



Dear Yagya Friends,

Welcome to the New Year! I hope it has gotten off to a positive and productive start for you.

As I write this, our annual Navagraha program is nearing completion. Seetharam and Aditya have only a few more days of travel to the various temples in southern Tamil Nadu. I will post photos from their trip as soon as I have them.

We were fortunate to have sufficient participation this month so that we could offer an additional free yagya for everyone. Saraswati Jayanti, her traditional birthday is Saturday, January 28th. Our priests and pundits under the direction of Pandit Mishra, will be performing this ritual in Varanasi, on the banks of the Ganges River.

Maha Shivaratri and our expanded program is just a few weeks away. We'll be posting the update and signup pages on the Puja.net site early next week. Not only will we have 11 priests performing yagyas for 12 days in Kanchipuram, but on Shivaratri night we will have an additional 15 pundits in Varanasi performing an all night yagya for us, followed by a traditional Ganga Yagya the next day.

Lastly, Seetharam and I have completed work on the 2012 yagya schedule and the details are contained in this newsletter and on the Puja.net site. Be sure to have a look. We have a lot of great yagya events planned for the balance of the year.

As always, this newsletter has beautiful photos of our various yagyas events that took place in India during December.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter. If you have suggestions or comments, I'd love to hear them.

Very best regards,

Ben Collins



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Shivaratri Maharudra Yagya

February 9-20

We are proud to announce a full schedule of events for this year's Maha Shivaratri yagya series. We begin with a full day for Ganesha featuring the offering of 1008 modaka balls into the yagya fire. This ritual assures that there will be no obstacles to the successful completion of the Maha Rudra Yagya.

The next day, we begin the 11 day Maha Rudra Yagya. Eleven priests perform Rudra Abishekam eleven times each day, with different traditional ingredients (water, milk, curd, honey, sugar, sandalwood, pancha amritam, ghee, rosewater, coconut water, and vibhuti) being poured over the Shiva Lingam. This is 121 Rudra abishekam each day, for a total of 1,331 over the full eleven days! Each day concludes with a fire yagya for Shiva with offerings of ghee and samhit (special wood).

On the final day, we conclude the program with the usual 11 repetitions of the abishekam, and an extra large yagya with 108 different ingredients, traditionally wood, seeds, herbs, leaves, etc offered into the yagya fire.

In the evening we begin with Rudra Abishekam at the countryside temple (see photos later in this issue) and continue with pujas at as many Shiva temples in the Kanchipuram area that we can.



At the same time in Varanasi, under the skilled direction of Pandit Mishra, 15 priests will construct a huge Shiva lingam from Ganges clay (above) and perform an all night Shivaratri yagya offering thousands of the traditional bilva leaves.

The next day, 10 priests will perform the very sweet and cooling yagya for Ganga, the presiding deity of this most sacred river (right).

The complete 12 day program is a wonderful yagya, performed by the very best and most qualified priests available anywhere.

Please join us and support this effort. Full details will be posted on the Puja.net site before February 1st.





