

Saivite Hindu Religion

The Master Course • Level One • Book Two

Professional Teacher's Guide



First Edition

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by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

1997

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Book Two Professional Teacher's Guide*. Book Two of the "Saivite Hindu Religion Children's Course" brings Hindu children into the next level of education in Saivite Hinduism, in continuity with Book One. Our working assumption is that you, the teacher, have the *Book One Professional Teacher's Guide*. And that you now have brief or lengthy experience of teaching Book One. Book Two covers many of the same subjects as Book One and adds a number of new areas. You will quickly see that this professional teacher's guide is lengthier than the Book One. In some cases we have borrowed material from the *Book One Professional Teacher's Guide* and brought it forward into this guide, with a bit of retooling. Some subjects are too difficult to advance the children through too fast. We have expanded to four pages assigned to each lesson exploration. This allows us to stretch out more with the main presentation, to create longer stories and develop the concluding categories (*Connections, Background, Homework, etc.*) at length. It also means there is more room for any suggestions or hints that you the teachers may have that we can incorporate into the *Book Two Professional Teacher's Guide* or into future professional teacher's guides. You are encouraged to communicate with Kauai Aadheenam about your ideas and experiences on the evolution of this guide. At the outset, it would be a very good idea to read through this guide several times and to study the recommended sections in *Dancing with Siva, Loving Ganesha* and Book One given in the guide for parents and teachers at the end of Book Two before you making your lesson plans.

Books One and Two are formatted into a simple page sequence rather than a lesson sequence. Book One had one page for the text and illustration of each presentation to appear on. Book Two has two pages for each presentation: one for the picture and one for the text. There are 31 lessons, one for each day of the month. For the *Book Two Professional Teacher's Guide* we have followed the same page sequence that is in Book Two. So at the top of each *Book Two Professional Teacher's Guide* page there is a heading indicating which page of Book Two it applies to. For example: Book 2, Page 2. Or Book 2, Page 50. These appear at the top of each page of the guide. There are four pages (or more) in the guide for each presentation in Book Two or for a combination of closely related presentations. This is the same as our approach for Book One: if presentations are very close in substance or directly relate we combine them into a single guide. The longer story presentations—such as Nambi and Girija, and New Year's Day—are combined into a single presentation and can be treated as a single class. Any presentation can be divided into two or more classes, totally at your discretion and in keeping with your schedule. Many metaphysical subjects you may want to spend more time on, and this is encouraged. Don't feel you have to rush through this course. It is preferable to allow time to explore the richness of the subject matter.

This guide is written as a teaching aid for the teacher, and is simultaneously written to a child's point of view, a child's world. In the *Key Presentations* we endeavored to give psychological avenues into this child's world. We also freely sprinkled in little additional activities and many analogy/illustrations into the *Key Presentations* discussion—these are in addition to the *Activities* and *Analogies and Illustrations* sections. You must be observant to see these and use them from the *Key Presentations*. The intention of the professional guide,

however, is not to only relate to young children. It can be (and is) used with excellent success in teenage and adult classes. The guide is written as a sentence-by-sentence aid for the teacher. However, and we make this point strongly: this guide is not supposed to be read to the class. There is the temptation to stand in front of a class and just read the text of this guide. The only section that is specifically meant to be read to the class is the section called "Story Reading." The teacher does read "Story Reading" to the class. If the class is an older group, then discussion can be stimulated. In addition, there are occasional sentences, or paragraphs, in each lesson that may (or should) be used verbatim. In the *Key Presentations* section we use underlining to highlight areas or points that should be covered in the class. However, this does not mean to skip the rest of the *Key Presentation*. Often what is before or after the underlined text relates importantly to the underlined material or is just as important.

The major intention is for the teacher to creatively study and use this *Professional Guide* so that an inspiring, animated learning experience takes place with the children. Activities, stories and analogies make knowledge stick—they are the "velcro" of teaching. The fun and hands-on excitement of games and exercises is being newly discovered in the West among teachers for older youth and adults. To successfully present a class in this course a minimum of two hours preparation is necessary.

Each *lesson guide* is divided into a number of sections. But not every lesson has all the sections. A brief description of the sections follows: **Lesson Focus:** a brief statement on what is covered in the lesson. **Key Presentations:** the main guide for presenting the topic. The underlined sections quickly identify the key ideas, but the whole section should be presented. Often there are analogies and lots of metaphors built into this section.

Analogies & Illustrations: very specific imagery that teaches the concept by comparing it to a situation the children can "do," "picture" or "sense" in their minds.

Visual Interpretation: quick pointers to unusual features of the illustration that are part of the overall presentation. Often there is information here that appears nowhere else in the lesson.

Story Reading: a short story to be read *dramatically* by the teacher. Each story involves an 9-year old in a different country and time, and the story directly relates to the lesson. The story reading is a must.

Background: a brief historical discussion primarily for the teacher's benefit.

Connections: ways that the current lesson relates to other lessons in Book Two—it threads lessons together for the children.

Citizenship: hints on how a particular lesson creates a better citizen in the nation this course is being taught.

Wrong Thinking: a correction to very specific misinformation or disinformation concerning Saivite Hinduism. An important section.

Homework: small assignments for home, often involving an experience. Some lessons may not have a homework assignment, but the teacher can create their own if they wish.

Activities: an experiential game designed to demonstrate the lesson dramatically. Each one of these activities is custom-created for these lessons. They are a very valuable resource in themselves.

One thing not to do in this class. *Please do not illustrate points using stories from the Puranas (such as Siva Purana or Bhagavatam) or the historical epics (Mahabharata and Ramayana)*. This guide provides everything you need. Stick to this guide. And use *Dancing with Siva* as a further reference. There is also a very good list of supplementary reading materials in Book One.

LESSON FOCUS

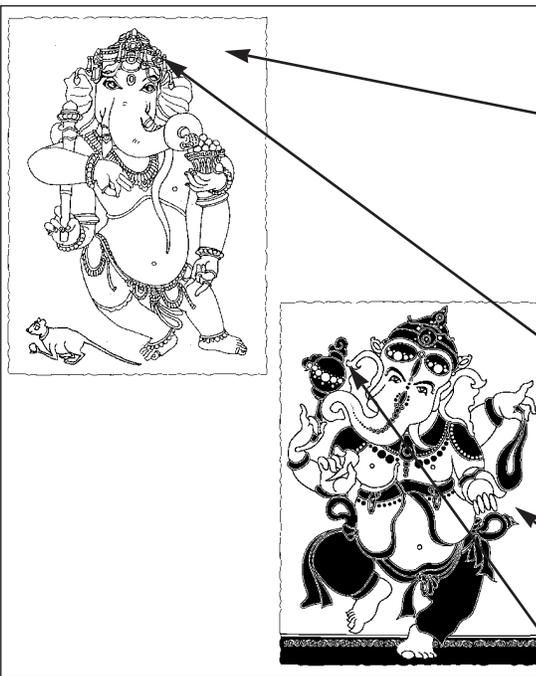
Lord Ganesha helps the young Hindu in many important ways. He is very easy to come close to. Ganesha is the first God we turn to for assistance and guidance. This advanced Soul being is our great friend and guide when we act with virtue.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

As children, when we need help in our daily life and affairs, we always go to someone we like and know is knowledgeable enough to give wise and practical advice. It could be mom or dad, an elder brother or sister, an uncle or a school teacher or spiritual guru. There is always someone we like to go to for help, to acquire new knowledge or get through difficulties or start a new project with insight from someone else's experience. Now, we can always turn to people for help and they can certainly aid us greatly in many ways. We can see and meet and talk with them in our physical bodies. But for a very large view of our life the intelligence and the understanding of people in physical bodies is limited. What about the deva world people—the deva people who live in the spirit world that is invisible to our physical sight? Yes, they can help us a lot when we ask them. They are very intelligent and understand the pattern of our karma. They can see into the future and know our past lives. We can mentally pray or write a written note to the deva people for help, and they will respond in unseen ways very quickly. Perhaps an idea will come to you suddenly, or a fresh insight into a problem, or you will be introduced to a new system of concentration and memory that is very helpful in school. The deva people love to help us and they are very capable.

With the help of people and devas, we seem to have a lot of support available to us. But there is more help for us, and this assistance is so great, so far-reaching, so important that this is the first source of help we turn to. This is Lord Ganesha, the Soul being who is the knower of infinite knowledge, of all past, present and future time and who knows us fully as a soul evolving on planet Earth. It is Lord Ganesha who is our first guide, our first helper in life.

Before we go to any person or deva for help or blessings we first worship and mentally communicate to Lord Ganesha. We also first offer worship to Lord Ganesha before we worship other Gods. This tunes us



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is an image of Ganesha in a rare standing pose. Elephants on Earth can't stand up like this. But Lord Ganesha *is not* an elephant deity. He is a super advanced soul who chooses of His own free will to appear with an elephant head. Ganesha also has a beautiful soul face. Notice the lovely crown Ganesha is wearing. This bejeweled crown indicates His many spiritual powers and perceptions.

Here Lord Ganesha is dancing, for He is filled with the delight of being identical with the Mind of God Siva.

This is the goad that Ganesha uses to help keep unfortunate choices away from us. There are always choices every day in life. Each child needs to always make the choice that takes us further spiritually, and avoid the choice that is not spiritual.

Lord Ganesha was created by God Siva. He is Siva's son. He helps to remove obstacles and solve problems in our life. We always worship Him first. He helps us to be happy.

Lord Ganesha has an elephant's head. Everybody loves an elephant. Pray to Lord Ganesha. He helps you to study well in school and to have good friends. You come close to him when you are kind and helpful. Always sing in praise of Him.

in—like tuning in a TV channel on our TV—to the mind of Ganesha and He is able to best prepare us for further worship, yoga or any pursuit in life. Because of the vastness of Ganesha's knowledge, He knows what is best for us in life. So when we go to Him for help, He may direct us away from an idea, or project, or pursuit or even a group of people that may not be good for us. Ganesha wants all that is good for us, so He helps to keep away the bad. So in some cases, something that we have a strong desire or wish for, may not happen for us. This is because when we worshiped Lord Ganesha first, He saw that our wish could bring us harm or slow our spiritual growth. He then helped us by stopping that desire from being fulfilled. At other times, our need will be methodically fulfilled, as Ganesha helps us to bring forth our own

best intelligence, will power and intuition. He removes obstacles to our best interests and performance. Ganesha will not simply do things for you. He will help you help yourself. And He will inspire (which means to invest with spirit) other people to help you, but

you must be making your very best effort. You can not simply pray to Lord Ganesha to arrange for you to get a perfect score on an important test in school. You must be open to Ganesha's guidance in how to study more effectively and master the subject with your own mental powers. And this help could come in many subtle ways, so you need to be sensitive to Ganesha's grace.

Lord Ganesha is a very evolved soul, a being of such beauty and power that all the beauty of all the planets would not equal His soul beauty. And He has an elephant head. Ganesha personally chose to have this elephant face because it naturally awakens happiness, wonderment and contentment in people. Our human form is actually a physical flesh duplication of the soul body. Ganesha does have a beautiful human-like face and head, but He chooses the form of

most popular Deity on Earth.

Ganesha is very easy to contact. All you have to do is think about how He looks. See Ganesha with your imagination. This mental visualization will automatically take the child to the consciousness of Lord Ganesha. Then you can talk to Ganesha mentally. Tell Him your idea or your problems or the choices you need to make in life. Try to save the important things to you for consulting with Lord Ganesha. It is not necessary or advisable to approach this God of good fortune for small matters that the devotee can handle on his or her own.

The Gods are the most helpful and kind beings the children can imagine. Naturally if we want to actually communicate with Lord Ganesha and be helped it is best if we ourselves are always kind and helpful. The children should actively seek out every day ways to be kind and to help others. This is one of the most important actions for our spiritual life. By being kind and helpful in all situations—including being vegetarian—we avoid being angry and hurtful. If we are angry and hurtful, then we block ourselves from Ganesha’s sight and wisdom.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. In our television and computer age, it should be easy for children to mentally picture Lord Ganesha. They can study a favorite picture of Ganesha. Then, like they are watching TV inside of their head, the child mentally imagines Lord Ganesha.

STORY READING

“Oh no,” cried Shivaji, a grimace crossing his young bronzed face. “My note papers.” From across the Thar desert a ferocious hot, dry wind carrying billions of sand grains swirled Shivaji’s papers of text and drawings into the churning river of water and mud far below. The sand wind came out of nowhere. Shivaji shut his nutmeg brown eyes against the scraping sand as he lunged out to grab some of the papers. His hands swung through the air blindly. He lost his balance on the edge of the steep river bank. The wind was pushing him over. But his friend Raju saw the movement through the thin slits of his clenched eyes and quickly reached out and grabbed Shivaji’s dark blue cotton belt and pulled him back. “You almost went over, Shivaji,” he shouted anxiously and spit out some sand

from his mouth. They were both quickly unwinding part of their bright red turbans to pull some cloth over their mouths and nose. “Yeah,” shouted Shivaji back. “I almost joined my notes down in the river. Thanks for pulling me back. How could they be gone?” And when he said the word “gone” the sudden sand wind died to a whisper and stopped.

“Oh Siva, what a relief,” said Shivaji as he began blowing sand out of his reddish brown rudraksha beads that hung around his neck. The beads were sacred to Siva and they were Shivaji’s most treasured possession. He dusted off his white punjabi shirt and trousers while saying, “It took me months to take those notes and create those drawings.” Shivaji and Raju—both 9 years old—lived in northwest India above the Thar Desert. It was over a hundred years ago when there were no cars or planes. There were camels, horses, bullock carts and trains. Shivaji had collected notes on the plant and animal life at the edge of the desert. He knew some plants were very valuable as medicines. He was studying where and under what conditions they best grew. Several months ago, in a bright, golden and blue-light filled dream Lord Ganesha instructed Shivaji to study the plants and wildlife, to see them as living energies of Siva. Now, as the pale orange sun was turning the desert to evening fire, Shivaji was remembering the Ganesha vision. He turned to Raju, who was watching a family of deer grazing on yellow mustard plants. “I’m going to the old stone Siva temple by the Night Jewel Lake, he said. “Right now.”

“You’re going to meditate and talk to Lord Ganesha, aren’t you?” said Raju with a smile. His brown eyes were picking up the flickering of the sunset.

“Yes. Right,” Shivaji replied. “I need help. I think Ganesha can help me put my notes back together from memory.”

Raju looked at a distant train wandering into the low hills and swiftly said, “I’ll go with you. Lord Ganesha can help me with an important decision. Let’s get going, so we can get back home by dinner.”

The two boys began running down the side of the hill they were on and headed straight north. They ran like the wild donkeys of the desert, jumping over rocks, skidding down loose gravel, running through soft sand while their hearts pounded like drums in their chests. In the gathering darkness they could see the headlight of the black and red locomotive com-

1. This is the happiness and study-well game. Bring in a supply of colorful marbles and a supply of large coins. The marbles are “happy marbles.” The coins are “study-well coins.” The kids form two rows of even numbered kids, sitting on the ground about eight feet apart. The teacher sits at the head of the two rows. “Happy marbles” are passed out to one row of kids. “Study-well coins” are passed out to the opposite row. The teacher calls the name of two of the children with coins. They say “I worship Ganesha and He makes me happy all the time.” Then two kids with “happy marbles” roll their marbles to the kids who just spoke who have to catch the marbles. If the marbles go off course, the other kids catch them and send them on to the kids meant to receive them. When the marbles roll, everybody chants “Jai Ganesha.” Then the teacher calls the names of two kids with marbles. They say, “I worship Lord Ganesha. He always helps me study well.” Then two kids with “study-well coins” slide their coins over to them and they receive them. This goes on until everybody has exchanged marbles and coins, then the game can begin again.

ing up the valley. The rail tracks were about five minutes away, and they didn’t want to have to stop for the train, a very long train with many freight cars. Raju cried out with a heaving voice, “Let’s go to the old mine bridge. We won’t have to wait for the train.” The mine bridge hung at an abandoned coal mine. It’s wood was old and the metal cables were worn. Shivaji shouted out, “OK. Let’s try it.” The two boys, still running, turned toward the mine. Shivaji had been here many times before as part of his exploring for plants. He knew every little hill and stream bed, every cluster of bushes and plants. It was like a map in his mind. He guided Raju through the rough country and in minutes they were at the mine.

The foot bridge crossed over the rail tracks. It hung, like a single spider thread, thirty feet in the air. Gushes of wind coming up the valley swayed the bridge. It moaned and creaked with old age. Shivaji and Raju had crossed the bridge before. It was old, but still safe. They hoped. The boys stood at the foot of the bridge, its wood planks wide enough for two men to cross together. The train was almost passing

through the mine yard and the long string of freight cars would noisily pass right under the bridge. Raju stepped out onto the bridge and started to walk across the planks, holding onto the cables by his side. The locomotive, puffing out dark clouds of coal smoke like an iron dragon, was just passing under the bridge. The bridge was vibrating, shaking with the roar and weight of the train on the tracks.

“Wait! Raju,” shouted Shivaji. “Stop!” But Raju didn’t hear. Shivaji had a feeling, a strong thought that flashed into his mind from some place above, some place in his mind connected to Lord Ganesha. The bridge might fall. Raju didn’t hear Shivaji’s cry to stop. Shivaji quickly stretched out and caught Raju’s thick cotton belt. He pulled. Both boys came tumbling back, rolling on the sandy ground. The train rumbled by below, and smoke blew up into their faces. The bridge still held. But across the bridge, they could see one cable had snapped loose and was dangling in the air. Any weight on the bridge and it would fall, crashing onto the tracks below. The boys looked at each other. “Thanks Shivaji,” said Raju, his eyes narrowed and intense with gratitude. “That was too close.”

Shivaji said with a shrug, “I had a feeling, some warning from Ganesha. Like it came from above my head into my mind. Besides, you saved me this morning. It’s your good karma coming back...within twelve hours. Well. Let’s get going. Still a ways to go.” The train was gone. They crossed the railroad tracks and kept running for twenty minutes towards another valley with steep sides. Hidden in the valley was the Night Jewel Lake next to a very ancient Siva temple. Shivaji and Raju climbed up a narrow stone trail that led to the temple. The trail went past the lake with its dark green, glassy surface that seemed to pick up the star light and mirror it like a jewel. Now, the lake was filled with sky sunset purples and reds. The Siva temple was small and special, carved of dark red stones stacked in layers that locked together and black granite pillars. It was worn with incredible age, having seen thousands of summers and winters. The two boys liked coming here, for the temple was very powerful, as if it had captured ten thousand strikes of lightning inside. Inside the temple, in the left-hand shrine was a gold Ganesha, perfectly carved, very real. It was solid gold, a wondrous object, and it was a wonder too that it was never touched

by thieves or bandits. For there were plenty of those around. But this gold Ganesha had so much power, no one dared think of taking it. Darkness was flowing like Indian ink down over the sky and the two boys now moved in the temple by feeling their way across the polished stone floor and reaching out for cool pillars. The old yogi who did the pujas in the temple wasn’t around—the temple had only a few oil lamps flickering in the Siva Lingam sanctum.

“Over here,” whispered Shivaji. “The Ganesha is over this way.” There was a pool of peace that washed over the temple, and it made Shivaji less worried about his lost notes and maps of the precious plants. He felt confident a solution would come. “There should be an oil lamp we can light at the Ganesha,” he whispered again. As their eyes adjusted to the shadowy darkness, they could see a faint glimmer of the gold Ganesha. It was about one foot tall. Even in the low light it had a noticeable glow—and Shivaji thought he saw a blue light playing around it. The Ganesha was so life-like the boys thought the eyes might suddenly turn from gold to Ganesha’s large soul body eyes. A bronze oil lamp, kept clean and polished, stood next to the golden Ganesha. A wick was in it. “There’s oil in the lamp,” said Raju, just pulling one finger out of the lamp. “We need matches.” He felt around with his fingers. “Ah. Here. One match,” he said with relieved happiness. “Only one match. We’d better make it work.” With a scratching sound, the match was struck against the rough stone surface of the wall. It just scratched. No flame. Raju turned the match to its other side. “Alright good match, please light,” he whispered. The match flame crackled and sputtered, casting orange-yellow light across the gold of the Ganesha and into the red stone of His shrine. The lamp was lit, and more light poured out and shadows lay on the floor from pillars carved with horses and winged beasts and drumming dwarves.

Shivaji and Raju fell flat on the floor in front of the gold Ganesha, their hands outstretched. They lay, prostrating, for two full minutes, each boy asking Lord Ganesha for help in their need. Rising, Shivaji chanted a short mantra to Lord Ganesha. Then, without a word spoken, each boy found a spot in front of the Ganesha and settled into a meditation posture.

Under his thick brown eyebrows, Shiva-

ji’s eyes closed and his breathing came like slow gushes of wind through his nose. He began talking to Lord Ganesha, describing how he lost his notes of the desert plants and wildlife. He needed Ganesha’s help to accurately remember all his notes and recreate them and his drawings. An hour later, he smiled widely and stretched his arms. The gold Ganesha was watching him. It had all come back—all his knowledge that was written, mapped and drawn had returned into his mind as Ganesha helped his memory stir to full power. And even greater understanding came of the plant and wildlife, as a special gift from Lord Ganesha. Raju too was smiling for he had made his decision while basking in the light of Lord Ganesha’s mind. The two boys prostrated, frozen like silver before the gold Ganesha. They put out the oil lamp and hurried home, where their moms had hot vegetarian food waiting for them.

BACKGROUND

All across Asia and across the tableau of Asian history, the power of Ganesha as the academic and cultural guide and benefactor of individuals and society is apparent. Each of the Asian nations worshiped Lord Ganesha—meaning a two-way communication is established—and much knowledge and invention came through for humans. In Hindu India breakthrough advances in mathematics, linguistics, astronomy, agricultural irrigation, construction technique, medicine and metallurgy were achieved. These advances came through men: well educated with creative intellects who were open to the intuitive powers of their own soul minds and that of Ganesha.

CITIZENSHIP

Recognizing that religious tolerance, spiritual knowledge and practices vitally contribute to the education process and social adjustment process is important for good citizenship. In Saivite Hinduism, we establish a worshipful communion with Lord Ganesha to help us toward superior education performance and good will for our fellow citizens. Eventually this creates an adult who enters a career that is progressive for the country and gives back to the community he lives in through volunteer service.

NOTES

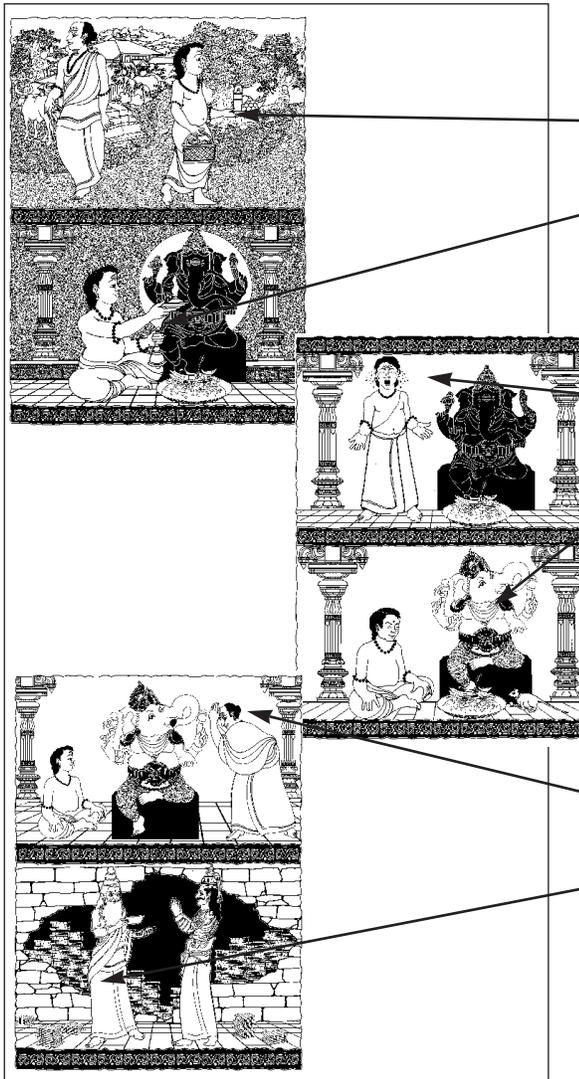
LESSON FOCUS

Faith in the reality of the Gods, even to the extent that they may supernaturally participate in our natural world is the focus of this lesson. Also, the fact that the Deities and devas do use the inner essence of the food offering at the puja. And a final focus is cultivating all children in the art of performing home puja.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Within all of Hinduism throughout India (not just Saivite Hinduism) there are stories of Deities actually physically eating the food offering of the puja ceremony. In these stories the Deities respond to the magnetic pleading of devotees entranced in the reality of the Deity. Many of these stories involve children, but just as many have adult devotees as the recipient of this extraordinary event. Some fresh episodes of this Deity-food-eating are documented in very contemporary Hindu non-fiction books, so it is a phenomena that goes on today, not just a thousand years ago. Who knows that one of the children you teach may witness such an event: or already did during the 1995 Ganesha-milk-drinking miracle, discussed in the next lesson. In each of these stories the sacred food offered to the Deity during the puja is somehow physically consumed or in some cases a depression is left of a finger or fingers, as in scooping up some of the food.

These types of miracles build the children's faith in the reality of God and the Gods. The Gods are real and may physically interact with our world. Here in Nambi's story, in the midst of a very devotional act—the puja—Ganesha actually alters the laws of the physical universe. Food that is normally untouched physically, is consumed by the energy hand of Ganesha. When we say the “energy hand” (a nice metaphor to use) of Ganesha, we mean the high vibration energies Ganesha would use to transform the puja food into a spirit essence, no longer physical. Now this should be no surprise to the children, for by now they should know that Lord Ganesha is the God who governs the physical universe of space, stars and planets and nature in all of its power, beauty and change. In fact, the children should be reminded from Book One that the physical world comes out of the energies of the Gods' world and the devas' world. So, it would be as easy for Lord Ganesha to physically vaporize the food, as it would be for each



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Nambi is carrying the offerings necessary for a puja to Ganesha, including the sweet food. During the puja Nambi is passing a single flame before the deity while chanting Sanskrit *mantras* (special phrases of power and mind communication with the Gods).

Disappointed that Lord Ganesha has not eaten the physical food, Nambi pleads for the soul God to eat his offering. In His etheric form, which is of a far higher vibration than our Earth bodies, Ganesha mysteriously energizes the food into a subtle life force—this force helps others spiritually.

Nambi's father is amazed that Lord Ganesha is eating the food offering. He learns not to doubt the reality of the Gods working with our Earth world. As a result of Nambi's childhood experience, he started practicing yoga and being an example of the Siva spiritual life. With spiritual sight he found missing sacred texts.

Namby was a little boy. His father was a priest at the Ganesha temple. They lived in Tirunaraiyur, in South India, a thousand years ago. One day Nambi's father went to another village. Nambi had to do the puja for Ganesha. He took sweet rice, modaka balls and fruit to the temple. He lit the lamps and chanted. He prostrated to Lord Ganesha and asked Him, “Please eat the food.” But the food was still there. Ganesha had taken only the inner essence. Nambi cried and cried. He wanted Ganesha to really eat the food. Finally Ganesha said “Nambi, stop crying, stop crying.” Then Ganesha really ate the food that Nambi offered. Nambi told his father what happened when he came home. But the father did not believe it. So Nambi took his father to the temple. There Nambi did the puja and again offered food. His father was surprised to see Ganesha eat it. The story of Nambi traveled far and wide. Even King Rajaraja Chola heard about it and came to honor Nambi. Nambi became a great saint and lived for many years.

child to boil a pot of water into steam. These types of supernatural events during pujas or other spiritual pursuits cultivate belief and faith in devotees. This event in Nambi's youth was spread widely through the empire of South India a thousand years ago. It would be like watching TV news today. So, many people spiritually benefit from such supernatural events, as the Gods are made more real in their minds.

Now, do the Gods actually eat food? No. They do not. No soul body (Gods are very advanced souls) eats food, and neither do advanced people in their astral/mental body in the devas' world. The Gods are not human, and do not have human needs or traits. They are souls of cosmic intelligence and cosmic spiritual force. We, as children and

adults, are souls in human bodies trying to bring forth our soul nature.

No, the Gods do not eat or sleep or get married or do anything human. But part of the puja is offering food to the Deity, food which is psychically infused by the God with beautiful spiritual energies and then given to the worshippers to eat. The food—especially fresh fruit—releases its subtle life forces into the atmosphere of the shrine or temple. The devas project these forces into the devotee’s aura. The radiant subtle energies of the blessed food are absorbed into the physical, astral body and aura of the devotees. This graced food can help in health, mental and spiritual matters for the worshipper. So, actually, every puja is a supernatural event, an important spiritual process.

Are such miracles as Nambi’s story commonplace? No. They are very rare. Again, they are meant to solidify faith. If such supernatural phenomena were common, then people would simply depend on the Gods and devas to do everything. Humans would diminish or quit striving to handle their own self-created karmas—both individual and group. Humans need to advance mostly by their own will power, intelligence and yoga toward solving problems and seeking God-realization. God Siva and Lords Muruga and Ganesha do not want to interfere with that essential process.

In the larger perspective, the children should be taught that all of life on Earth and all of our universe is a tremendous ongoing symphony of miracles: uncounted trillions of miracles at every moment.

Nambi’s story obviously revolved around the circumstances that he personally did the puja. The personal performance of puja is a very important act for all Saivite Hindu children to be familiar with and aspire to do one day. As emphasized in Book One, puja in the home shrine is essential to the spiritual purpose of the family and home. Performance of puja and chanting the Sanskrit mantras is a sacred honor and a time of direct connection with the inner spiritual worlds. Puja creates a bridge between us and the Gods.

STORY READING

Off in the distance of the smokey air of the city of Hong Kong 9-year old Vijay heard a siren. A fire engine, he thought: bright bold red with sun-shining brass and long ladders and hoses and brave firemen riding inside. Hong Kong seemed to be covered in a

gray blue cloud that looked like the gray blue waters of the bay that the city with its very tall buildings sat next to. Hong Kong was all buildings and cars and boats squashed together in a very small space. The siren was gaining in pitch, like Vijay’s sitar string when he was tuning it tighter so he could practice. Sometimes he pulled on the sitar’s wooden tuning peg too much and the string went *twang* and broke into two pieces of thin steel. He had to put on a new string then. He knew the siren was coming toward him because it was hitting higher notes. Sweeping his wood brown hair away from his right ear he listened carefully to see which street the siren was coming down. Where was the fire? His marble black eyes closed and he tilted his head a little. He had a kind, generous face that people liked to watch. The street was crowded where he stood at a corner, next to a single Orchid tree dropping lovely purple flowers like gifts of life into the polluted city. People, cars and bicycles and spicy, fried food smells were rushing by him. There was also a large Singapore Airlines jet screaming overhead, its landing gear coming down to land on an island in Hong Kong bay. And in the far distance, towards the steep pine and bamboo hills that surrounded Hong Kong the ringing of Hindu temple bells rose with peaceful, swaying tones. Vijay’s mother, dressed in a sea green sari and holding some shopping bags, was nearby talking to a Chinese lady, telling her how to prepare a very tasty vegetarian squash and peanut curry. There are mostly Chinese people in Hong Kong. But Vijay, using a concentration method he learned from a swami visiting the city, listened only to the siren. It meant danger and lives at risk. It also meant his father was busy. Vijay’s father was a captain in the Hong Kong Fire Department. He wore a blackish blue uniform with shiny badges over a crisp white shirt and a captain’s hat over his curly black hair. He was a fire fighter, and had been given many awards for being a hero. Vijay’s father also served as a priest on weekends at the Happy Valley Temple. The family had a lovely wood-and-clay tile shrine room at their house on the edge of the tall city. Out of the one window of the shrine room was the view of rolling grass mat hills and rolling sea waves that went into the country of China. Father did a puja every morning for the family, chanting in musical Sanskrit and waving small orange-yellow flames before the golden images of

1. Bring in a picture or statue of Lord Ganesha. Also bring one strong flashlight. Have the kids bring in a small sweet snack their moms made at home. The snack should be on a little plate—small paper plates are fine with plastic spoons. Set up a little shrine for Ganesha. One of the children, boy or girl, volunteers to be Lord Ganesha’s voice. He or she sits behind the Ganesha shrine out of sight with the flashlight. One of the other children—again boy or girl—volunteers to be Nambi. Nambi brings his sweet snack up to the Ganesha shrine and sets it before Ganesha. Nambi says, “Ganesha. I really love you and want you to eat this nice snack.” Turn off the lights in the classroom as Nambi finishes saying this. The boy or girl playing Ganesha then says, “Nambi, you are a soul of light. Here, I will shine my light on your wonderful food.” Ganesha then turns the flashlight on the offered snack. Ganesha then says, “I have taken the spirit of the food. It was very good.” The flashlight is still on. Nambi, then says in a crying voice, “Ganesha I want you to really eat the snack. Please.” Ganesha says, “For you, Nambi, I will eat the food. You must promise to always be a vegetarian.” Ganesha turns off the flashlight so it is dark. Then Ganesha takes the snack and takes a bite with the spoon, then puts the snack back on the shrine table. The lights in the classroom are turned on. Nambi says, “Look everybody. Ganesha ate my sweet offering.” This is repeated as different boys and girls play Ganesha and Nambi.

