

# धर्मसन्देश Dharma Sandesh

a quarterly newsletter of Bharatiya Mandir, Middletown, NY

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः। Let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere. RigVeda 1.89.1

## नमस्ते Namaste

ॐ – OM. With the blessings and grace of the Supreme Lord (परमात्मा), we are proud to inform you that Dharma Sandesh is now in its fourth year of publication.

Seasons continue to change. We were blessed to have had a mild winter and a beautiful spring. The summer season is here in full swing and with it are hope, joy, warmth, and fun.

We are eagerly awaiting many of our community students to graduate from their respective programs in school and college this year. To commemorate this, there will be a special Puja to Mata Saraswati by all the graduates on July 1, 2012. All students will be seeking the Divine Mother's blessings for all their future endeavors.

We will also be celebrating Sri Vara MahaLakshmi Vratam (श्री वरमहालक्ष्मी व्रतम्) in July, in the holy month of Shravana (श्रावण). Also in Shravana, we will be celebrating the birth of our Lord Sri Krishna (श्री कृष्ण). The festival will be marked by devout Puja, bhajans, dances, songs, music, and pomp.

In this issue, we have a wonderful article "The significance of Fire within Hinduism" written by Jay Kumar, a bright high-school student. Also, Dr. Padma Sundaram writes about the holy Shiva Linga.

We hope that readers will continue to enjoy reading these articles and gain some insight into our Sanatana Dharma. Let us all pray to the Paramaatma (परमात्मा) to shower His blessings upon all His children!!

Sincerely,

Your Editorial Board

Web: [www.bharatiyamandir.org](http://www.bharatiyamandir.org)

## सुभाषिता Subhaashitaa

*In this section, we present a Sanskrit quotation and its interpretation/meaning.*

विद्वत्त्वं च नृपत्वं च नैव तुल्यं कदाचन ।  
स्वदेशे पूज्यते राजा विद्वान् सर्वत्र पूज्यते ॥

vidvatvam-ca-nrupatvam-ca-naiva-tulyam-kadaacana |  
svadeshe-pujyate-rajaa-vidvaan-sarvatra-pujyate ||

There can be no comparison between knowledge and royalty. The king is worshipped in his own kingdom. However, a knowledgeable man is worshipped everywhere.

Knowledge always trumps wealth, power, and other attributes in the end. A knowledgeable man is always highly respected and adored the world over. We should always respect knowledge and learning, and always strive to achieve more of the same.

*Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara*

## साई प्रेरणा Baba's Teachings

*In this section, we present a teaching of Sri Sai Baba.*

Sri Satya Sai Baba spoke thus – "Today, the experience and wisdom of great seers who have unveiled the mystery of the cosmos and their feelings of universal love are not appreciated, accepted, and respected. All religious dogmas, except a few, can easily be harmonized and reconciled. The same God is extolled and adored under various names through varied ceremonial rituals in many religions. In every age, for every race, God has sent prophets to establish peace and goodwill. Presently, many religions have spread far and wide across the world and have lost

fraternal feelings over time. There is an urgent need for harmony. All great people are images of God. There is only one single caste in the realm of God and all belong to one nation, the Divine Fellowship. You must interest yourself in understanding the practices and beliefs of the others. Only then you can, with cleansed mind and loving heart, attain the Divine Presence. - *Sutra Vahini, Chap 3, "Harmony of all religions"*.

*Contributed by Dr. Vijaya Dasari*

## ज्ञानविहार JnanaVihara

*In this section, we present articles on Hinduism, Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, and related philosophy.*

### **The Significance of Fire within Hinduism** by Jay Kumar



In its most basic perceptions, fire is recognized as a purifier of sins and both a creator and destroyer of life. In Hinduism, fire plays an important role within various rituals and traditions ranging from cremation to the

process of worship.

Fire is personified by Agni (अग्नि), a deity whose origins span to the Vedic period. Agni was an important deity in Vedic society, and had many Vedic hymns in his praise. Agni's role within Vedic society, and transitively, Hinduism, is paramount and essential to the background of the modern Hinduism. If Agni can be seen as the personification of fire, his presiding element, then further analysis yields that Agni is largely a metaphysical symbol within the Hindu religion. Within the context of Hinduism, a religion that places due emphasis on man's recognition within the Supreme Godhead, or Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), inherent in him, fire plays an ambivalent role that is encapsulated by Agni.