2012 Yagya Schedule

January - Navagraha temple yagyas

February - Shivaratri and Maharudra yagya

March - Family harmony yagya, 10 Avatars of Vishnu yagya

April - Rama/Hanuman yagya and Manya Sukta yagya to remove obstacles

May - Jupiter changing signs yagya and Shiva/Dakshinamurti enlightenment yagya

June - Dhanvantri and Mrytunjaya health yagyas Also, Mars changing signs yagya

July - Guru Poornima yagya, Vyasa and Shiva temple yagyas

August - Maha Lakshmi Yagyas, Saturn changing signs yagya

September - Vinayaka Chaturthi (Ganesha) yagya and Ancestor yagyas in Varanasi

October - Navaratri, the nine nights of the Divine Mother

November - Divali and Skanda Shasti yagyas

December - Rig Veda and Pavamana Soma yagyas

December Lunar Eclipse Yagya

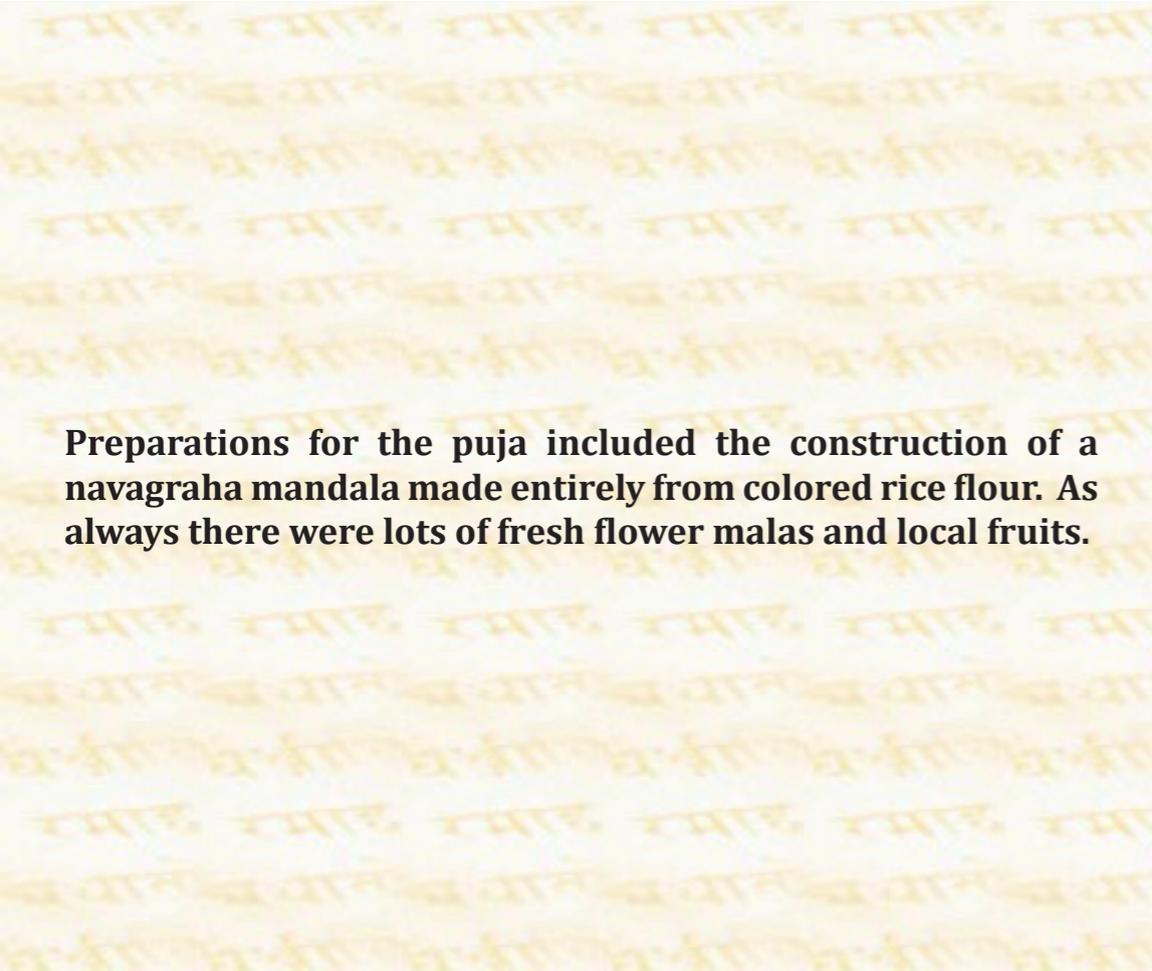


December featured a total lunar eclipse and because pujas and mantra repetitions during an eclipse have added power, we arranged for a special event to take place at a Vishnu temple outside Bangalore.

The temple is dedicated to the various incarnations of Vishnu, and you can see some of the 10 avatars on the main tower of the temple (above right).

The event consisted of two parts; a Navagraha (nine planet) puja followed by extended mantra japa and more pujas on the banks of the river nearby.





Preparations for the puja included the construction of a navagraha mandala made entirely from colored rice flour. As always there were lots of fresh flower malas and local fruits.





Our priests performing the Navagraha puja.

Nimita is the Vedic study of omens and when an eagle was observing the pujas and mantra japs by the river, it was a particularly good nimita (omen).