Lords Ganesha and Muruga and God Siva. And every morning, mother brought into the shrine a single, bright yellow banana as a food offering. It reminded Vijay of the crescent moon—a sign of Siva—he loved to watch at night at the beginning of each month. Vijay knew Siva the Supreme and the Gods were very real, as real as his mummy and daddy, as real as Hong Kong and Earth itself and the space Earth spun in. Vijay knew God Siva and Ganesha and Muruga could dip into our world and take a piece of banana offering. He knew they could magically touch a single red rose and turn it instantly into a carpet of white and red roses as big as a soccer field. He knew Siva could send a wave of love that could turn horrible wars into joyous peace. He

knew God and the Gods could create a billion Earths, each with a billion souls on them. He knew there was nothing Siva, Ganesha and Muruga could not do. He often thought to himself as he lay in his firm bed with blue sheets and blankets that Siva is everything, everybody and everywhere. How could He not do anything? Vijay breathed deep, and felt the loving glow of Siva within himself, and thought, “Yes, Siva can do anything anywhere anytime.” He repeated it: *anything anywhere anytime*. For his 9-year old mind, *anything anywhere anytime* summed up the power of Siva.

And the siren came closer, casting echoes off of stone and glass buildings. Two streets over Vijay said to himself, and four blocks down. But where was the fire? He could see no flames or smoke. No smell of smoke. “Mummy,” he excitedly said, turning to his mother and reaching out his hand to pull on her green sari. “The siren. A fire engine. A fire somewhere. Maybe dad’s there.”

“Yes, I hear it, dear,” said his mom, who was still talking to the Chinese lady. The lady, dressed in a fine blue-black Chinese dress with white buttons, lifted up her hands in the namaskar greeting that Hindus use. She was a Buddhist and the custom of greeting with palms and fingers together had gone from India to China. Vijay namaskared back and bowed his head a bit. “Excuse me for interrupting,” he quickly said and nervously brushed at his new blue kurta shirt. “But I feel something...something urgent is happening. Dad may be there. Mummy. Let’s go, please. Let’s follow the siren.” His mother looked at Vijay with slightly alarmed eyes, then stroked his long hair. “Alright. Let’s be off then. You lead the way.”

They said their goodbyes to the Chinese woman. Vijay turned, checked the busy traffic and quickly crossed the street after giving a friendly pat to the Orchid tree. He was saying to himself, “Aum Namah Sivaya, Aum Namah Sivaya, Aum Namah Sivaya.” He was also hoping that nobody was hurt in the fire. It hurt him to see people hurt, and he was always giving away his personal allowance to poor people. His mom and dad didn’t always approve of this, but it was one of his ways of being good and doing good. Vijay and his mother, the son in blue and white and mother in sea green, walked swiftly down the gray sidewalks. Then Vijay’s keen sense of smell picked up smoke. Not the smoke from food fires or old bus-

es and trucks with bad engines. This was fire smoke. A big fire. Burning up wood, carpet and curtains and plastic. “Oh Vijay. You were right,” his mom said with sadness and fright. “Siva. Siva. Let’s hope everybody is safe.”

“Don’t worry Mom. I think everything’s OK,” said Vijay, but his legs were moving very fast now. Another block and they saw the flames. Giant hands of fire with long fingernails of night black smoke poured out of a small brick building. A crowd was across the street, shielding their faces from the heat. And shooting hard silver jets of water into the fire was a long fire engine truck. It was even redder in the hot light of the fire. Vijay instantly saw on the side of the truck the number 108 in brass. Dad’s truck he noted. I knew it. Vijay’s dad was very proud of fire company #108, the Hindu number of good fortune. Vijay’s dad was the captain of this group of firefighters. Vijay coughed a bit from the smoke and knew his dad was someplace inside battling the dragon fire. But a flute-like wind of a voice inside his mind told him not to worry. Of course his mother was very worried, and she was just staring at the fingers of fire. “Mother,” said Vijay in a very grown up voice. “This may sound strange, but I know everything will be fine here. Don’t worry.”

Vijay heard some people say that everyone had been safely cleared from the building. No injuries. Then he noticed one of the signs on the building, a metal sign reading Himalayan Spices, Saris and Shrines. “Poor person that owned that store,” thought Vijay. “Gone. Everything will be burned into dark ash.” And the water continued to fight the fire.

With sharp cracks, and wood and glass splintering into the street, a group of firemen broke through a large door with their axes. They stepped on to the street and took off their hats and masks. Vijay could see his dad, dressed in his yellow fire-fighting suit, leading the men. “Dad,” he shouted at full voice. “Dad. Over here.” His father lifted his head and looked around puzzled. Then he saw his son Vijay and came running over. “Vijay, what are you doing here?” he cried as he was going to give him a hug, but stopped because he was covered with black ash. “Mom and I were shopping nearby. I heard the siren. I thought it might be you,” Vijay said excitedly.

“Well, it’s not a very big fire,” said his dad. “We have it beat. But you know there

was something very interesting in there. See the Hindu store there.” Vijay nodded at the same sign he noted before. “Well,” his dad continued. “Whole place was burned up. Lots of wood and cloth in there. But in the middle of the store was a small, beautiful wooden shrine with golden images of Siva, Ganesha and Muruga in it, like we have at home. The shrine was untouched. Not a mark on it. No soot. No smoke. Nothing. A beautiful shrine sitting in the middle of a terrible fire. Never seen anything like that before.”

“Seems like a miracle, doesn’t it?” said Vijay. “The Gods have touched our world.”

His father nodded his head. “Yes...yes. it’s a miracle. One of many every day.” And then the news reporters came and the TV cameras came. And on the evening TV news that night Vijay watched the report of the miracle Siva shrine in downtown Hong Kong.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson nicely connects to the following lesson on the Ganesha milk miracle. Note that while the Nambi event involved two people, the 1995 milk-drinking event involved tens of thousands and was seen by millions on television.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children to think of a miracle they would like Lord Ganesha to perform and why they would like Him to do this. Leave this open-ended—don’t tell them what kind of miracle, personal or for others—so that the child’s mind becomes more revealed to you. If this is an older class, you can instruct them to think of their miracle in terms of personal and general human karma—to see if they understand the teachings of this lesson.

As a second part to this assignment, have the children find some commonplace event or situation that they find miraculous.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

Once in a great while there is a super extraordinary spiritual event that captivates the world, and raises the consciousness of all humankind. In today's world of immediate global news even to remote lands, a tremendous spiritual event within a religion is immediately shared among humanity. So, within Hinduism, in late September 1995, thousands of sacred images of Lord Ganesha in temples and shrines around Earth drank thousands of gallons of milk, a miracle of pan-Earth proportions that was the top religion item in the print and broadcast news media for several days.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

In our previous lesson, young Nambi experienced a miraculous event by himself, then later witnessed by his father. Over a period of months and years the story of that small miracle in a Ganesha temple spread further and further throughout south India. It was spiritual news in slow motion: word-of-mouth, village story tellers, royal heralding, and perhaps the story traveled to other kingdoms by traders or the king's envoys.

In 1995, the year that saw the first real astronomy sighting of planets akin to Earth orbiting stars trillions of miles away, Ganesha images absorbed milk offered in spoons by devotees. The milk simply disappeared from the spoons, sucked into an invisible ether as if it was being drunk. And so on September 21st, 1995, from a small temple in New Delhi, India, the miracle of Ganesha drinking milk spread throughout the city, throughout the country and throughout the world. In a matter of 24 hours, worldwide, Hindus rushed to temples and shrines to offer milk to Lord Ganesha from Alaska to Vietnam. Truckloads of milk were offered by great lines of Hindus—often whole families taking turns—and truckloads of milk were miraculously absorbed by thousands of tiny and large Ganesha icons. It was an Earthwide recharging of faith for Hindus. As the TV media and newspapers quickly picked up the story, the global miracle in Hinduism became world news.

In contrast to Nambi's personal miracle and slow-and-local spreading of the story, the 1995 Ganesha milk event reached around the world in a single day, experienced by hundreds of thousands of Hindus and witnessed by hundreds of millions of people via television. Thus in 1995, Hinduism was host to history's largest experi-



In 1995 a great miracle began happening among Hindus all over the world. On September 21st of that year in India, Lord Ganesha drank milk. In thousands of temples around the world, millions of people offered milk to Ganesha. The milk they offered disappeared. Ganesha had taken it, just like he ate Nambi's food a thousand years ago. Even on television the BBC and CNN showed Ganesha taking the milk. This was a very great blessing shared by the whole world.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

The whole family—dad, mom, son and daughter—are offering milk to the image of Lord Ganesha. Even the young son is aware of the importance of this occasion. Father is not wearing any shirt, so this means they are in a temple in South India.

The milk is being offered and it is disappearing out of the dish. The daughter is offering a small pot of milk, and perhaps all of it disappeared.

Here are represented the tens of thousands of devotees who experienced the miracle of Ganesha drinking milk all over the world. These Hindus live in many different countries. Can the children guess which countries they come from?

da there are regularly scheduled TV shows dedicated to angels, and quite often it is the wisdom of the Eastern laws—karma, reincarnation, oneness of the universe, ahimsa (including vegetarianism)—that are the main themes of the shows.

enced and witnessed spiritual miracle. This should be made vitally clear to the children in your class. Hindu families experienced a tremendous opportunity to renew and re-fire their faith in the reality of the great Gods that continually help us on Earth. Simultaneously, millions of people of other religions open to mystical events—no matter their source—were also elevated in mind and belief in the power of the divine.

There are several points here to teach your class:

1.) Stress the point that this miracle was experienced by Hindus of all backgrounds and castes, from the poorest peasant to wealthy tycoons, scientists and temple priests. Quite often it was the children and youth's milk that was drunk by Ganesha.
2.) Over the past decade there has been a tidal awakening in spiritual people of all faiths in the reality of inner beings or heavenly beings. What we call devas, the Western religions call angels. What we call *mahadevas* (great devas or Gods) the Western faiths call archangels. In the US and Cana-

Dozens of books have been published on angels, selling tens of millions of copies. The popularity of angels and devas has never been higher in our history. And now Lord Ganesha, a great God of the deva/angels, brought the spiritual plane closer to Earth for all believers in angels with this milk miracle.

3.) Scientists in India and elsewhere attempted to explain the ethereal absorption of the milk in terms of science theory and even mass hypnosis. However, the main theory of the scientists, having to do with stone solids absorbing liquids, totally failed to account for the vast volume of milk disappearing: literally thousands of gallons. The scientists had to admit the phenomena was a physics mystery. And indeed there are many thousands of examples every day of both spiritual and natural events that are mysteries to our current sciences.

4.) There is a misconception that Lord Ganesha is exclusive to Hinduism—a Hindu deity only. Actually Siva, Muruga and Ganesha *are not* exclusive to Hinduism.

ACTIVITIES

They are God and Gods of all. It is Hinduism and some schools of Buddhism that recognize and know them. However, Siva, Murugan and Ganesha are just as real for non-Hindus. Indeed, Lord Ganesha is very popular among non-Hindus.

5.) Notice that the nature of this miracle was simple: milk absorbed into thin air through Ganesha images. There was no mass healings, or eradication of hunger, or sudden peace in Northern Ireland or Bosnia or Sri Lanka—all miracles of great help to millions of people. But as was pointed out in the previous lesson, this type of supernatural miracle would be involvement with human karma. The Gods do not want to directly solve our karmic challenges for us. We spiritually grow by solving our own plights and trials, with the Gods and devas giving inspiration and hints.

6.) Finally, once again, it is to be emphasized that Lord Ganesha is a soul being with a body of extremely pure light and a mind of infinite being/intelligence. Ganesha—nor any God—does not drink milk or eat food, or gets married and has children. Those are human functions. What did Lord Ganesha do with the milk? He turned it into an astral energy mist that could be used by the devas to help each devotee.

STORY READING

The month of September was almost over. Fall was painting its bright colors of yellows, reds and rust oranges on forests of trees in Switzerland. The air was turning quite cool. Time for thick coats and warm gloves and wool hats and hot chocolate that coated the tongue with the sweetness of Lord Ganesha. The air was very clear, like a magnifying glass on the sky. Sounds traveled far and fast in the cold air. The ringing of the Snowjewel Siva Temple bells in one valley could be heard in valleys far, far away. And sometimes it was as if the bells of the valleys were having a long, loving conversation. The curtain of night was falling sooner and the stars appeared quickly, several thousand diamonds cast across the dark purple twilight. School had started in September for 9-year old Shama and her best friend Shalini. They had grown up together in Switzerland, a small mountain country famous for its Swiss Alp mountains that rose like white-tipped castles into herds of clouds flying through a double blue sky. Both of their families were Saivite Hindus that owned small country inns. Tourists stayed in the inns, coming to the

country for fresh air, fresh vegetarian food and fresh fun in hiking through the golden Alp meadows and woods of dark green pine trees. During the summer, Shama and Shalini were guides for the tourists, along with Shama's brother, who was fifteen and as big as a big ox. His name, curiously enough, was Balamuruga. Bala means small. But he was not small. They knew the best trails and were good at climbing rock cliffs, and even knew how to survive for several days in blinding snow storms. Shama and Shalini spoke Tamil, Swiss, German and English. They sang Saivite songs as sweet as songbirds and played brass cymbals and the silver-stringed tambura. They called themselves the Swiss Siva Sisters, though they weren't sisters. But they were born in Switzerland and they loved God Siva, so the name became popular around the village they lived in. The Swiss are great singers too, and they loved to have the Swiss Siva Sisters join in evening time song festivals. Dressed in matching apple red punjabi outfits, their black hair falling to their waist with white roses pleated in, the two girls sat and sang with voices that were as airy as clouds. And even the snow-white stars seemed to shiver in the rhythm of the tiny cymbals that Shama *clink-clanked* together. "Like the fairies," the Swiss elders would say, and ask for another spirit song.

It was a Saturday in the last week of September. Lemon and orange sun light tumbled out of the Alp mountains. Green pine trees that would stay green even through the long lay of winter snow were sprayed with golden light. Shama had been up since the first flickering of dawn. She liked to say "Aum Namah sivaya" one hundred and eight times, one for each of the 108 reddish brown *rudraksha* beads on a gold chain she ran through her fingers. Each time she said "Aum Namah sivaya" the colors of the dawn changed. Her window looked right out to the tall rock gray faces of the mountains, tipped with vanilla ice cream snow. And during the fall months the sun would peek like an orange eye between two high cliffs and send a shaft of warm, silky light through her window onto her pretty face. And she would think, "Ah, the light of Siva as the star of our world. How warm. How safe. How good. Thank you." So often Shama said her private chanting of the name of God with her eyes open, looking out the big window of her small bedroom.

The glass of her window went *knock, knock, knockety knock knock*. Shama sat up

1. This is the "super straw miracle" game. Bring some kind of image of Ganesha, and a large, dark cloth. Bring in a generous number of long drinking straws, the longest straws you can find. Also have some tape on hand. Bring in three LARGE spoons and a modest supply of milk. Have the children tape together from a number of the straws three very long "super straws." The tape must seal over the adjoining straws very tightly and strongly. These "super straws" can be up to six feet long, the longer the better. But make sure the kids can suck liquid through the super straw before making them too long. Put a large table or desk in the middle of the classroom. Cover the table or desk with the cloth. Put Ganesha on the desk as a shrine. Three children hide behind the shrine table, each one with a super straw. Three other children come up to Ganesha with three spoons of milk. They offer the milk to Lord Ganesha, holding their spoons to the side of Ganesha. The three children with the super straws then try to put the end of their super straw into one of the three spoons and suck the milk out. They do this while trying to remain hidden. A lot of the fun is just trying to get the straw in the spoon. Maybe the kids making the milk offering will have to help. So it is a miracle when the milk disappears from the spoon. Then another set of children be the super straw kids, and others to do the offering.

in bed quickly and her pet cat, named Maha Meeow, jumped high off the thick, white-with-pink bears bed covers. Its tail and all four feet spread out. Meeeeeeeeow, said Maha Meeow, landing on the pine wood floor with his long white fur standing stiff like a cartoon. Maha Meow was afraid. But Shama wasn't. She was fearless. The glass, all covered with golden light, had knocked. *Knock, knock, knockety knock knock*. Again the glass knocked. Shama leaned forward and put her hand to the glass. It was cold and smooth. Is somebody there she thought. She couldn't see anyone. Alright I'll see if somebody is there. Glass does not knock by itself. "Is somebody there?" she said very loudly so that the somebody out there could hear through the glass.

Up jumped a bright red ski cap with yellow deers running across it with a dark brown, round girl's face with cheeks touched by cold and a very wide, white smile. "Hi," the girl cried through the glass of Shama's bedroom window that was still covered with the magical golden light. "It's me."

"Shalini!" cried Shama, smiling back at her best friend as she reached over to open the window. "Brrrr. It's cold. What are you doing out there? You scared Maha Meeow right off the bed." But by now Maha Meeow was over his fright. He had jumped up to the warm, fluffy bed covers and was looking at Shalini with green cat eyes and twitching whiskers. Shalini lived just a few houses down on a street that was made of dark gray/green stone fit together like bricks.

"Sooooorrrryyy. Maha Meeeeeeeeeow," Shalini said to the white cat, who was now licking his chocolate-colored paw and purring as if nothing had happened. "I've got some news Shama." Shalini's little thin body was lifting off the green lawn and her black hair was bouncing. This must have been exciting news. The sky was lemon yellow over pale blue. Thunder clouds rushed over the Alps, and way off some place was a crackling explosion of lightening. "I just heard it on the radio. The news station," Shalini said. "Lord Ganesha's drinking milk all around the world. In the temples. Ganesha's images! Come on. Let me in."

"What? Ganesha doing what? Wow," said Shama as her eyebrows shot up. "Come around to the back door at the kitchen. I'll meet you there." Shalini cried out, "OK." Shama closed the window with a gentle thud. She jumped out of her bed, pulled on some warm wool socks and a big brown Kashmir shawl that had a small Sanskrit Aum symbol sewn into it. Maha Meeow arched his back and stretched and yawned. Just like a yoga pose, that cat arching its back, thought Shama as she walked out the door, and skated her wool sock feet along the pine wood floor like she was on ice. Ganesha drinking milk? she thought. Amazing. She skated up to the shrine room of her home on the right side of the hall. Yellow flames were waving in the oil lamps, casting shadows across the red carpet and oak wood shrine that her dad had built and the bronze metal images of Siva, Ganesha and Muruga. She peeked in and looked at the Ganesha statue. In the dim light, it

seemed to smile at Shama. She skated down the rest of the hall, walked across the living room, through the dining room and into the kitchen. Shalini was waiting at the door, her warm shoes already off, doing a little dance in her socks to keep warm.

"Alright," Shama said as she swung open the door for her best friend, "Let's hear it." Shalini stepped onto the pale blue tiles of the kitchen that had an Indian folk art design in them. She liked to skate too, so she skated over to a radio above the refrigerator. "I'll turn on the radio in case there's another report," Shalini said. The radio crackled and hummed. "Lightening is giving us static. Maybe it'll clear up. Let's make some hot chocolate. It's cold this morning."

"OK, but start telling me the news. Can you reach into that cupboard and get the brown sugar please?" Shama said. Shama and Shalini didn't eat any white sugar foods. Bad for their health.

"Heard it this morning. It started two days ago in New Delhi in India, in a little Ganesha temple or Siva temple—I forget which. But the Ganesha image was offered some milk in a spoon by the priest. And the milk disappeared out of the spoon! Like it was being drunk!" Shalini said in her believe-it-or-not voice as she grabbed the brown sugar. "The spoon was empty. Milk gone. The news spread like wildfire through the city and the country. By the end of the day thousands of Hindus were lining up at lots of temples and the Ganesha images were drinking gallons of milk out of spoons as devotees offered it. Unbelievable, huh? Then Hindus in other countries started trying it. Everybody must have been calling their relatives in foreign countries or something. The news jumped out of India very fast and now Ganeshas in countries all over the world are drinking milk. USA. Canada. Fiji. Australia. It's on TV. We have to try it here in Switzerland."

Shama was heating up the milky hot chocolate, and it smelled very good. "Incredible. Around the world. Gee. Yes. Yes. Let's try offering some milk today. Let's get some milk and go to the Snowjewel Siva Temple. Do you think Ganesha will drink our milk?"

"Hope so," responded Shalini. "Most of the milk is being accepted from children. I think children believe in the reality of the Gods as very old soul beings more than adults. Adults are too...too busy, too questioning...well, they have kind of closed

minds sometimes." And both girls laughed.

"Hey," said Shama. "How about hot chocolate?" as they sat down at the kitchen table to noisily sip from their cups. "Ganesha likes sweets. Maybe He'd like hot chocolate? A nice cup of hot chocolate for Lord Ganesha." And they laughed again. "I'll get dressed. We'll find Balamuruga and he can come with us. Let's get some milk in a plastic bottle. And a couple of spoons." And so Shama and Shalini went off that Saturday in late September in Switzerland and the Ganesha at the Snowjewel Siva Temple drank their milk offering.

CITIZENSHIP

Miracles are an important dimension of all religions and tribal faiths. The stories of miracles are among each faith's most treasured and long-lived chronicles, carrying on from generation to generation through the media of story-telling, songs, books and now in our age movies, radio and television. Even the computer Internet is part of this passing along the stories of miracles. Saivite Hinduism has a rich repository of miracle lore, both from north and south India as well as from other countries Saivite Hinduism settled into. Each country has its locales associated with miracles and they are almost always points of pilgrimage for the faithful of the religion of that miracle location. Often a country will have many miracle sites associated with its diverse religions. Every citizen of a country should respect the miracle sites of each religion in the country, and be happy for miraculous events that occur in each faith toward the greater good of people. It would be out of place for Saivite Hindus to disrespect or devalue the miraculous events within other religions.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children to see if they know anyone in their family, extended family or family friends and associates who experienced the 1995 Ganesha milk-drinking miracle. Have them try to remember what they were doing on the day they heard about the event.

NOTES

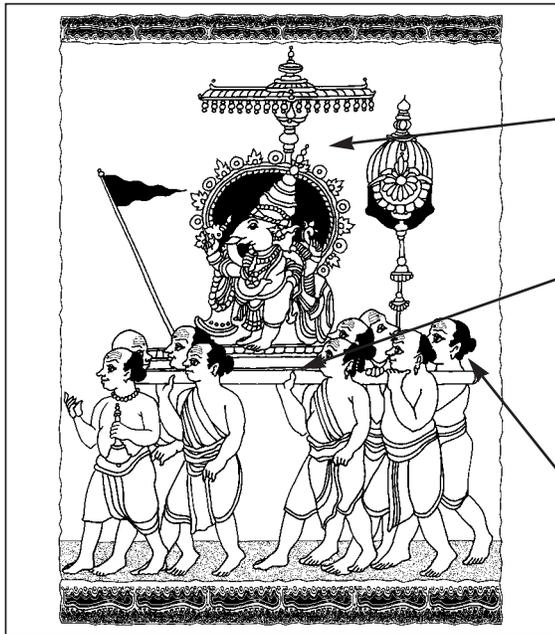
LESSON FOCUS

The Ganesha Visarjana festival is a fun and meaningful way of understanding that Ganesha as a God soul being has both a personal soul body of light and a universal mind essence of pure consciousness. This is a golden key principle of Saivite Hindu philosophy, for indeed all souls are both a soul body of light and a soul mind of pure cosmic consciousness. As the clay images of Ganesha dissolve in the water, each devotee is reminded that they also have a universal essence. This essence is experienced in yoga meditation. In a real sense yoga is the complete dissolving of the limited human mind into the unlimited celestial mind.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

The water-side celebration of Visarjana is the finale of the Ganesha Chaturthi celebration, itself a long celebration of Ganesha's birthday. This is the occasion of Ganesha's birthday, an event in a superspace very deep inside our stars and a time so long ago it lies outside our measure of time. Birthdays are important to children, marking a year of physical growth, new knowledge and "getting older." And birthday parties are among the most fun events of the year for kids—if you're invited. Fortunately, everybody is invited to Ganesha's birthday party festival, and it is celebrated all around our fair planet. The birthday of a God is truly a spectacular celebration. For one thing, it does remind us that all souls are created by God Siva out of His mind of absolute energy and love. Our soul light body is woven out of the pristine energy of Siva, much as if each child in your class were able to make a human-like body out of blue laser light. Each child in your class obviously celebrates a human birthday, but there is also a birth time for their soul, their true identity. They should think about that: a birthday for the creation of their soul by God Siva.

The birthday celebration of Lord Ganesha is a time to remind, to re-teach and reaffirm to ourselves all the ways that Lord Ganesha helps us in our earthly and physical life. For children, Ganesha is the patron of arts and sciences, a God who can help each child reach their peak performance in school and cultural arts like Bharatnatyam dancing and playing the Indian flute or drum. Ganesha, also most meaningfully for children, is the Gatekeeper of Dharma, as was discussed in Book One. This means during Ganesha Chaturthi and Visarjana the children can pray to Lord Ganesha for



Every year in August-September we celebrate Lord Ganesha's birthday. We make or buy a clay image of Him. It is made of clay because clay dissolves in water. We bring Ganesha home. He is our honored guest for ten days. We dress Him in fine clothes. We feed Him the best food. Every day we do special puja to Him. On the eleventh day, Visarjana, we carry Him to the river, lake or ocean. We all say "Jaya Ganesha" as we put Him in the water. *Jaya* means victory.

guidance in determining their destiny in life. Dharma is like a spiritual destiny, which besides spiritual unfoldment, includes the best success and happiness in all our human pursuits: education, culture, career, family, community status and service. Ganesha is able to provide each child with a dharma map, a map that shows the best roads for the child to take through life. This is done if the child asks for the dharma map by worshipping and talking/praying to Lord Ganesha. Ganesha responds by providing understanding and clarity in the child's mind and good counsel from other spiritually-minded and good people. The celebration of Ganesha Visarjana is a very good time for this.

As part of this annual Ganesha festival, a clay image of the elephant-faced Deity is made personally by the devotee or purchased. Have the children realize that there are tens of millions of these clay Ganeshas

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

A large clay image of Ganesha is being carried on a platform to a beach beside the ocean. This is a very ornate Ganesha and a lot of time has gone into crafting it.

This platform being carried on the men's shoulders will be a raft to carry the Ganesha out into the waters of the ocean. Eventually, the Ganesha will sink into the ocean water, dissolving into a complete blend with the sea water.

All the men we see here carrying the Ganesha are brahmin priests who do puja in the temples. Their heads are partially shaven and their hair is tied in a knot at the back of the head.

being made at this time of year. There would be enough clay Ganeshas to make a single file line from Earth to the moon and back again. It is certainly nice to make your own clay Ganesha, for your own creativity, love and life energies go into the image. The clay image represents the individual soul body of Lord Ganesha. If you buy clay to make your own Ganesha, it is good to get a kind that is

non-polluting when it dissolves in water. Part of the profound worship of Lord Ganesha is taking care of our earth, waters and sky. So we don't want to pollute the water as part of our worship. If you paint your Ganesha try to use bio-degradable paints.

Visarjana is always celebrated near a body of water: a river, stream, lake, pond, ocean, sea. The water represents the edgeless, unbounded first level of existence. *All* arises out of this infinite ocean of consciousness. It is the Mind of Siva that saturates everything as pure awareness and love. We call this *Satchidananda*: perfect being, perfect knowledge and perfect bliss. *Satchidananda* is also the mind of Ganesha and the mind of each child in the class. For the children, let's call this the Supermind. It knows everything everywhere at all times, is all powerful and peaceful, and is the bliss of bliss. Right now, each child is using this mind to a small degree. Lord Ganesha uses

His Supermind all the time at full power. When the clay image of Ganesha is placed in the water and the clay begins to dissolve into the water, this has great symbolism for the Saivite Hindu. First, it symbolizes that the sense of individuality—even as a soul body—is absorbed into the Supermind that is like an infinite ocean of power, peace and bliss. We literally are universal, cosmic in the Supermind. During Visarjana, Ganesha is teaching us this truth. Secondly, the dissolution of the clay into water is a symbolic reminder that yoga meditation is a similar process—allowing our personal human mind to fade into transparency so the Supermind shines out. Our clay-like human mind dissolves into the clarity of clear water and the Supermind is first seen as a clear, white light. Once again, Lord Ganesha is teaching us a special truth, and He beckons each child to practice yoga, merging their mind into Siva's Supermind.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Many of the children may not have seen a clay image dissolve in water. It would be useful to make a quick demonstration. Rather than using clay, bring several cubes or lumps of sugar, a thermos of very hot water and a clear glass and spoon. Drop the sugar cube into the hot water, and the children will see it begin to break down and dissolve into the water. A gentle stirring will keep the tiny sugar crystals suspended in the water, as if completely absorbed.

STORY READING

Mahadeva was asleep. His black hair lay all messy over the white pillow. The sheet and thick brown cover were half on the floor. His left elbow was sticking up, like a bumpy branch of a mango tree. He had a thin nose with a round tip, and his mouth with puffy lips was slightly open. His amber brown eyes were of course closed in sleep. His tummy was rising and lowering with his breathing. But it was surprising he was still asleep. Because through his thin nose Mahadeva was snoring like a bear. Like a big bear. Like a big bear asleep in a cave with echoes of snoring. Why didn't he wake himself up? That's what his younger sister, Devi, often asked. If I snored like that, she thought, how could I be asleep. Mahadeva told her he was practicing breath control. "When I'm asleep I take big breaths through my nose. Like a yogi. You should

try it," he told her. But she didn't believe that. "I think you're more like Yogi Bear than a yogi," she said back to him, thinking of a famous cartoon character of a smart, talking bear in the USA national parks named Yogi Bear.

This morning, and it was still shadowy dark outside, Mahadeva was asleep, doing his breath-control snoring. And he was dreaming. His eyelids were moving, and he was far away from his home in Curepipe, Mauritius, a small island country floating in the Indian Ocean. Mahadeva was dreaming that he was in a large, tall forest of giant banyan trees. The trunks were gray-brown with deep grooves and wider than a car. The roots snaked out along the grass-carpeted ground and formed lumpy walls and stair cases you could climb they were so big. Instead of ordinary leaves, these trees had leaves that glittered like green emeralds, and banyan berries as beautiful as red marbles. Mahadeva was dreaming he was in this forest next to a silvery-gold pond. He sat on the pond's bank made of white stones that were as soft as mushrooms. The white stones surrounded the pond, and here and there among the stones grew an orange bush, each with a single large orange and covered with so many white flowers it seemed like foam on an ocean wave. And the creamy scent of orange hung heavily in the air. The silvery water splashed up to Mahadeva's feet. The pond had tiny ripples that circled through it, as if rocks were being tossed in it. But nobody was throwing any rocks. The pond created its own rippling circles and the little ripple waves turned golden color on the silver surface of the pond.