In the ritual sense of the religion, Agni is portrayed in five forms: fire produced using sticks (समिधाग्नि) for the purpose of sacrificial ritual (हवनम्), fire given to a shishya (शिष्य) by his Guru (गुरु) at the time of his initiation (upanayana - उपनयन) ceremony, fire kept within a home mandir for domestic rituals, the southern fire of the ancestors used in certain rituals, and the funeral fire used in the cremation rituals.



This is counterpointed by the natural manifestations of Agni as: ordinary fire, lightning, the sun, the digestive fire (jatharaagni - जठराग्नि) and the destructive fire (that is going to consume the world). The ritual and natural manifestations of Agni work in tandem to produce a subset of the largely abstract and highly metaphysical allegory that bleeds between the lines of mythology and a quasi-humanistic philosophy of substance and purpose. The emphasis on both points is towards the intermediary character that fire plays between the corporeal and divine/spiritual affairs of man. This analysis is further given ground by the purification mechanism that Agni serves as shown by the presence of fire within the yajna/homa (यज्ञ/होम) to accept and transmit the mortal offerings to God to procure certain amnesties and favors from the Godhead. Under the fore-mentioned notion, fire plays the role of a bridge between two distant locations where the nature of one location cannot be perceived by the second, while the seemingly imperceptible location has full understanding of the other location's nature.

The metaphysical nature of the Vedic conceptions of fire, as portrayed by Agni, is augmented by his characteristics. The vahana (वाहन) of Agni indicates sacrifice being present in Vedic rituals; however, its

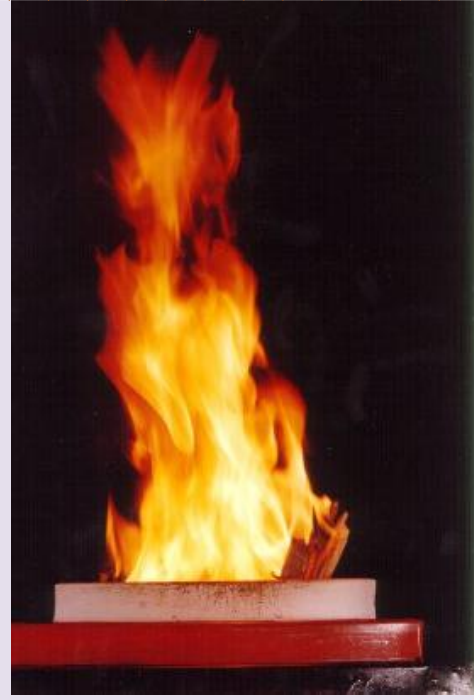


purpose extends beyond such corporeal limitations set by human emotion. The sacrifice of the ram is that satiation of the fire's destructive nature and an appeal to it. By recognizing the destructive nature inherent in fire and the need to appease the Godhead, Vedic tradition displays fire as an ambivalent force being capable of warding man's enemies off and destroying man himself through its blind whims as shown through this Rig Veda (ऋग्वेद) hymn (6.6. 5, 6, 7):

अध जिह्वा पापतीत प्र वृष्णो गोषुयुधो नाशनिः सृजाना ।  
शूरस्येव प्रसितिः क्षातिरग्नेर्दुर्वर्तुर्भीमो दयते वनानि ॥५॥

आ भानुना पार्थिवानि ज्रयांसि महस्तोदस्य धृषता ततन्थ ।  
स बाधस्वाप भया सहोभिः स्पृधो वनुष्यन् वनुषो नि जूर्व ॥६॥

स चित्र चित्रं चितयन्तमस्मे चित्रक्षत्र चित्रतमं वयोधाम् ।  
चन्द्रं रयिं पुरुवीरं बृहन्तं चन्द्र चन्द्राभिर्गृणते युवस्व ॥७॥



Wealth bright,  
O Bright One,  
vast, with many  
heroes, give  
with thy bright  
flames to the  
man who lauds  
thee. ||7||”

