

Hindu Mandir Priests' Conference 2012

April 27-28, 2012
Pittsburgh, PA



महाजनौ येन गतः स पन्थाः

Mahajanau yen gatah sa panthah

Follow the path advocated by self-realized predecessors.

Hosted by:

Hindu Jain Temple and Sri Venkateshawara Temple, Pittsburgh, PA

Sponsored by:

Hindu Mandir Executive Council

Organized by:

World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) and Hindu Institutions



1ST HINDU MANDIR PRIESTS'S CONFERENCE 2012 WELCOMES YOU.

सुस्वागतम् बुधानां, कृपया समागतानाम्

Vision

Sustainability and advancement of *Sanatana Dharma* by making the Hindu modes of worship meaningful and relevant for the younger generation of Hindus.

Purpose

LEARN

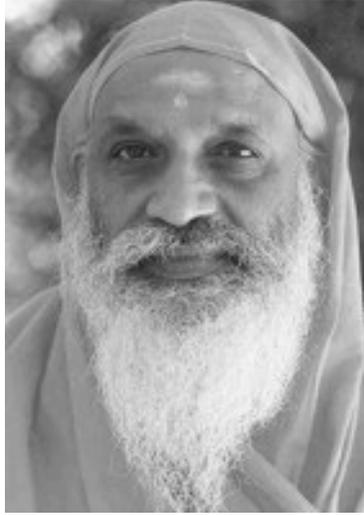
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SUSTAIN

The purohits (priests) play an essential role in the spiritual and cultural welfare of North American Hindu society. The conferees will explore ways to make the priests' role more effective in meeting the ever changing needs of the North American Hindus.

Message from Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati

April 16, 2012



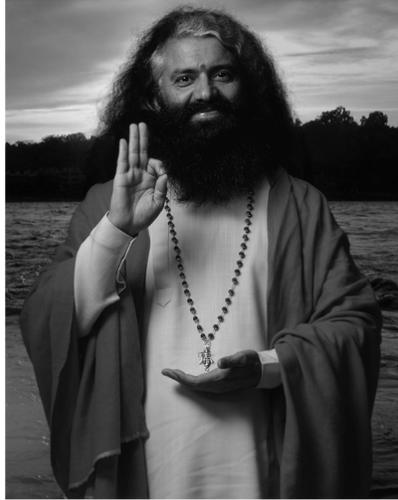
I am very happy that a conference for the Hindu Mandir priests is being convened April 27-28 at Pittsburgh. In this conference, I am sure there will be discussion about the need for the preparedness of priests to address various questions raised by both adults and children on various topics. It will be good to have a list of questions prepared and the answers also discussed.

My prayers and best wishes for the success of this conference.

With love

Yours

Swami Dayananda Saraswati



Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

Ashirvadam

Dear Divine Souls,

I hope that -- by God's grace -- this finds you all in the best of health and happiness. It is wonderful to know about the Hindu Mandir Priest Conference. What a wonderful idea to bring all of the priests together. I wish I could be there personally but prior commitments in India require that I remain here. However, I am with you all in heart and spirit and my blessings are always with you.

You are all achieving so much and providing so much for your individual Hindu communities through your individual mandirs. I am so impressed by your commitment and dedication to God, your culture and your community.

In India priests typically serve a typical role of simply performing puja in a certain temple. However, you all serve not only as pujaris, not only as the ones performing pujas and karmakand. Rather, in America, in your individual communities, you truly serve as the glue that holds the Hindu communities together. You serve as guides, mentors, confidantes and counselors for youth, families and individuals. It is a truly essential role that you play as priests, much more than simply overseeing and officiating rites and rituals.

I pray that you will all take this role with great seriousness and great gravity. Much of the future of Hinduism in America depends upon you all -- your method of communicating with and inspiring the youth to maintain their tradition and stay true to their heritage. They need to understand that the point of rituals is to make us spiritual; ritual for ritual's sake is not enough. It must be a means to the end of becoming spiritually connected.

You have all been divinely chosen for this great task and great responsibility. I know you will fulfill it beautifully.

I send you all and all your loved ones my deepest blessings and prayers.

In the service of God and humanity,

Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

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Namaste!

On behalf of the Hindu Jain Temple, it is our honor to welcome Pujya Swamini Svratmavidyananda of Arsha Vijnana Gurukulam, Hindu Mandir Pandits, Mandir Executives and officials of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, to the *First Hindu Mandir Priest Conference* hosted by Sri Venkateswara Temple and the Hindu Jain Temple in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

This conference will provide a unique platform for our Pundits to discuss the common concerns and challenges which they face in our communities, and will also present a wonderful opportunity for them to collectively share their experiences. It is our sincere hope that after attending this conference, we all have a better understanding among ourselves regarding importance of our pandits in sustaining *Sanatan Dharma* in America. Such gathering will assist our pandits establish enhanced communication with younger devotees.

Thanks to all pandits and temple executives for their participation and hope that their expectations were met in the conference and also in our hospitality. Our sincere thanks and appreciation to Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America for giving us the opportunity to host the conference, and Shri Abhay ji Ashtana and Shri Sant ji Gupta, who had put tremendous efforts in putting the conference program together.

Jai Shri Krishna!

Very Sincerely,

Krishna Sharma
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SRI VENKATESWARA TEMPLE

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Phone: 412-373-3380 Fax: 412-373-7650 email: srivaru@svtemple.org

Sri Venkateswara Temple, Pittsburgh is happy to cohost the first Hindu Mandir Priest Conference (HMPC).

For the past 36 years devotees across North America have made Pittsburgh as a major Hindu pilgrimage center and have regarded the SV temple as Tirupathi of America. Our objectives have been to develop the temple as a place of worship as per Agamas and traditions. In this day and age there is a need for temples to engage the devotees in a way to improve their involvement and understanding of the rituals. Rituals are a stepping stone to understand the deep inner spiritual meanings behind the worship practices.

Priests have the special privilege of this communion between the divine and the devotee. The pandits (priests) play an essential role in the spiritual and cultural welfare of North American Hindu society. It is but natural that the temples come together to deliberate on aspects related to the firmament of devotion among Hindus, and the role of priests and temples to serve the devotees.

The need for establishing faith and tradition among the young minds of our next generation is paramount for our present day temples in USA, since the youth of today have to bear the responsibility of administering the temples in future. The objective of the HMPC is sustainability and advancement of Sanātana Dharma by making the modes of worship meaningful and relevant for the younger generation of Hindus.

SV Temple wishes the HMPC delegates a successful conference and hope that the outcome will benefit the Hindu community at large in USA.

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FIRST HINDU MANDIR PANDITS' (Priest) CONFERENCE

The Theme: Role of Pandits in Sustaining Dharma in America
April 27-28, 2012, Hindu-Jain Temple, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

PROGRAM DETAILS

The objective of the HMPC is sustainability and advancement of Sanātana Dharma by making the modes of worship meaningful and relevant for the younger generation of Hindus. The pandits (priests) play an essential role in the spiritual and cultural welfare of North American Hindu society. The 1st Hindu Pandits' Conference sponsored by HMEC is meant to bring together pandits, temple management, and devotees in order to explore how pandits can be better assisted and empowered to serve the community as well as their own calling. It is an opportunity to collectively examine the expectations of the heritage community and give serious consideration to those duties that are more appropriately shouldered by Hindu lay leaders, and qualified volunteers (dharma-sevaks). The conference provides an opening for better understanding between the Hindu pandits in North America and Hindu devotees in terms of mutual support and empowerment. It seeks a deeper communication of the requirements of both pandits and the communities they serve, in order to find ways in which these diverse needs can be met.

FRIDAY, April 27, 2012

Session	Time	Topic	Speakers & Moderators
	4:00 PM	Registration	
		<i>Registration</i>	
		<i>Assembly, Tea, Snacks</i>	
Meal	6:00 PM	Dinner	
		Emcee: Saraswathi Vasudevan	
Session 1	7:00 PM	Inaugural Session	Moderator - Sant Gupta
<i>Start on an auspicious note with Sri Ganesh Atharvashirsha and set the context for the conference - the motivation, the need, the criticality. What will we be discussing and sharing during the conference and why? Set the tone about developing better understanding and respect for what each of the three elements, the pandit, the temple management and the devotees, bring to create a positive, sublime and welcoming environment in the temple. Set the stage by hearing the perspectives of a pandit, a temple manager and a youth.</i>			
		Sri Ganesh Atharvashirsha	Pandits
		<i>Ekatmata Mantra, Bhavgeet</i>	Bhakti Mehta
		<i>Deep Prajjwala</i>	Chairperson HJT
		<i>Welcome - Host Temples</i>	Pandit Joshi, HJT GG Hegde, SVT
		Inaugural Address: Motivation, What and Why	Pandit Roopnauth Sharma
		<i>My Journey as a Hindu Pandit</i>	Pandit Ramsneh Tripathi
		<i>Management Perspective on Temple Religious Activities</i>	Ramgopal Srinivasan, SVT
		<i>Expectations, Reality & Limitations - Youth Perspective</i>	Bhakti Mehta & TBD
		<i>Open Discussion</i>	All
		<i>Introduction of the Pandits</i>	Emcee
		Bhajan	HJT
	9:30 PM	<i>Announcements & Closure</i>	Navin Kadakia

SATURDAY, April 28, 2012

Sadhana	6:00 AM	Yoga, Pranayam, Devotional Singing	Coordinator - HJT
		<i>Yoga Pranayam</i>	Pandit Suresh Joshi
		<i>Suprabhatam, Bhajans</i>	Pandits, All

