

धर्मसन्देश Dharma Sandesh

a quarterly newsletter of Bharatiya Mandir, Middletown, NY

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

नमस्ते Namaste

ॐ – OM. With the blessings and grace of the Supreme Spirit (परमात्मा), we bring to our dear readers this issue of Bharatiya Mandir's quarterly newsletter "Dharma Sandesh".

Winter has been extremely harsh on us this time. But we have faced it with determination and have survived through it. Spring is almost here in our midst. Vasant Panchami was celebrated this time on February 12 with the Puja for Devi Saraswati, the almighty Goddess of Speech, Learning and Knowledge. It is time for Maha Shivaratri already (March 2), and soon we will all be coming together to celebrate Holi, the festival of colors on March 19 with much joy and enthusiasm.

In the splendid months of Chaitra and Vaishakha (celebrated as Baisakhi), Spring is celebrated with much fervor. Ugadi (युगादि) and Gudi Padwa (गुडि पाडुवा) arrive on April 4 marking the advent of the Lunar New Year. Soon after, we will celebrate the Solar New Year on April 14. We celebrate the birth of our Lord Rama on Sri Rama Navami (April 12) and Sri Hanuman on Sri Hanuman Jayanthi (April 17).

In this issue of Dharma Sandesh, we continue with the article on Dashaavatara, the ten primary Avatars (incarnations) of Lord Vishnu. The descriptions of the first four Avatars (Matsya, Kurma, Varaha and Narasimha) were given in the previous issue. Here, we continue with the Vamana Avatara and Parashurama Avatara. The descriptions of the rest of the incarnations will be presented in the next issue.

Dr. Padma Sundaram continues to write on the "Consorts of Lord MahaVishnu". In this issue, she tells us about Srimati Radha Rani, the most favorite companion of Lord Krishna. In fact, Sri Krishna has

stated that Radha's name must always be taken before His own. Imagine the power of the name Radha!! She is the ह्लादिनी शक्ति (Hlaadini Shakti) – the power of the Lord that brings joy to all. Sri Radha Rani ki jai!!

Dr. Madhu P. Godsay writes about "Hindu Samskaras". He talks about the different rites of passage or sacraments in the Hindu tradition.

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

Sincerely,
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सुभाषिता Subhaashitaa

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

विद्या विवादाय धनं मदाय शक्तिः परेषां परिपीडनाय ।
खलस्य साधोः विपरीतं एतद् ज्ञानाय दानाय च रक्षणाय ॥
vidya-vivaadaaya-dhanam-madaaya-shaktih-
pareshaam-paripidanaaya |
khalasya-saadhoh-viparitam-etad-jnaanaaya-
daanaaya-ca-rakshanaaya ॥

The difference between an evil person and a good person is highlighted as follows: an evil person uses his education for senseless arguments; his wealth makes him increasingly egotistic; he uses his strength and power to torment others. On the other hand, a good person uses his education to impart knowledge to others; he uses his wealth to donate to others and make their lives better; and he uses his strength and

powers to protect the weak. Everyone should try to emulate the good person.

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

साई प्रेरणा Baba's Teachings

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

Sri Sai Baba spoke thus – “Reading and enjoying the stories of the glory of the Lord in some sacred spot like temple, prayer hall, shrine, hermitage of a saint, or in the company of virtuous and good people, is a source of great inspiration and joy. It will make you forget everything else. Taste for such wholesome literature is the result of accumulated merit and endeavor. You can even approach pious men, serve them and listen to their exposition of the glory of God. Listening alone will be enough in the beginning. Later, the stories will arouse interest in the nature and characteristics of God and the aspirants will find and seek for themselves the path to Self-realization.” – *Bhagavatha Vahini, Chapter 1 – The Bhagavatha.*

Contributed by Dr. Vijaya Dasari

ज्ञानविहार JnanaVihara

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

Dashaavataara – Part II दशावतार – २

In the previous issue of Dharma Sandesh, I presented descriptions of the first four (out of ten) Avatars of Lord Vishnu, namely the Matsya, Kurma, Varaha and Narasimha Avatars. I continue with the descriptions of the other Avatars here.

