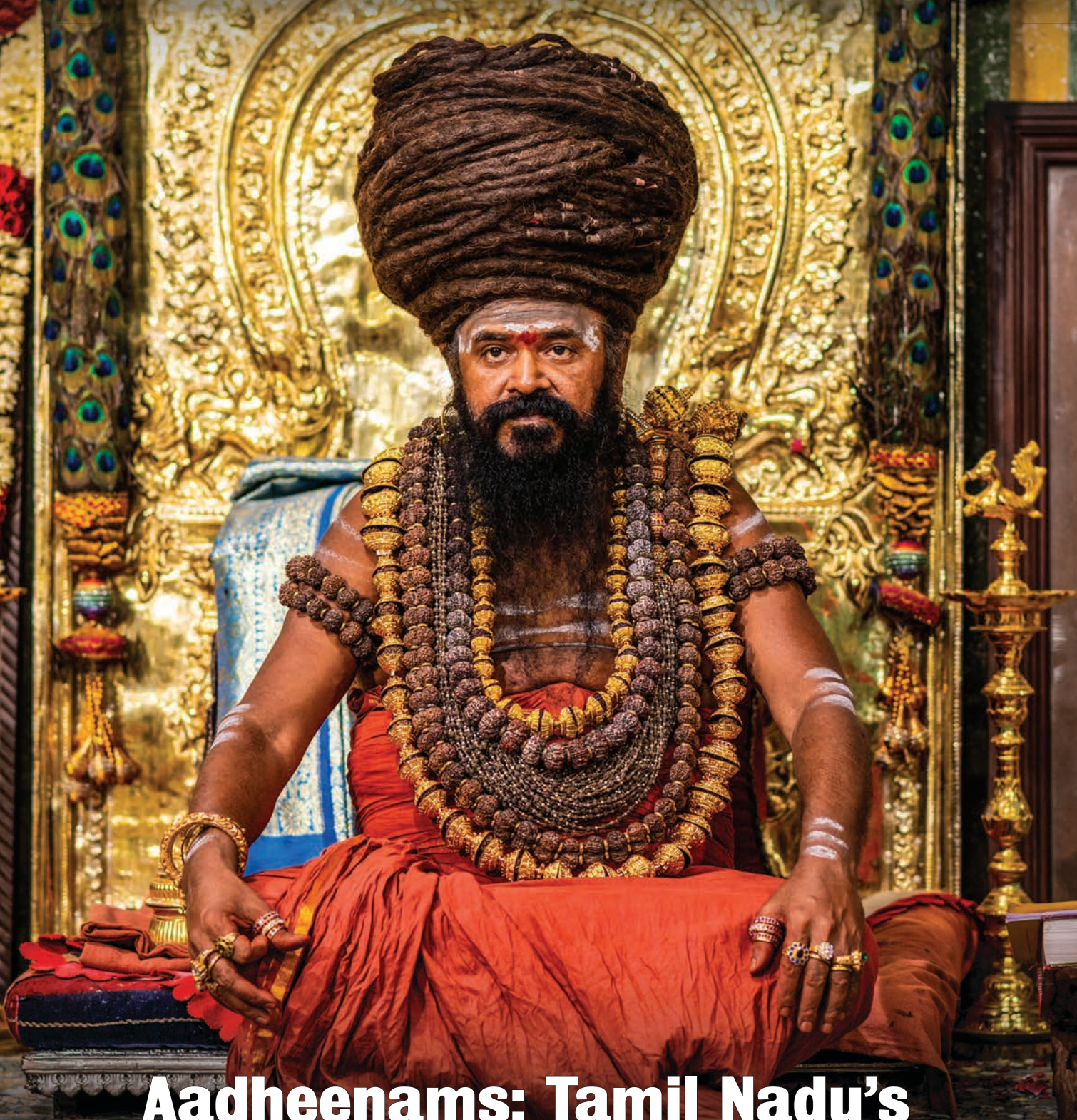


HINDUISM TODAY®

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



Aadheenams: Tamil Nadu's Monastery/Temple Complexes



(Cover) The 27th Pontiff of Dharmapura Aadheenam Sri la Sri Kailai Masilamani Desika Gnanasambantha Paramacharya Swamigal enthroned on the Guru Peetham, seat of his authority; (above) two calves garlanded for the South Indian Pongal festival

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2024 • The Hindu Year Krodhi, 5126 • क़्रोधी

Bodhinatha Veylanuwami www.gurudeva.org

INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** Join Us for an Epic Mahasivaratri Festival where 200 Deities Gather in Mandi **18**
Thailand: How an Ancient Hindu Priest Tradition Continues to Serve the Country's Royalty **30**
Religious Centers: Meet the Monks Managing Dozens of Temples and Vast Endowments **52**
Sacred Cows: The Beloved Bovines of India: a Stunning Portrayal of Care and Veneration **60**

LIFESTYLE

- Educational Insight:** An Illustrated Guide on How to Properly Visit a Hindu Temple **35**
Priests: Paul DeSantis Speaks Out for Professional Treatment of Hindu Priests by Temples **58**
Health: Turmeric's Surprising Health Benefits **64**
Parenting: My Dad Made Me a Better Hindu **68**

OPINION

- In My Opinion:** How Divine Content Online Bolsters My Internal Religious Life **9**
Publisher's Desk: Why We Need to Cultivate Willpower in Inner and Outer Life **10**
Letters to the Editor **13**
From the Scriptures: Part Two of Saint Auvaiyar's Ageless Alphabetic Advice to Youth **17**
Influence: How the Vedanta Society Changed American Culture without Anyone Knowing **51**
Interview: Vanamali Mataji on the Merits of Feminine Spirituality in the 21st Century **62**
Ministry: Two Stories of Hindu Chaplaincy **66**

DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** **6**
Quotes & Quips **14**

USA Contacts: Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY®, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, letters@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY® (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), October/November/December, 2024, Volume 46, No. 4. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-808-822-3012; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-822-3012; subscribe@hindu.org. Advertising: 1-888-464-1008, ads@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY® is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy Publications®, a nonprofit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanuwami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. Global subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$299/lifetime. **International Contacts:** In Malaysia: Datta Impexs, PT 6949 Jalan Casuarina 7, Desa Casuarina, Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, NSDK. Tel: 1-012-607-7310; E-mail: dattaimpexs@yahoo.com. The Russian edition is available through contacting Dinanatha Bodhiswami in Moscow: bodhiswami@gmail.com For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY® article, e-mail letters@hindu.org. Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY®, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

© 2024 HIMALAYAN ACADEMY PUBLICATIONS®, 107 KAHOLALELE ROAD, KAPAA, HAWAII 96746-9304 USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



www.hinduismtoday.com



subscribe.hinduismtoday.com

Mahasivaratri Himalayan Style

One of 200 visiting Deities is greeted at the Madho Rai Temple in Mandi with an avalanche of flowers and the thunder of drums and trumpets. . . page 18



GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

Kashi Vishwanath Temple Innovates

KASHI VISHWANATH TEMPLE of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, one of the 12 Jyotirlinga temples, has introduced 12 minutes of virtual reality darshan starting in June, 2024. *PTC News* reports this will cater to devotees who wish to avoid standing in a long queue in the scorching heat. It is partly in response to the increase of pilgrims since the recent massive expansion of access to the temple. In the adjacent Durlabh Darshan Kendra hall, pilgrims can witness rare sights of Lord Bholenath and watch the five-part arati through virtual reality headsets. Temple CEO Vishwa Bhushan

Mishra said, "3D virtual reality is a new technique which has been implemented in various temples like Ujjain's Mahakaleshwar and Mata Vaishno Devi temple."

Meanwhile, Varanasi Police Commissioner Mohit Aggarwal is making changes within the police force to more harmoniously manage bustling crowds and facilitate smooth darshan, according to the *Organizer*. Police officers now dress as pujaris to help foster a sense of reverence and warmth among visitors. They adhere to a no-touch policy

to prevent incidents of pushing or mistreatment. Officers in uniform are stationed outside the sanctum to maintain order, while those dressed as pujaris are inside, guiding devotees. Aggarwal emphasized that these officers must undergo rigorous training, including learning basic English to communicate effectively with non-Hindi speaking devotees.

.....
Modern darshan: devotees sit in the cool Durlabh Darshan Kendra hall to attend puja virtually



Celebrating a decade: Some of the attendees at the tenth annual International Day of Yoga hosted by the Scottish Hindu Foundation

SCOTLAND

Global Yoga Day Turns Ten

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF Yoga celebrated its tenth year on June 21st, 2024 with the theme, "Yoga for Self and Society." The message is that yoga enhances personal well-being and fosters a more positive and harmonious society.

In Scotland, *North Edinburgh News* says the annual event is hosted by the Scottish Hindu Foundation. This year's function, held at the Kelvin Hall Art Gallery in Glasgow, began with traditional Vedic chants to bless the proceedings and participants.

Attendees then witnessed a Bharatanatyam dance recital dedicated to Lord Siva, performed by Mrs. Manimegalai Arun, invoking the spirit of rejuvenation, well-being and positivity for the soul. It was followed by the live hatha yoga demonstrations and lessons by instructors. Guest speaker Shri Amit Kumar Chaudhary, Vice Consul of India, shared that India's government Ministry of Ayush is enthusiastic to collaborate with Scotland in advancing yoga as a holistic health system beyond just physical postures.

were only on TV, but now are available at [youtube.com/@artnbuddhism/videos](https://www.youtube.com/@artnbuddhism/videos). In *The Temple Cosmos*, uploaded in June, 2024, Behl visually explores how Indian temples are conceived as a place of self-transformation for devotees, where the noise and confusion of the material world are left behind.

.....
Heritage capture: Benoy Behl on location to photograph and film at an archaeological site.



VIDEO SERIES

Benoy Behl's Lens on India

DOCUMENTING INDIA'S ART heritage is a monumental task, and historian Benoy K. Behl has embraced the challenge for nearly five decades. His wikipedia page says he has taken more than 50,000 photographs of Asian monuments and produced 140 documentaries which are regularly screened at major

cultural institutions worldwide. Behl's photos of Brihadeeshwara Temple and Ellora Caves have been featured in magazines like *National Geographic*. He produced a series of documentaries called *Spectacular India* for Doordarshan TV channel, covering temples and sites from north to south. For a time these films

TOP TO BOTTOM: TRIPADVISOR.COM; SCOTTISH HINDU FOUNDATION; COURTESY BENOY BEHL

ESTONIA

First Siva Temple Inaugurated

ESTONIA'S FIRST SIVA TEMPLE was opened in June, 2024, in the picturesque region of Lileoru, near the capital Tallinn, reports [News18.com](https://www.news18.com). Nestled in a forested area, the complex spans 5500 square meters.

Surrounding the main circular, dome-like structure are many murtis for Ganapati, Murugan, Karpaga Nadhar, Brahand Nayagi, 18 Siddhas and more.

Founder Ingvar Villido Acharya Ishwarananda, who teaches Kriya Yoga, said the temple "symbolizes our dedication to the eternal teachings of Sanatana Dharma, following the footsteps of the great rishis and siddhas."

There are only a few hundred Hindus in Estonia, which is one of the least religious countries in the world today. They include Estonians who have adopted Hindu practices, Indian expatriates and students. Hinduism has

influenced Estonian society particularly through the teaching of yoga and meditation. Many Estonians practice yoga and other Hindu-derived activities. Historically, Estonians worshipped nature, with thousands of ancient sacred sites scattered throughout the country.

.....
The founder: Ingvar Villido with chief priest from Tamil Nadu during the consecration



FRANCE

Cambodia Sends Bronze for Restoration & Exhibition

THE GREAT RECLINING VISHNU of Western Mebon, the largest bronze statue found on the Angkor Wat site, arrived in France in June, 2024, to be studied and restored before its exhibition in 2025 at the Guimet National Museum of Asian Arts in Paris.

The French embassy in Cambodia writes that the restoration is a symbol of the exceptional Franco-Cambodian partnership. Dating from the 11th century, the sculpture was discovered in 1936 by French curator Maurice Glaize.

An unrivaled masterpiece of Khmer art, it captivates researchers and curators worldwide, particularly with its symbolism and unique form, unprecedented for a Khmer bronze of this size. After the Guimet museum, the reclining Vishnu will be exhibited in several cities in the United States before being returned to Cambodia.

.....
Remains: The original sculpture must have measured more than 16 feet long by 14 feet high

NORTH AMERICA

Lord Ram Is Paraded to 1,000 temples across the US & Canada

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NORTH America, a murti of Lord Ram road-tripped from temple to temple in March/April, 2024, to celebrate the inauguration of the finally rebuilt Ram temple in Ayodhya, India. The Ram Rath Yatra, or chariot procession,



echoed such a procession held in India in 1990 to inspire building efforts in Ayodhya. This new pilgrimage lasted two months and covered 16,000 miles, reports

Religion News Service. Temples in the US (851) and Canada (150) each made themselves available for a short but sweet darshan of Ram Lalla, the child form of the Deity. Perched in the back of a decked-out Honda Odyssey "chariot," Ram visited an average of 14 temples per day, spending 30 minutes at each. "I bought the van and said, 'I'm going to go, anybody want to join?'" said Amitabh Mittal, joint general secretary of the World Hindu Council of America, the group behind the yatra.

"I would say I had a blessing from Shri Ram," said Manan Raval, one of the four road-trippers who were on the move from 6am to midnight each day. "If He wishes something, He will make it done, and He has willed that Amitabh Mittal called me." Raval is the head of Bharat TV, a online news service that covered the pilgrimage.

For Catherine Vander Vliet,

another passenger who works for Bharat TV, the journey has already made her a "different person," meeting people she would have never met, whom she credits with introducing her to the "patience, warmth and perseverance" of the Hindu faithful. Americans like her, she says, "don't know the real Bharat." "At the end of the day, we're all one, no matter who we say our

prayers to," she said. "They're doing the same thing that we're doing, they're putting their heart and their soul into their God. That's the same thing I do when I go to church."

.....
Road trip: (left) The decorated "chariot;" (below) Ram Deity gives brief darshan in front of Ganesha at the Hindu Temple of Siouxland in Tea, South Dakota



TOP TO BOTTOM: GUIMET MUSEUM; SHIVA TEMPLE ESTONIA; ANI; WORLD HINDU COUNCIL OF AMERICA



PAKISTAN

Hinglaj Yatra Festival Brings Mountainous Region to Life

THE ASCENT OF STEEP MUD volcanoes marks the beginning of Hindu pilgrims' rituals in southwestern Pakistan. They climb hundreds of stairs and clamber over rocks to reach the summit, tossing coconuts and rose petals into the shallow crater while seeking divine permission to visit Hinglaj Mata, an ancient cave temple that is the focus of their three-day worship. The dramatic surroundings of Hingol National Park in Baluchistan province are the setting for Pakistan's largest annual Hindu festival, Hinglaj Yatra, reports [News18.com](#), which takes place

in late April. Organizers say more than 100,000 Hindus participated this year. Muslim-majority Pakistan is home to 4.4 million Hindus, just 2.14% of the population, and Hinglaj Mata is one of the few Hindu sites that continues to draw large numbers of pilgrims yearly from across the country. Hindus believe Hinglaj Mata is one of the places where the remains of Sati, the Goddess of marital felicity and longevity, fell to Earth after she ended her life. Maharaj Gopal, the temple's senior priest, explains, "It is the most sacred pilgrimage in the

Hindu religion here. Whoever visits and worships accordingly during these three days will have all of their sins forgiven." The journeys begin hundreds of miles away, mostly from neighboring Sindh province. Hundreds of packed buses depart cities like Hyderabad and Karachi, traveling along the Makran Coastal Highway that hugs Pakistan's south and southwest. There's scant vehicular access to holy sites in Pakistan, so many pilgrims disembark and complete their travel by walking over parched and rocky terrain, sometimes barefoot and carrying children or luggage. It's a few miles from the main road to the mud volcano and then almost 25 miles to Hinglaj Mata. Winds buffet the desert-like

Oasis: (left) After ascending a barren volcano; (right) pilgrims reach the remote cave temple beside a cold stream

conditions, churning up dust that whips the eyes, nose and mouth. The pilgrims' festive cheer and brightly colored apparel are in contrast to the arid landscape. Strong gusts distort people's celebratory cries of "Jai Mata Di" and "Jai Shiv Shankar!" Kanwal Kumar, 28, was visiting the temple for the first time in 2024 with her husband. "We have yet to conceive a child after six years of marriage, so we are hopeful for help from the Goddess," she said. "We believe that no one returns empty-handed. All wishes are granted by Hinglaj Mata."

BRIEFLY...

CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES OPERATING in India are continuing to lose the government's authorization to legally collect foreign donations, reports *Christianity Today*, which is a devastating financial blow. This March, Vision India, an organization that provides leadership training for Christian young people, was unable to renew its Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act license.

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY OF South Africa celebrated the opening of Sivanandashram in Sandton, Gauteng province, this June. Their press release explains that this center will

support the significant migration of devotees from Durban and elsewhere to the northern suburbs of Johannesburg.

CONFLICT IN MYANMAR CONTINUES to escalate, with increased fighting between the military-led Junta army and ethnic rebel groups across many parts. *New Indian Express* reported this May that nearly 5,000 homes of Buddhists and Hindus were destroyed in Buthidaung, just 155 miles from the Bangladesh border.

HINDUS IN SWITZERLAND CAN now scatter ashes of their deceased in the Aare River

in Bern state. *Baern Today* wrote this January that the Saivanerikoodan association obtained a "water protection permit," but for only 20 times a year. With around 60,000 Tamils living in Switzerland, they hope to increase the limit.

TARANAKI, A COASTAL AND MOUNTAINOUS region on the western side of New Zealand's North Island, welcomed its first Hindu temple in New Plymouth in late 2023. [Indian-newslink.co.nz](#) said it features Lord Rama as the main Deity. Taranaki Hindu Cultural Trust received a very positive response from local residents.

ON THE OCCASION OF GUYANA Hindu Dharmic Sabha's 50th anniversary this January, Guyana's president, Dr. Irfaan Ali,

noted that it plays a pivotal role in producing well-rounded leaders and driving positivity within society, as reported in the *Guyana Times*. Over time, the Sabha has expanded its work to include social issues, health and well-being, and community service.

Global Dharma news is provided by
HINDU PRESS INTERNATIONAL
Subscribe to a free daily news summary about Hinduism worldwide at [hinduismtoday.com/hpi](#)

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT: MATTHIEU PALEY; FACEBOOK/HINGLAJ MATA MANDIR



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



Founder:
Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Publisher:
Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Editor-in-Chief:
Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami

Publisher's Aide: Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami
Deputy Editor: Acharya Kumarnathaswami
Managing Editor: Acharya Arumuganathaswami
Production Manager: Sannyasin Saravananathaswami
Assistant Editor: Sannyasin Tillainathaswami,
Subscription and Distribution Manager: Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami
Advertising Manager: Sannyasin Kaivalyanathaswami
Correspondents: Choodamani Shivaram, Bengaluru; Lavina Melwani, New York; Dev Raj Agarwal, Dehradun; Nikki Thapa, Nepal; Anne Petry, France/India, Claire Burkert, USA/Nepal. **Copy Editor:** Chamundi Sabanathan. **HPI Staff:** Chandra Sankara. **Consultants:** Dr. S. P. Sabharatham Sivachariyar. **Photo Contributors:** Thomas L. Kelly, Dinodia Picture Agency, Dev Raj Agarwal, Dehradun. **Distribution:** USA: New Leaf, EBSCO Subscription Services, WT Cox. Europe: Publications Overseas, SWETS **Subscription Service:** Malaysia: Datta Impex. India: Central News Agency Limited, Delhi. Mauritius: CODIP. **Printer:** Quad/Graphics, Midland, Michigan.

IN MY OPINION

Digital Tools for a Spiritual Life

How the Internet's spiritual resources offer me support in my religious life and practices

BY KUMUDHA VENKATESAN

I WAS IN A STATE OF ECSTASY hearing devotees chant "Jai Sri Ram" and sing soulful bhajans while watching Ram Lalla's Prana Prathisthapanam (installation) live on a large LED TV at the Hindu Temple of Atlanta. Seeing the divine Ram Lalla adorned with flowers and precious jewels was spiritually elevating and a feast for my senses. In a moment of deep love, I adopted Ram Lalla as my precious son, filling my heart with motherly affection. My intense bhakti (deep love) for God grows each time I gaze at Ram Lalla on my smartphone.

Swami Sarvapriyananda (of the Ramakrishna Order), in his YouTube video "Bhakti Yoga: The Path of Devotion," emphasizes the power of the form of God for bhakti, explaining that having an image or picture of God provides a divine focus for love and devotion. This principle explains why devotees have personal Deities like Ladoo Krishna or Bala Murugan. I also enjoy listening to and singing devotional songs from various sources on YouTube. These songs inspire joy and devotion in me. I memorize and sing these songs while cooking, and share recordings with my mom. During a video call with my sister from Tiruvannamalai, I feel the bliss from the sacred land of Ramana Maharshi. I also join a weekly call with devotees to learn kirtans and stotras. Listening to and memorizing these songs guides me on the path of dharma.

Seeing or visualizing religious things has an amazing impact on calming my mind. Beautiful images of Lord Siva on Instagram aid my meditation. Once or twice a week, I immensely enjoy reading the Kauai Hindu Monastery blog, where Saiva monks pray, meditate, garden and publish this very magazine, to spread the eternal glory of Hinduism to the world. I loved witnessing the Iraivan Temple's crystal Sivalingam Prathisthapanam live on YouTube. Whenever my mind is agitated, I imagine Lord Siva emerging from the crystal Sivalingam



to embrace me. Instantly, I feel composed and calm, and I can think clearly! Narada Muni in the *Bhakti Sutra* says, "At all times, in all ways, without worrying—love and worship God." Lord Ram explains nine types of bhakti that bring one closer to God. They are: satsang, hearing the divine attributes of God, service to the guru, devotional singing, chanting Vedic mantras, control of the senses, selfless service to others, contentment, simplicity and humility in every moment.

Despite my spiritual practices, I sometimes experience negative emotions when faced with challenges. In such times, I mentally chant "Om Namah Sivaya," recall Ram Lalla's beauty and visualize divine scenes, which instantly bring me calmness. *Narada Bhakta Sutra* emphasizes virtues like non-violence, truthfulness and compassion, which I cultivate through my devotion to Ram Lalla. This devotion makes me kinder and more empathetic, and I maintain balance in praise and criticism.

The Internet, though filled with distractions, is essential. Following Swami Gaur Gopal Das's advice on moderation and awareness, I use the Internet judiciously. Setting weekly spiritual goals helps me stay focused. The Internet deepens my connection with the Divine, providing wonderful satsang that melts my ignorance and fills my heart with devotion.

Living by Swami Chinmayananda's words, I strive to make each day beautiful with love, goodness and joy. Visualizing and reflecting on divine events keep my mind aligned with loving and surrendering to God. Bhakti has made my life fulfilling and happy. I am eternally grateful to God, my guru, and the Internet for increasing my devotion and helping me to be a better version of myself.

KUMUDHA VENKATESAN, based in Atlanta, Georgia, is a wife and mother. She is passionate about Hinduism and spirituality. Contact: [kumudha_1998@yahoo.com](#)

Concentration & Willpower

Exploring how our meditative life strengthens the outer and our external life sharpens the tools to go within

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

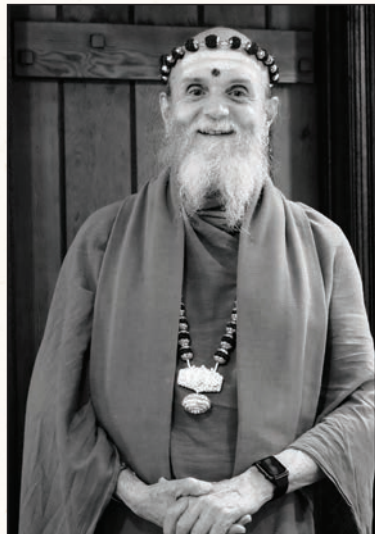
WE ALL KNOW INDIVIDUALS WHO DON'T connect their inner life to their outer life. They give meditation a high priority when they sit to meditate and want to go within. Outside of meditation, when they are at work or school, they don't apply the same level of willpower and concentration. Some even belittle ordinary life, taking a "whatever" attitude: "It doesn't matter as much. The inner life—that's what's important. The outer life—that's something to be endured." What's wrong with such an attitude?

What's wrong is that it's the same us. There aren't two of us. There isn't one us that meditates and another us that works or goes to school. It's the same us—the same mind, the same soul. We don't become a different person when we turn within to meditate and then come out to meet our responsibilities, our dharma. We are the same person, inside or out.

Concentration is focusing the mind on a single object or line of thought, not allowing it to wander. If we seriously focus on our inner goals when we meditate and then come out and don't strive to control our thoughts at work or school, it's counterproductive. It's like exercising intensely for one week and then not exercising for three weeks. Is the one week going to benefit us? Not so much! If we go within and meditate and successfully concentrate our thoughts for an hour and then come out of meditation and go to work or school for eight hours and let our mind wander where it will, is that one hour of meditation going to do us any good? Some, of course. But just like in the exercise example, not as much as it could!

For spiritual progress, we need a continuity of effort between our inner life and outer life—between what we do in meditation, and what we do when we are actively and positively engaged in the world. Conversely, if we pay attention to what we are doing at work or school throughout the day—if we concentrate and don't allow our mind to just wander because it can, because we know how to do what we are doing—then we will enhance our progress in our outer activities and that adds power to our meditations.

Take driving, for example. We know how to drive; we could think about anything as we do. We are washing dishes; we could do it blindfolded, while pondering all kinds of things. But if we don't allow ourselves to do that, if instead we concentrate on what we are doing, that helps our inner efforts. That enhances our restraint of the mind which tends to meander. It's a continuity of effort. When we don't draw a line between the inner and the outer, the control gained in our meditative moments stabilizes our emotions and mental prowess, and the willpower gained by harnessing the mind during



the day adds to our focus during meditation.

Having concentrated on what we are doing in the external world, when we sit down to meditate, what happens? The improvement is cumulative. We have controlled our mind during meditation and we have controlled our mind during work or study. Each day our concentration will improve, similar to exercising. If we exercise every day, what happens to a muscle? It has to get stronger. It has no choice. That's the way the body works. If we control our thoughts when we meditate and when we work or are at school every day, our ability to concentrate has to improve. It works the same way.

Let's look next at willpower.

Willpower is the channeling of all energies toward one point for a given length of time. An example of lacking willpower is the student who wants to get up early to study to do well on a test, but then sleeps in anyway. The desire is there but the willpower isn't strong enough.

Willpower is an interesting phenomenon. Generally, the more you use something, the less you have. If you spend money, your bank account decreases. You go into the kitchen, you take some food, you cook it, you eat it and the amount of food in the kitchen goes down. Willpower isn't like that. The more you use, the more you have to use. It's like having a \$3,000 bank account and spending \$2,000 only to find the balance increased to \$5,000. Why is that? Willpower is like a muscle. The more we use it, the more we have to use.

Another interesting aspect of willpower is interest. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, says that awareness, energy and willpower are one and the same thing. If we are doing something we don't enjoy, it never seems to end. It may only take five minutes, but it seems like an hour. When we are doing something we love to do, an hour seems like five minutes. That's awareness, energy and willpower being the same thing. The more we are interested in something, the more energy we draw out to do it, and it seems effortless. The less we are interested in something, the harder it is to do. If we can find a way to be engaged in whatever we are doing, it's a lot more fun and we are a lot more focused. If we are bored, then it seems to take forever and



Undistracted: A yogi sits in firm padmasana, surrounded by astral and worldly forces of distraction. Assailed by threats, temptations and desires of all sorts, he is not moved, but uses his willpower to remain centered on his meditation.

difficult, because it's abstract. To do a physical task well is a lot easier. To study a subject and do well on a test is also a lot easier, because it's not abstract; it's concrete. This makes it easier to strengthen our willpower and improve our ability to concentrate when involved in outer tasks. That's why external tasks are important and not to be neglected by the meditator. We are developing our concentration and willpower, which will be available when we sit to quiet the mind.

Gurudeva gives us a simple key for strengthening willpower. He taught: "Finish every job you start." Sounds easy, right? But we don't necessarily do that. We all have things in life we start and then give up. Why? A major reason is starting things impulsively, not thinking them through before we begin. Perhaps our friends are doing it, our neighbors are doing it, so we'll do it, too. That's not necessarily a good enough motivation to finish a task, because when they give it up, maybe you will as well.

Clearly, we don't want to be impulsive when we start something, because then it's likely we will not follow it to completion, and that would create a negative habit pattern in the mind. To avoid that, it's good to give adequate thought to a project before you embark on it to maximize your chances of finishing it. Each time you complete a task or a project, you strengthen the pattern, you set the stage for completing the next one and the next. Such positive habits are worth developing. A second statement from Gurudeva on strengthening willpower adds this idea: Do it well. But he doesn't stop there: Do it even better than you initially planned. Then you are using a little extra willpower, more than you normally use to get by, and that strengthens your willpower.

In summary, get rid of any conceptual division you have between the external and the internal. Keep in mind that a great deal of our spiritual progress is made in the external world. It's where we learn to concentrate and use our willpower. Those abilities are needed to control our thoughts when we sit down to meditate and succeed in going deeply within.

Ideally, we don't stop meditating when we open our eyes; nor do we stop worshipping when the puja ends. The most advanced practice is

controlling awareness throughout the day, not just when we are sitting quietly. We want such continuity. Gurudeva took it even into the night, saying restraint of our mental movements eventually extends even into our dreams, so we do not go where we don't belong, even on the astral plane. That's an advanced state we can work toward. In the meantime, take each moment to practice; use each moment to develop the willpower needed to achieve your spiritual goals.

distractions are abundant. The energy comes when we draw on it; the energy increases when we are interested. How do we strengthen our willpower? First of all, it's easier to cultivate it in external things. That's one of the advantages of not dividing life into external and internal and thinking about the internal in a very precise way and the external in a very undisciplined way. To sit in meditation for an hour and concentrate and control our thoughts is



LETTERS

Historic Ram Temple in Ayodhya

I read the article "Ram Janmabhoomi" (in July/Aug/Sep 2024) with great interest. However, I was disappointed with the section titled "The New Ayodhya," where the author echoed the stance of various Hindu-phobic publications when it comes to the history behind one of our most sacred sites. She completely omitted the Hindu community's perspective, along with overwhelming historical evidence, and simply wrote that "Hindu groups claimed the [Babri Masjid] mosque was constructed on the birthplace of their God Ram." The history of Ram Janmabhoomi does not begin with the Babri Masjid and is not a concocted modern day claim. The Indian Supreme Court gave a unanimous 5-0 decision in favor of Ram Janmabhoomi because of overwhelming evidence that there indeed existed a magnificent Hindu temple that was destroyed and repurposed into a mosque. The Archeological Survey of India has recovered countless Hindu artifacts from this site and 16th century historians have definitively chronicled the destruction of this temple. A more recent British publication in 1891 entitled "The Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the Northwestern Provinces and Oudh" clearly mentions there was a

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PRESS OFFICE



The Ram Temple: The prana pratishtha dedication ceremony held on January 23, 2024, attended by thousands

significant temple called "Janmasthan" at the time of the Islamic invasions. In addition to all of this, Hindu civilizational memory never forgot, even after 500 years, that this was the sacred space once dedicated to Bhagwan

Ram in his child form. Instead of repeating the dominant narrative set by certain biased media platforms, it is imperative that we as Hindus not be afraid to speak our truth to power.

