



Dear Yagya Friends,

July is the month of Guru Poornima, the time when we honor the role that “guru” plays in our lives. Certainly we all have enjoyed the benefit of knowledge and advancement that come from our gurus, spiritual or otherwise.

There is so much that we are doing this month! We begin with special Guru Poornima and Vyasa yagyas on the 15th in both Kanchipuram and Varanasi. Then we follow with our Shiva/Parvati and group yagya program in Kanchipuram. At the same time a group of our priests will join others in Rameshwaram for Veda Parayana; the recitation of the complete text of the three major Vedas (Rig, Sama, and Yajur). At the end of the 10 day program, our priests will first perform Shiva and Saraswati Temple yagyas, and then a final yagya in Rameshwaram. Lastly, in Varanasi we will offer a meal (anadanam) to the community of sanyasi there.

In this issue you will find photos from each of the yagya series we had last month; Eclipse yagyas, Jupiter abishekam, Shiva abishekam, and Mrityunjayeshwara Temple yagyas. There are lots of beautiful images!

In August, our focus will be on Lakshmi - the goddess of abundance. I hope you will join us!

As always, thank you for your on-going participation and support. You make so many good things possible.

Enjoy the yagya programs!

Ben Collins



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July Yagyas - Guru Poornima - July 15 - 24



Guru Poornima is the special time of year when we can enhance our connection with the universal principle of the “guru” - one who passes along knowledge and enlightenment and thus greatly speed up our personal journey towards enlightenment.

This month the yagyas will focus on Shiva in the form of Dakshinamurti; the first teacher who passes along knowledge and gives enlightenment, Saraswati who is the embodiment of wisdom and Veda Vyasa, the rishi who organized the Vedas; the source of spiritual knowledge.

For ten days we begin with two hours of Vedic recitation. Then Ganesha puja is performed, followed by Navagraha puja for the nine planets, the nakshatra of the day, and the deity of the day. Shiva is honored with an extensive abhishekam (ritual bathing), as is goddess Saraswati and the rishi Veda Vyasa. The day concludes with the performance of homam; the vedic fire ritual.

We will also sponsor two very special events in Varanasi; a yagya at one of the few Vyasa temples in India, and a very special meal to many of the Sanyasi who live and practice their spiritual program there. They are very deserving of our support and the gift of a meal is a traditional way to honor the Guru and spirituality.

Full details and sign up are available on the Puja.net site.





Guru Poornima

For all of us, the search for spirituality has benefited from the guidance and inspiration of one or more teachers along the way. The role of a teacher, even in the depths of Kali Yuga, is profoundly important and this festival recognizes the vital role they play in our lives, spiritual or otherwise.

The Vedas contains a verse, usually taught to children, which summarizes this nicely;

*"Matrudevo Bhava,
Pitrudevo Bhava,
Acharyadevo Bhava"*

The word *bhava* means a devotional feeling. So the meaning is something like; "Mother is the home of God, Father is the home of God, Teacher is the home of God." In each case the love and affection that is exchanged between student and teacher is given a high status and has a place in the development of knowledge of all kinds. Our parents are our first gurus and their role is supplemented by all

the other teachers that we have throughout our life.

The quality and characteristics of the teachers of all kinds that we will have in life is seen through the condition of Jupiter in our Jyotish birth chart. A strong Jupiter suggests that we will meet and learn from good teachers in this lifetime on the basis of good karmas that we've earned in past lives. So the performance of yagyas and pujas on this day will help to attract good Gurus in this life and the next. These yagyas are an investment in our spiritual future!



Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa

Guru Poornima was originally known as Vyasa Poornima in honor of this rishi who assembled the various hymns of his time and divided them into the four Vedas. He was the son of Parashara, the originator of Jyotish.

Vyasa recognized as the author of the Puranas which tell the stories of the various gods, and the Mahabharata which contains the Bhagavad Gita, the Shrimad Bagavatam, and the Brahma Sutras. The photo on the left shows Vyasa dictating the Bhagavad Gita to Ganesha, who is acting as his scribe.

Vyasa was the first to establish the tradition of teacher - student and so he is considered to be the first “guru” in the sense we know it today. As one might expect, over time, the focus of the day was expanded to include all forms of the Guru and not just Vyasa.

