

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.

This season, the winter has been very fierce so far. The snow has been relentless, and the brutal cold from the Arctic, including the breakdown of the polar vortex, has made people's lives miserable for weeks at a stretch.

In anticipation of Spring and good weather, we will be celebrating Holi, the festival of colors on March 16. People will greet each other with a multitude of colors – red, green, blue, yellow, orange, purple, and pink, and the air will be filled with the mixture of all these colors. That is such a wonderful sight to behold!!

We will invite the New Year in the form of Yugadi, Gudi Padwa, Cheti Chand, Baisakhi, Vishu, Puthandu, and Thapna. Following that, we will celebrate Sri Rama Navami, the birthday of our Lord Sri Rama. Later on, in May we will be celebrating the 15th anniversary of Bharatiya Mandir.

In this issue, I write about Maryada Purushottama Sri Rama and about Yugadi. Dr. Padma Sundaram writes about Lord Kubera, the Lord and guardian of wealth and treasure. Ms. Akshani Patel writes about the colorful festival of Holi.

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.

सर्वद्रव्येषु विद्यैव द्रव्यमाहुरुत्तमम् ।
अहार्यत्वादनर्घ्यत्वादक्षयत्वाच्च सर्वदा ॥

sarva-dravyeshu-vidyaiva-dravya-maahu-ranuttamam|
ahaaryatvaad-anarghyatvaad-akshayatvaacca-sarvada ॥

Among all assets education is the most supreme. It cannot ever be stolen, it is always priceless, and it never perishes.

Other assets and property, whether land, money, gold, grains, or other wealth, can always be stolen by other people. Property can decrease in value, and sometimes wealth and other property can be destroyed. Education and knowledge, on the other hand, never die. They are always priceless, and can never be stolen by anyone. One should always strive to earn this asset called education.

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 – “When your mind matures and attains fruition, it easily becomes free of all qualities. It becomes placid, calm, and pure. It effortlessly merges in the one and only *Atma*. Each person has the unique chance to taste the inner peace that such a mind can grant, but, unfortunately, most are strangers to the unshakeable joy and equanimity that is their birthright. Meditation is the only island of refuge in the ocean of life for all beings tossed on the

waves of desire, doubt, dread, and despair. This Vedantic truth must be present in the mind, even while one is engaged in the mundane material world!” – Sathya Sai Vahini.

Contributed by Dr. Vijaya Dasari

ज्ञानविहार JnanaVihara

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

Maryada Purushottama Sri Rama

मर्यादा पुरुषोत्तम श्री राम

Sri Rama (श्री राम) is the seventh avatara of Lord Vishnu on this earth. He incarnated to rid the earth of Rakshasas such as Ravana and Kumbhakarna and their associates and to establish Dharma in the world. The great epic Ramayana (रामायण) composed by Sage Valmiki (महर्षि वाल्मीकि) in Sanskrit extols the life, pursuits, adventures and virtues of Lord Rama. The same epic was recomposed in the Avadhi language as *Sri Rama Charit Manas* (श्री रामचरितमानस) by Sant Tulasidas. Another important composition in the Sanskrit language is *Sri Adhyatma Ramayana* (श्री अध्यात्म रामायण) attributed to Sage Veda Vyasa. This version is steeped more into philosophy than the previous two versions.

Brief Story of Sri Rama:

Sri Rama was born as the eldest son of Queen Kausalya and King Dasharatha of Ayodhya in the solar lineage (Surya Vamsha सूर्यवंश) of Ikshvaku. He was born on Navami (ninth day) of Shukla Paksha (bright half) of the Hindu month of Chaitra. That day is celebrated all over India (and the world) as Sri Rama Navami.

King Dasharatha performed the Putra Kameshti Yajna (पुत्रकामेष्टियज्ञ). From the blazing sacrificial fire came a God with Payasa (पायस – porridge) and gave it to King Dasharatha. The king distributed the Payasa among his three wives Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi, who bore him four sons. Lord Vishnu had ordained that He would be born as Sri Rama to

vanquish the Rakshasas and establish Dharma on earth. To help Him in this venture, His three brothers were incarnated and born as well. They were Lakshmana (लक्ष्मण from the great serpent Adi Shesha आदिशेष on whom Lord Vishnu reclines), Bharata (भरत from the Shankha शङ्ख or conch of Lord Vishnu) and Shatrughna (शत्रुघ्न from the Chakra चक्र or discus of Lord Vishnu). Bharata was born to Queen Kaikeyi and Lakshmana and Shatrughna were born as twins to Queen Sumitra.