RAJESH VERMA
RVERMA2001@YAHOO.COM

Editors' response: Thank you very much for pointing out the unintended implications

of this summary paragraph on the site's history. There was no intention to cast doubt upon the fact the Muslims did indeed tear down Ram's temple to build the mosque, as they had thousands of others in India. For the benefit of readers of that article, this is the paragraph in question:

"The genesis of Ayodhya's transformation can be traced back to the land dispute involving Babri Masjid mosque, which was built in the 16th century by the Mughal emperor Babur. Hindu groups claimed the mosque was constructed on the birthplace of their God Ram. A series of legal battles and communal tensions led to the demolition of the mosque in 1992, sparking widespread riots across India which claimed 2,000 lives, mostly of Muslims. A 2019 Supreme Court ruling allowed the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple at the site."

The text on our website will be revised to read as follows: *The genesis of Ayodhya's transformation can be traced back to a land dispute involving Babri Masjid mosque, which was built in the 16th century by the Mughal emperor Babur after demolishing a large temple marking the birthplace of Lord Ram. Hindu protests to reclaim the sacred site started in 1853 and continued until modern times, culminating in the demolition of the mosque in 1992 which sparked riots*

across India and neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh. In 2019, India's Supreme Court ruled that the site belong to Hindus. The decision was based on an investigation of the site by the Archeological Survey of India which clearly showed the mosque was built after the destruction of a Hindu temple on the same location. Construction of the new temple started almost immediately after the decision.

THE EDITORS

Sri Adi Shankara

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your article, "Adi Shankara, India's Great Spiritual General" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2024) written by Swami Advayananda, Brahmacharini Taarini Chaitanya and Sudarshan Ramabhadran.

Shankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta is considered superior to other philosophies in academic circles for its logical rigor, comprehensive commentary on sacred texts, unification of diverse philosophical strands, and profound spiritual depth. His systematic approach, dialectical skills, and ability to synthesize various philosophical traditions into a coherent non-dualistic framework have cemented his legacy as a preeminent philosopher. The practical and experiential dimensions of his teachings further enhance the relevance and appeal of Advaita

Vedanta, ensuring its enduring influence and academic recognition.

PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA
PRADEEPSCOOL@HOTMAIL.COM

God's Favorite Flower

Reading this article (July 1999), I never realized how deeply ingrained the lotus flower is in Hindu culture and religion. It's fascinating to learn about its symbolism, from representing purity and divinity to being associated with various deities.

DAVID MOORE
MRDAVIDMOORE@GMAIL.COM

Neem Karoli Baba

Thank you for this lucid story (Jan/Feb/Mar 2024) of a saint who inspired many. His life was a spark of devotion and love that has ignited the quest in many. Love is a mighty force that makes many things possible.

JAY THAKAR

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

FROM: "FOURTEEN QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK ABOUT HINDUISM"

Why do many Hindus wear a dot on their forehead?

THE DOT WORN ON THE FOREHEAD IS A religious symbol. It represents divine sight and shows that one is a Hindu. For women, it is also a beauty mark. It is called the bindi in the Hindi language, bindu in Sanskrit and pottu in Tamil. In olden days, all Hindu men and women wore these marks, and they both also wore earrings. Today it is the women who are most faithful in wearing the bindi.

The dot has a mystical meaning. It represents the third eye of spiritual sight, which sees things the physical eyes cannot see. Hindus seek to awaken their inner sight through yoga. The forehead dot is a reminder to use and cultivate this spiritual vision to perceive and better understand life's inner workings—to see things not just physically, but with the "mind's eye" as well. The bindi is made of red powder (called sindur, traditionally made from powdered turmeric and fresh lime juice), sandalpaste or cosmetics.

In addition to the simple dot, there are many types of forehead marks, known as tilaka in Sanskrit. Each mark represents a



particular sect or denomination of our vast religion. We have four major sects: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. Vaishnava Hindus, for example, wear a v-shaped tilaka made of white clay. Elaborate tilakas are worn by Hindus mainly at religious events, though many wear the simple bindi, indicating they are Hindu, even in the general public. By these marks we know what a person believes, and therefore know how to begin conversations.

For Hindu women, the forehead dot is

also a beauty mark, not unlike the black mark European and American women once wore on the cheek. The red bindi is generally a sign of marriage. A black bindi is often worn before marriage to ward off the evil eye. As an exotic fashion statement, the dot's color complements the color of a lady's sari. Ornate bindis are even worn by actresses in popular movies and TV shows.

Men and women of a particular religion wishing to identify themselves to one another often do so by wearing distinctive religious symbols. Often these are blessed in their temples, churches or synagogues. Christians wear a cross on a necklace. Jewish boys wear small leather cases that hold scriptural passages, and the round cap called yarmulka. Sikh men wear their hair in a turban. In many countries, Muslim women cover their head with a scarf, called hijab.

Do not be ashamed to wear the bindi on your forehead. Wear it proudly. The forehead dot will distinguish you from all other people as a very special person, a Hindu, a knower of eternal truths.

Giving Temple Goers Much-Needed Knowledge

The center of this issue is a good example of the resources we provide to the world



By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami,
publisher of Hinduism Today

Visiting a Hindu Temple," the Educational Insight in this issue, states, "Be they luxurious palaces, rustic warehouses, simple halls or stone sanctuaries, Hindu temples are springing up all over the world, numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Yet outside of India and a few places like Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bali, what happens inside these temples remains a mystery—to young generations of Hindus as well as to curious newcomers. It's all a bit

intimidating at first." Clearly there is a need to demystify the Hindu temple in order for young generations of Hindus as well as newcomers to feel comfortable enough to enter the temple and participate in the worship.

This feature does just that in answering common questions that arise: Why are temples important? What are the customs and protocols, the dos and don'ts? What attitudes should one hold inside? Do all those rituals have a meaning? What is the priest chanting? All these musings and more are addressed here to help newcomers—both Hindus and non-Hindus—enjoy and benefit from their temple visits.

To mention three of the major sections: The section "What Is Puja All About?" provides a detailed description of the sequence of actions the priest performs during a typical puja—a ceremony similar to a grand reception for a king.

In the section "Puja Is Communion" the inner, mystical perspective of the rites is explored. "Chanting and satsanga and ceremonial rituals all contribute to this sanctifying process, creating an atmosphere to which

the Gods are drawn and in which they can manifest. By the word manifest, I mean they actually come and dwell there and can stay for periods of time, providing the vibration is kept pure and undisturbed."

Certainly a major confidence builder for newcomers is "18 Steps for Visiting a Hindu Temple." Each of the steps, from arrival to departure, is described and has a photograph of devotees performing it to provide additional clarity.

We encourage our readers to share "Visiting a Hindu Temple" with individuals they know who are interested in attending a Hindu temple but are not confident or knowledgeable enough to do so.

Help our magazine navigate today's shifting currents, remaining strong and able to continue fulfilling its vital mission. We ask all who would support HINDUISM TODAY to direct donations—yearly, monthly or occasional—to the Hinduism Today Current Expense Fund to meet day-to-day expenses:

Donate at: bit.ly/help-HT, or contact us at: +1-888-464-1008 • support@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

“True strength is not in the force of our actions,
but in the patience of our responses.”

ChatGTP4o OpenAi

Hinduism would not be eternal were it not constantly growing and spreading, and taking in new areas of experience. Precisely because it has this power of self-addition and re-adaptation, in greater degree than any other religion that the world has even seen, we believe it to be the one immortal faith. **Sister Nivedita** (1867–1911), *disciple of Swami Vivekananda*

Inhale, and God approaches you. Hold the inhalation, and God remains with you. Exhale, and you approach God. Hold the exhalation, and surrender to God. **Tirumalai Krishnamacharya** (1888–1989), *Influential yoga instructor*

Knowledge has a beginning but no end. **Geeta Iyengar** (1944–2018), *yoga teacher*

The task is not to see what has never been seen before, but to think what has never been thought before about what you see every day. **Erwin Schrodinger** (1887–1961), *quantum physicist*

The mind says there is nothing beyond the physical world; the Heart says there is, and I’ve been there many times. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

You have simply to shine as the Soul of All. Then energy, life activity, will naturally begin to radiate from you. The flower blooms and fragrance begins to emanate of itself. The way to gain anything is to lose it. **Swami Rama Tirtha** (1873–1906), *Indian saint and philosopher*

That knowledge which purifies the mind and heart alone is true Knowledge, all else is only a negation of Knowledge. **Ramakrishna** (1836–1886), *Indian mystic*

Just as when we touch a live wire the electric force infuses itself into our body, when we deeply meditate on God, the power of the whole universe seeks entry into our personality. **Krishnananda Saraswati** (1922–2001), *general secretary of Divine Life Society*

Spiritual awakening is the most essential thing in man’s life, and it is the sole purpose of being. Is not civilization, in all its tragic forms, a supreme motive for spiritual awakening? **Khalil Gibran** (1883–1931), *Lebanese-American poet*

The only difference between a rich man and a poor man is that the poor man suffers uncomfortably, while the rich man suffers comfortably. **Swami Brahmananda** (1863–1922), *direct disciple of Ramakrishna*

Conflict exists strictly as an opportunity to raise our consciousness. **Carl Gustav Jung** (1875–1961), *Swiss psychiatrist*

The entire world is God. **Sant Tukaram** (1608–1649), *Marathi saint and poet*

All sorrow is due to the fact that many are seen where there is only one. Duality is pain. So long as man does not wake up to his identity with the One, the round of birth and death continues for him. **Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), *Indian spiritual teacher*

Especially in times of collective neurosis, the existence of mature people is of crucial importance. **Marie-Louise von Franz** (1915–1998), *psychologist*

Today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness. **Kalidasa** (c. 4th–5th century ce), *classical Sanskrit writer*

We are slowed-down sound and light waves,

a walking bundle of frequencies tuned into the cosmos. We are souls dressed up in sacred biochemical garments and our bodies are the instruments through which our souls play their music. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning. **Werner Heisenberg** (1901–1976), *quantum physicist*

It’s the challenges of life, when we face them through exercising self-control, that bring us a lot of spiritual progress. Not just sitting on the mountaintop in a quiet place. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

Guruji, what is it that makes us human?

Correctly selecting all the images containing buses or traffic lights

HINDUISM TODAY – IMAGE GENERATED BY DALL-E AI

DID YOU KNOW?

Encapsulating Divinity

AKALASHA IS A METAL POT, OR KUMBHA, with a large base and small neck, made of brass, copper, silver or gold, its mouth large enough to cradle a coconut. Ritually adorned, filled with water, topped with a coronet of mango leaves and a coconut, it is used as a temporary vessel for Divinity. It holds the energy of the God or Goddess during puja, much as does a granite or marble statue in a temple. The kumbha can be used to represent any Deity.

The entire arrangement (see photo) is called purna-kalasha or purna-kumbha. The kalasha is filled with water and sometimes coins, grains, herbs, gems or even gold are included. The mango-leaf coronet, with 5, 7 or 11 leaves, touches the water inside. A sacred thread is tied around the metal pot and incantations are intoned.

Worship with purna-kumbha dates from the time of the *Rigveda*. Scriptures speak of how the kalasha temporarily contains *amrita*, the elixir of life, bringing abundance,

wisdom and knowledge of our inherent immortality. Rich in mysticism and symbolism, the purna-kalasha is associated with the five elements in sacred scriptures; with elements of the human body, such as the head, hair, the nerve system and the chakras.

In addition to its use during puja, the kalasha plays a significant role in the consecration of new temples. During the prana pratishtha ceremony, the life force of the Deity is transferred from the kalasha to the murtis of the temple, imbuing them with divine presence. This sacred process involves the invocation and establishment of the Deity’s energy in the temple, making it a living, vibrant center of worship.

The kalasha is also used in the transfer of spiritual power to new shrines. When a shrine is being established, the energy from an existing consecrated shrine is ritually transferred to the kalasha. This pot, now



Preternatural pots: two kalashas are blessed with the sacred power during a temple’s consecration.

charged with divine energy, is then used to consecrate and empower the new shrine. Its usage ensures that the sanctity and power of the Deity are preserved and extended to new spaces, fostering spiritual growth and continuity in worship.

PUZZLES

Word Search

Instructions: in the word cloud, find and circle the words given below. They might be horizontal, vertical, diagonal or even spelled in reverse.

P M B L G E T K Z H I K T A O A C B A S Y D N A R Q J H B V
A G N A R U T A H C H U Z H Y G U H T B W K R S V W J X E I
J U H N E A F G C S G N P A M D I A P X R A S M G A M C Q B
P W I Z H C L O E D W D M M D T K G S A H B Q U P N I B C T
U U Y B Q C X R H E T A O K R G W A J S K H D P A A U I H R
H F R K E V J K I E D L L A V O M V K S O A T I G R R M U N
G A T U T V N K I N I I E R H A Q A B P N K P Q M A D W F Q
G V E O S Q A I A T G N J A D J I D D D O T D J Y K J I U J
L S M H B H N N M O Q I Q H P S T M A E T I O L W H S G N O
P A H R I D A Y A H C G I H V G S A N A M A A S H A P U A P
H M Y V Q W P Y D J S J S A U F L N T T H V D P U T E Z V I
Y A Z B A T K C Q M M K R U C P H V D S I A E X S N F A Z I
P N R E W N J H H Q L A A D I M R A E A G I T H M A X N U N
N P G C O K A A A C U V D L S S H L K J L H U H A C Q N J X
D P U O N A C V E S L I Y H J T K R K Z Z D V R A Z M B J M
K S U T R A W R U K A D T Q A H L N M X D H O K C M R Y A M
Q M F V V N W U W H B Y Y J D V U J L H B S P R S F F D E R
M W L Y U L L O S J B A N R O U A R I Y Y V H Y Q D A J A Q
Q M U E I H N R Y F B Z E B G G N F G F Y L X R D P Q O C F
R E Y R C B Z L G N D Z S W L A R D U M P F X C Y P K U F H

AHAMKARA	LAKSHMI
AKSHARA	MADHAVA
ANANDAMAYA	MANAS
ANTAHKARANA	MUDRA
AVIDYA	NIDRA
BHAGAVAD	NYASA
GITA	PADA
BHAKTI	PURUSHA
SUTRA	SAMADHI
BHUVANA	SHUDDHI
CHATURANGA	
DANDA	
GARBHA	
HATHA	
HRIDAYA	
ISVARA	
JNANA	
KAIVALYA	
KLESHA	
KUNDALINI	



I Want to Be a Monk

Life at Kauai’s Hindu Monastery in Hawaii is profound, spiritually demanding and richly rewarding. If you or someone you know feels called to a life of selfless service and meditation, we welcome the discussion. Candidates must be male, under age 25, single and ready to embrace a strict and traditional Hindu way of life. E-mail: monklife@hindu.org



More details about the Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order can be found by scanning the QR code.



Join Us at 4 Dharmic Temples in L.A.

These four ten-minute videos capture class visits to a Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh temple. They were developed by Hinduism Today for use in California sixth and seventh grade social studies classes in which the history of these four Indian-origin faiths is taught. Each visit was hosted by a member or clergy of the temple and approved by the temple management. By these tours, students learn the basics of the related faiths and experience their sacred spaces.



HINDUISM



JAINISM



SIKHISM



BUDDHISM



See the videos at: bit.ly/TempleTourPlaylist



FROM ATTI CHUDI Words for Youth Part Two

A Continuation of Auvaiyar’s Advice for Young People

Below are the last 45 of the 109-verse Atti Chudi, a poem by second-century-bce saint Auvaiyar, in which she offers terse advice for youth—one topic for each letter of the Tamil alphabet.

-
- 65. Do not pursue if sure of defeat.
 - 66. Hold firmly to goodness.
 - 67. Act in ways that are acceptable to the country.
 - 68. Do not depart from a good position.
 - 69. Do not play in dangerous waters.
 - 70. Do not eat tidbits that are unhealthy.
 - 71. Study many books.
 - 72. Plant rice fields.
 - 73. Follow good morals.
 - 74. Do not become involved in destructive actions.
 - 75. Do not speak insulting words.
 - 76. Do not bring illness on yourself.
 - 77. Do not utter vulgarities.
 - 78. Do not associate with people who are like snakes.
 - 79. Do not speak of misdeeds.
 - 80. Follow the path that brings honor.
 - 81. Protect and cherish your supporters and prosper.
 - 82. Plough the land and cultivate crops.
 - 83. Procure the support of great men.
 - 84. Eradicate ignorance.
 - 85. Do not associate with the immature.
 - 86. Protect your wealth and prosper.
 - 87. Do not cause quarreling to occur.
 - 88. Do not waver in your mind.
 - 89. Do not accommodate your enemy.
 - 90. Do not speak excessively.
 - 91. Do not desire to eat too much.
 - 92. Do not tarry where warfare has broken out.
 - 93. Do not associate with obstinate people.
 - 94. Hug your wife of tender nature and good character.
 - 95. Listen to the words of high-minded people.
 - 96. Keep away from a house of immoral women.
 - 97. Speak virtuous words.
 - 98. Give up infatuation for that which is impermanent.
 - 99. Do not boast about your prowess.
 - 100. Do not argue with elderly, wise people.
 - 101. Desire to learn.
 - 102. Follow the path that leads to moksha.
 - 103. Be a person of integrity.
 - 104. Live amicably with the people around you.
 - 105. Do not speak harsh words.
 - 106. Do not do bad deeds willingly.
 - 107. Rise from sleep before daybreak.
 - 108. Do not trust enemies.
 - 109. Do not speak biased words..



200 Deities Pilgrimage to Mandi for Mahasivaratri

Join our reporter for the little-known, week-long celebration of Mahasivaratri in the Himalayan foothills, attended by some two hundred Deities paraded to Mandi town on the shoulders of the devotees from villages far and near. Hundreds of thousands of devotees converge for days of worship, music, dance, drama, sporting events and fun with family and friends.

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, HIMACHAL PRADESH

PREPARE TO REIMAGINE EVERYTHING YOU KNOW about Sivaratri. Welcome to the town of Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, which suddenly comes to life after the long, cold months of winter in preparation for the International Sivaratri Festival 2024. In this grand event, some 200 Gods and Goddesses from temples all over the district of Mandi congregate in the town, along with hundreds of thousands of devotees gathering to seek blessings. Started by the town's royal family in the 18th century the festival is today carried on by the district administration.

I arrive in Mandi on March 4, three days before the festivities begin, allowing me time to get a feel for this old town once ruled by kings. I meet a native journalist and photographer, Birbal Sharma, who explains how the people interact with the visiting Gods (Devatas) and Goddesses (Devis).

The Divinities are brought from Their home temples to Mandi, some far away, on ornate wood-frame palanquins usually carried by two men. Mounted in front are *mohras*, gold or silver masks of the Gods, the most prominent represent the main temple Deity, and have been consecrated in a *pran prathishta* ceremony to carry the power of that Deity. The function is similar to the parade Deity in a South Indian temple, which is taken out on special occasions, but otherwise kept inside the temple and regularly worshipped in a shrine. Here, the parade Deities are taken far outside Their local area to join with other such Deities in large numbers.

One must understand, I was told, that the hill people regard these Gods as living beings, able to talk with you, understand your problems and offer guidance. Communication is facilitated through the *gur*, a person who serves as a medium, directly conveying the words of the Deity.

Birbal Sharma further explained that the Gods also communicate with one another—apparently a consequence of so many convening in the same place at once. When two palanquins meet, each with its respective God, interaction between them may be evidenced by involuntary movement of the palanquins, which become difficult for their carriers to control. The *gur* for one Deity may speak to the *gur* of another. It is a hypnotic sight—mood, sentiment, even insistence is expressed. It may seem exotic to outsiders, but for the hill people, the Divinities are living inner-plane beings able to bless you with peace and prosperity and make prophecies for the future. People find solace in Their company.

A visit to Mandi is incomplete without walking through the rustic lanes and enjoying the small, sleepy bazaars, just a stone's throw from the main road. Diminutive temples dot narrow lanes, and the air is filled

Huge numbers of devotees take part in the festival's second grand procession (inset) a palanquin of one of the visiting Deities, represented by one or more mohras (masks) usually the one top one, and related Gods and Goddesses



with the aroma of spicy Himachali delicacies cooking in roadside restaurants and kiosks. The old part of Mandi has many historical temples.

History of the Fair

The tradition of celebrating Sivaratri in this way began during the reign of Raja Ajber Sen, who in 1527 built the Bhootnath ("Lord of Ghosts") Siva temple. During Sen's reign, Mahasivaratri was celebrated each year in the temple's courtyard, with a several Deities coming in from other temples. Over a century later, Raja Suraj Sen, who ruled from 1664 to 1679, had no heir to the throne, as all his sons died, leaving him alone and totally dejected. His advisors suggested he give over the throne to God. Embracing the idea, the king built a temple for Madho Rai, a form of Vishnu, not far from Bhootnath and the royal palace. He engaged the goldsmith Bheema to make a silver murti of Madho Rai. That murti was declared the king of Mandi region and remains so regarded today. Bahu Sen, the King's brother, carried on the lineage as the representative of the royal family. Today, his descendant Omeshwar Sen has a central ceremonial role in the festivities, greeting each visiting Deity personally after they visit the Madho Rai temple.

During the reign of Raja Ishwari Sen (1784–1826), the fair was linked to the Mahasivaratri festival. Ishwari Sen was held a prisoner of war for twelve years after losing a battle with the king of Punjab in 1792. He was freed during the Gurkha invasion of Kangra and Mandi states. Upon returning home, the people welcomed him with great enthusiasm on the day of Mahasivaratri festival,

to which he invited all Deities from all parts of Mandi. Ever since then, the week-long fair of Mandi begins with Mahasivaratri. It is proudly stated that the mela, which started with the establishment of Bhootnath Vishnu Temple, became a harmonious blend



of two religious traditions, Vaishnava and Saiva, after Madho Rai Deity became the supreme head of the state.

Similar festivals are held elsewhere in Himachal Pradesh, most notably the massive International Kullu Dussehra festival. Dating from the 17th century, it is celebrated in September/October, starting on Vijaya Dasami.

Kamrunag, God of Rain, First to Arrive

I was lucky to have located the party of Kamrunag—God of Rain and first to arrive in Mandi—at the house of Mohan Lal Saini on March 6 in Chandiyal, a picturesque village on the outskirts of Mandi. Saini and his family are deeply devoted to Kamrunag, the most respected of all the Gods and Goddesses attending the festival each year. His temple is in Bath Valley, about 37 miles from Mandi on the Kamrunag Lake at an altitude of 11,000 feet. The journey on foot along a traditional route takes about two weeks, with many stops along the way. Each year, Saini hosts the God, Who is represented by a large, heavy, ornate spearhead, greeting all those accompanying Him.

Kamrunag. Pandit Shiv Pal Sharma, head of the Committee of Devatas (as the Gods are locally called), receives Kamrunag in Pulgharat, the main point of entry to Mandi. The committee maintains a list of Deities to be invited from the more than 500 temples in Mandi District, keeping in mind the scarcity of space and the possibility of overcrowding. Sharma is responsible for each temple's accommodations and care in Mandi. All the Deities and the accompanying musicians are paid honorariums by the government.

Instead of being carried on a palanquin with mohras (images of the Deity) and decorations, the Kamrunag spearhead, attached to a long silver pole, is carried by one of His devotees. The crowd swells as the procession reaches Madho Rai Temple. Deputy Commissioner Apporv Devgan welcomes Kamrunag before Kamrunag offers His prostrations to Madho Rai.

Devgan, one of the principal organiz-



ALL PHOTOS: DEV RAJ AGARWAL

Two Hundred Gods and Goddesses Arrive to a Kingly and Sacred Welcome



(Left to right) Kamrunag being received by Deputy Commissioner Apporv Devgun inside the Madho Rai temple; Dev Khuddi Jahal of Dehru reaches the town; Omeshwar Sen, descendent of the last reigning king of Madhi, the ceremonial head of the event, greets one of the Deities; each Deity bows in respect at the Madho Rai Temple; (above) newly arrived Deities approach the central festival grounds





ing officials, said the government has spent US\$500,000 on the event this year alone. They organize volleyball, wrestling and cycling championships, theater performances, poetry recitation and painting competitions. Hundreds of traders come, adding tremendously to the local economy. "Our focus is to promote our language, art and culture," Dev-gan declared.

Mahant Devendra shared, "Every person of Mandi is Godlike. It is a city of faith, of intense religious belief." Rituals begin long before Mahasivaratri. Each day of the preceding month, from *tara ratri* (the ninth day of the waning moon in the month of Shukla) to Sivaratri, the Siva Lingam in Bhootnath Temple is covered with butter into which a representation of a different God is scribed. Women of the neighborhood bring homemade cow's milk butter for the purpose. Artistic youngsters create each day's image.



Mahasivaratri Day

Today, March 8, is Mahasivaratri, the day Lord Siva married Parvati, according to local tradition. It is perhaps the most important festival celebrated in Himachal Pradesh. Thousands celebrate by fasting, worshiping at a temple, offering Ganga water to the Sivalingam and more. Long queues brave the morning cold in Chauhatta Square, waiting to worship in Bhootnath Temple. The temple's narrow alley is jam packed.

As devotees wait with their offerings of milk, bilva leaves and flowers, a symbolic marriage procession of Siva and Parvati makes its way past the square, headed by Mahant Devananda Saraswati, head priest of the Bhootnath Temple. Mahasivaratri is observed as a night of worship, bhajan and meditation, and thousands of ardent devotees keep the traditional all-night vigil in Bhootnath and other Siva temples in Mandi,



Festival scenes: (left to right) *So-nam Thakur (interviewed) before a Deity; young devotee; girls whisper their prayers into Nandi's ears; line-up of palanquins at the festival grounds*

such as Panchvaktra and Maha Mritunjay.

Sivaratri is the day the Gods and Goddesses reach Mandi. All roads leading to the town have caravans of *bajantris* (musicians), *devlus* (devotees) and the quintessential palanquin—locally called a *rath*, though a rath is normally a wheeled chariot pulled by hand. People welcome them with folded hands as they inch their way to the Madho Rai Temple. The melodious music of drum beats and trumpets resonates through the town. Some of the Deities have come from long distances, spending nights in the forests and villages. They have their fixed halting places. Each group coming into the town includes



devotees, the gur and, in many cases, a police escort. Accompanying the musicians, with their drums and enormous horns, are people carrying *chharis*, beautifully decorated silver staffs with colorful cloths tied atop. A total of 216 Gods and Goddesses have been officially invited to the festival by the local administration this year. So far, 193 have arrived for the fair.

Let the Fair Begin

The International Sivaratri Fair officially began the morning of March 9, but there is a small procession (locally known as *jaleb*) to Bhootnath Temple on the 8th to seek Siva's permission to start the festivities and inviting Him to join. A havan fire worship is performed in the courtyard of the Madho Rai Temple. As per tradition, only the palanquins of Shukradev Rishi, Jaidev Shri Jhati Veer and Dev Dhangaru participate. The Deities offer their obeisance to Madho Rai and then meet among Themselves. Mounted police lead the colorful procession, with *bajantris* playing their drums and loud trumpets just behind. Mandi's deputy commissioner, Apporv Dev-gan, walks behind the procession with other officials. His family take darshan of Bhootnath, symbolically inviting the Deity to the festivities.

Three processions are organized during the week-long fair on the first (March 9), fourth and seventh days. Following the traditional system, only certain Gods and Goddesses take part in these processions. The others remain in their respective places of stay, spending the day in the festival grounds, a large field known locally as *paddal*. Here nearly all Deities are assembled in rows. A few of the Gods



Pomp and Ceremony



ALL PHOTOS: DEV RAI AGARWAL

(Left to right) Musicians on their way to the festival grounds; God Shri Jahal from Khuddi Gad visiting Madho Rai temple; policemen lead the procession to Bhootnath Temple; Tara Mata Temple





do not go to the festival grounds. Kamrunag, for example, remains in the Tarna Mata Temple for seven days, while Dev Shri Parashar Rishi and Budha Bingal reside in the Narol courtyard of the palace.

Today, March 9, the Siva Lingam has returned to its unadorned form after the abhishkam bath, and the temple has been opened to the long queues of devotees. A squad of young boys and girls, joined by IT professionals, teachers and doctors, offer their services for the daily chores at all temples in Mandi. The first procession begins on March 9—in the afternoon, giving people a

chance to recover from the previous long night of Sivaratri festivities and worship. In the Chauhatta square adjacent to the Bhootnath Temple, passersby are attracted to three majestic palanquins of important Deities seated on the pavement: Magru Mahadev, Shri Hari Vishnu Narain, and Nag Chhaplandu. Late-arriving Gods continue to visit Madho Rai Temple.

The Main Procession

Deities escorted by their musicians and devotees wait to take part in the procession to the festival grounds. Meanwhile, crowds

swell gradually at Seri Manch, an open-air stage a few hundred feet from Madho Rai Temple and Chauhatta Square. There, turbans are being tied on the heads of honored members of society, including the chief minister of the state. In Himachal Pradesh, the turban is a part of the dress code for men at auspicious ceremonies, especially weddings.

One of the highlights today is the huge drum called *tamak* from the Tungal region, saved from extinction by the collective efforts of administrative and cultural agencies. Men and women dancers from Saraj valley, in traditional costumes and jewelry, dance with the procession. Faguli dancers are the center of attention, their faces masked with jute-like fibers and wearing loose wool outfits.

Amidst the thunder of drums and trumpets appear the magnificent palanquins of the Gods in an order followed since olden times. Only the foremost Divinities, totally 26, take part in the processions.

