



Ālaya Vānī

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*"Seek the company of
the good and the
wise. It protects
you and promotes
your spiritual
career."*

-Rāmakrishna

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**Message from the Secretary
The Council of Hindu Temples of North America**

Dear Friends,

Namaste & Greetings.

The annual meeting of the Council of Hindu Temples of North America (CHTNA) was held at the Hindu Temple of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA in April 2014. Total of 21 Temples from different parts of the country participated in the meeting.

Meeting was productive and provided a forum for discussions on various subjects pertinent to Temples. These included discussions on religious visas, Temple management, endowment funds, youth involvement, etc. There were discussions about Temple safety/security and representatives of the Temples present shared their practices.

It cannot be emphasized enough that all the Temples must join hands and become members of the Council. This is not only to participate in the meetings but also to share and learn from each other's experiences. CHTNA is a national body representing all the Temples

There were 24 entries for the Essay Competition of 2013-2014. (Middle school - 11, High school - 12 & College - 1) All the Temples must encourage their young devotees to participate in the Essay Competition. Cash prizes were given for the first and second place winners at all the levels.

Dr. Uma Mysorekar

President, *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam*,
Flushing, NY

**MEMBERSHIP APPEAL
TO ALL THE TEMPLES**



PLEASE JOIN AND BE A PART OF THE COUNCIL OF HINDU TEMPLES OF NORTH AMERICA BY BECOMING A MEMBER AND MAKING THE COUNCIL A STRONG BODY REPRESENTING ALL THE TEMPLES. THE COUNCIL CAN HAVE A POWERFUL VOICE IN DEALING WITH ISSUES SUCH AS RELIGIOUS WORKERS VISAS, ETC - COMMON CONCERN OF ALL TEMPLES.

For Further Information regarding membership form and dues, Please call the Secretariat of The Council - Dr. Uma Mysorekar
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**Summary of the Annual meeting of the Council of
Hindu Temples of North America (CHTNA) held on
April 19th, 2014 at Hindu Temple of Atlanta, Riverdale, GA**

- Participated by 21 Temples.
- Membership drive discussed in detail - Emphasized that all the member Temples should reach out to their neighboring Temples. It was emphasized that criteria for membership should include obtaining a copy of 501 C3 incorporated as Religious Corporation.
 - A new category of membership - 'Associate Membership' for individuals was introduced. Criteria to be fulfilled are 1) must be a Hindu. 2) must have served on any functioning committees at the Temple, he/she is associated with. 3) must have attended at least one CHTNA meeting. 4) Must pay annual dues of \$101.
- CHTNA to support 'Autuer Productions' towards the production of DVD on '*The Asian and Abrahamic Religions: A divine encounter in America*'. This DVD to be distributed among all the member Temples to promote publicity and spread the word among the local schools in their respective cities.
- Detailed discussion of Temple Management including dakshina policies for priests, criteria for hiring cleaning crew members, etc. Some of the Temples have a system of pooling all the dakshina to be distributed to all the priests equally at the end of the month and other temples have policies allowing their priests to take their own dakshina.
 - There were discussions about medical insurance including Obamacare for employees. A brief summary of Obamacare was distributed among the member Temples present. There were discussions about inventory control and other related matters.
 - Safety Security arrangements for Temples - it was recommended that the Temple management should make sure that all CCTV cameras are working well and must have good relationship with respective local precincts so that the police can patrol around the Temples especially on festival days. Temples must also maintain good relationships with local community boards and elected officials.
- There were discussions about the benefit of the Council. It was reiterated that all the temples coming together increases the strength of the Council and thus be an effective representative of all the Temples.
- One of the youth trustees of the host Temple (Atlanta Temple), also an active youth member emphasized the importance of involving youth in all the Temple activities. In his opinion youth can get involved by volunteering during major festivals, *seva* activities, etc.
- Work assignments for 2014 - 2015 were discussed and distributed to member Temples present.