Vishnu always rides on an eagle by the name of Garuda and an eagle's presence was felt to be a sign of Vishnu's acceptance of the puja offerings and the granting of his blessings to the participants.



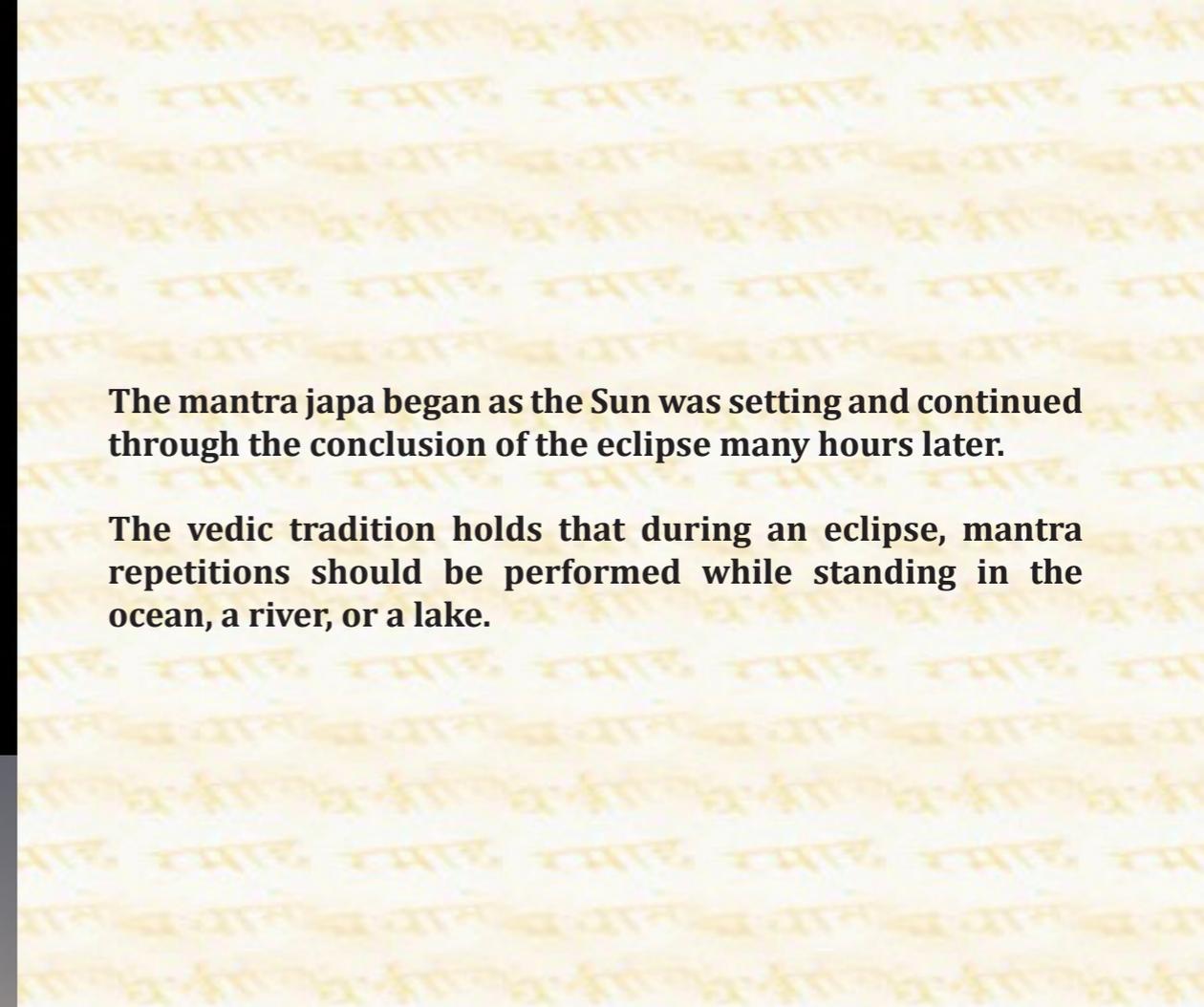


A peaceful view from the river bank as the sun sets.



The mantra japa began as the Sun was setting and continued through the conclusion of the eclipse many hours later.