The children grew up in the royal household filled with a mixture of love, happiness and discipline. They were trained by Guru Vashishta in all the Vedas, philosophies, the sciences, religion, and military sciences and arts. They grew up to be experts in all the arts, sciences and warfare,

especially in archery.

Once Sage Vishwamitra arrived at the palace of King Dasharatha and requested that the king send Rama with him in order to vanquish the Rakshasas who were impeding the Yajnas (rituals sacrifices) that the Rishis in the forest were performing. King Dasharatha sent Rama and Lakshmana with the sage. In the forest, Rama killed scores of the terrible Rakshasas who were killing the pious sages. After that, he revived Ahalya (अहल्या) who had been cursed by her husband Sage Gautama to assume the form of a rock.

Later, Sage Vishwamitra took the princes to Mithila, the kingdom of King Janaka. The king was holding a Swayamvara (स्वयंवर) for his foster-daughter Sita, the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi. The challenge was to string the bow of Lord Shiva, which only Sri Rama could perform. Sri Rama won the Swayamvara challenge and married Sita.

King Janaka happily performed the marriage of his daughter Sita with Lord Rama. He also gave his other daughter Urmila in marriage to Lakshmana. His brother's daughters Mandavi and Shrutakeerti were

given in marriage to Bharata and Shatrughna respectively. King Janaka performed all the marriages according to scripture.



On the way back to Ayodhya from Mithila, Lord Rama encountered Sage Parashurama, the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Parashurama did not recognize the new incarnation and proceeded to insult Sri Rama and challenge him. Instead, Sri Rama

defeated Parashurama and proved his strength by stringing a new bow belonging to Lord Vishnu. The sage accepted defeat and offered all of his powers from his meditation to Sri Rama as he realized that Sri Rama was the new incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Lord Rama entered Ayodhya with his bride Sita and his family. They stayed there happily for some time. Meanwhile, King Dasharatha planned to install Sri Rama as the crown prince (Yuvaraja युवराज). The entire population of the state was happy except Queen Kaikeyi whose mind was poisoned by her maid Manthara. Queen Kaikeyi devised a plan to stop the coronation of Sri Rama as Yuvaraja.

King Dasharatha had once given Queen Kaikeyi two boons. The queen proceeded to encash those two boons. With the first boon she demanded that her son Bharata be made crown prince in Sri Rama's place, and with the second boon she demanded that Sri Rama be exiled for fourteen years.

King Dasharatha was left speechless. He had his hopes and his whole life pinned on Sri Rama but, at the same time, he could not break a promise that he had given to his queen. He pleaded with her not to demand the two boons, but Queen Kaikeyi was adamant.

Lord Rama was informed of this incident and he immediately set off for the forest without a moment's hesitation. Sita and Lakshmana followed him everywhere he went. Heartbroken and unable to bear the separation from his son, King Dasharatha breathed his last with Queen Kausalya by his side. Once

Bharata came to know of these events, he rushed home from his uncle's kingdom where he was visiting at the time these events took place. He was mortified to find out that his mother had been the sole cause for the misfortune that had befallen them all. After performing the last rites for his father King Dasharatha, he rushed to the forest where Sri Rama was staying and implored Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya and accept his rightful place as king. Sri Rama flatly refused Bharata's request stating that he must fulfill the promise given to his father at all costs.

Sri Rama, accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana, spent several years in the forest visiting with sages and vanquishing Rakshasas who were troubling the sages.

In the fourteenth year of exile, Sita was kidnapped by the Rakshasa king Ravana. He took her to Lanka and kept her in the Ashoka Vana (अशोकवन) garden. Sri Rama went searching for his wife, and in the process vanquished several Rakshasas. He also made new friends in Sugreeva, king of the monkeys and got a new prime devotee in Hanuman. When ordered by Sugreeva to go and look for Sita, Hanuman crossed the sea at Rameshwaram and found Sita Devi. Sri Rama led the monkey and bear armies into Lanka, where he defeated and killed the evil Ravana,



Kumbhakarna and the Rakshasas who were responsible for troubling and killing pious people and who were responsible for impeding Dharma. He then installed Ravana's brother Vibheeshana as the king of Lanka. Vibheeshana, in spite of being a Rakshasa, was a good and pious man and a devotee of Sri Rama.