Meal	7:00 AM	Breakfast	
		Emcee: Lakshmi Gopi	
Session 2	8:00 AM	Pandit Adjustment, Growth and Development	Moderator - Sushim Mukerji
<i>What are the problems that a pandit faces as he adjusts to the life in the West. What are the avenues for his or her growth, development and continuing education. Efficiency of a temple could be enhanced by offering opportunities to the pandits to learn new skills: computers, learning English/ public speaking/musical instruments. How the size of temple, its property, endowments and other environmental realities limit what a particular temple can do. What are the challenges that the temple managements face in running a temple: nuts and bolts including finances (a private enterprise) where human issues are to be handled with fairness and in accordance with the law of the land.</i>			
		<i>Bhavgeet</i>	SVT
		Chanting	Pandits
		<i>Challenges of Adjustment in the Western Society</i>	Pandit Chandrashekhar Sharma
		<i>Impact of Temple Size and Environment on Expectations</i>	Acharya Kailash Sharma
		<i>Continuing Education & Skill Development</i>	Pandit Ram Hardwar
		<i>Compensation, Benefits, Housing, Long-Term Service Issues</i>	Pandit Digambar Upreti
		Q&A	
Break	9:30 AM	Break	
Session 3	9:45 AM	Serving the Youth and Young Couples	Moderator- Gaur Nataraj Das
<i>The core objective of sustaining and advancing Hindu Dharma is best achieved by serving the needs of our youth and young families. Temples have to develop a model on how much diversity of services they can afford. This model is to be revisited continually to find new opportunities. Young interns can learn through association with the pandits who can offer insight into Hindu practices while at the same time develop an appreciation for the needs of youth and young families. New, innovative ways are needed to connect with and retain young families as life long active members of a temple.</i>			
		<i>Challenges: Multiple languages, Disparate Customs, Devotees Demands</i>	Pandit Anant Dixit
		<i>Summer Internship for Youth/Students Working with Pandits</i>	Pandit Trilochan Bhatt
		<i>The Role of Hindu Priests in North America</i>	Shri Jitendra Oulkar
		<i>Connecting with Young Families</i>	Rakesh and Krishna Rathod
		Q&A	All
Session 4	11:00 AM	Samskaras	Moderator - Naga Rajan
<i>Music is an universal language that attracts young and old. How do we develop this skill in pandits so they are better equipped to work with the community. Similarly, working in conjunction with community experts how can we counsel and support young couples. Sometimes there are practical restrictions imposed in performing Samskaras. For example, in performing Saivaite versus Vaishnava functions or funeral / death ceremonies. These practical aspects / expectations sometimes are not discussed in early stages and may pose problems when the need arises. There is a growing need for performing initiation into the Hindu tradition; what are the mechanics of such an initiation?</i>			
		<i>Music Training Program for and by Pandits</i>	Pandit Jagadish Joshi
		<i>Vivah Samskar – Inter-religious Couples, Counseling</i>	Acharya Deepak Kotwal
		<i>Antyeshthi Samskar & Followup Support</i>	Pandit Murali Bhattar
		<i>Initiation of Non-Hindus to Hindu Dharma</i>	Pandit Dinesh Trivedi
		Q&A	All
		Chanting	Pandits
Meal	12:15 PM	Lunch	
		Group Photo II	
Session 5	1:30 PM	Practical Issues	Moderator - Harilal Patel
<i>This session focuses on some practical issues and methods to address them. The qualification for a pandit to work in North America. Sharing the experiences of an independent pandit; what motivated him to become independent, what did he learn: opportunities and pitfalls, what could be changed to make things better. The benefits of a sabbatical program for Pandits in which they can explore alternate opportunities to enhance his/ her career or learn new skills.</i>			
		<i>Qualifications for a Pandit in North America</i>	Arun Jatkar

		<i>Independent Pandit Practices and Policies</i>	Pandit Bhairav Sundaram
		An Exchange (Sabbatical) Program for Pandits	Parminder Sharma
		Q&A	All
Session 6	2:45 PM	Professional Aspects	Moderator - Anil Bajpai
<i>This session covers topics dealing with professional aspects of temple operations and outreach services. For example, creating a positive, stimulating environment that fosters respect and loyalty for all members of the temple. Initiating a dialogue with the learned pandits of the Hindu community about healthy family relationships and about identifying already-existing community means and methods to assist families that are undergoing tumultuous times. Fulfilling a need for Hindu clinical-pastoral chaplaincy program.</i>			
		Chanting	Pandits
		<i>Pandit Retention & Loyalty</i>	Pandit Rishikesh Tiwari
		<i>Counseling Program for Young Adults & Families</i>	Debarati Bardhan Sujatha Reddy
		<i>Chaplaincy – Clinical or Pastoral Program; Lay Priests; Seminary</i>	Rita Sherma (NP) Esther Friede
		<i>Worship Practices: What Children Want to Know About Alankara/Shringara</i>	Pandit Gopal Bhattar
		Q&A	
Meal	4:00 PM	Tea	
Session 7	4:15 PM	Concluding Session	Moderator - Vishnu Khade
<i>Highlight what we learned at the conference and review the key action items that we decide to work on. Hear from the host of the 2013 HMPC conference. Close with vote of thanks and blessing of Swamiji.</i>			
		Keynote Address: Parting Thoughts - Blessings	Swamini Svatmavidyananda AVG
		Honoring Pandits	SVT, HJT
		<i>Summary & Action Plan</i>	Sanjay Mehta
		<i>Vote of Thanks</i>	Venkatcharalu SVT Mahendra Bhalakia HJT
		<i>2013 HMPC Hosts' Acceptance</i>	TBD
		<i>Q & A and FEED BACK FORM</i>	
		<i>Prarthana</i>	BVM
Finish	5:30 PM	Conference End	

1st Hindu Mandir Pandits' Conference Talk Summaries

Below we provide the summaries of some of the talks in which the authors' express their personal views for the benefit of the attendees. We were able to publish only the summaries that reached us prior to the publishing deadline of April 18, 2012.

“Continuing Education & Skill Development” of Hindu Priests

*Pandit Ram Hardowar
Shri Surya Narayan Mandir, NY*

In order for Priests to continue their education and improve their skills, it very important to first have a clear vision and understanding of their role and responsibilities both in and out of the Mandir. Often we would define or think of a Hindu Priest as the one who changes the Murti clothing, prepares the altar and performs daily arati/poojas. While this may be a significant aspect of his many roles it should not be the only thing that defines him. In my opinion, one of the most important responsibilities of a Priest is to teach so let us briefly examine this and a few other aspects with respect to our topic.

Priests are Teachers

- 1) Priests must see themselves as teachers of our Shastras. Therefore, their training must be tailored to meet this requirement. Since the Priest plays such an important role, keen attention must be placed on their approach, body language, dress code and overall attitude when interacting with others. *Remember teachers teach most when they are not teaching.*
- 2) Priests must be seen as teachers by all. It is not enough for only the teacher to have the right training and attitude but the ones being taught should also have a profound sense of respect and appreciation for their Priests and our ancient param-para system. It is time for us to stop Bollywood and other agencies that in a systematic and very organized way are stereotyping and portraying our Priests in a negative and derogatory manner. This negative portrayal is very damaging to the image of Hinduism in the world platform and particularly to the young impressionable minds of our Hindu children. Temple management must also recognize this important role of Priests and help to create the environment necessary for this teaching to take place. All Priests must be reminded of their teaching responsibilities by integrating it in their job description and emphasizing it at interviews.

Training and Skill Development Going Forward

- 1) Creation of a Pandit/Purohit Sabha. This will enable priests to meet, interact and share ideas, discuss common problems in the same way this conference has brought Priests together but on a more regular basis. Some critical areas of discussion/training may be:
 - a. What level of modifications are required (if any) to our poojas, sanakaras, customs and practices to adopt to local laws/needs without sacrificing any core concepts of our Shastras.
 - b. Training by senior Priests to be organized by the Sabha. In addition to basic requirements Priests should develop a good understanding of the significances and scientific implications of our rituals. Supplemental training should also be obtained by doing college level courses in Public speaking, Psychology, American History etc.
 - c. Create Internships for Priests in training in various Temples under senior Priests. Issue certificates to successful interns at the end of training.
 - d. Standardization of rituals as much as possible respecting & accommodating our geographical and philosophical differences. Select common dates for celebration/observance of main festivals/utsav.
 - e. Salary, benefits, vacation, pension plans etc.
- 2) Focus on Youths. Spend at least 5-10 minutes during poojas talking directly to them explaining some scientific concept of our rituals/pooja. Not in great detail but enough to whet the appetite of the young mind and to show that Science and Hinduism exist in harmony. Use current illustrations and examples.

- 3) Avoid Comparisons with Abrahamic Religions. Do not try to borrow from other religions to reinforce your thought or explain your point. ***Sanatan Dharma is full and complete in and by itself, we do not need to substantiate it by saying 'a similar reference is given in the Bible' and the like.*** Avoid using English words and phrases which do not have the same meaning as our Sanskrit words. For example Ishwara to mean Brahman or Ishwara. Stay away from the use of Christianized words like hell/heaven, sin/blessing, soul etc.

Challenges: Multiple languages, Disparate Customs, Devotees Demands

Pandit Anant Dixit

Hindu Temple of Toledo, OH

Bharat is not a homogeneous country; it has a large amount of variety in culture, language and religions. Hinduism the largest religion in India has many variations based on Vedic, Loucik and unique family traditions plus sub variations within each tradition.

Pundits are generally trained in a specific tradition and style of reciting and conducting poojas. In a particular gurukulam; a specific system is advanced and to remain true to the system and its intended outcomes, variations are generally not encouraged.

Similarities

It is true that all of the systems generally worship the same deities for example Lord Ganesha, Kalash, Prithivi, Varuna, Maatrika, Navgraha and whatever pradhana devata is being worshipped.

Difference

However, the way in which the worship is done, the articles used in the pooja and the chronology may be different. Most importantly, the mantras recited may be different or may be the same with variations in some words or style depending on the sampradaya or the North/South difference in reciting base on Shukla and Krishna Yajur Veda.

North American Experience:

The coming together of large number of devotees from India, Africa, Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad and other places all of whom through geography, time span, family customs and mixture of customs has produced a big demand on Pandits who were never trained for this eventuality in terms of language, delivery of sermons and generally meeting the pooja needs of devotees based on their own perceptions and traditional styles..

The difference and variations in customs make it seem that Pundits don't know what they are doing. This puts Pundits in bad light. For instance, Yajmaans may be dissatisfied because what they are accustomed to is not delivered.

Language:

With sometimes three generations in a single family, Pundits have to cater to the language needs of all three generations Deg, Dadi speaks Punjabi, son speaks Punjabi and Hindi and grand daughter speaks only English. The language barriers disenchant young kids who want you to communicate freely and effectively with them. The issue is to respond to the nuisances of the language.

Pravachan:

Most Pundits are not trained in delivering pravachans or on giving meanings of rituals. The North American experience is that people will only have faith if they are given palatable meanings and rationale for doing pooja, upwaas etc.

The demands on Pandits are many. To carry forward a rich tradition and pass on knowledge to a varied group with different language needs sometime with little reward and grudging rewards.

Challenges of Adjustment in the Western Society

*Pandit Chandrahekar Kashavajjala
Bhartiya Hindu Temple, Columbus, OH*

It is my privilege to participate in this conference on the status of priests working at various places in USA since 1973 onwards. Thousands of Indian priests migrated to keep up Indian traditions and to safeguard the tenants of Indians in enjoying the religious functions, rituals, festivals, ceremonies like birth and death and so on.

The US government is liberal enough to allow so many number of Indians to settle in various towns of USA with employment in commerce, engineering, banking, medical, scientific research etc., and also allowed them to discharge the Hindu traditions as per our culture in a whole hearted way. Thus the religious visas are being issued liberally since 1973 onwards Hosts of Indian priests migrated to USA on religious visa to extend the religious traditions at USA and cater to the needs of Hindus settled in USA.

It is the happiest thing for me to convey that the Hindus settled in USA have greater respect towards keeping up the Indian traditions and religious aspects of Hindu culture. The same respect is shown towards priests which is admirable.