**Council Meeting 2014
at The Hindu Temple of Atlanta, Riverdale GA**



**WINNERS & PARTICIPANTS of the
ESSAY COMPETITION
2013-2014 conducted by
The Council of Hindu Temples
of North America**



The top two winners in each category were :

College -

•Tejas S. Aralere

High School -

•Keertana Srinivasan
•Alekhya Gunturi

Middle School -

•Saichandra Katragadda
•Meghna A. Iyengar

The participants in each category were:

Middle School -

Anish Das
Saptarshi Dutta
Meghana Subrahmanya
Arnav Gupta
Divya M. Sarma
Meghna A. Iyengar
Anish Navada
Anwitha Sherigar
Sachin Ganesh
Saichandra Katragadda
Shivani Singh

High School -

Varun Ravichandran
Vigneshveran Anbalagan
Sumanth Subrahmanya
Ankur Singh
Sweta Narayan
Alekhya Gunturi
Jasmine Bar
Saurabh Sudesh
Keertana Srinivasan
Samhita Rao
Saimouli Katragadda
Swati Narayan

College -
Tejas S. Aralere

**The Council members congratulate all the
participants and winners for their interest and dedication.**



**ANNUAL COUNCIL
MEETING OF 2015**

will be held in April/May 2015

LOCATION TO BE ANNOUNCED

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING MEETING CONTACT
SECRETARIAT - DR. UMA MYSOREKAR
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ŚRI MAHĀ LAKSHMI MAHĀ YAJNAM

Friday, May 23rd thru Monday, May 26th, 2014

Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthānam, Flushing, NY

ŚRI MAHĀ LAKSHMI

The Divine Mother or *Ādi Parāśakti*, in Her manifestation as the bestower of wealth and prosperity, is known as *Śri Lakshmi*. Among many other meanings, the word *Lakshmi* stands for good fortune, success, wealth & riches, beauty, grace, charm, etc.

In order that She may be able to confer all the above blessings on Her devotees, the Divine Mother Herself must have an infinite reservoir of these. The Divine Mother manifests these qualities in the form of eight powers or *Ashta Lakshmis* (eight *Lakshmis*).

The first is known as *Śri Mahā Lakshmi*, the beloved Consort of Lord *Nārāyana*. *Śri Mahā Lakshmi* is usually depicted as seated in *yogāsana* or *padmāsana* on a red lotus. She has the complexion of the full moon and wears a mellow smile (*mandasmita*) in Her countenance. She is endowed with four hands bestowing boons (*vara*) and refuge (*abhaya*) with two hands and holding divine lotuses in the other two.

The petals of the lotus in which *Śri Mahā Lakshmi* is seated is the source of the seven other powers She manifests when She confers blessings on Her devotees. These seven powers are personified as: *Veera Lakshmi* (for bravery); *Dhana Lakshmi* (for wealth); *Santāna Lakshmi* (for progeny); *Jaya Lakshmi* (for victory); *Dhānya Lakshmi* (for grains or food); *Dhairya Lakshmi* (for courage); and *Rājya Lakshmi* (for kingdom or land).

An accidental glance from Her eyes is enough to shower on a devotee all prosperity like: knowledge, wealth, health, progeny, cattle, land, grains, fame, nobility, success and longevity, etc. This attribute of *Śri Lakshmi* is vividly illustrated in the touching story behind *Ādi Śankara's* hymn *Kanaka Dhāra Stotram* in praise of *Śri Mahā Lakshmi*. Moved and inspired by the love with which a poor housewife fed *Śankara* with the only fruit she had in her house, *Śankara* composed this hymn appealing to *Śri Mahā Lakshmi* to dispel poverty from that household. Immediately, *Śri Mahā Lakshmi* literally showered that poverty-stricken household with golden fruits thereby removing misery from their lives. Devotion to the Divine Mother is the ultimate treasure one can have and accordingly one's pure bhakti or devotion to Her is the greatest *Lakshmi* one can have.

*Om śreem hreem śreem kamale kamalālaye praseeda praseeda
śreem hreem śreem mahālakshmyai nama: ||*

The character that I like in Ramayana and values that I learn from that character

by: Saichandra Katragadda

In Ramayana, Hanuman inspired me in various ways. Hanuman is one of the most celebrated and worshipped figures in Indian religion. Hanuman has the ability to accomplish even the most difficult tasks, and protection from ghosts and evil spirits. Hanuman's tale is told in the epic Ramayana is renowned for its ability to inspire its readers to face ordeals and conquer obstructions in their own lives. At the time of the Ramayana, Hanuman is sent as an advance spy to Lanka, the capital of the mighty demon Ravana's empire. Ravana has provoked Lord Rama by carrying away his beloved wife Sita in order to start a war. During the epic times that follow, Hanuman brings hope and secret messages to the captive Sita, leads Rama's monkey army in the Battle of Lanka and single-handedly kills many demons including Lankini, Champion of the demons.