Mahadeva was dreaming that he had just placed a clay image of Ganesha into the silver waters of the pond. He had made the clay image himself, the clay he had found in his dream under a flat black rock that shone like glass, like a mirror really. Mahadeva looked at the mirror surface of the black rock, and saw his own face, and then a triangle of gold light appeared on his forehead. In his dream he asked himself what that meant. It meant, simply, look down. He looked down, and just under the lip of the mirror rock was a lump of white clay. It was as white as China dishes and felt like melted white chocolate to his fingers. Mahadeva scooped up some of the white clay and began to make an image of Lord Ganesha, an elephant head with a curling trunk, two arms, two legs and a belly like a

1. This is the clay Ganesha game. Have each of the children bring a spoon and some clay (or other substance that can be shaped from home. The children are going to be making clay Ganeshas. Using the spoon, they carve and shape as best as they can a simple Ganesha. They should not take too long and should be praised and made happy with whatever they sculpt. then they carry their ganeshas and place them on a display desk. then the children sing together a Ganesha bhajan, or simply chant "Jaya Ganesha." Then each child gets his or her clay Ganesha back and takes it home at the end of the day for the home festival.

balloon. And big eyes, for Ganesha has very large, beautiful eyes and long eyelashes. He sees everything, Mahadeva thought to himself. The clay Ganesha was white, but still soft and gooey. Mahadeva set the image on top of the flat black rock, and little flames rose out of the rock, surrounding the Ganesha, giving off heat. The image dried and turned even whiter. In his dream, during which he was still snoring like a hairy bear, Mahadeva was wearing a purple shoulder pouch made of thick, shiny linen. Inside the pouch was a water color set with long wood brushes and little squares of color from blushing red to dried straw yellow. Next to the silver-gold pond Mahadeva painted his Ganesha, giving it the color of life and royal clothes and rich necklaces. All the while in his dream he sung a little Ganesha bhajan. It was a lovely tune, a melody that would make dolphins jump out of the sea for joy or wolves howl in delight even though there was no full moon. And this little song asked Ganesha for help in making all the right choices in life. The song went: *Ganesha, with your elephant ears help me listen to spirit voices of gurus and rishis; Ganesha, with your elephant eyes help me see my right road in life; Ganesha, with your elephant trunk help me wrap around kindness and selfless service; Ganesha with your elephant tusks help me stay away from bad people and thoughts; Ganesha with your big belly help me learn wisdom, and not eat a lot of junk food.* That last thought was added in by Mahadeva in his dream because he was tempted by candy quite often—in fact every day. In his dream Mahadeva had finished the clay Ganesha and was sitting in a half-lotus cross-legged po-

sition next to the pond. He was meditating, his eyes closed and he was trying to experience the unending, all-knowing mind of Ganesha. So he had his eyes closed in both places. In his bed at home in Mauritius while his physical body slept. And in his dream on the pond's bank while he meditated on the Supermind. He chose a spot on the pond that had a little deep pool formed by dark brown rocks that had patches of green moss growing on them. The moss glowed like fireflies turned to green and stuck together on a rock. Mahadeva chose this spot because he thought this is where Ganesha would like to go into the pond. Ganesha likes beauty, and this is a beautiful spot, he thought. Underneath the silver surface of the pond, the water was blue-clear. Mahadeva finished his meditation, picked up the Ganesha and began to place it into the blue-clear water. The water was not cold, nor warm, nor hot. It was slightly electric, tingling. And the Ganesha drifted down to the bottom and landed among some rocks that looked like turtle shells. Mahadeva watched the Ganesha in the water, and he was waiting for it to begin to dissolve. The body of Ganesha was supposed to dissolve into the pond of consciousness. Little particles were supposed to break off the Ganesha, like smoke drifting from an incense stick. But nothing happened. The Ganesha sat there. Solid as a rock among the other rocks. Mahadeva, in his dream, asked himself, "What happened? Ganesha is supposed to melt into the pond." He sat there in the banyan forest next to the pond and thought about this. "There is something going on here. Something I have to figure out," he thought and scratched his thick hair and gave a little tweak to his ear, a habit when he was thinking. "Hmmm. The clay Ganesha won't break down, won't merge into the water. Maybe the water is too cold? No. I didn't feel any temperature. Maybe the clay is too hard?" He tossed in a piece of dried clay next to his foot. It dissolved immediately into a white cloud in the blue-clear water. "Nope. Not too hard. What is it? Maybe it's me," he thought. "Maybe I have to be meditating as myself being the Supermind. After all Lord Ganesha, God Siva and I all have the same divine mind. So in order for the clay Ganesha to dissolve into the pond, I have to experience the Supermind. Alright. I'll try it." Once again, he closed his eyes in meditation and began to slow his

breathing down, as slow as a turtle breath. He sat up straight on the edge of the pond and placed his hands in his lap. He began to feel a wave of devotion drift over him, a wind of surrender blew through him, a letting go of the anchor of his small Mahadeva self into the great ocean of being. He became the soul mind, the Oneness. And then, he opened his eyes. The clay Ganesha, so beautifully painted with water colors, had completely disappeared into the bluish colored water. It was gone.

Mahadeva woke up suddenly. The dream with its forest and pond was gone. But the memory was like a video camera recorder in his mind. He was back in his bed in La Morne, Mauritius. It was Ganesha Visarjana day. He and his sister were bringing their clay Ganeshas up to the Grand Bassen lake with their family for the celebration. And Mahadeva now knew the real meaning of Visarjana. "Hey, Devi," he called out to his sister. "You'll never guess what happened in my dream."

CONNECTIONS

This lesson can be nicely associated with other lessons that not only discuss festivals, but those that explore the practice of yoga. In the Visarjana act of submerging a dissolvable Ganesha and having it completely dissolve into the water, there is a major clue as to the process of yoga. It also teaches us that the Gods are indeed continually realizing themselves as the Absolute Reality.

BACKGROUND

Just to show that Hinduism is an ever-evolving religion, the one-day observance of Ganesha Visarjana was not always such a big event. Lokman Tilak made it into a big affair about 100 years ago, first in Mumbai. Now it is celebrated worldwide.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

Lord Murugan is the Deity who most helps us in our personal pursuit of yoga. Lord Murugan is the God of the primary cosmic energy that generates and sustains life and flows through our physical body from the spine and head regions. As such He may catalyze quick and sure healing of body or mental ills through regulation of this vital force. Our ability to deeply understand Saivite Hinduism, and apply its principles, is tremendously assisted by Lord Murugan. He is the Mind of mystical knowing. Murugan's light spear is a tool of great cosmic power to protect us and help us.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Instruct the children to close their eyes and using their imagination see themselves stepping out of their home onto the street and looking up into a clear night sky. No moon is shining and no clouds hide the great bowl of space overhead. Thousands of stars flash in a net of pin-point lights. With the children seeing in their mind's eye all these beautiful stars, have them feel the power, the sheer energy force of trillions of stars—a galactic river of ice blue and white light bubbling with bliss. In doing this, the children felt the outer edges of Murugan's being. Their minds briefly touched Lord Murugan, for He is the God of Yoga, the cosmic Deity of Starpower. As stars are universal symbols of awesome beauty and power, one of the most potent symbols for Lord Murugan is the *shadkonam*, six-pointed star. This tells us that Lord Murugan projects the power of uncountable stars. And with this starpower Murugan shines from within each child who is trying to find Siva through yoga. In fact, as a person succeeds in practicing yoga a beautiful white star emerges from their energies in the spine and can be seen psychically.

Helping us in yoga—perfect union with God Siva—is Lord Murugan's greatest function for each girl and boy. Since the purpose of our many births on Earth is to realize our identity as Siva, then Murugan's help in yoga should be our most treasured gift. Navigating the mind through yoga is like traveling across the midnight reaches of space to a far distant star in a spaceship. It takes great intelligence, courage, skill, discipline, will power and personal energy.

Lord Murugan helps our yoga in several key ways. We need Lord Murugan to give us guidance, to teach us from deep inside ourselves the best way to actually attain yoga.



Lord Murugan was also created by God Siva.

He is Siva's second son. He is the God of yoga, healing and teaching. He helps us understand our religion. We pray to Lord Murugan to help us be peaceful and good. He uses a spear of light to protect us from bad things. His peacock is beautiful and colorful just as our Saiva religion is beautiful and colorful.

We need His starpower, the power we feel like a river of golden love and superelectric force traveling up the subtle channels of the spinal column. He helps still the traffic of thought that is ever flowing through our mind and keeps us feeling that we are merely human and separate from God Siva. Murugan can weave a cocoon of special light around the young boy or girl as they meditate, protecting them from bad thoughts and forces other people in the neighborhood or city are projecting. Murugan helps us learn the benefit of humility, so that it is easy for each youth to surrender the small "I" into their true cosmic soul consciousness.

How do we contact Lord Murugan? Well, it is very similar to contacting Lord Ganesha. We need to think very strongly of Lord

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Lord Muruga is sitting on a beautiful and very large lotus flower. This represents the power of the inner consciousness forces in the soul body, giving each soul a vast variety of spiritual abilities.

This right hand is giving out blessing of spiritual energy. Imagine a trillion suns radiating their energy in a spiritual form out of Lord Muruga's hand. With this powerful blessing He can help us in yoga and in healing our bodies.

Another form of Lord Muruga, showing six faces. In the Sivaloka Gods do not have multiple heads and arms. But they do have many powers of mind and energy that are represented by many faces and limbs. In both these pictures Lord Muruga is carrying His Vel of cosmic light.

Murugan, and see His beautiful face in our imagination. Murugan is easy to see because He is so beautiful. We see Murugan in our mind and talk to Him, pray to Him. Prayer is talking, so the children can be very specific and detailed in praying to Lord Murugan for help in yoga and for clearer, deeper understanding of Saivite Hinduism. One of the best

places to contact Murugan is in His temples. But He is easy to reach also in caves, for caves are spaces in living rock, creating unearthly quietness and penetrating, sacred peace.

When we meditate, we want to do so at the same time each day and in the same place. This way Lord Murugan will know you are there and He can help.

We can see that Lord Murugan helps each person with their soul body (yoga), their mental body (spiritual education) and with their physical body (healing). Spiritual learning is one of Lord Murugan's best aids to young minds. The very process of studying this course—this lesson—is overseen by Lord Murugan. All the knowledge that you as the teacher can give from *Dancing with Siva* is given extra power of com-

prehension by Lord Murugan and his devas. Spiritual learning should be considered the compass of life—it gives direction, purpose and understanding to the entire range of life’s experiences. It would be helpful to even bring a compass to class. It should be emphasized to the class that the fact they are studying this course means Lord Murugan is helping them.

Our normal view of the human body is that it is composed of skin, muscle, skeleton, organs, glands, blood system and nerve system. Hurts, wounds and sickness happen to a body of flesh and blood. But from the viewpoint of our spiritual body, the physical body we occupy each incarnation is really an energy body. It is made of energies going in slow motion so to speak, whereas our astral, mental and soul body are energies going faster and faster. And this is the way that Lord Murugan is able to help in healing our wounds, illnesses and mental traumas. By using light and sound of soul energy that flow into our spine, Murugan changes the quality, color and mixture of our physical body energies. This is like standing near or under a lamp that gives off heat when we are cold or wet or stiff. We can immediately feel the changes in our body from the heat energy. Working at a deeper level than normal medicine, Murugan’s healing energies can create rapid and even instantaneous healing, remissions and cures. However, this must relate to each individual’s karma. Very often we experience our karma—our spiritual school lessons—through physical hurts and illnesses. If we think and act selfishly, angrily, bitterly and jealously toward people, or are harmful to animals, then that bad karma often returns to us as illness or injury. Often, such karmic wounds and diseases are best lived through so the lesson is really learned. But if an individual has been living a virtuous, generous, spiritual life and does penance (see **Book 1 professional teacher’s guide**, lesson 12), and a karmic injury or illness comes, then Murugan may offer His healing grace.

The quality of karma in each child’s life also applies to Lord Murugan protecting us from danger. When we suddenly find our selves in a dangerous situation—for example, the brakes get wet on our bicycle and fail to work—we should immediately beseech Lord Murugan’s help. We call to Him for protection. Lord Murugan can travel instantaneously in consciousness and be there right away to divert or soften disas-

ter. However, there may be a karmic lesson in the situation that is important for us to experience, to learn from. We may learn detachment, compassion or bravery for instance. Penance is the method for softening our harsh karmas.

STORY READING

Kumar, 9-years old, was fearless and very curious. His curly reddish brown hair refused to be brushed or combed. It just sort of sat on his head like rusty seaweed. His light blue eyes were always on the move, searching, looking, inspecting. His lips liked to move too, like he was talking to himself. Which sometimes he was. His hands, pale like lead, were dancers. Dancing over book pages or the keys to his computer or feeling leaves and flowers or petting his dog. Or ringing the brass bell in the Siva shrine room of his home in Canada. He was the best bell ringer in the whole world. Kumar really listened to the tones of the bell as he rung it, *dang adanga dang dang, dangety dang adang dang dang*. The bell in his fingers, created stairs to the deva’s world, for he could hear a hundred notes in the bell, each one a step upward. And sometimes he liked to ring two or three bells at the same time, their notes bending and blending into a deva-angel harmony. His dad did the puja and Kumar rang the bells, keeping a nice rhythm to match the rolling rhythm of the Sanskrit. Kumar’s favorite bell, with more deep bass tones, had a lovely little Murugan carved in silver on the top. It was the handle. Kumar kept this bell polished so well that it shone like tiny bolts of lightening were sparking off of it.

Kumar and his dad were now at the bottom of the world. The southern end of Earth, ten thousand miles from Canada, ten thousand miles away from mom and from his dog, called Raja Rex, which meant *king* in both Sanskrit and Latin. Kumar had looked that up on his computer one day. He wished Raja Rex was here, with his red bushy fur and friendly face and long floppy ears and a very long tail that made a nice swishing sound on the carpet at home. Here, at the southern bottom land, there was little sun light and no sun warmth. The land was called Antarctica. It was a vast, vast desert of glinting, shimmering blue ice with gray white snow storms often blowing over it. White snow piling up on mountains and meadows of blue ice under a pale yellow sun that didn’t even rise into the sky for months and months. Kumar called them

1. Bring in a copy of Dancing with Siva, one of the best books available for studying religion. Also bring in a stiff cardboard tube and some aluminum foil and a long length of yellow string or yarn. Divide the children into three groups: one creates a spear of light out of the tube and aluminum foil. The second group creates a base for the spear of light. The third group takes the yellow string and ties a knot in it for each child in the class—so that the number of knots equals the number of children. They attach one end of it with tape to the Dancing with Siva, and the other end to the spear of light. Arrange the children in a circle sitting down around the spear of light. The Dancing with Siva, attached by the yellow thread, is given to the first child in the circle. Everybody closes their eyes. They see the spear of light glowing with golden power and they say outloud, “Lord Muruga helps me in the understanding of my religion.” The book is passed to the next child and the same affirmation is repeated outloud. The book continues around the circle, the string carefully winding around the spear of light.

the night days. It was still day, and he ate a vegetarian breakfast, lunch and dinner, but it was like twilight all the time. It was so cold your nose could freeze off if you didn’t keep your face covered. And without goggles you could go snow blind.

Kumar’s dad was a scientist who studied the air very high in the sky, almost where the sky turns into outer space. This part of the sky protected the Earth and all of its life forms from energies the sun creates that are too harsh for life. They would hurt and even kill life if this blanket of special gas in the sky let them through. But it absorbs them harmlessly. Kumar had switched on the glowing green screen of his computer, called up an encyclopedia and read that this was called the *ozone layer*. As Kumar tapped his computer keys and paged down through the electronic encyclopedia, he thought of Lord Murugan as the protector of our wellness and spiritual life. Kumar had been taught that Lord Murugan created blankets of golden energy around people when they meditate. This protected them from other people’s bad thoughts as they did yoga. Maybe Murugan helped design

the ozone layer thought Kumar in his curious mind. Murugan would just think it, and it would instantaneously exist around Earth. Next to Kumar's computer was his silver Murugan bell. He reached over, rubbed the Murugan image, picked up a very soft cloth and polished the bell. Then he closed his eyes, and as the computer hummed like a hive of electronic bees, rang the bell. Silver notes filled the room and filled the snowy silence of the Antarctic. Over in the crowded corner of the aluminum-colored room where Kumar and his dad lived was a small shrine. Siva, Ganesh and Murugan stood there on red velvet with a small blue spotlight on them.

Kumar put his feet on top of his thighs in the full lotus seating position. I'm a lotus flower in the Antarctic he thought with glee. This was the only time of the day when he really tried to hold still, during a short time of yoga. He breathed slow and his blue eyes closed. He tried to feel the starpower of Lord Murugan in his spine, and he did feel a soft stream of bliss-light for just a few seconds. "Good night, Murugan, and thank you" said Kumar out loud and jumped into his extra thick blankets as fast as he could.

Kumar's father was Dr. Sivanatha. He was studying the ozone layer in the high sky of the Antarctic as part of a large international team. There were scientists from many countries, all working together. They were all in a large camp with low, round buildings packed together, some with radar and radio antennas on top. Outside were colorful tanks of fuel and bright orange snow mobiles that travel over snow and snow cats—big, warm cabins on giant treads powered by engines that could go far distances over the ice. Everybody wore giant yellow jackets and thick pants and boots and gloves—all yellow with orange stripes, so they were easy to spot out in the endless snow desert.

Vrrroooooom! The snow cat engine roared to life. Kumar's dad had just turned the key after checking the fuel and some other dials on a complicated instrument panel. Heat was coming into the cabin and Kumar took his gloves off to warm his hands next to the incoming hot air. "Wow. That feels good," he said to his dad.

"Very cold out this morning. Forty below zero and winds gusting up to thirty miles an hour. That equals seventy below zero. But we have to go out and check station

number 12. No choice. Important data is out there. I checked our astrological calendar just now. It's not a bad time to travel. Not a great time either, but we'll be careful." He reached over with his gloved hands and punched on the snow cat's headlights. Instantly, giant pools of light shone out into the dark ice and wind-born snow.

It was gray-black dark outside, but soon it would be a little lighter as the sun skimmed along the horizon. Kumar's father put the snow cat into gear, said Jai Ganesh, and the snow cat's treads bit into the snow, like a very strong tiger putting its claws into ice. They moved forward, following a worn road being dusted by snow flurries. Station number 12 was about an hour away driving in the snow cat. Inside a waist pouch, Kumar had stowed his Murugan bell. He felt for it, as the snow cat was rocked a bit by a strong blast of wind. The windshield wipers were beating snow off the cabin's large window. They made a comforting sound that for some reason reminded Kumar of home, of his mom and Raja Rex. He would call his mother today he thought. Hadn't talked to her in a week. The snow cat rolled on across fields of ice and climbed over snow ridges. Once in a while, Kumar could see long, very dark cracks in the ice. Crevasses they were called. Very dangerous. But his father knew where they were and most were marked by red flags. But new ones could suddenly open, like a giant hammer crunching down on the ice. The snow cat cabin was comfortably warm from the engine heat. For a while Kumar closed his eyes, took off his hat and just relaxed. The wind moaned and whistled outside, sometimes sounding as if a flute was made of ice and being blown by snow devas.

Silence surrounded Kumar. Too much silence. And the familiar rumble of the engine was gone. Station 12 already? Fast trip, he thought. He opened his eyes. No Station 12 in sight.

"Kumar...son. Get your gloves on fast!" ordered his father. "Engine just stopped. We'll start chilling down real quick. Put your hat on and your jacket hood up and face mask on." Kumar instantly stuffed his gray wool hat over his head, but already he felt a very icy claw of cold brush his neck. Heat was going out of the cabin fast. And deadly cold was coming in. If they had reached Station 12, its single room and heater would have provided shelter. Now they were sitting on the ice in super-freez-

ing and windy weather. Kumar's father was working on some engine controls. "Totally dead," he said. "We have some battery power. We have the radio. But no heat. Might be a good time to start praying to Lord Murugan," his father said seriously. "We're going to need Murugan's protection. I'm radioing the main camp."

For about twenty seconds Kumar took off his right hand glove. He wanted his Murugan bell in the waist pouch. It was bitterly, biting cold and he could see his fingers just starting to turn white. But the bell was a magic connection to Murugan. The bell was like a computer link-up to the office of Lord Murugan. He unzipped the pouch, got the bell and quickly pulled his glove back on. His fingers were going numb. He rang the bell and it sounded like a thousand bells in the shrine of cold they were now in. "Dad. I think Murugan wants us to do some yoga. Concentrate on our body warmth, and the energies of the devaloka body. That'll create spiritual heat," Kumar said to his father through his face mask. His father was just getting on the radio: "Base, this is snow cat two headed out to Station 12. We're in trouble. Engine's dead. No heat in the cabin. Need rescue immediately."

The main camp crackled back on the radio: "We copy that snow cat 2. That's Dr. Sivanatha and Kumar right? Stay calm. Stay warm. We're on our way. Be there in an hour or so. Winds are getting faster. Temperature's going down! Stay on the radio. Do not fall asleep." The radio crackled into silence. Sleep would mean death.

Dr. Sivanatha pressed the radio button with some difficulty as the super cold was numbing his hands through the gloves. "Glad you're on the way. We're going to practice some serious yoga out here. Generate some inner heat. We're leaving our lights on so you can see us." Turning to Kumar, he said, "Good idea son. Yoga. Don't think we can sit in a cross-legged position with these snow suits. But let's sit up straight, breathe deep and slow, and let Murugan guide us into a spiritual fire inside our body."

Kumar said with his teeth chattering, "Right. Let's do it. Let's feel Murugan's flame from the Vel go through our whole body." And father and son began their yoga. The temperature in the cabin was now sixty below zero. Icicles were forming, hanging from the cabin ceiling and instrument panel like white carrots. But father

and son weren't even aware of this—their eyes closed in a yoga link with Lord Murugan. And slowly, they felt a joyous, warm energy flow through their body, out to their fingertips.

The rescue snow cat pulled up an hour and half later. Inside, Dr. Sivanatha and his son Kumar were alive and well. No sign of cold sickness or frostbite. They returned to the domes of the main camp, and in their room did the most thankful puja to Lord Murugan they had ever performed.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson on Murugan associates well with the lesson on the satguru. Lord Murugan as the God of yoga and spiritual learning relates directly to the satguru who is the ultimate human guide in yoga and spiritual learning. The Saiva satguru and the line of satgurus is very close to Lord Murugan. This obviously has to be so, because Lord Murugan is the deity of religion. His vast mind oversees and flows through the process of religious practice and evolution. Further, as Lord Murugan (or Skanda or Kumara) is able to protect us from badness in our life, the satguru serves as the guide for a life of goodness and success and also through his advice is able to protect us from bad things and actions.

CITIZENSHIP

Nations today are struggling with increasing crime, unemployment, stagnation of family values and a young generation engaged in largely unwholesome entertainment or diversions. Cultural pursuits—the arts and humanities, crafts and nature interests—are rapidly diminishing among the youth. A clear, productive and high-minded direction in life is often lacking for youth, even after 12-16 years in school. It is as if there is no compass for their life. And finally, health care is an enormous financial and social concern for nations, institutions and companies. Understanding about Lord Murugan as the deity of spiritual learning and health and then establishing a working relationship with Him is a vital aid to addressing all of these modern national concerns—from ethical conduct in society to cultural revitalization to direction in life to vital and long-lasting health. However, mere worship of Lord Murugan alone does not provide these. That is the first step, followed by many steps of opening the mind to learning from many sources that Lord Murugan

may inspire—such as learning the difference between processed white flour and rice (very unhealthy) and natural brown flour and rice (very healthy). Also regularly practicing spiritual ethics and disciplines, being curious and interested in culture, cultivating personal will power.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children to each night to think of how healthy an elephant is. Elephants are vegetarian. They eat grasses and leaves from shrubs and trees and they eat fruit from trees. All of this food is fresh, right from nature. Elephants are very strong and they live a very long time. They very rarely get sick. This is because they eat well, and their food is from nature and is full of nature's power. What would happen if elephants ate food that came from factories or was frozen or in cans, of food that had nature's power stripped from it so that it looked white or lasted longer? The elephants would get sick and die young. The children should think about how their food can come more from nature.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

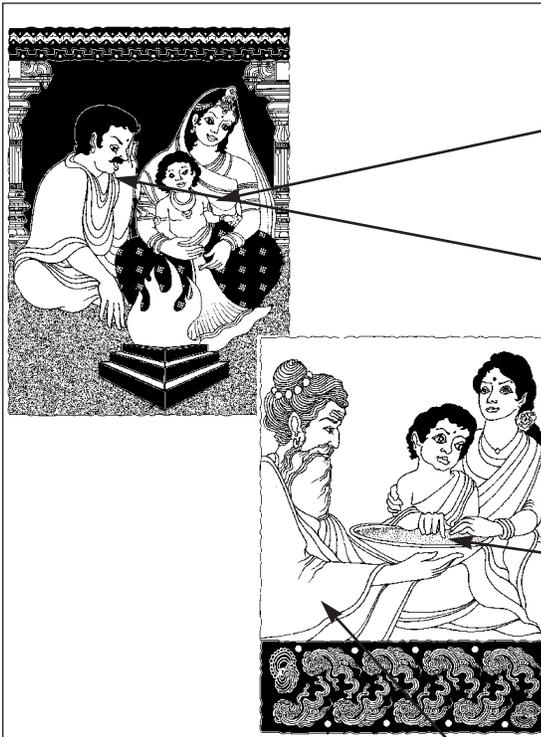
There are very important times in our life when we really need the guidance and blessings of God, the Gods and devas. These times usually mark a major change in our life, such as starting our education or marriage. Soon after birth children in Hindu families become Hindus by undergoing the name-giving sacrament or *samskara*. The *samskara* ceremony is a specific ritual to invoke the presence of the divinities during these important periods of change. A very important *samskara* for childhood is the beginning of the child's education. This is focused on for divine guidance by the writing-of-the-first-letter *samskara* ceremony, which is usually done in the temple.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

All people, especially young kids, like to have good luck and good fortune in their lives. There are many times in children's lives when they wish (which is a mental prayer) for something to happen. Or they wish for an event to turn out well for them and their family or friends. At a young age and as we grow older there are many important changes in life, and having good fortune and wisdom at the exact time of those changes is indeed an important part of Saivite Hindu living. We call the ceremony that brings us good luck and wisdom, the *samskara*. There are many *samskaras* given throughout child and adult life. The last *samskara* is the one for when we die. This *samskara* is held after we have left the physical body, and are on our way to the devas' world in our astral body.

Samskaras are always ceremony rites. They are religious rituals. There is always a certain way of doing each *samskara*. For instance, the groom and bride always take seven steps around the fire during the wedding *samskara*. But *samskaras* do not always take place in the temple. Many take place at home, or at public halls. But most *samskaras* need a priest to perform the rite. The *samskaras*' purpose is to bring the Gods and devas directly into the life of the devotee at the time of the major change. Blessings are given—which means the Gods send pure colors of light that helps the person be smarter, more caring and more spiritual. The Gods and devas look at the *karma* map of the person and see what is best for them during the change. New opportunities may come, and this is good fortune.

Many changes for children involve phys-



Soon after your birth you were given your Hindu name. You became a Hindu for your whole life. When the priest puts a big tray of rice in front of you, your parents help you write your first letter, "A." Now all the Gods and devas know you are ready to learn. They will help you learn your school lessons.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

The very young boy is in the temple with his mother and father. A fire ceremony is underway, magnetizing the inner world deva angels to the *samskara*.

Father is whispering the child's name into his ear. What do the children in the class think the baby boy's name is. The deva angels know the name too, and one of the deva angels is assigned to be a guardian for the boy for his entire life—watching over him, offering protection and invisible advice.

With mother holding him tenderly and with hope in her eyes for her son to be a great benefit to humanity, the young boy writes his first letter into the tray of rice. This scene could be a girl or boy, each one seeking the most favorable start for their education. Education should of course include and put as a priority, spiritual knowledge.

In this picture a guru is holding the rice tray the boy is writing into. This would be a double blessing, for the guru is attending the *samskara*. He may give the mother and boy some advice which should be followed.

ical abilities or growth: such as having teeth grow in or learning to walk. Or the child learns to make its first sentence, a very remarkable accomplishment in itself.

But there are changes that are super-important. They are so important that the Gods and devas themselves want to be involved and to aid the young devotee. The first of these events is the name-giving *samskara*, called the *namakarana samskara*. In Saivite Hinduism, this is when the baby girl or boy receives their religious name. A name is chosen by the parents for the son or daughter. The astrologer is consulted on this, as there are certain best first syllables for the name, depending upon the astrology of the birth.

In its simplest form, the name is given to the child by its father in the home shrine room. The name may also be ceremonially

given to the child by a priest conducting the rite in the temple. This *samskara* is one of the most important rites, because it is the child's formal entrance into Saivite Hinduism. The child is introduced to the Gods and devas, and the boy or girl become part of the great overview of the Gods helping us with our spiritual growth and karma. During this rite, the Gods and devas are very aware of the individual girl or boy. Many blessings are sent for the most successful spiritual life. It is during this *samskara* that a guardian deva is assigned to the boy or girl. This deva is a personal guardian or friend for the child, and helps guide and protect the person throughout their entire life. This receiving of a guardian deva is one of the most important parts of the name-giving ceremony, and indeed one of the most significant events in the person's life. The rite is equally valid whether done at home or in

the temple.

This same ceremony, the namakarana samskara, is given when someone not born in a Hindu family wishes to join our faith. Even people who have been in other religions can formally enter into Hinduism through the name-giving samskara. They then take that name, change it legally and use it for all aspects of their life. It is important to understand that the name-giving ceremony can occur at any time in life. It does not have to take place only in childhood.

There are a number of other childhood samskaras, but the most important one—after the name-giving—is the writing-of-the-first-letter samskara. This marks the formal beginning of the child’s education, one of the most important changes and times of our life. Writing the first letter—which is the letter A in the child’s spoken language—signifies the entry into the world of education. Usually the letter is written into a tray of rice, and it is written quite large. During this samskara, which is held in the temple in most cases, the Gods and devas are able to give the child a great psychic push into success in school studies, in social education and spiritual learning. This is a samskara that will be felt all the way through the university years. This samskara opens the doors for the most successful and beneficial education for the individual. However, it is up to the child and the parents to make sure they go through the right doors. That is, that they make the right decisions—in tune with the Gods and devas thinking—regarding education opportunities.

STORY READING

At the edge of the large city of Calcutta in north India was another city, much smaller and much, much poorer. It was called Anandpur, the City of Bliss. Calcutta was rich with street after street of busy stores and kingly homes the color of white marble and European buildings with high columns left by the British. It would take a child two days to walk through Calcutta, it was so large. The City of Bliss had no stores, no buildings, no fancy houses. It had homes made of cardboard and odd scraps of old metal and old blankets as doors. The homes of the City of Bliss had one room, two at the most. A family of six or ten would live on a hard dirt floor in a single room. The one room was a kitchen, living room, bed-

room and shrine. Everybody in the City of Bliss was very poor, as poor as mice on a farm where no rain had fallen. The fathers of the City of Bliss went to work in Calcutta doing heavy work. They pulled people in rickshaws, pulled metal beams on carts, collected garbage and sifted through garbage for everything useful to sell. And they brought home enough rupees to feed their families and pay the rent on their cardboard homes, and sometimes buy a wonderful sari for their wives or daughters or help out a neighbor in need. The fathers were very strong, but got old very fast. They were generous, with nothing to give, but gave away even that nothing anyway. The mothers stayed at home, cooking meals over smokey fires of rice, dhal and a few vegetables and pepper spices. They sewed clothes and did laundry. They kept their humble homes very clean. The mothers, devout devotees of Lord Ganesha’s home wisdom, took pride in their homes being as clean as possible. They swept the dirt in front of their cardboard homes every early morning during the deep red dawn. They greeted each other brightly to see that sleep had been kind to them. Perhaps there was a dream of Ganesha or God Siva helping their children to learn and become a businessmen or teacher in Calcutta. The children of the City of Bliss were happy, though their clothes were ragged. They played games in the lanes of the City of Bliss. They sang songs of bhakti. They gathered around a neighbor’s radio, and crowded around the dazzling images of a small TV, the only one in the City of Bliss. Several small old wood and patched metal schools opened their doors every day for the children to learn and grow into good young adults.