This is one side of the coin. Keeping this matter apart, priests entering USA, face problems as they come to USA to earn livelihood.

The following are the measurable conditions:

- 1) Salary payment which is not up to the mark with 2 to 3 years of agreement to work in a temple.
- 2) Keeping the passport of the Pandits with the management restricts the pandit's career growth.
- 3) Lack of insufficient facilities in temples to meet the needs of priests. And the priests live alone in a remote place where no help is extended to them.
- 4) Medical Insurance is a critical right of the priest. But in so many temples proper medical insurance is not paid by temple management on behalf of priests and their families. As a result, the priests facing medical problems, are struggling mentally and physically to overcome from the problems.
- 5) One of my friends joined as a priest in one of the temple of USA in 2002-2003. In 2003 he suffered a severe health problem, due to which he was admitted in a hospital. But the temple management was not in a position to pay the health insurance premium. As a result the treatment stopped for a while. He approached the honorable court and obtained lawful charge of insurance from the insurance company and then he was forced to shift to a new temple. Imagine what his condition would be in such scenario, it can not be explained in words.

When I recollect the above matter, I feel very lucky. By the grace of Ishwara, I am in safe hands of our temple management at Columbus. I am whole heartedly saying this.

Let me continue, some of the other measurable conditions faced by the Vedic Pandits who migrated with a dream of earning more money, to keep up the religious traditions and to lead a comfortable life.

- 1) Management of some temples are imposing restricted conditions on Vedic Pandits that they should not get married up to 2 to 3 years after joining the temples. Even after completing the said period if the priest gets married no house rent allowance or medical insurance is offered to his wife.
- 2) Usually the priests are being sent outside temple to cater to the needs of devotees on their request to attend certain religious functions on payment of a fee to the temple where the priest is working. In this form, huge amounts of money is being credited to the temples while the priests get very limited amount, even though they are taking lot of physical and mental strain (Travelling to the respective place in the early hours of the morning or in the night hours). Some times to achieve this purpose the priests have to manage their own expenses.

- 3) Sometimes, even though working hard (leave the money apart), priests are not getting appreciation which will boost their confidence. If priests get encouragement and support from management that will really help the priests perform well. These kinds of things are also not being done to keep the priests in some of the temples.
- 4) Priests will be happy if some part of educational allowances of their children is paid by the management.
- 5) Some times due to differences among the nature of the trustee members, priests are being targeted which is making them weak in their performance and they limit their social life.
- 6) Imagine the situations like these where the priest came to USA by leaving his family alone in India to keep up the Hindu traditions and Hindu culture in the form of performing rituals at temples in USA.

Hence a mandatory changeover is required where the priest is properly treated as a religious head and given more human values on par with the other citizens.

- 1) Study of market rates needs to be done and accordingly the salary needs to be offered to the priests.
- 2) Proper medical insurance need to be provided to priest staying with his family.
- 3) Proper lodging need to be provided.
- 4) Free transport is to be given to the priests to attend and perform the rituals in devotee's place.
- 5) No teasing or playing politics on the priest's life by the management should be done, at the same time the priest's hard work need to be monitored.
- 6) Showing good respect towards priests and giving importance to their views/opinions to improvise the way of performing rituals to help the temple's growth.
- 7) Good amount of annual increments should be given based on the performance
- 8) Proper facilities in temples need to be provided.
- 9) Required vacation is to be granted (at least 30 days per annum) to the priests to visit their home ground once in a year.
- 10) Last but not least, proper encouragement and appreciation needs to be given in the form of a mail or certificate to the priest on a regular interval or after performing major rituals. This kind of appreciation makes the priests to perform well in the upcoming rituals beyond their extent.
- 11) Priest always chant the divine mantra 'Sarve Janah Sukhino Bhavantu' (which means all living beings should lead happy life) in front of Ishwara by representing the other normal people. Hence they should be treated as representatives of Ishwara and should be taken care of in a proper way.

Thank you all for giving me this opportunity. However, the above said points may not be applicable to all temples management. But I have mentioned some of my and my friends' observations and shared some of our experiences as priests in US temples. I request you all to pardon me in case if any of the said points caused disturbance. Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate each and every member in this conference who has taken part in initiating this topic to be discussed. Thank you very much.

*'Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu',
Sarve Janah Sujano Bhavantu,
Sarve Sujanah Sukhino Bhavantu'. Swasti*

Impact of Temple Size and Environment on Expectation

*Acharya Kailash Sharma, Chief Priest
Hindu Temple of Greater Cincinnati*

There are over 700 temples, big and small, in North America catering to the religious and spiritual needs of over 2.5 million Hindu populations. The first temples in north America were built in the early 70s: the temples in Flushing, NY, in Pittsburgh, PA, (1977), Malibu Temple in California (1981) and in Dayton, Ohio (1985). The surge in temple building activity which started in the 80s continues unabated. The principle here seems to me that the larger the city the bigger the temple, to cater to the large Hindu population in the city.

The smaller temples serve the needs of three kinds of population. First, in large cities the sheer distance one has to travel to go to the temple. Second, giving importance to Ishta Devata. Third, there is a different kind of small temple built by the Vedanta Societies. Are our temples fulfilling the expectations of the devotees? It

seems to me that the smaller the temple the better fulfillment of devotees expectations. For example, when a group of devotees build a Sai Baba temple their expectations are totally fulfilled. There is no division in these small towns between "they" (temple management) and "we" (devotees).

In the case of larger temples, however, the devotees' expectations outweigh what the temple management can offer. For example, some devotees of a large temple may like to see a Jagannatha chariot festival for which that temple may not have the resources or space or organizational capabilities. If we have a large South Indian temple, devotees from North India prefer a North Indian, Hindi-speaking priest.

I am proud to say that our own Hindu temple in Cincinnati is unique among all the Hindu temples of North America. The central "deity" which presides is AUM. If you want, you can call our temple an "AUM Mandir." Our principal deity interestingly is not a "deity" but the principle which underlies all deities, namely AUM. Our Cincinnati Hindu temple is large situated on a 100 acre land in a wooded area. Because our temple is big, we can accommodate a large number of deities in the temple thus fulfilling the expectations of varieties of groups. Because our temple is an "Aum Mandir," all deities are given equal status. Groups that have their own allegiance to a particular Ishtadevata can have their own deity consecrated in our temple. This is our solution to fulfill the expectations of our diverse groups of devotees.

In conclusion, I would like to make a small point about the big temples and the devotees' fulfillment or frustration of expectations. The large temple in North America are not built because the community wanted them and collectively acted to build them. Rather, a small group of like-minded "founding people" got the idea and executed them. Once you build them, the devotees come. Our temple builders also seem to be following an interesting principle of marketing, viz. "You do not produce a product because the consumers want it, but you first produce a product and make the consumers want it." In the same way, we seem to be saying: Build a Temple, the devotees will come. Most challenge for temples is to involve our youth in temple activities interestingly. Per my observance and experience the most important part is from parents. How much priority is given to involve their self with children in temple activities? It is not one day job. Just like putting seed at the right time in soil, the tree will grow accordingly.

Sangeet se Sadhana

Pandit Jagdish Joshi

Priest Hindu Jain Temple, Pittsburgh PA

Sangeet se sadhana: the compound word sangeet is made out of two Sanskrit words, sama = samyak means properly, geet means sung, which now becomes sung properly. We are not talking about micro details of music, nor are we talking about that how entertaining music can be, we are talking about "Sangeet se Sadhana." How we can uplift the living soul? How we can achieve oneness with the Supreme Atman? How can we worship Ishwara through sangeet? How can we feel divinity with sangeet? Sangeet is divine expression of heartfelt emotions. Sangeet is realization of devotion: or devotion is realized through sangeet. Our seers realized the Sangeet through their meditation. They realized that the whole creation is filled with "Dhwani" the divine sound "Aum" which is the origin of divine sangeet, not to mention that the Aum is also the origin of entire creation. In other words the entire creation is created from Aum and evidence to support that is everywhere. Sangeet is all pervading, look around you look at birds, trees, vines, rivers, look at all the creatures they communicate with each other with sangeet . Look at yourself: your breath, your heartbeat, your blood circulation system. Anything you look at, anywhere you see there is Sangeet.

Now how can we uplift ourselves with Sangeet? Couple of things: Sangeet shouldn't be just for entertainment of your blind mind. It should open up your mind and take towards divinity, it should not be about that who can stretch their voice to extreme and who can touch the highest note in alap, it should also not be about that who can attract the biggest crowd and who is the biggest celebrity. Who is most famous in music, who is good looking or who has the voice of a nightingale etc. When it comes to divine music in Sangeet none of that matters. Sangeet is simple, like Meera, Tulsidas, Soordas, Maharshi Balmiki, Kaalidas, Vedvyas, Lord Shiv, Hanuman and so many more. They all were not singers not at least according today's standards, they sang from their hearts and liberated millions of miserable sorrowful hearts, they showed us Ishwara directly, whatever they wrote whatever they sang was so easy to follow. You don't need fancy degrees to sing that sangeet, nor do you need amazing voice to impress your audience. All you need is a very deep devotion and

a dedicated heart to Ishwara, that simple but devoted singing will become your "SADHANA." We all have the capacity to sing. We just have to recognize it. Not just sing for yourself, sing for others. Your heartfelt devotional sangeet will help liberate millions of sorrowful hearts, you will become torch bearer of happiness. As I said you do not need fancy training to practice devotion, just see the great souls like Meera, you will be fine.

The youth understand this secret of music. That is why we need to introduce music classes in every temple and encourage the youth to lead the bhajans and kirtans on appropriate occasions. Many priests are well trained in the art of music. Others can always seek that training. Music is one of the secrets to engaging the youths in our temples. And through music and dance inculcate "sadhana" or self discipline in our children. It is a natural process.

Serving the Youth and Young Couples

Anil Bajpai

Hindu Temple of Central Indiana

Connecting between generations has been a continuous challenge for the society. It becomes even more challenging when we want to connect the younger generation to our religious beliefs and practices. We want them to understand the values of Hindu traditions and be part of our Hindu celebrations and functions. They do have desire to associate and be active participants. It is not that they lack interest or do not want to be part of it. It is us who fail to cater to the needs and requirements of our younger generation.

The values of Hindu traditions cannot be transferred only by strenuous, extensive chants or standing in long extended lines to have a glimpse of our magnificent murtis. We will have to preserve our values and traditions by making them easily understandable and accessible to the younger generation. I believe we can achieve our goal of engaging and serving younger generation and help them sustain Hindu Dharma by following few simple steps:

- a.) Present the importance of values by living them rather preaching them.
- b.) Need of multilingual priests.
- c.) Train priests to understand the needs of younger generation.
- d.) Train priests to have an open dialogue with devotees.
- e.) Prepare materials and have priests explain the meaning and purpose of the occasion.
- f.) Explain the values of rituals, their need and relevance to our daily life.
- g.) Preserve the sanctity but make the processes more feasible and accessible.