5. Vamana Avatara – in this Avatara, Lord Vishnu incarnated as Vamana (वामन– a dwarf Brahmin) to crush Bali, the Asura king and restore the kingdom of the Heavens (स्वर्ग लोक - Swarga Loka) to Lord Indra, the Lord of the Devas.

Bali was the grandson of Prahlada, whom Lord Vishnu had protected in His Narasimha Avatara. Bali

was basically a good person and a kind and just king. He was also a devotee of Lord Vishnu like his grandfather Prahlada. But Bali waged war with the Devas and usurped the Heavens (Swarga).

The Devas sought refuge in Lord Vishnu and prayed to Him to defeat Bali and get their kingdom back. Lord Vishnu knew that Bali was a good person, but he had committed a sinful act by usurping Swarga. He, therefore, told the Devas that He would get the Devas their kingdom back, but He would not kill or punish Bali.

Lord Vishnu incarnated as a son to the divine couple Kashyapa and Aditi. He is therefore known as Aaditya (आदित्य) – the son of Aditi. In this regard, He became the younger brother of Indra, who is also the son of Aditi. Therefore, Lord Vishnu got the name Upendra (उपेन्द्र) – the younger brother of Indra.



Lord Vishnu grew up soon, but remained a dwarf (Vamana). Sage Kashyapa happily performed the Upanayana (sacred thread ceremony) for his son, who was none other than the Supreme Being Himself.

At that time, Bali was performing the last of one hundred Ashwamedha Yajnas (अश्वमेधयज्ञ). If he completed this last Yajna, then he would become invincible and Indra would lose his position forever.

Vamana proceeded to the area where Bali was performing the Yajna. He stood with the other Brahmins who were waiting in line to receive gifts from King Bali. As was the custom, Brahmins would be given land, cows, wealth, grains and other gifts by the King.

Vamana shone with luster equivalent to a crore suns as He stood with the Brahmins. When His turn came, Bali bowed to Him with respect and washed His feet. He then asked Vamana what He desired. He said, “O Brahmin, shall I give you gold, grains, cows, silks, or anything else? Please let me know and I will do your bidding.”

Vamana said, "O great king, I know that you are kind and generous. But I have no need for any of the things that you are offering me. I just need three paces of earth so that I can perform my Yajna without any hindrances."



King Bali said, "O Brahmin, I shall give you acres of land then. How many do you need?" To that, Vamana said, "O King, I do not need acres. I just need three paces of land where I measure the paces

with my own feet.

All people assembled in the hall began to laugh. Three paces of land measured with the feet of a small boy!! For what purpose are such three paces of land enough? For nothing!!

While other people laughed, Sage Shukracharya realized that something was wrong. With his yogic powers, he realized that Vamana was Lord Vishnu Himself. He went to King Bali and said, "O king, do not grant this Brahmin his request. He is Lord Vishnu Himself and He will take everything away from you."

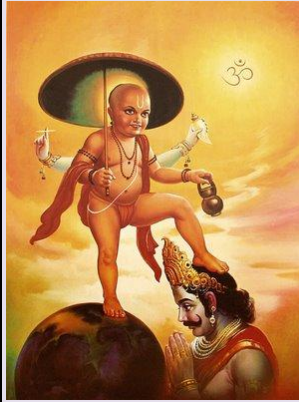
Bali bowed to his preceptor and said, "O Guru, all beings in all the worlds do severe penance in order to please Lord Vishnu and obtain boons from Him. Here that Supreme Being Lord Vishnu has come to accept charitable alms from me. Can there be anything more glorious than this? I will definitely grant Him anything He wants."

Saying this, he agreed to give three paces of land to Vamana. As he picked up his Kamandalu to perform the Sankalpa (सङ्कल्प), Sage Shukracharya, using his magical powers, entered the spout of the Kamandalu in order to stop the water from flowing out. Vamana took a darbha (blade of grass) and pierced the eye of the spout piercing Shukracharya's eye in the process. Crying with pain, Shukracharya came out of the Kamandalu with only one eye intact.