Guru Poornima

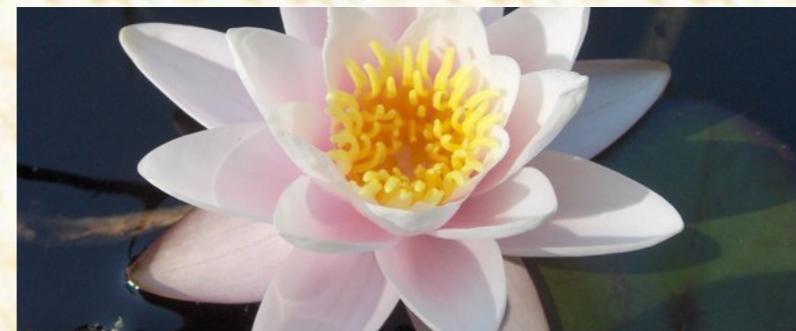
Guru Poornima always takes place on the first Full Moon in the vedic month of Ashada (June-July). It is the beginning of Chaturmasa, which means “four months” and marks the time when the rainy season begins and the gods rest. During this time the sanyasi are supposed to stay in one place and spend their time meditating and teaching.

The summer full Moon is especially bright and yet it is just the reflection of the Sun’s light. In the same way, this festival reminds us that no matter how great our own accomplishments, our knowledge and accomplishments would not be possible with the light of wisdom which comes from our teachers.



Saraswati Yagya

Dakshinamurti is the form of Shiva associated with the Guru and development of spiritual insight. Jupiter is the planet that represents that same energy in life. The goddess form is Saraswati and she is sometimes referred to as the “Mother of the Vedas” as so we include her in the yagya program for Guru Poornima with a special temple abishekam in Kanchipuram.





Veda Parayanam

Each year many of our priests travel to Rameshwaram site of a very famous temple (above and upper right) located on the site where Rama and his army built a bridge to Lanka in order to rescue Sita from the demon Ravana. Rameshwaram is so important as a spiritual center that it has been called the Varanasi of the south.

Veda Parayanam is the complete recitation of the three main Vedas; Rig, Sama and Yajur by pundits who have mastered them. It is quite an effort because of the length of these texts; the longest, Rig Veda is 10,000 verses long and the physical demands of chanting this much are extreme.

On the last day of our 10 day program, Seetharama and the rest of our pundits will travel to Rameshwaram to conduct a large yagya on our behalf. Since virtually every yagya that we perform comes from the Vedas, to have priests recite all of the different Vedas gives us much of the benefit of having every potential yagya performed on our behalf.

In the largest sense, the positive effect of Vedic recitation is a way to support and protect dharma for ourselves and the universe.



In the Mahabharatha, the great teacher Bhishmacharya says about dharma:

*Tadrisho ayam anuprashno yatra dharmaha sudurlabaha
Dushkamha pralisankhyatum tatkenatra vysvasyathi
Prabhavarthaya bhutanam dharmapravachanam kritam
Yasyat prabhavasamyuktaha sa dharma iti nischayaha.*

SHANTHI PARVA - 109-9-11

“It is most difficult to define Dharma. Dharma has been explained to be that which helps the upliftment of living beings. Therefore, that which ensures the welfare of living beings is surely Dharma. The learned rishis have declared that which sustains, is Dharma.”



Sanyasi Feeding in Varanasi

Sometimes a yagya can take the form of something physical and direct rather than abstract and symbolic. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to support the community of Dandi Sanyasi in Varanasi through the service of offering them a good meal in honor of Guru Poornima.



June Lunar Eclipse Yagya - Varanasi

June featured a significant total eclipse of the Moon. During that time we arranged for 27 priests to perform special pujas, extensive Mrityunjaya mantra japa and a traditional homam (fire yagya). These events took place for most of the night at our yagya facility on the banks of the Ganges outside Varanasi in north India. The evening began with a traditional purifying dip in the Ganges, followed by many hours of pujas.