Calcutta had large temples made of large white stones with large white marble images of the Gods. The City of Bliss had one small temple made of red brick and gray mortar. The temple was donated by a kind and wealthy worshipper of Siva. His name was Rudraksha, which could mean “tears of Siva,” as well as the “Eye of Siva.” The temple had a reddish clay tile floor, could hold about thirty people inside, and the main image was a lovely bronze Siva Nataraja, the King of the Universe. So the Siva-worshipping devotees of the City of Bliss danced their lives with the King of the Universe. And they were happy, for they knew no other kind of life. They had found peace

1. Bring in an audio cassette tape player and a tape of very nice Hindu music: flute, vina, sitar, santoor. Bring in some colorful yarn. Cut the yarn into two feet lengths. Have all the kids tie one end of the yarn around their wrists so that all the kids in the class are joined (or if it is a big class, two or three groups) by the yarn. This forms a “yarn snake.” Now start to play the music. As the music plays—which represents the presence of the deva people in the devas’ world—the kids in the “yarn snake” try to form different letters in the alphabet, starting with the letter A, which may be in any alphabet. This is a *cooperative learning* skill in which the kids have to work together to form the letter. Once they have one letter formed, they all say, “The devas are helping me to read and write.” Then they go on to the next letter. If they are doing complicated letters, they may have to untie some of the “yarn snake” connections to make the letter. This is great for their imaginations and spirit of cooperation. A large class may be able to form short words.

and joy and strength in simple things and simple pleasures. Karma was as real as the yearly monsoon rains that gave life to dry farm fields, and also flooded city streets. Karma was rain, drops of water from each one’s past lives, rain that brought good and not-so-good. It mattered how they met the rain of their own karma. And the people of the City of Bliss met their karma with understanding and a strength beyond the rich people in Calcutta. An old swami, with silver hair, orange robes and a dark wood staff had taught them of karma and reincarnation. God Siva had helped them understand this, as His star-golden energies of Love came through His small brick temple in the poor city next to Calcutta. It was at this temple that the important samskaras were performed for the poor folk. Births and weddings were celebrated with color amid the dreary hues of the poor city. First feedings and rites of writing-the-first-letter were times of happiness, special food and hope-filled dreams.

Anandi was on her way to the red Siva temple. Dressed in a hand-me-down punjabi of bright purple with yellow stripes on the edges she was a young girl with lots of

round features: round coconut face, round brown eyes, small round mouth like an O, round button nose. Even her midnight black hair was curly. And Anandi loved to laugh with her round mouth. She was always smiling and joking. Well, almost always. There was sadness too, but it didn't get her down for long. At 9-years-old she was short, and only had two punjabi outfits to wear. One was the purple one she had on today. The other was silver with light blue lines on the collar and sleeves. Anandi washed one each day, dunking it in water brought from a water tap that took twenty minutes to walk to, and twenty minutes back. She hung it out to dry, and in the blistering sun of the summer, her punjabi would dry in two minutes. During the rainy season, she had to dry it by fire heat, or wait for days for the rains to stop.

She sang a lilting song to Siva she had heard one day in Calcutta, at a huge bazaar. The bazaar was full of brass pots, grass brooms, clay cups, silver Gods and Goddesses, granite mortars and pestles for grinding spices, heaps of spices, bundles of incense stacked like fire wood, plastic arm bangles of every color and great round piles of marigold flowers. The hills of butter yellow marigolds were taller than Anandi. The song to Siva had come floating over the marigolds, like a ship of beautiful notes and words. It sailed right into Anandi's mind, and she instantly memorized it. She was very intelligent, and had the eyes of a poetess, deep as pure water wells. Anandi was singing this same song as she walked to the temple with her family. It was early in the morning. Thousands of gray-white wisps of smoke rose out of cooking fires, looking like a forest of gray smoke trees in the blood red dawn. Anandi pretended these were all angel-devas that helped the poor folk of the City of Bliss. The tower of the temple was the tallest part of the City of Bliss. It was made in the north Indian style, like stone coils of rope stacked on top of one another. Anandi could see the tower in the distance, and she imagined a shining rainbow curving down from the coal-colored clouds and touching the tower with red, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple and violet light. Anandi could see things inside her mind very easily. Other children couldn't do that. But her imagination was bright with pictures and colors and sounds. She called it her "color zoo world" because she could imagine any animal or place.

Today, at the temple, Anandi and her family were attending the first-letter samskara of her young friend Shakti. Shakti was five years old, and would be starting school next year. Shakti wore her black hair in two long braids, one on each side of her ears. She always looked like a bell that was waiting to be rung. Anandi had known Shakti since she was born, and Anandi was at the Siva temple for the name-giving ceremony of Shakti. Anandi was only four years old at the time, but she remembered the plump priest, the homa fire and smell of burning ghee and fig wood, and the newborn baby girl. A name flew out of the priest's mouth, flew out like a white dove among the eagles of other Sanskrit mantras, and the girl was named Shakti Devi. And by the end of the fire-and-mantra ceremony, the baby girl was accepted by the deva-angels of Lord Ganesha, Lord Muruga and God Siva as a Hindu. It was a great moment, another Hindu on planet Earth. Now five years later Shakti was again in the deva spotlight of the temple. Anandi had already taught Shakti much fine knowledge, and Shakti was very eager to start the wonderful world of school. In the City of Bliss, school was a passport into the world of knowledge, of reading and numbers, of science and art, of history and human drama.

"Namaste, namaste," happily cried out Shakti when she saw Anandi. "I'm so excited," and her black braids, curled into loops like elephant ears, bounced over her spotless white punjabi with gold trim. It was so very white against the dull tans, grays and burnt reds of the poor lane that it seemed to glow of its own light. Shakti was lifting up her pale blue pants to keep the cuffs from getting dirty.

"Me too. I'm thrilled for you," said Anandi and she took her young friend's hand. "Alright. Come right over here. I brought a little bag of rice. I'm going to sprinkle it on the ground here, and I want to see your A in Hindi." They walked over a few steps. Anandi spread out the rice. A few tiny birds came fluttering down immediately, looking for a meal of rice. "Alright, Shakti. Write for me in the rice," said Anandi. Shakti crouched down, ever careful to stay spotless, and lifted her left hand. She was left-handed, as one out of every ten people are. Her hand came down to the rice—like a tiny bird. And the other tiny birds moved away a little bit. Very gracefully Shakti

wrote the Hindi letter A in the rice. "Oh, that's so nice Shakti," said Anandi. "That's the first letter in my name, and my name means the bliss of Siva, and here we are Anandpur, the City of Bliss. Alright, let's go inside. The devas are waiting for you." And both girls joined their families for the sacred samskara inside the Siva temple in the City of Bliss that was so poor in rupees, but so rich in spirit.

BACKGROUND

Besides the name-giving ceremony and the writing-of-the-first-letter ceremony, there are many other samskara rites for the child. These are itemized in the parents guide for this lesson in Book 2. It is largely the responsibility of the parents to see to these samskaras, and to also see that they have meaning in the child's life by explaining that they occurred and what they empower for their children as a young adults later in life. These samskaras have been given for thousands of years within Hinduism, and form one of its most important institutions. Consider that in the sequence of reincarnation, an individual would be receiving samskaras in each lifetime. The sooner an individual wakes up to their spiritual identity—which these samskaras help with—the quicker the best fulfillment of that life can be embarked upon.

CITIZENSHIP

The formal entrance to a religion is regarded as central to all religions. It creates spiritual identity and loyalty. Both of these later translate in life into a need to serve the religion so that it remains strong in its service to its followers. Loyalty should not breed intolerance and intrusion on other faiths. A nation that has strong and caring religions, with strong and loyal followers within them, helps for a more principled and happier citizenry—that is therefore more productive and contributes to the greater good of the society.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

Creation is one of the ultimate powers of God Siva. The original source of all creation is God Siva, the Supreme Soul. From His infinite knowing and infinite energy, all beings and all things are created. At the same time, God Siva is all of His creation. He is *in it* as the Supreme Soul creator. And He *is it* as the complete saturation of love, light and energy through all.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

While Ganesha and Murugan are Gods with specific duties and powers to aid all souls in all worlds, Siva is God, the Supreme Being. For this reason, we call Him *God Siva*. A crucial concept for the children to grasp is that Siva is the First Soul. This means that Siva is the very first being, the very first soul, the very first Mind. No other souls came before Him. We call this *primal*, meaning the “very first.” All other souls, and worlds and forces and time and space were created out of Siva’s Mind of infinite energy, intelligence and love. This is one of the most fundamental tenets of Saivite Hinduism, and great lengths must be taken to catalyze understanding of this in the children. Here is a quick analogy often used to convey this concept: Siva is an ocean of a single substance, water. Pure water. This is like pure consciousness. Out of the ocean of pure water arises waves with foam and bubbles at the top. The foam and bubbles are all the souls and worlds being churned out of the ocean of consciousness. Yet the foam and bubbles are the same substance as the ocean: pure water.

Create is an important word. When we create something, it means we are making or producing something that did not exist before. If we give the children a sheet of white paper and colored crayons and tell them to make a drawing, they will all be creating. Our world is full of creation. A country creates a youth program. A poet creates a poem. A husband and wife create a family, and a family creates a home. The sun creates light. The wind creates sound through the tree branches in the forest. Automobiles create pollution of our air. A flower creates a scent. A bee creates bees wax and honey. Everyday, there are millions of acts of creation. The forces of nature are creating. Life is creating life. Life with thinking minds, such as people, can create almost anything they need or want.

All these acts of creation are wonderful.



Lord Siva is God. He created Lord Ganesha and Lord Murugan. He created people. He created the worlds. He loves everyone. He is everywhere. He is within everything. He protects us. Do not ever forget Him. Worship Him every day.

This is part of God Siva’s spiritual plan—for everything to have the ability to create. Yet deep within, beyond the sight of our eyes or tools such as a microscope, it is God Siva that is the true Creator. If everything in our world, and every person, animal and life form were magically followed to their original source, we would see God Siva is the first creator. He is creating all the time. Let’s look at the children creating a crayon drawing. Have the children “think of this. Where did the paper come from? If they say trees, then ask where did the trees come from? If they say from soil and seeds, ask where they came from. If they say from the Earth, ask where Earth came from. This is like running a film in reverse. Finally, we see that the first Creator is God Siva. Let’s say God Siva is number 1. All other numbers, representing all other beings and things, come from Him. And we see that God Siva not only created all things and beings in our world, but all worlds and all souls and all other forces, such as time and light. God Siva is the Creator of all. And He

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

The soul body of God Siva is the first and most perfect soul form. It is, in a word, perfection. Siva’s face is neither male or female. It is the perfect beauty of the soul face. Siva’s hair is brilliant cinnamon red in color.

Siva’s eyes are infinitely beautiful, full of the grandeur of all existence and the love force that flows through everything. The color of Siva’s eyes is amethyst violet.

Around God Siva’s neck are the rudraksha (eye of Siva) beads. These are the seeds from the rudraksha tree that grows in the Himalayan region of India. The fruit surrounding the seed is bright blue, a very rare color in nature. The beads themselves are reddish brown and very wrinkled. The bead is always made of several faces—five is the most common. Less than four and more than six are extremely rare.

continues to create. It is not just a single event of creation. God-Creation is all through time. And remember that it is God Siva that creates *time* itself.

The amazing thing for the children to understand is that God Siva creates everything out of Himself, out of His own energies. He creates from His mind of light. There are no materials or energies lying around for Him to create from. Remember, He creates all energies and matter. Let’s go back to the kids creating a picture. They are given paper and crayons. They have also been given intelligence by God Siva. The kids do not create the paper or the crayons or their own intelligence. They use these to create their picture. They use materials and their personal mind which are already provided. All people create with things and their minds which are already provided. Who is the provider? Siva is the provider, or more accurately, the creator of our own abilities to create. This is rather a remarkable knowledge.

Children and adults also create from their own energies in simple, yet very real

ways. If the children were to think of pure love, a happy love feeling, and project that out of themselves to others, it would create a love feeling for other people. Or it may help heal a sick person, or calm someone who is upset. This is creation from within ourselves. And God Siva is creating absolutely everything out of His energies.

Now, God Siva does not create a soul or a world or a sunflower or an elephant, and then let it exist on its own, separate from Siva. In fact, that is impossible. No thing or person, animal, bug or soul can exist totally separate from Siva. If Siva were not fully within Mt. Everest, the tallest mountain on Earth, then Mt. Everest would not exist. It would not be here on our world. If Siva's Mind was not completely through all the water and minerals of the Pacific Ocean, our world's largest ocean, then the mighty Pacific would not be here. Let's return once again to the kids' pictures. The kids have their pictures in front of them. The white paper is smooth and thin. The crayons are waxy and round. If we break the crayon in two we see the inside of the crayon. Where is Siva? Well, let's give the kids magic fingers. These kids now have fingers that can peel back a very thin layer of crayon. The inside space of the crayon is shown. In that space is an incredibly bright white light sparkling like a billion stars. That is Siva inside the crayon. That is Siva's cosmic love inside the crayons and inside the entirety of existence, even the seemingly bad things.

STORY READING

"Ugh. Snails. Double ugh. Ugly," said Marga as he picked up with the very tips of his fingers a slimy slug in a curly-cue shell. "I hate snails. Slimy things. Leaving trails of slime. Eating all my plants. Look at all the chewing they did," whined Marga as he stood up in a large vegetable garden. He still held the snail by his dirty finger tips, not wanting to get gooey slime on him. The garden surrounded him like a very lumpy green, yellow, red and purple carpet. The garden spread its veggie food down a gentle hill, and then bumped into meadows of silky grass and purple lily flowers, that in turn bumped into a long hedge of blackberries and a grove of pear trees and tall elder trees. After that was a big house, two stories tall with large windows, each under their own small rain roof. The house was painted squash-yellow with cherry-red trim. On the front door of the comfortable home was a brass Aum, the Sanskrit letter

for Aum. And on it was a door knocker, so when guests came they had to knock the Aum, and it made a pretty piping sound. Marga, 9-years old with a body like a carrot, could see the yellow house from where he stood in the middle of the garden. It was his house. Actually he and his sister, Margi, and his mother and father lived there, with a bird, two cats and a big sheep dog whose white hair always hung over his brown eyes. They were the Kriyashakti family. Marga's sister, Margi, was over by the carrot patch. Margi was Marga's twin. That's why they were named Marga and Margi by their parents. Actually, Margi was born first. She was two minutes older than Marga, a fact she didn't let Marga forget: "Don't forget," she would say. "I'm older, wiser and smarter than you." And Marga would say back, "Well, my astrology is better—a better sign rose in those two minutes." These two were smart and had all kinds of hobbies, including gardening and astronomy, and basket-weaving.

Margi was tugging out bright orange carrots with their green, frilly tops. Waving her hand she shook off the black-brown dirt and put the carrots like trophies in a straw basket she had wove herself. "Snails. I love snails," she cried out to the garden, and to her brother fifteen feet away. She liked to say things that were the opposite of Marga. "Umm. Slimy snails are so nice. You can pick them up twice. They move so slow. No place to go. Why not go for a tomato?" she said with loud giggles over her funny rhyme.

Marga smiled at the rhyme, but said, "Hah. You won't even pick up a snail. Too scared." And he was still holding on to his captured snail. He then made up his own rhyme: "Snails. Why are you born? You come so early in the morn. You sneak along the ground so you can eat down our corn. And pretty soon the whole garden is torn!" And he laughed with bubbling giggles. Margi smiled, and the sun was shining on their two twin faces and their cinnamon brown hair.

Marga took the snail he was holding over to the edge of the garden, and put it in a moist bag with some other captured snails. He called this his 'slime bag,' for it got pretty sticky, but the snails remained safe. Later in the day he would take them far away toward a distant village, called Starbridge in England, for that is where the twins lived, and release them. He would talk to them, advising them, "Snails, it would be better

1. This is the "Siva Pyramid" game. The class is going to be making a 4-sided pyramid, like the ones in Egypt. Bring in 4 very large pieces of medium thick cardboard. The bigger the better. Even as big as five feet square. Preferably the cardboard should be blank or fairly clear of other writing. Also bring some aluminum foil and strong tape. The teacher needs to draw out the same sized triangle on each of the four boards. The kids then form four groups and carefully cut out the triangles. A fifth group of kids make an image of God Siva out of the aluminum foil. The kids with the four triangles then draw on them pictures of Lord Ganesha and Lord Muruga at the top of the pyramid, then the deva people in the middle and pictures of human people or landscapes on the bottom. Then the four big triangles are taped neatly together by the kids to form the "Siva Pyramid." It should stand like a real pyramid with sloping sides going up to a pinnacle. Then, on the very top is placed (perhaps by cutting an appropriately sized hole at the top of the pyramid) the image of Siva in aluminum foil. Siva is the Supreme God, standing in love and happiness over all the Gods, devas and people.

for you and better for humans if you ate young plants from nature." Marga and Margi followed Siva's law of *ahimsa*, non-harming. They didn't harm or injure any life, unless it was necessary to do so for their own good. They knew Siva was all life, from microscopic bugs to the largest creature on Earth, the blue whales living in the northern oceans. Naturally, they were vegetarians, the whole family. And the vegetable garden spilled over with squashes, tomatoes, string beans, snow peas, onions, carrots, lettuce, spinach, beets, lima beans, corn, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers. Next to the yellow-and-cherry house was a herb garden set around a pattern of tan stones shaped into the star of Murugan. Murugan is the God of health as well as yoga. The herb garden was like a temple for the nose, with all kinds of delightful smells from the health-giving herbs. You could have a cold with sniffles, sneezes and sore throat, and by just sitting in the herb garden and breathing in the herb-filled air you would feel much better. Of course, mom,

an expert cook, used the herbs everyday in their meals. The family was very generous to all of their neighbors, and many a family in their village had become vegetarian, just by trying some of the delicious food of the twin's home and talking to their mother about the benefits of the vegetarian diet.

Marga and Margi were thinkers. They liked to think. They prided themselves on thinking, on solving problems, on understanding the way things worked. Today, as butterflies flitted among honeyed flowers and dragonflies flew in squares, not ordinary circles, the twins were talking about snails. Marga walked along a row of cloud-green cabbage and said, "I mean, I have to ask this question. What are snails for? What do they do that is useful? In other words, why did Siva create the snail?" With this very basic question, Marga looked at Margi, who was pulling weeds in the carrot patch. He was expecting an answer.

"Siva and the snail. That's the question, huh," she said and bit into a fresh carrot, with a little orange carrot juice dripping down her chin. "That's a good question. Why did Siva create snails?" She walked down the puffy rows of carrots toward Marga, still chewing on a fresh carrot—it was quite sweet. "Well, snails must be part of the nature plan, you know the way bugs and plants and trees and small animals and big animals and birds live together to make everything keep working and growing. Of course, everything has to eat something else. There's a word for that. Eeee. Eee-something."

"Ecology," said Marga quickly and crisply. "Ecology is the word. It means the house of life. It's like the red peace roses we have down by the house. The beetles like to eat their leaves, right. So mom planted geranium flowers among the roses. The geraniums have a strong, tamarind-like smell that we like, but drives the bugs crazy. They stay away. That's smart and ahimsa ecology. By the way, speaking of eating, some people eat snails—they are considered a delicacy in Europe and America. Even kids eat them. They eat them baked with lots of garlic. So even the snails are eaten—but by humans!"

"Yuuuk!" cried Margi with a look of disgust. "That's absolutely disgusting. How could people be so yukky?" She went on thoughtfully, "Well, everything has to live in the house of life. So the snail is part of ecology. They must add some ingredient to the

mix of nature. Maybe their slime fertilizes the ground or keeps ants away. Maybe, before we humans started planting gardens thousands of years ago, the snails were chewing down weeds or plants dangerous to other species."

"Could be right, Margi," said Marga, who was now turning some crumbly blackish brown soil in his fingers and sniffing it. He put his nose close. It smelled good, like brown bread baking. The incense of the Earth thought Marga. "Yes, I think you have something there. Siva's idea for snails is to protect other life from plants that could poison them. Plants can't defend themselves you know, like our cats or dog. Roses have thorns, but many plants and trees create poisons inside themselves to send to their leaves. Some animal eats the leaves and they get a big tummy ache from the poison. They don't come back to chew on that plant!"

Margi walked into the rows of snow peas climbing with curly green feelers up a wire fence. Snow peas weren't white, as in white snow. They were light green and small, tender, very tasty shells of Ganesha goodness. You ate the peas inside the shell. Margi liked to make snow pea and ginger curry. She continued the conversation: "So one purpose of a snail, one of Siva's millions of life forms on Earth, is to help nature's balance. Like a seesaw. On one side are plants trying to defend themselves. On the other side are bugs and animals needing to eat. One side can't win over the other in nature. Nature is always balanced. So snails are like referees in a soccer football game."

"Pretty slow referees," joked Marga. "The game would be over before they even got on the field. But there are so many of them they must get something done. Who eats the snails to keep them in balance? Besides those people in Europe and America." And they both laughed. "Actually, I happen to know," said Marga, "that there are tens of millions of vegetarians in the West, especially among the younger people. Let's go to lunch. I'm hungry. Thinking makes me hungry."

The twins picked up their straw baskets, full of heavy vegetables, and headed off to the blackberry hedge, where they gathered in handfuls of the squishy, sweet black berries for their mother to make a chutney out of.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson naturally ties into the lessons on Mahasivaratri and Aum Namah Sivaya. In this lesson, we are teaching about worshipping Siva everyday. During Mahasivaratri a single night per year is a powerful focus for making our best efforts to come close to Siva, perhaps to even experience some measure of our identity with the Siva Mind. The power of Mahasivaratri should carry over into the following year's daily worship and yoga practice and understanding of Siva as and in all.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children to try and see everything that they see with their physical sight as being totally full of Siva. There is not one part of everything and everybody they see that is not filled by the light and love of Siva. This is called "seeing Siva everywhere." This is also how each of the children naturally see and feel in their soul body. In truth they are seeing and feeling themselves as everywhere, for they are one with Siva.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

The most spiritual world of the Three Worlds is the *Sivaloka*. This is the universe of God Siva Himself, a universe of fantastically beautiful, blissful light and sound mindscapes created by Siva out of His own energies. The *Antarloka* and *Bhuloka* are also Siva's energy creations, but the *Sivaloka* is the universe where Siva, as the first and supreme Soul Being dwells. The *Sivaloka* is where all Mahadevas (*great devas*, super-advanced souls) live in their soul bodies and do their functions and evolve themselves. The Mahadevas Ganesha and Murugan live and perform their cosmic responsibilities in the *Sivaloka*.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

In this teacher's guide we have introduced several analogies for visually describing the relationship of the Three Worlds. We used the image of a wonderful kind of balloon that has two balloons—each smaller than the other—blown up inside the large outer balloon. The largest balloon on the outside is the *Sivaloka*. The next balloon inside is the *Devaloka*. And the smallest balloon inside the other two is the *Bhuloka*. The *Sivaloka* is the first and largest universe—so immense in the infinity of spirit consciousness that it has no end, no edge, no boundaries. As we can see in the balloon illustration, the *Sivaloka* contains the astral universe and physical universe. The *Devaloka* and *Bhuloka* exist within the *Sivaloka*. The *Sivaloka* is the primary universe, its energies are stepped down to a slower, denser level to form the *Devaloka*, and the *Devaloka*'s energies are slowed and crystallized even further into what we know as physical matter. A neat illustration of this is the formation of a snowflake, which is a tiny speck of dust that in quick cooling conditions in clouds serves as a seed for tiny water droplets to crystallize around—each one a unique snowflake. In a real sense the vast planets, stars, space, and world forms of the *Devaloka* and *Bhuloka* are like snowflake creations from the *Sivaloka*. Other terms for the *Sivaloka* are the Gods' World and the Causal plane.

The *Sivaloka* is a universe so wondrous, so full of vast, fantastic creations of rich, sparkling, jewel-like rainbow light and harmonious symphonic sound that it is beyond our language and imagination. It is the universe of the Gods, the demigods (very advanced souls who are not yet deified) and all the uncountable souls that as-



Siva lives in the *Sivaloka*. It is the highest heaven world. Lord Ganesha and Lord Murugan also live there. They are Mahadevas. They help Siva to guide, guard and protect everything in the universe.

sist them in the *Sivaloka*. Deep within this super-spiritual universe, at the very core and center of it is God, the Supreme Soul—Siva. To illustrate this, have the children imagine a very large sphere of light—like a giant beach ball made of light—and at the very center is Siva, the perfect soul being with a very tall body of pure white light, incredibly large, luminous violet colored eyes set in a spellbindingly beautiful face, and long, auburn red hair. Now, the remarkable theological (study of God knowledge) principle at work here is that Siva is creating and sustaining the *Sivaloka* universe with His Mind, which in **Book 2, Lesson 7**, we defined as *Satchidananda*: perfect being, perfect knowledge, perfect bliss. And indeed, from the center of the *Sivaloka* God Siva creates, sustains and transforms (or reabsorbs) absolutely everything in all the universes. And Siva, as the first Soul, creates out of His all-powerful Mind of Light all other souls. Siva is the single supreme Soul. It is not a matter of a group of Gods in the *Sivaloka* taking turns at being the Supreme

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

God Siva is holding His hand here in a blessing mudra (seal of energies). Out of His hand is coming golden white light so bright your physical eyes could not behold it, but your deva body eyes and soul body eyes easily see and receive this energy of higher consciousness.

At the very high point of the temple puja, God Siva and the Gods appear briefly hovering above the main temple murthi. It is at that moment we can receive their blessings. So we raise our hands up high as the priest lifts the arati lamp, and just for a moment the eyes of our soul might see God more strongly than we see the temple sanctum.

God. That is totally wrong thinking.

All souls, including the souls of the children in your class, were created by Siva in the *Sivaloka*, and there are many more souls of light being created in the *Sivaloka* continuously. These are young souls, newly created with all the faculties of Siva's soul being, yet undeveloped. Here is a useful analogy. This is like a newborn baby that possesses the brain and nerve system to be a historic genius, but, of course, needs many years of education, experience and awakened imagination to unfold into genius. Young souls are very brilliant and beautiful but require long epochs of experience and karma to unfold their full soul identity and powers. Much of this experience and karma is gained in the *Devaloka* and *Bhuloka* through the astral and physical bodies that the soul functions through (see **Book 1, Lesson 25, Professional Teacher's Guide**). The maturing soul body itself remains in the outer realms of the *Sivaloka*. This means the children in your class are actually existing as a soul right now near the *Sivaloka*. In fact, every night when they go to sleep, during the deepest part of sleep time they are fully in their soul bodies.

Very old souls who have evolved through long eons of time in the physical and astral realms, and who have fully realized their identity as being the same Mind and Source as Siva no longer need a physical, astral or mental body to learn through. These very evolved souls live and serve in the *Sivaloka* as assistants to the demigods and Gods in their cosmic functions. Lords Ganesha and Murugan are *mahadevas* (*maha* means great, *deva* is a self-shining being; we also refer to them as Gods). The mahadevas Ganesha and Murugan have always inhabited the Sivaloka, for they were created as Gods by Siva to help maturing souls in the Devaloka and Bhuloka. Ganesha and Murugan fulfill all their many functions in and from the Sivaloka, fully utilizing the powers of consciousness itself. This includes responding to each individual child's prayers, meditations, karmic needs and the overall pattern of their life.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. We often speak of *consciousness* in these lessons. It is a very abstract word and is particularly hard for young children (and most adults) to understand. But *consciousness* is so fundamental to Saivite philosophy and yoga that it is necessary to attempt teaching children what it means. After all, they use consciousness literally all the time, indeed they *are much more* consciousness than anything else. Simply put, we know and feel ourselves—our body, thoughts and emotions—through consciousness. We are conscious or aware of ourselves. We also know everybody and everything outside of us through our consciousness. We are aware or conscious of cats, dogs, buildings, the sky, streets, cars, people, mountains, music, trees, flowers, etc. Without consciousness we wouldn't know or feel any of these. Without consciousness we would have no sense of being a person, of having a mind, or being a soul. Consciousness is like still air. It surrounds us and everything all the time. We walk through it. It is invisible. It extends everywhere. Yet, this *air consciousness* also flows through us and flows through our mind and our astral and soul bodies. In fact, this consciousness goes so deep that it is the basic building block—like the first block in a child's building set—of creation. Everything is built from consciousness. Our soul mind is pure consciousness, with all of its power and knowl-

edge.

STORY READING

Kriya was blowing up balloons for his friend, Karuna. Red and white balloons. Big ones that can soar and float in the air a long time. Kriya sucked air into his lungs with lots of noise. "Breath control. I can blow up two balloons one after another. I've been practicing," he said to Karuna. Karuna with a I-don't-believe-you look on his thin, fox-like face, said, "I don't believe you. You can't do that."

"Stand back and watch," said Kriya, very sure of himself. "Stand back," he repeated. "If this balloon blows up I don't want you hit by flying rubber." Karuna moved back a couple of steps. "By the way, did you know that rubber comes from a tree—sticky white stuff? Called the rubber tree."

"Nope," said Karuna, raising his eyebrows in exasperation. "Didn't know that. Come on. Let's see you blow up two balloons with one breath."

"Alright. The yogi trick of two balloons with one breath. Here goes." Kriya had a very pale face, with straw brown hair that hung straight down. He sucked in lots of air, making a sound like a barrel being filled up. And his chest puffed out like a fat purple pigeon, who are always puffing out their chests. And his very pale cheeks started to turn pink, then red, as red as the balloon he held in his fingers close to his mouth. Balloon went to lips and Kriya began to blow. He blew hard, pushing hot air out of his lungs into the red balloon. It grew. One foot. Two feet. Bigger. Bigger. His eyes were beginning to bulge out a bit. Karuna, his blackish hair swept back and pressed close to his pointy ears, looked at his wrist watch. "Geez, Kriya. Don't you need air. It's been thirty seconds." Kriya finished the first balloon and quickly tied it, and pushed it off to float around the room. It was the red planet Mars floating around the two 9-year-old boys. Kriya, looking calm, but with a red color over his face and throat grabbed the white balloon. He blew. The white ball of hollow rubber blew up. And up. And up. And up. His fingers tied the knot. The white balloon joined the red one, the white planet Pluto circling around the boys.

Kriya heaved air in noisily as he sat down on a nearby couch. "Wow. That air feels good. Better than chocolate ice cream at the moment."

"You did it, Kriya," shouted Karuna. "You held your breath for over 100 seconds. I

1. Bring to class one very large balloon and 8 smaller balloons. Also bring some string. Have the kids help blowing up the balloons. The very large balloon represents Siva, the one Supreme God. The smaller balloons represent the Gods or Mahadevas, including Muruga and Ganesha. Using the string, tie all of the smaller balloons to the large balloon so there is about three feet distance between each Gods balloon and the God balloon. The result is a group of 9 balloons floating. This shows that the Gods can not be separated from the Supreme God. Have the kids spread out and push the God/Gods balloons from one child to another child, so that all get a turn pushing and receiving the balloons.

timed it. You could dive under water."

"No thanks," Kriya grunted. "I'll stick to blowing up balloons. No sharks and eels and giant squids." By now about thirty large balloons were sailing around the room, bumping into furniture and walls and plants in pots and into the two boys. The balloons were for a birthday party for Karuna's older sister, Vanita. She was going to be twelve. The birthday party would be fun, but what the boys were really looking forward to was the trip to the Mount Palomar telescope after the party. The telescope at the Mount Palomar observatory in southern California was one of the three biggest telescopes in the world. Kriya and Karuna lived in a town called Bakersfield in southern California. It was hot and dry—a sun-baked, desert town like the towns in the desert of the Punjab in India. Kriya's father was a doctor. Karuna's father was a dentist.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Kriya said. "All these balloons floating. Like worlds in space. Worlds in Siva space." His breathing had returned to normal. But Kriya kept breathing very deeply. It was now a habit, as natural to him as blinking his blue eyes. He moved to a large brown chair with a square white pillow in the middle of the pine wood and red brick room. There were beautiful paintings of ancient temples on the walls, and a long carpet of Hindu folk art design hung on the west wall, where the rising eastern sun would strike it at dawn. The red and white balloons spun around, drifting in long circles. "I could be like God Siva right now.