The Gods Dev Chhamahu Sheshnag and Dev Chhanjanu lead the procession. Close on their heels follow the Gods from Saraj valley: Markandeya Rishi, Dev Kotlu, and Vishnu Matloda. Behind them are Dev Shetty Nag and Devi Ambika. The trio of Magru Mahadev, Bayala Narayana and Nag Chhaplandu follow; then Vitthu Narayan, Luxmi Narayana and Ambika Nau. Next some of the four quintessential Gods of Chauhar Valley: Pekhara Gahri, Dev Pashakot, Bada Dev Hurang Narayan and Dev Ghadauni Narayan.

They are easily recognized by their unique palanquins. In the center of everything, the palanquin of Madho Rai marches past. A few more Gods bring up the rear, followed by the Chief Minister of the State, Sukhvinder Singh Sukkhu.

The procession culminates at the festival grounds. The chief minister then formally inaugurates the exhibitions set up here by government agencies, cooperative societies and self-help groups. Two other processions proceed along the same lines, with the same Deities but different dignitaries. The evening features popular singer Hansraj Raghuvanshi. The spell-bound audience sings Siva bhajans with him until late in the night. The huge stage at the Seri Manch is continuously occupied by artists. There are competitions for children and women in the morning. Evenings are cultural programs by visiting troupes.

The Festival Grounds

The entire area is a sight to behold. The riot of colors, the air redolent with myriad incenses, the soothing effect of the balmy Sun and the charged atmosphere are enough to send anyone into a trance. Every God and Goddess has a designated place to settle in a particular order. The amount of space given to a Deity depends on His or Her rank and status. There is a distinct appearance of the Deities from each region, in the size and nature of palanquins, and their gold and silver masks or mohras.

Hundreds of thousands of people throng the grounds over the festival's nine days. Nearly everyone, young and old, including children and university students, spares time

Divine Palanquins

The diversity of palanquins is not limited to their varied colors and shapes. Every valley has its own style. Locally called a *rath*, each has several mohras, bas-relief images of Deity faces in metal. The main Deity face is made of an alloy of eight metals, *ashtadhatu*, while the others, depicting the same or related Deities, can be of any other metal, including gold or silver.

The rath's purpose is to allow the Deity to be taken out of the temple. Before so used, the *pran pratishtha* consecration is done for it. "This give the mohras the same divine power as the image in the temple. Taking darshan of a moving Deity is as beneficial as the darshan of the Devata in the temple," states Bhagat Ram Thakur, from the party of Markandeya Rishi.

The tops of the rath, called the *mandap*, differ from one region to the other. Some are made of silver, while others are of made of beautifully embroidered velvet, or even cuttings of white cotton cloth. The raths are decorated with artifacts, such as crowns and pieces of jewelry donated by devotees, including the royal family. Each rath is carried on two long wood poles, are often encased in silver. These are strong but flexible, so they can bend freely during the dancing.

Usually, two men carry the rath on their shoulders. They have to be strong enough to bear the weight, as

well as any sudden twists, turns and sideways bends caused by the Deity. This phenomenon can be seen in videos of the event. When the carriers do not understand what the Deity intends by some movement of the palanquin, the gur is nearby to explain.

.....
The Parade Deities: Palanquin in the courtyard of Tarna Mata Temple



Music and Dance Are Major Parts of the Event



(above) Devotees take darshan of Kamrunag at the Tarna Mata Temple; (left to right); master craftsman Ghimar, with his grandson, in his shop in the fair; Faguli Dancers in the first Jaleb procession; dancers from Panjai region in their traditional dresses perform near their God, Pundrik Rishi; procession of the second Jaleb



each day of the celebrations to bow down in front of the divine figures, one by one, and make offerings large or small. Some devotees can be seen consulting the priests and gurs, seeking solutions to their problems. It is heartening to see little children following in the footsteps of their parents, with a promise to carry on the beautiful traditions to the next generation.

At the stall of Pundrik Rishi from Panjai, a group of men in traditional costumes are dancing as bajantaris play ecstatically. Some dancers perform with swords, the symbolic arms of the Deity which are proudly carried along with the palanquin. According to Promil Guleria, the district Language Officer, Falguli dancers and the masked dancers of Seraj Valley are star attractions of the jaleb procession. "To keep the tradition alive, we invite them especially on the occasion of Mahasivaratri Fair."

Related Venues

There are other key places besides the festival grounds, Bhootnath Temple and Madho Rai Temple. One is the Tarna Mata Temple on a small hillock overlooking the town. Kamrunag sits here in the rear corridor of the temple. Tarna Mata is Goddess Shyamakali. She is so powerful that no one dares to face Her directly. Inside the sanctum, Her murti faces to the left, so devotees see Her from one side. The atmosphere is especially charged where Kamrunag is placed. The priest and volunteers attending Kamrunag are busy, tying the *roli* red thread on the wrists of the devotees, giving them rice grain as prasad and blessing them.

Another key place is the courtyard of the

palace, where the six Devis (Goddesses) of Narol are staying. As told by one volunteer, in olden days, the king of Mandi would go to the fair alone, leaving the queen at the palace. Feeling lonely and slighted, the queen requested these six visiting Devis to remain in the Narol courtyard after being welcomed to Mandi. To this day, the six Devis remain inside the palace for the festival. Devotees come by the thousands to pay obeisance to Them.

This year, only four of the six attended—Baglamukhi, Budhi Bhairava, Kashmiri and Busain Baglamukhi. Apart from the Devis, the large room also hosts the famous Deities Parashar Rishi and Budha Bingal.

Meeting the Devotees

I encountered **Sonam Thakur** at the festival grounds. She was visiting every God and Goddess, one by one. "I have reached this far in two days, with five more days to finish taking darshan of all the Gods. I am here for mental peace. For achievements, you have to work hard and then it comes true with blessings of all the Deities here." Sonam is keen on becoming an army officer. She failed in her first attempt and became depressed. "As I prayed to Them, 'Please be with me,' I could feel Their presence as a constant unknown force around me. Then came the moment, I found myself out of that traumatic time of my life. I did my postgraduate degree in English literature with the Gods being my guiding force."

Shubhanya Thakur and her two friends from nearby Sundarnagar are here for two reasons—

first, the darshan of the Gods and, second, shopping and enjoying the festival. For friend **Sukanya**, the charged atmosphere with the presence of such a gathering of divine figures and the music of drums and trumpets is very special. "You can almost feel the Divine around you! This is an entirely different feeling here, so divine amidst the mundane. The moment you are here, you find yourself at a different level of consciousness." She was told by her parents to pay visits to all the Deities, especially Tarna Mata and Kamrunag.

Shubhanya personally requests the Gods to bless the whole of mankind with peace and prosperity. "From Kamrunag, I had wished at an earlier festival for my admission in a government college. With His blessings, I am now pursuing my engineering degree from Jawahar Lal Nehru Engineering College in our town. Shubhanya's second friend, whose name I did not catch, is a staunch follower of Hateshwari Mata. She remembers how her wish of getting admission in the government engineering college was fulfilled last year. This year she is busy thanking the Gods by visiting each of Them.

Babloo Soni is enjoying the exhibitions



THE AUTHOR

Dev Raj Agarwal of Dehradun, India, is a photographer who loves to capture Bharat's immense diversity of people, cultures and nature, especially in the Himalayas. Email: devraj-agarwal44@gmail.com

with his wife, children and his sister's family. Their purpose of coming was dual, to take darshan of all the Deities and take the children around to pamper them. "If we casually make a wish, it will never be fulfilled. You have to wish for something with complete faith, and then only the wish comes true," he said. All his wishes have come true so far.

The Festival Concludes

In the early morning of the last day is the Chauhatta ki Jatar—"journey to Chauhatta." Instead of going to the festival grounds today, all the Deities gather in and around Chauhatta Square, facilitating darshan to their devotees. Prophecies are made by Deities through the gurs. Rituals are performed to cast off evil spirits. The Deity Adi Brahma takes a round of the town to protect everyone with His divine power. The accompanying devotees tie a raksha thread on wrists for the safety and well-being of everyone.

Badadev Kamrunag comes down and bids farewell to Tarna Mata Temple. But before leaving the town, the Deity comes to Seri Manch, where devotees bid farewell to Him and seek His blessings. With heavy heart, the devoted inhabitants of Mandi bid farewell to the Deities, some of Whom visit Their devotees' homes before leaving town.

Many more religious and cultural festivals of India need to be promoted on the lines of Mandi International Sivaratri Fair to keep us rooted for the sake of posterity. With a little effort and initiative from the people and the government, we should be able to conserve our rich cultural heritage and showcase it to the outside world.

Speaking for the Deity

The most important component of the Devata system of religious practice is the gur. The gur is not a priest but a person who speaks on behalf of the Devata. The Devata is regarded as a living being, with *pran* and *vani*—life and voice. The gur remains in constant touch with the Devata through dreams and thoughts. There is a mysterious and unquestioned connection between the two.

Easily identified among the mass of devotees by his white turban, the gur usually remains silent when not speaking as the Devata. When he does speak, every single word is patiently listened to by devotees and village folk. At Mandi there were gatherings (photo lower left) in which the wise men of a village held discussions with the Deities through the gur, working hard to understand the right meaning.

Tall and lanky, Chaman Lal Sharma is the gur of Khuddijal Maharaj of Dehuri. He is from a family of gurs among which no one had been a gur for 18 generations. "One night, I was woken up by the Devata at 11:30. I almost lost my reason, unable to know what happened to me," recounts Chaman Lal. "It was a call from the Devata to become His gur."

In the dead of night, Chaman Lal left home, running madly on jungle roads. He went from one temple to another, drawing inspiration and gathering the power required for the job. He remembers, "My ac-

tions were following some unknown command. My body and mind were fueled with a strange energy, I could feel something happening inside me." After a lot of rituals and pujas in the presence of many hundreds of people, Chaman Lal was initiated as the gur of Khuddijal Maharaj.

Although they lead a family life, gurs are very disciplined. It is not their duty to perform rituals in the temple, yet they have to be there nearly all the time. On the advice of the Deity, they convey prophecies and prescribe rituals and remedial practices to the followers to overpower the ill effects of evil spirits on people.

Speaking for the Deity: Gur Chaman Lal Sharma looks on as the Khuddijal Maharaj Deity is worshiped during the festival

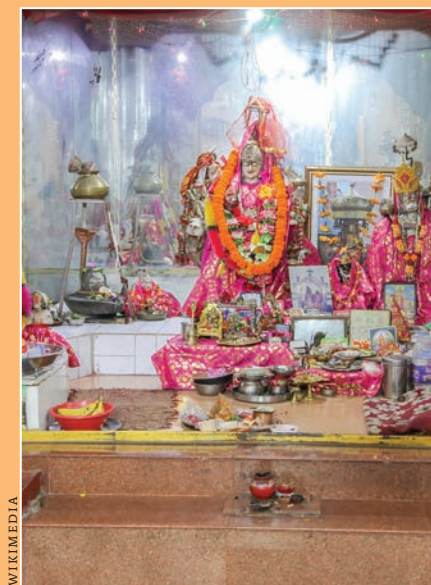


Festival Scenes



ALL PHOTOS: DEV RAJ AGARWAL

(Left to right) Village elders consulting with their Deities through a gur; a devotee has darshan of Kamrunag at Tarna Mata Temple; another worshiper at Tarna Mata; Naina Devi in Naina Mata mandir in Khaliyar, where Markandeya Rishi is staying; a large stack of currency notes offered to Mahunag Taraaur on the festival grounds

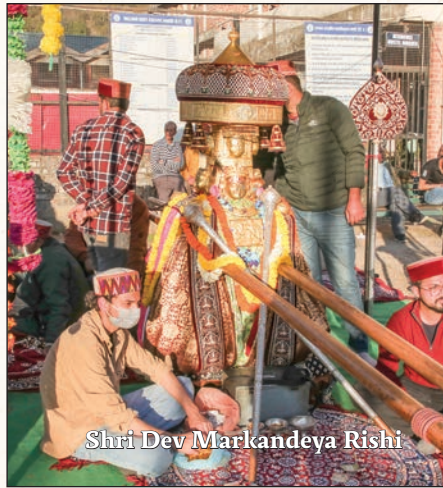


Meet the Prominent Gods



Bhagwan Anant Balunag

Bhagwan Anant Balunag last came to the Mandi Mahasivaratri festival 144 years ago. He is regarded as an avatar of Lakshma and His temple is in a remote region bordering Kullu and Mandi. His arrival this year was the talk of the town. With no knowledge of the route they had followed more than a century ago, the party marched forward, led by the Devata himself, devotees behind him camping wherever the God directed a halt. "The Devata had been expressing His desire to come to Mandi since last few years," Balbir Thakur told me. "We were a little reluctant as we never came to Mandi after 1880. We have been able to convince the Devata about the



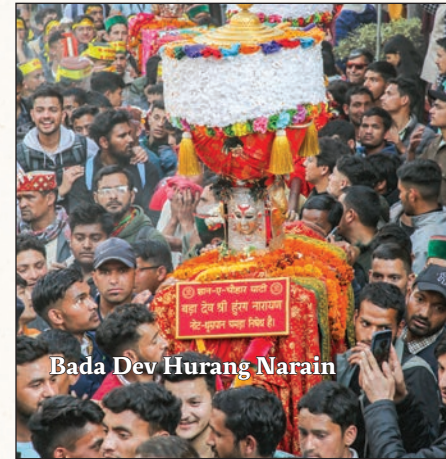
Shri Dev Markandeya Rishi

situation during the last five years, but this time He was adamant and said, 'Whatever you do, I have to go.'"
Khuddijahal of Dehuri, like Anant Balunag, is in Mandi after more than a century's absence, at the insistence of the God. Traffic came to a halt when the Deity's large procession of musicians, dancers and devotees reached Mandi. His palanquin was accommodated in Ekadash Rudra temple, next to the historical Victoria bridge. It travels to the festival grounds daily, though not as part of the main jaleb procession. As with Anant Balunag, His absence had to do with changes in district boundaries.



Khuddijahal of Dehuri

Khuddijahal is the richest of all Devatas. During the 1962 war with China, Khuddijahal and many other Deities gave gold to the government, which was returned after many years. Khuddijahal owns orchards, land and other properties. He has given land for 70 schools, 35 post offices, and other public utility facilities.
Shri Dev Markandeya Rishi from Aut is staying in Naina Mata Mandir in the village of Khaliyar, about three miles from the town. I was invited to Khaliyar by some boys carrying His rath. The entire neighborhood gathers in the temple to greet the visiting Deity. I asked Bhagat Ram Thakur about



Bada Dev Hurang Narain

the God's prophesies. He narrated the story of last year's floods. When people requested the Devata to send rains, He replied, 'You talk of rains? It will be difficult to save mankind.' Many ignorant people could not interpret what the Devata meant by saying this. We had unprecedented rains and landslides in the entire Beas valley."
Hurang Narain is the prominent God of Chauhar valley. His Rath is much different from others, with its dome covered with cuttings of white cotton fabric. He is known to bless people with children.
Balakameshwar Banyuri: Dev Balakameshwar is the Devata of lovers. A boy and girl who cannot marry because their horoscopes do not match go to the temple of Bala Kameshwar, fifteen miles from Mandi. Marriages are solemnized there without astrolog-



Shri Dev Parashar Rishi

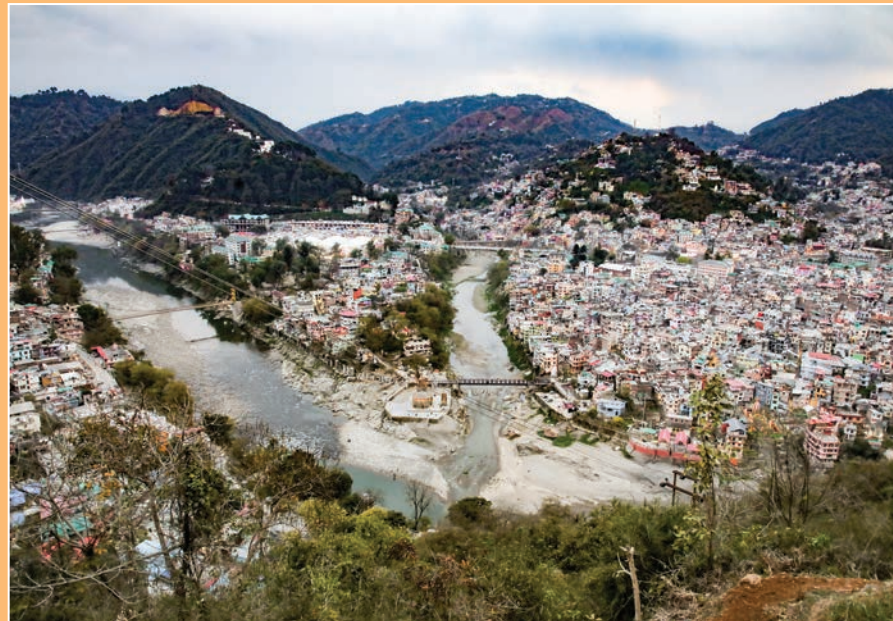
ical compatability. It is said the success rate of such weddings is one hundred percent.
Shri Dev Parashar Rishi, the father of Maharishi Veda Vyaasa, is one of the most important Deities of the area. But instead of taking part in the festivities, He stays in Rupeshwari temple, where the six Narol Devis also stay. Instead of having a rath for Himself, Parashar Rishi travels in the form of a *chhadi*, a long silver staff.
The native place of **Magru Mahadev** is Chhatri, about 75 miles from Mandi. The main mohra of the Deity was found in a field in Shwan village. His temple is one of the finest examples of the Kath Kuni style of architecture. It is said to have been built from a single cedar tree, with the craftsman being personally helped by the Devata, Who is known for His generosity.



Maa Baglamukhi

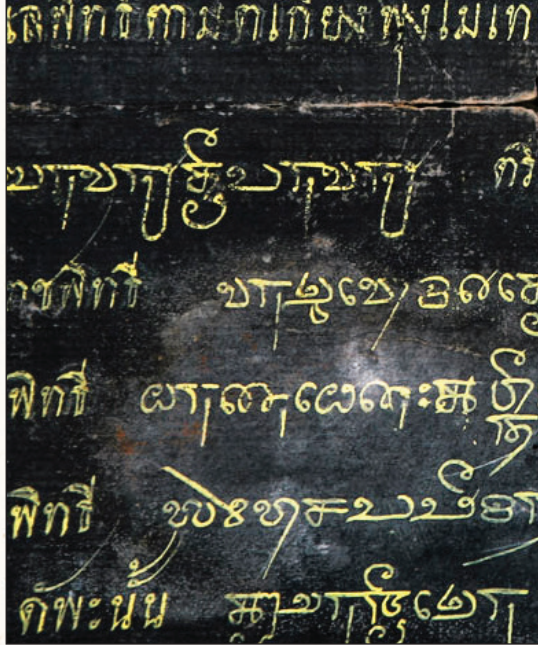
Dev Vishnu Matloda is the most important Devata of the Saraj Valley. Situated at a height of 9,000 feet, His temple is 55 miles from Mandi. If a childless woman comes there seeking blessings, she is certainly blessed with a baby. Vishnu Matloda, one of the richest Gods, is a star attraction at the fair. His rath alone is valued at half a million US dollars, His gold necklace weighs two kilos, and He has land in many villages.
Maa Baglamukhi: Fifteen miles from Mandi, in Bakhli village, is the temple of the powerful Maa Baglamukhi. It replaced the original which was submerged in the waters of Pandoh Dam. She is one of six Goddesses who remain in seclusion during the festival. Baglamukhi is worshiped specifically for *vaksiddhi*, "perfection of speech," such as in the arts of oration, debate and discussion.

Mandi's Magnificent Himalayan Setting



(left to right) Mandi town in the evening with the large white festival-ground buildings just above and left of the photograph's center; a priest accompanying one of the Deities; the Panchvaktra temple at the confluence of the Suketi River at right with the Beas River, one of the state's major rivers which eventually joins the Sutlej in Punjab and later the Indus.





ALL PHOTOS COURTESY ROYAL THAI DEVASTHANA

THAILAND

Siamese Brahmins Assist the King

For 800 years Hindu priests have guided Thailand's royal court rituals

BY HURDITYA DEVA, THAILAND

AMONG THE INDIAN DIASPORA SCATTERED across the globe, their settlement in Thailand, formerly known as Siam, often goes unnoticed. This likely stems from the seamless integration of Indian religions, culture and society into Thai life since ancient times. The propagation of Buddhism and Hinduism was primarily led by monks and priests who built monasteries and temples to promote their faiths. In early modern times, Hindu priests became known as Siamese Brahmins, an esteemed group headed by the Rajaguru, appointed by the monarch. They have played a pivotal role in shaping the country's spiritual and cultural landscape since the Sukhothai period (13th–14th centuries ce) or earlier. Descendants of ancient lineages, these brahmins conduct royal ceremonies, preserve traditional rituals and provide spiritual guidance to the Thai monarchy.

Of all rituals, the most important task for the court brahmins is the royal coronation, Rajyabhisheka. After several decades, Thai people witnessed the grand coronation cer-

emony on May 4th, 2019, including through live telecast. The Rajaguru was at the forefront, as the head brahmin is entrusted to sanctify the sacred water collected from various rivers in Thailand and offer it to the king to bathe with, signifying the very moment he becomes the monarch. Additionally, the Rajaguru handed the royal regalia to the king as he sat on the throne, including the tiara, scepter, sword, fly whisks and parasol.

After the king was fully enthroned, the Rajaguru read a secret passage to the king, during which the telecast was muted. This solemn moment is known as "Opening of the Gate of Mount Kailash." It is said that the passage invokes Gods to come down from Kailash to bless the king. In India, this moment would be equal to the Rajopadesha, in which the Rajaguru transmits the mantras and other teachings to a newly crowned monarch.

The Siamese Brahmins

In ancient times there were three groups of brahmins in Thailand, each divided into four branches. The Horachrya Brahmins, belonging to the Rigveda branch, served as official

court astrologers, calculating auspicious times for royal ceremonies. The Adhvaryu Brahmins, from the Yajurveda branch, performed various recitations in both Thai and Sanskrit for royal and religious ceremonies. The Udgatha Brahmins, from the Samaveda branch, performed similar recitations to the Adhvaryu Brahmins. The Brahman Brahmins, from the Atharvaveda branch, conducted religious discourses and assisted other brahmins in palace rituals.

In the Rattanakosin period (1782 ce to the present day), three groups of brahmins are recorded, with the Vedic branches seemingly lost. The Vidhi Brahmins, who are Saivas, serve as the main priests at the Grand Palace. They conduct or assist the monarch in various royal ceremonies and hail from a brahmin lineage of Nakhon Si Thammarat, an ancient port where ships from India used to make stopovers before journeying to other countries in Southeast Asia. The Horacharya Brahmins, from the Sukhothai lineage, perform the same duty as official court astrologers. The Phrithibat Brahmins, from the Cambodian lineage, take care of

the elephants and perform rituals related to them, including preparations for the capture of wild elephants and training them for employment at the royal court.

Similar to the brahmins in India, the Thai brahmin lineages are patriarchal, but their mothers need not necessarily be from brahmin families. However, being born into a brahmin family does not guarantee selection as court brahmins. One must undergo rigorous training and ordination, including becoming a Buddhist monk, before being eligible and proven worthy to be selected as court brahmins.

In modern times, Thai brahmins are identified by their last names, given by King Rama VI in the early 20th century, when the Western practice of having first and last names was adopted in Thailand. Last names include Gurukul, Sivayabraham, Thavornbrahman, Chandrabrahman, Raksabrahman, Vedbrahman, Devaratna, Senakalpa, Shankhabrahman, Sucharitkul, Charusena, Chueabrahman, Vindubrahmanakul, Sirivadhanakul, Singhaseni, Svastivedin, Nagavedin, Ratnabrahman, Bhavanganang and Rangsibrahmanakul.

The Siamese brahmins' headquarters, the Devasthana, is located at the very heart of old Bangkok, where Rama I, the founder of the present Chakri Dynasty, allocated land to build their temple. Now, the Devasthana houses three main shrines, dedicated to Siva, Ganesha and Vishnu. The temples display old Thai and Indian bronzes of Deities from different periods, including a few early Chola bronzes of Nataraja, evidence of the Thai brahmins' connection to India.

The Present Rajaguru

Chawin Rangsibrahmanakul, 71, inherited the position of Rajaguru, with the official title "Phra Maha Rajaguru Vidhi Sri Visuddhikhun," a role previously held by his

Devasthana shrines: (far left to right) Rajaguru and team perform puja at Siva shrine, chanting mostly in Thai; Rajaguru gives the new king sanctified river water to bathe with during coronation ceremonies; Thai Grantha script, similar to Tamil; (below) priest chants at Ganesha shrine



grandfather and great-grandfather. He heads a group of 15 brahmins who have been officially ordained as the royal priests of the palace.

When he was young, besides receiving training from the senior court priests, the Rajaguru was also tutored by Vidyadhara Shukla Pandit, an Indian priest who served at the Hindu Samaj and Vishnu Mandir in Bangkok. Vidyadhara initiated Rajaguru with the Gayatri mantra and taught him Hindu scriptures. The North Indian pandit also took him to India, visiting many important pilgrimage centers in northern and southern India. He later studied Sanskrit privately with Padma Sri awardee Dr. Chirapat Prapanvidya, a professor of Sanskrit at Silpakorn University.

Outside the palace walls, the Rajaguru used to enjoy driving his classic cars around Bangkok on free days. He is also a collector of fine gems, a keen photographer and enjoys listening to Pavarotti.

The Rajaguru does not have any children. He is now mentoring young brahmins in the court rituals. In a bid to preserve and rejuvenate ancient traditions, he has sent a few young Thai brahmins to India to study subjects of their choosing under the guidance of His Holiness Vijayendra Saraswati, the current Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram. These young scholars are also receiving training in ancient Indian brahmin customs and rites, such as the Sandhyavandana.

The South Indian Connection

The present Rajaguru believes his clan, the Ransibrahmanakul, hailed from the famous Nataraja Temple of Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu. It is believed that his forefathers, the Deekshitaras, embarked on a journey across the Andaman Sea hundreds of years ago and landed at Nakhon Si Thammarat port. This province contains evidence of the Indian connection in its material culture, food, performing arts and textiles. The nearby original Thai capital, Ayutthaya, was razed by Burmese in 1767ce during a war. Bangkok was later established as the new capital city in 1782. Brahmins who had been scattered in the war's aftermath were regrouped and brought to officiate the royal coronation and other state ceremonies, legitimizing the new reign.

Although there is no written or epigraphical record of their ancestors hailing from Chidambaram, one of the most significant clues lies in the royal brahmins' core hymns. These hymns, the Thiruvempavai and Thiruppavai, are chanted during their most important liturgy of the year in the original Tamil, despite the brahmins not speaking any Tamil and



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY ROYAL THAI DEVASTHANA

using a unique tune that differs significantly from the version sung in South India. The hymns are recorded on manuscripts made of mulberry bark, written in the Thai Grantha script, which few people have the knowledge to read. The Thiruvempavai and Thiruppavai festivals take place in December or January, which falls in the Tamil month of Margazhi.

In Tamil Nadu, these hymns—Thiruvempavai dedicated to Siva and Thiruppavai dedicated to Vishnu—are still chanted today, but separately in each God's respective temple. The Thiruvempavai, composed by the Saiva saint Manikkavacagar, is part of the larger collection known as Thiruvvasagam. The Thiruppavai, composed by the female saint Andal, is within a collection of the Tamil Divya Prabandham composed by twelve Vaishnava saints (Alvars).

In the Thiruvempavai, Lord Nataraja is praised many times. It is also believed that this hymn was first chanted by the saint-composer himself in the presence of the Lord in front of Chitsabha (the sanctum sanctorum of Nataraja). It is customary to chant "Thiru Chidambaram," which can be loosely translated as "Hail to the Holy Chidambaram," at the very beginning of the hymn. Thus, it is not surprising that Nataraja is worshiped as the main Deity at the Devasthanam and why the Rajaguru firmly believes he is a descendant of the priests of the famed Nataraja temple. It is unique that the aforementioned hymns of Siva and Vishnu are chanted at the Devasthanam in the same precinct. On the first ten days, Thiruvempavai is chanted in the Siva temple, followed by the Thiruppavai during the next ten days in the Vishnu temple.

Pilgrimage and festivals: (clockwise from above) Rajaguru and retinue are welcomed at Chidambaram Temple by Deekshitaras in 2024; (inset) discussing Thiruppavai hymns at the Srirangam Temple; the Royal Plowing Ceremony on May 9, 2019; the "Giant Swing" ceremony held at the end of the Thiruvempavai/Thiruppavai festival at the Bangkok royal court; small Deities swing on a wooden swan as prayers are chanted in a lullaby-like melody

The festival culminates in the "Giant Swing" ceremony, which involves the worship of a large wooden plank along with celestial bodies like the Sun, Moon, Mother Earth and the river Goddess Ganga. After the worship, the plank is fixed with ropes, hung on poles, and mounted by a court official and a brahmin known as *nalivan*. In this ritual, the brahmin symbolizes a naga, while the court official, representing the king, symbolizes Siva. The "Giant Swing" itself (photo right) is no longer used, deemed too dangerous.

The ritual corresponds to a mythological story recounting a bet between Siva and Parvati. Parvati doubts the stability of the earth, and Siva proves her wrong by asking a naga to stretch itself between two trees while He stands on it on one leg as the naga swings about. This imagery is also reminiscent of the image of Nataraja, representing the cosmic dance of Siva. Furthermore, the myth bears resemblance to the *sumudramanthana* (churning of the milky ocean), where Gods and demons battle over the elixir of immortality, a giant sculpture of which greets visitors at Bangkok's main airport.

It's worth noting that Thai kings in the Chakri dynasty have regnal names prefixed with "Rama," such as the current monarch, Rama X. This tradition signifies the belief that the kings embody Vishnu, who is revered as the ideal king in numerous ancient

Hindu scriptures. However, the most important liturgy at the Devasthanam is dedicated to Siva. This coexistence of Saivism and Vaishnavism in Thailand demonstrates a unique blend and tolerance not commonly seen in India in the past.

Twelve-Month Ceremonial Cycle

After the fall of Ayutthaya in 1776, many royal liturgies conducted by the brahmins were discontinued. King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) compiled a work based on written and oral records called *The Royal Ceremonies of Twelve Months*. The book outlines various sacred and secular ceremonies (see sidebar for list) that the Ayutthaya kings conducted every month for the welfare of the state and the people. Many of these ceremonies are undoubtedly Indian in origin and were most likely conducted by brahmins, while others are Buddhist in nature, military or socially related. The first Thai month begins in December and ends in November. There were probably many more rituals per month, but the knowledge was likely lost. Today, the book serves as the only record of ceremonies in the premodern history of Thailand. A handful are still conducted today.