After the war was complete, Sri Rama ordered that Sita Devi be brought to his presence. When Sita arrived, Sri Rama disowned her stating that since she had been in Ravana's household, she no longer was his wife and he had fought the war only to uphold and protect Dharma. Sita requested Lakshmana to prepare a pyre into which she jumped stating that if she was pure and chaste, the fire would not harm even a hair on her body. When she jumped into the fire, Lord

Agni appeared with Sita and proved to Lord Rama and the world that Sita was indeed pure and chaste.



Sita thus passed the fire test (अग्निपरीक्षा). Rama then happily accepted Sita and they returned to Ayodhya.

Upon his return, Rama was crowned king of Ayodhya. He ruled for several thousand years. But he had

to banish a pregnant Sita to the forest in response to some persons speaking ill of her and casting doubts on her chastity. Staying in the forest at the hermitage of Sage Valmiki, Sita bore twin sons Lava and Kusha.

Once, Sri Rama performed the Ashvamedha Yajna (अश्वमेधयज्ञ). As part of the process, the sacrificial horse was let loose to run across kingdoms. Lava and Kusha tied up the horse and thus challenged Lord Rama to war. When Rama came with his forces to vanquish the perpetrators, he was defeated. Sage Valmiki then revealed to Rama the fact that Lava and Kusha were his children. Lord Rama was overjoyed, but then Sita, who did not want to go back to Rama, prayed to Mother Earth to come and take her. The earth opened up and Bhumi Devi (Mother Earth) appeared and took Sita away as everyone present there watched in awe.

Maryada Purushottama Sri Rama:



Sri Rama is referred to as Maryada Purushottama (मर्यादा पुरुषोत्तम) – the Perfect Man, the Lord of Virtue, the Ideal Man. He is not called Purushottama just because He is Lord Vishnu's incarnation. Sri Rama personified perfection and all characteristics an ideal person would aspire for. Sri Rama fulfilled all his obligations and never crossed the line of Dharma (Maryada).

At a time when it was normal for kings to have multiple queens, Sri Rama declared that he would observe the Eka Patni Vrata (एकपत्नीव्रत), meaning that he would have only one wife – Sita Devi. He never broke his promise.

Sri Rama did not look at another woman with any desire arising in his mind or heart. He considered all other women as his own mother. That is why no devotees ever consider Sri Rama as their husband like they consider Sri Krishna, who is the next incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Devotees can consider Sri Rama to be their father, but never their husband. Even when Sri Rama banished Sita into the forest, he kept a golden image of her while performing the Yajna since, according to the rules of scripture, a couple has to perform the Yajna together.

Contrary to what many people believe, Sri Rama did not disrespect his wife Sita when he asked her to undergo the Agni Pariksha (fire test अग्निपरीक्षा). He never doubted his wife's chastity. She resided in his heart throughout and he pined for her day and night. Since Lord Rama knew that Ravana would kidnap Sita, he had Sita live inside the fire with Agni's wife Swaha Devi while he installed a fake (illusory) Sita (मायासीता) in his Ashrama. Ravana kidnapped the fake Sita. After the war, Rama had to get back the real Sita without revealing the details to everyone. So, he pretended to disown Sita and made her enter the fire so that Lord Agni could bring back the real Sita and offer her back to Lord Rama. In fact, the fake Sita, who in reality was named Vedavati (वेदावती), requested Lord Rama to marry her in her Sita form. Even Sita Devi agreed to it. But Lord Rama said that the real Sita was his one and only wife, and since Vedavati had performed this unusual sacrifice for him and Sita, he would marry her in another incarnation as Lord Venkateshwara (श्री वेङ्कटेश्वर). Later, Vedavati would be born as Padmavati (पद्मावती) and would marry Lord Venkateshwara.

Sri Rama always kept his word. He never went back on any promise he made to anyone. He did not wait for his father King Dasharatha to spell out the two boons that he had given Queen Kaikeyi. Lord Rama took it upon himself as a son to protect his father's word and proceeded to the forest without any delay or hesitation. Even after King Dasharatha died and

Bharata implored Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya, Sri Rama refused stating that once he had given his word, he was bound to follow it, irrespective of what happened. Sri Rama never crossed the Maryada (limit) of Dharma. He always sought to protect it. There are many other examples that illustrate this fact.

Sri Rama did not look at a person's status or wealth in order to become friends with the person. Among his closest friends were Nishaada Raja Guha (a hunter), Sugreeva (a monkey), Vibheeshana (a Rakshasa), Jambavaan (a bear), etc. Hanuman, the monkey, is his greatest devotee and friend. Sri Rama treated everyone, men and women, with equal respect and adoration and without any bias or discrimination.