Sitting at the center of all worlds. Everything circling around me. Siva is the hub of the world wheel. You know like the hub on the wheel of your dad's 4-wheel drive jeep."

Karuna jumped into a matching chair, kind of slouching, and brushed back his thick hair. "Siva is the hub at the center of the wheel of the worlds. Like a jeep wheel, huh? Not a bad thought." Karuna looked around at the floating herd of balloons. A warm breeze blew in through a south-facing window, looking out at the desert's tans and whites and the watery greens of tall, thorny cactus, each with only two branches. The sky was a pale blue bowl with no milky clouds floating in it. "You know that means that wherever Siva is, that is the center of everything. Absolutely everything!" went on Karuna. His light brown eyes widened and a look of wonder shot over his face. "What if Siva was right here? Right here in this room, with us—in Bakersfield. We, you and I, would be at the very center. Right next to the Supreme Soul, at the center of all. Wow! That's neat!" And he sank into the chair, closing his eyes, enjoying his thinking. The balloons drifted about, seeming to be lifted higher by the boy's talk.

"Yeah, nice thinking Karuna," replied Kriya. "There must be a name for Siva that means something like the center. Some Sanskrit name...but I don't know it. There is the Sivaloka, though. Siva's world. Siva's universe. The God's world. I can't even imagine what the Sivaloka is like," he said dreamily and Kriya's face became still as a windless lake, his blue eyes were boats in a lake of thought. "But I'm going to try to see it at the Palomar telescope. Can't wait. We'll go in your dad's jeep, just the men."

"Yeah, me too," echoed Karuna. "Can't wait. Birthday party will start soon. Then, to Palomar. Straight up the mountain in dad's jeep."

The birthday party ended a few hours later. Bright gift-wrapping paper from the presents all over the house, and party plates empty of delicious vegetarian snacks, and the half-eaten birthday cake of German chocolate and Sri Lankan coconut. "Made without eggs," said Karuna's mother proudly. "Don't need eggs to bake the world's best cake." Kriya had stuffed himself with three giant pieces of the heavenly cake. Karuna too. Vanita was happy. Kriya had given her a fine drawing set of stiff, soft white paper and pastel coloring chalk. It was a type of chalk that was very good to draw with, even

professionals used it. Vanita liked to draw animals in forests, or horses in fields, and even whales in the ocean.

Four doors slammed with a metallic thud all in a row: thud, thud, thud, thud. The jeep, silver and black and even blacker in the night sky, was full of the men: Kriya, Karuna and their two dads. "Seatbelts on everyone," reminded Karuna's dad. "Don't want anybody bouncing out onto some mean cactus." He turned the key and the jeep engine roared.

"Hey dad, let's slide the roof back so we can see the sky," said Karuna. He was dressed in a dark green kurtha shirt with a high collar of blacker green and tan brown pants. A gold chain draped over his neck with a single red-brown rudraksha bead.

"Great idea," said Kriya, who was wearing a deep red kurta shirt with white pants and a shoulder shawl of white kashmir wool. "No moon tonight. No clouds. Perfect for the Palomar telescope." It was summer, with warm, dry nights that felt as if a giant battery were charging the air with electricity.

Karuna's dad punched a button and with a soft whirring sound, a large square hole in the jeep's roof opened up. Star light streamed through and hit the boys' faces, light that had been traveling for thousands and millions of years. "Gosh, its beautiful tonight," said Kriya. "Siva's theater of stars. Siva's dancing out there. I know it."

The jeep pulled out of the driveway, and leaving a trail of dust in the night air, drove north for Mount Palomar. The stars streamed by through the jeep's sun roof, and Karuna and Kriya saw several star pictures—constellations—they knew from books. There was a smell of dry earth in the air, mixed with the aroma of sage brush, a pleasant, spiritual smell. "American Indians burn sage as an incense," said Kriya as he sniffed the night air coming in through the jeep's open windows. "Learned that yesterday in school."

The jeep followed a curving road that climbed up a brush-and-rock mountain: Mount Palomar. At some corners Kriya and Karuna could see on top of the mountain a very large dome shape, a ghostly white dome against the black sea of night. It was the Mount Palomar Observatory, built in the 1930's. It was old. But it still looked space age, like it belonged on the moon or Mars. And the huge telescope inside was still a wonder of technology. No lights

shown at the observatory. Any outside light made it difficult for the telescope to pick up only the star light. So the observatory was unlit. Mount Palomar was chosen not only for its height, but also for its distance from the city of Los Angeles, which threw a giant field of light into the sky every night. "They call that light pollution. The astronomers, the star watchers. Makes it very hard to see," said Karuna.

The black jeep rolled into the black parking lot of the space dome. Like a giant block of cheese with one third cut away, the dome was open one third. The dome had doors and they were open. A wide, black slice out of the white dome, and through the opening could be seen the white barrel of the great telescope. It was huge, as long as a very tall tree and three tall men could stand on top of one another's shoulders inside it.

"Wow. Look at that," said Kriya. It's so big. I never imagined it so big." Kriya and Karuna were walking toward the dome and could see soft red lighting inside through some tiny slit windows.

"Yeah, it's amazing. You know the main mirror inside the telescope is 200 inches across," said Karuna, his turn to show off some knowledge. "It took six years just to create the mirror. It curves in towards the middle of itself, like a bowl."

"You mean like a bowl to collect light?" questioned Kriya.

"That's right, a huge mirror shaped like a bowl to collect light. That means it can see fantastic distances out into space. Astronomers would work up here all night, every night. Even through the winter. Freezing cold. As you can see, the dome is just open to the night sky."

The boys and their fathers walked through a thick door into the dome structure. There was a humming sound of large but quiet electric motors and huge gears turning. To their left the boys could see the white telescope, cradled in a cage of black metal, was moving. It was like a white whale in a sling moving across the night sky. The telescope was being moved so it could look at a precise area of space. An area with more stars than grains of sand on the beaches of Earth.

The telescope barrel moved left and up, very slowly. At the very bottom of the telescope there was the viewing chair. A plain metal and cushion chair bolted to a metal grid inside its own small, open cage. It was on a small elevator and was off to the side

of the telescope. A chair to view the universe. It was very exciting to Kriya and Karuna, who were trying to look at everything in the dim red light that washed over the telescope room.

“Alright, boys,” said Kriya’s father. “Let’s look at some stars.”

Kriya rode up the short elevator ride, strapped in the chair, surrounded by steel and aluminum. His short legs dangled over the edge of the chair’s red cushion. The cushion was very worn from many legs rubbing against it through many long nights. Most of the time, the telescope was used to take pictures on film. The telescope would drink in star light for hours and hours, and that would produce a picture from deeper out in space. For this, the scientists who ran the telescope worked in a separate room. But Kriya and Karuna were looking through the telescope with their eyes.

Blinking, Kriya put his left eye up to the eyepiece of the telescope that hung so hugely right beside him. Absolutely amazing he thought to himself. The telescope had already been perfectly focused. Kriya looked out at a field of bluish stars spread through a large rust-red cloud of space dust. The stars were so far away it had taken their light millions of years to reach Earth. The space dust cloud was so vast, it would take a human millions of years to travel across it. And now Kriya was seeing these stars. They were young stars, very hot, and therefore were blue in color, for blue is the hottest color of sun fire. Kriya sat as if in a trance, a feeling of delight, goodness, awe, worship, oneness welled over him. Siva’s creation he thought. I’m looking out into the physical universe, uncountable worlds and uncountable stars. How did Siva create all this? How does he keep it going? Kriya’s mind was bubbling with questions as the stars beautifully bubbled with Siva energy. Where is Siva in all this? In thinking to himself, Kriya thought of Siva as the First Soul. The very first soul being. This was easy for him to understand. First. First soul. First mind. Where is the First Soul, Kriya thought. Will I see Siva out there, creating more stars and planets? He took his eye away from the telescope for a minute. There was the red glow of the room below him, but otherwise it was very dark. Kriya closed his eyes. He was thinking, and trying to see with the light of his own mind. Then, Kriya knew. No. I won’t see Siva out there. Out there in the wonder of stars and space. That is a beau-

tiful creation of Siva, but Siva won’t be there as the First Soul. He is there as the first light and energy going through everything. He is there as life itself and the stars and planets and space itself. But to know where Siva as the First Soul lives, Kriya thought, I must meditate. Meditation is like a super-powerful telescope that looks inside myself. Rather than outside myself. I have to meditate, to spiritually travel inside myself, to visit Siva’s universe. Then Kriya thought to himself, Siva’s universe, the Sivaloka, must be here. It must be here, somehow flowing through or behind the physical universe. And going to the Sivaloka must be like walking through a spiritual door, Kriya thought and saw a sudden star-like brilliance in his mind. And he knew he was right. “Aum Namah Sivaya,” he said out loud.

Kriya came down on the viewing chair, still joyful with his recent discovery. “Your turn,” he said to Karuna, who was very eager to get into the chair and go up to the stars. Kriya would share his thinking with Karuna later. Now he sat down, began to slow and control his breathing, and entered a short meditation inside the Mount Palomar Observatory. He was searching for the spiritual door to the *Sivaloka*.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson nicely ties into the Mahasivatri lesson as it is the Sivaloka that we are striving to attune to during the Siva vigil night. It also, of course, gives the location for Lords Ganesha and Murugan. Also any lessons discussing the soul body, for the soul itself functions within the vast layers of the Sivaloka, depending on its evolution.

HOMEWORK

Instruct the children to do this simple exercise during the day and evening. Every time they look out a window, looking through the window they should pretend and feel that everything outside the window is the *Sivaloka*. Everything inside the window is the physical world. There is only a thin glass that is separating the *Sivaloka* and physical world. It is very close to our world. They should imagine and feel that God Siva is fully flows through both the *Sivaloka* and the physical world as energy light, consciousness and love.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

If we combine our knowledge of God Siva, our search in finding God Siva through yoga and the auspicious time of the new moon night in February-March, we have the most meaningful and important festival of the Saivite yearly calendar: *Mahasivaratri*. This is a very spiritual festival, a very inner (meaning of our soul reality which is inside of us) time. It is really a vigil, meaning a sacred time dedicated to specific spiritual practice. *Mahasivaratri* means the “Great Night of Siva.” It is a night vigil-festival, and one of the challenges for youngsters is to stay awake late into the night, as the stillness of the new-moon midnight invites deep meditation.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Saivism offers many festivals throughout the seasons of the year. Included are festivals for Ganesha and Murugan, and there is a day in July of celebrating the guidance of the Satguru—called *Guru Purnima*. Depending on what ethnic community you are associated with—Gujarati, Nepalese, Tamil, Sindhi, Kashmiri, etc.—there are lesser festivals to Siva or some aspect of Siva, but the most important and most beneficial is the sacred night of *Mahasivaratri*. Maha as we learned in the previous lesson means “great.” Ratri means “night.” Siva literally means “the Good” or “the Auspicious,” and, of course, Siva is God, the Supreme Being and Mind of light that saturates everything and every being. Thus *Mahasivaratri* means the “great night of Siva.” And it is a very auspicious time, the period of the new moon when the moon is but a silvery crescent sliver hanging in the Western evening sky. This very thin crescent moon is very beautiful and very auspicious to see. It is the very thinnest of the moon crescents on this night, and it will fall below the Western horizon by 11 at night. It is a wondrous astronomical experience to encourage the children to watch for. And this occurs every month. There is a *Sivatri* every month at a particular stage of the new moon, and some Saivites celebrate this every month by fasting (we explain various methods of fasting further below), special pujas and meditation.

Mahasivaratri begins in the morning of the day astronomically calculated as the fifth day of the new moon, and ends about 18 hours later in the early dawn hours of the next day. It is a night-time celebration, with personal spiritual preparations and



Mahasivaratri is the most important Saivite festival of the year. It is on the new moon of February-March. We worship and celebrate Siva’s greatness all night. We stay awake until the last puja.

pilgrimage made during the day for the evening, midnight and early hour bhajans, pujas and meditations. In some countries, worshippers of Siva will walk long distances, taking days to arrive at the place of *Mahasivaratri* worship.

Of all the festivals in the world, *Mahasivaratri* is the one most dedicated to yoga meditation. For children, it can even be emphasized as “Siva’s great night for yoga, for finding Siva.” It is a night dedicated to experiencing our identity in and as Siva. It is like Siva providing an optimum time every year for each person to experience their own Siva mind.

Night time is an incredibly potent time for yoga practice. The darkening sky and fall of night coincide with a turning within of our physical and mental energies. Automatically, we feel more spiritual, more attuned to our inner reality, even closer to the *Devaloka*. The energies of the planet are softer, less harsh. The night and stars sur-

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

A lady is pouring water over the Siva Lingam during *Mahasivaratri* night. She is trying to pour so that there is no break in the stream of water. This is a north Indian style of worship. Many tens of millions of Hindus worship like this on *Mahasivaratri* night.

This is the Siva Lingam (mark of Siva). It is a sign of the Absolute Reality, which is beyond the Mind of Siva—the indescribable Source of consciousness itself. Since the Absolute is without form, the symbol for the Absolute does not have any recognizable form or shape. The Siva Lingam is that symbol—a formless mark that says the Absolute Reality is beyond.

The water is caught in a basin. This water, spiritually magnetized by the Lingam, is later distributed among the devotees to sip out of their right hand.

round us like a huge cosmic cave, inviting a few minutes or more for meditation. All Saivite children should practice a few minutes of simple meditation before they go to

sleep. But on *Mahasivaratri* we are dedicating a large portion of the night to worship and meditation.

For most people, it is the one night they strive to come closest to Siva, perhaps to even comprehend for one minute that they and Siva are identical in consciousness and in the Absolute Reality (a concept not introduced in this course at this level).

The central preparation for *Mahasivaratri* is fasting, which means to not eat at all (only taking water), or to not eat certain foods. Obviously, to be a good Saivite, one must already be a vegetarian. It is very difficult to worship and meditate upon Siva when the child or adult is routinely eating meat, fish, fowl or eggs that are the killing of living bodies occupied by souls of light, and contributes to the massive destruction of vital rain forests and other environments. This is certainly the opposite spirit and action of Saivism. Any day or night is a great time to decide to be a lifelong vegetarian. But on *Mahasivaratri* everybody—

even meat-eaters—must be vegetarian. Many people just drink water during the day before Siva's night. And many people just eat fruit and perhaps some nuts. But nobody eats a normally cooked meal. The final act of the Mahasivaratri—late at night—is to partake of a fine cooked meal that has been blessed during the Siva pujas. This food is charged with Sivaness. Many devotees prepare and bring this food as part of their worship.

Mahasivaratri is a sacred vigil. A vigil is a period of time we dedicate to spiritual thought and practices. The entire Mahasivaratri night festival is a lengthy vigil for Saivites. It includes bhajan, puja, listening to swamis or spiritual leaders talk about Siva philosophy and practice, and most importantly, meditation on our oneness with Siva. Children are not used to dedicating a long period of time to a single pursuit. But they do go to school each day, learning many subjects, playing with friends and eating lunch. Mahasivaratri is like a school for Siva, only at night. It is a night time school with lots of things to learn and do. But the challenge for children is to stay awake until the final puja is done and the blessed food is served. Most kids like the idea of staying up late. It is more adult, more fun than trudging off to bed. Yet, as the midnight hours approach the touch of sleep is very overpowering, and the child will quickly find herself or himself fast asleep, and functioning in the Devaloka in their deva world body. This in itself is not bad in any way. But the intent of Mahasivaratri is to push ourselves, to strive harder, to sacrifice our normal physical comforts, so that our soul body of light comes forward into our consciousness and we experience some kind of closeness or oneness with Siva. There are different times for the conclusion of Mahasivaratri. Many people hold their final puja at midnight, with a meal served afterwards. Others carry on until the early morning hours. If a child can make it to midnight without falling asleep that is a great accomplishment.

STORY READING

The train whistle blew loudly twice, telling everybody on the platform, "This train is leaving now!" A thousand people surged forward into the train, all dressed in Indian whites and black vests and brown Kashmir sweaters, and rainbow saris and block print punjabis and a few in jogging suits, and one yogi in yellow robes, his brown

shaven head reflecting the noon sun. Hot steam blew like small clouds out of the train engine, a great dark, dirty machine beast. Out of the smoke stack, blackest black with soot, came orange sparks and a dark gray river of smoke. The thick smoke drifted back the whole length of the train, going along the top of the cars. It was a banner of coal-smelling smoke. Virasiva covered his pale gray eyes from the bright sun and looked at the endless ribbon of smoke drifting back. He had two thoughts: this train really pollutes the air, and it would be kind of fun to write something into the smoke, something like "Stay on track to Siva" or "Train yourself to love Siva."

Virasiva chuckled at his little word-jokes in English, and imagined writing, very fast, into the train smoke so that the letters were made of clear blue sky. He had seen sky-writing, where small airplanes put out puffs or ribbons of white smoke and spelled out messages. Now Virasiva was at the head of the train, right next to the giant engine. He had just turned 9-years old. His reddish black hair was straight as bamboo and he wore it long, but knotted in the back with a short pony tail, a style that was becoming popular among Hindu boys in India. His black hair hung over a deep red kurta shirt with a high collar and a necklace of rudraksha beads—also reddish brown—bounced around his thin neck. His pants were tough, made of hemp, and were the color of a desert camel. He needed tough pants. A long hike across very rocky land lay ahead of him. Virasiva and his two older cousins were on a pilgrimage to a very holy and old Siva cave in Kashmir for Mahasivaratri. This train would take them to the start of the narrow, steep trail they would have to walk with hundreds of other pilgrims to the high and deep cave.

The whistle screamed with hot steam one more time. Got to get moving thought Virasiva, and he ran to car number six on the train. Six was the number of Lord Skanda, the Lord of Yoga in north India—a good sign Virasiva had told his cousins when they got their tickets. He jumped up the old wood-and-metal steps that led to the train car door just as the train started to move forward, clattering over the metal rails: clack, clack...clack, clack...clack, clack. It was an old train. It was quite small, like a sure-footed pony this train was meant for steep mountain work. Virasiva thought it could be in a museum, a train

1. Mahasivaratri is a celebration of Siva always being inseparable from us. This is the "Siva Twin" game. Bring to the class a number of white or light colored strips of cloths from sheets, old verthis, old curtains, whatever. They should be long enough to tie two kids together at the ankles and shins. Bring in two or three large balls, like a soccer ball. Bring in a box big enough for the ball to roll into with a foot of clearance on each side. Divide the class into pairs, boy and boy, girl and girl. The teacher and the kids all help each other tie the pairs together very tightly at the feet and shins. They should be like one leg. The boy on the left is the soul in a human body. The boy on the right of the pair is Siva, who cannot separate Himself from you. Whatever the human does, Siva is right there, inseparable. The same with the girl pairs. Clear the class of desks and chairs so there is a clear floor. Or do this in a gym. The object of the pairs is to kick the soccer ball with their bound feet to three other "Siva Twin" pairs, the last pair tries to kick the soccer ball into the box. Loads of fun. Keep the balls circulating among many different "Siva Twin" pairs.

museum down in New Delhi. But here it was, an undying ironhorse still pulling pilgrims up to the mountain chasms and caves of Siva.

Virasiva quickly walked into the train car, painted a dull yellow, with seats made of old fading-red cushions and yellow-painted racks above for stowing luggage, bed rolls, pots and pans, food, musical instruments, cymbals, incense, holy books, whatever pilgrims were inspired to bring on pilgrimage.

He spotted his cousins, tasseled black hair over deer-tan kurthas, also with tough hiking pants. They were looking out the window of the train car. The windows had no glass and were small. The cool mountain air came in, along with a thousand smells from the nearby town. The train was moving, already climbing, already gulping for air in the mountains of Kashmir in north India.

"I'm getting kind of hungry," Virasiva said as he landed on the train seat next to Akshaya, his 15-year-old cousin. On the other facing seat was Shankara, his 21-year-old cousin. Shankara was tall and thin as a

bean, with a little mustache crawling across his lip like a caterpillar. Akshaya was short, muscular like a rugby player and his black hair was also tied back in a knot and pony tail. He also had two gold earrings. He liked to rub the earrings when he talked, as if the gold made him think better. Maybe it did. The three cousins had not eaten any solid food that morning. A cup of tea and some water was all they had taken. Their stomachs were beginning to grumble and rumble like bears awakening from a long sleep.

“We could get a bit of fruit. Some bananas at the next station,” said Shankara with a hopeful smile. “I’m a bit hungry too. Long hike ahead.”

“Alright with me,” agreed Akshaya who was pulling out a pair of very shiny brass cymbals from his pack overhead. “The hike up to the cave will take several hours. Best if we aren’t weak.” He began playing the cymbals, setting up a beat against the beat of the train wheels on the rails. It sounded brassy and good, two metal beats forming a rolling train thunder. The train rolled upward. Outside, forests of deodar cedars and white birch and Himalayan ferns and meadow flowers went by in a blur. Dark, boiling clouds danced around the mountain tops. Sheets of rain were off in far valleys and at one time three rainbows arched through the sky—like playground slides for nature devas to gently fall to earth. Smoke from the train engine licked in the window once in a while. The boys would quickly jump up to dodge the smoke. It would make their fine clothes dirty and smell of coal. But they were probably going to get dirty on the hike and in the ancient cave.

At the next train station the boys bought a large bunch of ripe bananas and some more sugary tea called *chai*. The bananas let go of their sweet smell as the boys peeled them. They made some faces like monkeys, and laughed, and enjoyed their simple meal. It was a meal meant to give them energy to reach Siva.

An hour later the train slowed and gently rolled to a stop. With short and long bursts of steam the train whistle blew and echoed a dozen times through stone canyon walls. This was the stop for the Siva cave trail. It was called the *Guhanatha marga*, the path (*marga*) to the (*Guhanatha*) Lord of the cave. The three boys grabbed their backpacks that included a bed roll, warm jackets, mittens, wool caps, cymbals, sandalwood incense, waterproof matches, wood,

pots, cups, coffee and a bag of whole wheat flour, almonds, raisins, brown sugar, dates and coconut. The boys wanted to make a sweet to be offered as part of the food offered to God Siva and given as the sacred night’s sacred meal to the pilgrims. Also in Shankara’s pack was a copy of “Dancing with Siva.” He planned on reading the chapters on God Siva and yoga to the two other boys during their Mahasivaratri vigil. It was a very heavy book—weighing 3 pounds—but Shankara knew it would be worthwhile to carry it in his backpack to the Guhanatha. Akshaya also had tied to the top of his backpack a long bamboo flute, thick and brownish yellow. When Akshaya blew his breath across the flute opening, a low and golden tone streamed out into the cold air, like honey becoming thicker. At midnight, Akshaya was going to find a high rock near the cave and create a midnight raga melody from his flute to drift among the stars.

The three boys jumped off the train with their backpacks and headed for the start of the trail. Hundreds of other people were behind the boys, all moving silently to the trail, the only noise was their feet on the dust and rocks and some pots knocking together. All were pilgrims to find their own understanding and experience of Siva. Then, when they all reached the trail, there was a chorus of shouts, “*Namah Shivaya*.” Cold air wrapped around them, but the afternoon sun, burning yellow in a superblue sky with only small patches of clouds, offered warmth. Shankara, Akshaya and Virasiva started walking up the trail, a path of stone slabs and dust and small rocks heading up over a hill covered with low dark green bushes with tiny purple flowers. The boys figured it would take them about three hours to make the hike to the Siva cave. This included stopping to help other elderly pilgrims on the way. They brought water from fresh streams to old ladies and men, carried their packs for them and said kind words of encouragement. The trail climbed into the stone mouth of the Himalayas and the pure, spiritual air of the sky. Deep, almost black shadows drew across the tan, gray and green rocks and strong pine trees that often grew right out of the rock. The sun was sliding down the bowl of the sky, heading for its disappearance behind far away mountains. The boys could see the slim crescent of the moon directly overhead them, hanging in the dark blue sky.

The further the sun went down, the more visible the sliver of the moon would be visible. It was a sign that Siva’s love and blissful energy would pour into the pilgrim’s mind just as sun light poured into the bowl of the crescent moon.

Then, as the boys walked around a bend of tall, column-like rocks, they saw the cave, Guhanatha. It was truly huge, a giant opening of blue-black that could swallow a large freight ship. It was set into a solid face of blue-gray rock that rose several hundred feet up. And across the rock face ran three uneven stripes of creamy silver rock, flashing like lightening with thousands of crystals. The boys stood rooted to the ground, staring with open mouths and wide eyes at the fantastic sight. “The mark of Siva,” said Virasiva with a wave of awe choking his voice. “The three stripes. The three laws of spiritual growth,” said Shankara with wonder in his voice. “The cave of Siva’s Mind, perfect peace and perfect spirit power,” said Akshaya as he touched his rudraksha beads. The boys came out of their spell of wonder and walked quickly the rest of the trail. Outside the cave, they left their backpacks on flat stone areas where tens of thousands of pilgrims had camped before them over many, many centuries. Many other pilgrims were right behind them, and soon the entire area outside the wondrous cave was busy with pilgrims setting up small camps. The wood was all carried in, as there was not even a stick up here. Fires flamed into the falling darkness with dark smoke rising toward the crescent moon. And there was no fatty smell of meat, just the pure smells of vegetables, dhals, rice and chapatis and various sweets cooking.

The three boys, now brothers in Siva spirit, entered the cave that was lit by slow-burning torches. They had already prepared their sweet, and now were ready to begin the first hours of their vigil with Siva. The cave was so quiet that they heard their own heartbeat, and a very piercing flute-like tone in their ears. But it was not a sound from outside. It was a *devaloka* sound, a spiritual sound that came into their minds. The cave floor was very dark green and smooth, almost polished from so many pilgrim feet walking across it. The cave went very deep into the mountain, like a tunnel. The deeper the boys walked into the blackness mixed with orange flames and light, the smaller the cave became. It was narrowing, a clue in nature that to

reach God Siva, the sense of I-ness and me and mine needs to become smaller and smaller. Outside the night sky was clear as only high mountain air can be clear, and the stars' light seemed to catch diamonds in patches of snow around the cave. The crescent moon, a thin sliver of yellowy silver was frozen in the black western sky.

At the very back of the cave was the shrine, formed naturally of granite rock and a vein of silver. It was a Siva Lingam, the sign of Siva as That which cannot be described. The three boys, dressed warmly and feeling a spiritual-star glow inside themselves, spent the Mahasivaratri vigil worshipping, singing, listening to *Dancing with Siva* being read and meditating. Virasiva, though only 9-years-old stayed up way past midnight without falling asleep. And then they all enjoyed a very delicious meal prepared by the pilgrims. It was the best meal they'd ever eaten. And then, they spread out their bed rolls under the late night stars, and very quickly fell to sleep. And Siva's great night for that year was over.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children to choose one evening over the period in between these classes and try to do as many Siva practices as they wish to for that evening: chanting Aum, a little yoga meditation, weaving a garland, singing Siva bhajans, etc. They should not stay up past their normal bedtime. The idea is to dedicate a normal evening to as much Siva spirituality as they are comfortable with.

NOTES

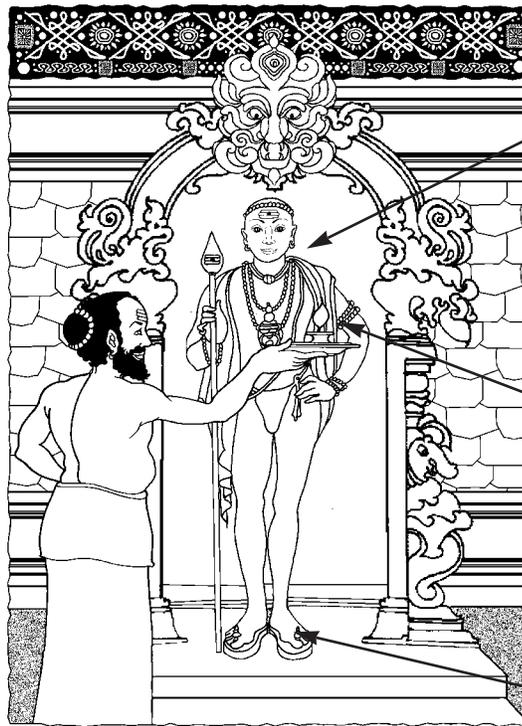
LESSON FOCUS

There are two times during the year that are dedicated to cultivating our closeness and communion with Lord Murugan, God of yoga and religion. These two festivals are Skanda Shashthi (held in November/December) and Thai Pusam (held in January/February). These two festivals are very close together in the yearly seasons, and offer a back-to-back opportunity to ask for, earn and be spiritually open to the intense grace of Saivite learning, yoga and healing that Murugan radiates. Skanda Shashthi reminds us of the ultimate power of pure godly light, an omnipotent gold light that turned solid into Murugan's magnificent *vel*. Thai Pusam is our time to purify our minds through fasting and *kavadi* (defined below), penance so our karmas are softened and we are more successful in life and spiritual unfoldment.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Lord Murugan is the God of spiritual advancement. He oversees each Saivite Hindu progress of unfolding spiritually. That is, like a flower unfolds its petals into its greatest beauty and fragrance, each soul on Earth unfolds into its greatest spirituality. Lord Murugan provides ways and guidance for this unfoldment. In fact it is Lord Muruga who oversees all religions on our planet and countless other planets as well. It is no wonder then that Skanda Shashthi is such a rich and potent festival when it is properly understood.

Think of these festivals as planetary gatherings in devotion and union of wills and minds to the Deity of religion, Murugan, who is known by many names. *Skanda* is one of those names. This festival should be taught as an extremely important yearly event in the children's lives. There is a God, a supersoul, who can directly help each child in their spiritual progress, to make sure that each child's life reaches its full bloom of spirituality—and the minimum of spirituality is understanding and following spiritual laws such as karma and selfless service. Again, we must remind the children that our reason for Earth life is to achieve spiritual oneness with Siva. Religion is the vehicle, the great space ship, that carries us on that journey to oneness. Murugan is the captain of the ship. He is our pilot and navigator. So Skanda Shashthi becomes for the child a special time to appreciate and understand religion and spiritual life and laws, and that



Skanda Shashthi and Thai Pusam are big festivals to honor Lord Murugan. Hindus celebrate these all over the world. There will be lights and parades and lots of people.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Lord Murugan is standing here in his monk form, representing the natural state of the advanced soul: non-attachment to things of the world and pure dedication to spiritual expression. It is this power of dedicated spiritual striving that is tapped into during Lord Murugan's festivals.

The puja flame is being passed to Lord Murugan during the festival. At some of the more popular Murugan temples in south India, tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of devotees gather for the blessings and guidance of this God of yoga.

Children can leave problems at the holy feet of the murthi. The children simply send their problem by thought transfer to the deity's feet. The children leave the problem there without thinking about it, which would take the problem back. The soul God can then break down the force of the problem and it disappears.

Lord Murugan wants to and is able to help each child in this process.

At the core of Skanda Shashthi is the celebration of Skanda (or Murugan) receiving His *vel*, the spear of spiritual light. The *vel* is a real thing, a real spear made out of a cosmic golden light, a light so strong and powerful it would outshine a trillion stars. It is also the same power that is part of our soul being, and we can feel it running through a subtle channel that we feel physically in our spine. Obviously, this is a very vital mystical fact, and it ties into yoga, for it is in the energies of the spinal column and brain that we first experience yoga.

But is the *vel* a weapon that can hurt someone? No, the *vel* is a weapon of the mind that can only help. The *vel* is the spiritual knowledge of God, the special higher knowledge which overcomes the lower instinctive nature. In *Dancing with Siva*, sloka 25, Gurudeva said, "Its blade is wide, long and keen, just as our knowledge must be broad, deep and penetrating." The *vel* brings positive changes in one's life, it nev-

e_r causes harm.

Now many stories about Lord Murugan (Skanda, Karttikeya or Kumara) tell of great battles in which various foes are destroyed by the *vel*. We cannot take these stories literally. The Gods never hurt or kill other beings by the use of force or weapons. To put this thought into the head of a child is a grave offense to true mystical reality, and surely damages the child's understanding and devotion. It is utterly wrong! We should always interpret these stories (if we must encounter them at all) in a mystical way, as the victory of spiritual knowledge over ego and instinctive ignorance, and not as real battles fought at such and such a time.