The court brahmins also conducted several rite-of-passage rituals known as *samskaras*. One of few such rituals still performed in the modern period is the tonsure



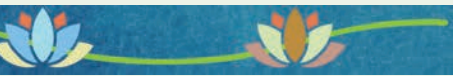
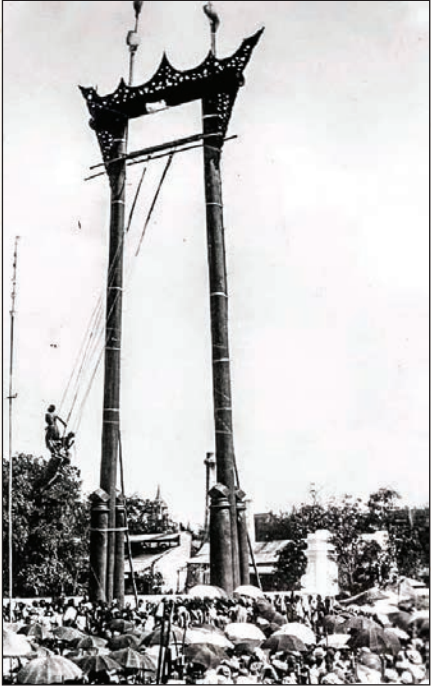
ceremony, where a hair tuft of a young boy is cut, signifying his transition into adulthood. Moreover, the brahmins participate in palace Buddhist ceremonies, such as the changing of the costume of the Emerald Buddha, which occurs at the beginning of each season.

In the Contemporary World

In modern times, the Rajaguru faces an array of new challenges. Rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and global influences pose significant questions about the preservation of traditional values and practices. The swift pace of change can sometimes overshadow ancient customs, creating a tension between maintaining cultural heritage and embracing modernity. Despite these changes, the Rajaguru's role remains as vital as ever, providing a stabilizing force in a rapidly evolving world.

The Rajaguru frequently visits pilgrimage

centers of South India, to which he has an affinity due to his link with Chidambaram. These visits are not just spiritual journeys but also opportunities for cultural exchange and scholarly interaction. After a long absence due to the lockdowns and a tight schedule, including the king's coronation, the Rajaguru and fellow royal brahmins most recently visited India in February 2024. They first paid a visit to His Holiness Sri Vijayendra Saraswati at the Kanchi Mutt, discussing the establishment and exchange of knowledge and research, which the government of India has expressed willingness to support. This includes digitization projects of Thai and Indian manuscripts and comparisons of chanting styles, such as those of the Thiruvempavai and Thiruppavai, as well as studying ancient Indian migration routes to Southeast Asia. Such initiatives are crucial in preserving the rich tapestry of spiritual traditions and understanding their



Historical Rituals

- * **December: Royal Boat Ceremony.** It was held immediately after the monsoon season. During the Ayutthaya period, this ritual was of great importance as the city, essentially an island surrounded by rivers, was prone to flooding. The king and his family, dressed as Deities, sailed on a royal barge, believing their divine presence would lower water levels and protect the rice fields.
- * **January: Thiruvempavai and Thiruppavai Festival.** It is the grandest brahmanical ritual in Thailand.
- * **February: Royal Plowing Ceremony.** Marking the beginning of the agricultural season, the brahmins conducted the sacred plowing of the field to ensure a bountiful harvest.
- * **March: Paying Homage to Teachers.** Students offered flowers, incense and candles to their teachers as a symbol of respect and appreciation.
- * **April: New Year and Water Blessing.** Priests chanted and sprinkled holy water on participants, for purification and renewal.
- * **May: Second Royal Plowing.** Similar to February, this one also included the release of sacred oxen, which were believed to predict the agricultural fortunes of the year based on the food they chose to eat.
- * **June: Homage to Land Guardians.** This ritual was performed to honor the Deities and spirits that protect the land and its inhabitants.
- * **July: Buddhist Lent.** This marked the beginning of the rainy-season retreat for Buddhist monks.
- * **August: Welcoming the Monsoon.** Lord Varuna was invoked to ensure sufficient rainfall for the agricultural season.
- * **September: Rice Harvest.** New rice was offered to express gratitude to spirits and Deities for a bountiful harvest.
- * **October: Ancestor Worship.** Offering food, flowers and incense to ancestral spirits along with sacred chants to invoke their blessings.
- * **November: Loy Krathong.** This marks the end of the Thai ceremonial calendar. Participants float decorated baskets on waterways to seek forgiveness for any harm caused to bodies of water.



historical spread and influence.

Next they visited Chidambaram, where a group of Deekshitaras awaited and welcomed Rajaguru with a parade that led him to witness abhisheka of the ruby Nataraja and crystal Sivalinga. Srirangam was the next stop. After darshan of Sri Ranganatha, the reclining Vishnu, they visited surrounding shrines, making a longer stop at the Andal shrine, where a few Vaishnava priests demonstrated the chanting of the Thiruppavai. The Rajaguru noted that some *pasurams* (chapters) resemble chants at the Devasthanam. In Thailand, the Thiruvempavai and the Thiruppavai are not chanted outside the festival in December/January, unlike in India where they can be chanted in homes and as an *upacara* (service)

2024 India visit: (clockwise from below) Royal brahmins in a hall at Kanchipuram; younger brahmin receives arati at a Kanchi Mutt shrine; Rajaguru inspects a potential royal Devasthanam purchase at Sukra Jewellery, which recently made puja items for the new Ayodhya Ram Temple

to the Deities in temples on other important occasions.

The group ended the South Indian pilgrimage at Rameshwaram, welcomed by descendants of the Sethupathi clan, hereditary custodians of the temple. Rajaguru offered the abhisheka to the Jyotirlinga, after which the young Thai priests got a chance to bathe with water from the twenty-two sacred wells for the first time.

Talking about the younger generation, there are currently few practicing brahmin priests left in Thailand. Many born into brahmin families have chosen careers in business or the corporate world, driven by the demands and opportunities of contemporary society. Besides officiating royal ceremonies in the palace, a handful of priests earn their living by establishing spirit shrines, conducting housewarming ceremonies, inaugurating businesses and practicing astrology. This diversification of roles reflects the adaptive nature of brahmin priests in the face of modern economic realities.

Conclusion

Adapting to these changes while preserving the essence of Thai spirituality is delicate. The current Rajaguru, like his predecessors, navigates it with integrity and wisdom. He ensures that Hindu teachings, which have harmoniously merged with Buddhism, remain relevant and accessible to society. The fusion of Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions in the Thai ceremonial calendar exemplifies Thailand's unique cultural identity and underscores the importance of continuity and adaptation in preserving ancient traditions in a modern context.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hurditya Deva is an opera singer and scholar, with a Masters and PhD in Sanskrit Studies. He researches Sanskrit texts and epigraphy in India and Southeast Asia.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY ROYAL THAI DEVASTHANAM



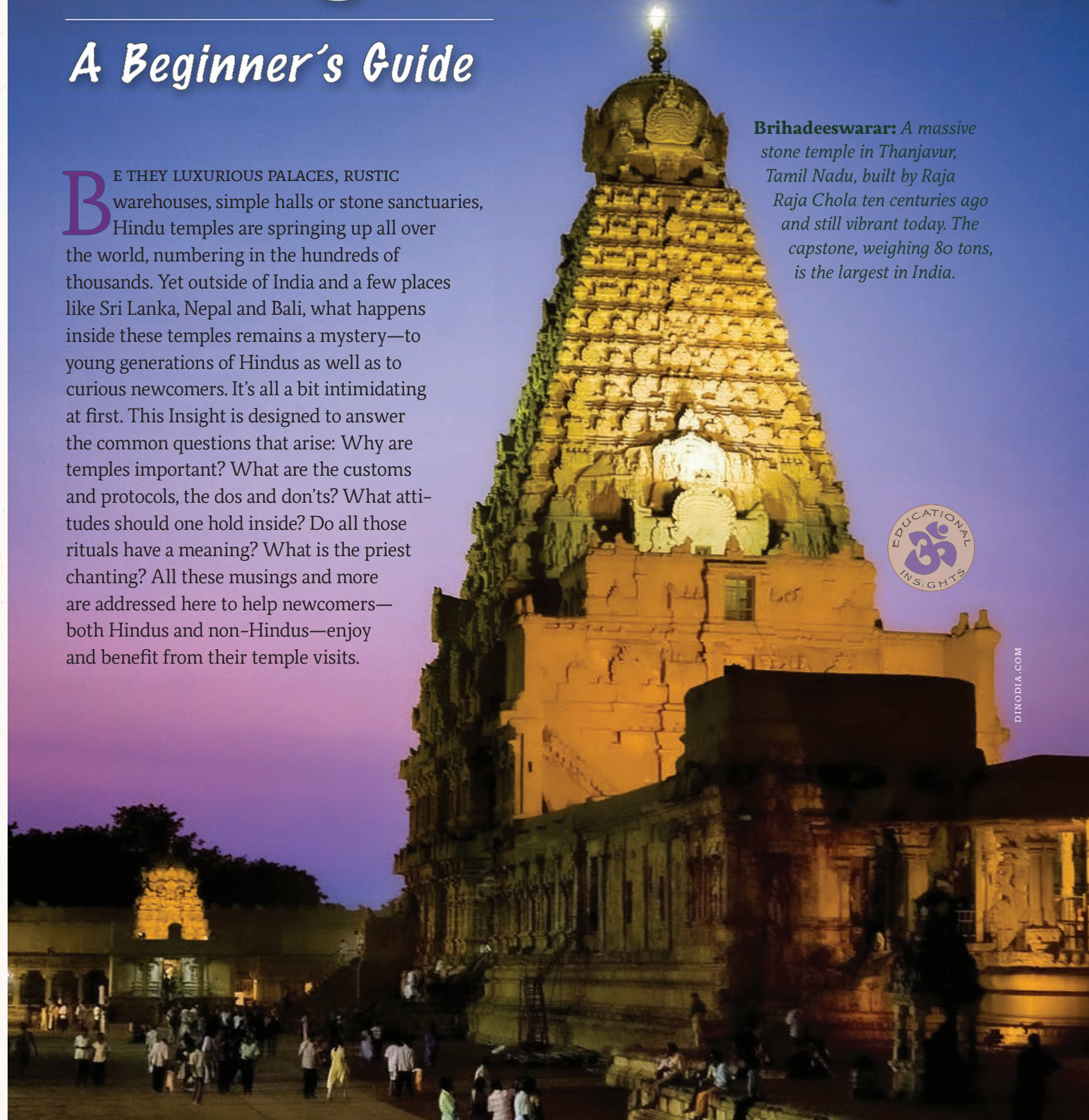
EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Visiting a Hindu Temple

A Beginner's Guide

BE THEY LUXURIOUS PALACES, RUSTIC warehouses, simple halls or stone sanctuaries, Hindu temples are springing up all over the world, numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Yet outside of India and a few places like Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bali, what happens inside these temples remains a mystery—to young generations of Hindus as well as to curious newcomers. It's all a bit intimidating at first. This Insight is designed to answer the common questions that arise: Why are temples important? What are the customs and protocols, the dos and don'ts? What attitudes should one hold inside? Do all those rituals have a meaning? What is the priest chanting? All these musings and more are addressed here to help newcomers—both Hindus and non-Hindus—enjoy and benefit from their temple visits.

Brihadeeswarar: A massive stone temple in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, built by Raja Raja Chola ten centuries ago and still vibrant today. The capstone, weighing 80 tons, is the largest in India.



Quick Start...

Dress modestly, no shorts or short skirts. Remove shoes before entering. Be respectful of God and the Gods. Bring your problems, prayers or sorrows but leave food and improper manners outside. Do not enter the shrines without invitation or sit with your feet pointing toward the Deities or another person. Refrain from gossip and worldly talk. Mute your cell phone. Treat the priests with respect and obey visitor signs. Men and women avoid hugging and other demonstrations of affection, and usually sit separately. Enjoy a spiritual time in this holy sanctuary.

Why Are Temples Needed?

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A few years ago at a temple in Australia, while I was chatting with sons and daughters of key members, one youth challenged: “Swamiji, since God is omnipresent, what is the need to build large temples to worship Him? The cost of construction is large, plus then you have the ongoing cost of monthly maintenance that has to be met. Couldn’t all that money be spent in a better way?” “Good question!” I responded. “Yes, it is true that God is everywhere, permeating everything, including this room. By looking intently around us, we should be able to experience God, right? But look around you now. How many of you can see God?” They all smiled and admitted they could not. I continued: “Practically speaking, God’s omnipresence is at a very subtle level, too subtle for most of us to experience without a lot of experience in meditation.” That’s how I explain the need for the Hindu temple: it is a special space in which the inner and outer worlds commune and we can experience Divinity. If we want to see a distant galaxy, we can go to an observatory and look through a powerful telescope. To see into the nucleus of a cell, we go to a laboratory and use a microscope. Similarly, to know God, we can go to the temple and experience Divinity through the sanctified murti. Temples are especially sacred for three reasons: construction, consecration and continuous daily worship. Hereditary temple architects, known as *sthapatis*, are commissioned to design and construct the temple according to the sacred architecture found in the Agamic scriptures. Consecration occurs through the powerful ceremony of *kumbhabhishekam*, with many priests performing elaborate rituals for several days. Then begins the perpetual schedule of obligatory pujas conducted by highly trained priests. These daily pujas sustain and build on the power set in motion at the *kumbhabhishekam*.



BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA

Hindu Temples Are Not All Alike

IDEALLY, TEMPLES (OFTEN CALLED MANDIRS) ARE BUILT IN accordance with the ancient scriptures, planned out by skilled Indian architects to resemble the traditional styles found in India. This ideal temple has certain features: 1) a central sanctum enshrines the main Deity; 2) other Deities in the pantheon are represented by murtis in secondary sanctums or shrines; 3) the structure has no basement; 4) cultural and social activities are provided for in separate facilities, not in the main area dedicated for worship; 5) trained, ordained priests perform a daily regimen of pujas (others do not enter the shrines); 6) the temple openly represents a particular denomination of Hinduism and a specific lineage of teaching and liturgy. While these principles are well known among the thousands of communities of Hindus around the world, the reality is that each temple comes up in its own way, organically, with the above ideals flexing with the exigencies of the day, the resources and often-mixed geographical background of the constituents. Hence, we now have a vast variety of temples, particularly outside India, each serving the needs of its community as a center of worship, culture, community service and spiritual fellowship. Every temple is unique. Agamic temples provide elaborate pujas several times per day. The main Deities are in distinct, prominent sanctums. Individuals come and go at any time and worship privately or as a family. Other temples may be

Sanctuaries for God: (above) The BAPS Swaminarayana Mandir of Houston, Texas; (right) a priest holds the arati flame before Lord Ganesha at the Sri Manika Vinayakar Alayam in Paris

structured as a simple hall with a stage in front, and Deities on pedestals usually around the perimeter of the room. The style of worship here is often congregational, with temple members gathering at a set time for a structured service conducted by a priest or elder. In some mandirs devotees may do a simple puja themselves. Services may include some form of teaching, such as a lecture by a swami or lay leader, and devotional singing or dramatic readings from the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Here is the format followed at the Hindu temple in Midland, Texas, as described by Dr. Padmaja Patel: “Every week on Sunday we gather at our temple from 10:30 to 12:30. After removing our shoes in our shoe room, we enter the main hall. The men and women sit separately. There are a set of *shlokas* and *stutis* that everyone chants together, followed by bhajans, which are usually in the call-and-response fashion. At the end of the session, our priest will perform a short puja to a particular Deity. Then we sing a food-offering song, followed by the ‘Om Jai Jagadish Hare’ arati, where everyone can come forward. There are usually four or five arati trays with which people can offer arati to their Ishta Devata, or chosen Deity. Then we adjourn to a separate hall and enjoy the blessed food offerings as prasad.” It is prudent to consult members of the community in advance to learn how best to prepare yourself to attend a particular temple.



PHILIPPE LISSAC/GODONG/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/NEWSCOM

What Is Puja All About?

The Hindu worship service called puja, literally “adoration,” is the central activity in most temples. Conducted by a priest, or pujari, puja is similar to a grand reception for a king. The ritual can last from ten minutes to several hours. All pujas follow one basic pattern. First, the pujari purifies himself, the sacred implements and the place of worship. He chants in Sanskrit the time, place and nature of this particular puja. Through hand gestures (mudras) and mantras, he beseeches the Deity to come and dwell in the image. Ringing a bell and intoning mantras and hymns from the ancient *Vedas* and *Agamas*, the pujari then offers precious substances to the Deity, including water, uncooked rice, holy ash, sandalwood paste and kumkum. Some rites include a ritual bath, called *abhishekam*, in which water, sesame oil, turmeric water, saffron, milk, yogurt, ghee, honey, lime juice, vibhuti, sandalwood paste, panchamritam (mixture of five fruits), coconut water and rosewater are poured over the Deity. Devotees are seated during most of the puja, usually on the floor. After *abhishekam*, the Deity is dressed in new clothes and beautifully decorated with flowers. At this point, devotees may sing devotional songs. After decorating the Deity, the pujari offers incense, oil lamps and food. He offers flowers while chanting 108 names of the God. At the high point of the puja, a large lamp is waved before the Deity and bells are rung loudly as God sends His power through the holy image of Himself. When the lamp is lowered, everyone prostrates to the Divine. The lamp is then carried out to bless the worshipers, who often leave a donation on the tray (or later in the temple offering box). Finally, depending on the tradition, sacraments such as sacred ash, blessed water, sandalwood paste, kumkum, fruit, sweets and flowers are passed out to bless all present. These include a portion of the offerings—flowers, cooked food and more—often brought by devotees. Devotees may then sit in meditation, basking in the blessings invoked by the puja.

18 Steps for Visiting a Hindu Temple

You will want to look and feel your best when you go to the temple, God's home. Prepare yourself by bathing and putting on clean clothing. Traditional dress is best—saris or punjabis for ladies, long dresses for girls, and kurta and dhoti or pants for men and boys. But any nice, modest clothing suitable for sitting on the floor is acceptable. In anticipation of your visit, prepare your mind by thinking about God. Keep focused on your spiritual purpose during travel time, be it a few minute's drive or a long pilgrimage. If traveling with family or friends, direct discussions to spiritual matters and away from worldliness.

Bring an offering, such as fruits and flowers or flower garlands. On arrival, it is traditional to circumambulate the temple where possible. Inside, greet the Deities at their shrines, starting with Lord Ganesha, hands pressed together in namaskara. You may prostrate and present your offerings. Inwardly feel God's uplifting presence, called *sannidhya*.

The primary focus of Hindu temples is the worship ritual called puja. Puja is a ceremony in which the ringing of bells, passing of flames, presenting of offerings and chanting invoke the blessings of God and Gods. During the puja, focus on the acts of worship, rather than letting your mind wander. Over time, devotees strive to learn the inner meaning of what the priest is doing and mentally follow along.

Ardent worship takes many forms in a temple. You can be immersed in the joys of devotion, in prayerful communion, seeking consolation for a loss, singing hymns, chanting mantras or celebrating a rite of passage. Meditation is appropriate, especially after the puja, and emotion is not out of place. God will receive your devotion, however you offer it.

Dancing with Siva summarizes: "With offerings in hand, leaving our shoes outside, we enter through the *gopura*, or temple tower, wash hands, feet and mouth, and seek blessings at Lord Ganesha's shrine. Next we follow the outer *prakara*, or hallway, clockwise around the *mahamandapa*, central chambers. Inside, we leave our worldly thoughts at the *balipitha*, or offering place, then prostrate before the *dhvajastambha*, temple flagpole, and worship Nandi the sacred bull [or Garuda, Mushika, etc.]. Next we circumambulate the central sanctum, *garbhagriha*, usually three times, returning to its entrance for worship. During puja, we stand with hands folded or in *anjali mudra*, though according to temple custom, it may be proper to sit quietly or sing devotional hymns. After the *arati*, or waving of the camphor light before the Deity, we prostrate (*ashtanga pranama* for men, and *panchanga pranama* for women) and rise to receive the prasada, accepting them in the right hand. We walk around the *garbhagriha* one final time before taking our leave."

YOU ARRIVE

1. Worship at the Temple Gateway



As soon as you arrive, stand humbly before the temple entrance. Raise your hands above your head in the prayerful gesture three, five, seven or nine times. You may prostrate here as well.

2. Remove Shoes, Rinse Feet & Hands



Remove your shoes (socks are usually OK to keep on, especially in cold climates). If a place is provided, rinse your mouth, feet and hands to purify yourself before entering the sacred premises.

3. Worship at the Flagpole



Many temples have a flagpole where one may prostrate and pray, and a *balipitha*, offering place, where negative thoughts are left. Then worship the Deity's mount, or *vahana*. In Iraivan Temple it is Nandi the bull.



WORSHIPING & ATTENDING PUJA

4. Pray First to Lord Ganesha



Worship Lord Ganesha, the Lord of Obstacles. By honoring Him first, the dynamic blessings of the temple will be opened to you.

5. Ring the Shrine Bell



Often there will be a small bell that you can ring to announce your arrival to the devas and Gods; its pure tones can easily be heard in the inner worlds.

6. Greet the Deities



Visit and greet the Deity in each shrine. The priest will often guide the order to be followed and explain the unique powers of each Divinity. Offer a flower to each.

7. Walk Around the Sanctum



Walk clockwise one, three, five, seven or nine times around the main shrine, withdrawing your awareness from worldly matters and directing it toward the Divine.

8. Present Your Offering



Place before the shrine the offering tray or basket that you prepared at home or purchased (they may be available in stalls near the entrance). Put love into your offerings.

9. Sit for Puja



During the puja, don't let your mind wander. This is the innermost time for reflection and communion. Devotees sit on the floor, then stand during the last part of a puja, and prostrate at the end.

RECEIVING THE PUJA SACRAMENTS

10. The Arati Flame



When the priest holds the lamp in front of you after puja, pass your open hands through the flame three times, lightly touching your eyes each time to draw the blessings into you.

11. Holy Ash



Accept the holy ash in your right hand. Transfer it to your left hand, then use the right hand to apply it to your forehead. Ash symbolizes transience of life and the burning away of impurity.

12. Blessed Water



The priest will place a small spoonful of blessed water or milk into your cupped right hand. Bring your hand up to your mouth and sip it.

13. Sandalwood Paste & Kumkum



Fragrant sandalwood paste is then given, followed by red powder. Apply a dot of these in the middle of your brow with your right ring finger. See “about the sacraments” sidebar.

14. Prasada and a Flower



Blessed food (prasada) may then be given, such as a piece of fruit, a sweet or a spoonful of cooked food. Lastly, one may receive a flower that was offered to the Deity.

15. Monetary Offerings



It is customary to leave a monetary offering in the temple donation box. In addition, a donation may be placed on the arati tray to support the priests and their families.

AFTER THE CEREMONY

16. Singing Bhajan



Singing is a superb way to express love and devotion. Bhajans and other hymns can be sung during the puja when the curtain is closed, or later on, by yourself or with a group.

17. Japa and Meditation



After the puja, sit quietly and meditate on the Divinity within yourself. This is an ideal time for japa, mentally repeating your mantra while counting on a strand of beads.

18. Archana for Personal Blessings



Archana is a personalized puja in which the priest recites to the Deity your name, lineage and birth star. To receive an archana, you pay a small fee and present an offering basket.

About Sacraments

At the end of the puja, the priest passes out to the attending devotees various substances that were offered to the Deity. By partaking of these offerings, called prasada, one absorbs the blessings into one's being. Observe the way experienced temple-goers receive these sacraments to properly learn the nuanced customs.

First, the sacramental lamp which has just been offered at the high point of the puja is passed among the devotees. The devas can see and bless you through this flame as it lights up your face. Sometimes you, too, can glimpse into their world. When the priest comes to you with the lamp, reach out and pass both hands devoutly over the flame. Then bring your hands back, turn your palms toward your face and touch your eyes with your fingertips to receive the Deity's blessings. (In some temples, the devotees take turns passing the arati flame in front of the murtis while singing “Jai Jagadish Hare....”)

At a shrine to Lord Vishnu, the priest may bring out the Deity's silver or gold crown and lightly touch it to the head of each devotee. This represents God's feet being placed on your head. A sacrament offered at Siva shrines is holy ash, *vibhuti*, made by burning dried cow dung with ghee, flowers, yogurt and other ingredients. It symbolizes the purity we attain by burning the bonds of ego, karma and maya to reveal the soul's natural goodness. It is applied on the forehead, generally three broad stripes for men, and one short stroke for ladies. A spoonful of blessed water that was offered to the Deity, or milk with which the Deity was bathed during the puja, may be offered for you to drink.

Sandalwood paste, valued for its fragrance, is often next. A small dab is placed in your hand by the priest, which you transfer to your left palm with a wiping motion. Dip your right ring finger into the paste and apply it with a small circular motion between the eyebrows, or in your chosen sectarian mark. A red powder called kumkum is then given. The priest will place a small pinch in your right hand or invite you to take some from the container he holds before you. Apply the kumkum on top of the sandalwood, creating a dot, or bindi, which represents the third eye of spiritual seeing. Vaishnava Hindus traditionally apply a V-shaped tilaka on the forehead, representing the feet of the Lord.

Flowers may also be distributed by the priest, as well as cooked food. Many devotees wrap portions of their prasada to share with loved ones or place on their home altar.

Did You Know?

All giving and receiving in the Hindu tradition is done only with the right hand or with both hands.



Six Secrets About Temple Worship

FROM *MERGING WITH SIVA*, BY
SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

1. One God, Many Gods

In the Hindu pantheon there are said to be 330 million Gods. Even so, all Hindus believe in one Supreme Being who pervades the entire universe. The many Gods are perceived as divine creations of that one Being. These Gods, or Mahadevas, are real beings, capable of thought and feeling beyond the limited thought and feeling of embodied man. So, Hinduism has one God, but it has many Gods. There are only a few of these Gods for whom temples are built and pujas conducted. Ganesha, Siva, Subramaniam, Vishnu and Shakti are the most prominent Deities in contemporary Hinduism. Of course, there are many others for whom certain rites or mantras are done in daily ceremony, often in the home shrine. These include Brahma, Surya, Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Agni, Chandra, Ayyappan, Hanuman, Mariyamman and others. The Hindu traditionally adopts an Ishta Devata. This is a personal Deity chosen from the many Hindu Gods, often according to the devotee's family background or the feeling of closeness to one form of divine manifestation. It is the unique and all-encompassing nature of Hinduism that one devotee may be worshipping Ganesha while his friend worships Subramaniam or Vishnu, and yet both honor the other's choice and feel no sense of conflict. The profound understanding and universal acceptance that are unique in Hinduism are reflected in this faculty for accommodating different approaches to the Divine, allowing for different names and forms of God to be worshiped side by side within the temple walls. It may even happen that one may adopt a different personal Deity through the years according to one's spiritual unfoldment and inner needs.

2. Temples Are Transformative!

Visiting a Hindu temple, receiving darshan from the majestic Gods of our religion, can altogether change the life of a worshiper. It alters the flow of the pranas, or life currents, within his body. It draws his awareness into the deeper chakras. It adjusts his beliefs and the attitudes that are the natural consequence of those beliefs. But the change is slow. He lives with the experience for months and months after his visit to the temple. He comes to know and love the Deity. The Deity comes to know and love



A couple walk barefoot in the precincts of the Sri Ekambaranathar Siva temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu

him, helping and guiding his entire evolutionary pattern. Darshan coming from the great temples of our Gods can change the patterns of karma dating back many past lives, clearing and clarifying conditions that were created hundreds of years ago and are but seeds now, waiting to manifest in the future. Through the grace of the Gods, those seeds can be removed if the manifestation in the future would not enhance the evolution of the soul.

3. Three Worlds Communing

Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds. The First World is the physical universe, the Second World is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, or angels, and spirits live, and the Third World is the spiritual sphere of the Mahadevas, the Deities, the Gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds. Religion blossoms for the Hindu as he awakens to the existence of the Second and Third Worlds. These inner worlds naturally inspire in man responses of love and devotion and even awe. They are that wonderful. It is in the Hindu temple that the three worlds meet and devotees invoke the Gods of our religion. The temple is built as a palace in which the Gods reside. It is the visible home of the Gods, a sacred place unlike every other place on the Earth. The Hindu must associate himself with these Gods in a very sensitive way when he approaches the temple. These intelligent beings have evolved through eons of time and are able to help mankind without themselves having to live in a physical body. These great Mahadevas, with their multitudes of angelic devas, live and work constantly and tirelessly for the people of our religion, protecting and guiding them, opening new doors and closing unused ones. The reality of the Mahadevas and their darshan can be experienced by the devotee through his awakened ajna



Denizens of the three worlds are often depicted, as here, on a temple's ornate towers

vision, or more often as the physical sight of the image in the sanctum coupled with the inner knowing that He is there within the microcosm. This darshan can be felt by all devotees, becoming stronger and more defined as devotion is perfected. Through this darshan, messages can be channeled along the vibratory emanations that radiate out from the Mahadevas, as well as from their representatives, the Second World devas who carry out their work for them in shrines and altars.

4. Where Problems Can Be Dissolved

Hindus always want to live near a temple so they can frequent it regularly. When we go to the temple, we leave with our mind filled with the shakti of the Deity. We are filled and thrilled with the shakti of the temple in every nerve current of our body. When we return to our home, we light an oil lamp, and that brings the power of the temple into the home. This simple act brings the devas in the Second World right into your home, where they can bless the rest of the family who perhaps did not go to the temple. The devotee stands before the sanctum and telepathically tells the Gods a problem, and with hopeful faith leaves and waits. Days or weeks later, after he had forgotten about his prayer, he suddenly realizes the problem has disappeared. He attempts to trace the source of its solution and finds that a simple, favorable play of circumstance and events brought it about. Had the Gods answered his prayer, or would it have happened anyway? He brings another prayer to the Gods, and again in time an answer appears in the natural course of his life. It appears to him that the Gods are hearing and responding to his needs. Trust and love have taken root. He goes on, year after year, bringing the Gods into his secular affairs, while just as carefully the Gods are bringing him into their celestial spheres, enlivening his soul with energy, joy and intelligence.