Bali then performed the requisite Sankalpa where he offered Vamana three paces of land as measured by Vamana's feet. Once the Sankalpa was completed, Vamana began to grow. He grew and grew until He covered the entire Universe. He became Trivikrama

(त्रिविक्रम). With one step, He covered the Earth. With another step, He covered the Heavens. At that time, Lord Brahma paid obeisance to Lord Vishnu and washed His feet (पाद्य – Padya). The water that flowed from the Lord's feet became the holy Ganga (गङ्गा).

Trivikrama said to Bali, "O King, you promised me three paces of land as measured by my feet. In two paces, I have covered the Earth and the Heavens. That means that everything that you owned is now mine. You still have not fulfilled your promise. Where shall I keep my third step? O king, you have failed. If you fail in your promise, you will have to suffer Hell"



Bali immediately replied, "O Lord, I am already blessed with your darshan. You have accepted charity from me. How can I ever refuse you? O Lord, do not fret. Please place your third step on my head and help me fulfill my promise."

All the people assembled there were shocked at Bali's statement. But Bali was unfazed. He knelt down before the Lord and folded his hands in prayer. Trivikrama's foot came down upon Bali, but stopped just in time. Lord Vishnu gently placed His foot on Bali's head and sanctified him with His contact.

The Lord appeared in His original form and said to Bali, "O King, I am very pleased with your integrity and steadfast faith. You are MahaBali (महाबलि) – Bali the Great. I have taken away two of the regions from you – the Earth and the Heavens. But you still have the nether regions. Go to Sutala Loka and rule wisely well. Consider this sacrifice as complete by my command. By the merit of these 100 Yajnas, you will earn the position of Indra in another Manvantara (era). Until then, rule in Sutala. I will guard the doors of your fort forever as Janardana. And you can visit Earth once a year." Saying this, the Lord disappeared. MahaBali and his clan went to Sutala and ruled there.

Once a year, on the first day of the month of Karthik (कार्तिक शुद्ध प्रतिपत् – Karthika Suddha Pratipat), MahaBali arrives on Earth to shower his blessings on all who have integrity and good character. Deepavali

(Diwali) is celebrated on that day and people welcome MahaBali and perform Puja for him.

MahaBali is one Asura who sets a perfect example of integrity and good character that people can follow. He did not flinch when he was faced with doom. Even when he was cursed by his Guru Shukracharya for not following his orders, he did not falter from his word. He realized that keeping one's word is extremely important in the long term.

6. Parashurama Avatara – in this Avatara, Lord Vishnu incarnated as Parashurama (परशुराम – Rama with the axe) (परशु = Parashu = axe) to rid the Earth of the evil Kshatriya kings who had begun misusing their powers and strength and were tormenting people on Earth. Although he was born as a Brahmin, Parashurama spent most of his time fighting as a Kshatriya. He is, therefore, known as a Brahma-Kshatriya (ब्रह्मक्षत्रिय).



Parashurama was born as the son of Sage Jamadagni (a Brahmin sage) and Renuka Devi (a Kshatriya princess). He performed severe penance in honor of Lord Shiva and obtained the divine Parashu (axe) from the Lord as a boon.

Hence he is called Parashurama.

At that time, there was a famous king by the name of Kartaveerya-Arjuna (कार्तवीर्यार्जुन) who ruled over Mahishmati (माहिष्मति – modern Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh). Kartaveerya-Arjuna, born in the Haihaya clan, was a great devotee of Lord Dattatreya, and after performing penance, he received a boon from the Lord that he could obtain a thousand arms anytime he needed. So, he was also known as Sahasraarjuna (सहस्रार्जुन – Arjuna with the thousand arms). Kartaveerya-Arjuna became very arrogant and haughty because of his boon.

Once, King Kartaveerya-Arjuna visited Jamadagni's ashrama. The sage welcomed the king with due respect and provided hospitality for the entire army of the King. When Kartaveerya-Arjuna came to know of this, he asked Jamadagni how he could provide such a

royal feast for the vast army. Sage Jamadagni told the king that he was fortunate. The Gods, pleased with Jamadagni's penance, had given the divine cow Kamadhenu (कामधेनु) to him. Kamadhenu could provide anything anyone asked for. Hence he could arrange the elaborate feast.