The best understanding of the *vel* is that it is Murugan's tool of light. It is like we humans using a laser light to perform delicate surgery or other beneficial tasks. It is like a child in your class using a flashlight to light up a book somebody is reading or to find a lost object, or illuminate a path in dark-

ness. The flashlight is a very useful tool. Lord Skanda has a very useful tool: His vel of spiritual insight.

The *vel* is an exquisitely beautiful object, far more beautiful than any metal in our universe. It is made of molten gold light, and it glows with a wondrous halo of white golden energy. What does Lord Skanda do with His vel? Many helpful things. For one thing it protects individuals during meditation and large groups of people gathered in spiritual pursuits. The star-shining light of Murugan's vel naturally repels negative beings (lower astral world people and beings who are temporarily expressing badness) who are attracted to the energy of spiritual events. But strong spiritual light repels them. This is like when we light a fire in the woods or jungle to keep away bears or tigers who may harm us. Lord Murugan also uses the *vel* to dissolve huge clouds of astral force made up of base human emotions: anger, fear, jealousy, greed, and violence.

Thai Pusam is a huge festival common to the Tamil Saivite Hindus. It is a time of deep prayer and penance through *kavadi*. Kavadi is a very special dance to Lord Muruga. It is a dance that positively changes the karmas of the dancer. This is called penance. This is done by the dancer feeling great love for Lord Muruga, feeling sorry for any wrongdoing he or she might have done, and vowing to Lord Muruga to live religiously in the future. At the same time, the dancer carries a heavy arch on the shoulders decorated with symbols of Lord Muruga. This is extra weight for the dancer. This extra weight places a strain on the body, a discomfort. The dancer is bearing the discomfort on purpose. This is a physical karma the dancer is bringing to himself or herself. This act, plus feeling sorry and deep devotion, begins to soften the bad karmas he or she has yet to face. Thus, the dancer's future is improved by the *kavadi* dance, if it is done in the right spirit. If *kavadi* is performed simply as a social/cultural expression, then the mystic power of changing karmas does not operate.

STORY READING

The lights in Parvati's room suddenly went dim. She could hardly see any of her stuffed animals and drawings of song birds she drew that hung on the white walls. Her ginger brown hair fell on the shoulders of a white punjabi with delicate gold and red lotus designs stitched across the front. She

lifted up her head from the desk where she was doing homework. Her greenish brown eyes were spaced far apart and she had a thin nose and full cheeks. She looked around the small room that held a simple bed with thick blue-green-red covers, some oak wood shelves with story books, dolls, stuffed animals. On a small shiny rosewood stand was a gold-plated image of Lord Skanda holding His Vel. It stood five inches high and was a gift from her uncle. The Skanda statue and Vel were now a very important part of Parvati's life. She had even aimed a small spot light from her bedroom ceiling so that its short circle of light was right on Lord Skanda. Parvati was sitting at her small desk next to the bed. The lights were down to a faint yellow color, and the room seemed to be lit with candle light. Another drop in the electric power—just like in New Delhi she thought to herself. But here I am in Russia. Far north of India, far, far north. I used to live north of New Delhi, she continued thinking to herself. Next to the Himalayan foothills in a town called Simla. Now, I'm in Russia. In a land of tall pine trees, long rivers, long months of snow and huge areas of underground oil called Siberia. In a town called Strilget. From Silma, India, to Strilget, Russia. She looked back down to her textbook and pad of paper with her homework writing on it. Her handwriting was pretty. It had flowing loops and lines, like flower petals forming words. She knew Lord Skanda would like her writing because she concentrated and practiced at it. Lord Skanda liked any type of good concentration. Then she remembered reading a few days ago in a newspaper called *Hinduism Today* that a young Saivite swami born in Russia said that the word *Russia* came from the Sanskrit word *rishi*. On her desk, propped between two white elephants made of porcelain, was a set of blue-colored books called the *Saivite Hindu Children's Course*. Parvati was studying this course, and she knew that the word *rishi* means a person who can see with spiritual sight into the *devaloka* and *Sivaloka*.

The electric power was still very low, all the lights barely giving light. It was a bit cold. The one window of her bedroom was not tightly closed. She got up to force it shut, and said outloud, "Russia and rishi. Was Russia a land of rishis a long time ago? Rishis lived in Russia, so far north of India?" There were legends in the old yoga scriptures of the Saivite Hindus that told of a land in the mysterious north where the

1. The six-pointed star is one of the most beautiful symbols of Lord Murugan (or Skanda). Each point of the star is one of His powers of helping us spiritually. The six-pointed star is made by creating two equal-sided triangles, and turning one of the triangles 180 degrees so its top is now below the bottom of the first triangle. Here are several activities for the kids to create their own six-pointed Skanda stars. Bring in stiff white or light colored paper, coloring tools, scissors and glue. Help the children draw equal-sided triangles on two pieces of white paper—as large as the paper will fit. The children then cut out the triangles and glue one triangle on top of the other (in the opposite direction, of course). This creates a six-pointed Skanda star that they can color in. They can also take the same stiff paper and cut out the triangles so that they are hollow on the inside of the triangle—creating a 3-edged triangle that you can see through. They then glue these two see-through triangles together, color them, then attach a string to them so they can be hung from the ceiling. A third activity is to bring in six 5-foot long wood or bamboo sticks. They must be straight and fairly thin. Have the kids help you construct a six-pointed Skanda star on the ground from the sticks. You will notice each star-point is formed from a smaller triangle. The kids must jump from one star-point to the next star-point going around clockwise. The idea is to jump around the whole star without disturbing the sticks. This takes concentration, which Lord Muruga will help them with. They should be thinking of Lord Muruga and concentration when they jump.

perfected ones, the super yogis lived for hundreds of years. She looked out the window. Maybe they're still out there she thought. Hidden in the very old mountains of Siberia.

The countryside outside her window was in darkness, a forest of ancient evergreen trees silhouetted against a very blackish blue horizon. Lights from other houses were also as dim as candles. In the soft yellow glow of a lone street lamp she could see a few orange and gold-yellow lilly flowers and white daisies popping out of dark,

stony ground. It was spring time in Siberia, a Russian word meaning ‘the Land of Sleep.’ And Parvati recalled to herself as she looked out the window that one of the meanings of Siva is ‘the Lord of Sleep.’ This is because in the magic cocoon of sleep, when the physical body and mind are still, the higher mind of the person can touch into the Mind of Siva. The Lord of sleep in the land of sleep, Parvati thought. Would make a nice poem. A yawn snuck up on her and she stretched her arms out wide touching the cold window with her right hand and the book shelf with her left. In the window she could also see the flickering reflection of the gold Skanda and Vel. The reflection in the window made it look like the Skanda and Vel were floating outside, life-size, above the ground and near the trees. It tricked Parvati at first. Is there really a tall gold Skanda out there, she asked herself, and the image did seem very real against the blackish blue of the trees and night sky. I’m getting tired. She yawned again, and stepped back and the floating, reflected Skanda disappeared. But I want to stay awake a little more. Her brass alarm clock over by the bed read 8 o’clock. Tomorrow is Skanda Shashti. Her family would have their own private celebration. There were only two other Hindu families in the town of Strilget. It was like a village of scientists doing research for the oil projects in Siberia—the land of sleep, and now, oil.

Strilget was near the Stony Tunguska River, a clear ribbon of sparkling mountain water that Parvati’s father was assigned to make sure was kept pure and unpolluted. There was no Hindu temple here, though Parvati liked to imagine that once, long, long ago there was a great stone Siva temple along the Stony Tunguska River. This river was considered one of the most sacred in Russia, and much magic was given to it. Parvati had spent many hours at the river with her father. Out here in the beauty of Siva’s Siberia near the river she drew song birds sitting on pine boughs and painted them with her water colors. She had bathed her Skanda and Vel in the cold, gushing waters, and they came out of the river water with a shine and glow, as though they had been dipped in a river of sunlight. During the bathing her fingers went so numb she could hardly feel them. But she felt that the discomfort of her hands in this spiritual act was a healing penance that would soften her karmas. Any of her karma from the

past—a past life—that carried some kind of illness or misfortune or mean act returning to her would be changed into a milder, softer form as her hands became whitely chilled in bathing the gold Skanda. And of course she hardly felt the numbing chill of her hands as a warm spiritual love blew around and through her like a warm tropical wind. Tomorrow, Parvati would have her own private Skanda Shashthi as well, two hours she had set aside for Aum-chanting, yoga practice and a meditation on the meaning and purpose of Skanda’s spiritual Vel. She would bathe the Skanda and Vel in the morning. And her dad had promised to take her deep into the Tunguska forest where a mysterious force had instantly knocked over tens of thousands of trees in a gigantic circle eighty years ago.

She walked over to her bed and with a little, graceful leap landed on it. Sleep was casting its dream net over her. The lights were still very faint. Fighting off the urge to sleep, she got up and changed into her soft, red bed clothes, reached over and closed her textbooks and tidied the small desk. Then she reached up and hit the light switch. Darkness. Black darkness. Except for a little light streaming in the window. Parvati sat on her bed and chanted Aum for a few minutes. Sitting up in a full lotus position, her back very straight, Parvati tried to see a spreading joyous white light in her mind, a light that was the beginning edge of Lord Skanda’s vastly powerful star being. Then, sleep and journeys into the Devaloka.

The next morning broke with red, cloud-sailing skies, a sky on fire that turned within an hour to pure gold melting into light blue. Parvati’s brass alarm clock had jingle-jangled very early. Wow, that was a fast night she thought as she stretched and yawned and crawled out of bed to hit the hard wood floor. It was still dark, but the fiery dawn was right outside her window. Aum Namah sivaya she mentally chanted and said to herself, another great day. Suddenly, a picture swam into her mind, some pieces of a midnight dream she had during the night, a devaloka dream. A deva person dressed in deep blue robes with a round, tan face, long wheat brown hair, brilliant gray brown eyes appeared before her. It was a man, but there was no sense of maleness about him. He was more a person of intelligence and spiritual love force. The love force came out of him almost like a wind.

And Parvati could clearly feel it, the most beautiful feeling ever. Around his neck was a thin chain of gold, wonderfully crafted to look like a woven braid of nine strands. At the end of the gold braid was a large red ruby, carved into the spear-like shape of Skanda’s Vel. Inside the ruby was a tiny star-like white glow that was going brighter and dimmer in a rhythm. And there was an extremely beautiful tone, like the sound of butterflies singing, that came out of the ruby. Parvati remembered this from her devaloka dream, but try as hard as she could, she could not reproduce the sound in her mind. The deva person spoke with a smile and a voice of gentle kindness. And he spoke in rhymes, which Parvati found delightful, and easy to remember. He said:

My name is Rishi Skandaratna.
A name that has magic meaning
for devotees of Skanda.
Follow my rhyme
as I measure out a message for you in time.
Ratna means gem or jewel
and this ruby gem is to me a tool.
Rishi means I see into spirit worlds
as easy as you see nature’s flowers unfurled.
Skanda is my Lord, my Guide, my Master
He moves me to be spiritually faster.
For Skanda is swifter than light,
faster than thought. He is instant flight.
In the tiniest moment that you won’t even
know exists,
Skanda is there surrounding you, helping
you, protecting you, inspiring you to be
blissttt. (and he laughed at his funny
rhyme)
This ruby with star light in its red cradle
is a gem of power from Skanda,
the Lord of the soul’s learning fable.
Skanda commands me to teach
that you can do anything you for reach.
You are capable of much, much good
but most people are as dense as wood.
They don’t use their hours to give aid
or to strive in yoga so their soul
does not fade.
But you think often of Skanda’s Vel
and therefore you can not fail, or ail.
For Skanda sends you energies of health
and His Vel wraps you in pure gold wealth
of spirit light that is whitest white
and then you are a soul jewel so, so bright.

And the deva ended his poem. He said, “That’s the message for you from Lord Skanda on this Skanda Shashthi day. Now, it is up to you to pass it on to others.” He

touched his ruby gem, smiled and left in a halo flash of blue light.

WRONG THINKING

In the *key presentations* text we already discussed wrong thinking concerning the *vel* as a weapon to hurt with. It is a weapon of the mind, a tool really, for Lord Murugan to do his work. This is an crucial point for the children to understand.

There is today too much of a tendency to turn the Murugan festivals—with their kavadi dancing and other liberating activities—into a type of party atmosphere. Especially, this happens at the very big celebrations in Malaysia and India where social liberties take the place of genuine spiritual practices. It is good to instruct the children while they are young, and as teens, in the powerful sacred purpose and meaning of these annual events. Yes, festivals are times of joy—even penance should be done in a joyous spirit—but religious joy is far different from a worldly party.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children to have their parents show them some of the tools that are used around the house. These could be any kind of tools—screwdrivers, hammers, pliers, scissors, flashlights, even electronic tools such as a remote control on the TV or video player or a mouse for a computer. The children should look at the tools and think of Lord Murugan's *Vel* as a tool. It is not a weapon to cause harm, but a weapon of the mind, of the higher forces, a kind of tool. As the children look at each tool they should see that it has a special use, a special function. These functions do not include violence or hurtfulness. It is the same with Lord Murugan's *Vel*.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

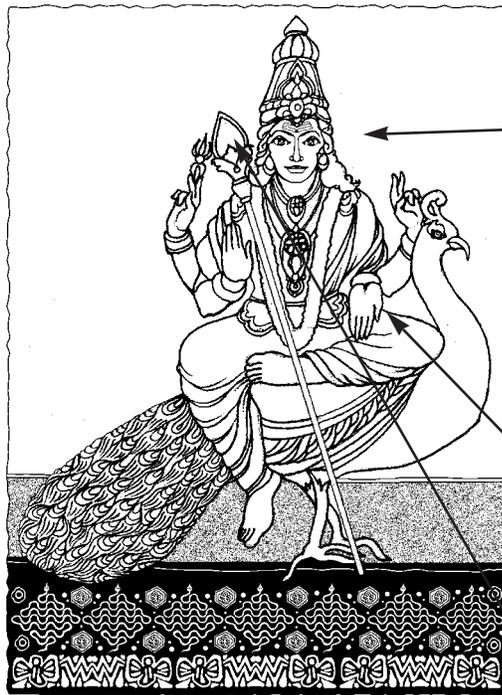
When we are in our final series of lives, and the spiritual path is very important to us, the satguru becomes the most important person in our life. The satguru is the enlightened guru. He knows his inner identity in and with God Siva. He has seen the resplendent soul form of Siva and attained perfect oneness with Siva's mind and the Absolute. Therefore, the satguru is the ultimate spiritual teacher, both for individuals and for Saivite Hindu society at large. The satguru is the only person who can guide us to our own realization of Siva. The satguru radiates a special energy, a soul force, that is the result of his Siva consciousness. This is felt by other people, and helps them spiritually.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

There are in the Saivite Hindu tradition many types of gurus. There are family gurus—the priests who do special ceremonies for the family and often offer advice. There are music gurus and dance gurus. In old times, all teachers would be looked at as gurus. A guru is one who is very knowledgeable and experienced in his or her field. There are several types of spiritual gurus. Some gurus teach Sanskrit and perform rituals. Some gurus teach philosophy. Some gurus sing, tell stories and teach ethics. Some gurus teach yoga and meditation. Some spiritual gurus advise families on how to live and help make choices in their lives. Some spiritual gurus may do a combination of these.

A satguru is an enlightened person. He has personally experienced oneness with Siva. That is what a satguru is—one who personally knows his identity in God Siva. And the satguru continues to know that identity through personal meditation of identity with Siva. The satguru is the yoga master. The word *sat* means knowing the truth of God's Being. So *sat* is a very special prefix. This means this guru is a knower of God, and he has the to guide a worthy disciple to that same enlightenment. Only the satguru has this power, no one else.

A satguru is truly a very rare person. He is much more rare than a king or a president or prime minister of a country. Because the satguru is constantly filled with the light, peace and power of Siva he is a very, very important person. In fact, to Saivite Hindus, the most important person



Lord Murugan says: “Satgurus are Hinduism’s greatest religious teachers. They have practiced many years of yoga and have seen God Siva.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Lord Murugan is telling each child in the class how important it is to have a satguru in each one's life. Since Lord Murugan is the God of yoga, then He works closely with the satgurus who are masters of yoga. Lord Murugan gives the power for all spiritual effort—the satguru teaches and guides through that same Murugan power.

Both of Lord Murugan's hands are offering blessings of spiritual growth in our lives. It is like star light coming out of His hands to brighten us up. Satgurus also give blessings through their hands.

Often satgurus carry staffs just as Lord Murugan carries his Vel of spiritual power. Often the ceremonial staff of a satguru is made of the precious metal silver.

ready to come under the spiritual influence of a satguru.

Many Saivite Hindus honor a chosen satguru by keeping his picture in their home or in the shrine room. These Saivites choose a satguru that they feel drawn to and love. They honor his picture, often daily, and seek his blessings through this simple worship. They may or may not try to follow this satguru's teachings. They may have never met him, or met him only once. They have an impersonal, honoring relationship with the satguru. Often a Saivite family will honor several satgurus. As a spiritual law, all Saivite Hindus honor all satgurus.

However, when the person is very advanced in the reincarnation cycle, and spirituality is the main drive in life, then that individual finds and becomes a personal disciple of a living satguru. The satguru has to personally accept the disciple. This means the satguru gets to know the person. He begins to give personal direction in his or her life, and begins to work with the individual's karma pattern. Becoming a disciple, or *shishya* (in Sanskrit), often involves a special ceremony, an initiation. Saivite Hin-

on Earth is the satguru. The satguru is like a living window to the indescribable bliss, love and knowing of Siva. Wherever the satguru is, wherever he lives or is traveling, he always shines forth with Sivaness. This is why many Saivite Hindus come to worship a satguru when he visits. They come to receive the blessings of his Siva light. To many Saivite Hindus, even to see a satguru from a distance, to have his *darshan*, is a very great blessing. It brings them into a purer spiritual mind. The sight of the satguru helps to ease their karmas. It gives them hope, faith and security. Seeing the satguru reminds people of the real reason they have a human life. They can look forward to their own enlightenment.

There are many ways in which Saivite Hindus relate to a satguru. Some relate very closely, others at more of a distance. Some even have yet to understand there really are satgurus. It is said they “do not recognize” the satguru, not because the satguru is not who he is, but because the person is not yet

With our dedicated acts, we celebrate the greatness of the glorious supermen among enlightened persons. These greatest of men are pure and most wise. They inspire deep thought...—RIG VEDA SAMHITA

and seek to qualify themselves for initiation. There are several levels.

When he seeks initiation, the shishya is in coming into a more advanced relationship with the satguru. He or she is now being personally taught and guided by the satguru, and a psychic bond of light and subtle knowledge grows between them. The satguru directly helps with the karma. This is when daily worship of the satguru's feet is most important and significant. The holy feet of the satguru, symbolized by a pair of wooden or metal sandals, are a special part of the shishya's home shrine. Every day, the shishya (and this could be an entire family) prostrate to the satguru's feet and do a simple puja. They try to feel the presence of the satguru, the special feeling of his enlightenment. They try to think as the satguru would think. They remember to put his teachings into practice each day. They personally seek his blessings and guidance for all important matters. Finally, and most importantly, the shishya seriously practice the spiritual disciplines of puja, mantra and yoga so they attain Siva knowledge in this life. Because at this stage of discipleship under the satguru is very demanding (taming of the personal mind is extremely demanding) a satguru may not have a large following of truly serious disciples. But he would be encircled by devotees of various levels of commitment and practice.

Often, our worship of the satguru extends to those satgurus who are no longer alive. This includes the line of gurus the satguru comes from. Sometimes, a Saivite Hindu will choose a satguru who is not alive as their chosen satguru. They follow his teachings and invoke his devas' world presence through guru pujas. But for rapid progress on the spiritual path, it is necessary to have a living satguru.

STORY READING

It was called the Pyramid building. Rising from a base of four sides it climbed to a sharp point that often was surrounded by a sea of swirling clouds. The Pyramid stood on four giant columns, each as big as a large, tall house. The building was eggshell white and had thousands of windows that when the sun rose or set would reflect the sky's glowing colors like a magical glass beehive. At the bottom of the Pyramid, between the giant black granite columns was a spacious flower and tree garden. A garden to bring peace and beauty to people doing

shopping and business in the large city. It was a very special garden. Since the Pyramid building was in the midst of many other tall office buildings no sunlight entered directly into the garden. So sunlight was captured on the top of the Pyramid and through a series of mirrors the sunlight was bounced down through the very tall building to the garden. There, the sunlight was spread out through a series of tubes and light sprinklers. Like rain sprinklers which sprinkle water, the light sprinklers sprinkled the sun's warm white-yellow light. The mirrors on top of the Pyramid followed the sun as it turned overhead through the day.

The garden was quite large with small ponds and bubbling streams over moss-covered rocks. Bushy light green ferns with what looked like cinnamon sticks growing out of them lined pathways of good-smelling wood chips. Daisies and daffodils, roses and rhododendrons, azaleas and african tulips, phlox and petunias, birch and basswood trees, segum joy and salvia flames, golden cedars and Siva's golden shower trees—plus many other flowers and shrubs grew in lovely clusters surrounded by a lumpy grass called zoisha. The garden was called Nataraja Gardens, named after a wealthy Saivite Hindu who donated a large teaching center on the 108th floor of the Pyramid Building.

"Zoisha! What kind of word is that?" asked 9-year old Suryaskanda as he stood next to a bumpy clump of zoisha grass. His wide, amber brown eyes looked even wider through his glasses set in bronze-colored frames. They matched his bronze skin, and his deep black hair had a touch of henna red in it. He looked around and quickly spun on his heels, the thick cotton of his gray-brown kurtha shirt moving like a sail. "Ah. There's a sign. Let's see. Hmm. Japanese. It's Japanese. Sacred grass," he said to his sister and four of his friends. They were all standing over by a short stand of rare black bamboo. They had met at the Pyramid Building, in the garden, to be part of a youth gathering with a Saivite satguru at the 108th floor teaching center. They were early and wanted to be the first ones there.

"It's beautiful. So thick. Like grass fur. Feels like the fur of a tiger," said Kumari, as she rubbed her hand over the zoisha grass. She had the light green eyes of a tigress set in a long, bronze face like her brother. Her very long black hair, also with a tint of henna red, was pulled back and caught in a hair

This the "satguru mountain guide" game. Bring in long lengths of thick twine or rope. Arrange the desks or class furniture into a mountain-type terrain: obstacles, tunnels and so forth. The teacher is also free to bring in whatever else will help create an obstacle course. This can also be done at a playground. We call these the "mountains of Siva." Group the children into several teams. Out of each team, one child is chosen as the satguru mountain guide, the one to guide the others safely and successfully through the mountains. Using the rope, link up the satguru to the other kids in the team. It is now the satguru's responsibility to guide his or her team through the mountains of Siva, to find God Siva on the other side. If there is time, other children can be the satguru and the mountains can be changed.

clasp made of sandalwood and carved in the shape of a drum, Siva's drum of creation. Kumari was twelve years old, but acted like she was much older. An aunt had almost bought her a hair clasp made of sea turtle shell as a gift. Kumari quickly said, "No way. I will not wear or use that. Sea turtles are close to disappearing on Earth. They are hunted. I will not be a part of that chain of pain." She felt very strongly about protecting animals, and she sent her aunt a personal letter and a little brochure on *ahimsa*, the Hindu idea of non-injury.

"How do you know what a tiger's fur feels like?" asked Karan, one of Suryaskanda's friends. He was ten years old, with black hair, black eyes, fair skin and a kind of half-smile always putting dimples in his cheeks. He wore a traditional, long, thick Kashmir sweater, whitish brown, and his hair hung over his head like a bowl.

"Well, not a living tiger," answered Kumari. "To pet a living tiger, he would have to be asleep from a drug. They do that you know. Shoot tigers with darts filled with a sleeping drug. Then people can check how well the tigers are doing, because they were close to extinction in India." Kumari turned to the whole group, her green eyes seeming to have waves in them. "But I *have* felt a tiger's fur!"

"Huh. How? You can't get near a tiger, not without it being asleep. You just said so yourself," said Raja, also nine years-old. He

had long legs and liked to run over long distances. Wolves were his favorite animal. They could run for a long time. His brown hair was shaggy like a wolf's and he had gentle gray eyes, close together with a short, roundish nose. His kurtha shirt was snow white with delicate red stitching of an ancient Indian design that came up the high collar. The pants over his long legs were also snow white. And, of course, his running shoes were white, with blue tie straps.

"The tiger was dead," said Kumari. "Already dead. A tiger skin laid out on the floor. The tiger died naturally, of course. I checked. It wasn't shot by some raja for silly, brutal sport."

"Hey, that's my name," chirped Raja.

"Sorry Raja. Not thinking of you," Kumari said and laughed. "This was in India, when I went to Rishikesh last year. An old yogi, dressed in faded yellow and wrinkled like a rudraksha bead, did his meditations on the tiger skin. The manager of the ashram let me go up and touch the tiger pelt, and sit on it. He said the tiger fur helped take the electric energies created by the yogi in meditation into the ground. I didn't feel that, but after I got off the tiger fur I touched a metal pole and got a shock. Amazing, huh? But the fur was soft and thick, like this zoisha grass. Maybe the satguru upstairs will be sitting on a tiger skin," and she lifted her hand up to the high ceiling above the garden with mirrored sun beams shooting through the air.

"Hope so," said Nilakantha, a shy 10-year-old boy who kept his hands in his pockets so much you didn't even know he had hands. He squinted his dark brown eyes, which were already narrow with a Chinese Asian look. His family had come from the northeast India. His shiny black hair hung long over a long turquoise blue shirt with black and gold stitching across the shoulders and a red sash around his waist. "Yea, I really hope so," he said again a little louder. "I'd like to touch a tiger skin." And out came a rare hand from the deep pockets of his brown pants to make a petting motion. Then his pale hand disappeared back into his pocket, like a baby kangaroo jumping into its mother kangaroo's warm pouch.

"Let's walk around some more," said Kumari. "There's a really nice waterfall over there."

Suryaskanda looked over at the clear water falling over black and sand-colored

rocks. For some reason it reminded him of the flow of time. He had a sudden urge to look at his watch. "Whoa, everybody," he said excitedly. "Look at the time. We have to get upstairs. We want to be first, right. We want to be up front, right."

"Right, Suryaskanda," all his friends said together and laughed, for Suryaskanda always liked to say "right" at the end of his sentences. "Where are the elevators?" asked Kumari. "Anybody see the elevators when we came in the garden?"

"I did," said Raja with authority in his voice. "Follow me. I've been here before. It's like climbing a mountain. I'll be your guide."

"You're going to be our guru for getting up to the 108th floor, right?" asked Suryaskanda.

"Yes," chimed in Nilakantha, his shy pale blue eyes turning down to the garden path and up again, down and up again. "Raja will be our guru to get up to the satguru."

"Ok, everybody," said Kumari. "Let's follow our Pyramid Building guru, Raja."

The group of six youngsters stepped quickly and softly over the wood chip path and Raja, dressed in pure white, led them through a forest of gold bamboo and white Kilimanjaro bushes, took a left turn through a grove of rare red palms, then a right turn through a little picnic area made of flat white rocks with large yellow tree roses growing between them, then they walked up a series of rock steps lined with blue ginger and birds of paradise. "Everybody still with me," he called back to the rest of the group. "Nobody lost?" He stopped on the path, turned and quickly counted—1,2,3,4 and 5. "Five heads," he said in a worried voice. "I only count five heads. We're supposed to be six. Did we lose somebody?"

Karan, flipping back his black hair, and with his usual dimpled grin, said, "Raja, you forgot to count yourself. You are the sixth person," and they all laughed.

"Oh yea. Right. That's funny," Raja said smiling. Then he grinned even wider and said, "But I will also have to count God Siva too, because He's in all of us. There can't be six of us without Siva. So there's actually seven of us. Alright, the elevators are just this way," and he led the group out into a large hallway made of red sandstone with the very polished brass doors of the elevators set into the stone. There were eight elevators. "Let's take this one," said Raja and

he pressed the up button and they waited for the doors to open.

"Up to God. Up to the satguru. Up to the devaloka and Sivaloka. Everything is up," said Kumari. "How're we doing on time?"

Suryaskanda checked his fancy watch, which had all kinds of dials and gauges. He even had one time dial set for Mount Kailash, the most sacred mountain to Hindus, located in Tibet, the country above India. "We're doing good. Only took us seven minutes to get here. We'll be there first."

The brass doors of the elevator slid open with a soft metal hiss. They all walked in, trying hard to look grown up to a large group of Japanese tourists that had just walked into the hallway.

"Alright," said Raja, turning to the floor selection panel, his finger running up and down the buttons like a squirrel on a tree. "Floor number 108. Here's the button. Very high up. 108 floors. That's sky high. What a view, eh. The plaque next to the button says 'Upanishad Center.'"

"Yes, that's the name of the teaching center," said Kumari. "Upanishad Center. Number 108 is very sacred to Hindus. Nilakantha, why don't you push the button."

"Good idea, Kumari," said her brother Suryaskanda. "Come on over Nilakantha." Nilakantha shuffled over to the panel, both hands in his pockets, covered by his beautiful blue shirt and red sash. "What is Upanishad—what's it mean? Sounds Indian," he said as he stood on his tip-toes, withdrew his right hand and stretched for the black button with gold letters: 108. He punched it. The doors whished closed. The children felt the red carpet floor rush up under their feet, and there was an electric hum above them. The elevator sped up, the floors flying by, and the youth felt their bodies press against the floor, making them feel like they were gaining weight. They were all smiling and Suryaskanda balanced on one leg in a yoga pose, his arms waving in the air. They all laughed. Kumari turned and said to Nilakantha, "Let's ask the satguru what Upanishad means? I think it's a Sanskrit word."

The elevator, seeming like it was going to blast out of the Pyramid Building and head for the moon, started to slow and gently rode to a stop. The doors hissed open into a clay-tiled hallway with Indian designs, old Indian vases and pots, folk art tapestries on the walls and wood and brass tables with antique Indian jade pieces. Shiny bronze

letters on one wall read “Upanishad Center,” and underneath that in smaller black letters, “Knowledge of the spiritual Self.” All the children gasped as they entered the hallway, and their normal chattering fell to a silent hush.

Two large rosewood doors, carved with sun symbols and fitted with bronze handles with red tassels, were in the middle of the hallway. They were closed.

“Are they locked,” asked Raja with a sudden concern as he walked up to them with his hand outstretched. But Nilakantha was already there ahead of him, taking out a hand from his pocket and placing it on the door handle like it was gold. He turned it. It clicked downward.

“Hey,” Nilakantha whispered with excitement. “It’s open. The doors are open.” And with a heave of both his hands he pushed open the heavy rosewood doors so all his friends could pass through. Inside was a deep white carpet stretching across a very large room shaped like a honey cell of a bee hive—five sides. It was a sacred shape. The walls were highly polished deodar pine wood from the Himalayas with columns of black granite carved in a temple style at the corners of the room sides. Each column had a gold Ganesha set into its middle. On the white carpet were several hundred maroon red cushions for sitting and meditation—one side for boys, the left side for girls. Great beams of wood arched across the ceiling. The room was empty and as quiet as a cave deep in a mountain, and smelled like a real sandalwood tree. The children walked in, their feet squishing into the carpet like it was grass. On the far side of the room was a large teak wood stage going back into the wall. On top of the stage was a tiger skin, rust orange with black stripes. A small deep red cushion on top of it. A spotlight shined down on the tiger skin and the rest of the room was lit as soft as first dawn light.

“We’re the first ones here,” said Kumari excitedly. “We’re first. It’s wondrous. I’ve never seen anything like this,” and she gracefully walked like a dancer into the middle of the room, carefully missing the beautiful cushions. The others followed her, the boys managing to barely miss the cushions. “Don’t step on them,” she cautioned. “Those are our seats.”

From out of nowhere a man’s voice spoke warmly: “Come up front. Right up to the stage. Come and sit with me for a while before the others arrive.”

“Who was that?” asked Karan as his head quickly spun around.