Devotees offer prayers in a temple in Bengaluru, Karnataka

The Hindu looks to the Gods for very practical assistance. He devoutly believes that the Gods from their dwelling in the Third World are capable of consciously working with the forces of evolution in the universe and they could then certainly manage a few simpler problems. He devoutly believes that the Gods are given to care for man on the planet and see him through his tenure on Earth, and that their decisions are vast in their implications.

5. Puja Is Communion

The physical representation of the God, be it a stone or metal image, a yantra or other sacred form, simply marks the place that the God will manifest in or hover above in His etheric body. It can be conceived as an antenna to receive the divine rays of the God or as the material body in or through which the God manifests in this First World. Man takes one body and then another in his progression through the cycles of birth and death and rebirth. Similarly, the Gods in their subtle bodies inhabit, for brief or protracted spans of time, these temple images.

When we perform puja, a religious ritual, we are attracting the attention of the devas and Mahadevas in the inner worlds. That is the purpose of a puja; it is a form of communication. To enhance this communication, we establish an altar in the temple and in the home. This becomes charged or magnetized through our devotional thoughts and feelings, which radiate out and affect the surrounding environment.

Chanting and satsanga and ceremonial rituals all contribute to this sanctifying process, creating an atmosphere to which the Gods are drawn and in which they can manifest. By the word *manifest*, I mean they actually come and dwell there and can stay for periods of time, providing the vibration is kept pure and undisturbed. The altar takes on a certain power. In our religion there are altars in temples all over the world inhabited by the



The 700-pound crystal Sivalingam in Iraivan Temple, decorated with flower garlands after puja rites have been conducted

.....

devas and the great Gods. When you enter these holy places, you can sense their sanctity. You can feel the presence of these divine beings, and this radiation from them is known as darshan.

6. Dealing with Disbelief

In the beginning stages of worship, a Hindu soul may have to wrestle with disbelief in the Gods. He may wonder whether they really exist, especially if his own intuition is obscured by assimilation of Western, existentialist beliefs and attitudes. Yet, he senses their existence, and this sensing brings him back to the temple. He is looking for proof, immersed in the process of coming to know the Gods for himself. He is heartened and assured by hundreds of saints and rishis who have fathomed and found close and enduring relationships with the Gods, and who then extolled their greatness in pages of scripture and chronicle.

The Gods of Hinduism create, preserve and protect mankind. Their overview spans time itself, and yet their detailed focus upon the complicated fabric of human affairs is just as awesome. It is through their sanction that all things continue, and through their will that they cease. It is through their grace that all good things happen, and all things that happen are for the good. Now, you may wonder why one would put himself under this divine authority so willingly, thus losing his semblance of freedom. But does one not willingly put himself in total harmony with those whom he loves? Of course he does. And loving these great souls comes so naturally. Their timeless wisdom, their vast



Seeking blessings, pilgrims reverently touch the sculpted stone feet of Lord Vishnu in Tirumala Temple's Srivari Padalu shrine

.....

intelligence, their thoroughly benign natures, their ceaseless concern for the problems and well-being of devotees, and their power and sheer godly brilliance—all these inspire our love.



Other Temple Events

Have faith in God. Believe in Him with all your heart. Think that in the world He is for you the sweetest of all sweet things. Think that there is nothing other than God. Sitting or standing, walking or lying down, think of Him. Let the thought of Him permeate your nerves, flesh and blood.

Natchintanai 7, Satguru Yogaswami of Jaffna

Annual Festivals

Many annual festivals are celebrated in temples. These are auspicious days when the veil between the worlds is thin and God and the Gods can touch our world. Festivals provide the opportunity to go on pilgrimage, journeying to a far-off temple for blessings and renewal. Celebrated with unmatched fervor but with paced regularity, festivals serve as a reminder of one's identity and allegiance to Hindu traditions and ideals. As Professor Dr. Shiva Bajpai remarked, "Festivals, pilgrimages and temple worship are the faith armor of Hindus."



Rites of Passage

A central part of every Hindu's life, *samskaras* are sacred rites of passage, such as coming of age and marriage, and childhood rites, including name-giving, first feeding, ear-piercing and head-shaving. They are held in temples, homes or halls. You may observe *samskaras* in progress during your visit. Consult with the temple priest for more information. These rites usually include a puja and a homa, or fire ceremony. If you request a *samskara*, the priest will set an auspicious time, explain how to prepare, what to bring, and what to do during the ceremony.



Fire Rites

Major pujas in temples are often preceded by a *homa*, or "fire-offering," among the most ancient forms of Hindu worship. Fire is the object of worship, and oblations are offered into a sanctified fire pit, which is usually made of earthen bricks. One or more priests sit near and tend the fire, offering wood, ghee, grains and dried herbs while chanting mantras from the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. The rites invoke the temple's main Deity as well as other Gods, such as Ganesha, Agni and Varuna.



Did You Know?

In a Hindu temple there is often a multiplicity of simultaneous proceedings and ceremonies. In one corner, an extended family, or clan, with its hundreds of tightly knit members, may be joyously celebrating a wedding. At another shrine, a lady might be crying in front of the Deity, saddened by some misfortune and in need of solace. Elsewhere in the crowded precincts, a baby is being blessed, and several groups of temple musicians are filling the chamber with the shrill sounds of the *naga-svaram* and drum. After the puja reaches its zenith, brahmin priests move in and out of the sanctum, passing camphor and sacred ash and holy water to hundreds of worshipers crowding eagerly to get a glimpse of the Deity. All of this is happening at once, unplanned and yet totally organized. It is a wonderful experience, and such a diverse array of devotional ceremonies and such an intensity of worship can only be seen in a Hindu temple. There is no place on Earth quite like a Hindu temple.

Living with Siva



This mural depicts typical activities in the precincts of a large temple, such as one would find in South India.



A man bathes and worships at the temple tank as an act of purification.

A devotee breaks a coconut near the Ganesha shrine while praying for a new job. His son knocks his forehead temples in an act of prayer.

A woman approaches the temple carrying an offering tray of fruits, incense and camphor.

A father and son receive blessings from the temple elephant, who lightly touches their forehead with his trunk.

A family worships at the temple entrance before going inside. Vendors sell garlands, incense, rosewater, coconuts and other traditional offering items.

A merchant at a stall watches after devotees' footwear for a small fee.

A husband and wife prostrate at the flag pole.

Led by musicians, the festival Deity is pulled around the temple in a special chariot.

At the Murugan shrine, a woman beseeches the Deity for help with a difficult problem.

A family finds a small stall which provides devotees with water and light snacks.

A young man prayerfully circumambulates the Murugan shrine.

A youth meditates in a quiet corner.

A child, held by his father, is having his ears pierced by a trained priest.

A family sings devotional hymns in praise of God and the Gods.

Hovering over the temple in the inner worlds, Lord Siva gives forth blessings.

At the main shrine, a pujari offers the lighted oil lamp before the Sivalinga at the height of puja.

A girl joyfully rings the big temple bell.

Two boys listen as their teacher chants the Vedas.

A man gives coins to a group of sadhus.



Questions & Answers

What is the cosmology that gives rise to the belief in Gods and devas?

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami:

Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds. The First World is the physical universe, the Second World is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, or angels, and spirits live, and the Third World is the spiritual sphere of the Mahadevas, the Deities, the Gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds. Religion blossoms for the Hindu as he awakens to the existence of the Second and Third Worlds. These inner worlds naturally inspire in man responses of love and devotion and even awe. They are that wonderful.

What is the significance of the temple?

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha: Mandir is the Hindu name for a place of worship or prayer. Mandir is a Sanskrit word meaning the place where the mind becomes still and the soul floats freely to seek the source of life, peace, joy and comfort. For centuries, the mandir has remained a center of life, a common community place where people forget their differences and voluntarily unite to serve society.

Sivaya Subramuniyaswami: On this Earth plane, the Gods have a special home, and that is the holy temple. It is in the sanctified temple, where regular and proper puja is being performed in a pure way, that the Gods most easily manifest. You can go to a Hindu temple with your mind filled up with worries, you can be in a state of jealousy and anger, and leave the temple wondering what you were disturbed about, completely free from the mental burdens and feeling secure. So great are the divine psychiatrists, the Gods of our religion, who live in the Third World, who come from the Third World to this world where our priests perform the pujas and invoke their presence over the stone image.

Why are temples needed?

BAPS: Every religion in its own tradition builds houses of worship. It is the mandir that fuels our faith in God, strengthens our society and teaches us to trust one another and to become trustworthy.



DINODIA.COM

Spiritual culture: (clockwise from left) A mother and daughter attend the temple together; devotees draw blessing from the arati flame after puja at a temple in Mumbai; a girl prays at a puja in Ubud, Bali

.....

Schools will educate the mind, but who will educate the soul? Hospitals will mend a broken arm, but who will mend a broken heart? Cinemas and arcades will excite the mind, but where will one go for peace of mind? The mandir is a center for learning about man, nature and God. It is where ethics and values are reinforced. It is where people celebrate festivals and seek shelter in sad times. It is where talents in various arts—music, literature and sculpture—are offered in the service of God.

Are there varied views regarding the Gods and temple images, or murtis?

Yes, from the Agamic perspective, the murti is considered a sacred medium of the Divine. Another view is that the various murtis are symbols of the facets of Divinity.

Acharya Ananda Swami, Pitampura Temple, West Delhi:

The sanctum sanctorum is the place where God resides. In Hindu culture, the idol is made based on the form of God which our rishis and saints saw through their penance and meditation. So, for us the idol is not just something made of stone; it is a form of God, a living God. These idols are established in the temples following directions given in our *Shastras* and *Vedas*. Once the idol is established with due rituals, that place becomes the garbhagriha, or sanctum sanctorum. To maintain the purity of the temple, only the priest can enter the sanctum or touch the Deity.

Chinmaya Mission: God, the infinite, the formless, is exceedingly hard to contemplate upon. Most of us need some grosser expression. Symbols of the eternal principle are called idols, murtis. These idols represent the eternal principle, God, the ideal.... If we are not yet able to see the Lord in everything, we are asked to first practice seeing him in at least one image and then slowly expand our

Is Temple Worship Only for Beginners?

Temple worship is for all men and women at every level of spiritual development. Its meaning and experience deepen as we unfold spiritually through the stages of service, devotion, yoga and enlightened wisdom.

Dancing with Siva



DINODIA.COM



DINODIA.COM

vision (*Bal Vihar Teacher's Handbook, Grade Five*).

BAPS: Sanatan Dharma believes in murti puja—worshipping Bhagwan, His avatars and Deities in the form of images. Followers believe in the presence of the Divine in such images and offer them worship with faith (shraddha) and loving devotion (bhakti). In turn, due to His grace, the Divine accepts this bhakti. Throughout Sanatan Dharma's history, He has let His manifestations and Divinity be known through various murtis and [miraculous] events.

How should one prepare to go to the temple?

Acharya Ananda Swami: Devotees should come with complete mental and physical purity. In the temple the devotees should engage in bhajan, kirtan and worship of God. Before we enter the temple, we must purify ourselves by sprinkling of water and also purify our inner self by chanting holy mantras. Even our dress should be sattvic and light colored or even white. We must wear fresh clothes and avoid wearing leather items, like belts and shoes. Our heart should have sattvic feelings when we come to the temple.

Why have many temples in the Hindu diaspora combined the functions of temple and satsang hall in one facility?

Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, Ram Mandir, Toronto: When people move from an environment they are accustomed to, they try to accommodate situations and in so doing may create a new approach to getting something done. When people settled in the colonial countries, they were given accommodations in simple lodges, and there was only one gathering hall. They placed the Deity there, did their puja there and congregated there for satsang. They held their havan there as well. But in India that would not happen. In the Caribbean, it became a place for darshan and *shiksha* (teaching) and satsang, because it was the only place they had, and this is what is evolving in North America today—like our congregation here in Ram Mandir. We are trying to create an environment where people come and sit and listen and learn, an institution not only for darshan but for spiritual learning, and learning about the Hindu way of life.

Padmaja Patel, Midland, Texas: In North America, in addition to temples of traditional South Indian style, there are many community temples which include a satsang hall and murtis. Our local temple falls in that category. To best utilize the space and money, we also have a stage in the hall for children's cultural performances. The current design serves our small community well. The other important factor is that some of the smaller communities cannot afford to have a full-time priest, so this type of non-traditional temple serves them well.

Acharya Ananda Swami: In North India there are also many temples where the design is such that the idols are placed inside a satsang hall.

What is the purpose of walking around the temple or shrine?

Acharya Ananda Swami: There is a special importance of pradakshina (or parikrama). For different Gods and Goddesses there are different numbers of pradakshina one has to undergo. Most knowledgeable devotees undertake pradakshina as part of their routine of worship. The devotee can do general pradakshina for all the Gods, once, thrice, eleven, twenty-one, fifty-one times or even more.

Sivaya Subramuniyaswami: When we come to the temple out of the world, off the street, we are often shrouded by negative vibrations, which can actually be seen in our aura. Our nerve system may be upset, especially now, in the technological age, when we often suffer from stress and strain, the insecurity of so many changes and the rapid pace of life. In order to prepare ourselves to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, the great mandapam inside, we walk clockwise around the temple very slowly. In this way we prepare our mind. We consciously drop off worldliness, letting the sufferings go, letting all disturbances leave our mind the best we can, and trying to reach deep inside of ourselves where peace exists eternally. We become as celestial as we can during the time we are walking around the temple, so that we can communicate with the celestial beings within the temple.

How does the temple help individuals?

BAPS: A hectic routine packed with work tensions and idealistic ambitions, imperfect relationships and demanding family stresses, leaves the average individual with an ardent craving for answers to life's unlimited questions; the most burning being: "How can I attain peace of mind?" Sometimes the individual may turn to alcohol, substance abuse, crime, gambling or other such vices, helplessly in search of peace. Many genuine efforts are also made, such as recreational activities, days off or retreats. The mandir offers a refreshing tranquility. Through its natural teachings and activities of prayer and worship, the mandir generates devout faith in God and in fellow man and guides the individual towards spirituality. With this new-found faith in God, the individual embraces physical, mental and spiritual purity. The teachings and natural activities of the mandir offer the individual an understanding that peace of mind does not lie in addictions and other such vices. They mold the character of the individual by endowing basic virtues of humanity, such as fidelity, courage, forgiveness, unity, friendship, honesty, humility, tolerance, understanding, patience, charity and universal brotherhood. Thus, the mandir also plays an indirect role in improving society by improving the state of the individual.

What is the significance of the showing of lights?

BAPS: Only through the light of knowledge can one welcome Bhagwan in one's heart. The symbol of this knowledge is light. Only in the light can one have Bhagwan's darshan. Arati is the ritual that welcomes Bhagwan with light.

Acharya Ananda Swami: Fire worship has a significant role in the temple. It is used in the puja and archana. We light the dipas and perform the arati in which the role of fire is very important. When special festivals or functions are held, dipas or lamps are lit 'round the clock.

What cultural importance does the mandir have?

BAPS: Throughout the history of Hindu civilization, mandirs have been the most significant patrons of architecture, sculpture and painting. Mandirs were also great patrons of the performing arts, supporting the performance and teaching of devotional vocal and instrumental music. Mandirs also promoted a tradition of devotional dance. These traditions of music and dance were developed in the mandir and spread out into the wider culture. Without the mandir's patronage, these priceless artistic traditions would not be available for the world to appreciate today.



Ten Tips to Make the Most of Your Visit

1 Attend a puja at the temple at least once a week. Experiencing the divine energy of God and the Gods on a regular basis helps keep you pure and strong in your religious commitments.

2 Dress in traditional Hindu clothing. This helps put you in a religious mood. Keep special clothing just for the temple.

3 Make your travel to the temple a religious time. This prepares you to arrive in a spiritual frame of mind. Don't focus on problems or projects at home, work or school. Don't think or talk about politics or business. Listen to religious music or chanting while in transit. Tell the children uplifting stories.

4 Bring an offering. Ideally, bring a flower, flower garland or fruit for each shrine at which you worship. The act of giving makes you receptive to blessings.

5 Put prana into what you offer. Prana is the energy that exudes from your hands. Buying a garland is good, but making one is even better. When the priest puts your hand-made garland on the murti, it's almost like you are touching the Deity yourself.

6 Focus on the worship service and the priest's chanting. Don't let the mind wander. Learn, at least generally, the meaning of what the priest is chanting. Similarly, when singing bhajans, keep focused on the meaning of the song.

7 Stay for a while after the ceremony. Don't rush away. Sit and meditate. Bask in the divine energy of the temple. This is also an ideal opportunity for japa.

8 Light an oil lamp in your shrine room when you get home. This brings devas who were at the temple right into your sacred space. From the inner world, they will bless the family and strengthen the spiritual force field of the home.

9 Watch for auspicious days. The Deity's presence is stronger on some days than others. By attending the temple on the most auspicious days, you become attuned to the Deity's blessings. For example, blessings are especially strong during the annual festival days.

10 Gain strength by taking vows. It is common to take a vow, or *vrata*, during festivals. A typical *vrata* is to fast during a day of temple ceremonies and break the fast that evening.

How Do Our Prayers Reach the Gods?

Through temple worship, the three worlds become open to one another, and the beings within them are able to communicate. By means of the mystical arts of puja, the worlds act in concert, and prayers are received. Aum.

Dancing with Siva



A priest passes an arati lamp before a Shannukha Deity.

PHILOSOPHY

Vedanta Society's Impact

Their teachings have quietly influenced generations of artists and intellectuals

BY JEFFERY D. LONG, PhD

WHILE THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AND the Vedanta Society of the West are often regarded as more or less the same thing, they are not. The RK Mission is focused on India, and primarily devoted to education, healthcare and poverty relief. The Vedanta Society is located mainly in more affluent nations. Its focus is on spiritual instruction. The extent of its influence is quite staggering when one looks beyond the membership of the Vedanta centers in, for example, the United States, and to the transformations in the culture of America that can be traced back to these centers. Certainly, Hindu teachers from lineages other than that of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have also exerted an influence on American culture. But a number of Hindu influences in American culture do have a clear Vedantic provenance—such as the inclusion of Vedantic themes in the popular Star Wars films.

Americans are largely unaware of the extent to which various Hindu philosophies, including Vedanta, have come to permeate their culture, particularly movies, music, and so on. As religion scholar Vasudha Narayanan noted: "Americans may not know it, but they've long been embracing Hindu philosophy." Why is this the case?

Answers to this question are complex and include reference to such unpleasant realities as racism and religious bigotry, as well as the deliberate appropriation of Hindu ideas and practices by some who then pass those ideas and practices off as their own, as can be observed in some quarters of the global yoga community.

In the case of Vedanta in particular, though, there is another aspect of this phenomenon of unconscious Hindu influence that is worth mentioning. Throughout its existence, but especially in the early and middle portions of the twentieth century, the Vedanta Society in America has been a magnet for intellectuals and artists: people who today might be dubbed cultural "influencers." It is not the case that these individuals nefariously passed off Vedantic ideas as their own. They were, in fact, all quite open about their Vedantic allegiances.

However, given that the Vedantic ideals which they held dear came to permeate all of their work, indeed their entire approach to life, it was inevitable that others who enjoyed their work picked up on certain themes and concepts without grasping that these themes and concepts were Vedantic in origin.

Major intellectuals and artists who were drawn to Vedanta, and whose work later came to influence others who were less directly connected with it, include such luminaries as Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, J. D. Salinger, Joseph Campbell and Huston Smith. Isherwood and Huxley were both initiated into Vedanta by Swami Prabhavananda, their guru and founder of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, which remains an important hub of the Vedanta movement in America today. Salinger and Campbell, on the other



hand, were both close to Swami Nikhilananda of the New York Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, while Smith had a connection to the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri.

All these men were influential writers who had a considerable impact upon the generations that followed them—particularly the generation that came of age during the rise of the counterculture of the 1960s, which was a period of especially strong Hindu influence in America. Isherwood, Huxley and Salinger were novelists whose books were infused with Vedantic themes, though not always explicitly about Vedanta, due to which their readers were not always aware of the origins of these appealing ideas. Campbell and Smith were scholars of religion who were similarly influential.

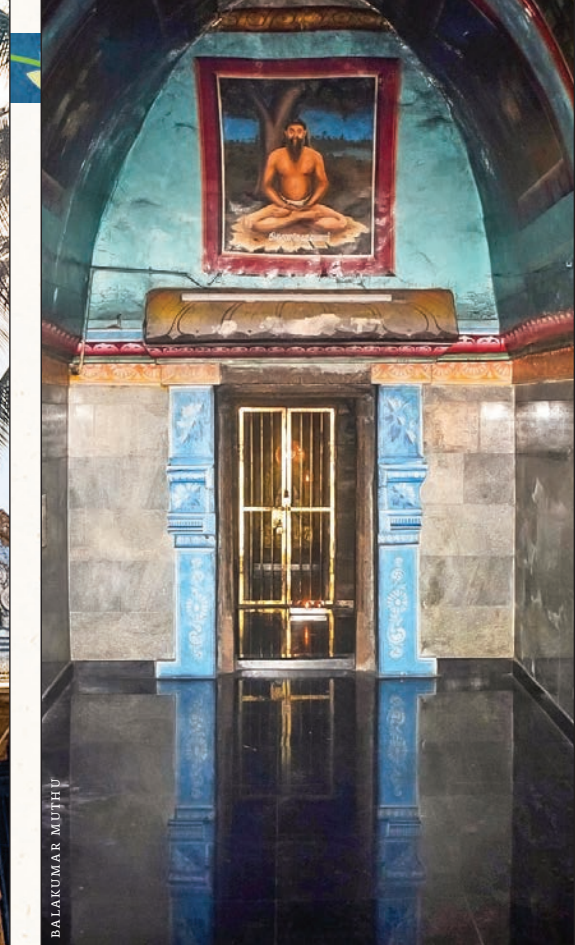
None of these figures made any secret of their Vedantic affiliations. Isherwood, in fact, jointly authored several translations of important Vedantic texts with his guru, including the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Sutras*. Huxley presented Swami Vivekananda's ideas about universal religion in his groundbreaking *The Perennial Philosophy*. And while intensely private, Salinger permitted the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York to release his correspondence with Swami Nikhilananda after his death, allowing the world to see the closeness of his relationship with his guru.

A particularly strong example, though, of how Vedantic influence passed incognito from one of these major figures to the wider public is in the relationship between religion scholar Joseph Campbell and film director George Lucas. Campbell was quite close to the Vedanta Society. Indeed, he aided Swami Nikhilananda in his translation of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The influence of Vedanta pervaded his scholarly works to such a great degree that Pravrajika Vrajaprana has written that "no reader of Joseph Campbell can escape Sri Ramakrishna."

One of these works by Campbell was a book on archetypal images and narrative themes in traditional mythologies called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. A young George Lucas read this book and became determined to create a great American epic myth in film. The result was *Star Wars*, with a huge, multi-generational following in America. In popularity, the *Star Wars* films are comparable to the music of the Beatles—another conduit through which Hindu ideas have come to pervade Western society.

By serving as a magnet for intellectuals and artists—people in a position to influence the ideas, morals and ways of life of millions of Americans—the Vedanta Society has exerted a massive, albeit largely unknown, influence upon Western culture. It is an influence on the world as a whole that is difficult to calculate or quantify, going, as it does, beyond mere numbers of formal adherents and extending into cultural attitudes and dispositions. The indirect influence of serious Vedanta practitioners with wide cultural reach has shaped American society in ways that are often unrecognized, either in India or the West. This influence is nevertheless real, and an important part of the story of America.

.....
Jeffery D. Long, PhD, is the Carl W. Zeigler Professor of Religion, Philosophy, and Asian Studies at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania, USA. He specializes in the religions and philosophies of India. This article was first published in the January 2023 issue of Prabuddha Bharata.



MONASTERIES

Guardians of South Indian Saivism

Four monastic centers serve Siva in South India and manage temple wealth

BY KAY KOPPEDRAYER, PHD

THE FERTILE KAVERI RIVER BASIN IN TAMIL Nadu has long been a center of Saivite religiosity. For millennia, the region has produced Saiva saints, mystics, siddhars and scholars. Included in the religious sites found in the region are a set of Saiva Siddhanta institutions that have been caretaking the wisdom of Lord Siva for centuries. These are the Dharmapuram, Suriyanarkoil, Thiruppanandal and Thiruvavaduthurai Aadheenams. *Aadheenam* is the Tamil term for a traditional monastic center. Located relatively close to each other in the Thanjavur district, they are independent, each headed by an initiated preceptor and organized around a spiritual lineage rooted in Saiva Siddhanta teachings. Saiva Siddhanta is one of the six schools of the Saivite sect of Hinduism. The centers participate in a range of ritual and secular activities. They manage substantial land and wealth, value education and scholarship, serve the needs of lay followers, maintain strict schedules and sustain many other activities. They are part of a large

er social network that makes up the religious culture of Tamil Nadu. All have unbroken histories since the mid-sixteenth century and are still thriving. The aadheenams give expression to South Indian religious experience. Research for my doctoral dissertation in the early 1980s took me to these complex centers immersed in both sacred and temporal realms. Much of what I write in this article is based on what I learned then. They were fascinating places for a young scholar. Even today, some forty years later, I feel immense gratitude to the many people attached to the Saiva centers who welcomed me into their lives. **The Aadheenams** At their core, each of the aadheenams is made up of a group of initiated ascetics who embody the tenets of Saiva Siddhanta. However, the institutions are hardly secluded from the world. Their worldly involvement includes land holdings and the management of numerous temples. The scope of their activity is reflected in the many structures

found on the grounds of these Saiva centers. With similar physical configurations, the aadheenam layouts are extensive: feeding halls, reception areas, guest houses, schools, research libraries, printing presses, offices, residences, places of worship and gardens. The *guru pitham*, “seat” of their guru, is where each center’s gurumahasannidhanam receives visitors and conducts religious and secular business. Each aadheenam adjoins a temple. At Dharmapuram, both appear to be one complex, for the aadheenam’s buildings are directly accessible from the temple; the walls of the two are connected. Physical contiguity is matched by administrative powers. The aadheenam is the trustee of the temple, overseeing its various activities. The same is true for the other three aadheenams. In all cases, the temples existed prior to the aadheenams and were important religious sites in their own right. Thiruvavaduthurai is known as *nava-koticittarpuram*, “the abode of nine hundred thousand mystics.” Within the temple complex is a shrine for Rishi Tirumular, whose

Asceticism: (left to right) Monastic residents of Dharmapuram Aadheenam. The pot they are holding contains holy ash given to visitors; the main entrance tower for Thiruvavaduthurai Aadheenam; temple and mahasamadhi shrine for Rishi Tirumular at Thiruvavaduthurai

Tirumantiram is a sacred mystical text for Tamil Saivites. Suriyanarkoil is a rare temple to Surya, built by the Chola king, Kulottunga I. Though the aadheenams have administrative powers over their temples and are virtually contiguous, the ascetics do not conduct the temple pujas. That is the domain of temple priests. Rather, the aadheenams are separate institutions defined by their spiritual lineages. At each aadheenam, religious activity is focused on its current preceptor and the founder of its spiritual lineage—and, by extension, the lineage as a whole. Each aadheenam’s central ritual consists of daily rites conducted at the samadhi shrine of its founder and to the Linga form of Siva worshiped by him. In accordance with tradition here, initiated ascetics are not cremated. When they attain the “fullness of Siva” (passing away), their bodies are interred. According to Saiva Siddhanta as taught here, not only is God eternal, but also individual souls and matter. Souls attaining liberation never quite lose their individuality while merging into the essence (or fullness) of Siva.

The head of an aadheenam, gurumahasannidhanam, meaning “sacred presence of the guru,” conducts the daily puja at his lineage founder’s samadhi shrine. The current gurumahasannidhanam at Dharmapuram is the 27th in succession. At Thiruvavaduthurai, the current head is the 24th. The gurumahasannidhanam oversees the aadheenam’s worldly activities, no small task. With the exception of Suriyanarkoil, the Saiva aadheenams have considerable endowments. At Dharmapuram, all the agricultural lands in its immediate surroundings, both irrigated and dry, are under its control. The settlements of the laborers who work this land are likewise owned by the institution. It also owns thousands of hectares of productive land elsewhere. It has considerable investment properties in nearby Mayiladuthurai and other cities, including Chennai, Trichy, Chidambaram and Madurai. The situation is similar for Thiruvavaduthurai and Thiruppanandal aadheenams. Those endowments are related to the temples and rights that each aadheenam administers, the result of gifting in earlier times. Thiruvavaduthurai has sixteen temples under its control; Dharmapuram has twenty-seven. In their role as landlord and temple overlord, the Saiva aadheenams are connected to a large network of people: farmers of the endowed lands, temple priests, overseers and accountants supervising their finances, and the many people involved in

their religious and fiscal activities. The chamber housing the *guru pitham* is called *otukkam*, meaning “self-control” and “place of seclusion.” It is regarded as a spiritual sanctum. Entry is controlled by the gurumahasannidhanam’s closest aides. Here, the gurumahasannidhanam receives reports and considers requests from the center’s manager, treasurer, accountants and all employees whose offices and residences are within the aadheenam’s compound. The research libraries contain hundreds of palm-leaf and paper manuscripts in Sanskrit and Tamil, and thousands of published works in Sanskrit, Tamil, English and other languages. Particularly important are the halls where, during festivals, the rite of *maheshvarapuja*, honoring and feeding of the faithful, takes place with the gurumahasannidhanam presiding. The aadheenams are often referred to as Saiva *mathas*. Though related, the two terms, *matha* and *aadheenam*, are not interchangeable. In Tamil usage, *matham* carries a connotation of “place,” as in the site where ascetics reside. It can be applied to a wide range of monastic sites, religious centers and rest houses. In contrast, *aadheenam* designates an independent institution that has its own internal structure of authority. **Shared Lineage and Service** Thiruvavaduthurai, Dharmapuram and Thiruppanandal share a common distant



A divine life: (clockwise from left) The heads of Dharmapura (second from left) and Thiruvavaduthurai (third from left) Aadheenams and representatives of other aadheenams present the Sengol scepter to PM Narendra Modi in 2023; Siva temple at Thiruvannainallur, living place of Meykandar; in-house research team at Thiruvavaduthurai digitizes ancient palm-leaf manuscripts in Grantha scripts; a 2012 stamp honoring Kumara Guruparar

lineage. They all trace back to early Saiva Siddhanta preceptors known as the Santana Acharyas and beyond, through a celestial line, the line of Kailasa, to Siva Himself. All of these centers agree that their lines originate with Lord Siva, who in turn enlightened one celestial figure after another. Sometime in the 13th century, a spiritual young boy caught the attention of one of the celestial sages. That sage, Rishi Paranjyoti, descended from Lord Siva's abode on Mount Kailasa to initiate the boy into the eternal Saiva teachings, giving him the name Meykandar, "he who has penetrating vision." With that initiation, the earthly lineage begins.