Focus and emphasis on the role of priests is of core importance because they are the direct connection in helping our youth understand the value of their active participation. Realization of core value will inspire them to be an active participant and to be proud sustainer of our Hindu Dharma.

Connecting With Young Families

Rakesh D. Rathod

Hindu Jain Temple, Pittsburgh, PA

To understand the modern, young, Indian family in the United States, we will need to review where these families originate, what motivates them, challenges they face, and how they differ from their parents. Once these factors have been exposed, we can begin developing effective solutions to reach these families and actively engage them in religious and cultural events, discussions, and thought. This paper and the accompanying presentation will look at these factors and attempt to drive a discussion on how to reach young, Indian families in the United States. This paper is not meant to define solutions as the problem is complex and requires vetting.

Families come to the US through a number of channels; primarily as immigrants, through marriage or through work-related events. From whatever channel, it's clear they come to the US from varying economic classes and with varying skills (business owners, professionals, academics, etc.) These variations, no doubt, lead to variations in the family's approach to acquiring their needs and wants – needs and wants driven by motivators.

Every individual and family is driven by one or more motivations. In some cases, families seek continued upward mobility in wealth or notoriety, perhaps good opportunities for their children, or exposure to Indian culture and religion. Some families want abstract ideas and concepts to become meaningful and to help them answer their life questions. In any case, young families that are entrenched in the American corporate or business environment are exposed to highly professional and structured organizations and are beginning to expect the same from their Indian entities.

Of course the newer families are different from older generations and significantly different than the previous generation. These newer people so called "millinials" are drivers in their organizations and are more about driving the company and less about taking orders. No doubt the work to reach these younger families is a difficult one requiring further discussions and more agile approaches to traditional methods.

Religious and cultural organizations should seek ways to reach young families on the family's own terms and the organization should expect to adopt nontraditional approaches to communications, content delivery, and meaningful context in a sustainable way.

Counseling Program for Young Adults and Families

Sujatha Reddy LPC, MEd, BAMS

Counselor, Asha Ray of Hope

With changing times and geography of our Hindu heritage we have to be competent and cautious when counseling young adults and families within our scope of practice.

As a priest of the temple there are certain duties he has to perform according to his job description and expertise. Most of what he does is for normal people in the society for up keeping the Hindu dharma and enhance the family life. Being an immigrant in this country the priest along with the temple authorities may be expected to take on duties he would otherwise not have done before in his native country. In olden days people used to go to priests for advice on any matters relating to family. They used to have a family astrologer and purohit. Along with his regular job of a priest in the temple he also partakes in services outside the temple like, birth and death rituals, conducting marriages, etc. and compassionate services like counseling families and young adults. *The Hindus still have a lot of faith in the priest and go to them for advice.* It is still a taboo and is a general understanding that they have to be insane to see a counselor or a psychotherapist among the immigrant population.

When counseling young adults and families priests have to be knowledgeable and aware about: Priest competency, job description and hierarchy; Vedic Dharma Vs. Societal dharma; Acculturation in the new land; Family systems; Parenting; Professional competency other than Vedic expertise; Hindu marriage act; Divorce laws in the state; DV laws in the state; Vedic marriage Vs. registered marriage; Challenges faced by priests when counseling couples with distress; The law of the land (societal Dharma); Legal and ethical boundaries for counseling married couples; Workshops for priests in marriage counseling; Temple bylaws and legal boundaries.

Priest Retention and Loyalty

Pandit Rishikesh Tiwari

Hindu Temple Seattle Washington

In times when one's own personal gain and material advancement have become the keywords of a person's very existence and outlook on life, values such as loyalty and selfless devotion to one's calling have assumed proportions of great importance. There were times when loyalty to a master or a calling was as much a part of life as breathing and sleeping. Ekalavya never questioned before cutting off his finger for a guru who never even actually taught him. Laskshmana endured the rigors of Vanvas because of his loyalty to his brother. Bhishma Pitamaha's loyalty to the Kaurava throne surpassed all boundaries of personal consideration and even a sense of justice.

The reason for quoting these somewhat clichéd examples is to set the foundation for discussing the evolution of Hindu society from such exalted values to one where a person's own gain has become the paramount deciding factor in all matters of spirituality and devotion.

A Hindu priest has the sacred duty of being the thread which joins Ishwara to Humankind and this duty itself calls for certain inherent values and qualities. Kabir the renowned 14th century priest has said in one of his Doha's...

*Guru Gobind Dono Khade, Kake lagu pay |
Balihari guru aapno, Govind diyoo batayee||*

A guru and Ishwara are standing next to each other and the devotee is confused as to who to bow to first. The answer of the Doha itself is self-explanatory of the value system which we have been striving to follow. The same idea is reinforced in the very well-known Guru Shloka.

*Guru Brahma Gurur Vishnu
Guru Devo Maheshwaraha
Guru Saakshat Para Brahma
Tasmai Sree Gurave Namaha*

A Guru is given the same, if not more, respect as Ishwara Himself.

A Hindu priest acts as a Guru to all of his devotees. In view of changing times and dynamics of operating in a foreign land, especially North America, the duties and responsibilities of priesthood have become more wide ranging than ever before. A priest is now becoming a very important member of the community – a person to whom people turn to not only in matters of deciding on which day to perform a certain puja, but also as a reliable and comforting source in whom they can trust and discuss problems. A priest is being required to continually keep his eyes and ears open to the shifting nuances of the devotees needs. Developing a rapport with all the devotees and even other members of the community, including people of different professions and even sects and religions is becoming more and more important. The scope of a priests duties have extended beyond just being a spiritual adviser to an important community resource where families can turn to in tumultuous times.

In the course of his duties a priest meets a lot of people in different walks of life. Keeping this repertoire as a database, he can be instrumental in connecting people through introductions and other means for job search, skill acquirement and other outreach services. A small example was how The Bhutani bandhu community was helped in Seattle. Through the temple, volunteers were garnered to help teach them driving skills and assist in acquiring driving licenses.

A lot of people who arrive in the US are overwhelmed at first by the new way of life, and if economic crisis adds to spiritual confusion, they become a target for various conversion tactics by other religions. A priest has to understand these needs and reinforce the value system which might be wavering in the light of promises of material help.

Temples seem to have become a viable business proposition and in some areas they are springing up a dime a dozen, whereas some areas in US are still bereft of a temple. Priests can use their unique position to promote Vasudeva Kutumbakam or unity and brotherhood among all. Only when Hindus are united and not giving in to petty disputes of region, caste and a million other divisionary factors, can we become strong as a community. This will help pool not only financial resources but human resources as well. When we stand united we can have our voice heard, even in the high reaches of political echelon. We take great pride in telling our kids the story of the woodcutter with the four sons who tested them by asking them to break a single stick and then a bunch of sticks bound together. We have to go within ourselves and see if we are practicing what we are preaching.

A priest should not use his position to generate friction among diverse groups but promote harmony. A lot of people take priests words very seriously and it is very important to speak the language of unity and pragmatism rather than dissent and fanaticism.

Having said all this, one should not forget that a priest is a man of the world too-with bills to pay and college education funds to worry about. In this scenario being loyal to his profession and to the temple he is serving

becomes a daunting task. It is precisely these challenges which probably make the task all the more worthwhile. A balance between all-consuming material greed and a renunciation of all worldly desires is what is required. Bringing about a change of perception about the role of a priest, and making erstwhile priests realize this shift in the profession is an important task. The Hindu community as a whole, putting aside differences, has to work with “Tan, Man and Dhan “to bring about this transformation, so that the future generation sees it as a most worthy calling and sincerely accepts it. It is only then can we keep the light of our Sanatan Dharma burning in this land.

The Role of Hindu Priests in North America

Shri. Jitendra Oulkar
Forum for Hindu Awakening

Hindu temples are at the heart of Hindu Dharma education in North America and Hindu priests can play an important role in disseminating Dharma education. Hindu youth brought up outside India can barely relate to the Dharmik rituals and ceremonies performed in Hindu temples, due to barriers such as not understanding the meaning of the rituals or the language of the priests. This has made for dwindling interest of the youth in core temple activities. This presentation explains how priests can reverse this trend with practical ideas like relating to the youth the scientific basis of Hindu rituals.

Practical Issues

Moderator—Harilal Patel

Working as a pandit in North America is very different and demanding than working in Bharat.

In Bharat, the priestly work is limited to Pooja, seva in the Temple and performing the sixteen sanskars at the temple premises or in the community. Reading Panchang and giving the Muhurt- Auspicious day for beginning the different activities. It does not require the knowledge of all the shashtras, different languages, practice of different customs, dealing with people from different faiths etc.

The role and responsibility of pandits in North America is very dynamic and ever changing. The second generation youth, which is growing up in a Christian dominated society and is surrounded by many different faiths, want to know more about our faith and practices.

They are studying all the religions of the world in schools. They will be comparing these with others and will have to stand up to their peers at work place and community as to what they do and why they do it.

Most parents are illiterate in these matters and therefore the burden of explanation comes on pandit's shoulders.

As there are more than 35 languages in Bharat and all the bharatiya communities in North America are much diversified mix of all, the pandit's task becomes very difficult.

Interfaith marriages are taking place at a higher rate and pandits have to play a role to explain and preserve our dharmic values to the newly wed couples.

They have to know English for communication, much different variation of practices performed in Bharat and knowledge of Shashtras beyond Pooja and Katha.

Most temples are visited by people of other faiths for several reasons, so pandits should act as an ambassador of Hindu society and Hinduism. Should be able to explain visitors to their satisfaction.

As our communities are growing over last 45 years, and many would like to perform various rituals at their homes, the demand has been created for pandits. This has resulted in having independent pandits who are not associated with any particular temple.

There is growing thought as to exchange of pandits from one temple to another for a period of short time and rip the benefits of both the pandits.

Qualifications of a Paṇḍit in North America

Arun D. Jatkar, Ph.D., Hindu-Jain Mandir, Pittsburgh, PA

Summary:

Practically all the Paṇḍits in Hindu Mandirs in North America today have been trained to be 'archakas' who perform the essential Mandir vidhis such as pūjā, havana and alaṁkāra, and to officiate such gr̥hya saṁskāras as nāma-karaṇa, upanayanam, vivāha and antyeṣṭi. Occasionally these Paṇḍits also officiate the community-based 'readings' of scriptures such as Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Rāmāyaṇa, etc., communal bhajans and kīrtanas. This skill-set possessed by the Paṇḍits has served the needs of the contemporary Hindu devotees very well.