Agni is  
portrayed as the  
messenger of  
God to man  
and of man to  
God, capable of  
initiating man's  
spiritual union  
with the divine  
force, thereby

playing a paramount role in the development of early civilization as illustrated by hymn above. In early Vedic tradition, Agni was offered human worship, which transpired to cattle sacrifices, and then sacrifices of rams after the cattle was proven lucrative to agriculture. However, a paradigm shift in Hinduism, and the recolonization of cruelty done to the innocent animals, saw a shift from Agni worship to the worship of deities such as Durga (दुर्गा) and Kali (काली). This does not, however, undermine the nature nor detract from the nature of sacrifice and Agni as the personification of fire just as the evolution of Hinduism has not done away with the Vedic concepts of yajna/homa, but has merely adjusted them to suit the ethical tastes of its period.

In the Vedic tradition Agni is portrayed as immortal, a quality attributed to the daily lighting of the diya or lamp. The immortal quality of Agni can be seen as a diverse allegory that references the immortal light or divine illumination that guides man to God. In certain



Vedic traditions,  
Agni was  
recognized as  
the presiding  
deity of the  
earth as well as  
a mediator  
between men  
and gods,  
protector of men

“Forth darts the Bull’s tongue like the sharp stone  
weapon discharged by him who fights to win the  
cattle.

Agni's fierce flame is like a hero's onset: dread and  
resistless he destroys the forests. ||5||

Thou with the sunlight of the great Impeller hast  
boldly over-spread the earth's expanses.

So drive away with conquering might all perils  
fighting out foemen burn up those who harm us. ||6||

Wondrous! of wondrous power! give to the singer  
wealth wondrous, marked, most wonderful, life-  
giving.

and their homes, and a witness of man's actions. For this reason, he is invited on solemn and important occasions to grace, officiate and divinely sanction the event he was invoked upon as shown by this hymn from the Rig Veda (ऋग्वेद 6.1. 5, 6, 7):

त्वां वर्धन्ति क्षितयः पृथिव्यां त्वां राय उभयासो जनानाम् ।  
त्वं त्राता तरणे चेत्यो भूः पिता माता सदमिन्मानुषाणाम् ॥५॥

सपर्णेण्यः स प्रियो विक्ष्वःग्निर्होता मन्द्रो नि षसादा यजीयान् ।  
तं त्वा वयं दम आ दीदिवांसमुप जुबाधो नमसा सदेम ॥६॥

तं त्वा वयं सुध्योऽ नव्यमग्ने सुम्नायव ईमहे देवयन्तः ।  
त्वं विशो अनयो दीद्यानो दिवो अग्ने बृहता रोचनेन ॥७॥

“On earth the people magnify thee greatly, thee their celestial and terrestrial riches.

Thou, Helper, must be known as our Preserver, Father and Mother of mankind forever. ||5||

Dear priest among mankind, adorable Agni hath seated him, joy-giver, skilled in worship.

Let us approach thee shining in thy dwelling, kneeling upon our knees, with adoration. ||6||

Longing for bliss, pure-minded, God-devoted, Agni, we seek thee, such, meet to be lauded.

Thou, Agni, leddest forth our men to battle, refulgent with the heaven's exalted splendor. ||7||”



The qualities ascribed to Agni complement such traits ascribed to him by Vedic society. In the Rig Veda, Agni is described as having two faces, three legs and seven arms, skin of a red or flame color complexion

with seven streams of light emanating from his body. In his right hand, Agni holds a spear.

Agni's three legs are symbolic of the three lokas (लोक) and is testament to his importance within Vedic society. In all his manifestations, Agni is construed as a fierce, yet delicate, being who is active in helping guide man in his spiritual journey. Within the three



lokas, Agni was represented as embodying a different element: in the Heavens he was known as the sun; the thunder in the skies; and as fire on Earth. This indicates that Agni held a higher significance in Vedic society than Indra, the King of Gods and the God of Rain and

Thunder, the former being necessary for a successful harvest.