For all his ideals and virtues, and for how he conducted himself in his incarnation and established and protected Dharma, Sri Rama is Maryada Purushottama. If every human being can follow Sri Rama's life and adopt some of his virtues, then this world would definitely become Rama Rajya.

Sources: Sri Valmiki Ramayana, Sri Adhyatma Ramayana

This article has appeared in an earlier issue of Dharma Sandesh.

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

Yugadi (युगादि)

Yugadi (युगादि also spelled Ugadi) is the New Year's Day for the people in the Deccan (Sanskrit: *dakshin* (दक्षिण) = south) region of India. In Sanskrit, the term Yugadi = Yuga (era/year) + adi (beginning), marking the beginning of a new year.

The Hindu calendar is a lunisolar calendar. People following the lunar calendar (Chaandramaana चान्द्रमान) celebrate Yugadi on the first day of Chaitra (चैत्र) – Chaitra Shukla Prathama (चैत्र शुक्ल प्रथम).

Chaitra is the first month of the Hindu year (occurring in March-April). People following the solar calendar (Souramaana सौरमान) celebrate

Yugadi when the Sun enters the zodiac of Mesha (मेष – Aries). In 2014, Chaandramaana Yugadi falls on March 31 and Souramaana Yugadi falls on April 14.

People celebrate the New Year as Yugadi (in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh), Puthandu (in Tamil Nadu), Vishu (in Kerala), Gudi Padva (in Maharashtra), Thapna (in Rajasthan), Cheti Chand (in Sindh), Baisakhi (in Punjab), Sajibu Nongma Panba (in Manipur), and Nyepi (in Indonesia and Bali).

Yugadi is associated with the arrival of the Spring season (वसन्त ऋतु), when young, tender, and green shoots are budding forth from all trees and new buds are eager to bloom into beautiful flowers, signaling God's splendor all over.

Yugadi is celebrated with much fanfare and pomp by Hindus all over the world. Families get together to



celebrate the advent of the New Year and the Spring. People tie fresh mango leaves and neem (नीम – Azadirachta Indica) leaves on the front door of the house, signifying

auspiciousness. They decorate the front of the house with beautiful Rangoli (रङ्गोली – ornate patterns with white and color chalk powder).

The day usually begins with a ritual oil bath (अभ्यञ्जन स्नान) followed by Puja and prayers. That is followed by a ritual partaking of a special mixture of neem buds or flowers and jaggery with a prayer. The concept behind the mixture of bitter neem buds and sweet jaggery is that life brings both sad and happy moments, and one should accept both equally and impartially.

Sometimes, the mixture also includes unripe mango (tanginess representing surprise), tamarind juice (sour



taste representing disgust), green chili or pepper (hot taste representing anger), and salt (saltiness representing fear). Life is a mixture of all these six types of experiences, and one should accept

all experiences (happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust, anger, and fear) together and with equanimity. Only

when we accept everything in equilibrium can we ever be happy. It is especially important for all people to remember this lesson as they begin their New Year.

Lunch on Yugadi is an elaborate spread of various mouth-watering dishes. In the afternoons, many children fly kites and have a great time.

In the evenings, people gather again to pray to the Lord and listen to an elderly person or a priest recite the Panchangam (पञ्चाङ्गम् – religious almanac), which presents a general forecast for the New Year.

May Paramaatma bless all people with happiness and good health in the New Year!!

Sources: www.wikipedia.com;
http://www.karnataka.com/festivals/ugadi/

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

Lord Kubera (राजा कुबेर)

Kubera (कुबेर), also called Kuvera, the Lord of riches and treasures, is a demi-god in Hinduism. He occupies a less conspicuous position in Hindu Mythology. In the Vedic era books he has been described as the Chief of Spirits. In the later Puranas and epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, he is described as the Lord of wealth, the Dikpala (दिक्पाल regent) of the North, and Lokapala (लोकपाल protector of the earth). He is depicted in the Puranas as Deva. He performed penance and appeased Lord Brahma, who granted Kubera the status of the Lord.



In the Vedic scriptures, Kubera has been described as a dwarf with a big belly, carrying a pot of gold or money bag and a club. In the Puranas, he is depicted as a dwarf with a large belly, fair complexion,

with three legs, three heads, four arms, eight teeth and one yellow eye. He holds a mace, pomegranate or money bag in one hand. He may also carry jewelry and a mongoose with him.

