



Ālaya Vāni

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*"The purer the
mind, the easier
it is to control.
Purity of the mind
must be insisted
upon, if you want to
control it".
- Swami Vivekananda*

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

Dear Friends,

Namaste & Greetings.

Best wishes to you and your families for the new year 2016. The annual meeting of the Council of Hindu temples of North America (CHTNA) for 2016 will be held at Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam (Ganesha Temple), Flushing, NY on Sunday, July 31st, 2016. On behalf of CHTNA, I take this opportunity to invite all of you to participate in the meeting and voice your concerns in the interest of all the Temples in US.

Highlight of this year's meeting is a day long "Next Gen Leadership Conference" on Saturday, July 30th. Details will be sent out soon. We request all the Temples to encourage their respective young (next gen) representatives to participate in the conference.

As the meeting this year is postponed to July, the deadline for submission of essays for the essay competition is extended to end of April 2016. We request all the Temples to spread this extension deadline so that more youngsters can participate.

May the blessings of God Almighty be with all of us and our families. Looking forward to meeting all of you in New York.

Sincerely,
Dr. Uma Mysorekar
President, Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam,
Flushing, NY

**ANNUAL COUNCIL
MEETING OF 2016**

will be held on Sunday, July 31st, 2016

THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF NA
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"Next Gen Leadership Conference"

Saturday, July 30th, 2016
at

THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF NA
Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam
45-57 Bowne St. Flushing, NY 11355

**All the Temples are requested
to encourage their respective young
(next gen) representatives to participate
in this unique conference!**

**For Further information please
contact (718) 460-8484 or
visit online at : <http://www.chna.org>**

**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.

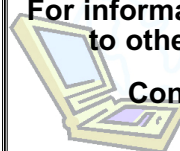
For Further Information regarding membership form and dues, Please call
The Secretariat of The Council
Dr. Uma Mysorekar
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Please visit the new Council website at

<http://www.chna.org>

For information as well as links and resources to other Temples in the United States.

Contact the Council by email at:
info@chna.org





WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RITUALS IN HINDUISM

by: Nishanth Araveti

"*Om Yopaam pushpam veda*". The sound of the priests chanting resonates in the air of the temple. As I look around I see a representation of India's traditions and rich culture. A devout lady behind me pours *Ganga Jal* upon a pure white *linga* of immaculate beauty. At the same time the man next to her is performing the *sashtanga namaskar* to Lord *Shiva*. All around, I see age-old customs that we sometimes take for granted. There are many different reasons why rituals are performed in Hindu culture and religion. Yet, the three main reasons are:

- To offer thanks to our creator [s].
- To become closer to and love *Bhagawan*.
- To purify oneself.

In reality, the word ritual is not the correct word ; rather, we must say "service". This is because the word "ritual" implies a mechanical and dispassionate daily occurrence. Therefore, rituals in Hinduism should be called "service". In essence, we are performing service to ourselves and *Bhagawan*. We display gratitude to the lord by giving oblations and performing certain customs/rituals. One of the most notable examples is *Naivedyam* or *Prasadam*. When we give *Naivedyam* we do so to give it to god. According to the following *sloka*:

*Naivedyam puradhonyasyam saksusha parikruhyate
rasanbhaktasya jihvake asnami kamalodhbhava
yathadakni muke punkte tatabimbhameke harih*

"When the *naivedyam* is placed before the *Vigraha*, God accepts through His eyes. He tastes the food from the tongues of *Bhaktas*. God takes the offered food, the *naivedyam*, like the acceptance of *Havya* through *Agni*". Thus, we are feeding the great lord food that we have prepared to give him thanks. We even express this principle when we are chanting prayers. This tells god that we are honoring him through the chanting of his name and praises. The *Yagas* and *Homams* we conduct also follow this fundamental precept. Case in point, we offer *ghee* and other objects to God through the divine conveyor, *Agni*; we perform service to god by thanking him for our creation.