Kartaveerya-Arjuna asked Sage Jamadagni to give him the divine Kamadhenu. He said that such a divine cow ought to be in the royal palace, not in a hermitage. Sage Jamadagni refused saying that the Gods had given Kamadhenu to him and that she was like his mother and he would not let anyone take her away. Kartaveerya-Arjuna got angry and ordered his soldiers to seize Kamadhenu and take her to the capital city.

Parashurama was not in the hermitage at the time this incident happened. When he returned, Sage Jamadagni told him everything that had occurred. Parashurama was furious. He grabbed his axe and set out for the capital city Mahishmati. There, he attacked Kartaveerya-Arjuna. A long battle ensued. Finally, Parashurama chopped off all the thousand arms of

Kartaveerya-Arjuna and killed him. The king's sons and soldiers ran away in fear. Victorious, Parashurama then brought Kamadhenu back to the ashrama and handed the divine cow to his father.



Kartaveerya-Arjuna's sons were angry that their father had been killed by Parashurama. They swore revenge. One day, when Parashurama had gone out on an errand, they stormed into Sage Jamadagni's ashrama. The sage was in deep meditation at that time. The princes attacked the unarmed sage. Renuka begged them not to hurt her husband, but the princes chopped off Jamadagni's head and left his body in a pool of blood and took the head with them back to their city.

When Parashurama returned to the ashrama, he saw his mother wailing next to his father's lifeless, headless body. When she saw her son, Renuka beat her chest twenty-one times screaming his name. Learning what had happened from the other members in the hermitage, Parashurama became red with fury. He set off for Mahishmati with his axe. He attacked

the guards at the gates and stormed into the palace looking for the sons of Kartaveerya-Arjuna.

Singlehandedly, he destroyed the entire army that came to attack him. He then killed all the princes.

Then he picked up his father's head and returned to the ashrama to perform the last rites for his father.

Parashurama's anger was not appeased. He vowed to his mother, "you beat your chest twenty-one times crying out in pain. I shall, therefore, traverse the earth twenty-one times and kill all the evil Kshatriyas who torment others."

Saying this, he set off with his axe. He traversed the earth twenty-one times and massacred the evil and arrogant kings, especially the Haihaya Kshatriyas and wiped out all the demonic forces from the earth. He, however, did not attack pure and pious kings like King Janaka or King Dasharatha. He focused on eliminating the bad and preserving the good.

After the extensive bloodbath, Parashurama performed the Ashwamedha Yajna (अश्वमेधयज्ञ) to purify himself. He then donated all the land that he had acquired in his endeavors to the Brahmins, primarily Sage Kashyapa, who had assembled at the Yajna. He then decided to perform severe penance. But he could not find any spot on earth where he could do penance. He had donated all the land to the Brahmins and he could not take it back.

So, Parashurama threw his axe into the ocean and requested Varuna, the Lord of the Oceans, to recede until the spot where the axe had fallen, thus giving him some land. The lands of the Konkan (coastal regions of Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra) and Kerala were thus created. Parashurama built his hermitage there and performed severe penance.

Unlike other Avatars, Parashurama did not ascend to Vaikunta at the completion of his duties of the Avatara. In fact, he is a Chiranjeevi (चिरञ्जीवि) – an immortal who lives on earth forever. He is one among the eight Chiranjeevis – Hanuman, Parashurama, Vibhishana, Ashwathama, Vyasa, Kripacharya, Markandeya and MahaBali.

Parashurama appears in the future incarnations of Lord Vishnu. He attacked the wedding convoy of Lord Rama and challenged Him to a fight. At that time, Sri Rama revealed to Parashurama that He was

indeed the next incarnation of the Lord. Realizing that Sri Rama was Lord Vishnu Himself, Parashurama gave away a lot of his powers (the Vishnu-effulgence - विष्णुतेजस्) to Sri Rama.