The vedic tradition holds that during an eclipse, mantra repetitions should be performed while standing in the ocean, a river, or a lake.



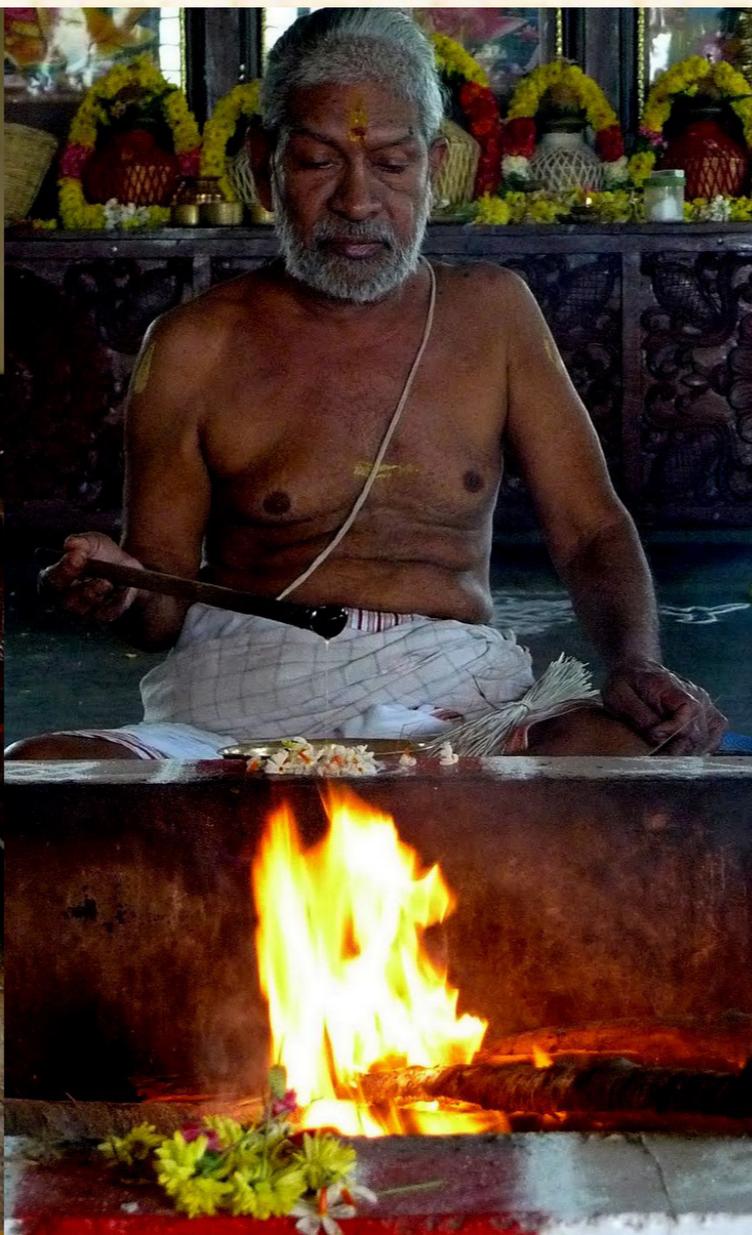
Pavamana Soma Yagya

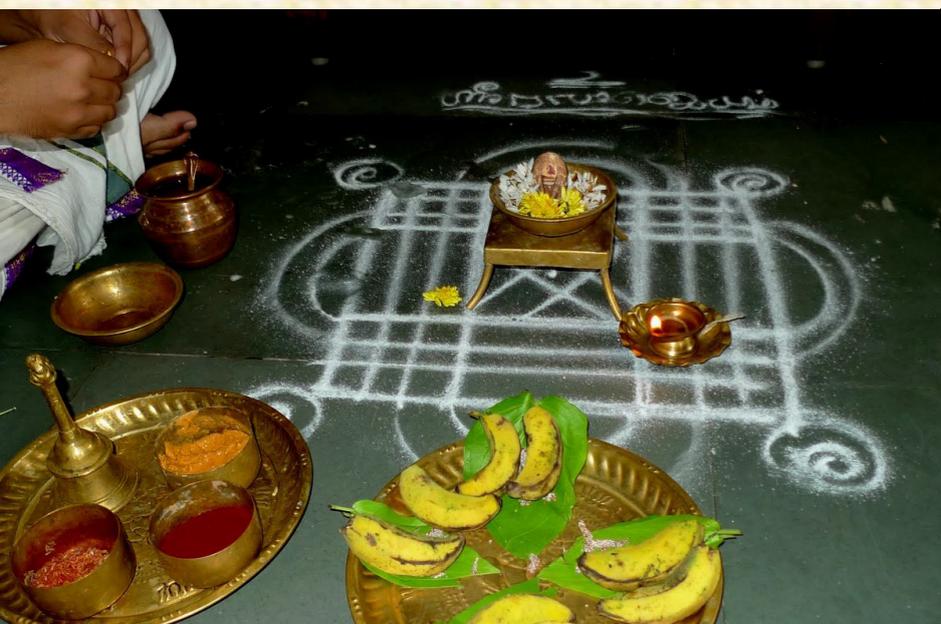
This yagya comes from the most ancient of the Vedas, the Rig Veda. It is performed in order to eliminate the inevitable karmas that we create in our daily life that will result in future obstacles. The yagya also supports the development of consciousness and progress towards enlightenment and liberation.

We began performing this yagya last year at this time and have continued for one full day each month during the past year. To conclude the year, we performed the yagya for 10 days, concluding with a special yagya performance at the countryside Shiva temple.

We are fortunate to have several specialists in this yagya from the Kanchipuram Mutt, who are responsible for the performance of these rituals for Jayendra Saraswati, the current Shankaracharya, and his predecessor Chandrasekharendra Saraswati. We are grateful for their expertise and assistance.

The ritual itself consists of extended recitation of the vedic verses, followed by various pujas and Rudra Abishekam. Then the sacred fire is lit and additional verses are recited as offerings of ghee and wood are made into the homa fire.