There are four Santana Acharyas, beginning with Meykandar, whose concise *Sivagnanabotham*, a text of twelve terse aphorisms, lays out the underpinnings of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. Meykandar's disciple, Arulnandi Sivan, composed further elucidation of his teachings. Arulnandi's disciple was Marai Jnana Sambandar, who in turn was the preceptor of the fourth San-

tana Acharya, Umapati Sivan. Collectively, their compositions make up the *Meykandar Shastras*, one canon of Saiva Siddhanta teachings in Tamil.

The lineages continued, with initiated preceptors in turn anointing disciples and sending them to religious sites to spread their teachings. Each current aadheenam measures its lineage in recent centuries from the time a preceptor settled at the site where the center is now located and began to teach and initiate disciples there. At Thiruvavaduthurai, Sri-la-Sri Namasivaya, living in the latter half of the sixteenth century, is the first guru. At Dharmapuram, the first preceptor is Sri-la-Sri Gurujnanasambandar, also a sixteenth century ascetic. The aadheenam at Thiruppanandal identifies early seventeenth-century Sri-la-Sri Kumara Guruparar as its lineage founder.

In the 1980s when I was doing field research, Thiruppanandal was an affiliate of the Dharmapuram Aadheenam in what members of both institutions referred to as

a *guru-sishya*, or teacher-disciple, relationship. It was then known as the Kashi Matha. That label reflected the life of Kumara Guruparar. He was a disciple of Dharmapuram's preceptor, who directed the young devotee to go north to Kashi (Varanasi) and establish an outpost for the sake of Saiva teachings. Kumara Guruparar did so, attaining the fullness of Siva in Kashi after a thirty-year stay. The outpost remains today. A century and half later, the matha following his lineage at Thiruppanandal was established. Today it is recognized as an independent aadheenam with close ties to Dharmapuram.

The founding preceptor of the Suriyanarkoil Aadheenam was the guru known as Sivagra Yogi, whose disciple was the famous scholar of the same name. The scholar Sivagra Yogi was a contemporary of Thiruvavaduthurai's Namasivaya. Though now affiliated with Thiruvavaduthurai, Suriyanar-

koil identifies its line of descent as coming from Lord Siva through Skanda. Thiruvavaduthurai, Dharmapuram and Thiruppanandal trace their lineage from Lord Siva through Nandi on Mount Kailasa. Theirs is the Kailasa Paramparai (the line of Kailasa); Suriyanarkoil's is the Skanda Paramparai.

The aadheenams are further defined by shared caste affiliations. Only members of four groupings of the Velala caste and one of the Chettiar, all of which are considered by their members to be high-ranking but non-Brahmin castes, are eligible to be initiated into their lineages. Velala leadership has been a hallmark of these centers and has figured strongly in Saiva Siddhanta tradition and scholarship.

Lay people who frequent any of these aadheenams usually come from families with a long history of association with that center. Lay people, both men and women, are eligible to receive formal *diksha*, initiation, if they demonstrate the requisite spiritual qualities. That initiation allows them to conduct their own Siva puja. Though there are occasional shifts of loyalty between one or another aadheenam, the general rule is that a relationship with one of the center's lineages is part of one's inherited religious tradition. Lay supporters are welcomed at the aadheenam's public rites, which serve to deepen their devotional life. Through audiences with the gurumahasannidhanam, they receive spiritual guidance. Some even give family members to the aadheenam's ascetic order.

The rites conducted in the aadheenams are not different in expression from those conducted in Saiva temples. At the same time, the weave of religious tradition at the aadheenams includes the devotional expressions of the Tamil Saivite saints. Tamil poetry echoes in their halls, along with the tales of the Nayanmars and other Saiva saints. The core of their religiosity is found in Tamil devotional tradition.

As for other concerns, education is part of service to their communities for Saiva religious formation and upliftment. When I was there, Thiruvavaduthurai Aadheenam maintained the village schools. It had an active research library where scholars worked, and it ran a Saiva Siddhanta correspondence course.



Dharmapuram likewise maintained a nursery, primary and secondary schools, an Oriental college and a post-graduate Saiva Siddhanta research institution. They still run a Devaram padasalai, where young boys are trained to memorize the poetic songs of temple oduvars, hymn-singers, and an Agamic padasalai, where young aspiring priests are trained in temple rituals from a Sivacharya.

Students trained in each of these schools are eligible to serve in the many Saiva temples throughout Tamil Nadu. Brahmin students serve as temple priests, and the oduvar students serve as temple singers, whose renderings of devotional hymns mark the culmination of the devotees' religious experience.

These Saiva aadheenams maintain clinics and hospitals as well. In 2021, during the Covid spread, Dharmapuram donated two oxygen concentrators to a government hospital. It also donated considerably to the relief fund and opened a 100-bed Covid care center at one of its colleges in Mayiladuthurai. The resources supporting these community and educational endeavors come from the revenue generated by their land holdings.

The aadheenams also bestow spiritual gravitas to national political leaders. On August 14, 1947, drawing on the ancient Chola-dynasty custom of enthroning a new king, the aadheenams presented a golden *sengol* scepter to Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, symbolizing transfer of power from the British. In the post-colonial Nehruvian establishment's determination to secularize India, the event was suppressed and the scepter forgotten. For 75 years, it languished in the Anand Bhavan Museum in Allahabad. In 2023, it was accorded its prior glory when the heads of 20 aadheenams helped install it in the Lok Sabha government chamber.

Though the members of these centers are celibate ascetics who have renounced desire for material gain, they control much land, immovable property, investments and so on. Though seemingly odd for a group of ascetics to control such wealth, the role of the aadheenams in temple administration is not at all contrary to their religious formation. Rather, it is a celebration of the presence of Lord Siva here and now. The ascetics sever ties with their birth families, while affirming the physical world as an arena of operation for both the Deity's powers and for devotees who aspire to supreme states of knowledge.



This outlook goes straight to the heart of their Saiva Siddhanta teachings. As the head of Dharmapuram expressed repeatedly during my stay, "pati-pasu-pasam" summarized their religiosity. Siva (pati), the souls of humans and other sentient beings (pasu), and the physical world, the stuff of existence (pasam) are intrinsically bound together.

Bestowing Diksha

The Saiva Velala ascetic lineages are based on a preceptor-disciple relationship which resembles the kin-based relationship of a father and his sons. The preceptor is the father, while the disciples, known as *tampiran*, are the sons. The "sons" must be "born" into the family through *diksha*, initiation. The qualifications for diksha include proper caste background and demonstration of sincere spiritual yearnings. Such yearnings are shown, for example, by frequent attendance of the aadheenam's functions, a reputation for pious behavior and familiarity with Saiva Siddhanta. A further qualification is life-long celibacy, *naishtika brahmacharya*. Yet this

rule, like any other rule, has its exceptions. There are stories of tampiran who previously had been householders, a status they renounced prior to receiving diksha.

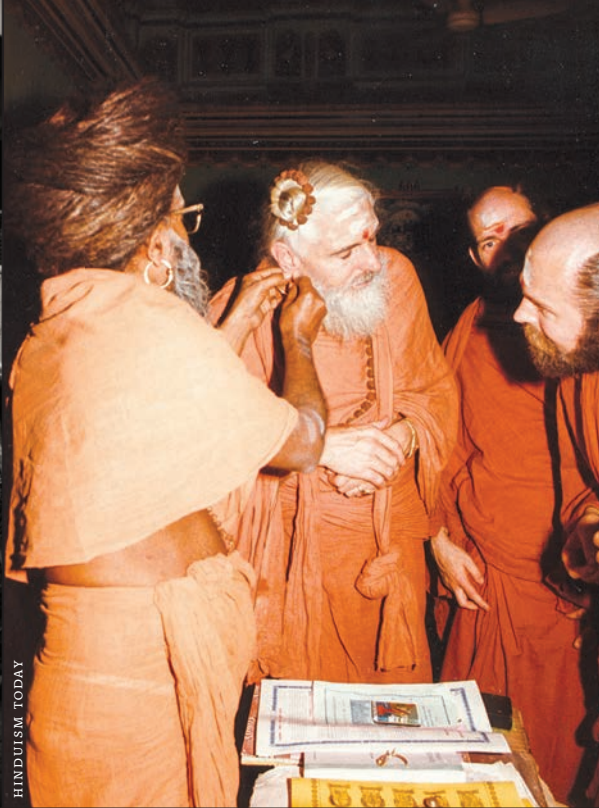
The dikshas administered by each aadheenam's gurumahasannidhanam are rooted in the Saiva *Agamas* and their Tamil summaries. These texts define spiritual competence. There are three initiations—samaya diksha, vishesha diksha and nirvana diksha. A special fourth rite, *acharyabhisheka*, is administered to those destined to become preceptors. Dikshas occur linearly and only when the recipient is ready. The progression of the three rites is to transform the tampiran, culminating with a shared identity with Siva. Each stage of initiation carries with it duties and obligations.

Prior to entering an aadheenam's lineage, an aspirant must demonstrate a certain level of spiritual maturity, calibrated in the determination he shows to gurumahasannidhanam. This might be tested by repeated refusal of an applicant's entry, discouragement and by other frustrating acts on the part of





SRINIVASAN NATARAJAN



HINDUISM TODAY



Service: (clockwise from far left) Students of Dharmapura's Agamic padasalai; the previous head of Dharmapura presents gold earrings to the late founder of this magazine and Kauai Aadheenam in Hawaii, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, on January 30, 1981; hand-binding books at Thiruvavaduthurai's in-house press

.....

the guru. The aspirant's background and state of health is carefully considered. Historically, the heads of aadheenams were reluctant to consider any individual with mental or physical defects, or someone who sought the aadheenam as a haven from work.

When the individual is able to satisfactorily convince the guru of his spiritual vigor, he enters a probationary period. He is given a white dhoti to wear and is assigned tasks such as gathering flowers for use in puja, or service in the aadheenam's library. He is expected to learn the history of the lineage and the tenets of its Saiva philosophy. The length of the probationary period is indeterminate.

When gurumahasannidhanam recognizes that the neophyte is ready, he will administer the first dikshas, samaya and vishesha, back to back. At this time, the neophyte must give up his family and his desire for women and wealth in a formal declaration. He declares before the preceptor that he bestows his body, soul and wealth upon the lineage. In the samaya rite, the guru consecrates the initiate, bringing him into the community of Saivites. Then, with vishesha diksha, he brings about the initiate's transformation into a child of Lord Siva.

These rites take place in the shrine housing the manifestation of Lord Siva worshiped by the lineage's founding preceptor. At Dharmapuram, for example, that would be in front of a Linga named Lord Chokkanatha. The guru presents the initiate with one of the diksha names common to the lineage. The initiate is also given golden earrings, a necklace of

rudraksha, ochre robes and other insignia that declare him to be a tampiran. Should a tampiran decide to renounce his membership in the lineage, as sometimes happens, he will remove the earrings and rudraksha before Lord Siva in that very same shrine and leave the aadheenam.

The preceptor grants nirvana diksha only when the tampiran shows a preparedness, or ripening of the soul, indications of which are discernible to the guru's insight. One sign of the ripening is the tampiran's grasp of the



BALAKUMAR MUTHU

transformative power of puja. How long it takes—if ever—before the tampiran is given nirvana diksha depends on this ripening.

Nirvana diksha is the culmination for most tampiran nowadays. In this rite, gurumahasannidhanam uses mantras to draw out the initiate's soul, atman, and remove binding obstructions (pasa). He then joins the initiate's atman with his own which, through his preparations, is pervaded with Siva's essence.

This union gives rise to a new body, created out of subtle elements, that is able to experience conjunction with Lord Siva. The guru makes the tampiran a full member of the religious brotherhood by bestowing permission to utter the lineage's prime mantra, the Panchakshara—Aum Namah Shivaya.

The rare fourth rite, acharyabhisheka, ensures continuity of knowledge transmission, and thus the lineage, as it transforms the initiate into a preceptor. This rite involves ritual unction (abhisheka) of the preceptor-designate, using consecrated water charged with the power of Siva. As this water is poured over his head, the preceptor-designate receives Siva's power. Following this rite, the recipient is presented with the insignia of acharya (preceptor). These emblems include the same insignia—such as umbrella and mirror—and offerings, such as flowers and lamps, that are presented to Lord Siva during puja, as well as the insignia of the preceptor's office, such as signet ring and special rudraksha.

By giving acharyabhisheka to a tampiran, the aadheenam's guru has appointed his successor. Succession is not determined by seniority. The most elder of the tampiran, either in actual age or in length of time served as a tampiran, will not automatically inherit the leadership of the lineage upon the preceptor's passing away. Only when the preceptor sees in the disciple the signs of grace, described to me by Dharmapuram's guru as the descent of shakti, will he administer acharyabhisheka.

According to their teachings, Dharma-

puram's present gurumahasannidhanam, like his predecessors, is one and the same as their first guru. That he must maintain the worship of Chokkanatha, the 16th-century Gurujnanasambhandar's personal Deity, acknowledges this equation. Through generations of acharyabhisheka, the essence of the preceptor has been maintained by Dharmapuram's spiritual lineage—kept alive, as it were, and transmitted from one preceptor to the next. The same understanding is shared by the other Saiva aadheenams.

Adminstrating Temples

The religious logic of spiritual transformation effected by diksha explains the role of the Saiva aadheenams in temple administration and the responsibility of caretaking vast holdings. In South India, as elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent, Hindu temples are large complexes with towering gateways, main shrines, subsidiary shrines and more built over centuries through acts of patronage, temple endowments and other forms of gifting. At the center of the complex is the temple's inner sanctum which, in the case of Siva temples, houses the form, usually a Linga, where Lord Siva resides. His dominion extends not only over the buildings and the land covered by the temple complex, but also over the collectivity of endowments that maintain the temple's activities.

In the past, resources supporting the many ongoing components of temple activity, as well as continuous additions, came through gifts, known as temple endowments, from benefactors. In pre-modern Hindu India, kings, queens, members of royal families, caste groups, guilds, wealthy individuals,

tradesmen, temple servants and others gave endowments. Many were recorded by inscribing them in stone on the walls of the temple or on copper plates. An endowment was not a one-time gift of money, but often a grant of income from land that would be turned over to the temple on an ongoing basis for eternity, or as long as the sun and moon shined.

This gift was offered to the Deity of the temple. For Saiva temples that was Lord Siva present in the inner sanctum, or to any of the many other Deities present on that site. But who, on behalf of Lord Siva, was going to ensure proper management of that endowment? The language of an endowment, having both religious and legal form, typically recorded the appointment of an agent to oversee its management and thus guarantee its continuity. Prior to the consolidation of temple administration during British rule, various stakeholders oversaw the management of the endowments for large temples. These groups shared in the supervision and management of the ritual activities at the temples along with revenue from the endowments. In certain temple inscriptions, representatives or members of spiritual lineages were named as trustees of the endowments to ensure their future. After all, who better than the embodiment of Lord Siva to safeguard the gift, or represent the interests of the group offering the gift?

By the eighteenth century, the Saiva aadheenams were being given administrative control over land or income endowments made to temples for the upkeep of specific daily rituals. These endowments effectively controlled the resources needed to maintain the rituals and thus figured importantly in the existence of the temple. Rights to oversee these endowments guaranteed the controlling institutions significant power. In this way, the aadheenams came to have interests in temples located elsewhere. At these sites they maintained outposts, or mathas, that served the religious and administrative needs of the aadheenams and their extended communities.

Legislation dating back to the mid-nineteenth century under British rule sought some regulation of temple administration, leading to the government appointment of designated trustees. Who or which group should be

appointed as the main administrator was not always a straightforward decision, particularly where more than one party or institution had competing interests. Over that process of adjudication, in cases where the Saiva aadheenams held well-established rights overseeing management of temple resources, they were designated as temple administrators. From early times to the present, Indian law recognizes that temple ownership rests with the Deity. The aadheenams thus do not own the temples under their trusteeship. Rather, on behalf of Lord Siva, they manage the resources accrued by the temples. Even today, India's Supreme Court continues to decree that all temple property is owned by the Deity.

Today, one does not find many ascetics residing at any of the aadheenams. At Thiruvavaduthurai, for example, I met only a few. Low numbers of initiated ascetics partly accounted for that, but there were other reasons. The rest of them lived in mathas at temples where the aadheenam served as the temple's hereditary trustee, or where it administered endowments. This included temples in the Tirunelveli, Pudukkottai and Thanjavur districts. At these sites they represented the aadheenam and looked after its interests. On important dates, such as the annual celebration of Gurupuja, a commemoration of the lineage founder's attainment of the fullness of Siva, they would return to Thiruvavaduthurai.

Back in the 1980s, the number of ascetics was not large enough for each temple connected with the aadheenam to have a resident tampiran, and not all ascetics had the requisite managerial skills. At those sites, employees of the aadheenam took on the duties of temple administration. Those tampiran and aadheenam employees were all acting on behalf of the gurumahasannidhanam, who in turn was acting on behalf of Lord Siva.

In sum, the Saiva aadheenams are marvelously complex institutions. Their makeup reflects layers of Hindu religious history in South India. Their arenas of religious activity extend far into the temporal world. But grounded in their Saiva Siddhanta religious understanding, those arenas of activity are not in opposition to each other. Rather, they express the totality of Lord Siva's domain. 🙏



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kay Koppedrayar is a retired university professor of religion and culture. A Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship supported her field research at the Saiva Aadheenams.



PRIESTHOOD

Let's Respect Priests with Dharmic Bylaws

Reflections on how USA Hindu temples can have a proper professional relationship with their priests that benefits everyone

BY PAUL YOGANANDA DESANTIS

ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREAT SAINTS, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, inspired Hindus worldwide with his loving, uplifting writings and lectures. Gurudeva taught that the Gods and devotees meet in our Hindu temples on Earth. These are unique, holy places of spiritual inspiration where devotees can experience uplifting darshan. When the devotees leave the temple, they report feeling more peaceful and often have found new life-sustaining insights.

The experience of "good darshan" in a temple is not accidental. Skilled Hindu priests, through their extensive Sanskrit prayers offered for many hours, create good darshan. In a Siva temple, it is the Sivachariyars



who tirelessly invoke the Deities to enliven their divine presence in the murtis. The priests' prayers are the existential component that attracts high vibrations. Visiting a sanctified Hindu temple provides a spiritually uplifting experience. Devotees go to a temple to experience higher consciousness for prayer and meditation and to share food blessed during pujas.

Gurudeva knew that some devotees were disrespecting and mistreating Hindu priests in USA temples. Regrettably, this priest mistreatment still exists two decades later in some USA temples. How is this possible? Temples in the USA have dedicated, hard-working Boards of Directors who volunteer their time to help maintain the temple's physical buildings



Priests in action: (Left) A priest in Texas completes a havana during Durga Navami puja in October, 2023; (right) a priest performs arati to Lord Ayyappan

and equipment. However, in some temples, the administration does not fulfill its obligations to meet the needs of its dedicated priests.

Many devotees are surprised to hear that these devout Hindu priests, who create the sanctity in the temples, are often scorned, underpaid, and serve as overworked employees. Why are many good priests paid less, receive lower health care benefits, poorer housing, and significantly worse retirement than a public school teacher or the clerics of other religions?

What is the origin of the hostile—or at least negligent—attitudes toward priests, often held even by educated temple members? Why are negative attitudes tolerated in any USA temple? During India's medieval period and the British Raj, Hindus and their devout priests were disrespected and shamelessly persecuted, while their temples were spat upon, desecrated and often physically destroyed. In British India, the Crown administrators pressured Hindus to convert to Christianity for a "better education" or a "better job." For some USA Hindus, those disrespectful attitudes may be alive as unexamined, subconscious anti-Hindu priest beliefs.

Freedom of Religion in the USA Since 1791
In the revolutionary war the Americans successfully rebelled against the British Crown and formed their own government on the North American continent. In 1791, they adopted the First Amendment to the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

What follows are recommendations on how we can strengthen our temples and establish proper dharmic relationships with our Hindu priests. First, we must acknowledge the painful truth that in our USA democratic tradition, "we the people"—in this case, we, the USA Hindu devotees—are ultimately morally responsible for the adharmic conduct towards priests in some of our temples. Second, it is our duty and privilege to establish pro-priest temple guidelines—free from the anti-dharma prejudices Hindus suffered during those despicable, intolerant days on the other side of Earth.

To begin, we must update our temple bylaws to include fundamental dharmic principles to protect, nourish and enhance the welfare



of our priests. In California, religious organizations incorporate under the California Non-profit Religious Corporation Law, Corp C §§9110-9690. Amending the bylaws is not difficult (Article 5, Corp C §§9150-9153). To simplify the bylaws document, instead of modifying various provisions in any existing bylaws, I recommend preparing an "Addendum A, the Priest Policy Bylaws," which sets forth the basic principles for Hindu priest employment and conduct. Below are listed sample principles to be included.

PAUL YOGANANDA DESANTIS of Santa Monica, California, holds a J.D. from Georgetown University. Born in New York and raised a Christian, he converted to Hinduism over three decades ago. He has practiced law and served on the board of a California Hindu non-profit religious organization for more than thirty years.

Proposed Dharmic Bylaws for Hindu Priests

Gurudeva's teaching inspires us to include mandatory provisions to honor and care for our Hindu priests. Dharmic bylaws must contain specific principles which support Hindu priest dharma, such as the following:

- A statement that Hindu priests are an honored, existential part of our religious organization who provide essential services for the devotees.
- The temple shall have a written contract with each Hindu priest that specifies the terms of employment in this Addendum A, including the following points:

1. The priest's basic salary should be at least comparable to that of an experienced public school teacher.
2. Health care for the priest, his wife and his children.
3. Details on how the temple will provide suitable housing for the priest, his wife and children.
4. Any dispute which cannot be resolved between a temple member and a priest shall be submitted to formal mediation before any attempt to commence litigation.
5. Priests must have a voice in temple administration. The chief priest and at least one other priest should attend all Board of Directors meetings.
6. The temple's financial reports should disclose the compensation paid to priests and any delinquency in payments to priests.



ALL PHOTOS: ANNE PETRY

ANIMALS

The Divine Bovine

Hinduism venerates animals as part of the Sacred, with cows holding a unique, celestial status, symbolizing virtue, prosperity and purity

STORY BY PADMA KRISHNAN
PHOTOS BY ANNE PETRY

IN HINDUISM, ANIMALS AND BIRDS ARE elevated to divinity, in their association with Gods and Goddesses. This role might intertwine with the Deity Themselves, such as with Lord Ganesha's elephant form, or it might betoken the vehicle that carries Them—like the beautiful peacock Lord Murugan rides. In their Divine forms such as Nandi and Garuda, animals are worshiped. In their physical forms they are deeply honored. The docile cows are special; it is said Lord Siva rides the white bull, Nandi, and cows are prominently featured in stories of Krishna. They are honored across India and celebrated in rituals and festivals.

The *Siva Purana* extols the cow as a symbol of virtues in life, declaring that all other creatures live only because of the cow. Beyond providing milk and dairy products, cow dung is used as a purifying substance and fuel, while cow urine has medicinal properties according to ayurvedic tradition. Cows hold a status far more significant than pets or farm animals; they are revered as the Mother Goddess, often in the form of Lakshmi, root-

ed deeply in *ahimsa*, nonviolence, a key tenet of Hindu dharma.

Traditions and stories reinforce the sacred status of cows. Killing a cow is considered a grave sin with repercussions believed to span many lifetimes, while protecting and feeding cows earns good karma. These ideas are told and retold in many scriptures.

One well-known story is the birth of Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling divine cow, from the *Samudra Manthana*—the churning of the cosmic ocean. Kamadhenu, portrayed as a radiant white Zebu cow with the head of a woman and eagle wings, is believed to have the power to grant wishes. According to various *Puranas*, her body contains the whole legion of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, and honoring a cow is akin to worshiping all Deities.

The holy cow is revered in various forms, such as Sunanda, Surabhi, Sumana, Susheela and Nanda. For many, Surabhi, created by Lord Krishna, is considered the mother of all cows on Earth. The five essences, *Panchagavya*—milk, curd, ghee, dung and urine—hold significant religious and spiritual importance in Hindu rituals and ayurvedic medicines.

Several festivals honor cows, reflecting our deep reverence and gratitude towards these sacred animals. The Gopashtami festival commemorates Lord Krishna's role as a cowherder, celebrated with joy and reverence in temples like Vrindavan and Mathura. During Govatsa Dwadashi, which begins the festivities of Diwali, devotees express gratitude by offering grains, fruits and sweets to cows, symbolizing nourishment and prosperity. Govardhan Puja marks the legendary event where Lord Krishna lifted the Govardhan hill to protect villagers from torrential rains, with cows and calves celebrated alongside the divine Cowherd and the hill.

In South India, Mattu Pongal, part of the harvest festival of Pongal, is dedicated to honoring cows, bulls and other farm animals, acknowledging their role in agriculture. Markar Sankranti, coinciding with the harvest season, sees cows adorned with floral garlands and fed special food, recognizing their vital contribution to agrarian communities. The unusual festival of Gorehabba in Karnataka celebrates the cow, and even involves playful battles in cow dung, believed to bring good fortune and ward off evil. These cele-



Caring for cows: (clockwise from far left) A senior cow is offered praise at Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu; a cow's horns are lovingly decorated during a celebration of Mattu Pongal; other cows that have been decorated; a woman makes her way along a rural village roadside, leading along two of her family's most important members; a small stone Nandi the bull is elaborately decorated during celebrations at Sri Ramanasramam; a mother and daughter proudly display a freshly created kolam at the entrance to their home during Mattu Pongal

traditions, cows hold a central place in daily rituals and customs across Indian communities. Gau puja, the veneration of cows, is a common practice in temples and households. This reverence has led to the establishment of Gaushalas, cow shelters, across India, preserving native cow breeds and caring for abandoned and aging cows.

The reverence for cows is intertwined with principles of ahimsa, karma and the recognition of the Divine in all beings. Through festivals and rituals, cows become conduits for experiencing the divine presence in everyday life, encouraging compassion and a holistic understanding of our place in the universe. Embracing these teachings can cultivate a more spiritually enriched way of life.





COURTESY VANAMALI MATAJI

INTERVIEW

Vanamali Mataji:
All Women Are Sacred

BY BASSANI ERICA, RISHIKESH

It was my great good fortune to interview this 84-year-old saint at her Rishikesh ashram March 15, 2023. After a brief chant we began.

What is the universal power of the Shakti?

She is Shakti, power. She is that spark that starts the engine. The engine is Siva. There is a beautiful conversation between Parvati and Siva. She (Parvati) was doing tapas (austere practices) to win Siva's love, and He told her, "I am complete in myself, I do not need anybody." To this, She replied, "No, you need me. Without my power, you cannot achieve anything in this world." Without Shakti, all of creation would not even have started. All of Nature that we see is Her form. This is also depicted in the incredible icon of Kali dancing on Siva's seemingly dead body: Siva, without Shakti, is only *shava*—a corpse! This is an example to show that the male is powerless without the female Shakti! Such was the importance given to women throughout our history and mythology.

Siva and Shakti are always united?

In the *Skanda Purana*, we find that the masculine and feminine are eternal principles involved in the projection of the universe. They are never separate and are fundamentally one—like gold and the ornaments made from it. Siva is inert. Shakti is maya, an illusion—which offers pleasure, colors, music and beauty. All arts and sciences come from Her, in the form of Saraswati. Saraswati is not a male God, she is a Goddess. Saraswati is also the Goddess of learning, to whom the children pray so they can learn better. Siva is the formless, actionless witness, the stage on which Shakti plays.

Can you tell me about the forms of the sacred feminine in the Hindu tradition, and how they inspire you?

In Hinduism, all women are sacred. In ancient times, the name Devi (Goddess) was added to each woman's name: if her name is Kalyani, it becomes Kalyani Devi. Every woman is considered part of the Divine Mother. The many taboos related to women are not meant to diminish them, but rather to protect them. The woman is the womb of the world; without her, there are no people. So, she must be protected. For example, during her menstrual period, the woman would rest quietly in her room, and food would be brought to her so that she could regenerate her health. There was a hyper-protective attitude towards women. Also, women ruled in the house: they worked in the fields around the house and cared for the animals and the children. Today many women go to work [outside the home] almost immediately after having delivered a baby. She has some weeks or a month off, and then again she is pushed into this stream of work, and the child ends up in the hands of someone else who takes care of it. It used to be important for children to be brought up in their mother's love and care. The best formula is made by nature herself. It was fundamental for the culture. The restrictions in which the woman lived were to protect her well-being and that of the coming generation that came through her. But with the arrival of Western ideas, Indian women began to feel limited by these customs.

How do we recognize ourselves as divine? How do we surrender to life?

Surrender can only happen through bhakti, devotion. You can surrender to God only if you have the deepest love for Him, a very deep connection. It is impossible to surrender to the Divine if we are egoistic. Ego makes us do everything we can to sustain and even

Saint in residence: (left) Vamamali Mataji at her ashram in Rishikesh; (below) hydrangeas flowers are a favorite in her garden

strengthen our individual attitudes. The ability to give yourself to the Divine only comes when you have a great, great love for God—a non-human love. We can only rely on something far, far, far superior to us, which at the same time is so intimate, so wonderful and so beautiful. Otherwise, you are just playing with words. It means nothing.

More and more women are experiencing anger (often unconscious) towards the male. How can we transform these emotions into love, understanding and compassion, while also transforming ourselves from victimhood to freedom?

This is only possible through knowledge. Everything is caused by ignorance. Men must understand the crucial role that the woman plays in life as a creatrix. Without her, there would be no creation. Your Western men must be re-educated to recognize you as Divinity.

On the spiritual path, how important is mutual support between women?

It is very important. You may have married the best man in the world and have all the beautiful children you want, but it will always be important to cultivate female friendships. This is why we have many festivals here in India where women meet together. Female friends can have fun, support each other and get through difficult times. Because only a woman can know a woman's heart. Men cannot actually know what a woman is really about!

As women, we often feel a range of complexes around our appearance, rarely happy with how we look. How can the spiritual quest change the perception of one's own bodily image?