During the time Hanuman is captured by the enemy, only to outwit them with the cunning use of his powers. He returns to find Lord Rama and his brother Lakshmana themselves captured by the enemy and about to be sacrificed to the goddess Kali by the sorcerer Mahiravana. In a tale of great daring, Hanuman outsmarts the evil lord into becoming the sacrifice himself, thereby earning the eternal respect of Kali. She appoints Hanuman as her doorkeeper and today many of her temples are seen to have a monkey guarding their doorways. After the defeat of Ravana, Rama and Sita are crowned King and Queen of Ayodhya. Hanuman is offered a reward for his bravery and asks only to continue in service to him and to live for as long as men speak of Rama's deeds. He remains as Rama's favorite general to this day. I learned that "There is no success without working hard."

Hanuman inspired me in being confident because of his bravery, perseverance, strength and devoted service, Hanuman is regarded as a perfect symbol of selflessness and loyalty. Worship of Hanuman helps the individual to counter the bad karma borne out of selfish action, and grants the believer fortitude and strength in his or her own trials during the journey of life. Hanuman is also invoked in fights against sorcery and protective amulets depicting him are extremely popular among his devotees.

During a horrific battle in Southern India, Rama's brother, Lakshmana, is gravely wounded. His only chance for survival is to be treated with a very specific and rare herb that is found at the top of the Himalayas. Rama is distraught and has little hope that someone could make it to the Himalayas, find the herb and return back in time to save Lakshmana. This impossible task falls upon Hanuman; son of the wind, powerful and intelligent monkey god, emblematic of devotion. Taking a mighty "leap of faith" across the ocean from the south of India to the Himalayas, Hanuman finds him unsure of the exact location of the herb. He is innately guided to get "bigger around his situation" rather than "getting lost in finding the exact herb" and picks up the entire mountain range and carries it over his head while he leaps back to the battlefield. The healing herb is quickly located by experts and Lakshmana is saved. Later in the Ramayana, Hanuman makes another great leap from India to Sri Lanka to reunite Rama and his beloved Sita. Based on this I learned to be powerful and intelligent.

As he grew up, Hanuman sought to educate himself and for this purpose he chose Surya the sun god as his guru saying: "You see everything there is to see in the universe and you know everything there is to know. Please accept me as your pupil." Surya hesitated. "I don't have the time," he said. "During the day I ride across the sky, and at night I am too tired to do anything." Based on Hanuman education I learned that Hanuman struggled with himself, too. I saw it -- I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself.

"Then teach me as you ride across the sky during the day. I will fly in front of your chariot, facing you from dawn to dusk." I am impressed by Hanuman's zeal and determination, Surya accepted him as his pupil. Thus Hanuman flew before the chariot of the sun god, withstanding the awesome glare, until he became well versed in the four books of knowledge (the Vedas), the six systems of philosophies (darshanas), the sixty-four arts or kalas and the one hundred and eight occult mysteries of the Tantras.

When Riksha died, in accordance with the law of the jungle, the monkeys fought each other for becoming the leader. Vali successfully killed or maimed every other contender to the throne and became the undisputed ruler of the monkey world. As one who had successfully earned his dominant place among the apes, Vali was not obliged to share the spoils of power with anyone, but being of a magnanimous nature he shared everything with his younger brother Sugriva. It was in these circumstances that Hanuman entered the companionship of Sugriva who later became the king of monkeys himself. It was under Sugriva that the massive army of monkeys helped Lord Rama reclaim his wife who had been abducted by the demon Ravana.

In the story of Ramayana in the lecture about Ramachandra we described the symbolism of Lord Rama, who is an incarnation or avatar of the god Vishnu. Ramachandra, represented with blue skin like Krishna, is depicted with his bow and arrow and is the chief hero or character of the Ramayana. In his story, his wife is abducted by a great demon named Ravana. Rama is only able to free his wife Sita from the demon because of the aid of Hanuman. It is Hanuman who makes it possible for Sita to be rescued, and for Rama and Sita to be reunited. So the role of Hanuman in the Ramayana is important. In the minds of many Southeast Asians, the service and devotion of Hanuman make him the most important character of the Ramayana. For many, he is the most revered deity, even though he is, we could say, at a lower level or a servant of Rama. Yet many see Hanuman as greater because he is a faithful servant, and thereby a great hero.

I learned a lot of things from Hanuman. My family performs Kumkum archana at the feet of Sri Anjaneya for good health and prosperity every year. We worship Hanuman by offering betel leaves, garlands of flowers. Hanuman exemplifies the ultimate devotion and respect. When we embody his spirit in our own lives, we perform pure karma. Without a doubt, worship of Hanuman inspires devotion, the purest conviction, and the highest motivation in every devotee's path to Self-Realization. I will use this mantra for my education: Om shree vajradehaya ramabhakthaya vayuputhraya namosthute.