In Vishnudharmottara Purana (विष्णुधर्मोत्तर पुराण), Kubera is described as the embodiment of Artha (अर्थ – wealth, prosperity and glory). Kubera is said have the complexion of lotus leaves. He is adorned in golden clothes and ornaments symbolizing his wealth. He has one yellow eye. He wears armor and a necklace down to his big belly.

The Puranas further describe that his face is inclined to the left, sporting a beard, mustache and two small tusks that protrude from his mouth (this represents his powers to bestow boons as well as punish). His wife Riddhi is on his left lap representing the journey of life. Kubera has four arms, and holds a gada (mace) and shakti in his left hands. In his right hands, he holds the standards bearing a lion representing Artha (wealth) and a club called Shibika (शिविका Kubera's weapon). The nidhi (निधि treasures) Padma and Shankha stand in human form beside him, with their heads emerging from the Lotus and the Conch respectively.

Background and Parentage: The exact origin of Kubera's name is unknown. In Sanskrit, Kuvera means "deformed or monstrous or ill-shaped." Kuvera is also split as Ku (meaning Earth) and Vera (meaning hero). Another theory suggests that it might have come from the root verb Kumba meaning to "conceal."

Kubera is the son of Sage Vishravas (meaning Fame). Hence, he is called Vaishravana (वैश्रवण – sometimes translated as Son of Fame). It is said that once Kubera looked at Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati with jealousy. So Parvati cursed him that he would lose both his eyes. Then Kubera fell at Lord Shiva's feet and asked for His forgiveness. He said that he had no bad intentions in his heart when he looked at Devi Parvati. Lord Shiva requested Parvati to take her curse back. So Devi Parvati gave him a deformed eye and turned it yellow so that he would always remember the incident. From then Kubera got the name Ekakshipingala (एकाक्षिपिङ्गल – one who has one yellow eye).

According to the Ramayana, Kubera did severe penance to please Lord Brahma. As a result he was given the riches of the world, equality with the Gods and the Pushpaka vimana (पुष्पक विमान – flying

chariot). He was also given the golden city of Lanka. Kubera ruled that city well and lived there happily.

Meanwhile, Kubera's father Sage Vishravas married a demon princess Kaikasi. Through her he had three sons – Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and Vibheeshana, and a daughter named Shurpanakha.

Ravana drove Kubera out of his kingdom Lanka and seized his Pushpaka Vimana. Then Kubera moved to the city of Alakapuri (अलकापुरी) in the Gandhamadana (गन्धमादन) mountains in the Himalayas near Mount Kailash (कैलासपर्वत). Lord Brahma requested Vishwakarma, the celestial architect, to build that city for Kubera with all splendor and beauty. The city is also called Prabha and Vasudhara.

The epics state that Kubera has a magnificent court where he entertains the Devas (Gods), Rakshasas, Kinnaras, Yakshas, and even Lord Shiva and Devi Parvati.



Kubera married Bhadra (meaning auspicious), the daughter of the demon Mura. He had a son Nalakubera and a daughter Meenakshi with her.

According to the Mahabharata, Kubera's wife is called Yakshi or Charvi, and they had two sons. The two sons were very handsome, but were very egotistical. They

once insulted Sage Narada. The two men were bathing in the nude with their wives ignoring the Sage. Even after their wives apologized to the Sage, the two sons neglected the Sage. He got angry and cursed them to become trees. When they fell at his feet and begged forgiveness, Sage Narada said that only Lord Krishna would grant them salvation. They stayed as trees till Lord Krishna, in his infant form, uprooted the trees and granted them salvation.

Kubera has been called by several other names. He is known as the Rajadhiraja (राजाधिराज–King of Kings), Dhanadhipati (धनाधिपति–Lord of Wealth), and

Dhanadaa (धनदा–Giver of wealth). Related to his subjects, he is called Yaksharaja (यक्षराज–King of the Yakshas or nature-spirits), Rakshasadipathi (राक्षसाधिपति–Lord of the Rakshasas), Guhyakadipa (गुह्यकाधिप–Lord of the Guhyakas – semi-divine beings), Kinnararaja (किन्नरराज–King of the Kinnaras – beings that are half-man and half-horse), and Nara-Raja (नरराज–King of men).

The Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas give Kubera Godhood and the status of Lord of the riches. He has been described as the richest Deva. At the same time he became the Lokapala (World Protector) and the Dikpala (guardian/regent) of the North.