Shiva Temple Yagya - Eclipse Day

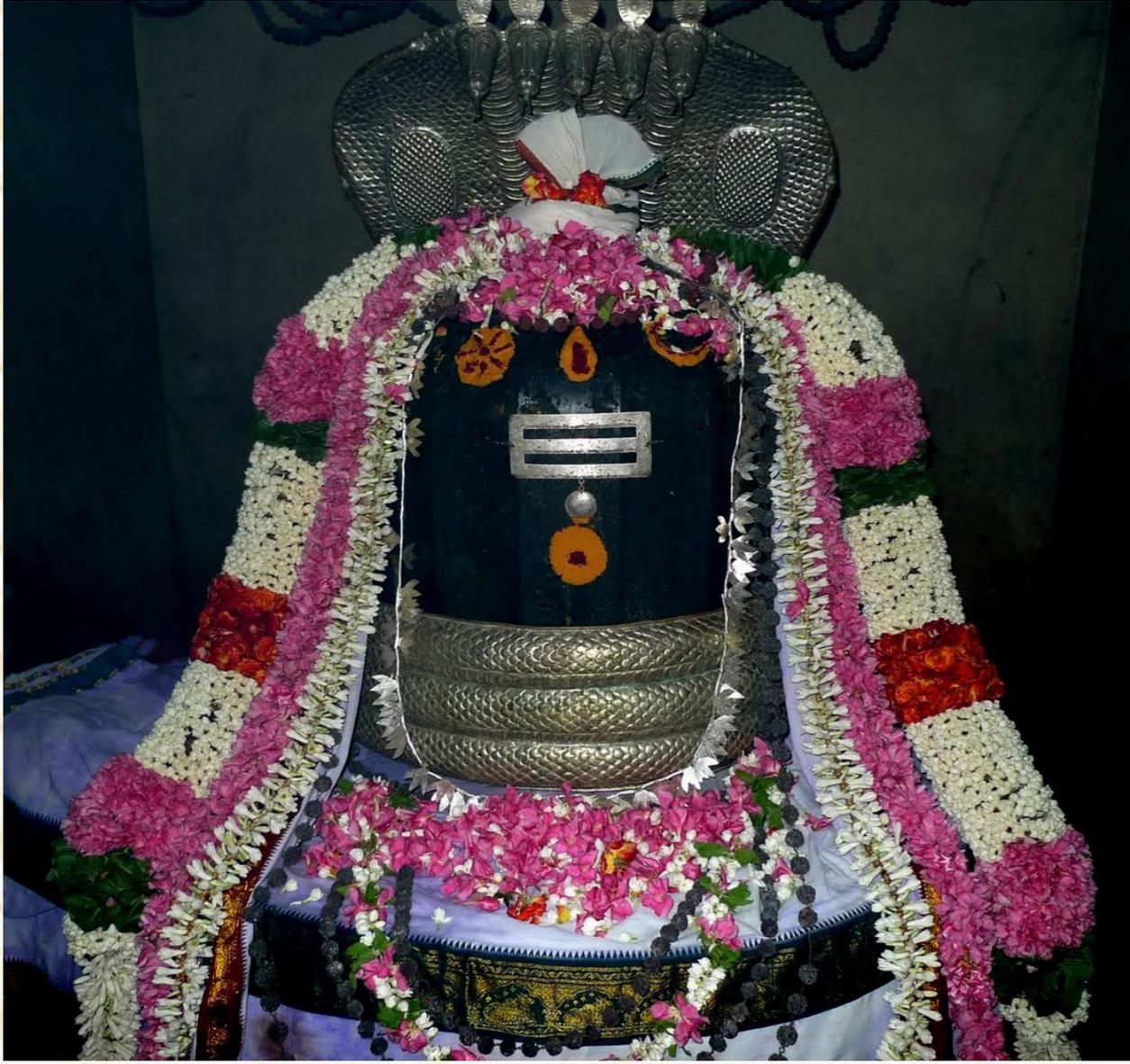


Also on the eclipse day, our Kanchipuram priests performed an traditional Rudra Abishekam at our favorite countryside Shiva temple. This temple is surrounded by many fields of rice and sugar cane. It is peaceful and quiet and features an impressive Shiva lingam. Originally the lingam was out in the open under the huge tree that you see in the photos. The temple was built around the lingam without disturbing the tree 20-30 years ago.

Since traditionally Shiva wears the Moon in his hair, this is a perfect place to perform these rituals on an eclipse day. Our priests performed pujas and Mrityunjaya mantra japa for several hours as the night progressed.







त्रयम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान् मृत्योर्मुक्षिय मामृतात् ॥
trayambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam ।
urvārūkamiva bandhanān mṛtyormukṣiya māmṛtāt । ।

