

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 present this issue of Dharma Sandesh.

Summer is ending as I write this. The school year is starting and all children and teachers are eager to get back to their academic pursuits. Many children recently performed Sri Ganapati Puja and Sri Saraswati Puja as part of the Summer Camp at the Mandir, and they asked the Supreme Lord for blessings of good education and learning without any obstacles. We are celebrating Sri Ganesh (Vinayak) Chaturthi at the Mandir on September 15.

Soon, autumn (Fall) will be here and we will be celebrating Navaratri (नवरात्रि) with devout worship of the Goddess Mother Durga in all her glory. There will be Raas Garba and other wonderful dances at the Mandir for all nine nights and ten days. Then we will celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights, with much enthusiasm and vigor.

In this issue, Jay Kumar writes an article “In Defense of Idol Worship.” I extol the virtues of the “Guru” and write about a famous Shanti mantra (शान्ति मन्त्र). Akshani Patel writes a review of the scintillating classical and folk dance performances given by visually impaired girls at the Mandir recently. I write about the Summer Camp held at the Mandir.

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

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सुभाषिता Subhaashitaa

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

जाड्यं धियो हरति सिञ्चति वाचि सत्यम्
मान्नो नतिं दिशति पापं अपाकरोति ।
चेतः प्रसादयति दिक्षु तनोति कीर्तिम्
सत्सङ्गतिः कथय किं न करोति पुंसाम् ॥

jaadyam-dhiyo-harati-sinchati-vaachi-satyam
maanonnatim-dishati-paapam-apaakaroti |
chetaha-prasadayati-dikshu-tanoti-keertim
satsangatihi-kathaya-kim-na-karoti-pumsaam ॥

The company of good people (सत्सङ्ग - Satsang) removes the lethargy of the mind. It establishes truth in speech. It enhances respect and wards away sins. It calms and comforts the mind. It spreads fame in all directions. Tell me, what doesn't this Satsang do for the humans?

Satsang is the company of good people. These good and virtuous people have the ability to transform the lives and behaviors of those who are in their company. They are a source of inspiration for many. They lead by example. These virtuous people do not preach; rather, they practice Dharma and Satya in their lives every day.

Staying in the company of such virtuous people relieves stress, and calms and comforts the mind. It wards off one's lethargy, and makes one active and enthusiastic in the pursuit of God, truth, and Dharma. By doing so, one attains peace of mind for oneself. One is truly blessed to find such Satsang and actually find the opportunity to become a better person.

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 – “I have a "Task": To foster all mankind and ensure for all of them lives full of bliss (*ananda*). I have a "Vow": To lead all who stray away from the straight path again into goodness and save them. I am attached to a "work" that I love: To remove the sufferings of the poor and grant them what they lack. I have a "reason to be proud", for I rescue all who worship and adore me, aright. I have my definition of the "devotion" I expect: Those devoted to me have to treat joy and grief, gain and loss, with equal fortitude. I will not give up my mission nor my determination. I will never give up those who attach themselves to me.”

Contributed by Dr. Vijaya Dasari

ज्ञानविहार JnanaVihara

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

The Guru

गुरुर्ब्रह्म गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुः साक्षात् परब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥
gurur-brahma-gurur-vishnuh-gurur-devo-
maheshwarah |
guruh-saakshaat-parabrahma-tasmai-sri-gurave-namah
॥

The Guru is himself Lord Brahma, the creator of the Universe. The Guru is himself Lord Vishnu, the protector of the Universe. The Guru is himself Lord Maheshwara (Shiva), the annihilator and purifier of the universe, and who assimilates the entire universe unto Himself at the end of the creation cycle. The Guru is verily the Supreme Spirit, the Ultimate, and the Absolute Brahman!! Salutations to that Guru!!

Most of us are familiar with this shloka. And many of us are generally familiar with its broader meaning. But do we know what it really means?

At a party once, one well-educated and well-to-do person was making fun of her kindergarten and elementary school teachers. “After all, they teach A, B, C and 1, 2, 3. What is the big deal? What else can they really teach?” “No wonder they get paid so less.” “Guess they could not get a better job. That’s why they became teachers,” and so on.

If those underpaid, overworked kindergarten and elementary school teachers had not taught that lady those ABCs or 123s at that time, then she would not be standing there with her education and money. They taught her, they inspired her to achieve great things in life, and they helped her in more ways than one to be the person she is today. Those attributes and experiences are extremely valuable to us as growing, impressionable children, and they shape our lives permanently.