Nowadays, there is so much stress around physical appearance. So many beauty products, clothes, this and that,... but true beauty will not emerge from that. Inner beauty, which depends on kindness, compassion—qualities that women have—the desire to help others, maternal instincts.... These are the things you have to cultivate. These constitute the true beauty of a woman. Some women, even of a certain old age, have a very attractive aura of love around them, due to their inner beauty. Of course, it's OK for young girls to make themselves pretty and all, it's not a problem. Don't go around with messy hair and wrinkled clothes—after all, remember you are a Goddess! But not all Deities are beautiful externally. Think of Kali, Durga, Chandi.... We have so many Goddesses who are not beautiful in appearance but are very forceful. So, women should cultivate their inner, uniquely feminine qualities. Then beauty will come out. If you want a plant to flourish, wet the roots, not the branches.

How do we fully and practically integrate with the Divine?

The supreme Divine is beyond duality and gender. We live in this dimension of time, space and causality, because that is how the mind works. But the Divine is in everything, in every creature, every star, every flower. So how can you talk about reconciliation? *Aham asmi*—"I am the Divine! I am Brahman." Not only can women and men say this, but also any dog or cat. Only the human, however, can understand

and experience this. You are. You are everything. I am. The Divine is not differentiated. Everything is That, and That is all. All life is One. There is no two. Everything is an emanation of that One. We are already complete, but in our ignorance we perceive differentiation and feel ourselves apart from the whole, separate from the rest. This is the one original sin in Hinduism. When that knowledge finally arises, we realize the unity of life. It cannot be cut into pieces. It is One. In differentiation it can manifest itself, just as electricity can manifest itself in various forms: in the fan, in the light, in the refrigerator, in the oven,...but the power is one. It is not two.

Why during their period should women not go to temples?

Temples are places with a very active pranic current which can lift our mind and energies to the higher chakras. Going to the temple when the *prasoothi* pranic current is active within us would create conflicting forces which, according to our sages, can cause infertility, endometriosis, tubal blockage, etc. So our taboos against entering temples were simply intended as a protection for women's health. Men ignorant of our ancient culture took this opportunity to suppress and control women, but the original reason was well-intentioned. In fact, we have always worshiped God in female form. We have an infinite number of Goddesses in our pantheon. Even when a Goddess is related to her male counterpart, her name always comes first: Lakshmi/Narayana, Gauri/Shankar, Radha/Krishna. Her name comes first, because she is the Shakti, she is the power.

To which female Deity we can look for energy and courage?

Durga, Durga! She is the eternal feminine. She has no consort. She does not depend on anyone for Her power. She is said to have been created by male Deities, using the best of their powers, to kill the demon Mahishasura. She was generated by fire and is the very emblem of being a woman. All female Deities are powerful, and each has different characteristics. For good auspices we pray to Lakshmi. For art, science and wisdom, we pray to Saraswati. In ancient times, men prayed to Durga before going into battle, because She is the One who wins the war. In the *Vedas*, the Goddess of the Earth is praised as Prithvi—our first mother. From the Earth, we are born, and to the Earth we will return. Our tradition is to touch the Earth as soon as we get out of bed in the morning and ask Her forgiveness for stepping on Her during the day. We are taught from an early

age to revere Her great stability and inexhaustible fertility. Similarly we revere our rivers and mountains. Our rivers are known as Goddesses, for the ancients knew them to be the arteries of the country—our very lifeblood—pumping their inexhaustible fund of life-giving waters from the mountains to the sea.

Mataji recites a beautiful prayer that ends with a very sweet *Om Shanti Shanti Hari Om*. She adds, "Again, Shanti, or Peace, is the name of a woman. And on that note, let us close."

.....
The Author: Erica Bassani is a copywriter, author and spiritual seeker since her early twenties. She's combined her highest passion with her deepest love by founding the Women Awakening Project (www.womenawakeningproject.com), a space to gather interviews with female masters of all spiritual traditions.



COURTESY VANAMALI MATAJI



FOOD & HEALTH

A Testimony to Turmeric

Celebrated for its many benefits, this golden spice offers anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, enhancing well-being

BY LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, SAN JOSE

TO HINDUS, TURMERIC EMBODIES THE essence of Goddess Lakshmi: holiness, sanctity, prosperity, goodness and beauty. This golden spice reigns supreme in Hindu temples, festivals, religious ceremonies and marriages. For instance, Hindus create a small cone-shaped structure with turmeric powder and water to represent Lord Ganesha. My mother used to place this turmeric Ganesha on cloth alongside special items she made for Krishna during Janmashtami. Deities in temple sanctums are bathed in water saturated with fragrant golden-yellow turmeric powder. In South India, brides and grooms bathe in turmeric water on their wedding day, and the groom wears a dhoti soaked in turmeric water. During the marriage ceremony, the groom places a turmeric-soaked thread adorned with gold beads and religious symbols around the bride's neck. Women of the house welcome the newlyweds with a lit lamp (*man-gala arathi*) often made of turmeric. These lamps play an important role on all joyous occasions. Pilgrims to Tirupati seeking the blessings of Venkateswara also wear clothing imbued with turmeric.

Growing Turmeric

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) is a tropical plant with yellow flowers that produces fleshy, aromatic underground stems called rhizomes. Pieces of rhizome are used for propagation. Fresh turmeric rhizome is available in Indian grocery stores, and turmeric plants can be found in nurseries specializing in exotic tropical plants. Turmeric prefers sandy loam soil with good drainage, partial shade, a temperature range of 64–86 degrees Fahrenheit (18–30 degrees Celsius), and altitudes from sea level to 1500 meters. If you live in a region with these conditions, you can grow turmeric in your backyard. If not, you can grow it in containers and bring the plants indoors during unfavorable climatic conditions.

When propagating turmeric, cut the rhizomes into pieces, ensuring each piece contains a bud that will sprout into a shoot. Use rich potting soil in a container, and cover the rhizome pieces with soil. Place the container in a warm, sunny location. Keep the soil damp but not soggy. Shoots will appear above the soil in a week or two. You can continue growing the plant in the container, or transplant it outside if you live in a location with favorable growth conditions. Let the

plants grow to 4 or 5 feet before harvesting the rhizomes.

Culinary Uses

The rhizomes are sun-dried and powdered for culinary and medicinal uses. Turmeric reigns supreme in Indian and Asian cuisine. Far more than a coloring agent; it is a healthy spice and one of the most important herbs in Indian cuisine, included in nearly all curry preparations. The powder is an integral part of soups, stir-fries, fried vegetables, pickles and more. South Indian breakfast and snack items such as uppuma, uthappam and adai, as well as North Indian roti and paratha, are spiced with turmeric powder. Indian cooks use special rice preparations, such as lemon rice, tamarind rice and tomato rice, for color and flavor. Use one teaspoon of turmeric powder in four cups of any preparation. *Curcuma amada* ("mango ginger") is a related variety which is largely used in pickles and salads. It morphologically resembles ginger but has a raw mango flavor, hence the popular name.

Skin and Beauty Uses

Turmeric is a magic potion for skin problems,

working nicely for acne, skin rashes and spots, and it promotes skin health and rejuvenation. Daily use of lemon juice mixed with cucumber juice and a pinch of turmeric helps with dark underarms and neck. Mixing pure turmeric powder in coconut oil and massaging your skin with this oil before bathing is a good remedy for many skin problems. A mixture of milk cream with turmeric powder can be applied to the skin around the eyes, helping reduce dark circles and fine lines.

The brilliant golden yellow color of turmeric is very appealing. A common practice followed by Indian women is to apply turmeric paste over the body at least once a week before bathing. Fresh turmeric can be used to make a paste. Women in Indian villages use a grinding stone for this purpose, or you can use a mortar and pestle to prepare the paste. Married Indian women used to apply turmeric paste on their face daily, as it is considered auspicious and symbolic of marital bliss. Though this tradition is slowly disappearing in India, the Indian cosmetic industry now incorporates turmeric in beauty products, using *Curcuma aromatica*, which is more fragrant than *Curcuma longa*.

Healing Properties

India and China have been using turmeric for over five thousand years to treat various ailments, including digestive and liver problems, skin diseases and wounds. With complementary medicine gaining popularity worldwide, research on the use of turmeric in treating life-threatening and crippling diseases is expanding. The phytochemical curcumin, which gives turmeric its yellow color, has been shown to be effective in treating hepatitis, gallbladder problems, loss of appetite, arthritis, asthma, Alzheimer's disease, psoriasis and different types of cancers, including colon and breast cancers. Several laboratory studies report that curcumin has antiviral activity against HIV.

Curcumin has been shown to stimulate bile production by the gallbladder, helping to digest fats and reduce the risk of gallstones. It helps generate enzymes that assist the liver in breaking down and metabolizing toxic substances. It helps reduce blood cholesterol levels and may help maintain remission in people with ulcerative colitis.

Curcumin is a powerful antioxidant. Antioxidants scavenge free radicals, the by-products of oxidation that can damage cells and DNA. By neutralizing free radicals, antioxidants may reduce or prevent some of the damage they cause. As an antioxidant, curcumin protects DNA from breaking and prevents cell damage.

Ongoing research suggests that curcumin may prevent, control or kill several types of cancers, including prostate, breast, skin and colon. Curcumin has the potential to stop the



A restorative root: (far left) Turmeric in root and powdered form; (above) Turmeric paste is shaped into a small cone representing Lord Ganesha; (right) harvesting the whole plant

proliferation of blood vessels that feed cancerous tumors, thereby stopping cancerous growth. However, cancer should be treated with conventional medications; alternative therapies should not be relied upon alone.

Curcumin's anti-inflammatory properties help reduce inflammation by lowering levels of two inflammatory enzymes (COX-2 and LOX) and stop platelets from clumping together to form blood clots. Research suggests turmeric may help prevent atherosclerosis by lowering cholesterol levels and preventing LDL ("bad") cholesterol from building up in blood vessels. Turmeric may also prevent the formation of blood clots along artery walls, though more research is needed to demonstrate its effectiveness in treating atherosclerosis in humans. Because of its anti-inflammatory properties, turmeric may help relieve osteoarthritis symptoms. It is also antiseptic, traditionally to stop bleeding and prevent infection in open wounds.

Drinking milk mixed with turmeric is helpful for asthma and bronchitis patients, and a mixture of honey with turmeric is good for a sore throat. Gargling hot water mixed with turmeric and salt also helps. In Ayurvedic medicine, a teaspoon of turmeric powder and honey taken orally twice a day is effective in treating thrombocytopenia (low platelet count). A teaspoon of ginger juice with honey every other day makes this treatment more effective.

You can use turmeric for culinary purposes with no hesitation. Turmeric paste, powder or beauty products can also be used for healthy, blemish-free skin. A word of caution



though: do not self-medicate with turmeric alone for treating life-threatening diseases such as cardiovascular diseases or cancer. Consult your physician if you wish to use turmeric as a complementary medicine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lakshmi Sridharan is an American scientist of South Indian origin who lives in San Jose, California, with her husband Tim. As a freelance writer, she enjoys sharing with others her knowledge in plant science, culinary science, her experience in gardening and cooking as well as Indian culture and traditions.

My Journey to a Hindu Chaplaincy

The concept of a chaplain evolved in the West into a service within the military and then into an institution of general spiritual guidance

BY NISHA SINGH, PH.D.

I AM PRIVILEGED TO BE AMONG THE FIRST QUALIFIED inter-religious Hindu chaplains. A few years ago, I would never have thought of a formal role as a Hindu chaplain in a society so far removed from where my life began. Doing this, alongside being a full-time healthcare scientist, mother and wife, was challenging.

My journey started in South Africa, where I was a fourth-generation Indian. My great-grandparents left India in the 1880s, brought by ship to work in South Africa as indentured laborers. This was around the same time that Mohandas Gandhi also found himself in this country, at the beginning of his career. There are considerable gaps in the history of what happened to my ancestors after the indentured period in the colonies, but ship documentation indicates our link to North India.

My ancestors brought with them their Hindu spiritual heritage, and fostered and cherished it despite the hardships they faced in near captivity. My earliest memories are of my parents. We did not know any relatives or friends living in India. Yet, the flame of Hindu dharma that had been passed down from our great grandparents' generation endured and gave us the cultural coherence to survive the apartheid regime and flourish despite it. Various Hindu vernacular schools and cultural centers were established much later, and South Africa soon developed a thriving Hindu pulse by celebrating fasts and festivals and spiritually supporting other dimensions of life. We owe much gratitude to our parents, schoolteachers and spiritual leaders who united in preserving Hindu dharma for future generations.

My introduction to spiritual care happened mid-career. After receiving professional science education and experience in South Africa, I migrated to Australia with my husband and two young children. I immersed myself in my professional work for the next decade and a half. Then, I learned about and joined the Hindu Spiritual Care Institute (HSCI), based in California, which welcomed and nurtured learners regardless of origin or current domicile. Their graduate certificate designating one as a "Counselor of Hindu Traditions" was stimulating and thought-provoking. A fellowship provided by the Motwani Jadeja Family Foundation later offered Hindus an opportunity to enroll in the Inter-religious Chaplaincy program at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley. As one of the first recipients of this award, I was initially nervous about how such a seemingly Christian chaplaincy concept would apply to Hinduism. However, I was soon reminded that Sanatana Dharma does not hold barriers to caring and learning.

Several issues stood out as I surveyed the life of contemporary Hindus living in secular diaspora countries. Loneliness and depression among the aged were no longer the domain of Westerners. Hindu women are more empowered than before and contribute to



the family's income using their knowledge and career skills. The intergenerational family structure has diminished over time, and children educated in a secular setting have limited access to community-based or vernacular schools.

Hindu marriages are a prime example. They are increasingly cross-cultural or cross-racial, and pre-marriage guidance and the use of English explanations in ceremonies are hard to find. The guidance of chaplains can be significant for blending the traditional with the contemporary and letting the guests feel more intimately included in the ceremonies.

Gender diversity and mental health concerns affect the Hindu community, as do the problems of workplace discrimination. And yet, few adequately trained Hindu chaplains serve in hospitals, workplaces, education, correctional services, aged care, etc.

HSCI's dean, Gaurav Rastogi, described the societal shifts underway in the Western world and how this creates a demand for inter-religious Hindu chaplaincy, a term specifically promoted by GTU. He said, "The idea of a Hindu chaplain is naturally inter-religious. Hindus in the diaspora countries constitute under five percent of the local population, so there won't be enough demand to hire a chaplain who exclusively serves the Hindu demographic. A Hindu chaplain employed at an institution in these countries must serve non-Hindus and 'Nones'—meaning those who state their religious affiliation as 'No religion specified.' We are following GTU's lead in using the word *inter-religious* as a prefix." This principle of the chaplaincy developed in the last century and holds for chaplains of all religions serving in a multi-religious setting, such as the military, without an intent to convert anyone.

Gaurav continued, "This is a unique opportunity to serve humanity and further mainstream Hindu spiritual care everywhere. Hindu spiritual practices such as yoga and meditation have become universally accepted. The Hindu worldview of a universal family makes it natural for Hindu chaplains to perform their services to all, naturally and dutifully. In the coming decade, we anticipate inter-religious chaplaincy taking sound footing everywhere, even in India."

Inter-religious chaplains, firmly grounded in their own faith, serve others in line with the care seekers' beliefs. They are thus versed in trauma-informed care, spiritual counseling, spiritual care for marginalized communities, and compassionate care, including grief and loss, as well as other practices of spiritual care, such as prayers and bhajans.

Emerging Hindu chaplains need special preparation to deal with the following: 1) Most Hindu care seekers and those in caring professions do not understand the contemporary Hindu chaplain's role. 2) There is a lack of inclusion of appropriately trained Hindus to meet the professional demands of chaplaincy work. 3) Chaplains need to

collaborate with priests, social workers and medical professionals and refer the care seeker to chaplains from other faiths/beliefs as needed.

As a result of completing the HSCI and GTU cooperative programs, I can offer spiritual care in aged care facilities and at hospitals. My interactions with care seekers are humbling and enhance spiritual growth. I am reminded of this in an encounter where I met a man living with progressing dementia. He felt frustrated and trapped, unable to understand why he couldn't do things independently. I spent time with him daily, showing him photos and letters from people he had impacted. I displayed these in his room to help him feel connected. After a few visits, he started looking forward to my visits, even though he often couldn't remember them later. I realized the social aspect of caregiving is powerful and that simply being there in the moment is impactful. I feel blessed that he welcomed me into his life and allowed me to understand better the needs of those living with dementia.

Generational change is another area in which chaplains find themselves faced with feuding families. Simmi, one of our Hindu chaplains, reported: "When I first met Anni and Roy, all they spoke about was their teenage daughter Ashi's rebellious behavior. Ashi often stayed out late at night and wore specific clothes and makeup, resulting in dramatic confrontations with her parents at dinner time. After

counseling them, I had them prepare a list of dos and don'ts for Ashi, explaining each rationale while acknowledging and empathizing with her need to fit in, not just 'because we say so.' Ashi was asked to prepare a list of her wants and needs and explore ways to resist peer pressure going beyond 'but all my friends do it.' The last I heard of them, Ashi was in a program learning to create phone apps, which had boosted her creativity and led to new friendships. Anni and Roy were enjoying dinner-time conversations again. Seeing such dramatic improvement from their previous despair was gratifying."

In the vast Hindu diaspora, ancient traditions have survived due to their richness, breadth of expression, flexibility and openness. The emergence of standardized Hindu chaplaincy training programs and pathways to country-specific certification will bring much-needed support to the Hindu diaspora and bring the sweetness of Hindu spiritual care to the communities. That is what *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*—"the world is a one family"—teaches Hindus everywhere!

Dr. Nisha Singh is the principal genetics scientist leading a cancer diagnostic laboratory in Sydney, Australia. She is a member of *Spiritual Care Australia* and a lifelong learner at the *Divine Life Society* and *Chinmaya Mission*. She plans to offer her chaplaincy services in healthcare and local community-based settings.

I'm an Army Chaplain

BY SMRITI KRISHNA, CAPTAIN

From a young age, I was always fascinated by science and spirituality. My interest in Hindu texts led me to research and study them extensively. Driven by my passion for genetics, I pursued a PhD in molecular biology in 2000. The intricate relationships between genetics, lifestyle and emotional well-being intrigued me. During my graduate work at one of the largest cancer hospitals in India, I had the opportunity to support patients emotionally and spiritually as I became involved in palliative care and end-of-life support activities.

In 2009, I moved to Townsville, Queensland, Australia, for my postdoctoral research. There, I identified a need for a space to practice spirituality. As a lecturer in the university's medical department, I had the opportunity to mentor and provide pastoral support to medical and PhD students. I was also appointed as a university chaplain, allowing me to support many international students in distress.

During my time in Queensland, I did volunteer work for the nonprofit North Queensland Hindu Community for over 13 years. I conducted numerous seminars and workshops for the local Hindu community. Being part of the multicultural community afforded me countless opportunities to create platforms for conversations, conduct conferences and seminars, and bring the values of our dharma to a broader audience. My connections within the multicultural community also led to my role on the Community Advisory Board at the largest regional hospital, where I advocated for the needs of the "Culturally and Linguistically Diverse" community. This position enabled me to implement changes in the approach to dealing with death, palliative support and end-of-life support in a Hindu context.

I moved to Melbourne during the Covid pandemic as part of my



COURTESY SMRITI KRISHNA

work. I continued my community service by volunteering for various organizations. The Hindu Council of Australia endorsed me as a chaplain within the tertiary education sector, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad endorsed me to become a chaplain within the Australian Defence Force. After a year-long selection, I was appointed the first female Hindu chaplain in the ADF Army. It was a blessed day to take the oath in the presence of my mother, who has been a strong pillar of support throughout my life, and I was proud to show her that I am helping the broader community through my passion for Hindu spirituality. The Australian Defence Force has an increasing number

of Hindus, and there is a clear need for dharmic support and spiritual practices, including practical aspects, such as yoga and meditation.

Until now, I have conducted all my spiritual and emotional care activities without formal training or knowledge of institutionalized spiritual care by trained counselors or chaplains. To further my training, I enrolled in a Clinical Pastoral Education course as part of becoming a defence force chaplain. However, I realized the need for a Hindu Spiritual Care-focused course, as their Clinical Pastoral Education course was based on a Christian framework.

I was introduced to the Hindu Spiritual Care Institute by a graduate and decided to enroll in the their chaplain program, which was was an eye-opener for me. The knowledgeable faculty, the vast resources they have compiled, and the connections with the peer group I received through the program were immensely helpful. Being part of the

program gave me the confidence to practice as a chaplain within the army. Absent a local organization to interact with and find answers to my questions, the opportunity to engage with pioneers in the field through their program has been invaluable as I embark on my journey as an army chaplain.

Smriti Krishna, PhD, is a biomedical scientist firmly committed to translational research focused on applying recent scientific discoveries to benefit patients. She did her PhD at the Regional Cancer Centre, India, and has expertise in effective teaching in higher education.



PARENTHOOD

The Impact of My Dad's Morning Prayers

Worshiping with my father as a child established my connection with Hinduism and allowed me to later pass it on to my own son

BY MURALI BALAJI, NEW JERSEY

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP IN THE PHILADELPHIA suburbs, our house was small enough for me to hear the 4:30 am alarm sounding in my parents' room. That meant it was time for my dad to get up, shower and do his morning prayers for well over an hour.

As a teenager, I enjoyed sitting with my dad in front of our altar (which he built) and saying some of the same mantras, or prayers, even though I could never wake up as early as he did. But the feeling of praying with my father profoundly shaped my connection to Hinduism and my desire to keep practicing the faith into adulthood.

Part of the reason I felt that connection was that, at least for the 30 minutes or so I shared with him in front of the altar, my father and I were able to break through an invisible wall that existed between us. We had little in common, so extended conversations were rare. Besides basketball (we were both 76ers fans), we didn't talk about much in terms of life. I rarely asked him for advice, because I felt he really never understood me.

I grew up on hip-hop, 80s and 90s rock and metal, and played sports extensively. I took very little interest in the Hindu devotionals my parents would listen to, and I still cannot believe I did not appreciate singers like M.S. Subbalakshmi and Yesudas much earlier in life. My dad worked two jobs a lot when I was young, and when he was home, he was constantly fixing things around the house—a hobby I didn't take much interest in until I was a homeowner myself years later. Whenever his family friends would visit, they would get wrapped up in discussions about American politics or sometimes venture into the state of politics in Tamil Nadu while I would daydream about becoming a professional basketball player.

That's why praying with dad strengthened my bond in a way that no long conversation ever could. When I went to college 1,000 miles away at the University of Minnesota, I no longer had the benefit of sitting with him and praying in front of the family altar adorned with beautiful paintings of various Deities and photographs of Hindu religious leaders. One of the things my dad gifted me when I went to college was a set of my own murtis, which I set up in my dorm room. My own altar—stuffed into a dorm closet right above my sock drawer—gave me a sense of home and evoked memories of my dad and me praying together.

To be honest, I didn't know the meanings of many of the prayers I grew up saying, but repeating them—and closing my eyes and imagining my father next to me—gave me a sense of comfort and peace in an otherwise hectic college life. More importantly, those prayers and the murtis reminded me I was never far from home. At Minnesota, my daily exposures to "Minnesota Nice" (residents are known for their friendliness) included getting proselytized on my way to classes, so



I could always find refuge in my altar—and know that my dad's presence was near.

Nearly 30 years later, I still have those same murtis, which have become part of our family altar. I now know the meanings of most of the prayers I uttered as a teenager and 20-something, and my dad and I have had more conversations about religious topics. Following the death of my mother, my dad became more interested in reading about religious leaders, and became more engaged with aspects of Hindu philosophy, particularly ideas extolled by modern gurus such as the late Kanchi seer, Jagad-guru Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Mahaswamigal. My dad and I talk more about politics and sports, but it has been great to engage with him on topics related to our faith. Every year, we still sit to-

gether to change our sacred threads, a custom I have enjoyed for close to 35 years.

The time I spent with my dad in prayer has significantly shaped my own approach to fatherhood, particularly as a Hindu in an intercultural marriage (see my article on my marriage in the July, 2023, issue). As a father now, I relish the chance to do evening prayers with my son, though my wife and I have a more blended version of prayers that combines my Tamil and her Indo-Caribbean backgrounds.

Our son sings along to the prayers, and he applies the vibhuti, or holy ash, on our foreheads. Even as a toddler, he sings South Indian devotionals such as "Swagathan Krishna" and "Alaipauthey Kanna"—the versions sung by Yesudas—and North Indian ones such as "Man Tarpat Hari Darshan," sung by Mohammed Rafi. We hope that his engagement and enjoyment during those few minutes profoundly shapes his own relationship with Hinduism.

I don't know if my son will follow the same path as my wife and I, but spending that time with him in front of the altar has put into perspective the values my dad tried to teach me during our morning prayers. He didn't have the same experience of growing up in the United States as I did, but he did the best he could to help me better understand what it meant to practice Hinduism. I also have come to appreciate how hard he and my mother worked to make Hinduism a part of their kids' daily practice despite pressures to "Americanize." In some ways, Hinduism was a "language" that we learned because of how we repeated what our parents did.

I am truly grateful to my father for that time. Even as he nears 80, he still gets up and does his daily prayers, and that commitment inspires me to do the same. It's an enduring gift from father to son, one that I hope I can pass down as dutifully as he did.

.....
Murali Balaji is a journalist and a lecturer at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

Hindu Heritage Endowment

You Can Help Carry On the Tradition of Feeding the Monks

A traditional practice in any aadheenam—a monastery and temple complex in the South Indian Saiva Siddhanta tradition—is the ceremonial feeding of close, usually initiated, followers of the center, both lay and monastic. This is referred to as Maheshvarapuja. *Maheshvara* is a term for a Saiva ascetic, as well as for God Siva. And when Maheshvarapuja is held during a major aadheenam festival, such as the founder's annual Mahasamadhi, visiting Saiva ascetics in attendance are traditionally honored with gifts, such as dakshina and kavi robes.



The importance of Maheshvarapuja is mentioned in the ancient Saiva scripture *Tirumantiram*, with several passages ranking this rite above other forms of dana: "Maheshvaras will besmear their bodies with the sacred ash; those who consider them as Siva and worship them will get all benefits; to feed them in the daytime is more beneficial than building a thousand temples, and giving daily food to Maheshvaras will yield more benefits than granting a thousand dwelling places of Brahmins" (7.13).

To provide funds for an aadheenam's Maheshvarapujas, separate endowments were often established and documented in temple wall inscriptions. In chapter seven of her doctoral thesis, *The Sacred Presence of the Guru*, Kathleen Koppedrayar describes this tradition. "The numerous temple inscriptions that describe endowments made for the feeding in mathas of maheshvaras, sivayogis, tapasvis, paradesis (mendicants) and other types of ascetics and devotees thus appear to be examples of the ritual gesture which the *Tirumantiram* calls Maheshvarapuja. This act of feeding ascetics and others on both festival and ordinary occasions within the temple complex appears to have been highly significant; otherwise it would not have merited the public announcement of a temple inscription. In fact, many, if not most, of the temple records we have that make reference to mathas are concerned with this ritual gesture. In other words, it appears that mathas were precisely the places where such religious acts could be carried out. Put another way, mathas housed the 'religious institution' of making gifts—mainly of food, but sometimes of more substantial things—to ascetics and other individuals. Highly ritualized, this gifting was both purposeful and transactional.... The statements found in the *Tirumantiram* coupled with the frequency of inscriptional reference to the feeding of ascetics, as well as the centrality of this rite in the present-day ritual cycle of the Saiva mathas suggests a formal significance to this act."

Kauai Aadheenam has its own endowment for Maheshvarapuja called the Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund. (*Yagam*, a Tamil word, refers to religious feeding.) This endowment was established to provide meals for the monks and devotees on holy days, such as Gurudeva's annual Mahasamadhi observance, temple festivals and other special events at the Aadheenam.

If you would like to help the monks abundantly fulfill the Aadheenam tradition of Maheshvarapuja, you can do so by donating to the Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund at www.hheonline.org/funds/fund_61.html. The endowment allows the monastery to use your funds as an investment and draw on the grant income. This is a way to donate and see your impact last in perpetuity.