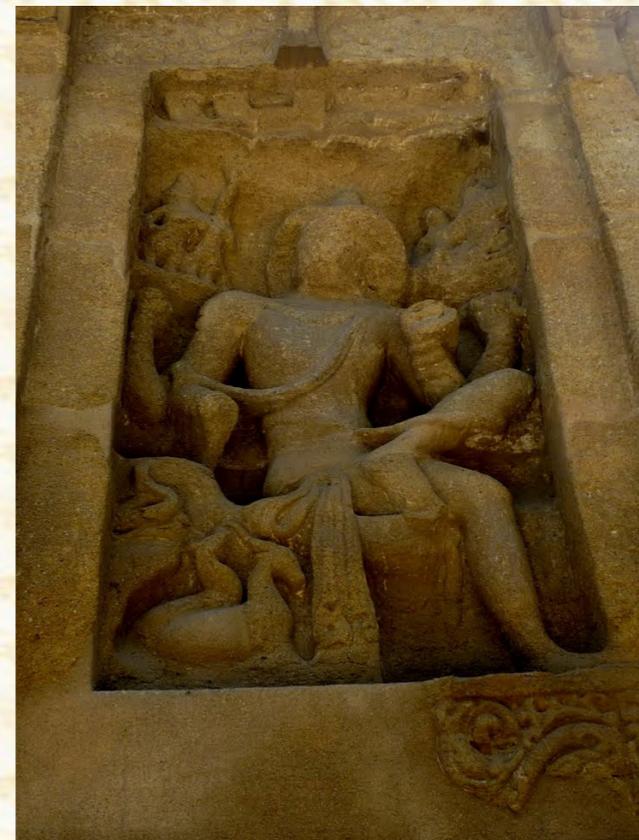
Mrityunjayeshwara Temple in Kanchipuram

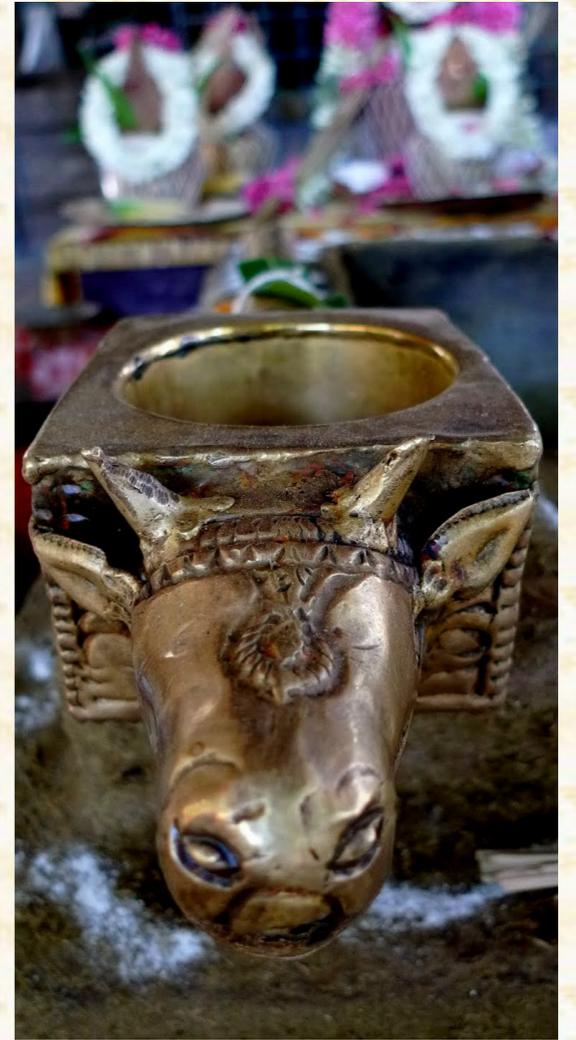


As you are well aware, repetition lies at the heart of many vedic rituals and techniques for spiritual development. So at the end of the 10 day program, our priests went to this temple which is dedicated to Mrityunjayeshwara; the form of Shiva who personifies this mantra and it's power to win victory over death. The performance of the yagya here is a symbolic offering of all the mantra repetitions over the course of the different rituals performed over the previous 10 days.

The temple itself is more than 1,500 years old. The beautiful and elegant temple carvings are made from sandstone which still retain a dynamic quality that makes you wonder what life was like when they were created. It must have been a special time.

The chief priest of the temple is very devoted and fiercely guards the temple's peaceful atmosphere and insists on strict adherence to the traditional methods of yagya performance and mantra repetition.







Jupiter/Navagraha Temple Yagya

From an astrological perspective, the force of nature that brings progress and enlightenment is seen through the planet Jupiter (Guru in Sanskrit) also known as Brihaspati. Shiva in his form of Dakshinamurti, the prototypical Guru, is naturally connected with Jupiter. In Jyotish, Jupiter is the best benefic and most effortlessly spiritual of the planets. The blessing of the Guru is the destruction of ignorance, so the connection to Shiva is very appropriate.

On the 9th day of the June program, our priests went to this temple to perform Navagraha Abishekam, especially for the planet Jupiter. This ritual involves the invoking of the nine planets and the ritual cleansing of the temple through the recitation of mantras and the offering of milk, sandalwood, haldi, etc. At the conclusion of the ritual the temple feel fresh and rejuvenated. These qualities are also transmitted to the sponsors of the yagya in a subtle way.









“With this fire of sacrifice (yajna) do you nourish the Gods, and in turn, the Gods shall nourish you; thus nourishing one another, you will attain the supreme good.”

-Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 3, verse 11)