However, the greatest metaphysical connection of Agni to Hinduism lies in the applications of fire itself within Hindu worship. Agni is unique from the conventional in many respects, some of which are detailed within this article, however, it is Agni's direct control over the life-death cycle of man that makes Agni a unique deity and diversifies his relationship with the spiritual man. As fore-mentioned, Agni is recognized as a purification mechanism within the Hindu tradition. The state of purity and enlightenment are synonymous within Hinduism in the sense that for man to recognize the divine force, he must be free of the physical, mental and emotional constraints of the world. This is achieved through ritual purification of fire, the most prominent of instances being in the cremation of the deceased. It is believed that while the body is being burnt in the funeral pyre, Agni is transporting the body to the spiritual plane most closely associated with the concept of “heaven.”

Agni's role is not restricted towards this latter stage of life; his influence is prevalent within all marks of life. For example, take the heat offered by fire. The mere presence of fire offers many benefits for humans such as protection, heat, light, and a means of cooking food. In Vedic society, the detailed effects of fires assured a means of life itself – survival. This benefit



## SRI SHIVA (श्री शिव)

Lord Shiva (श्री शिव) is one of the most complex Gods in Hinduism. There are numerous articles on Lord Shiva by various historians and philosophers, both eastern and western. I have taken a few of them and have tried to explain the concept of Lord Shiva in simple language.

## SRI SHIVA LINGA (श्री शिवलिङ्ग)

Lingam (लिङ्गम्) is a representation of the Hindu deity Lord Shiva (श्री शिव) used for worship in temples.

Whether it represents the physical body of God or is purely spiritual is a debate that is centuries old!!



The Lingam has been represented as male creative energy and is often represented with Yoni, the female creative energy or Shakthi (शक्ति). The union of Lingam and Yoni represents the union of the male (पुरुष) and female

(प्रकृति/शक्ति) energies that create and sustain this Universe.

As always, in Mythology there are a lot of meanings and interpretations for every concept, and the Lingam is no exception. In Linga Purana, the Shiva Linga is described as a pillar that has no beginning and no end. The pillar itself is very bright like fire. This represents the enormous energy from the Lord.

Sri Shiva Lingam has diverse meanings from gender and sex to philosophical and religious. In Sanskrit, the meaning of Lingam is a mark, a symbol, or characteristic. It is also the sign of gender or sex. It has been said in various articles and books by western and eastern authors that the Lingam represent the genital organs of Lord Shiva worshipped in the form of a phallus.



of a survival advantage outweighs the destructive nature of fire, as man must live and survive for some duration of time before he can face this effect of fire, and experience the ultimate end of death. In this way, Agni defines the notion of man's world as being replete with dangers as a pessimistic and ignorant views as it denies the "trinality" inherent in life, which can abstractly consist of the positive, negative and neutral under a modern analytical lens, while this "trinality" is actually a reference to the manifestations of masculine power, feminine power and union of masculine and feminine power present within life as per Hindu philosophy.

The significance of fire within Hinduism is abstract in nature. Fire, as represented by Agni, can represent several of man things: an allegory, a metaphysical device of man and God's relationship, or a symbol of purity for man in his pursuit of divine illumination. In its totality, Agni plays as prominent a role in shaping Vedic society, as it also does in defining present-day Hinduism, and serves as a beacon of hope for man in his pursuit of God's light.

Sources:

- ⤴ <http://www.mahavidya.ca/hindu-art-and-architecture/fire-in-hinduism/>
- ⤴ <http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/concepts/agni.asp>
- ⤴ <http://www.worldteachertrust.org/bk/agni/>

*Contributed by Jay Kumar*

According to anthropologist Christopher John Fuller, sculpted murthis (मूर्ति) are anthropomorphic but Shiva Lingam is aniconic. He calls it the pillar of light. Professor Donigar, in his book “Hindus Alternative History,” has written that the Shiva Lingam is an abstract symbol of God.

From time immemorial Shiva Lingam has been worshipped in the Shaivite communities in India and Sri Lanka. They have been installed in all Shiva temples. In ancient times sages believed that the Lingam has mysterious and indescribable power that induced concentration to help focus attention. The all-radiant Lingam talks to the devotee and raises him above the body consciousness.

The Lingam has three parts. The base is the bottommost part and is called the Brahma Peetam (ब्रह्मपीठम्), the middle part is the Vishnu Peetam (विष्णुपीठम्) and the uppermost part is Lord Shiva. This is explained in the scriptures that the Trinity (त्रिमूर्ति) of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara (Shiva) always go together. One does not exist without the other.