“Who do you think it is?” asked the voice, which they heard as coming from all around the room.

“The satguru. You’re the satguru, right,” said Suryaskanda, and the other children nodded in agreement. They all said together, “You’re the satguru, right.”

“Right, as the young man just said—I’m the satguru, and you want to know what Upanishad means, right?” as he laughed in copying Suryaskanda’s way of talking. The voice became a man on the stage, about six feet tall with whitish hair falling over dark orange robes. “Gather around children. Gather close,” he invited as the children sat in front of him as he sat on the red cushion on the tiger skin. “In fact, that’s what upanishad means. To gather around a spiritual teacher giving wisdom of God-realization. It’s that simple,” he explained with a smile. He continued, “So here at the Upanishad Center, we are gathered together today to learn more about your identity, your oneness with God Siva.” Across the room the door opened and more children and youth arrived, springing into the beautiful room like curious and eager cats. The satguru looked at them with laughing eyes and said, “Well it looks you all just have time to feel the tiger skin I’m sitting on. Come on up and give it a rub.” And so the children, led by shy Nilakantha, jumped up and rubbed their hands over the shiny fur of the tiger that had died naturally and now served a high yoga purpose.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children in your class to take a piece of paper at home—colored paper or a napkin, any paper—and fold it into a flower shape. They can make it any kind of flower shape. Then they can tie a string or ribbon around the paper flower. This is the spiritual knowledge flower. It can only be untied by the satguru. Inside the paper flower is great knowledge, but it must be untied and unfolded by the satguru. As the children look at their spiritual knowledge flower, they should think they need the help of the satguru to untie and unfold the paper. Then they can untie it and unfold it, and make another flower if they like.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

The physical body is only one of several bodies that we as souls of light use for experience to spur our individual spiritual unfoldment. Our true and real body, or the real I, is the soul body and mind of dazzling light. That is our identity. Our soul being is immortal and can not in any way be damaged or hurt. Our soul being is infinitely beautiful, our soul mind is exactly the same as the mind of Siva. The soul works through its denser bodies that exist in the mental/astral and physical worlds.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

As a first exercise in this class, have all the children look around at each other and the teacher. First they see each other as child human bodies—young girls and young boys dressed in school uniforms or a variety of western and Indian clothes. The teacher is an adult human. What they are viewing is the physical body, the human body. It is easy to see, because that is what our physical eyes naturally see. Now, have all the children look around at each other and the teacher again. This time have them see each person as a very tall being with feet, legs, hands, arms, head, face, eyes, mouth, nose and hair all made of beautiful bluish white light.

Around this body is an exquisite radiance of glowing colors, like a rainbow that is misting out of this light body. The entire body is made of brilliant, shining light, yet it looks very real. It does not look like a ghost. It does not look like a shadow. It does not look like a cloud. It looks like the most perfect body and face imaginable. It is very real. It is neither a boy or girl. It is an astonishingly beautiful being of light, and it shines with light from within itself. This is what we call self-effulgent. This is the soul body that is the true identity of each of the children in the class. The children are attempting to see with their imagination the soul body of each of their classmates and teacher. If there are ten children in the class with the teacher, then there are in true spiritual reality eleven souls sitting there. This is a good illustrative point to emphasize—as many the number of children with the teacher are in the class, there are that many souls in the class. In reality, we should view this Saivite Hindu religion class as a teaching class for souls.

Our soul body is our primary or first body. In fact, it is not even correct to say “our” soul body, as if there is something



Satguru says, “You are not your physical body. You are your soul. It is the real you. Your soul is a body of light. It cannot be hurt.”

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

In this scene of the satguru teaching a student, it is night time with a full moon in the Himalayan mountains.

The satguru is old with a long white beard, but he is still strong and healthy. He sits quite comfortably and can sit in a meditation pose for many hours a day.

The satguru’s hand is in a gesture that is emphasizing the truth that the soul is a body of light, immortal and never suffers from wounds, disease, aches or temperature.

The student is listening very closely to his satguru. He is trying to understand himself as a soul body, rather than as merely a physical body. He has a pet parrot. Perhaps the parrot is learning some words about the soul that it can repeat later.

else that occupies or possesses the soul body. The soul body with its infinite mind of Siva consciousness is our true “I”-identity. When we talk about the soul, we are always talking about the soul body and its all-pervasive, all-intelligent mind. As a quick demonstration of this truism, you could instruct the class to repeat several times: “I am a soul of beautiful, star-bright light. I feel myself as the entire world and universe. I am one with all beings. I know all knowledge. I see all worlds. I am joy. I am bliss. I am love. I am the unending ocean of Mind.” This repetition will begin to re-train the children’s minds into thinking they are souls first, and astral and physical bodies second. It is the soul that gives soul-life to and uses the astral and physical bodies. This is similar to we humans inventing and using different kinds of special suits—space suits, anti-radiation suits, germ-proof suits—for survival and protection in different environments. The soul of light uses the physical body of flesh and the astral body that is made out of dense thought. Just as

a scientist may put on a fire-proof suit to gain more knowledge about volcano eruptions, we as souls put on astral and physical bodies to gain more knowledge about our spiritual nature and oneness in and with God Siva. We do this by living on Earth as a human during periods of reincarnation and by living in the devaloka astral world all the time.

Our physical body and our astral body can easily be hurt, get sick, and eventually dies (or ceases to have life force). All the children know this as a real fact of life. Our physical health is the primary concern of people, beginning, of course, with good nutrition. The best nutrition for the most healthy human body is the vegetarian diet, and this is also the best nutrition for developing deep intelligence and a spiritual mind. All the children instinctively know that their physical body may be cut or bruised, a bone broken, or become sick. The astral body too is prey to sickness and injury—sickness and injury caused by lower emotions when we allow ourselves to be angry, fearful, jealous, vengeful, cunning, greedy. These emotions damage the energy

tissues of the astral body. Injury and sickness is one of the most powerful ways that our own karma creations return to us. If we cause harm to another living being, that harm returns to us as a learning karma, and we ourselves are in some way injured, either in body or emotionally or both. Similarly, if we are living mostly in lower emotions—are selfish, sullen, angry, resentful, greedy, etc.—these can manifest as serious sickness in our physical body.

Now, our true identity, the fantastically beautiful soul body, is made of extremely pure and powerful fibers of light. This soul light is so strong that not even the entire energy of all the trillions of stars in the universe could in any way hurt or damage it. The soul body is a permanent body that can never be hurt or injured by any force. It never dies. It is immortal. It is more permanent than time itself. The soul is each child's true self.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. A good analogy for teaching how the soul body is inside of our other experiential bodies—physical, astral, mental—is to use a bare light bulb in a table lamp that is emitting white light (this means the bulb has a white coating—many bulbs are just clear). Over the white bulb—the lamp is plugged in and switched on—is placed various colors of cloth representing the bodies covering, so to speak, the soul. The soul light shines through the colored clothes.

STORY READING

The air in the town where Rishi and Ragini lived was hot. Summertime hot. So hot that bugs and insects and even bees were dropping out of the sky and taking a rest on green leaves or inside flowers. Dogs and cats lay asleep, breathing quickly. The air was also wet, heavy with moisture. Rishi's chalky white kurtha shirt and earth brown pants stuck to his skin. His hair was damp on his neck. Even Ragini, who normally stayed dry was looking damp, her hands showing little droplets of water, like morning dew on a leaf. It was jungle air. Bananas were growing into great hanging stalks of yellow sweetness. Small birds pecked into the orange flesh of papayas. Light yellow flowers sprayed out of the mango trees like fireworks sparklers. Jacaranda trees showered purple-winged petals. On the jackfruit trees were large bumpy green fruits ripening into

a dessert fruit that tasted like bubble gum. Fields of sugar cane waved in a faint breeze coming in from the east where the Atlantic Ocean lay. Off the pavement of roads came waves of heat. The exhaust of cars lay thick in the air in the town. And the strange smells of a large mine nearby drifted through the streets. Rishi and Ragini lived in a small town in Suriname, a small country sandwiched into the coast of the huge nation of Brazil in the upper right corner of South America. Unending forests of jungle trees and volcanic rock and brown rivers spread north, south and west.

Rishi and Ragini sat in bamboo chairs on their porch, looking out at the hot, steel blue sky. A large fan blew in front of them. Its high-speed whirring sound was comforting and sent cooled air over them. They each had a cat, one a white Persian cat named Vibhuti because he was so white, the other a rusty red Tabby cat named Kumkum because he was so red. The cats were also near the fan, facing each other, sleeping. "Another hot, hot day," said Rishi, ten-years old with freckles on the pale brown skin of his sharp nose and dented cheeks. He reached back and pulled his reddish brown hair from his neck. He looked over at Ragini with his olive green eyes. "I'll have to drink 12 glasses of water today. It just goes out through my skin."

"You'll probably drink Coke," laughed Ragini as she lifted up a section of her sea green scarf to the wind of the fan and let it blow over her browned face. "Could you drink 12 cans of Coke in one day?" She had just turned nine years old a few days ago. Her black hair that had little tints of brown in it was braided and draped down a cool snow white punjabi made of cotton with gold banding across the front. Her eyes were black with little flecks of gold in the them.

"You know I don't touch Coke," said Rishi rather seriously, though he smiled. "It will make my teeth look like Kumkum's, sharp and pointed and yellow. And all that white sugar clogging up my cells. I'll stick to water or fruit juice."

Ragini, still tossing her green scarf into the breeze of the fan, said, "You never know. You might today. It's terribly hot and wet." She spoke with a British accent, as did Rishi.

"No. Never ever," said Rishi, shaking his head. He'd been reading a book about diet and how white sugar was very bad for the body. "I took a vow to Lord Muruga. No Coke or Pepsi or any other sugar drinks."

"Well, you know, white sugar won't hurt

ACTIVITIES

Request each child to bring in a piece of clean cloth, about two feet by two feet. The teacher should bring in little stick-on stars or colored dots, the very small kind. Have the children drape the cloth evenly over their right hand so that it becomes a puppet when they move their hand. The hand is the soul inside the sock, which is the physical body. The "soul hand" makes the "cloth body" move and talk. By curling the fingers forward the kids create the upper lip of a mouth and face. The thumb is stretched across (below the fingertips) to serve as the lower lip. Now they have a functional puppet. Apply the stars or dots to make eyes. They now have "soul cloth" puppets. Divide the class into several groups. The groups are sitting on the ground. One group stands up and say together, while moving their puppet mouths, "I am a soul body of light." Then they sit down as the next group jumps up and have their puppets say, "I do not die." They sit down and the next group jumps up and says with their puppets, "I cannot be hurt." The next group can say, "I was created by God Siva." This can go on with the kids making up their own saying about the soul. The teacher can help.

your soul body," said Ragini with a little grin. "Your soul body can't be hurt. No bruises. No broken bones. No disease. No death." She was learning about the soul body of light. Rishi sat up and petted the orange red fur of Kumkum. "Well, Kumkum, it's goodbye for a few weeks. That's true. Nothing can hurt our body of soul light. Not even lasers or nuclear bombs. Not even the sun or galaxy blowing up," he said with growing enthusiasm. "But," and he paused, sitting back in the bamboo chair. It squeaked a bit. "But, if you don't take care of the physical body and mind—it gets sick or weak—then it's hard to be spiritually strong. Difficult for the soul body—the real you—to stay connected to the physical body. So, stay healthy. Drink fruit juice."

"I'll join you for a guava juice later this morning on the plane," said Ragini. "Are you packed?" Rishi and Ragini and their mum and dad were flying west today, a long flight from the wet heat of the endless jungles to the Andes mountains—high, needle-like mountains curtained by snow most of

the year.

“Yup. I’m packed. Ready to go. Have my new mountain jacket, wool cap and gloves. Big change from down here. You ready?”

Ragini instantly said, “All packed. One suitcase. It’s like a suitcase of karma for each life. I’m taking just what I need for this trip—no more, no less. Oh, and my camera. Plenty of great pictures up there in the Andes. Maybe I’ll be the first Hindu girl photographer up there. We’ll be very high, higher than clouds even.

Rishi stood up, dropped Kumkum to the porch floor and said, “Well, not higher than all clouds. But it will be very, very high. I’ve been practicing deep breathing, taking in more oxygen. Sometimes I feel very light, like I have no weight. Like I’ve just become pure energy light, a light body of bluish white light. It’s incredible. Maybe you can take a picture of that?” He looked over at Ragini, who was turning off the fan. The whirring circle of blades started to slow down, and the grinding metal sounds of the mine floated in.

With a slow smile Ragini said, “Hmmm. Doubtful. Can’t take a picture of the soul body. It is far beyond the light of our world that falls on film in a camera. But we’ll try. The picture will probably show you looking like a human bear, all bundled up in thick clothes,” and she laughed. “Let’s go. Time to fly.”

Seven hours later the family landed in Lima—an old, small city sitting like a temple tray of stone buildings and mud brick homes before the towering statues of the Andes peaks. Lima was high. It was like being in a plane all the time. The people who lived here were an ancient civilization that for a thousand years created a kingdom over the rugged Andes mountains. It was a sky kingdom, with a spiderweb of stone stairways and ridgetop trails leading from town to town. The people had brown skin and black hair and dark, friendly eyes over sharp noses and high cheeks. They wore dark colored clothes with bursts of rainbow color banded through them and lots of beautiful silver jewelry. They could breathe easy up here—sky people Rishi and Ragini called them. And the cold, dry air gave them energy. They were at home in a land as high as clouds.

“Whoa. Aum Muruga,” said Rishi with a voice that sounded like a choked vacuum cleaner. His chest heaved up and down. “This is hard. Hard, but great. The air’s so

clear, like you can reach out and touch a rock twenty miles away. But where’s the oxygen? Aum Muruga, give me strength.” Up a long stone trail of large steps that seemed to be made for twenty-foot tall giants, Rishi and Ragini climbed. They were far north of Lima, part of a tour group exploring the old Andes towns and temples, all made of large slabs of stone. It was thirteen thousand feet, as cold as ice and they were still climbing higher. Their tall guide was up ahead, disappearing into a grey mist wrapping around a dark purplish brown peak like a tired ghost. Mountain grass grew tough and green around the stone steps, and a few yellow flowers waved by the cold hands of a wind. But there were no trees. It was clear where Ragini and Rishi climbed up the steps. On both sides, dark, split cliffs fell steeply away into deep valleys that tunneled into a sapphire blue sky. Ragini was breathing hard too, taking a series of deep, slow breaths. She gasped out, “What a climb. Feels like my lungs are burning. But my legs are doing well. My head is a little light, like its floating. Maybe I’ll just float away, be a light soul soaring through the sky.” Ragini’s camera, black and silver with a long black lens, hung from around her neck. She’d already taken two rolls of film over the past two days.

“Give me the camera. I’ll get a photo of your soul body streaking over the Andes mountains like a meteor from space,” said Rishi as he climbed more stone steps carved so tightly there was barely cracks between them. “Yea. I feel light too. Have to be careful though. Don’t want to trip and hurt my knee or something. I can’t hurt my soul self. The real me doesn’t ever die. I go on getting brighter and brighter, heading for final oneness with Siva.”

“Rishi,” said his sister with kindness, though she was breathing hard. “*Do* be very careful. Remember, you broke your arm two years ago, climbing up that mango tree. You were heading for oneness with that real big mango.”

“Hey. That wasn’t my fault. A monkey jumped on the branch,” said Rishi with a big grin and he took in a full breath of thin air. “A very heavy monkey,” and he laughed, but he ran out of air. “Whoa. Can’t laugh too much up here. What a fantastic view, eh? Endless beauty. Look. I can turn around in a full circle and it is like we’re all alone up here, just souls on a new, fresh world. I’m feeling pretty warm. Getting

thirsty. Want some water?” He took out a bottle of fresh mineral water from his small bright red backpack. A few people ahead were stopping for a water break. “Don’t drink too much,” advised Ragini as she looked through the viewfinder of her camera. She was lining up a photo shot of a mountain peak, streaked with snow and a night black mineral that shined like golden glass. The early morning light was soft, so all the colors leaped out like in a movie theater. “Here, take some of my shakti food. Shakti means energy. Andes flower honey and almonds, coconut and raisins. Made it myself. It’s in my pack over there on the rock. The light’s perfect for this picture. It’s like a soft mango or peach color splashed through the mountain mist—like a color shining out of my soul body.” She was holding very still. Not even a slight tremor in her hands. The camera was balanced on a rock covered with green moss. Her finger came gently down on the camera button. A faint click and the soft swoosh of film moving forward in the camera.

Rishi walked over to the bright blue pack, undid the straps and dug deep inside. “Got it,” he yelled back, with a mouthful in his mouth already. “Sticky stuff. Good stuff. I’ll bring you some. Wow. I’m really starting to feel lightheaded. The rest of the group is stopping for a while. Let’s stay here. Rest. Get some energy.” He walked over, gave Ragini some shakti food, and sat with his back against the soft moss of the rock. His wool cap was over his reddish hair and the cold made his freckles stand out more. He had taken off his gloves to eat the shakti food. He washed his hands with water, dried them with a towel from his backpack and put his warm gloves back on. “That feels good,” he said and looked cold but contented. The ghost-like mist was beginning to crawl down toward them from the mountain peak, its whitish gray fingers lit by the morning apricot-colored light. Up ahead there were old stone walls and wide courts and broken-off columns that jutted up through the mist.

Ragini and the camera were moving as a dancer—indeed she was learning bharatnaytam back home in Suriname. She stepped into the dry grass off the steep stone steps, shooting photos of valleys that looked like rivers of light far below. Her photos would be exhibited at school and she was hoping published in the local news magazine. “Alright Rishi,” she cried out to

her brother. “Let’s take some shots of you. See if your soul body comes through onto the film. Or if you just look like a small, cold bear,” and she laughed. “You sit there and meditate. Meditate on the satguru teaching that our true identity is the soul body. There’s a mist coming in that will look very good as a background.”

Rishi looked over from the moss rock he was leaning against. A little white and brown field mouse scurried in and out of its hole near the rock. A black bird with huge wings sailed overhead. “Well mouse, time to have your picture taken,” Rishi said outloud. “OK,” he called to Ragini. “Let me get in the full lotus position—if I can with my running shoes on.” He sat up straight against the rock and lifted his feet into the lotus yoga pose. “Hey. I did it,” he shouted triumphantly. “Quick. Take my picture.”

“Rishi. Take off your hat please,” said Ragini. “Let your hair blow in the wind, like a mountain yogi.” She was lying flat on the gray stone steps, each one bigger than she was, pointing her camera up toward Rishi. With a swoop of his hand Rishi took off the wool cap and messed up his hair so it stuck up like he had been shocked by a lightening bolt. “How’s that? Like a mountain lion, eh,” he joked to Ragini.

She laughed despite the seriousness of her work with the camera. “Yes. You look like a mountain lion with freckles. Now, flatten out your hair and get serious. Try to do the yoga where you feel like light.”

Rishi matted down his hair, closed his eyes and said, “Here goes. Entering the light of the soul body.” And he became very still, a human rock next to the old green moss rock. The little mouse came out of its hole and jumped into his lap. Rishi didn’t move. Wind blew. Grass grew. Not a muscle moved. His face was calm and there was a slight upturning of his lips. His long eyelashes brushed his skin as if his soul body was painting the very flesh his physical body was made of.

Ragini too was still, frozen like a young deer hearing a strange sound. Her hands cupped the camera, holding it on a small bump in the stone step. Her right eye was up to the view finder, but she too was feeling very light, very much like a beam of sunlight crossing the blue sky out into night black space. Rishi appeared in the camera’s view finder, a young yogi at fourteen thousand feet with a great spire of a mountain peak thrusting up through mist, cloud and sky. It

was a poster picture. Ragini gently pressed the picture button, breathing very softly. She took several more shots, changed her position and shot some more while the mist, clouds and sky light changed to an ivory color. Rishi remained frozen in yoga. The little mouse was in his jacket pocket, twitching its whiskers.

Two days later, Ragini’s film was developed. She and Rishi ripped open the film envelope quickly. “Let me see,” said Rishi and he looked through the pictures. “Here I am,” he said. “Hey. Where’s the light body? I don’t see it. Look. There’s a mouse in my pocket. I didn’t know there was a mouse there.”

Ragini took the pictures back and said, “I told you. You would just look like a human bear with a cold nose. The camera can’t see the soul body. But you were someplace out of your body. That mouse visited all of your pockets looking for food. You didn’t even feel it.” A week later they were back in hot Suriname and Rishi still wasn’t drinking any Coke.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson importantly relates to the lessons on karma and reincarnation. It is the soul which is deriving the final transformations that come from our Earth karma and reincarnation cycle on Earth. Yet the soul body itself is not effected directly by the sense and biological experiences of the physical body.

HOMEWORK

Direct the children to watch the light that comes out of various light fixtures and lamps. We are continually surrounded by these and the variety of light they give off. Have the children imagine they are that light. The light does not die, nor does it feel pain and sickness.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

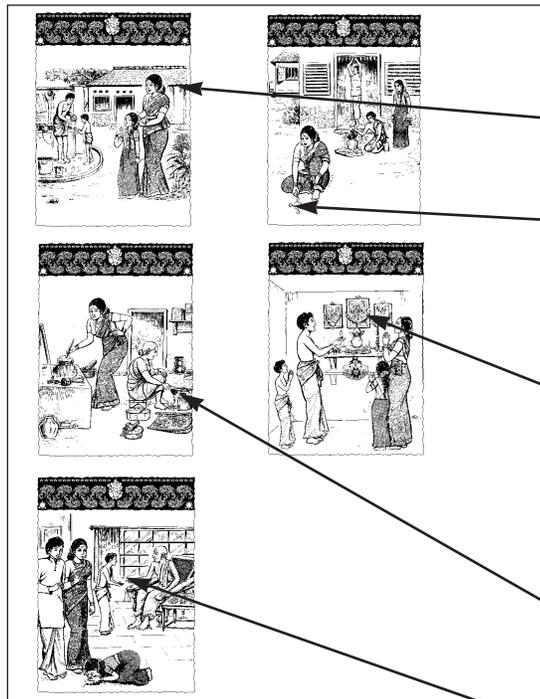
The New Year's Day celebration naturally means it is the first day of a new year. With the new year comes new growth physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. It means a year of receiving new karmas and making new karmas, of fresh challenges and successes in life, even for youngsters. This first day of the New Year marks a time of cleansing, connecting with Siva and the Gods and devas, celebrating the joy of giving and the value of family respect in social and spiritual pursuits.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

A year is the period of time it takes our planet Earth to make a great circle around the sun. It is one of our most important measurements of time for it begins and ends the sequence of our seasons. The year also begins and ends the lining up of our planet and the sun with 12 different star groupings called constellations. These star groupings strongly contribute to the subtle astral world energies that shape our astrology. It is good to make this point with the children, even young children, and this point can be demonstrated by having a globe and a lamp (the lamp being the sun). A simple definition of astrology is: invisible astral forces from planets and nearby stars that help define the character, nature and events of people and groups of people. Astrology is a very important knowledge for understanding ourselves.

For many Hindus, this new year begins when Earth and the sun align with the first of these star groupings—this occurring in mid-April. So we can see the new year day is a very important time that relates our lives and minds to the stars. Other cultures and peoples celebrate new years at other times, but in large part the very oldest cultures and civilizations did celebrate the new year day around the beginning of spring, which is near the first part of April.

New Year's Day is a special home celebration. For children, it can be thought of as a day of celebrating family and home life. It is a *bhuloka* or physical world celebration, rather than a *devaloka* or *Sivaloka* festival. It is the very first day of the new year, the first of 365 days that will bring many hundreds of new experiences to each child. All of these experiences are in the karma pattern of the child. Since we know that karma is our own creation and our own teaching force, each child can view the new year positively and with spiritual cu-



The New Year Day has come, in April. We clean the house and the yard. We decorate. In the early morning we bathe. Then we dress in new clothes.

Father decorates the door with mango leaves. Mother draws kolams at the entrance with rice flour. Daughter Kamala brings flowers in a basket. Son Kumar prepares the kumbha to welcome the new year.

On New Year's Day we prepare special food. Mother makes sweet rice. Grandma prepares vadai cakes. Many visitors come to eat with us.

On New Year's Day we do a big puja in our home shrine. We make the Gods beautiful. We light the lamps and incense. We offer fruit, flowers and freshly cooked food to God, Gods and our family guru. Father does the puja to seek blessings for the coming year.

On this special day we prostrate to our parents, to show our love and seek their blessings. We give great respect to our elders. We receive gifts from the elders in our home.

riosity as to what their karma may bring. Each child's intellect and body will grow over the new year. The child's emotions will mature, as the child learns more about religion and spirit life, there is an understanding of the need for greater control over the emotions. For instance, the young boys or girls will not get angry so easily, or tease others with unkindness.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Mother is braiding flowers into her daughter's hair as part of the New Year's Day celebration.

Kolam designs are being carefully and artistically laid out on the ground with colored rice flour. Father is handing mango leaves at the top of the door.

Father is performing a puja in the family's home shrine room. This also includes the sandals of the satguru. The coconut and brass pot—symbolic of Ganesha's good fortune for the home—is in a central position.

Delicious feast food is being prepared by mother and grandmother. Perhaps there will be some New Year guests.

The daughter is prostrating to her parents and the son is receiving a generous coin gift from grandfather.

The New Year's Day is a single day, but it is very full with activity, almost too much to fit in one day. But with the whole family participating it is a day of great accomplishment, cultural beauty and friendship. Since it is the very first day of the new year, it is as if everything is made fresh and new in the home. This is done by vigorous and thorough cleaning of the house and the surrounding yard, trying to bring new beauty into the home and lawn and garden. It is a good time to plant new flowers, bushes and trees.

The cleaning of the home is directed by mother, and it is up to the children to eagerly volunteer for the cleaning chores. The children should practice a "cleaning" yoga by actually looking for places that may not have been cleaned for awhile. They can chant a Muruga chant as they do this or softly say *Aum* to themselves. A fun game is to chant a very long *Aum* while you are vacuuming. New Years Day is a day of newness in our personal relationships within our family. Brothers and sisters should be getting along

well, helping each other. Amends should be made before New Year Day with any person with hurt feelings. Apologies should be expressed and friendships made renewed.

New Years Day presents a vital opportunity for expressing honor and appreciation to one's parents and grandparents. The children should think of all the things their parents and grandparents did for them, and say a big thank you for all of them. The children think of the new year as a time for new advice from their parents in the new adventures of their life.

On New Year's Day, it is traditional for the children and youth to receive presents from the elders, including new clothes which are worn that day. As well though, it is a very nice gesture for the children and youth to make simple gifts for the elders: draw a picture or write a poem and turn it into a card, make a nice dried flower arrangement, create a scrap book of family accomplishments over the past year, if the children do clay art at school they can make tea cups for the elders, sew a scarf for colder weather or a nice cushion to sit on during prayer or meditation. There are many ways to hand craft a simple gift for parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts.

New clothes are important for the new year. New clothes means they have not been worn before by anybody. Therefore this means the clothes *do not* have the astral or devaloka vibration of another person. The new clothes will absorb the astral vibration of the person wearing them. This is good to teach the children.

The home puja done in the home shrine on New Year's Day should be especially grand, for it is an asking for divine help for the coming year. There is a group of deva angels who live in the devaloka within the home shrine. They can live there as long as there is harmony and peace in the home. They help each member of the family in many ways. This New Year's Day puja is a fine opportunity to renew the astral magnetic power of the home shrine. This helps keeps the deva angels close to the home. The children should help in the preparations and decoration for this event. A lot of bhajan should be sung. The bhajan creates a beautifully shaped and lovely colored structure—like a tiny perfect house—made out of astral sound energy. This structure, glowing with color and uplifting geometric patterns and streams of energy, surrounds and penetrates the home shrine room in the astral atmosphere. This sound

structure (for it is made of astral sound) lasts as long as their is daily chanting, out-loud mantra recitation, bhajan and beautiful music in the home. The opposite—harsh, angry words and argument and jarring rock and roll music—creates very ugly and harmful sound structures.

ANALOGIES & ILLUSTRATIONS

1. New Year's Day is like the very first day of the new school year. There are new teachers, new subjects, perhaps a new schedule, new clothes, new textbooks, new friends, sometimes a new school. The first day is a big adventure and the child can begin to glimpse into the future to see what the school year will bring. Similarly, the child can glimpse into the new year on New Year's Day.

2. New Year's Day is a very unique day in our planet's journey around the sun. Only four other days are as important in terms of the planet's orbit: the winter solstice and the summer solstice (the shortest and longest days of the year, respectively) and the vernal and autumnal equinoxes (when the days and nights are equal in length). All of these are phenomena of Earth's orbit around the sun. For the children, it is easy to explain that it takes 365 days for the Earth to travel around the sun in a slightly elongated circle. This means that every single day the Earth is moving around the sun. The New Year Day marks the very first day of that journey, the beginning step so to speak of 365 steps that make the orbital circle. The day before the New Year Day is the last step of the year's journey.

STORY READING

It was a long time ago when the world was younger as it circled around the sun. The nights were darker and clearer, with the stars seeming so close a child could catch a handful like a fingers-full of white light sand. The days were bright blue and the clouds, sailing overhead as gigantic ships carrying rain, hail and snow, were silver white and at times even golden. But on one side of our world there were volcanoes spewing up red-hot lava and hot black smoke billowed into a sky made gray by a thousand volcanoes blasting all at once. The volcanoes raised out of the green sea, bubbling the waters into hot foam and huge bubbles that lifted into the ashen sky. And the volcanoes burst out of the land, tall cones of power that sent forth flames toward the sun and stars. On the other side of

1. Bring in a supply of stiff white paper and tape. The children should have their coloring sets. With the teachers help, the kids tape four white paper sheets together into a box that is slightly smaller than the size of one sheet of the paper. They are making a home to decorate. A fifth sheet of paper is the roof, which is taped over the top of the four "walls" of the home. Then with their coloring tools the youth paint and decorate their home for the New Year festival.

2. This is a celebration of bringing God into our homes to start the New Year spiritually. We are bringing God to our home. Ask the children to draw a picture of a rainbow coming right into their home—they should draw their house as realistically as possible, so they know it is their house and home. The rainbow represents the beauty and peace of God pouring right into their home.

our world were great fields of frozen ice and stone moving down from the north mountains. Everyday the vast ice fields moved and the land was changed, and our lives changed. The snow fields filled up valleys and dug up forests and scooped out bowls that would become lakes a thousand years later. Our world was young and it was a world of fire and ice. It was a time of magic and mystery for the world was different then. Great masters of spirit were roaming the lands helping kingdoms to seek new countryside, and not to do battle in the process. These gurus were our guides, and they had many powers—they knew the secret language of the book of nature. They were called simply the Ones. For they knew their oneness with the One, the Siva One. They wore golden yellow robes and their hair was wind-blown, never cut. They were said to ride the wind, having no need to walk the ground.

People were moving everywhere. It was a time of moving, of long journeys where whole villages, towns and cities formed long lines of men, women and children, carts of household and business goods, horses, cows, dogs and even mice. Going south or east. Traveling to new lands to build temples and towns, plant crops and

trade goods, stitch back together their culture and civilized life. Many children were in the long caravans heading to the south.

It was spring in a deep forest. A long caravan from a large abandoned city was traveling through the forest. Ten thousand people moving through a land called Anarka in the first week of April. It was biting cold and a thick white frost coated everything every morning. But meadow flowers were blooming purples, reds and yellows amid patches of grass. These were a Siva-worshipping people seeking a new homeland through much hardship. They still paused for several weeks to celebrate the ancient festivals. They had camped near a sparkling river that ran through a valley but the giant hand of the ice flows was not far behind.