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment		Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Ambika Alagere	\$US6.42	Tilagame Adinarayane	100.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00	Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	50.68		
Brijianand Jugurnauth	10.36	Sai Jayakumar	51.00	Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.83	Sumathi Kuppusamy	501.00	Sumathi Raja Chanda	450.00
Gowri Nadason	112.21	Umasankaran Mohambourame	189.05	Venkat & Hema Devraj	111.00
Indra & R. Neelameggham	751.00	Gowri Nadason	112.21	Michael Doyle	216.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	32.84	Panshula Ganeshan	50.00
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00	Parimala Selvaraj	93.00	Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam	21.00	Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00	Toshadeva Guhan	50.00
Ravi Vinayak Family	100.00	Anonymous	186.00	Eric Mackow	48.00
Anonymous	202.00	Total	1,327.78	Vel Mahalingum	2.69
Total	1,732.37			Whitney Merritt	108.00
Iraivan Temple Endowment		Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund		Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00
Eshwar & Aarati Bandlamudi	303.00	Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Frank Burkhardt	30.00			Cassan Pancham	1,500.00
Raj Chappidi	5.00	Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam		Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	32.84
Rajagopal Krishnan	324.00	Hridaya Sivalingam	21.00	Kumar & Mala Ramalingam	22.00
Vasaant Krishnan	60.00	Anonymous	30.00	Srikakshmi Rathakrishnan	51.00
Vimala Muniandy	15.00	Total	51.00	Hitesvara Saravan	710.00
Mohan & Rajalakshmi Sabapathy	600.00	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	63.42
Nandi Sivam	27.00	Muthukumar Jayapalan	5,000.00	Ravi Thaker	44.00
Prashant Srivastava	15.00			Anba Dayananden Valayten	5.65
Nesa Kumar Subramaniam	50.00	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		Anonymous	3,632.00
A. Vaithilingam	1,000.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	Total	7,846.61
Madan Ganesh Velayudham	836.00			Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Other Donations	120,341.26	Hinduism Today Production Fund		Arnab Chatterjee	12.00
Anonymous	1,778.00	Ambika Alagere	4.35	Hridaya Sivalingam	12.00
Total	125,384.66	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	8.09	Anonymous	100.00
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Brijianand Jugurnauth	10.36	Total	124.00
Isani Alahan	108.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.83	Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Malvi Gandhi	75.00	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
Raman & Nayana Gandhi	51.00	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	32.84		
Ramalingum Moodley	50.00	Anonymous	63.00	Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Jogendra Moorooogen	4.20	Total	181.48	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	4.20				
Logathanas Murugasu	21.10	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	Benevity	381.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00
Rajesh & Vinutha Sathiamurthy	108.00	Tamnash J. Gupta	216.00		
Nandi Deva Sundaram	300.00	Roshan Harilela	375.00	Tiptur Shiva Temple & Youth Hostel Fund	
Mahesh Viswanathan	251.00	Prasidha Mohandas	101.00	Louis Parrott	5.00
Kitri Waterman	250.00	Natraj Narayanswami	50.00		
Anonymous	54.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Total	1,326.48	Hitesvara Saravan	36.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Hridaya Sivalingam	12.00	Rajiv Verma	150.00
Abhinav Goswami	249.00	Matthew Wieczork	180.00	Anonymous	100.00
Martand Sharma Ippili	249.00	Anonymous	33.00	Total	260.00
Anurag Jagota	249.00	Total	1,462.75	Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund	
Ganesh Kalyanaraman	249.00	Hindu Education Endowment		Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	12.83	Fidelity Charitable	100.00	Visvas Patel	21.00
Tejwantee Meetoo	44.94	Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00	Total	81.00
Bhaveshan Moorghen	13.12	Total	175.00		
Logathanas Murugasu	42.34	Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment		Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment	
Indra & R. Neelameggham	249.00	Prashanth Srichandramohan	443.00	Vel Mahalingum	12.83
Amit Pandya	299.00	Positive Discipline Endowment		Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Bhanugopan Ramudu	350.00	Fidelity Charitable	6,640.00	Anonymous	54.00
Swapna Rao	249.00	Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund		Total	291.83
Gautam S	249.00	The Blackbaud Giving Fund		Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund	
Easan Saravan	276.27	YourCause	17.89	Surinder Kalra	108.00
Chidambaram Sendan	233.00	Rajeshwar & Anu Kumar	250.00	Anonymous	33.00
Sandeep Somani	249.00	Madan Ganesh Velayudham	200.00	Total	141.00
Vallabha Tantry	249.00	Anonymous	1.00		
Mahesh Viswanathan	250.00	Total	468.89		
Anonymous	151.00				
Total	3,913.50				

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Brijianand Jugurnauth	10.36	Ajita Gupta	20.00
Arnab Chatterjee	12.00	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	375.00	Suresh & Meena Joshi	121.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Natraj Narayanswami	62.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth	10.36
Anonymous	983.00	Varalakshmi Ramamoorthy	324.00	Velika Lawrence	9.99
Total	1,044.81	Padmini Samuthiran	162.00	Archana Mahavadi	45.00
Siva Poomi School Trust		Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	Umasankaran Mohambourame	51.00
Chin Kuok Fwu	21.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00	Prasidha Mohandas	101.00
		Vidhushei Yogeswaran	500.50	Kulagan Moonesawmy	4.40
		Anonymous	699.00	Gajanan Nataraj	21.00
		Total	2,357.03	Mohan Pamarthi	101.00
Kodiswara Satguru Malaysia Travel Fund		Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund		Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam	63.00	Raj Chappidi	5.00	Renu Sinha	108.00
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Anonymous	108.00	Tarangadeva Sinhaputra	63.00
Anonymous	75.00	Total	113.00	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	84.52
Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona Endowment		Bharathi Yoga Dhama Fund		Barathy Sockanathan	500.00
Anonymous	6,875.00	Dhaval Patel	40.00	Ravi Thaker	18.00
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Panchangam Endowment Fund		Riorita Tkatchenko	100.00
DNR Trust	21.00	Sivananda Ashram Yoga Camp	10.00	Senthil Velusamy	108.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	Bhagirath Gopinath	101.00	Saravan Veylan	324.00
Ambika Sureshkumar	100.00	Sidharth Sankar	10.00	Hema & Brad Werner	108.00
Anonymous	108.00	Anonymous	11.00	Anonymous	2,808.00
Total	379.00	Total	132.00	Total	5,611.78
India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Digital Dharma Endowment		Concord Shiva Murugan Temple (CSMT) Endowment Fund	
Anonymous	45.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	14.97	Natraj Narayanswami	50.00
Hindu American Foundation Endowment		Vijay Srinivasan	2.00	Antyodoy Anatha Ashram Orphanage Endowment	
Surinder & Rani Bhardwaj	80.00	Anonymous	64.00	Arnab Chatterjee	24.00
Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Other Donations	10,256.00	Pramod & Anjana Sinha	202.00
Arun Aarooren	75.00	Total	10,336.77	Total	226.00
Ambika Alagere	6.42	Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund			
Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00	Ambika Alagere	6.42	Total Contributions	\$185,140.74
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	8.09	Yuvaraj Athur	153.00	Funds at Market Value, Jun 30, 2024	
		Anandkumar Ayyachamy	75.00		
		Ashish Deshpande	100.00	Grand Total	\$23,636,209.29
		Shubha Gangal	401.00		
		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	8.09		

MISSION STATEMENT: Hindu Heritage Endowment is a publicly supported, charitable organization recognized as tax exempt by the IRS on April 22, 1994. Employer ID 99-0308924. Founded by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, its philanthropic mission is to provide secure, professionally managed financial support for institutions and religious leaders of all lineages of Sanatana Dharma.

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS: Halbert, Hargrove, Investment Counsel; Lynn M. Gaumer, J.D., Stelter Co. and Sonoda & Isara LLP, certified public accountants. HHE is a member of the Partnership for Philanthropic Planning, the source for education, research and advocacy for professionals who have a role in designing and implementing donors' philanthropic plans.

I WANT TO PARTICIPATE: Where should I Send My Donation? You can send your gift to an existing fund, create a new endowment or request information through the address below. Donations may be made online at www.hheonline.org to join our family of benefactors who are Strengthening Hinduism Worldwide. Thank you.



HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT

KAUAI'S HINDU MONASTERY

107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA

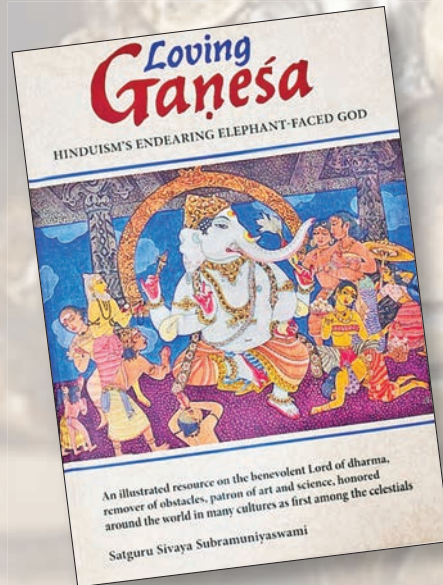
808-822-3012 • hhe@hindu.org

www.hheonline.org • www.facebook.com/hhecares



MiniMela

Kauai Hindu Monastery's
Spiritual treasure box



Newly released 3rd edition of *Loving Ganesha*

by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami is now available with more exquisite illustrations and now in full color. In the clearest, most captivating terms, the satguru introduces you to this great God, shows the many ways to develop a rapport with Him so as to illumine and uplift your life. Learn about this endearing God who, of all the Gods, is closest to us. Learn how to contact Him, pray to Him and celebrate His presence in your home.

Hinduism's most essential

teachings as presented and illumined by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. The three volumes may be acquired together or separately. They elucidate Hinduism's:

- tenets and philosophy, vol. 1
- lifestyle, culture, ethics, vol. 2
- metaphysics and mysticism, vol. 3



Path to Siva • Composed by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami to present Hinduism's teachings in a way youth could more immediately appreciate. It contains all of Gurudeva's teachings rearranged, compacted, trimmed, and turned it into a delightful, beautifully illustrated 96-page handbook of liberating knowledge and wisdom. (Adults are also fond of this book.)

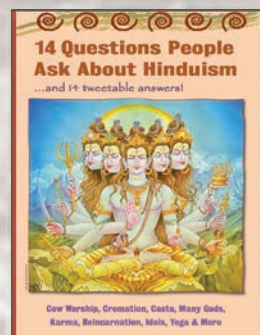


36-bead rudraksha mala grown and assembled by devotees of Kauai's Hindu Monastery and blessed by the swamis.



5 rudraksha beads grown at Kauai's Hindu Monastery and blessed by the swamis.

14 great answers to those 14 tough questions people ask you and your children (Why many Gods? Do Hindus worship cows?... etc.)—a 16-page booklet created by Hinduism Today's editors.



Study materials and guided studies:
bit.ly/ha-master-course

And much more at:
minimela.com

HAWAII HEAVEN



Magnificent ocean bluff gated estate w/180° ocean view from every room

- 2,100 sq. ft. home, 2-bedroom, 2-bath, large living room, 1.23 acre of land
- perched on a hillside facing East for picturesque sunrises • Anahola Kalalea mountain range backdrop to the West
- guest house rights and plans ready

Yelena Okhman Realtor®(S) • Remax Kauai
808-635-6552 • yelenastars@gmail.com

Lemurian Scrolls

ANGELIC PROPHECIES REVEALING HUMAN ORIGINS
Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami



Gain a great understanding about where human-kind is headed at this point in time, the reason we originally came to this plane of existence, why we have gone

through all that we have gone through, where it will all lead and what is the purpose of it all.

Lemurian Scrolls consists of akashic messages that were revealed mystically to the founder of Hinduism Today magazine, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva) in 1973. After decades of being kept private, Gurudeva decided, one day, to release them to the world. If you know Gurudeva's other teachings, you know that you can expect sound, clear information that will mean a great deal to you.

400 illustrated pages • hardback • color • US\$35

www.minimela.com/lemurian



VEDIC YAGYA CENTER

(Traditional Vedic Yagya Remedies Performed by Expert Vedic Pandits)
FOR MORE INFO : (+1) 512 633 7999 | www.vydic.com



Sadhana Yatra & Yagya

Special Individual Yagyas at the sacred abode of Lord Shiva - Mother divine - Lord Ganesha & Lord Subrahmanya (Murugan)



Pundit Samavedula at Vedic Yagya Center is organizing first time a special yagya remedies at the holy abode of **Lord Shiva & Goddess Shakti** to offer the utmost highest **remedial yagyas** to remedy many issues in our mundane lives.

These remedial yagyas can help participants to live with the **highest level of comfort & bring success, happiness and peace** into their lives.



Level A - Shiva Shakti Parivara Yagyas (Over 30 Yagyas together) Order Now - \$1801 (Early Bird Price - \$1503)
Benefits: Health & healing - Prosperity & protection - Wealth & well-being - Success in personal & professional life



Level B - All Shiva Jyotirlinga Maha Yagyas Order Now - \$999 (Early Bird Price - \$899)
Benefits: Good health & rejuvenating/healing energy - Balancing all Graha Doshas - Help with legal issues in personal & professional life



Level C - All Shakti Peetha Maha Yagyas Order Now - \$999 (Early Bird Price - \$899)
Benefits: Health & healing - Prosperity & protection - Wealth & well-being - Success in personal & professional life



Level D - All Ganesha Kshetra Maha Yagyas Order Now - \$455 (Early Bird Price - \$355)
Benefits: Neutralizing obstacles in personal and professional life - Helping with anxiety and Depression in one's life.



Level E - All Subrahmanya Kshetra Maha Yagyas Order Now - \$455 (Early Bird Price - \$355)
Benefits: Creating a stronger energy for healthy fertility - Neutralizing Naga, Sarpa Doshas in natal chart - Finding a suitable spouse or companion in one's life.



Shiva & Shakti Yagyas Only Order Now
Benefits: Eliminate the effects of past sins and distractions, enabling a focus on divine creations.



For your personal and professional astrological and vedic remedy consultation with Pundit Samavedula, please contact : vyc@vydicfoundation.org | +1 (512) 633 7999 / +1 (888) 835 7788



सा विद्या या विमुक्तये

KNOWLEDGE IS THAT WHICH LIBERATES

Vedic Wisdom - Online

Mission

The Hindu University of America provides education in knowledge systems based in Hindu thought involving critical inquiry, ethics, and self-reflection. Committed to fostering the culture and traditions of Hindu Dharma in an atmosphere of academic excellence and freedom, it prepares students for service, leadership, and global engagement.

Vision

Promoting dialogue across disciplines, cultures and civilizations, while enabling self-discovery, conscious evolution and harmony, the Hindu University of America will set the standard for the study of Hindu Dharma.



www.hua.edu

Hindu University of America is an institution of higher learning, teaching, reflection and research based in the knowledge systems rooted in and emerging from Hindu thought, where you will find a welcoming, global community of learners led by passionate faculty.



Wishing
all our friends
a most blessed
and fulfilling

**Ganesha
Chaturthi 2024**



EASAN KATIR

private wealth management
since 1983

easan.katir@gmail.com

1-530.320.3287 (USA)

easankatir.com



**Help Iraivan Temple
welcome its pilgrims soon**

Iraivan's major event of 2023 has been the Crystal Lingam installation ceremony, held in March and May, which culminated a year of myriad accomplishments. We are now creating new infrastructure to allow for public access through the Rudraksha Forest and the magnificent San Marga path so future pilgrims can worship & meditate in this spiritual haven.

Donate at:

himalayanacademy.com/iraivan

Contact:

iraivan@hindu.org



THAT INDIAN PLACE

Kauai, an exceptionally beautiful island with an incredible Indian Restaurant.

www.thatindianplace.com

808-320-3512

2360 Kiahuna Plantation Dr, Koloa HI 96756



LOTUS SCULPTURE
WWW.LOTUSSCULPTURE.COM

"THE STATUES WE
SELL ARE MORE
THAN JUST ART;
THEY'RE STORIES
SHAPED BY ARTISTS
AND ENRICHED BY
HISTORY."

Kyle Tortora

Founder, Lotus Sculpture

10% OFF with code **HINDU** | (760)994-4455 | info@lotussculpture.com



Life Insurance and Estate Planning

Rely on a professional for
Retirement and Estate Planning

For information, contact one of
the most highly trained financial advisors:

Niraj P. Baxi, msi, clu, chfc
Tel: 800-686-8436
niraj@baxifinancial.com
www.baxifinancial.com

Kauai
Investment Properties
Homes Condos Land

Claire SUNITA Keaton
Real Estate Broker
RE Licence: RB 23898
808-652-9543
clairekeaton@yahoo.com
kauaihomesearcher.com
Brokerage Licence: RB 23899

Kauai
Home Searcher LLC
Real Estate Sales & Property Management



**Hindu
Global Charity**



Food distribution in Pakistan • We are also planning
projects in Bangladesh, Kenya and hopefully soon in India.

American Hindu World Service (AHWS) is a
501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to educating the
American public and the world about Hindu perspec-
tives on global health and international development.
It is now working in education, women's empower-
ment and maternal/child nutrition. It is active with
other religious communities on interfaith issues, and
serves without discrimination as to ethnicity, gender,
nationality, or creed • More at www.ahwsngo.org

AHWS • PO Box 1483, Laurel, MD 20725-1483, USA
+1-443-761-9890 • ahwsngo@gmail.com

SRI GAYATRI

Amma Sri Karunamayi unveils the profound essences
and sacred timeless wisdom of
Gayatri Mantra—syllable by syllable



"Gayatri Devi, Mother of the four Vedas, is universally
revered, She is self-luminous, seated on a lotus, radiating
purity, spiritual awakening and divine grace. She is the essence
of the **Gayatri Mantra** which is central to Sanatan Dharma
and embodies wisdom, purity, and spiritual enlightenment,
making it one of Hinduism's most powerful mantras."

— Amma Sri Karunamayi



Explore our books, CDs, and more to enhance your spiritual journey
<https://theammastore.org> • ammastore@karunamayi.in



Vegan Vitamins & Supplements

No animal products or derivatives of any kind

High quality
Wide selection
Affordable prices



...and many more!



DEVA vitamins are 100% vegan, vegetarian and certified by the Vegan Society, the non-profit organization that actually invented the word "vegan."

Available for purchase at:

WHOLE FOODS & other
Natural Health Food Stores.

January-February-March 2024 issue

(888) 988-DEVA

www.devanutrition.com
info@devanutrition.com

SACRED STATUES & ART

FROM **INDIA & TIBET**



This magnificent 6-foot tall sandstone Surya and other fine, hand-carved statues are available in the USA now, ready to be shipped anywhere.

713-668-2948

surtal2014@gmail.com

www.zarposhindia.com

Zarposh India

We specialize in orders from monasteries & temples



THE FINEST COLLECTION OF ANTIQUES & ART FROM INDIA, TIBET AND NEPAL

We offer group tours to visit temples in INDIA

Shrii Lalithaa Sahasranaama Sthothram

by Mrs. Rama Kalipatnapu Rao

English translation of one thousand Sanskrit names of **the Goddess** and interpretation of Hindu imagery and concepts • Sanskrit pronunciation guide

Available on Amazon, at bookstores \$16.99/paperback • available in e-book

Shrii Shiva Sahasranaama Sthothram

by Mrs. Rama Kalipatnapu Rao

English translation of one thousand Sanskrit names of **Shiva** and interpretation of Hindu imagery and concepts • Sanskrit pronunciation guide

Available on Amazon, at bookstores \$16.99/paperback • available in e-book

"The rich diversity of Hinduism and Indian cultures include diversity of sexuality and gender expression."

Read our updated LGBTQ policy brief.
myhaf.org/ht-lgbtq



Hindu American Foundation
hinduamerican.org

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified ads are us\$55 for 20 words, \$1 for each additional word. "Box ads" are \$80 and \$150 • 10% to 35% discount for repeat ads • 888-464-1008, 808-634-5407 fax: 888-217-3108 • ads@hindu.org www.hinduismtoday.com

Devotional Supplies

For All Your Spiritual Needs

Shop at the home of **Hinduism Today** for all your devotional and spiritual supplies. Books, including the complete works of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, incense, rare rudrakshas, malas of all types, elegant statues, children's books and much more.

www.minimela.com

Free Products & Services

Home-Study Course in the Vedanta.

Contact Parashakti Vidya Gurukul, PO Box 250, Spring Valley, NY 10977 parashaktividya@aol.com

Professional Products & Services

Indoor/outdoor painting—No. California Residential, commercial, interior & exterior. Color consulting. Licensed, bonded & insured. Vama's Painting Co., 925-279-1051.

Freight Forwarder

Ship >45 kg or more
Anywhere from US
+1-888-247-7732
Sales2@air7seas.us
www.air7seas.com



Fine Quality Neem Products

Specializing in fresh neem leaf, neem sticks, living neem trees and other Ayurvedic herbs. Our complete line of neem products contains more neem than any other U.S. manufacturer, all at fresh-from-the-farm prices.

www.neemtreefarm.com
877-500-6336

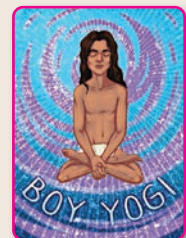


Publications

Creation of a Great Yogi

The inspiring true story of a teen who courageously meditated non stop for 12 years and became the great Shri Shivalayogi Maharaj. View on Amazon. Free in the USA:

germaine108@yahoo.com



Dreaming Peace: The History of Positive Thinking and What It Means in the Post-Truth Era, by Nori Muster norimuster.com/books/

Babaji's Kriya Yoga Publications

Books, correspondence course, seminars, ashrams, audios, videos, pilgrimages.
babajiskriyayoga.net
1-888-252-9642



Sri Aurobindo books. Ayurveda. vReiki. Vedic astrology. Alternative health. Plus over 14,000 health & wellness products. Wholesale-retail-mail order. Free catalogs. Lotus Press, HT Box 1008, Silver Lake, WI 53170 USA • www.lotuspress.com

Sri Chinmoy Books

Sri Chinmoy's soulful offerings in the form of books, music and art have been the source of inspiration and wisdom for seekers for over 50 years.

+1-734-994-7114
srichinmoy.org
srichinmoybooks.com



Divine Life Society Publications

Choose from over 100 free e-books and 300+ printed books on Hindu philosophy, yoga, meditation and more by Swami Sivananda and his disciples.

www.dlsebooks.org • www.dlsbooks.org

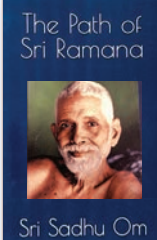


Discover Your True, Divine Nature: Read *Yogatma - the Spirit of Yoga*. Explore Yoga beyond asana and pranayama • www.yogaatma.in

The Teachings of Sri Ramana

The best comprehensive and introductory book on the teachings of the great sage by Sri Sadhu Om, one of his direct disciples. Available at Amazon marketplaces worldwide.

ramanahou.org
vimeo.com/ramanahou



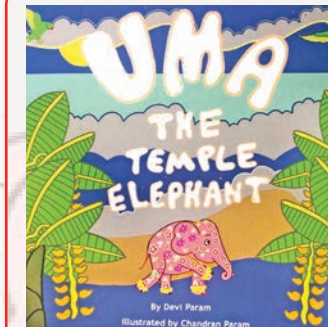
Yoga Tantra Sri Vidya Sacred dance Kirtan Samskrit Samskara Puja

MATHA GITANANDA ASHRAM



a traditional Hindu ashram in Italy

+39 019 584692 |
monasteriindu@gmail.com | www.gitanandashram.it



Uma, (Story of dreams)

Baby Uma was born to be a worker elephant but this is not the life she wants. Determined, she

dreams of another world where she can make her own choices.

Tiru (Story of friendship)

Baby Tiru has lost his mother. Hungry and afraid he meets Thamby, a vegetarian village boy who shows him that friendship lasts forever.



By Devi Param
Illustrated by Chandran Param
Order from Amazon.com

SACRED DIALOGUE ARTIST



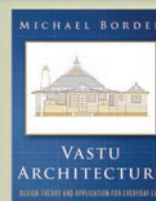
Your guide to Self Empowerment



Book a session by email
Xylawaum@gmail.com
Studio Trust



VASTUVED INTERNATIONAL



Building design in the ancient tradition of Vastu Shastra
Residential and Commercial Properties
Comprehensive Vastu Design Theory and Application for Everyday Life

<http://www.vastu-design.com/vastu-architecture-book.php>
www.vastu-design.com 1-641-472-2157

Find the Divine within

Eternal Friend offers the keys to the Divine that ever resides within—is always there, ready to guide and help you attain that peace and contentment which is your true nature.

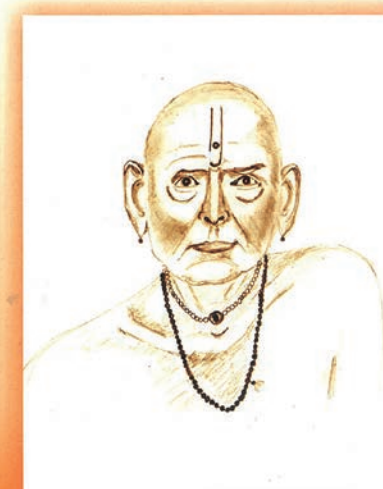
"*Eternal Friend* is a doorway to auspiciousness and infinite peace."—Shri Sathya Sai Baba

"*Eternal Friend* helps people manifest their deepest soul potentials."—Dr. David Frawley:

By M. Hanumante, PhD • 142 p.
hardcover • color

mukund@juno.com
<https://akkalkotswamisamarth-usa.org>

ETERNAL FRIEND ŚHRĪ SWĀMĪ SAMARTH MAHĀRĀJ OF AKKALKOT



By
MUKUND M. HANUMANTE, Ph.D



"The practical solutions offered by HPN enable our children to live and breathe Sanatana Dharma"
- Parent of a 5th grader

Hindu Parents Network

Conscious Parenting:

- Empowerment Workshops and Events
- Curated Resources: Articles, Videos, Books, and Infographics
- Parent Community Support with Expert Advice and Resources

School Advocacy:

- Addressing Bullying & Prejudice
- Textbook Accuracy: Correcting Distortions in Portrayal of Hinduism
- Supplementary classroom-ready teaching resources

Empowering Hindu parents through education and advocacy

✉ contact@hinduparentsnetwork.org
 🌐 www.hinduparentsnetwork.org
 📱 [f @hinduparentsnetwork](https://www.facebook.com/hinduparentsnetwork)

Learn more.
Volunteer.
Donate.



Key Activities



CoHNA
Coalition of Hindus of North America

Empowering North American Hindus through advocacy, education, and civic engagement.

Volunteer

Join our efforts by contributing your time and skills.

Public Policy

Represent Hindu interests in legislative and policy discussions at local, state, and national levels.

Education

Develop resources and programs to educate the public, policymakers, and key stakeholders about issues impacting Hindus.

Civil Rights

Protect and promote the civil rights of Hindus, ensuring freedom from discrimination and bias

Youth

Organize events, workshops, and seminars to foster youth community connections and a greater understanding

Contact Us

🌐 www.cohna.org
 ✉ info@cohna.org
 📱 [f @CoHNAOfficial](https://www.facebook.com/CoHNAOfficial)

Learn More.
Volunteer.
Donate



HELP SAVE INDIA'S ANCIENT TEMPLES & TRADITIONS



Temple Renovation



Oil Donation
to Poor Temples



Annadanam

Practicing Hindus Preserving Our Past

India's ancient temples are dying. In Tamil Nadu alone, more than 12,000 temples do not have any poojas happening or even a single lamp being lit. Thousands of temples across the state are lying in ruins waiting to be renovated. Behind Every Temple is a 501c3 Non-Profit organization dedicated to ensuring these sacred sites are protected and renovated for future generations. In addition to temple renovation, we also provide free oil to ancient temples in poor condition and regularly perform annadanam (feeding) for intellectually disabled people. We are entirely volunteer-run, so 100% of your tax-deductible donation goes directly to these projects.

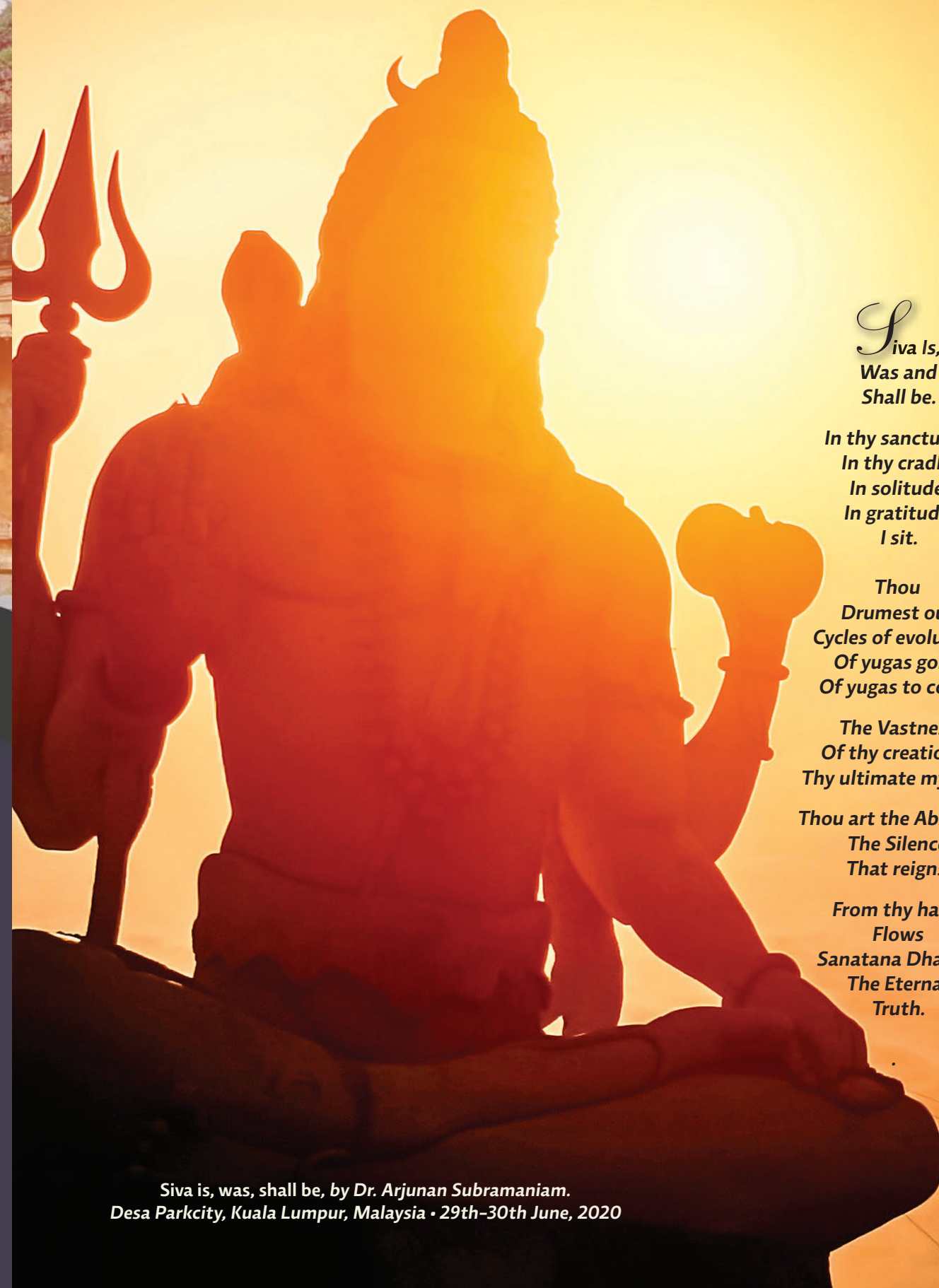
For Hindus, dana (giving) is an integral part of one's dharma, so we invite everyone to help participate in these noble projects and help keep India's temples and traditions alive



To learn more please visit us at
www.behindeverytemple.org



SCAN ME



*S*iva Is,
Was and
Shall be.

*In thy sanctuary,
In thy cradle,
In solitude,
In gratitude,
I sit.*

*Thou
Drumest out
Cycles of evolution,
Of yugas gone,
Of yugas to come,*

*The Vastness
Of thy creation is
Thy ultimate mystery.*

*Thou art the Absolute,
The Silence
That reigns.*

*From thy hand
Flows
Sanatana Dharma
The Eternal
Truth.*

Siva is, was, shall be, by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam.
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia • 29th-30th June, 2020

From Patanjali's Yoga Sutras: walking the known path



His hands held worshipfully above his head, a yogi follows the Sivaneri, the path to Siva, stepping in the footsteps of the illumined ones who have gone before. His goal is the Light and Love of God Siva, standing at the end of the path in the form of a Mukhalinga. On the left is the beautiful natural world, with its organic forces, time, space, gravity and life-giving energies. On the right is the world of man, family life, culture, villages and survival strategies that perpetuate humanity, of which most are not consciously on the spiritual path but marching through their worldly karmas. The world has lost its allure to the yogi whose yoga is focused, consciously remaining undistracted by either world as he moves toward God with devotion and determination.

Canada CAD 10
India INR 225
Malaysia MYR 14
Mauritius . . . MRU 115
Singapore . . . SGD 10
UK GBP 5

