey in the West for three of India's highly respected and energetic spiritual figures - H.H. Sri Sivaratnapuri Swami (affectionately called Tiruchi Swami) of Kailas Ashram, Bangalore, and his disciples Shivapuri Swami and Sri Sri Balagangadharnath Swami, head of the giant Adi Chunchanagiri Mutt outside Bangalore.

They hopped from Michigan to Pennsylvania to New York, Illinois, California, Hawaii and then to Osaka, Japan staying with devotees. Unable to fully switch time zones, they often roared past midnight with daytime energy only to jump up before sunrise to perform a homa in their hosts' little shrine rooms. They saw some of America's wonders - redwoods and the Golden Gate Bridge - and left a trail of blessings in their wake.

Kingly servants

The swamis hail from that unusual South Indian megopolis Bangalore, a twin-poled magnet of spirit and matter, specializing in high-technology and high-spirituality. For thousands of villagers in this region, the names Tiruchi Swami and 9 or demanded allegiance or tribute, they stole into the hearts of their respective communities through sheer indefatigable service. Harnessing the intelligence, creativity and sheer power unleashed by decades of sadhana, they ministered to every kind of need - brusquely dismissing distinctions between social service and spiritual service. They assumed the role of father. Typically, if a family had nine daughters and their marriages left them penniless, Tiruchi Swami provided funds.

Bangalore's farmers needed water. So Balagangadharnath dug wells - giant wells - ever intoning his service mantra, "What have we, gurus, men of God, done for the masses?" In a few years, his wells sprouted thousands of acres of coconut groves, irrigating a poor community with new wealth and pride. Since 1974, from his hillock monastery, he has built over 80 educational institutions - including orphanages, schools for the blind, Sanskrit gurukulams, serving over 25,000 youth. But his real jewel is a beautiful new medical school and hospital.

His guru, Tiruchi Swami learned the white occult arts from a wandering sadhu at age 15 and more from a Muslim mystic. At 17, he met Goddess Rajarajeshwari through vision and voice. It began his lifelong relationship with her. It was She who led him from his bed one night up a hill 44 years ago and told him, "Preach the glory of God to all men and uplift them...Lead those who aspire to achieve my grace towards me. Now go to Nepal. Your guru is waiting for you." He obeyed, found his guru, returned to Karnataka and today radiates Rajarajeshwari's shakti to a parade of daily visitors at his pink-toned, sprawling temple/ashram complex.

Generation Gap Test

SWAMIS & TEENS FACE-TO-FACE

Sharada Krishnappa: What happens during the time between our births?

Tiruchi Swami: (Translation) In addition the physical body, we have other bodies - the astral body, the mental body and the causal body. After the death of the physical body, the soul, the eternal jiva, with its other Bodies, attains to a higher state. All of our feelings and thoughts Will be stored in the causal body until time of rebirth. We will enjoy The fruits of our actions in this birth during that time in Higher consciousness. Then there will be divine help to guide us to be Born in a particular family depending on our total Karma - made up of individual, family, nation and occupation karmas - so we can further work out our karmas.

Harsha Krishnappa: Once you attain moksha, [liberation from rebirth] what happens to your soul?

Tiruchi Swami: The soul is never destroyed. It is always pure gold, it can assume, be made into, many forms.

Harsha Krishnappa: If there is no difference in the soul before and after moksha, what is the point in attaining moksha?

Tiruchi Swami: Imagine that God is everywhere, One, as billions of waves. Through divine agitation, a single wave comes out. This is the individual jiva, soul, me and you, but still connected. During the cycle of birth and death there will be suffering, But once you are free of this, the jivatma returns to the Paramatma, God, and merges. This is moksha.

Kumar Setty: How does one find his or her dharma in life?

Tiruchi Swami: The first dharma, or duty, is to be devoted to one's father and mother as God and Goddess. It is because of them that we are here.

Uma Setty: Why do we place so much emphasis on rituals?

Tiruchi Swami: We do these rituals for benefits, but the deepest significance would take some time to understand. Agni [seen in the arati and homa fire] is a main God. He acts as sort of a postman. If you wanted to Write a letter to your father, you would naturally give it to a postman With the proper stamp. In the same way, to easily send our Prayers to God, we use pujas and the temple rituals, all observing Very specific rules and regulations.

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