Another of the main reasons we conduct these rites is to serve ourselves. For instance, the *Surya Namaskar* we perform is to offer devotion, thanks, and prayer to the sun god, *Surya*, to in return fumigate and energize ourselves through direct contact with the sun god and his blessings in the form of rays of light. In essence, we assist ourselves through purifying and preparing one for the rest of the day. The chanting of the divine sound "*Aum*"/"*Om*" also clarifies us through repeated contact with the divine sound. The breaking of the coconut and offering it to represents the breaking of the ego and the cleansing of the mind by *Bhagawan*. We can say that we perform many customs and procedures to purge our shortcomings and be edulcorated.

The last reason and maybe even the most important yet least considered one is that we perform these customs to become closer to that Supreme Being in charge of the universe and to love Him for he is our creator. When we conduct *Naamsaptahs* and sing *bhajans* of the great lord we are becoming close to him through spiritual contact with the Supreme One and we begin to start loving the Eternal Being. We see him before our spiritual eyes and understand his love and compassion to every soul and we eventually end up returning that divine and beautiful love. In the process it is inevitable that we realize ourselves through the presence of God and his eternally undying compassion for us. For when we return that we begin to discover who we really are, when we understand God, we understand ourselves. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord *Krishna* said "I am seated in everyone's heart" meaning that we all contain Him. Hence, we begin to love *Bhagawan* and ourselves while performing the customs stated in the ancient texts that we under take upon ourselves to conduct.

I am awakened from my deep musings about customs and the reasons behind them by the final words of the *Vedic mantra* "*OM Shanti Shanti Shanti*". I look around one final time before getting up. As I do so, I see a lady giving a bowl of *Prasadam* to the priest to hand it to lord *Ganesha*. Then she sits down in front of the *Vigraha*. A woman whispers to her friend "Why is she doing that?" "Well, now I know.

2015 Essay Competition Entry - Middle School
Prize Winning Essay

RĀMĀYANA – THE STORY OF ŚRI RĀMA



Rāmāyana, an *Itihāsa* (thus it was) written by sage *Vālmiki*, is the inspiring life story of Lord *Rāma* (Lord *Vishnu*'s seventh avatar), the personification of *Dharma* (righteousness). Thousands of years ago, in the *Treta Yuga*, the king of *Ayodya* *Daśaratha*'s queens *Kousalya*, *Sumitra* and *Kaikeyi* shared the *prasād* from a *putra kāmēshti yajna*, and gave birth to Lord *Rāma*, the twins *Lakshmana* and *Satrugna*, and *Bharata* respectively. The princes excelled in scriptures and warfare. At sage *Viśvāmitra*'s request, the young Lord *Rāma* and *Lakshmana* bravely killed *Tātaka* and other fierce demons who were disrupting his *yajna*. In *Mithila*, Lord *Rāma* easily strung and broke the heavy *Śiva Dhanus* (Lord *Śiva*'s bow) and won *Sita*'s hand.

The entire kingdom rejoiced when *Daśaratha* selected Lord *Rāma* to be the *yuvarāja* (next king), except *Manthara*, a cunning old maid of *Kaikeyi*. She instigated *Kaikeyi* to demand that *Daśaratha* fulfill two previously unspecified boons promised to her: 1) *Bharatha* be the *yuvarāja*, and, 2) Lord *Rāma* be banished for fourteen years. *Daśaratha* and everyone else were heart-broken by her cruelty. To honor his father's promise, Lord *Rāma*, along with *Sita* and *Lakshmana* left *Ayodya*. *Bharata*, who was away, came back and was enraged by his mother's treachery which also indirectly caused *Daśaratha*'s demise. *Bharata* pleaded with Lord *Rāma* to become the king, but He firmly declined. So *Bharata* brought back Lord *Rāma*'s *pādukas* (sandals) to represent Him; and he governed as a custodian.