However, time has come to look far beyond the needs of our generation. The inheritors of our religious and spiritual traditions a few generations in the future are going to be vastly different from us in the make-up of socio-religious psyche, shared experiences and the world outlook. The skill set of today's Paṇḍits will be woefully deficient in serving the needs of these future generations.

As a result, tomorrow's Paṇḍits in North America will have to be more than Archakas and officiants. They will need to become complete resources, who will be able to perform the following, in addition to all the services Paṇḍits currently offer -

- (a) Fully relate to the life experiences and aspirations of future Hindus born and brought up in North America,
- (b) converse in fluent English and also be well versed in Saṁskritam and original versions of our scriptures,
- (c) offer an in-depth comparison of the Hindu Dharma against the other major world religions, and
- (d) counsel both the adults and the youth on religious and spiritual aspects of daily life

This is indeed a very tall order from the standpoint of our current situation. But we have to strive and stretch our imagination beyond what we think of as a breaking point. That is our obligation to the future generations.

Hindu Priests

Dr. Sheenu Srinivasan*

One feature in Hindu temple worship that has remained different and distinct from any other faith pertains to priesthood. While priests in other faiths lead their congregations in rituals during regular worships, they also deliver a sermon. The member families attending such churches not only participate in the practice of their beliefs through prescribed rituals but they also learn some aspect of their value system through talks delivered to inspire and motivate the devotees. Individuals and families can also receive counseling from their priests. The function of our priests cannot and do not include these aspects.

Hindu temple tradition, over thousands of years, has not followed this western approach. Our priests are experts in conducting rituals, chanting mantras and leading the yajamaana in proper conduct of the ceremony. Discussions of the philosophy, theology and culture which are rooted in the Vedas do not enter into temple programs as part of a service. The families therefore have to learn the foundations of our faith elsewhere. And that partly explains the somewhat vague expressions of beliefs you hear from almost every Hindu claiming that they know!

While there are good reasons for this unfortunate condition among our brethren, my purpose is not to dwell on them here. My goal here is to dwell on the impact of this condition on the succeeding generations of Hindus in the Diasporas. While we have succeeded in building temples, with attractive architecture and sculptures and staffed them with priests on visas, we have failed in the more important aspect of organizing these temples as centers of authoritative learning and spiritual support.

It is now time to develop an indigenous priesthood trained not only in their normal expertise but also in teaching the most fundamental aspects of our Vedic based Faith. So at the end of a worship service and before prasada is served, it will be customary for the presiding priest to deliver a message that focuses on a particular feature of Hinduism. If we introduce this new feature, then it follows that the worship ceremonies themselves need to be organized with a new Diaspora-driven need i.e. integrating discipline and learning into the pujas. Based on my experience working with the Hindu community and a host of priests, I do have recommendations as to how this can be successfully incorporated and implemented.

In summary our priests need three things: Training, Training and Training. And we can impart that. Let this effort serve as the foundation to establish a Hindu Divinity School in North America.

*Dr. Srinivasan is the Founder of the Connecticut Valley Hindu Temple Society.

Hindu Pastoral/Spiritual Care

Brief notes by Esther Friede

Pastoral/Spiritual Counselling and Chaplaincy

In religion, there are prescribed rituals, doctrine, rules and procedures, whereas in spiritual care, with the exception of religious services and administering religious rites when called for, there is just life - an entirely experiential spontaneous process, which is an intuitive, relational experience between the caregiver and the care seeker. Pastoral/spiritual practice is not without its own rules but they are of a different nature than the performance of religious functions. In chaplaincy, there are formalized organizational processes, more so than in pastoral/spiritual counselling but the real work lies in "being with," companioning the care seeker, either through illness, dying, incarceration, rehabilitation, therapy, trauma, grief, family breakdown, and the many varied life crises. Therefore the training for such vocations, in addition to the spiritual formation already established in becoming a religious leader, requires inner development of a psychological and relational nature, so that he/she can enter into the inner world of the care seeker to help alleviate suffering in a very individual way as well as minister to a group of people who may have experienced trauma. Sometimes both religious leadership and pastoral/spiritual care are performed by one person; sometimes not. In the case where pastoral/spiritual care is offered by someone other than a religious leader, both religious formation as well as psychological development must be addressed.

Pastoral counselling, chaplaincy, actually all psychological and spiritual work are vocations rather than jobs. Not everyone has the nature to serve in these capacities and can do more harm than good if they are put in the position to serve the most vulnerable. Although priests already have training and awareness of the need for spiritual care in different life situations, only those who feel a "calling" and have the necessary characteristics should pursue this more specialized work of pastoral/spiritual care. Each religious institution may need to decide what works best for them based on staff availability and willingness for training and service. The human needs are far greater generally than there are people available to minister to them, so institutions need to look at volunteer services, how best to employ lay people within their congregation as well as establish links with reliable external resources.

Traditional Hindu environments turned to pandits, gurus, for help and advice and have often mistrusted western and modern psychology as not being able to understand/honour their religious and cultural values. Also, there has traditionally been stigma connected with visiting a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychotherapist, social worker or counsellor, these being reserved for "crazy" people. As Sanatan Dharma establishes itself and Hindus integrate into North American culture, they have the opportunity both to enrich the western culture by bringing their religious and spiritual values into these professional environments and by bringing modern thought into their traditional environments, creating their own unique blend, taking the best from both worlds. Removing the stigma connected with receiving professional help is a cultural task that needs to be faced so that people receive the necessary help in a timely manner.

Suitability for Pastoral Care

Characteristics, qualities and training important for people working in chaplaincy and spiritual/pastoral counselling:

- Spiritual in nature as well as have religious training
- Belief that the divine is immanent and works through helping relationships
- Understands their role as an expression of divine support and is mindful of this function
- Tolerant, knowledgeable of their own faith as well as inter-faith collaboration
- Training in modern psychology, medical bioethics, patients' rights, elder care
- Able to face/discuss issues of illness, death and dying, loss, relationship challenges and breakdown from both the standpoint of the faith and culture as well as human psychology
- Able to allay others' fears and be a comforting and stabilizing presence for others
- Psychologically-minded, curious and interested in the workings of the human psyche
- Self-aware, conscious of one's own psychology, spirituality and responsibilities to self & others
- Able to bracket one's own personal concerns when being with others
- Mature emotional development
- Aware of needs for one's own personal growth, ongoing personal development and support

- Inner strength and quiet demeanour, patient and peaceful
- Very clear sense of boundaries
- Sexually disciplined, ethical and respectful of professional and personal boundaries
- Highly developed listening and advocacy skills
- Focused and attentive to individuals, not easily distracted
- Aware of family dynamics and skilful in being advocate for patient's/client's needs
- Able to put oneself in other's shoes without losing sense of boundaries
- Aware of personal limitations, need for self-care and potential for burnout
- Empathic, sensitive, kind, compassionate, caring, an understanding "presence"
- Able to accept projection of others as being an important religious figure without egotism
- Mindful not to seek to have their own needs met by helping relationships
- Mindful not to exert power over another
- Not concerned with one's own image or status but with the needs of the care seeker
- Able to extend oneself beyond level of personal likes, dislikes and comfort
- Relational and social, but interested in depth, rather than superficial relating
- Non-judgmental and accepting
- Authentic and honest, able to establish trust
- Able to connect with others both one-on-one and in groups
- Leadership qualities for organizing services, self-help and religious/spiritual study groups
- Able to function in institutional settings, aware of organizational psychology and politics and able to be patient/client advocate
- Able to function in multidisciplinary teams e.g., doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers/emergency personnel/prison, military, police staff/others
- Very good time-management skills
- Able to multi-task calmly in the face of crises and be centre of support for others
- Able to be creative in delivering spiritual care in non-conventional settings and sometimes in chaotic conditions
- Aware of conflict of interests and able to maintain professional limits
- Able to see beyond appearances, differences, tolerant of people's conditions and behaviours
- Able to be present to extreme suffering of others, companion them without trying to "fix" problems, have inner strength to witness suffering without judgment,
- Respectful, never minimizing others' concerns
- Able to recognize unarticulated needs and respond/act for the benefit of the other

Usually, most professional clinical courses provide both theoretical knowledge and appropriate training to develop awareness of these characteristics and create an environment for practicing these skills – such as hands-on practicums, supervised counselling, case studies, peer interaction. They usually also have a requirement that trainees undergo their own therapeutic process in order to know themselves well enough and understand what it is like to be on the receiving end of psychological and spiritual care.

Nevertheless, people considering undergoing training in order to be of service in these capacities should have some basis upon which to evaluate their suitability and sense of vocation for this line of work. It would be advisable that they receive guidance, spiritual direction in the early decision-making stages and throughout their training to ensure they choose wisely both for themselves, their families and their community. Similarly, community members should learn enough about what spiritual care is in order to make a valuable contribution in their religious institutions and not put an unnecessary burden on religious leaders to perform functions for which they are not suited or for which they may not have time to do the work justice. They can help in their religious institutions to support their religious leaders by designing organizational structures for appropriate pastoral/spiritual care, provide funding for additional services and staff and/or establish community links to needed resources.

Types of Pastoral/Spiritual Care

Pastoral Counselling for temple congregation	Outreach Chaplaincy
Individual counselling	Hospitals
Marriage preparation	Long term care

Pastoral Counselling for temple congregation	Outreach Chaplaincy
Couple counselling	Home visits
Family counselling: children, teens, whole family	Hospices
Grief counselling	Institutions and community homes for mentally ill
Addiction counselling	Prisons
Spiritual direction	Addiction rehab centres
Immigration support and guidance	Shelters
Women's support for domestic violence & rape	Crisis centres
Above can be offered one-on-one, in group therapy, support groups, workshops, courses, etc.	Educational institutions
Other suggestions: yoga, meditation, lifestyle coaching, stress management	Police, military, security forces, fire-fighting

Who Performs Pastoral/Spiritual Care

In temple pastoral/spiritual care office	In community
Priests	Professional psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, social workers
Trained Pastoral/Spiritual Counsellors	Professional Hindu chaplains
Volunteers with professional backgrounds	Lay people trained in spiritual care
Team of lay volunteers in congregation	Volunteers
? Other suggestions	? Other suggestions

Options for Training

Controlled by Hindu Community	External Resources (see more extensive list later)
Develop own Hindu Seminary with full curriculum with ability to grant degrees or diplomas	Collaborate/integrate with existing networks, colleges & universities:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop outline of requirements for Hindu pastoral/spiritual counselling and care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CASC (formerly CAPPE) in Canada – an equivalent organization exists in US
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify external resources for training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selected University with South Asian department and/or Theological Colleges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hindu community grant professional standing to those who complete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community College

Interfaith Learning and Research

The field of chaplaincy and pastoral/spiritual counselling has been long established in the western religious traditions. While examining what the traditional Hindu culture has done and wishes to do, it would be useful to research and have an interfaith dialogue with experts from other faiths. The Spiritual Care workers who provided Hindu spiritual care in the facility where I was chaplain were trained through the Tamil Caregiver Project sponsored by a Catholic hospital that saw the demographical shift in the population and the need for Hindu spiritual care in the healthcare system. The training program was designed by a Catholic priest and adapted for Hindu spiritual care. In my own bid for equivalency to a Masters of Divinity, it was an Indian Catholic priest who helped me structure my knowledge by providing the outline of the theological subjects taught in the MDiv program. It would be useful, I think, to become knowledgeable about what the western

traditions have typically done in training their people. A Zen Buddhist centre Upaya in New Mexico has a Buddhist chaplaincy program that also might be worthwhile studying. Its program is designed by a western Buddhist, Joan Halifax, who has written about death and dying. She probably would be a helpful resource in researching what needs to be included when designing a Hindu chaplaincy program.