We should always consider our teachers as our Guru. In fact, it is said in the scriptures that anyone in your life who teaches you is your Guru. Our parents are our first Guru, especially the mother who devotes her life to raising her child and guiding the child in the path of

righteousness. The father then initiates the child into education and inspires the child to become a well-informed and responsible citizen. Along the way, every teacher guides the child and molds the child in the path of life, education and career. Every one of these persons is the child’s Guru.

The scriptures state that the Guru is the ultimate spiritual preceptor who imparts divine knowledge to his disciple. The all-compassionate Guru is no ordinary human being, and must never be considered as one. The Guru is always equated with the Trinity Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva, and he embodies all the three entities in knowledge, power and benevolence.

गकारः सिद्धिदः प्रोक्तो रेफः पापस्य दाहकः ।
उकारो विष्णुरव्यक्त स्थितायात्म गुरुः परः ॥

gakaarah-siddhidah-prokto-rephah-paapasya-
daahakah |
ukaaro-vishnuravyakta-sthitaayaatma-guruh-parah ||

The letter 'G' symbolizes the grantor of all success.
The letter 'R' symbolizes the vanquisher of all evil.
The letter 'U' symbolizes the imperceptible Lord
Vishnu. That means that the great Guru is the grantor
of all successes, the vanquisher of all evil, and the
omnipresent Lord Vishnu.

गणेशो वाग्निना युक्तो विष्णुना च समन्वितः ।
वर्णद्वयात्मको मन्त्रश्चतुर्वर्ग फलप्रदः ॥

ganesho-vaagninaa-yukto-vishnuna-ca-samanvitah |
varna-dvayaatmako-mantrash-caturvarga-phalapradah
||



The letter 'G' is also symbolic of Lord Ganapati, who is the remover of all obstacles. The letter 'R' is also symbolic of Lord Agni (Fire), who is the vanquisher of all evil. The letter 'U' is symbolic of Lord Vishnu, the all-

pervading protector of the worlds. Therefore this two-syllable mantra called 'Guru' is the remover of all obstacles in his disciple's life, is the vanquisher of all evil, and is the protector of his disciple. In essence, the Guru is the divine grantor of all the four Purusharthas (पुरुषार्थ pursuits of human life) – Dharma (धर्म righteousness and discharge of duty), Artha (अर्थ acquirement of wealth), Kama (काम gratification of desire) and Moksha (मोक्ष eternal liberation or salvation).

The Guru is the ultimate source of all knowledge. All knowledge stems from him and is assimilated into him. The Guru is given the ultimate, supreme, and

exalted status of the Paramaatma (परमात्मा) the Supreme Spirit.

In fact, the Supreme Spirit Himself sought a Guru when He incarnated on earth. Though He was the source and the ocean of all knowledge, Sri Rama sat at the feet of His Guru Vasishtha who initiated Him into education and taught Him. Similarly, the Supreme Lord Krishna sat at the feet of His Guru Sandeepani and received instruction from him. Verily all great men have taken refuge at the feet of their Guru and have received instruction and knowledge from that Guru. For example, Svetaketu learnt the nature of Truth from Uddalaka, Maitreyi from Yajnavalkya, Bhrgu from Varuna, Narada from Sanatkumara, Nachiketas from Yama, and Indra from Prajapati. All the Gods have Guru Brihaspati (गुरु बृहस्पति) as their preceptor. The greatest and the most divine souls sat at the feet of Guru Dakshinamurti (गुरु दक्षिणामूर्ति), a form of Lord Shiva, to receive divine

instruction from Him.



The scriptures indicate that every spiritual aspirant and every student needs a Guru to show him the path of true knowledge

and help him in his quest for the Ultimate Truth or Brahma-Jnana (ब्रह्मज्ञान). The Guru imparts education to the disciple, imparts knowledge of the sacred scriptures, clarifies any doubts and ambiguities arising in the disciple's mind, and shows to the disciple the essence of all the teachings and the scriptures. While doing so, the Guru also deftly removes any defects, such as ego and ignorance, in his disciple that cause impediments in his quest for the Ultimate Truth.

Let us bow down to the Guru, respect every person who has taught us something valuable and important

in life, and attempt to shed the arrogance and disdain that we might have for other people, big or small in life. Who knows who our next teacher might be!!

Sources: Sri Guru Samhita

*Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara
(first appeared in Dharma Sandesh, vol. 1, issue 1)*

In Defense of Idol Worship

By Jai Kumar



Idol worship is a pervasive aspect of Hinduism, one that is intimately associated with the religion. However, despite its prevalence, there is no reference to the practice of idol worship in the Vedas. More rather, there is a distinct emphasis on the imperceptible nature of God. It is

explicitly mentioned in the Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) that “there is no image of Him” (Yajurveda 32:3).

