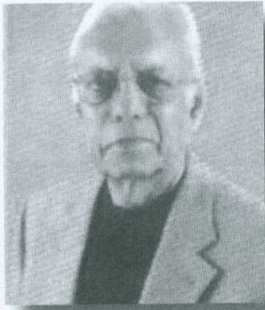


THE FUTURE HINDU TEMPLES OF NORTH AMERICA

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Hindu temples in the US - majority of them built in the last few decades - are undergoing changes to meet and accommodate the changing needs of the society and the devotees. A few suggestions are submitted here for general consideration and discussion.

- **Account Keeping:** Hindu temples often are found to be rather lax about account keeping; in the long run this may become a big liability in many different ways.

- **General Hygiene of the Temple:** Many of the Hindu temples need to pay attention to the general upkeep and hygiene. Special attention is needed for maintaining proper care of the rest rooms, which are often neglected.

- **Sitting Arrangements:** Hindu temples now have generally mixed arrangements for sitting on chairs and on the floor. The floor seating may be better organized to reduce over-crowding. On special occasions, often devotees sit even in the gangway. In the USA it is a rule to write the maximum number of occupants allowed in any room. This rule should be properly enforced to avoid fire hazard and other problems. Some Buddhist temples arrange individual seating arrangements on the floor also; this method may be adopted in future.

- **Language:** Temple activities are generally conducted at present in mixed languages. English and Hindi or other vernacular languages are used in a mixed manner. Hindu temples may seriously consider the use of English more and more so that all devotees may understand the proceedings. Hindu temples are often visited by mixed crowds of different Indian languages. Youth and children, who are

not well versed in Indian languages, often feel lost when the announcements are made in Indian languages. Ignoring the basic needs of the youth and children may feel alienated and avoid attending the temple altogether. Sometimes the language issue is unnecessarily made a sentimental topic. Children especially are pushed to learn the vernacular languages by emotional pressure. We may look at the problem by long foresight and be more practical. It is hard to imagine that Hindu children, after one hundred years from now, will understand many vernacular Indian languages despite all our efforts!

- **Bal-vihars:** Many Hindu temples now conduct Bal-vihars for children. This imparts basic knowledge of Hindu religion and culture to the children. The classes may especially concentrate on coaching sadachar (good conduct); they may be taught how they should behave with elders respectfully, with members of their family at home, and with others outside, instead of focusing only on complicated things like chanting shlokas and mantras. Sadachar has been the golden tradition of Hindu culture; it needs to be preserved.

- **Rituals:** Many people are in favor of discouraging what is termed as 'empty rituals', that is, rituals without understanding the meaning and not making use of the same in practical life. The rituals may be performed in more simplified manner: The ritual steps are made available to the devotees on printed pamphlets. The Sanskrit shlokas are printed both in original Sanskrit and Roman scripts. Meaning of the shlokas is usually also printed in English. As the priest chants the shlokas, he explains the meaning of each line. The importance

Editor's note: HMEC has published several books and manuals on performing various Hindu rituals with appropriate explanation. For complete list of HMEC and VHPA publications, please visit the web page at: www.myHMEC.org or www.vhp-america.org

of the shlokas in everyday life is emphasized by the priest, thus making the ritual of practical importance.

- Havan: This worship ceremony seems to be getting more popular in the USA. However, there is a need to modify it so that there is minimal smoke and fire as per the laws. Installation of an exhaust fan above the havan kund may alleviate the smoke problem and protect, especially those suffer from heart or lung problems. Often there is a lot of wastage of milk (e.g. Shiv-ratri festival), ghee, and other precious materials in ritualistic ceremonies. Symbolic mini-offerings may be substituted instead, and other useful articles may be collected in the form of canned foods etc. to be later distributed to some nearby homeless or poor centers.

- Social Service: Hindu temples may gear to take projects like Support Groups in different categories like youth, adults, women in distress, seniors, sick persons etc. The temples may also be involved in charitable projects both for deserving local Hindu community as well as for other communities in the neighborhood. This may create enormous goodwill. Doing a good deed is the proper way to deal with any negative feelings, thus creating a positive good relationship with other communities. Hindus have always believed in the philosophy of world as one divine family vasudhaiva kutumbakam.

- Priest/Swami: There is a need to keep an eye on the general behavior of the priest/swami in Hindu temples. They too are human beings and, therefore,

are vulnerable to make mistakes. Recent sex scandals of the Catholic churches may make us more vigilant that similar problems do not occur in Hindu temples. Unfortunately some cases have already happened in the USA as well as in other countries including India. Remaining in a denial mode is not a correct solution. The penalties are high, both for the person who commits the sexual offences and for the institutes and temples where these offenses take place, especially when minors are involved.