Parashurama appears in the Mahabharata several times. He was the Guru and mentor of Bhishma, Drona and Karna. In the future, he is also going to be the Guru and mentor of Kalki, the tenth Avatara of Lord Vishnu. He will also advise Kalki to undertake a long and severe penance for Lord Shiva so that he can obtain the celestial weaponry required to annihilate evil and establish Dharma on earth.

Parashurama was a great warrior. He was skilled in all the martial arts. He was an adept archer. He wielded the axe with much ease. At the same time, he was a very wise and knowledgeable person. His devotion to his father, his love for his mother, his generosity in donating all his land to Brahmins, his determination in annihilating the evil Kshatriyas, and his sense of Dharma make him one of the most respectable personalities in our Sanatana Dharma.

to be continued...

Sources: Sri Hari-Vamsha Puranam; Sri Bhagavatha Puranam; and other sources.

Contributed by Dr. Narasim Banavara

Consorts of Lord MahaVishnu – Part 4

SRIMATI RADHARANI - श्रीमति राधारणी

This incarnation of Sri Mahalakshmi is the most difficult to interpret as there are many versions of Radha and Lord Krishna as they grew up as children in Vrindavan. I have done my best to get the information from various sources and put them



together. There are a lot of controversies about this in the literature. At the same time, Radha is the principal incarnation of Sri Mahalakshmi.

Srimathi Radha has been called by many names like Radharani, Radhika. She was the childhood friend and lover of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna and Radha together constitute the "Absolute Truth" according to the Nimbarka Sampradaya.

Birth of Radha – Vindhyachala Hills requested the Lord that he wanted a daughter more beautiful than Lord Shiva’s wife Sri Parvathi. These prayers resulted in Radha incarnating on Earth. The Lord sent Sri Durga to Vindhyachala Hills after she got away from Kansas’s hands. Sri Durga settled in Vindhyachala and a temple was built in Her honor. Now that temple is in Mirzapur in Uttara Pradesh.

Fifteen days later, Radha was born in Vindhyachala. There are several articles about Sri Radha’s birth. One of them is that when MahaVishnu was to incarnate as Sri Krishna, he asked Sri Lakshmi to be born as Radha. Accordingly, she was found by Vrishabhanu when he was plowing the land. He took her and raised her as his own daughter with his wife Kirtida. Another story goes that Radharani was just 15 days old and that was the time when Kamsa had ordered all the newborn babies to be killed. The demoness Putana had come there to kill all the babies. Putana was carrying Radharani and the other gopis, but she became very heavy as Putana was flying over Vrishabhanu’s town. So she had to drop Radha, who was found by Vrishabhanu and was brought up by him.



Radha and Krishna met in Vrindavan when Vrishabhanu took his family to Vrindavan for the Holi festival. They were both happy to be together after the separation. They could share thoughts even if they were apart. Radha was the principal Gopi, and she and Krishna spent a lot of time together as they were growing up.

Radha comes from the word Aradhana, one who can give respect and serve selflessly. Radha has been described as radiant, gentle, sweet, and with ever-fresh youth. She has been called Bhuvana-Mohana-Mohini (भुवनमोहनमोहिनी), meaning the enchantress of the enchanter of the world. She has been described as the perfect devotee of Lord Krishna. She was His friend and advisor. Her importance even exceeds that of Lord Krishna. She is the original Shakti. What Radha and Lord Krishna shared was eternal love. Radha’s love was the highest form of spontaneous

love. She has been called as Madhava Swaroopini (माधवस्वरूपिणी – highest form of Divine love).

Radha and Krishna are one and the same. Without Radha, Sri Krishna is incomplete and vice-versa. It is said that on His left side is Radha sitting blissfully as the Lord is served by thousands of Gopis. Radha is the supreme Goddess who fulfills all the desires of her devotees. Radha and Krishna are undivided from each other. This is the intense unification with God.

In the Vaishnava tradition there are mentioned four sects – Vallabha Sampradaya, Swaminarayana Sampradaya, Gaudiya Sampradaya and Nimbarka Sampradaya. In the Nimbarka Sampradaya, worship of Radha and Krishna is performed for fulfillment of all desires. This was at the same time as Sri Shankaracharya. All of this is explained in the form of poetry in Vedantha Kamadenu Dasha Sloka (verse 6).