References to the use of idols as modes of worship can be seen in the Bhagavad Gita (श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता). In it, Lord Krishna stipulated the necessity of idol worship in the preliminary stages of worship, stating in Chapter 12 verse 5 that: “It is much more difficult to focus on God as the unmanifested than God with form, due to human beings having the need to perceive via the senses” (12.5).

It is important to note that the most relevant term to refer to God is *acintya* (अचिन्त्य), meaning “inconceivable” or “beyond thought.” Whereas Brahman refers to the immutable reality of the world (the essence of God), the term *acintya* precisely encapsulates the true nature of God as an imperceptible being. In order to realize Brahman, humans must rely on physical representations of God in order to mentally conceptualize and understand God. In this regard, the term idolatry is a misnomer as

it is a disparaging term that refers to the worship of idols as Gods. In Hinduism, the idols are not viewed as God in themselves, but as representations of God; a medium to channel their devotion and better understand God.

The scriptures stipulate the *arcya-vigraha* (अर्च्य विग्रह), or the “forms to be worshiped.” Amongst the *arcya-vigraha*, the *murti* (मूर्ति) is commonly employed as a medium to perceive God. *Murti*, or “form”, refers to the physical form of God – how God is presented. Through the *murti*, God is recognized through association with the qualities the *murti* represents, not the *murti* itself. God's manifestation as various deities reflects the nature of God. In this manner the gender, clothing, ornamentation, complexion, and physical appearance of God symbolize God's qualities.

The various denominations of Hinduism radically differ in their approach to idol worship. Some denominations of Hinduism believe that idols are intended to be a medium to understand God for the emergent devotee. Others believe idols are incarnations of the deities they represent. Equally prominent amongst sects is the belief that idols contain a piece of God, while others believe that idols are an alternate manifestation of God.

The use of idols in worship is not inherently good or bad. As is the case with religion, idol worship represents one of the many paths to communicate with God. In order to better understand the common practices of today, it is necessary to reflect and analyze on the purpose of the practices, and whether they can stand the test of time and remain relevant beyond the period of their inception. In the instance of idol worship, it suffices to say that it is a necessary and well-found measure in the increasing materialism and concrete-approach of the modern world.

References:

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Shanti Mantra (शान्ति मन्त्रः)

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यंकरवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु । मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

om-saha-na-vavatu | saha-nau-bhunaktu |
saha-veeryam-kara-vaavahai |
tejasvi-naa-vadhitam-astu-maa-vidvishaa-vahai ॥
om-shantih-
shantih-
shantihi ॥



Om – may He
(the Lord)
protect us both
(the teacher
and the student
or the speaker
and the
listener)
together! May
He nourish us
both together!

May we work together with great energy and enthusiasm! May our studies be luminous, vigorous and effective, and endowed with the force of purpose! May there be no poison of hatred or discord among us! Om – let there be peace (in the natural and supernatural forces that surround me), let there be peace (in the physical environment around me), let there be peace (in my inner being – mind, soul).

This famous Shanti mantra appears in several places in the Upanishads, most notably in the Katha Upanishad (कठ उपनिषद्), Taittiriya Upanishad (तैत्तरीय उपनिषद्), Mandukya Upanishad (माण्डूक्य उपनिषद्), and Shvetashwata Upanishad (श्वेताश्वतर उपनिषद्).

I will try to explain each component of this Shanti mantra. This mantra highlights the intricate relationship between the teacher and the student, the Guru and his disciple, and the speaker and the listener. The transfer of divine mental, intellectual, and spiritual energies from the Guru to the disciple, from the teacher to the student, requires a nurturing, familial, energetic, purposeful, and discord-free environment.

In this mantra, we pray to the Supreme Lord or Paramatma to protect both the Guru and the disciple, or the speaker and the listener, from one another. If the Guru does not have patience or does not care for the disciple, then he will not be able to impart good knowledge to the disciple. On the other hand, if the disciple does not respect the Guru, or does not have the discipline, patience, and aptitude for learning, then he/she cannot learn anything the Guru teaches. So, both the teacher and the pupil need to develop mutual trust, respect, and affection for one another so that teaching and learning take place effectively.

Then we pray to the Lord to nourish both the Guru and the disciple. A strong mind in a strong body is needed for both. Here we are seeking nourishment for the body, the mind, and the soul. Good food, good thoughts and ideas, good behaviors and attitudes are all essential prerequisites for good learning.