There is already a chronic shortage of Hindu priests in the USA. As such there is a need for lay persons who can offer a helping hand as priests. A short manual, which contains procedures for different ceremonies with mantras written in Sanskrit with English translation, may be prepared under the auspices of the HMEC so that more persons could use the manual. A brief course also may be offered to house-holders, who may conduct these ceremonies when necessary, on voluntary basis. Donations, however, should be given only to the temple, rather than to the individual volunteers, whenever such voluntary services are offered.

- Youth Involvement: There is a need to involve the youth in the temple activities. Often they shy away, especially when they are not encouraged. Their participation is essential; they are our leaders of tomorrow. In many Hindu temples, very aged senior persons hold the important posts, almost indefinitely. Certain executive committee posts may be earmarked for the youth, and

they may be given a free hand to fulfill their responsibility; we may trust them, and stand by them through thick and thin. The final responsibility lies with the seniors. The suggestions put forward by the young may be taken with utmost seriousness and implemented as far as possible; this is the only way the youth will involve themselves.

- Arrangement of Removed Shoes: Arrangement of removed shoes in Hindu temples has been often an eye sore. It is highly advisable to designate an appropriate area in the temple for taking off/on and storing the shoes. A few chairs should be available for the devotees so that they may remove or put on their shoes comfortably while sitting. Also, hand washing facility should be nearby. After removing the shoes, one should not have to walk on cold, wet, rough or uneven surface. It may not be known to many temple organizers that the diabetic patients are forbidden to walk bare foot even in home lest they may hurt their feet and then run into some serious complications.

- Sharing of Authority and Responsibility: Hindu temple is essentially a religious place. In a religious place of temple, it is rather unbecoming to resort to quarrels and arguments; we may always handle the temple matters gently by sharing all the authority and responsibility. Some organizational arrangement often invites politics. The senior office bearers who have spiritual attitude may defuse the confrontations and arguments effectively.

(Continued on page 23)

their objects of attraction.

6. **Dharana:** the first step toward meditation; fixing the mind to the object of concentration.

7. **Dhyana:** through the practice of Dharana, when one is able to hold the mind for 144 seconds on the object of meditation at the first stage.

8. **Samadhi:** the meditation lasting for more than 30 minutes turns into Samadhi when the object of meditation alone shines

In Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga, asana is limb number three. Asanas help to improve overall physical health and wellbeing, flexibility in the body, balance, strength, self-awareness, flow of energy and water, digestion, relaxation, and expands the consciousness. However, the foundation of yoga is the yamas and niyamas—the way we live our lives, or our “yoga off the mat” (our action, behavior, thoughts and self-discipline. Beyond asana there is so much more which ultimately leads us to Samadhi, which may lead us to true union with the divine, the ultimate Yoga—Liberation/Moksha.

The eight steps are equally important because they pave a logical pathway which leads to the attainment of physical, ethical, emotional, and spiritual health and also the purpose of life, Eternal Love, Peace and Anandam – Ultimate Union with Self, “Self-Realization.”

The goal of yoga is not only for physical fitness but to attain oneness of body, mind and soul. It helps one to actualize good health, calmness of mind, EQUANIMITY, everlasting peace, bliss/Anandam and self-enlightenment. Yoga helps bring about the ultimate union of the individual consciousness (soul) with the Supreme Consciousness (Sat Chit Ananda) by Self-Realization and liberation (Moksha) from worldly suffering,

The benefits of Yoga are unlimited. We can experience them immediately and in long-term at a physical level and also in every aspect of our lives. We experience positive changes in our lives that include improved health, greater self-awareness, mental clarity and self-confidence. Yoga is the means to connect us within. This connection raises our consciousness, changes our attitude, transforms our personality, redirects our way of thinking, and reframes our speaking and eating habits. These enriched energies within make us feel healthier, happier and in peace. Our heart is filled with love and compassion (Joy/Anandam/ Bliss). Our connectedness to nature, family, community and the world is imbued with our new found/renewed bliss. We enjoy our life to the fullest and share it openly with others.

Note: The article is written based upon recently release book “Yoga Beyond Asana... the Complete Guide for Blissful Life” by Satya Kalra.

<http://www.pathtoanandam.org/yoga-beyond-asana.php>.

The Future Hindu Temples of North America

(Continued from page 19)

- **Inter-racial Marriages:** By recent estimate, as many as one third of marriages in the USA Hindu community are likely to be inter-racial or inter-religious. This ratio may increase even further in the future. It is, therefore, important to gear our temples to welcome the non-Hindu spouses by exhibiting positive and accommodating attitude. Making proper arrangements to make them comfortable in sitting and conducting (or explaining) the proceedings in English will help.

- **Tirtha-yatra USA:** Earlier (Mandir Vani-Sept 2009), I had submitted a proposal to organize Tirtha-yatra USA.

There are now over 800 Hindu temples in the USA and Canada—some of them very grand and full of spiritual vibrations. For Hindus, visiting temples, especially in the later period of life, is considered very auspicious and essential for moksha or salvation.

There is a big potential, if some good travel companies would involve themselves for the benefit of the community.