In my own observation on the efficacy of the spiritual care training, while there was enthusiasm in the beginning, many of those trained lost interest once they were faced with the hands-on realities. They weren't sufficiently trained for facing the suffering they encountered. They also had anticipated that the training might lead to paid work but they soon discovered that hospitals and long term care did not have budgets to pay for Hindu spiritual care services. Church priests and ministers on call do not charge for their services as it is part of their parish duties as a priest or minister. Some of those who were trained continued on a volunteer basis. Training programs need to provide sufficient hands-on experience, internships of some type and consideration should be given to how these services will be funded in the community and external institutions.

Also, if I may add, do not be deterred by members of other faiths who discriminate against the Hindu faith but seek out those who are open to pluralism, interfaith dialogue and are prepared to collaborate and advise. In Toronto, Ontario Canada where I live, the multi-faith orientation is very strong. In the University of Toronto, Emmanuel College which is a seminary affiliated with the United Church recently launched an Islamic pastoral/spiritual care program. The Hindu community might find it helpful to find an existing accredited seminary at a university willing to collaborate with the Hindu community in establishing a Hindu seminary and/or pastoral/spiritual care training program. It would give the Hindu community a base rather than starting from scratch, thus providing access to established resources, literature, advisors but also acceptance in the wider community that the training meets North American standards and therefore will find it easier to integrate into the mainstream. Perhaps Canada, and Toronto specifically, might be a location to investigate.

Nature of Spiritual Care Work

Chaplains

In most cases, chaplains are on call at external institutions. A Hindu chaplain from a temple would register his/her name and contact information with the institution to be called if a Hindu resident/inmate/patient/attendee is in need of spiritual care. A chaplain on staff or sometimes other staff will contact as needed. The other possibility open to chaplains is that they become staff chaplains in external institutions. Usually, these chaplains will have to undergo some kind of training to become versatile and knowledgeable enough of all the other faiths in order to manage the spiritual care for all people in the institution by coordinating with other faith groups. External organizations specify educational and training requirements of which the community needs to become aware in order to integrate into the mainstream.

Pastoral/Spiritual counsellors

Usually, in faith communities, counselling is offered within the church, synagogue, for example, in a pastoral/spiritual care office or the office of priest, minister, rabbi. Some religious institutions may have a pastoral/spiritual care department and one or more trained pastoral care counsellor(s) with his/her own office specifically provided for counselling congregants. It could be possible that a person is part-time in more than one institution. A budget needs to be established to run a pastoral/spiritual care department and pay for pastoral/spiritual care services. Well-established churches such as the Catholic Church used to have trained nuns, monks and priests of their order to provide these services but this has become less available as secular society has decreased their numbers. Temples may likely have challenges as their communities integrate into secular culture in North American society in finding people willing to serve in religious capacities.

Pastoral/spiritual counsellors sometimes have their own private practice and they can provide their contact information to religious organizations, and social services for referrals to them of people of their particular faith. For example, a private practitioner may specifically state that they are a Christian pastoral counsellor and make themselves known to churches of their own denomination and to social service agencies. Similarly, it would be possible for a Hindu pastoral/spiritual counsellor to state their affiliation with Sanatan Dharma and advise temples, social service agencies and other institutions of their availability and background.

Eastern-based Spiritual Work Already Being Done in the Wider Community for Westerners

The temples can, with wise foresight also establish themselves as vibrant modern centres for serving the many psychological and spiritual needs of their communities by offering modern courses, workshops, support groups on: bridging the generation gap, relationships, dating, depression, stress, lifestyle coaching on nutrition,

healing and many other topics, meditation retreats, especially blended with today's modern interest in yoga, vegetarianism, Ayurveda and alternative health care, Vaastu and the many other holistic traditions that have Hindu roots. For example, Buddhism has evolved in North American society in a way that has developed Buddhist psychology, mostly through westerners who have adopted Buddhist practices. This is an area, in my opinion, that the Hindu community should embrace. They have an opportunity to reclaim their authorship of yoga and its deeper purpose and attract many westerners into their fold who are well trained in yoga, psychology, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), social work. This would be welcomed by the younger generation. Check out: Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the books by Jon Kabat-Zinn who has applied many Buddhist principles to modern holistic medical care, Mount Madonna Centre and Hanuman Fellowship, who have combined Hinduism, yoga and holistic practices. Note the popularity of Deepak Chopra in the wider population. Look at Upaya Centre (Zen Buddhist) Chaplaincy Training, writings of Ken Wilber – Buddhism applied in modern psychology. I point to these only as reference of how spirituality has evolved within the western culture so that Hindu temples can take the broadest vision of pastoral/spiritual care, while deciding specifically, what their priorities need to be to effectively serve their communities. One cannot be spread too thin either, so it takes good judgment to decide where to focus.

The Tale of A Priest and A Mandhir

["Nashville Naga"]

[Caution: These 2 stories are presented in blunt form with no sugar coating – with no intention of harming or blaming anyone. You may not feel bad if you have an open mind. This has been given all with good intentions only. No particular persons are kept in mind while writing this.]

(1) The Tale of A Priest:

Once upon a time (let us say some 15 years ago), there lived a poor priest family in an Indian village. The family was relatively big and they were suffering from poverty. With difficulty, the father arranged to have one of his sons to have the good “paatasaala” Vedic education. After completion, the son (out hero) was appointed in one of the cities in India and was happy.

At that time, through his friends' connections, he got a call from one of the trustees from a temple in USA. He attended the interview in tension – with a lot of thought clouds inside the mind – “foreign country, how it will be, language problems, food, parents here, this, that”, etc. He had to give some references. He was the finalist. Within a short time, he had to meet the temple trustee again to discuss further details. The trustee explained the overall process and asked him a lot of questions about his tenure, behavior, expectations, etc. The young priest in his excitement to be hired in a foreign country and to travel, he agreed to all conditions and said “Yes” to almost everything without much of thinking (and of course, with his full consciousness). His visa papers went out. It was all a new experience for him. He had to go to the US Consulate office for visa. Another heavy tension point. “What will they be asking”, “What should I answer?”, “Can I understand their pronunciation – while I am having difficult time watching English program in TV?” “How am I going to answer them?”, etc. Somehow, that event got over with a lot of tension and guess what, that evening, he knew that his visa was approved. What a joy!



Now the feelings start to spin around heavily. “Can’t believe that I am going to a foreign country and be a priest in a temple there!”, “What should I take?”, “Whom all should I tell?”, “How am I going to manage this ...or that...”, “Should I learn anything new before I go?”, “What are the Vedic / Pooja materials that I need to get before I leave?”, “How long will I be staying there before I can make a trip back?”, “Why should I be thinking of coming back now, while I need to think of getting things ready for making my trip there?”, etc.

One day, the tickets were booked. The day of his travel came in. Meanwhile, he started to remember the place names / US cities where he is traveling to, close by, the travel cities (for flight connections), etc. Boarded the flight, started to enjoy the flight, getting bored, getting tensed in the connection-city airports. With all the mixed feelings and dreams, he reached the place of the temple, welcomed by the temple committee members, and started his journey as a priest there. Making quite a lot of phone calls to the home town in India explaining how things are in his new city.

After a few years, he makes a trip to India. Met several such priests who made their trips to a foreign country or get the connections. Comes back to USA city. The thought process changes – especially after talking to other fellow priests. Getting extremely comfortable with the temple, surroundings, the work atmosphere, the management, etc. Setting up a different set of expectations based on the atmosphere that he is quite comfortable with, forgets all the promises that he gave during his 2nd interview with the temple trustee. And started to demand and even sometimes, be not-so-nice-and-friendly with new devotees coming to the temple – because, now he is well established and has a good set of followers (devotees) who respect him quite a bit. Now he is married and has a child. He is a family man now living in the full-fledged priest quarters given by the temple. His life style, day-to-day routines and the way of thinking is all different. Now the green card processing is taking place for him and his family. He started to complain about the temple management to others. He thinks that the temple management does not care about him – like they used to before. Somehow,



he feels in his heart that he has been missing something. Is it piece of mind? He even sometimes feels that he has become a bit greedy these days. He knew well he is different now than when he came to this country. What is the issue?

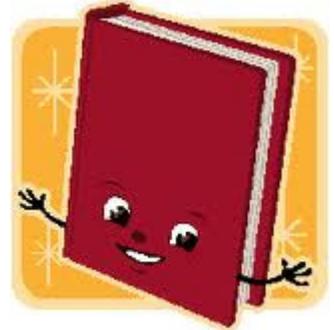
The story continues....

What is wrong with this story? If you are a priest, then I have a few words for you. You may not exactly be like our hero in this story. Your situation may be different. I need to convey the following to you, if you are willing to have an open mind to listen and think. Some or all of these may be applicable to you:

- Always Remember the Past – the atmosphere where we came from and any promises that we made at that time. (This reminds me of the old Tamil movie: “Server Sundaram” where comedy actor Nagesh – the hero – was a server in a restaurant and eventually he becomes a movie actor and becomes very rich. In his new building, in the main living room wall, he has the old server dress / uniform pinned to the wall. When people asks why such an ugly thing is there as a décor, he responds that, “I should always think of where I came from and I should not think too much of me and ignore the real important ones in life for the sake the mere “glitter”). Be level headed always and realize who truly you are.



- Do not judge the book by the cover. I am talking about several things here: (1) Devotees: Do not judge them by how they look or what they wear. When they come to the temple, they may come in a very simple dress (outfit) or in a casual Indian dress. That person may be a doctor or a Director in a big company. Devotees come to temple for many reasons: To get some peace; to pray to God to convey their difficulties – health, personal, financial, etc. It may be anything. When they come – no matter how they look, we need to treat them well – EVERY SINGLE TIME. Some may be coming from out-of-town just visiting one day with their friends or just to visit. When their first impression is extremely satisfied, they would have the motivation to come back again and again to this temple. (**First Impression is the Best Impression** and we may not know who is visiting the temple for the FIRST time). (2) The same way, don't judge the temple management persons just by their looks or the way they convey the things. Some may appear to be very tough, but they would have their own reasons FOR THAT PARTICULAR INSTANCE for saying this. They may extremely be kind-hearted and try to do you all good. So, don't just get into confrontation spoiling their impression on you or your image. Be sincere and don't be judgmental.