After this, we pray to the Lord to help us study with great energy and enthusiasm. One cannot study well without putting energy and enthusiasm into the process. We need to concentrate on our studies and

have passion for what we are learning. Only then can we understand and retain the material for long.



We then pray to the Lord that our learning be with a force of purpose. Our studies should be luminous, vigorous and effective. Otherwise, what is the point of learning? We cannot just read or listen to something without an objective or purpose in mind. We will not achieve anything significant by doing so. We need to set our goals, be aware of our goals throughout our educational journey, and endeavor and persist until we reach our goals.

At the same time, the learning should be luminous and effective, meaning that we should be able to use that knowledge when we need it. We have some people who study hard before a test and then draw a blank

during the test. There is nothing achieved in this case. This relates to the earlier paragraphs which say that one needs to concentrate, have passion, and learn with a force of purpose. Then it becomes easier to understand and retain the material so that knowledge comes handy in times of need.

We also pray to the Lord to help us avoid hatred or discord between the Guru and the disciple. Every person may have a different opinion on a topic or issue. That is no reason to hate one another or have conflicts with one another. We need to learn to be mature and resolve our differences amicably and respectfully.

While we pray to the Lord to grant us these qualities and bless us with good and illuminating knowledge, the mantra is also gently reminding us how to behave with one another during a learning or academic activity.

The mantra ends with a recitation of the Om syllable and three chants of Shanti (शान्ति) – peace. The three chants are meant to calm and remove three types of obstacles (Tapatraya – तापत्रय) to one's peace of mind and concentration. These obstacles can arise from the following three realms:

- (a) Adhidaivika (आधिदैविक) – these are obstacles or hindrances arising from supernatural forces, be they cosmic forces (Navagrahas नवग्रह), various Gods, deities, ghosts, or other supernatural forces. This also includes dealings of Fate.
- (b) Adhibhautika (आधिभौतिक) – these are obstacles or hindrances arising from people and other earthly creatures, and other material and terrestrial sources, such as natural disasters or catastrophes.
- (c) Adhyaत्मika (आध्यात्मिक) – these are obstacles or hindrances arising from one's own self, caused by fear, inertia, lethargy, disease, apathy, etc.

The chant of “Shanti” helps calm our minds in spite of all such onstacles and hindrances so that we can concentrate on our learning. This Shanti mantra is often used as a “universal” prayer to send the message of peace and prosperity around the world.

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

TEMPLE ACTIVITIES / CELEBRATIONS

Bharatiya Mandir has been busy in several special activities, in addition to the regular weekly Pujas.

Summer Camp 2013 at Bharatiya Mandir

The summer camp 2013 at Bharatiya Mandir was held on Saturday, August 24 and Sunday, August 25, 2013. Twenty one children, ages 4 through 12, participated in the camp, and had a lot of fun participating in a wide variety of activities.

The camp started with a Puja to Lord Ganapati to



remove obstacles. On the second day, the campers worshipped Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning and Knowledge. Each day, after the Puja,

Manubhai Patel taught them basic Yoga postures.

The highlight of the camp was the planting of two apple trees (one red delicious and one yellow delicious) and three strawberry bushes by the children. The parents helped in digging



the ground and preparing the soil for planting. All the children took turns planting the trees and bushes, putting the soil and fertilizer, and watering the trees and bushes. They had a great time



doing this activity.

Other activities included learning shlokas and bhajans, listening to stories from the Panchatantra, different arts and crafts, face painting, watching movies, doing confidence-building exercises, and playing both indoor and outdoor games and sports.

All in all, the children had a great time at the camp. The parents were very gracious to sponsor breakfast, lunch, snacks, ice cream, arts supplies, and also volunteer to help at the camp. Thanks parents!! Two youth volunteers, Juhee and Dulari, made extra efforts



to help out the young campers. Thanks to all the volunteers!!

Here are a few testimonials from the campers:

What I liked about camp was when we did the pooja, said the prayers and sang the bhajans. Planting the apple trees and the strawberry bushes was a very fun experience with nature and Dr. Banavara explained when we plant a tree it grows and we can eat the fruits. Breakfast and lunch was great. Getting to play with all my friends was really fun, and I most enjoyed the end when the blind girls danced. It was terrific – Hannah Naraindutt, 4th grade.