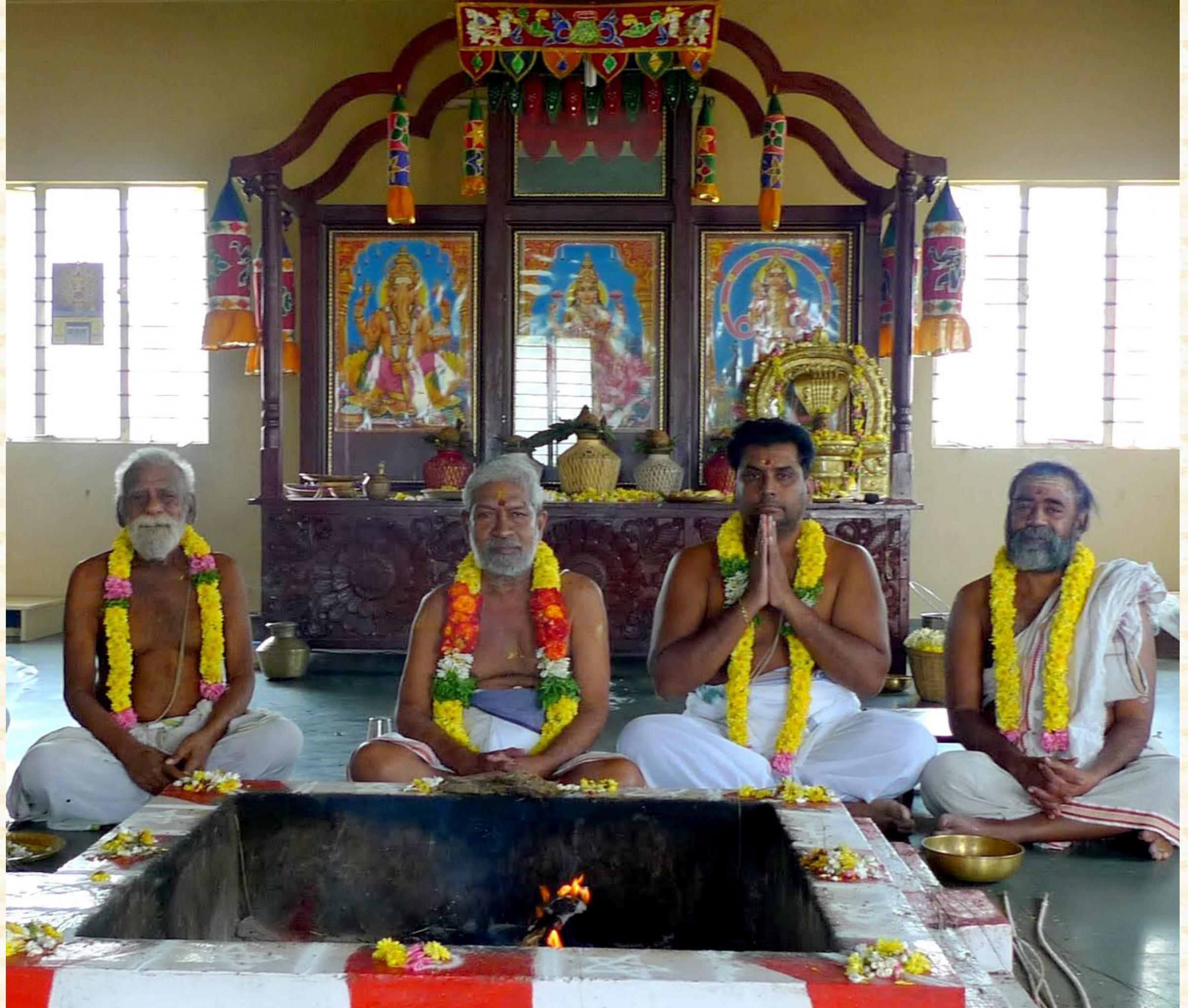






*Pavamanir dishanthu nah,
Imam lokamadho aamum,
Kaamaan samradhyanthu nah,
Devir devai samaabhruthaa.*

**Those who are purified by Pavamana Suktam,
Enjoy fully this world as well as the next,
Their wishes will be fulfilled,
And they will be united with gods and goddesses**



Rice Flour Rangoli and Yantras

One of our priests is an expert in the design and creation of these beautiful yantra designs. They are composed entirely freehand, taking several hours to create using colored rice flour. After the puja, they are swept up and discarded with a new one created the next day.









**Shiva Abishekam at the countryside temple
on the last day of the Pavamana Soma Yagya**





For many years we have been coming to this temple for special Shiva yagyas. It is located deep in the country away from Kanchipuram, and in the midst of sugarcane fields and rice paddies. Its isolation and beauty give the atmosphere a special softness and deep silence.

The temple itself is relatively new, having been constructed around a massive Shiva lingam that was discovered many years ago sitting out in the open, shaded by an ancient neem tree. There are no records of how or when the Shiva lingam was first moved there or by whom. A little mystery makes the place even more interesting!

Your support of our various programs has made it possible for the temple to be better maintained and the essential rituals to be performed on a regular basis. We return here every Shivaratri and after a special abishekam, feed the entire local village in a wonderful and happy event.





The outer wall of the main temple building. The large Shiva lingam is in the sanctum on the other side of this wall. Note the insets in which various deities are placed. There are close-up photos of the individual deities on the next page.



The temple contains smaller niches in which other deities are honored (from left to right); Ganesha, Dakshinamurti (a form of Shiva), Durga, and Nandi, Shiva's bull.