Swaminarayana in 1822 A.D. advocated the worship of Radha and Krishna in their Baalarupa (as children). He built a temple of Radha-Krishna in Ahmedabad. The Gaudiya sect was made famous by the poetry of a Bengali saint Srila Rupa Goswami, a student of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534) by his work called Lalita Madhava where he describes the beauty and importance of Radha.

The most famous aspect of all of the childhood Leelas of Radha-Krishna is the Ras Garbha. This is actually during the last days of Krishna in Vrindavan, soon after which he goes to Mathura and where the work of the Lord for which He took this Avatar starts. The separation from her beloved is very difficult for Radha. But she has to let Him go to do the job He came to do. Now the Lord consoles her by saying that she is a part of Him and that there is no Krishna without Radha.

Sources: several.

Contributed by Dr. Padma Sundaram.

Hindu Samskaras (संस्कार)

The simple English translation of the Sanskrit word “Samskara” will be “good impression.” It, however, does not connote the full meaning of the word. The word defies every attempt for its correct translation into English. The closest approach for describing the word would be “Sacrament,” which means “a

religious ceremony or act regarded as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace.” Samskara, however, can be regarded as “Sacrament Plus.” The word is used in a wide sense: education, cultivation, training, refinement, perfection and purity. A person having good Samskaras will have all these attributes. He/she will be a highly cultured individual ready to accept responsibilities and duties in his/her respective role in life.

The Indo-Iranian (Parsees), Indo-European and Semitic traditions have many parallels with Hindu Samskaras. Parsees in India still preserve a few sacraments similar to the Hindu Samskaras, such as at birth, first food for a child or the thread ceremony. Greeks weddings, at one time, were very similar to Hindu wedding ceremonies. Semitic religions perform many sacraments of ancient origins at important occasions in the life of an individual. The Christian sacraments, such as baptism, confirmation and matrimony, evolved from their Semitic origins.

There are sixteen Samskaras in the Hindu tradition, although some scriptures state 12, 16, or even 18 Samskaras. They range from conception to final cremation. The primary 12 Samskaras are:

- Garbhaadhaana - गर्भाधान - conception
- Pumsavana - पुंसवन - rites for begetting a male child
- Seemanthonnayana – सीमन्तोन्नयन - hair-parting (for the mother-to-be)
- Jaata-Karma - जातकर्म - birth ceremonies
- Naamakarana - नामकरण - naming of the child
- Nishkramana – निष्क्रमण - first outing for the child
- Anna Praashana – अन्नप्राशन - first feeding (of solid food) for the child
- Chuda-Karana - चूडाकरण - first hair-cut (for the male child)
- Vidyaarambha – विद्यारम्भ - beginning of learning
- Upanayana - उपनयन - sacred thread ceremony, includes initiation into schooling
- Vivaha - विवाह - wedding
- Antyesti – अन्त्येष्टि - funeral

Currently, very few of these Samskaras are being practiced. Probably today’s material needs are not being met by these mainly spiritual ceremonies. Many mysteries of life are being solved and man’s control

over the environment has increased. In spite of all these changes and the material aspects, certain central mysteries of life and human needs still remain. The understanding of the underlying principles of the Samskaras and their changes suitable for the present age are definitely needed for their continuation.

The prenatal ceremonies, for instance, can be skillfully woven in today’s baby showers. Current medical practices recognize the influence of the pregnant mother’s diet, happy environment and health on the unborn child. In Hindu scriptures and epics, such as the Mahabharata, various references are found to the fact that the conscious fetus is capable of absorbing and retaining the knowledge imparted to the pregnant mother. The story of Arjuna’s son Abhimanyu, who learnt the art of penetrating a type of army arrangement called the Chakravayuha while still in his mother’s womb, illustrates this fact.

Hindu Samskaras, therefore, prescribed the right time for conception to beget babies of desired sex – male or female. People seemed to have a definite purpose of procreating healthy, intelligent children.

The Pumsavana ceremony was the rite for getting a male child. Vedic hymns recited at this occasion mention Puman (son). The ceremony is performed before the fetus begins to move in the womb. This rite is not performed during every pregnancy.