- Do not be Lazy. Sorry to say this. When we are young and fresh when we came to this country, we will not hesitate to do even small things. When we get settled and feel very comfortable, we will try NOT to do certain things that we think we think may degrade our pride. I am saying this for your own goodness and health. Especially with the potential high cholesterol food, simply by being active, we may maintain our health in a better way than by being lazy. When we are energetic and not feeling even a bit of laziness, our health would be good for a very long time. When we feel lazy within ourselves, then starts all the issues – from health to prestige issues to conflict with the management to bad impression at the devotees, etc. You know very well what I am saying here. (For example, on a heavy, busy Saturday – after lunch time (as the temple is open) – some devotees are coming and you may feel tired and feel list resting. You may not want to get up to do some *aarti* and give some *prasad* to them. They may not mind or say anything. But remember it is up to you to get up and do the RIGHT things – by giving at least a banana to them to make them happy. **Always try to do the RIGHT things** – no matter who says what. On a long run, it will



pay off. People WILL realize who you are, what kind of a person you are and start to recognize you.

- They may have their reasons. I am talking about the temple management. When they say something about a particular topic / issue / benefits, etc. think that they may have their own



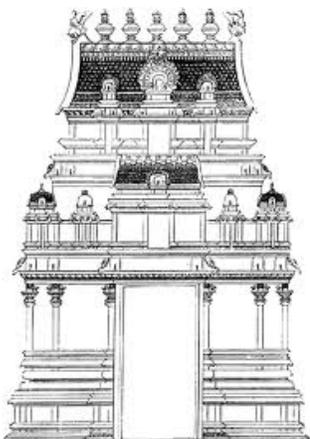
reasons – restrictions, limitations, etc. – for saying so. Don't be angry at them. Try to ask what is reasonable and try to justify why you are asking that or saying that. Once the decision is made, accept it happily. By you being happy, you are making your family happy, your management happy, your devotees happy and everyone is happy at the end. After all, our Sanadhana Dharma's (Hinduism's) basic, core concept is to attain happiness throughout the life – no matter what. This reminds me of M.K. Gandhiji's statement that goes something like: "I don't dislike the British people. I just don't like their ACT of ruling our country." Try to differentiate between the specific instance or act and the whole personality. Don't try to generalize the personality or attitude and start hating. Once again, they may have their own reasons. Just because they did not tell you everything does not mean that there is no reason.

- **Try Not to Compare.** Each temple is built under various conditions by different types of people. We may not know the full story behind it and we may not know the background activities or situations that the temple management faces in each temple. Every one is unique and different. When you talk to other priests about individual benefits, do not feel bad that you do not have one feature that the other priest has in another temple. They may not be telling all their lacking. It is just like travelling by flight from one city to another within USA. You might have paid \$250 whereas the person next seat might have paid \$675 for the similar seat next to you. We may not know the entire circumstances under which the benefits are being given in each temple. Comparison leads to jealousy and also promotes disloyalty and lack of sincerity, etc. ultimately leading you towards having to move out of the temple where you are now.
- **Bottom Line:** Try to be Sincere and Happy and not with the "blaming" attitude. After all, you are in the "religious" business. As far as the devotees are concerned, you are the ladder between them and God. So, try to act accordingly with the high qualities – not only projecting yourself - but truly have them inside.



(2) The Tale of A Mandhir:

Once upon a time (let us say some 40 years ago), there lived a typical, middle class family in a small town in India. The kids studies well. One of the sons – through some information obtained through his college mates – applied for a medical college in USA without thinking too much. Interestingly, he got the admission letter. Then only all the thoughts start spinning in the family. With some difficulty and a lot of excitement, he flew to USA and joined the medical college. Not many Indians and the studentship was very difficult. But his talent and sincerity were recognized by the department head. Meanwhile he got married. He completed the course and became a doctor. He got appointed in one of the university hospitals. He started his career as a doctor. Very proud of it. He got a child. He is now a full fledged family man. Started earning well. Moved to another hospital. After several years, started the private practice (clinic) along with a couple of other doctors. The business was quite good. There were several operational issues to be handled at the clinic which was a part of normal life. He became a reputed doctor in that area. The staff as well as the patients started respecting him quite well – in spite of "color" differences.



Meanwhile, on the social side, not too many Indians were there. Still he and a couple of his close doctor friends started thinking of starting a Hindu temple in that area – mainly for their kids and their families to spend on weekends in a spiritual way and of course with a broader, long term goal of providing religious services and to make it a common, social place to fellow Indian Americans. At first, started the temple in a small building with only one shrine and several pictures. During one of the trips to India, selected a priest and arranged for the visa, etc. Brought the priest and started learning all the formalities of running the temple "business" – which is a whole lot different from running his clinic. It is like another "baby" for him. Lot of difficulties on the path. Right from selection of Gods to the design of the temple, etc., he had to deal with other partners. (Did not imagine that they would fight for these things). Also had to struggle and fight and pursue with the local Government

authorities for getting any type of sanction or approval. Time flew. A lot of Indians came in to town – mainly the computer programmers and business people – like hotel owners, etc. The number of visitors increased tremendously – so as the operational management tasks and troubles. Had to find reliable people as volunteers to run the show. Started buying the surrounding land and started to build a bigger temple. Had to undergo a lot of difficulties in bringing goods, materials as well as artists to build in the typical Indian style temple. Finally, the Kumbabhishekam function happened. The number of visitors grew many fold. Had to form several committees to manage different operations. Had to review and setup many new things – like security system, small water falls to beautify the temple atmosphere, a playground for the children on Sundays mainly, organizing Sunday School, etc. It is interesting to see the temple grow many times in a fast manner. To cope up with the crowd of devotees, he and the fellow management had to interview several priests during their many India trips and appointed new priests. No matter what, this is like their “baby” and like “family business”. Spending lots and lots of time during weekdays and weekends – with the whole family on temple affairs – just to keep it in good shape.

With the ownership in mind and the number of activities happening at the temple, his viewpoint has changed slightly in the last several years. Also for him and others in management, it is hard to give a part of the authority to any one. Always has the feeling of need-to-know-everything-happening just like “good old days”. That prevents any part of delegation of authority from his and others side to youngsters for an ongoing continuity. These days, he starts to wonder as to what is going to happen to the temple after XX number of years from now. Losing piece of mind. He even sometimes feels that he has become too authoritative these days to all the staff and volunteers at the temple. Sometimes he feels good about it and sometimes not. What is the issue?

The story continues....

What is wrong with this story? If you are one of the founders of a Hindu temple and/or in temple management, then I have a few words for you. You may not exactly be like our hero in this story. Your situation may be different. I need to convey the following to you, if you are willing to have an open mind to listen and think. Some or all of these may be applicable to you:

- Always have the big picture in mind – Try to see the overall picture of how it (temple) got started, where it is heading, how we are managing, what can we do to improve the overall growth and mainly the sustainability – to keep the temple for ever – even for the younger generation.
- Delegate – Have Open Mind – Don't Micro Manage – When it comes to temple, when devotees come forward to volunteer, they will not cheat. Person with the right mind won't try to cheat and get something out of temple (God's place). Have the trust in them. Start to assign small tasks and see how they perform. Do not micro manage their tasks. Ask them to contact you if they need any help at any time. Don't be asking them to report every single small steps on the way of accomplishing the tasks given to them. Once you are happy, start to assign them bigger assignments. Mention your expectations very clearly up front – What to do, When do you need it, What is expected money allocation / max ceiling, what other resources are available, How to do it and mainly ask them to see if there is a better, more efficient way of doing it. These days, with the use of computer and brainy cell, the younger generation or experienced people may have some better ideas of how to get things faster. Try to have an open mind and listen to them. Don't try to shut them off right away. Remember that your interactions on the first assignment with them will make them either to come back to volunteer or turn them off completely. And Word of mouth advertisement spreads – especially the bad opinion faster than the good ones. Need to remember that.
- Try to Be in their shoes – When you deal with your staff and priests, try to look in their point of view as well. Try to listen to what they have to say. The priests and staff are the front-end people who deal with your customers (devotees) on a day-to-day basis. Especially when it comes to priests, as far as devotees are concerned, they are “next to God”. They get that kind of respect from devotees. You don't need to – at that level,



but it is NOT just “employer-employee” view that you need to have while interacting with them. They are the marketing people and they are the customer service people. If they are happy, they will do a good job of customer service with sincerity raising the image level of the temple – in turn making the customers (devotees) happy for them to come back again and again and support the temple efforts. Also try to convey your thoughts with some decent amount of justification to provide your views for them to understand. Without any explanation, if you follow “my way or highway” method, people eventually try to look for the “highway” at a suitable time without any consideration for you or the temple.

- Bottom Line: Try to be a Sincere, kind hearted, understanding and a happy person not with the “totally dominating” attitude. After all, you are in the “religious” business. You and your organization should provide excellent services to the devotees and the community for long term sustainment and growth. Trust in people. Express your expectations. And everything would be better.
- Together, we can achieve anything.

[“Nashville Naga” serves Sri Ganesha Temple, Nashville, Tennessee in different capacities – Board, IT Committee, Community Sewa Committee, etc. He is a co-founder and executive advisor for TTS (Tennessee Tamil Sangam). He also serves several other non-profit organizations at the national level. He is a software professional and is a owner of a small software company. He is passionate about learning deeper in Hinduism – following his father’s foot steps. He writes on various topics in several magazines on motivation, Hinduism, Self-Help and social topics. He travels and gives lectures on awareness and significance of Hinduism in his region and plans to expand. You may send your comments on this to NashvilleNaga@gmail.com . When you write, please try to mention: **HMPC – 2 Tales** in the Subject Line if possible.]

Vedic Temples as Centers of Sacred Knowledge

By Stephen Knapp (Sri Nandanandana dasa)

Vedic temples should be known as centers of sacred spiritual knowledge and practice. Such temples are often known as being places of worship where devotees can go and see images or Deities of the Divine, offer prayers and service, or *pujas* to uplift us or for other various reasons. They are also the places where we can stay in touch with the Vedic tradition and observe the holy days and its customs, and get association with other like-minded people. These are only a few of the important purposes of our temples.

For most of us this is enough, and we are content to continue going to the temples for such reasons. But for some of the younger generations, this may not be enough. Many will continue to respect the traditions found in the temples, at least in their own way, but they may also look at the worship to the Deities as less important, that it may not apply to their own lives so deeply. So, the meaning and the purpose of the temples need to be viewed as more than this. Thus, Vedic temples should also be viewed as centers of sacred spiritual knowledge, or places where we can attain the wisdom of the purpose of life that can be acquired no where else.