The Lingam represents the Omnipotent Shiva. It is only an outward form of Lord Shiva. In Linga Purana, it is said that the Lingam is devoid of senses like smell, taste, etc. This is called the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) and Prakruti (प्रकृति - Nature). In the post Vedic period it became a symbol of the generative power of Lord Shiva.

The Lingam is shaped like an egg and is called the Cosmic Egg or Brahmanda (ब्रह्माण्ड). It is also the

union of Prakruti (प्रकृति) and Purusha (पुरुष) – the male and female energies of Nature. It also signifies Satya (सत्य truth), Gnana (ज्ञान knowledge), and Ananta (अनन्त infinity).

There are two types of Lingams, one type that appear naturally (sprout on their own) called Swayambu (स्वयम्भू) and the other manmade. In India there are 12 Jyothirlingas (ज्योतिर्लिंग) and 5 Pancha-bhuta Lingas (पञ्चभूतलिंग). The ancient Shiva Lingam came from the river Narmada.



The following is a shloka about the Jyothirlingas from the Shiva Purana (श्री शिवपुराण).

सौराष्ट्रे सोमनाथं च श्रीशैले मल्लिकार्जुनम् ।  
उज्जयिन्यां महाकालं ॐकारममलेश्वरम् ॥  
परल्यां वैद्यनाथं च डाकिन्यां भीमशङ्करम् ।  
सेतुबन्धे तु रामेशं नागेशं दारुकावने ॥  
वारणस्यां तु विश्वेशं त्र्यम्बकं गौतमीतटे ।  
हिमालये तु केदारं घृणेशं च शिवालये ॥  
एतानि ज्योतिर्लिंगानि सायं प्रातः पठेन्नरः ।  
सप्तजन्मकृतं पापं स्मरणेन विनश्यति ॥

Saurashtre-Somanatham-cha-Sri-Saile-Mallikarjunam  
Ujjanyinyam-Mahakalam-Omkaram-amaleshwaram  
Paralayam-Vaidyanatham-cha-Dakinyam-  
Bhimashankaram  
Sethu-bandhe-tu-Ramesham-Nagesham-Darukavane  
Varanasyam-tu-Vishwesham-Tryambakam-  
Gautameetate  
Himalaye-tu-Kedaram-Grishnesam-chaShivalaye  
Etani-jyotirlingani-sayam-pratah-patennarah  
Saptajanma-kritam-papam-smaranena-vinashyati





Shiva Lingam is a very difficult to describe in simple terms. Its meanings and implications are enormous and beyond the scope of this article. This is just a bird's eye view of the subject. And I have made it as simple as possible.

**Sources:** Wikipedia; Subhamag Das www.about.com  
Mudaliyar Subaratna – Lecture on Shiva Linga at Jaffna Hindu College, Feb.21<sup>st</sup> 1913.

*Contributed by Dr. Padma Sundaram.*

**To: All the members of the Mandir**

Dear Members:

The Annual General Body meeting of **India Temple Foundation** will be held on Sunday, July 1, 2012, at about 1:00 p.m. after our regular Havan and Satsang at Bharatiya Mandir, Fair Oaks (Middletown), NY to discuss the following:

**AGENDA:**

1. Welcome & Introduction – Om Arora
2. Minutes of last General Body Meeting – Reeta Mahendroo
3. Annual Report – Damini Radhakrishnan
4. Treasurer's Report – Chitra Chauhan
5. Recognition of 2012 Graduates of our community
6. Election of 4 Directors for the next 3 years .