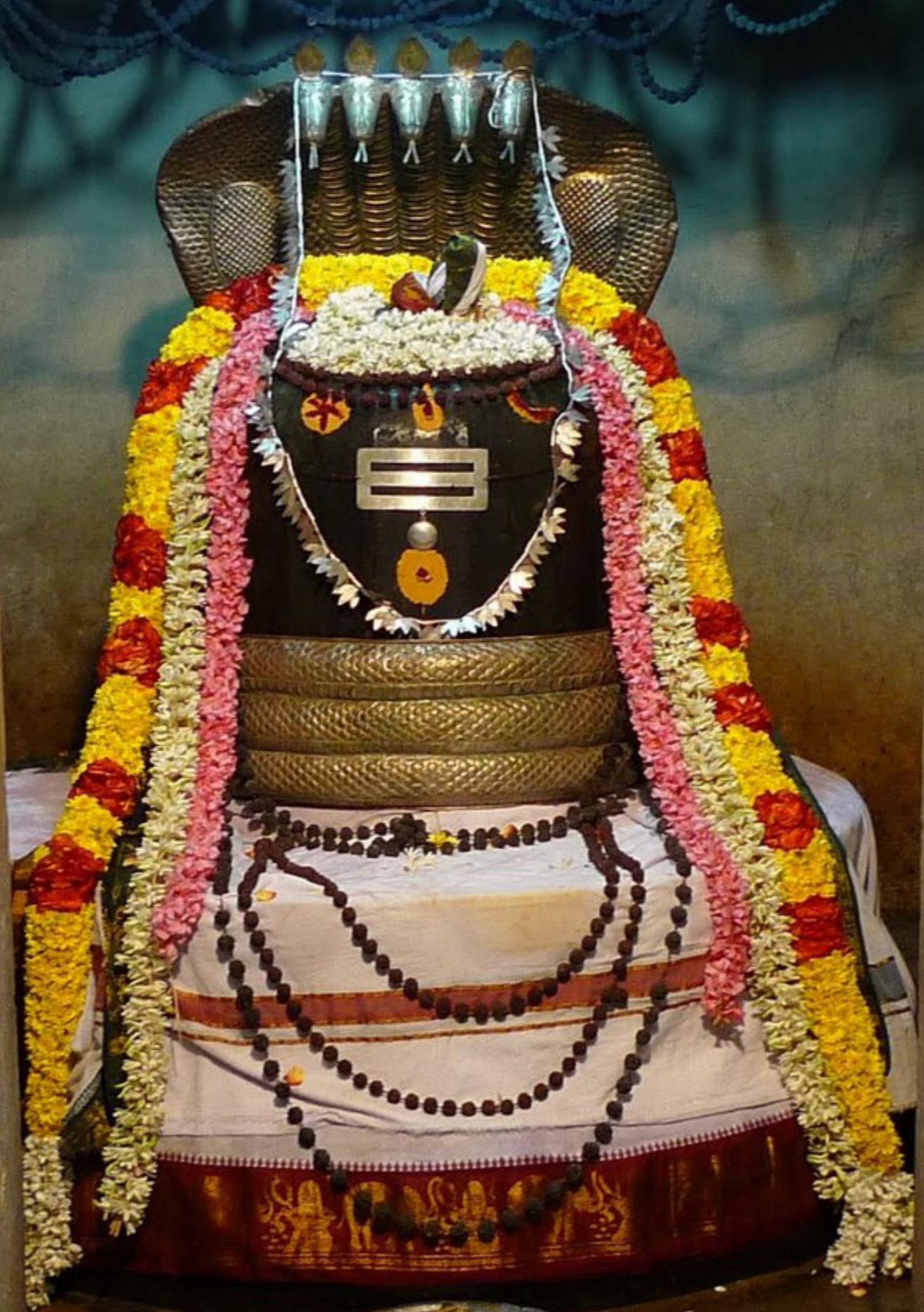
On the next page, you see the lingam in the sanctum during the abishekam while offerings of milk and sandalwood paste are poured over. The design of this lingam is unusual because rather than being smooth, it has ridges on the sides.

The lingam, obviously hand carved long ago, must weigh many thousands of pounds. No wonder the temple was built around it!











***Ya te Rudra Shiva tanur aghora papakashini /
Taya nastanuva shanta maya girishanta
bhisha kashihi //***

(Shri Rudram: Anuvaka 1 , rik 3)

**Rudra! Girishanta, Shiva, you who live on the Kailasa
mountain and confer great happiness to your
devotees.**

**Please behold us in that form of yours which is
not terrifying, which destroys sin, and which is all
blissful. Unite us with Brahman, the highest good!**



Rama: “When one has realized the supreme truth, what does he become?”

Vasistha: “To such a one even the rocks become friends and the trees in the forest are relatives; when he lives in the middle of a forest, the very animals become his family. He is a very dear friend of all. He is free from pity for others, but full of compassion...The truly wise ones live as if they had various desires and they laugh with everyone, though they themselves are different. No one knows their inner peace and illumined state. Only wise ones know other wise ones...Even the celestial gardens do not make one as happy as the wisdom of the enlightened individual.

-Yoga Vasistha, “On Liberation”