At the end of the 13th year, *Śurpanaka*, the *rākṣasa* (demon) king *Rāvana*'s sister passionately approached Lord *Rāma* and then *Lakshmana*, but was flippantly rejected. Angrily, she attacked *Sita*, but *Lakshmana* cut off her nose and ear. Vengefully, she enticed *Rāvana* to abduct the beautiful *Sita* for himself. *Mārica*, *Tātaka*'s son, was forced to become a golden deer and lure Lord *Rāma* and later *Lakshmana* by imitating Lord *Rāma* in distress. *Rāvana* in the guise of a *sādhu* asked *Sita* for food convincing her to come outside the invisible fire wall drawn by *Lakshmana*, and kidnapped her. *Jatāyu*, an eagle who was fatally wounded by *Rāvana* in his struggle to rescue *Sita* identified *Rāvana* as the kidnapper, and *Kabandha*, whom

Lord *Rāma* released from a curse, asked them to go to *Sugriva* of the *vānara* (monkey) clan for help.

Incorrectly assuming that his older brother *Vāli* was killed, *Sugriva* was crowned the king of *Kishkinda*. *Vāli* returned, and angrily chased him away, taking all that he owned. *Sugriva* was in exile. *Hanumān*, *Sugriva*'s chief of aides, cautiously enquired and was overjoyed at meeting Lord *Rāma*. He carried them to *Sugriva*, who brought out a bundle of jewels thrown from the sky, now identified as *Sita*'s. Encouraged by Lord *Rāma*, *Sugriva* challenged the stronger *Vāli* for a duel, enabling Lord *Rāma* to kill *Vāli* from behind a tree. *Sugriva* became the king and a group headed by *Vāli*'s son *Angada*, *Jāmbavan* the chief of bears and *Hanumān* was sent South in search of *Sita*. With hopeful anticipation, Lord *Rāma* gave his signet ring to *Hanumān* to give to *Sita*. Following a lead, *Hanumān* was chosen to leap across the ocean.

Hanumān grew in size and with one leap crossed the ocean and landed in Lanka. At nightfall he looked everywhere and finally found a distressed *Sita* sitting under a tree in the *Ashokavana* (garden). *Hanumān* jumped down from the tree and revealed who he was to the overjoyed *Sita*, and gave her the ring; and she in turn gave him her *cudāmani* (hair jewelry). He allowed himself to be dragged inside the palace and sitting on his tail coiled up as a throne higher than *Rāvana*'s, he asked him to give up *Sita* to avoid war. The furious *Rāvana* ordered his tail be set on fire and he be taken around. Due to *Sita*'s prayers, the fire God *Agni* cooled him instead. Suddenly, he leaped from roof to roof setting fire to the entire city, and leaped back across the ocean. Lord *Rāma* took the *cudāmani* and embraced *Hanumān* with grateful love.

Vibheeshana left his *adhārmic* brother *Rāvana* and surrendered to Lord *Rāma*. A bridge of boulders and rocks was built across the ocean. War was declared in Lanka! Lord *Rāma* rendered *Rāvana* weaponless, crownless, chariot-less and exhausted. He spared *Rāvana*, asking him to come back the next day. Humiliated, *Rāvana* woke up *Kumbhakarna* his giant brother, but Lord *Rāma*'s divine *astrās* stopped him. *Rāvana*'s son *Indrajit* made *Lakshmana* unconscious. Unable to locate the medicinal herbs, *Hanumān* carried back the entire *Sanjeevani* hill. *Lakshmana* killed *Indrajit* before he became invincible. Lord *Rāma* and *Rāvana* fought using divine *astras*, and *Rāvana* was finally killed by a *brahmāstra*. After *Sita* walked through fire proving her fidelity to the public, Lord *Rāma* accepted her. He became the King of *Ayodya*. *Hanumān* remained with Him, and still returns whenever *Rāmāyana* is remembered.