Seemanthonnayana literally means “parting the hair.” The ceremony is partly religious and partly practical. The religious intention of the rite is to bring about prosperity to the mother and long life to the unborn child. From the fifth month onward, it is believed, that the formation of the mind of the child begins. Therefore, the pregnant mother was required to take utmost care to facilitate this process, avoiding any mental or physical shock. This fact was symbolically emphasized by parting the hair, that is, the husband helping the wife in her make-up. The purpose of this was to keep the mother-to-be in good spirits and cheer. The husband was supposed to grant all her wishes, especially food cravings, and entertain her. Various ways are prescribed for the mother and the father to safeguard the unborn child’s health and cultivate the child’s mind.

Life has always been a mystery to man. Hindu Samskaras are just an attempt to fathom and facilitate

the flow of this mystery. Hindus realized that life was an art, and like art, it required cultivation and refinement. Samskaras involved conscious efforts to meet this need. The seers of the past tried to transform the crude animal behavior into refined human behavior. Samskaras helped in the refinement and purification of human life, facilitated the development of personality, imparted sanctity to the human body, blessed all material and physical aspirations of the individual, and finally prepared him to reach his ultimate goal of reaching the Almighty. Om Shantihi Shantihi Shantihi

Sources: Hindu Samskaras by Dr. Raj Bali Pandey; Ashwalayana Grihya Sutras.

Contributed by Dr. Madhu P. Godsay

बालविहार Children's Corner

A Trip Back Home!

by Bhavana Patil



Recently, my family and I went to India. We visited the Golden Temple and the Taj Mahal. Even though it is a Muslim cemetery, I found it very beautiful. We saw the Hindu palaces in Jaipur and learned about India's rich history. We saw the temple in Mathura, our beautiful Lord Krishna's birthplace. Seeing the places these kings lived in taught me lessons I'd never learn on my own. Learning about India's history showed me the world is much bigger and different than our little New York. Nothing in the world is comparable to India.

Finally, we went to visit our family in Bombay. The streets were filled with cars and rikshas all day and night. There were always people selling bhajias on the streets. It was a completely different experience to see all the poor people and animals living on the streets. We kids take everything for granted here and complain when we can't buy our favorite brand of shoes when there are much bigger problems people face in the world.

What moved me the most was definitely the way the kids live. All the kids were so involved in their studies. Truly, the amount of time kids put into their studies makes us Americans look like fools.

Everyone wants to achieve well, like us. But unlike us, they put much more effort into reaching their goals. I always thought I studied too much for my age, but I've made it a goal to study more sincerely in the future. Visiting India has made me think more about my heritage and people and has changed me as a person.

Some Upcoming Special Mandir Events

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|---------------------|------------------|
| Maha Shivaratri | Wednesday, Mar 2 |
| Holika Dahan | Saturday, Mar 19 |
| Dhuleti | Sunday, Mar 20 |
| Ugadi / Gudi Padwa | Monday, Apr 4 |
| Mata Ki Chowki | Sunday, Apr 10 |
| Sri Rama Navami | Tuesday, Apr 12 |
| Tamil New Year | Thursday, Apr 14 |
| Sri Hanuman Jayanti | Sunday, Apr 17 |
| Temple Anniversary | Sunday, May 1 |

Dr. Inderjit Kumar and Mrs. Yash Kumar of Middletown, NY have generously sponsored the printing of copies of this issue of Dharma Sandesh. Devotees may note that all the writing of the content and the editing of the newsletter are strictly voluntary.

Temple Anniversary

The 12th Anniversary of Bharatiya Mandir will be celebrated on Sunday, May 1, 2011. On this occasion, children and youth of our community are invited to make history: recite mantras, act out an episode from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Lord Sri Krishna's Leela, classical or semi-classical dance (appropriate for Temple). Capture the moment and be a part of the celebration. We only have 30 minutes in which you may present a 5-7 minute performance. Parents are requested to encourage their child/ren and help them prepare. Selection will be on a first-come-first-serve basis. This is an opportunity for children to experience their culture and spirituality.

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

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