The 2013 summer camp at the Mandir was simply amazing. We participated in so many fun activities that helped gain more knowledge and connect with our country –India, its cultures and heritage, even though we are halfway across the world from India. The summer



camp gave us a chance to interact with each other and make new friends. It has helped the Mandir spread the word about the children's class we have every Sunday. At the camp we made beautiful paper "diyas" or lamps and many more interesting arts and craft items. My favorite part was when all the kids got to help plant apple trees and strawberry bushes which was fun as everyone had a role. Outdoor gardening, shlokas, bhajans and garba dances were very enjoyable as well. I was proud to learn our country's national song "Vande Maataram" Some ideas I would like to share hoping we can include them in future are "cooking" and "rangoli." Thank you for making my summer memorable. – Sasrika Rajan, 6th grade.

This summer I did a special project at the Bharatiya Mandir temple Summer Camp. I learned how to plant apple trees and strawberry trees. I love gardening because it teaches me how to grow my own food. We also did a lot of arts and crafts at the temple as well. I had a lot of fun making different kinds of crafts with my friends. We made religious artifacts and other fun things; I even did some knitting. I also played lots of sports. I played basketball, soccer, and tug of war. I can't wait to do even more fun things next year. – Samantha Ramnarine, 4th grade.

Dharma Sandesh

I had a lot of fun at the camp. I planted some apple trees and strawberry plants. I sang shlokas and bhajans. I sang very well. All my friends were there. We played Kho. I made a deepa. There was story time. I played with my friends. I played soccer. I played basketball. Then we did Arati. I liked the summer camp very much. – Uma Banavara, 2nd grade.



Another highlight of the camp was the involvement of senior citizens on the second day of the camp. Some senior citizens interacted with the children and

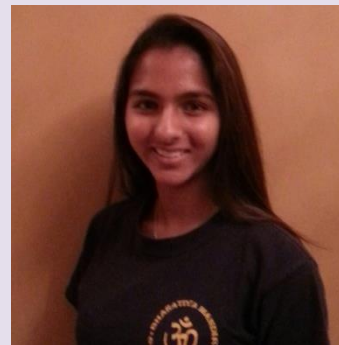
showed them new skills. Other senior citizens did fun things in their own group. The most important thing was that they had fun.

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

Dance Performance by Deepa Academy

Review by Akshani Patel

The impeccable performance by Deepa Academy had



the audience mesmerized. On Sunday, August 25th, our Mandir was blessed to be able to view six breathtakingly talented young ladies perform a two hour nonstop dance concert that included classical (Bharatanatyam and Kathak) as well as

folk dances. This group of differently abled girls brought their love and passion for dance on to the stage. Although they had a disability, they refused to



let that disability hinder their passion for dancing. With each one of the mudras and expressions

perfected, nobody would have known that these girls were visually impaired.

The Mandir hall was packed to the brim for this performance. All the children of the Summer Camp and the Sunday classes were present. At the conclusion of the dance performance, the children had come out with a smile like no other. The admiration in



their eyes for these young ladies was indescribable. The grace that these impaired girls brought to the stage had deeply touched the hearts of our younger generations. They walked out of the Mandir with a



twinkle in their eyes and a couple of new role models.

Suma, Sowmya, Gulabsha, Rashmi, Pallavi, and Lathamani – the six visually impaired, but extremely talented, ladies have brought a whole new look on the

girl child. They have brought hope to the once oppressed. Deepa Academy has been changing our home “India” one girl at a time.

Vedic Heritage Classes at Bharatiya Mandir

Sanataana Dharma (Vedic Heritage) and Bharatiya Samskriti (Indian culture) classes at Bharatiya Mandir will start on Sunday, September 22, 2013 (2:30 pm to 3:30 pm).

Some Upcoming Special Mandir Events

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|-----------------------------------|---|
| Sri Ganesh Chaturthee | Sunday, September 15 |
| Sarva-Pitri-Shraadh Paksh | Thursday, September 19 to Friday, October 4 |
| Mahalaya Amavasya | Friday, October 4 |
| Devi Navaratree (Garba) | Saturday, October 5 |
| Mata ki Chowki | Sunday, October 6 |
| Nav-Chandi Yajna | Saturday, October 12 |
| Sri Durga Puja | Sunday, October 13 |
| Vijaya Dashami (Dussehra) | Monday, October 14 |
| Karva Chowth | Tuesday, October 23 |
| Deepavali (Sri Maha-Lakshmi Puja) | Sunday, November 3 |
| Nutan Varsh (New Year) | Monday, November 4 |
| Anna Kut | Sunday, November 10 |
| Sri Tulasi Vivah | Sunday, November 17 |

Mrs. Raj and Mr. Om Arora 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:

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