If temples are also viewed as centers of deep spiritual knowledge, then it takes on a different role than only a place of worship. The Vedic spiritual knowledge offers the most profound level of insight and understanding on the purpose of our existence and what is our real identity. It provides a rare and unique view of how we fit into this world and what we are meant to do here. This knowledge needs to be preserved and distributed. And temples are the best places to provide that kind of education. But to be viewed as centers of deep spiritual knowledge, such awareness must also be found in the ability, character, and knowledge of the priests and managers within, and they must also provide the means to distribute such knowledge. This can be done in an assortment of ways, but primarily through classes and the distribution of books, not only in the rituals or *pujas* that are performed.

Books on the spiritual Vedic knowledge are very important to hand out and sell to one and all, but examples of this knowledge must also be made available. Thus, classes should also be arranged so everyone with the time and interest can go to gain the additional insights through discussions with others who know the information and how it can be applied in this day and age. This is one thing that has been said amongst Hindus themselves, that most are not educated enough in their own culture. So, this is only a part of the responsibility of our Vedic temples, which can allow them to be viewed as more than merely a place of worship, but a place where the unique Vedic wisdom on life can be attained.

This Dharmic perception is not simply temporary knowledge, but is something that can be used throughout one's whole life, up to and including the time of death. This, combined with the facility of approaching the Divine in the Deity and offering worship, prayers, meditation, etc., makes the temples similar to launching pads wherein we can propel ourselves to higher dimensions, or even get a glimpse of the spiritual atmosphere. It is through this transcendental knowledge and the process to realize it that enables us to begin to understand the importance of the temples and how to see who we really are and our connection with God.

Being viewed as centers of sacred spiritual knowledge adds a level of respect to the institution and what it can provide for us. The younger generation, along with everyone else, needs to feel that the temple is hallowed ground for allowing us to approach and view the Divine in the Deity, but also for the sacred spiritual knowledge that allows us to attain a higher view and understanding of who we are, as well as the importance of the Vedic tradition that we follow and why we follow it. If we do not provide this view, or if the Vedic process is seen only as a vehicle of faith and not a path of personal realization, gradually the whole Vedic system will fade. Its importance will become forgotten and the main reason for going to the temple will slowly become lost with each succeeding generation. Thus, the temple must remain places of worship, but also centers for preserving, upholding and distributing the sacred Vedic spiritual knowledge.

Handing over Temples to the Younger Generations

I have seen many times how the temples we have today are organized and maintained by a management team that is increasing in age, growing older and less able to do all that they once did. So, how

are these temples going to continue? And how is this spiritual Vedic knowledge going to remain available and handed down through the generations? Thus, it is imperative that the younger people realize the importance of not just going to the temple and observing the rites and *pujas*, but also realize how the temples can help them in their preparation for life's ultimate purpose.

This Dharmic information cannot be attained through secular schooling or colleges and universities. This knowledge cannot be attained through all the time spent playing cricket or basketball, or by engaging in whatever social organizations and activities that we often find in schools or society. Naturally, there may be a need to play sports to stay fit, and to develop one's self socially at different times, but for how long does one use such knowledge or ability in life? And how much longer can one use the spiritual knowledge that can be provided from the temples? We all need to realize this difference and the value of the latter.

Younger generations need to see that temples are an important aspect of one's social, cultural, and spiritual development as well. They need to see that without the facility provided by the temples, and without the special knowledge given within the Vedic system and its numerous texts, life remains incomplete. Regardless of whatever else is accomplished in life, the disregard for spiritual development leaves a gap in one's fulfillment of reaching our highest potential.

In this way, viewing the temples as centers of great spiritual knowledge can help young people and everyone recognize the importance of such institutions, and why they also need to become involved in managing them and helping with their continued operation. One problem is that they often do not feel they are respected by their elders. They may be interested, and the elders may want their participation and discussions, up to the point where there is some disagreement in ideas. Then the youth feel the elders no longer want their involvement. So, the younger people go on their way and then lose interest in helping with the temple operation.

Thus, there needs to be some give and take. Naturally, elders often feel the younger generation does not always want to listen to them. Of course, when it comes to traditions, such as the rituals and how they are performed, the principles for worshiping the Deities and things like that, there should be no changes or reduction in the set standards. Things should be done according to the directions given in the Vedic texts and commentaries. Otherwise, there will be a loss in the traditions that are meant to be observed and performed. The younger generations need to understand this, but in the proper manner. And understanding the reasons for such rituals and what they represent through the Vedic spiritual knowledge will help instill the necessary insights for their continued observance and preservation.

This is one of the responsibilities of the priests, to not only know and uphold the proper standards of worship and in doing the rituals, but also to be able to explain the meaning of them in ways in which people, especially the youth, can understand. This can be done in supplying explanations while doing the *pujas*, or with special classes and demonstrations wherein such things are explained, or even in brochures and handouts made by temple management so people can read them for their own learning. Also, all the prayers that are used in the rituals can also be typed and supplied, in Sanskrit, Hindi and English, or whatever languages are best, and made into prayer books, so that people can understand the prayers and mantras that are recited during the *pujas* and relate better to what is going on, or in some cases even sing or chant along with the *puja*. This always helps convey the practicality and purpose of what is being done, which is more important than ever these days. This is another of the ways in which the temple can distribute the unique and sacred spiritual knowledge for which it must be known.

However, when it comes to the operation of the temple, or the outreach programs, the way the temple newsletter or website are designed, the way people are involved in the temple, and how to interest the youth, the ideas of the younger generation can and should be heard. Things change with every generation. There is almost a new language that is used between them, and the way we reach them may also need to change. They can help with that. Plus, if they feel their ideas are at least respected and heard, if they can actually do things in the temple and feel they are a contributing factor in the success of certain things, like a Janmastami holiday celebration or other activities, they will feel like they should be more involved. Their enthusiasm will increase. And they will be more willing to honor the elders of the temple and learn the ways of the Vedic standards. Respect breeds more respect. When the older generation feels respected by the younger ones,

their fondness for the younger generation increases. It also works the other way in that when the youth feel respected by their elders, they also feel more respect for them. Thus, they become more willing to work with the elders and understand why things are done a certain way, albeit a certain latitude for change needs to be exhibited for the youth.

This sort of development needs to be there if we are to see a continuation of the temples we are building. There is no point in building more or bigger temples now if they only become empty later on after another generation or two. Thus, they need to be viewed as places of practical worship for the devotees, places of service, prayer, and meditation, but also as places where we preserve our culture and the Vedic tradition by the sacred knowledge held within, which must be carefully disseminated to one and all.

Why go to the Temple?

I will end this article with something someone sent me through email.

A 'devotee' wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to the temple. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 mantras. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the Gurus are wasting theirs by giving services at all."

This started a real controversy in the 'Letters to the Editor' column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this... They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to the temple for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

When you are DOWN to nothing..... God is UP to something! Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible! Thank God for our physical AND our spiritual nourishment! And thank God that we can still go to our temples, and that we have temples to go to. Let us not waste the opportunity. Let us go to our temples and absorb the Vedic knowledge and wisdom which nourishes our soul and fills the emptiness left from materialistic endeavors.

Jai Sri Krishna.

[Available from: <http://www.stephen-knapp.com>]

अथ स्वस्तिप्रार्थनामन्त्राः ।

हरिः॑ ॐ स्वस्ति॑नऽइन्द्रो॑बृद्धश्च॑वाह स्वस्ति
नः॑पुषा॑त्रि॒श्ववे॑दाह ॥ स्वस्ति॑नस्ता॒क्षर्यो॑ऽअरि॑ष्ट
नेमि॑ह स्वस्ति॑नोबृ॒हस्पति॑र्दधातु ॥ १ ॥ ॐ पयः॑
पृथि॑व्याम्पय॑ऽओष॑धीषु॒पयो॑दि॒व्यन्त॑रि॒क्षेप॑यो॒धाह
॥ पय॑स्वती॒हप्र॑दिशः॑सन्तु॒मह्य॑म् ॥ २ ॥
ॐ वि॒ष्णो॑रुरा॒टम॑सि॒विष्णो॑ह॒श्चप्त्रे॑स्थो॒वि
ष्णो॑ह॒स्यूर॑सि॒विष्णो॑र्ध्रु॒वोऽसि॑ ॥ व्वैष्ण॑वम
सि॒विष्णो॑वेत्त्वा ॥ ३ ॥ ॐ अ॒ग्निर्दे॒वता॑वा॒तोदे॒व
ता॒सू॒र्यो॑दे॒वता॑च॒न्द्रमा॑दे॒वता॑व॒सवो॑दे॒वता॑रु॒द्रादे॒व
ता॑ऽऽदि॒त्यादे॒वता॑म॒रुतो॑दे॒वता॑वि॒श्वेदे॒वादे॒वता॑बृ॒ह
स्पति॑र्दे॒वतेन्द्रो॑दे॒वता॑व॒रुणो॑दे॒वता॑ ॥ ४ ॥

ज्ञानानन्द मयं देवं, निर्मलं स्फटिकाकृतिम् ।
आधारं सर्व विद्यानां, हयग्रीवं उपास्महे ॥

ॐ सहस्रशीर्षं देवं विश्वाक्षं विश्वशंभुवम् । विश्वं नारायणं
 देवमक्षरं परमं पदम् । विश्वतः परमान्नित्यं विश्वं नारायणं हरिम् ।
 विश्वमेवेदं पुरुषस्तद्विश्वमुपजीवति । पतिं विश्वस्यात्मेश्वरं शाश्वतं
 शिवमच्युतम् । नारायणं महाज्ञेयं विश्वात्मानं परायणम् । नारायण-
 परो ज्योतिरात्मा नारायणः परः । नारायणपरं ब्रह्म तत्त्वं नारायणः
 परः । नारायणपरो ध्याता ध्यानं नारायणः परः । यच्च
 किञ्चिज्जगत्सर्वं दृश्यते श्रूयतेऽपि वा ॥ १ ॥

ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

॥ शान्ति-पाठः ॥

ॐ शं च मे मयश्च मे प्रियं च मेऽनुकामश्च मे कामश्च मे
 सौमनसश्च मे भद्रं च मे श्रेयश्च मे वस्यश्च मे यशश्च मे भगश्च मे
 द्रविणं च मे यन्ता च मे घर्ता च मे क्षेमश्च मे धृतिश्च मे विश्वं च मे
 महश्च मे सँविच्च मे ज्ञात्रं च मे सूश्च मे प्रसूश्च मे सीरं च मे ल्यश्च
 म ऋतं च मेऽमृतं च मेऽयक्ष्मं च मेऽनामयच्च मे जीवातुश्च मे
 दीर्घायुत्वं च मेऽनमित्रं च मेऽभयं च मे सुगं च मे शयनं च मे
 सूषा च मे सुदिनं च मे ॥

ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

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