Worship: Kubera is worshipped by all people as the treasurer of the world. It is said that even Lord Venkateshwara (Lord Vishnu) borrowed money from Lord Kubera during his marriage to Devi Padmavathi. That is why devotees go to His abode in Tirupati (तिरुपति) and donate money in the donation box (Hundi) so that Lord Venkateshwara can repay Kubera.

During Deepavali / Diwali, Lord Kubera is worshipped along with Devi MahaLakshmi, usually on the Dhanteras day. The Kubera Mantra reads as follows —

यक्षराजाय विद्महे वैश्रवणाय धीमहि तन्नो कुबेरः प्रचोदयात् ।

Yaksharaajaaya Vidmahe, Vaishravanaaya Dhimahi, Tanno Kuberah Prachodayat |

We meditate on Kubera, King of Yakshas and son of Vishravas. May that God of wealth inspire and illuminate us. This Mantra is recited to gain Kubera's blessings in attaining Prosperity and Wealth.

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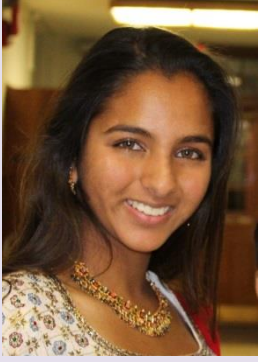
Kubera – Lord of Riches: Hinduism Gods and Goddesses, by Subhamoy Das

Vedic Mythology—Vedic and Puranic, W.J Wilkins 1900, London W. Thacker & Co.

Contributed by Dr. Padma Sundaram

Holi (होली)

Holi hai! The time of year has finally come, when



colors speak louder than words, children playfully splash their friends with powder and water balloons, and towns are filled with music and dancing.

Holi brings together Indians all over the world in celebration of forgiveness and the ultimate victory of good over evil. Holi

has a meaning that is deeper than what is seen to the eye. It reaches new dimensions of spirit and culture. It is a time of year to create new bonds, reach out to others, and forget about mistakes we made in the past.

Before all the fun and games begin a symbolic tradition must occur first. On the day before Holi, people gather at important crossroads and light bonfires that can be seen from miles away. The ceremony, called Holika Dahan (होलिका दहन), is used to praise the beloved Agni, the God of Fire. As the story goes, a Rakshasa named Hiranyakashyap (हिरण्यकश्यप) or Hiranyakashipu (हिरण्यकशिपु), who considered himself to be the ruler of the Gods, wanted everybody to worship him. To his displeasure, his own son, Prahlad (प्रह्लाद) began to worship Lord Vishnu. No amount of instruction or punishment was able to waive Prahlad away from worshipping Lord Vishnu.

Finally, deciding to get rid of his son, Hiranyakashyap asked his sister, Holika, to enter a blazing fire with Prahlad in her lap, for she had a boon to enter fire unharmed. Legend has it that Prahlad was saved for his extreme devotion to the Lord while Holika paid the price for her sinister desire. The tradition of burning Holika or 'Holika dahan' comes from this legend.

After a long night of bhajans and folktales, children wake up early the next morning to celebrate a holiday in which they can play with two things they love most – colored powder and their friends. With many stores and offices closed, excitement quickly fills the air. Children spray one another with their pichkaris while the women and the elderly smear colors on one

another as they sing traditional dhuns (songs) and dance to the rhythm of the dhol (drum).



Holi is more than just sweets, colors, and wishes. It has a deeply rooted concept – the concept of unity, friendship, and the

willingness to forgive and forget the past and let the present take over. Holi is a festival that is celebrated around the world. It is when people forgive one another and start the year with a clean slate. It is a time when love and happiness are so powerful that evil has no chance of victory. Holi is a festival that is filled with magic and hope.

Contributed by Ms. Akshani Patel

Some Upcoming Special Mandir Events

Holi / Dhuleti / Holika Dahan	Sunday, March 16
Yugadi / Gudi Padwa / Cheti Chand / Thapna	Monday, March 31
Mata ki Chowki	Saturday, April 5
Sri Rama Navami	Tuesday, April 8
Tamil New Year (Puthandu) / Vishu / Baisakhi	Monday, April 14
Sri Hanuman Jayanti	Tuesday, April 15
Bharatiya Mandir 15 th Anniversary Celebrations	Sunday, May 4

Mrs. Arati and Mr. Jateen Parekh 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:

Dr. Narasim Banavara

Dr. Padma Sundaram