7. Members' participation.
8. Vote of thanks.
9. Adjournment.
10. Arati

I invite all the members to attend the meeting and favor us with your valuable suggestions.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Damini Radhakrishnan, Secretary

*N.B.: If there is no quorum after half an hour of the scheduled time, the meeting will be adjourned and **reconvened** after 5 minutes to discuss the same agenda.*

India Temple Foundation, Inc.  
expresses grateful thanks to  
**P.N. Fire & Burglar Alarm Co.**  
for donating services and material  
for the Alarm System in  
***The Bharatiya Mandir.***  
*Their Donation is appreciated*



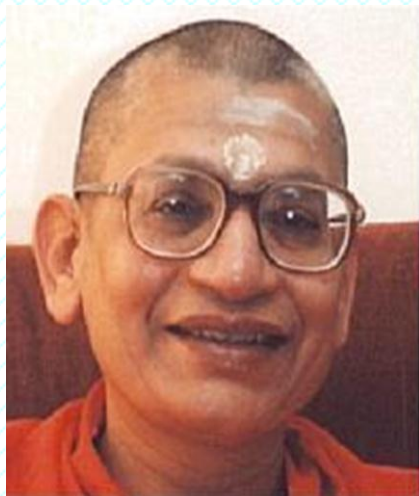
**Navagrahas** (नवग्रह) – The Nine Cosmic Energies –  
Surya (सूर्य Sun), Chandra (चन्द्र Moon), Mangal (मङ्गल Mars), Budha (बुध Mercury), Brihaspati or Guru (बृहस्पति Jupiter), Shukra (शुक्र Venus), Shani (शनि Saturn), Rahu (राहु ascending lunar node) and Ketu (केतु descending lunar node).

Please join us for a talk on

**HEALTHY ATTITUDE**

with

**Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**



Swami Veditatmananda, a disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam ([www.arshavidya.org](http://www.arshavidya.org)), expounds Vedanta with a simplicity and directness that makes it easy to assimilate. Having lived and worked in the United States prior to becoming a renunciate, Swami Veditatmananda is familiar with the lifestyles both in India and the West. With his insight into both cultures, he reaches out to everyone with equal ease.

**On Saturday, July 14, 2012 at 10 a.m.**

**Followed by Arati & Prasad (around 12 noon)**

**ॐBHARATIYA MANDIRॐ**

**347 Bloomingburg Road, Middletown, NY  
10940; Phone: (845) 361-3055**

For directions please visit our web-site  
[www.bharatiyamandir.org](http://www.bharatiyamandir.org)

**For further information please call Mandir at  
361-3055 or Mrs. Rita Shah at 845-342-9340**

**For seva please call Raj Arora: 845-692-0467**

**There is no fee to attend this talk.**

**Donations are welcome**

**Summer Day Camp for Children and  
Senior Citizens**

Saturday, August 18 and Sunday, August 19,  
2012, 9:00 am to 7:00 pm

**Pre-registration required.** The registration form  
can be downloaded at [www.bharatiyamandir.org](http://www.bharatiyamandir.org)  
Please call Pundit Ji at 845-361-3055.

A **special Puja** for the 2012 graduates of our  
community will be held on Sunday, July 1, 2012  
at 10.30 am at the Mandir. All the graduates  
(School & College) are invited to join. Please  
call Pundit Ji at 361-3055, if you plan to join this  
Puja. A Puja Thali will be reserved for you.  
Please pass the word around. Thank you.

**Some Upcoming Special Mandir Events**

Special Puja for Graduates	Sunday, July 1
General Body Meeting	Sunday, July 1
Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati's visit to Bharatiya Mandir	Saturday, July 14
Sri Vara-Maha-Lakshmi Vratam	Friday, July 27
Sri Krishna Janmaashtami	Friday, August 10
Sri Nand Mahotsav	Saturday, August 11
Summer Day Camp for Children and Senior Citizens	Saturday, August 18 and Sunday, August 19

Mrs. Dipti and Mr. Rahul Patel have generously  
sponsored the printing of copies of this issue of  
Dharma Sandesh. Devotees may note that all the  
writing of the content and the editing of the newsletter  
are strictly voluntary.

*Our quarterly newsletter is called "Dharma  
Sandesh" (धर्मसन्देश). "Dharma", in simple  
terms, refers to righteousness, conduct, a sense of  
duty, virtue, and the ultimate truth. "Sandesh"  
means a message or news. So, Dharma Sandesh  
refers to a message of Dharma.*

**Dharma Sandesh Newsletter Editorial Board:**

Mr. Om Arora                      Dr. Narasim Banavara  
Dr. K.N. Sundaram              Dr. Padma Sundaram