It was the eve before New Year's Day, the last day of the year gone by. Tomorrow would be a great celebration of the New Year with puja rites, gift-giving, honoring of elders and a wonderful feast. A large town of waterproof hemp tents, with indoor kitchen areas, spread throughout the valley forest. At the top of the valley ridge a thick-furred dog was furiously barking and digging under an old log fallen on the ground. "Dhanta," called a boy, who looked as strong as the dog and had thick, curly brown hair falling down his shoulders. The dog, his gray and white fur shining with health, was jumping with his paws in the air, barking and then digging, throwing the dirt behind him into a pile. "Dhanta, what are you doing," the boy called again, shaking his head and long hair over a thick cotton shirt the color of a blue mountain lake. He wore a brown waist belt made of hemp with a brass buckle and his pants were thick cotton dyed blue-black. Above the upper muscles of both arms thin gold bands circled, each band had a small rudraksha bead in it. The boy had made the arms bands himself. He was bare footed. He named his dog Dhanta, meaning tooth, for the dog had beautiful white teeth. Sharp teeth under a muzzle of blackish gray fur, a cold, black nose and bright, brown eyes. Of course Dhanta didn't smile, but he wagged his bushy tail almost all the time, meaning he was happy and smiling. Dogs smile with their eyes and tails. Dhanta was the guard dog for the cows and trading goods of the boy's family.

What is that dog up to? thought the boy as he walked through some tall oak trees

toward the big dog and old rotten log. The boy was 9-years old, which meant he had been on Earth for nine circles of the planet around our sun. The boy's name was Jyothimandala, meaning circle of light. He was tall for his age, like a very strong bamboo. And he was already grown up, for these were hard times, and there was little time for play. He could read and write in three languages and was learning numbers, the study of planets and stars, yoga and the knowledge of the Siva seers, and the ways of trading business. As well, he could farm, tend the cows, make clay pots and was familiar with the signs of land that pointed to gold and silver veins underground or in stream beds. Jyothimandala was a bright lad and had been named well.

Jyothimandala whistled a high, long note to his dog and called out, "Dhanta, come on. Come on boy. Let's have a look." Dhanta's ears stood up straight when he heard the boy's whistle and he immediately came running over, wagging his tail, giving small dog woofs and jumping on his hind legs with his front paws stirring the air. Dhanta was excited, and wanted to tell Jyothimandala something. "So what is it?" he said as they went over to the rotten log, smelling like decaying wood and wet mushrooms. There under the log, surrounded by leaves and dirt and small ferns was a brass ring, still polished and shiny like it was brand new. Yet it seemed very old, far older than Jyothimandala's people. It was large, twice the size of Jyothimandala's hand. Dhanta sniffed around the brass ring with his black nose, wagging his bushy tail. The dog sensed no fear around the ring. It was something good, something holy. "Well, look at that Dhanta boy," the young boy said and petted the handsome dog. "Good boy. You did real good. Let's see what this ring is, shall we? Maybe it'll make a good gift for New Year's Day tomorrow. I need something to give grandfather." He knelt down in the forest dirt, grabbing the ring with one hand to pull it up. He pulled. The ring didn't move. He pulled again with both hands, harder. The ring stayed true to the ground. Jyothimandala took a deep breath, stood on his feet and yanked at the ring with all his muscles. His face grew dark and sweat beaded on his brow. The brass ring, shining brownish golden, remained anchored. "What do you think Dhanta," and Dhanta looked at the boy and gave a yelp. "Yes, I think you're

right Dhanta," for Jyothimandala could understand in his mind what his dog brother was saying. "There's something very special about this ring. Some magic about it."

Over toward the boy's and dog's right, in the thick carpet of pine needles, pine cones and hawthorne leaves there was a soft rustling sound. It was like feet made of wind stepping lightly but with long strides. The dog's ears perked up stiff. The boy looked over. All he could see was a line of trees that led to two tall rocks standing side by side, like guards to a palace, but with a narrow space between them. Dhanta's ears were up, listening, but he was also wagging his tail. There was someone friendly out there. The rustling of feet on the decaying life of the forest came again, barely a whisper. Then, there *was* a whisper, a man's deep voice, that came through the air: "Solve this riddle, little man, and the ring will pull easy and a treasure will be known." Jyothimandala sucked in his breath and froze like an ice pillar of the north. Who was this whispering to him...who couldn't be seen...who spoke of riddles? "Who are you?" the boy shouted out, still not moving. There was no fear in his voice, but still he was curious and alarmed at the same time. Dhanta had sat down on his back legs with his furry face turned toward the whispering voice. The voice seemed to be coming from between the guard stones.

"I am you and you are me," said the whisper having the strength of a voice right in his ear. "We are one and in the ONE."

Jyothimandala suddenly knew. A yellow-robed master from the Ones of Siva was with them, within thirty or forty feet, unseen, but speaking like a shouted whisper. This is incredible, he thought to himself. This One remained hidden, a man blended into the forest greens and browns and the gray and tans of mountain rock.

"Solve this riddle, little man who is called circle of light." He knows my name, thought Jyothimandala. "The riddle," the voice said.

"The new year begins on a morn in spring. New karmas and fresh adventure does this new year bring.

The Earth takes 365 steps of days.

Honor and gifts, food and song are our new year ways.

Our world and sun point to a star.

Look to the guards to see so far.

There is a one word at the top of

the tower.

That keeps the world and stars in power.”

The whisper voice stopped suddenly, like a tree falling with a giant crash, then silence. Then, it spoke again, “Solve it, little man. The brass ring will be yours.”

“Yes, I can do it,” said Jyothimandala and he turned on his bare feet and faced toward the two tall rocks that made a narrow sliver into the blue sky. Using his feet he cleared a little dry area to sit down. It was right in front of the large brass ring. He dropped to the ground with practiced ease and sat in a meditation pose with his right foot up on his left thigh. He brought his hands into his lap, both palms facing up. “It’s a double riddle, isn’t it?” he asked quickly.

The One’s voice replied, “Yes. That is good. Your mind circles well.”

Jyothimandala thought, his mind sinking into a well of concentration. New Years begins with the dawn of the sun rise as the Earth and sun form a straight line toward a small group of stars far, far away. He knew the stars. But what were the guards to see so far? What are the guards? he asked himself with eyes closed. Then, his silvery gray eyes, bright with intelligent light, opened and he looked straight at the twin rocks. The twin rocks were the guards. Looking between them pointed directly to the star group that marked the new year. Tomorrow, from the brass ring, the rocks would line directly with the star group. Jyothimandala had solved the first half of the riddle. But what was the one word at the top of the tower? He quieted his mind. This was a puzzle of spiritual knowledge. One word. A word above all else, giving power to all below. Of course he thought. Of course. It has to be the sacred word Aum.

He stood up at the brass ring and shouted, “It’s Aum, isn’t it?”

“Yes, little man. Well done,” said the whispery One. “Now test your answer with the brass ring. I leave you now. Be one in Siva,” and soft footsteps rustled through fallen leaves. Dhanta’s tail wagged and he whined with excitement.

Jyothimandala stood at the brass ring facing the twin rocks with the sliver of a crack between them. He lined himself up perfectly with the rocks. Dhanta stood behind him. He kneeled down and grabbed the brass ring with one hand. It held solid as iron stuck into iron. Raising his head and closing his eyes he said with great force

Aum three times, letting the sound hang in the forest air like spirit smoke. He gave the barest tug to the ring. Jyothimandala’s face melted into delightful surprise as the brass ring rose silently, bringing up a small silver door. Dhanta barked and jumped, wagging his tail furiously. Under the silver door was a small square hole lined with copper. Inside was a compass, a telescope, a small gold Vel of Lord Skanda, a map, a necklace of diamonds and rudraksha beads, a brick of solid gold, a bag of seeds and an old book with the title “Journey to the One Siva.”

Jyothimandala stared down into the hole, frozen with wonder. He didn’t even reach for anything. He just looked. “Dhanta,” he said. “Look at this,” and the dog stuck his furry ace besides the boys face. “These would make wonderful gifts for New Year’s Day tomorrow,” he said to the dog. He reached down to begin to collect the objects. The first item he brought up was the most precious. It was the book, “Journey to the One Siva.” That was meant for him.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

Here is explored the oldest, most sacred and powerful words of Saivite Hinduism: *Aum Namah Sivaya*. Three words that create a *mantra* of peerless peace and spiritual power. A *mantra* is a magical utterance—a voicing, either mentally or vocally, of special words or syllables capable of spiritualizing a person’s mind, or of even transforming the laws of nature. The syllables *Na ma si va ya* are said to contain all the knowledge of Saivism on Earth. *Aum* of itself is a very potent *mantra*, and can be chanted by anyone. *Aum Namah Sivaya* ideally should be given from a qualified spiritual teacher to the young person.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Learning to speak a language, or several languages, is a natural and easy process for young children. One of the first sounds that any human baby makes is that of A as in the word law. It is the first sound of the sacred word-vibration Aum, and is often the first sound in a language alphabet. The samskara of writing-the-first-letter to mark a child’s entry into the formal world of education uses the sound A. We can see this sound A is very primal sound, of the nature of being first. Children learn to read and write languages very quickly—the language part of their brain and mind is extremely agile at this age. Language, of course, is very, very important. It is made of words that identify and describe the world around us—things, places, weather, atmosphere and space and the feelings of our own body. It also identifies and describes ideas, emotions and spiritual experiences and places within us. As such, language has power: the power to move knowledge and ideas from one person to another. The children in your class do this all the time. It is natural, so natural we often take this power for granted. Have the children imagine for a minute they have no words to talk or think with. It will probably be impossible for them. Then have them imagine for a few minutes all the words they know. Then explain that every one of those words and what they represent is part of Siva and is flooded with Siva’s energy. Thus, our speech and thought can be part of our spiritual understanding of Siva’s presence in everything.

A child learns many thousands of words in the first few years of childhood and education. But some of those words are more special and meaningful than all the others. *Mother* and *Father* are special. *Love* is special and sometimes expressions of *love* be-



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the *Aum Namah Sivaya* mantra in the language script of Sanskrit. It is also similar to the Hindi script, which came from Sanskrit

The first character is the Sanskrit symbol for Aum, one of the most famous religious symbols in the world. Everyday, tens of millions of people are saying this mantra silently or outloud.

This is the *Aum Namah Sivaya* mantra in the Tamil language. It also has a beautiful Aum symbol.

This is the *Aum Namah Sivaya* mantra in English. No matter what the language, this mantra always sounds the same.

A *mantra* is a sacred word or sentence. “*Namah Sivaya*” is Siva’s mantra. It means “Praise to Siva.” A holy man or priest will teach it to you. We chant “*Aum Namah Sivaya*” to bring us close to Lord Siva.

come special to a child, like the word *hug*. Far and away the most special of all words in any language are those used in our religious and spiritual life. Children, as part of their learning process, tend to fix on certain spiritual words. They may go around for days or weeks simply saying the word *puja* or *Siva* or *yoga*. This is to be encouraged.

Now, using this same learning process, we can teach the children about the most special words in our Saivite Hindu religion: *Aum Namah Sivaya*. In all the universe there are no more powerful words we could teach the children. These are sacred words, meaning that they have the power to bring spiritual energy and knowledge into our physical minds, bodies and world. Sacred is like a bridge between the *Sivaloka*, *devaloka* and *bhuloka*. These are Sanskrit words, and Sanskrit is Hinduism’s most sacred and oldest language. *Aum Namah Sivaya* is

composed of three separate words (the *h* is silent in *namah*) that when chanted are joined together into one sacred sentence. There is no break between the words—it is like a train of connected train cars. This sacred sentence is repeated over and over, and much like sitting next to a gentle waterfall that seems to chime with ever-falling water, *Aum Namah Sivaya* brings a deep,

friendly peace to the mind and body. It is as if God Siva is reaching into our minds to quiet thought, still the emotions, heal the body and awaken spiritual forces of oneness, wisdom and bliss. Repeating a sacred phrase a certain number of times is called *japa*.

Such a sacred sentence, or word, or even syllable (like *hrim*) is called a *mantra*—a new word and idea for the children. *Mantra* means a special phrase that affects or alters our mind, making it better able to experience soul consciousness and contact the advanced souls we know as *devas* and *Gods*. *Man* is the root word for ‘mind’ in Sanskrit and the English word *man* comes from this understanding of a thinking being. *Namah Sivaya* is the super mantra of God Siva. It means “Praise to Siva.” In a real sense, it is our attempt to put as much oneness and divine love into these sacred

words as Siva is continually shining forth. It is like joining in a chorus of sound energy that travels like waves of spiritual growth through the Gods' world, devas' world and physical world. To explain this, ask the children to imagine a deep red rose flower bud—its petals closed—that majestically opens its petals as the sound of beautiful music surrounds it.

Aum is a mantra that is the first sound of Siva creating and sustaining everything and all beings. It is like the never-ending vibration of God humming through everything. This mantra breaks down into three distinct sounds to vocalize: aw as in law; oo as in zoo; mm. Each of these is very powerful and primal, and when joined into a single chanting syllable is magically beautiful and stimulates soul energies in different parts of the physical body: the A should be intoned in the stomach area, vibrating the whole abdomen; the U should be intoned in the throat area; the M should be intoned as a long-held sound in the head area, up to the very top of the head. This creates an electrifying, joyful experience of the entire upper body. The mantra Aum is always present through everything, a point that should be emphasized with the children.

Aum may and should be chanted by all Hindu children. It is like a mantra passport, easy to use with easy entry into spiritual realms. Aum may be chanted anytime a child seeks peace of mind and happiness, or concentration for study and understanding. Two of the best times for children to say Aum are before going to sleep and upon rising in the morning. It is best to chant it outloud, but it can be mentally intoned also.

Namah Sivaya is often sung as part of a bhajan or used informally as a personal mantra or as a greeting and blessing. However, it achieves its fullest power when it is given orally to the child by a Saivite swami, guru or qualified priest. It is usually given as part of a ceremony in a temple or other holy location in which the mantra is privately whispered from the holy person into the ear of the child or adult. It is like a secret gift that is given to the child by voice. The children can imagine that they are receiving a secret gift of diamonds—diamond sounds flowing into their ear and mind. Because it is given from a spiritual person, the mantra's inner power is transferred. This is like giving somebody a portable computer that has fully charged battery power and is ready to run pro-

grams.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Several analogies have already been given in the key presentations text. Here are a few more. A *mantra* is like a key to a lock to a large and very beautiful room that has every imaginable happiness in it. You walk into this room and joy, patience and deep knowledge shine out of the walls into your mind and body. But...you must have the key to the lock to the door. Without the key you can't get in. You will be outside the room wishing you could get in, and there will be sadness, impatience and dullness. The mantra is the key—and of course the mantra must be used for it to work, just as a key must be inserted into the lock and turned.

STORY READING

With a jangle buzzing the school bell rang and 600 kids all jumped up from their seats in the school's classrooms—grabbing books and colorful backpacks, talking like a large herd of monkeys just let out of the zoo. It was 2:30 in the afternoon. School was out. Tomorrow was the weekend. Saturday finally, Satya thought to himself. I'll do all of my homework this afternoon after pitching the hay and cleaning the milking stalls. Get it out of the way, he planned in his mind. Then, to the Great Plains Siva Temple this evening for puja and meditation. Get a good night's rest. And tomorrow, riding the horses. Yes, the horses, he thought with growing excitement. And tomorrow there was a new horse to ride. Satya turned to see if anybody was looking in the school hallway. Everybody was squeezing through the glass doors heading for the buses. He lifted up his head and gave a neighing *whinny*, the sound of a horse, then brought his lips together like horse lips and blew. It was horse talk. Satya talked to the horses in English, Hindi and in horse talk. He knew for sure they understood him, and he knew he understood the horses. Or at least most of them. It was like talking to friends.

A voice surprised him and his light brown eyes looked up to a tall man. "You sure like horses don't you Satya?" asked Mr. Ingram, his science teacher at the school. He had suddenly come out of his classroom right where Satya was standing. Satya

1. Bring enough paper for the class and they should have their coloring sets. Divide the class into five sections and distribute the paper. Each member of the first group writes NA in really big letters on their sheet of paper. Each member of the second group writes MA in big letters. Each member of the third group writes SI in big letters. Each member of the fourth group writes VA in big letters. Each member of the fifth group writes YA in big letters. Starting with the first group and cycling through to the fifth group, the kids chant out their sacred letter and at the same time lift up and flash their cards, each group chanting and flashing their card, then the next group goes. This can be done at different speeds.

looked a little embarrassed. He stuck his hands under his clay-red kurtha shirt into the pockets of his gray pants. He was ten years-old with shiny black hair cut short so it wouldn't get in his eyes when he rode the horses or did his work. "Yea, I really like horses," Satya answered quickly and he raised his arm to throw his black school pack over his back. On the back of the pack was stitched in gold "Aum Namah Sivaya" in English with the Sanskrit lettering underneath in red. "Can't wait for the weekends to spend the day riding and training. In fact I have to catch the bus right now. See you on Monday. Doing your class homework today when I get home." He put on his brown cowboy hat and started to swiftly walk for the doors.

Mr. Ingram spoke quickly, "Slow down cowboy. You have a few minutes. Let me give you a book you'll like. It's a history of horses, includes parts on India and, of course, the wild West." Satya's white running shoes squeaked on the wood floor as he braked suddenly, like a horse stopping on a single tug of the reins. He knew Mr. Ingram's family came from Scotland to the Great Plains area of western Canada a hundred years ago and his grandfather was a great horse breeder. "Wow, Mr. Ingram. Sounds neat," said Satya with a big smile. A large book showing a herd of galloping white stallions through golden grass on the cover was put in his hands. His left hand held the big book, while his right hand gently wandered over the beautiful cover. On his right wrist was a bracelet made of cop-

per with the *Aum Namah Sivaya* tooled into it with brass and silver in Sanskrit lettering. Satya never took this bracelet off and he kept it very bright and shiny. A great satguru had given it to him a year ago when Satya had been given the *Aum Namah Sivaya* Mantra for personal chanting every day. “Gee, thanks Mr. Ingram. It’s...it’s magnificent,” he said emotionally and his eyes got a little misty from the kind act of the teacher. He quickly imagined many hours reading and studying the history of horses. Satya was one of the best students at the school and could read and understand books for much older youth. His school ability had improved greatly when he began practicing meditation two years ago when he was eight years old.

“Glad you like it Satya. Keep it as long as you like,” Mr. Ingram answered kindly and he leaned against the red brick wall like an old cowboy. “I’m riding myself this weekend. Out at the fairgrounds. My horse is a black quarterhorse. A real beauty. By the way, what’s that mean on your wrist? Nice piece of arm jewelry. Looks like a spiritual charm. Is it Sanskrit?” and Mr. Ingram pointed to the *Aum Namah Sivaya* bracelet.

Satya looked down the hall and out the window to make sure his bus wasn’t taking off. There were still lots of kids waiting. He held up his wrist closer to Mr. Ingram. “*Aum* is the first sound energy of all creation, from people to planets.” said Satya knowingly. “It’s awesome...or *aumsome* as I like to say,” continued Satya grinning at his own pun joke. Mr. Ingram smiled back. “Go on. It’s fascinating,” said Mr. Ingram, still admiring the bracelet. “I’ll get you on your bus.”

Satya continued, “*Namah Sivaya* means praise to Siva. That’s the simple explanation. Worshipers of Siva chant this everyday. *Namah* in Sanskrit is like the word *name* in English. *Namah Sivaya* is taking your mind into the entire knowledge base of Siva, like going into a huge super computer hooked up to all the computers in the universe. So *Namah Sivaya* is the most powerful chant for we Saivite Hindus. We call it a *mantra*. The bracelet is a spiritual jewelry—its metal is conducting, like an electric wire. Like we studied in your class.”

Mr. Ingram replied, “It is beautiful. And the *Aum Namah Sivaya* sounds like a very powerful phrase.” He took some keys out of his pocket and locked the door of his classroom. He smiled at Satya with a look of

good bye. “Yes, I know about mantras. Its common knowledge here in North America. Mantra is even in the English dictionaries. Well, thanks. You’ve got to run. Enjoy your gallup through that horse book.”

Satya spun on his white running shoes, crying, “Thanks again,” as he raced for the bright yellow bus parked out in the jewel-blue Canadian afternoon sky. Satya rushed up the steps of the bus, the last kid in and Mr. Singh the driver was just about to close the doors. Mr. Singh was a Sikh from India. Many Hindus and Sikhs lived in this region near the Rocky Mountains of western Canada. “*Namaste*, Mr. Singh,” said Satya, breathing hard, heading for a nearby empty seat.

Mr. Singh, with his white turban and huge black mustache, cast a wary eye at the young boy. “Close one. Almost missed the bus, lad. But I knew you were coming. Got to get you back to the ranch, eh? Your parents would call me up if you didn’t make it,” Mr. Singh said in a friendly but firm voice. He shifted the gears and eased the big yellow bus out of the school and down a straight highway heading right into the afternoon sun.

“Sorry Mr. Singh,” Satya apologized. “My science teacher just gave me a book on horses. And he was asking about my *Aum Namah Shivaya* bracelet.”

Mr. Singh looked back with a big smile—a couple of his teeth were missing from his soldier days in India—and said, “Don’t worry, lad. Ah, yes. Siva. Siva. *Namah Shivaya* is heard everywhere in north India. I even heard *Namah Shivaya* way over on the border of China. It’s a beautiful saying and can make you into the best kind of spiritual person.”

Satya relaxed into the hard bus seat, pretending like he was on a horse and watched the countryside go by in a soft blur. Great fields of wheat and grapeseed crops stretched out like golden and green seas foaming into the blue sky. The great plains pasture grass, thick and glowing green, rolled on like waves crashing into stands of trees and every once in a while a big white house with a big wood barn. Fences made of wood and stone crisscrossed the green and golden fields. Milk cows grazed and proud horses pranced and trotted in the thick dirt of stable grounds. Oil rigs rose skyward, pumping like giant insects on the vast land. Satya’s father had come from India to Canada as an oil engineer for the

great boom of oil drilling. Then, the oil business went down. Satya’s father put his money into a horse ranch and dairy farm. The family provided raw milk and butter and ghee and yogurt for thousands of Hindus and Sikhs living in the region.

“Here’s your stop, Satya,” called out Mr. Singh with his Indian accent. Satya spoke with a Canadian accent. He was born in Canada. Across the black ribbon of the highway was a large wood gate with iron letters hanging from the top that spelled, “*Siva Kailash Ranch*.” *Kailash* is the most sacred mountain to Saivite Hindus. It means ‘snow jewel’ and this was Satya’s family ranch. Satya jumped off the bus and ran down the ranch road, his back pack bouncing against him. He wanted to get his chores done with the cows, then get his homework out of the way.

Later that night with the far northern sun still hanging in the sky like a dark fireball, Satya returned home with his family from the Great Plains *Siva Temple*. He’d been tired at the temple and his meditation wasn’t going too well. He was doing more yawning than yoga. His sister even poked him in the ribs once because he was falling asleep. So he rubbed the *Aum Namah Sivaya* bracelet with his fingers for a minute or two and began saying silently to himself *Aum Namah Sivaya* over and over and over. It was like a train endlessly crossing through the sleepy realm of his mind. His eyes were closed. The train of *Aum Namah Sivaya* rolled by in his mind, gaining power and strength. Over and over he chanted the sacred mantra, even forgetting where he was or about the new horse coming in tomorrow. Then, he felt a lightening-like burst of energy in his spine and a glowing electric warmth ran through his body and even above his head. The *Aum Namah Sivaya* slowly circled in his mind. He, the mantra and Siva were one, a single spiritual note spreading knowledge and peace through all.

That was an hour ago. Satya lay in his bed, staring up at the ceiling. He’d been so sleepy at the temple. Now, sleep was escaping him. He was still feeling the soul energy of the *Aum Namah Sivaya* chant. Tomorrow was the big day. A beautiful new horse was coming in. A breed called Arabian, from the desert country of Arabia. The horse was silver white with a high, handsome head, flowing mane and a willowy tail held the highest of all horse breeds. They

were the raja kings of horses. He reached over to his bedside table where the beautiful history of horses book lay. Laying the large book out across his covers, he began reading. He read about horses in ancient India used for travel, carrying medicine and messages, sacred ceremonies and warfare. But sleep still didn't bring his eyelids down. He switched off the light, relaxed and just began to silently hear the Aum mantra in his mind, very faint and gentle, a rain fall of Aums through the wide sky of his being. He saw in his mind the white beard, bushy eyebrows under three stripes of Siva's ash and the clear gray eyes of the satguru leaning towards his ear, and the sacred sounds of Aum Namah Sivaya tumbled into his ear, as if from God Siva's voice. Then, magically, and without him even knowing it, he was asleep. He dreamt of a satguru riding an Arabian horse, and the horse was chanting Aum.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson connects to several other lessons: Mahasivaratri when this mantra is chanted perhaps several billion times; and the satguru. It is the satguru who is the most powerful giver of this mantra. Also this mantra relates to the lesson on God Siva, for it is one of the best ways to quickly and consistently bring the mind in tune with God Siva.

BACKGROUND

Aum Namah Sivaya is the among the oldest, if not the very oldest known sacred saying. It occurs in the *Vedas* and is said to fall directly in the middle of the *Veda* texts. In our age of space exploration this mantra was engraved on a plaque on the outside of a space probe vehicle sent to several of our neighbor planets and will eventually travel outside our solar system.

HOMEWORK

Instruct the children to try chanting the Aum mantra for a few minutes each evening before they go to sleep. See if they notice any changes in themselves.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

These lessons explore four basic understandings of karma that are essential and teachable even for young children. These are: karma as a law of teaching and growth; the timing of karma; how karma is both personal and involves groups of people close to us; how karma can be changed to be experienced in a more gentle form.

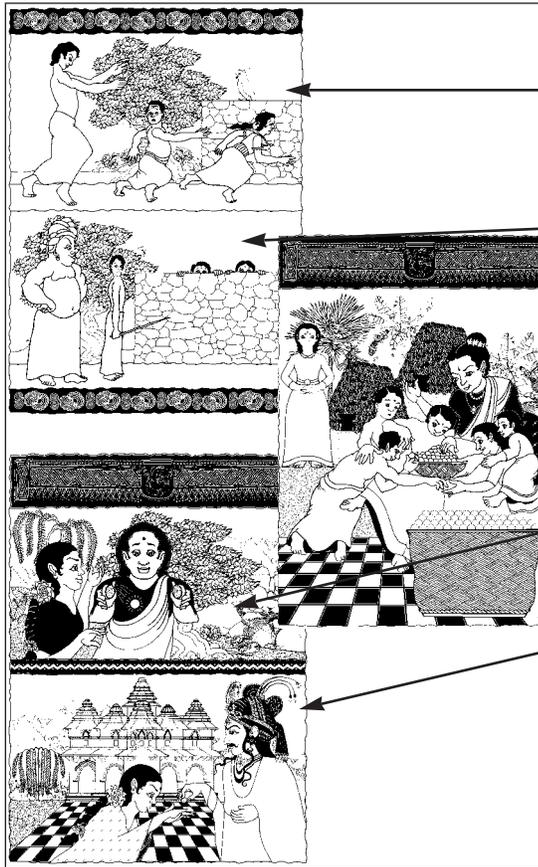
KEY PRESENTATIONS

Karma is one of the most important spiritual laws for children and adults to understand—to understand how karma works and to understand how real karma is. We could say karma is the most important of spiritual laws to learn about at the beginning stages of our spiritual life on Earth. For karma is a part of us all the time—every second of every minute of every hour of every day of our lives.

Basically, karma is what happens to us in life. What happens to us in our thinking mind and memories—if we do well in learning the multiplication tables, that is part of our karma. What happens to us in our emotions—if we are hurt by someone making fun of us, that is part of our karma. What happens to our physical bodies—if we fall and skin our knee: that is part of our karma. Everything that happens to us is our karma.

Also what we do makes karma. Our spiritual worship and meditation makes karma. Our thoughts make karma. Our emotions make karma. Our words make karma. Our physical actions make karma. To make karma means that we are creating karma. We are karma-creators. We are karma-experiencers. It is the karma of all the children in the class to be in the class. It is your, the teacher's, karma to be teaching the class. It is vital to make clear to the class that everything that happens to them is part of their karma. There are no exceptions to this—no happenings or experiences that we could say “are not our karma.”

Everything, including what seems as bad and sad, is our karma. And it is also vital to make clear that everything the children do creates new karma. Now, we need to put these two ideas together, for they are always linked, like a chain made of unbroken links. All the karma that happens to us in our daily life comes from the karma that we made in this life or created in our past lives. Let's give this a short memorable statement. Everything we do in the past be-



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Top, upper frame: An older boy makes negative karma by chasing younger children and frightening them.

Top, lower frame: The karma returns to him immediately as a big, mean bully is about to chase him.

Middle: Hungry children rush to grab the modaka balls. Girija is more selfless and in control of herself. She waits and takes only the last one.

Bottom, upper frame: Girija's mother finds a gold coin inside the modaka ball.

Bottom, lower frame: They take the gold coin back to the rich man. But the rich man intended to reward Girija's patience and gives them the gold coin to keep.

Top left: Karma means *action*. Every action has a reaction. If you do good deeds; good deeds will come back to you. If you say bad things; bad things will be said about you. This law of karma is God's gift to us. It teaches us how to live right. **Top right:** Girija was a young girl. She lived in India. One year there was very little food. People suffered. A rich man made modaka balls for the children. The children came to get them. They rushed and pushed. They ate the modaka balls right away. Girija did not rush. She waited. She took the last one. She did not eat it there. She took it home. **Bottom:** The rich man asked Girija, “Why do you take it home?” Girija said, “My mother is also hungry. So I shared it with her.” The next day also Girija waited and took the last sweet. She gave it to her mother. Inside was a gold coin! Mother said, “Take this to the rich man. It is his.” So Girija took it back the same day. But the rich man said, “Keep it. I put it there as my reward for you. You are patient, generous and honest.”

comes what happens to us in our present life. And, additionally, what we do in our present day, of our own free will, becomes what will happen to us in the future or in a future life.

So the past is fully linked like a chain to our present. And the present is fully linked like a chain to our future. If the children are learning simple arithmetic ($1+1=2$) then

we can make this simple arithmetic for karma: what we do = what happens to us. That's why we can say if we do good things, then good things happen to us. And if we do bad things, bad things happen to us.

If we understand karma as the spiritual arithmetic “what we do=what happens to us” we can see why we give karma the basic definition of “action.” Our personal actions and those actions that happen to us are karma. We can take this understanding one more step in saying that karma is Siva's way of teaching ourselves. It is Siva's law of teaching. Since we make our own karma (no one else makes our karma), and our karma is a lesson in life, then we can view karma as one of the most powerful ways of teaching we have. And we are teaching ourselves.

This is a wonderful view of karma—a law of lesson-learning, a law of spiritual self-teaching. When something happens to us that makes us feel hurt, disappointed, insulted, angry, jealous or sad, we know personally what that action feels like. We know what it feels like in others. Therefore, we won't do it again to other people or animals. We have learned not to harm or hurt

others in that way. We have learned the lesson of our own karma. If we do create a karma of hurtfulness to another or in society, then we will experience that karma again in the future—until we learn the lesson.

We can also convey to the children how all-pervasive and powerful karma is in our everyday lives. Every moment is filled with karma from our past and karma we are creating for our future. Karma is like air—always surrounding us. Even if we went into space or lived on the moon we would need to take air with us. And indeed, our karma would be there right with us and we would be making new karma in space or on the moon.

Remember, the children are karma-creators. It is a very powerful law of creation—we are creating all the events and emotions and mental happenings of our future. We are living through the karma creations of our past. We are creating new karma for our future. This means each child is creating the happenings of their future—spiritual, good, bad and mixed—a very profound, golden-key teaching that we want to make sure the children understand.

Karma is not necessarily immediate. It may or may not return quickly in the future. If, as a child, we create a get-well card for a friend who is sick—an action of good karma—that good karma won't return as a personal experience in just a few days in the future, or even a few weeks, months or years. It may come in this life, or it may come in a future life. The good karma of wishing someone well with a caring card will return as a similar happening of helpful karma to the child in this or the next life. Someone will help them feel better when they are sick by offering some kind of gift or caring expression.

In the story of Girija, she is creating a very good karma for her future by not being greedy or selfish—she lets all others go before her. She is a generous person in this life. Girija has also been a generous, caring, selfless person in her past lives. In a past life she rewarded someone for their kindness. Therefore in this life, the rich man gives her a gold coin as a good karma she created in a past life. Girija has also created a good karma for a future time with her selfless behavior when the rich man was giving out cakes.

This shows how understanding karma should relate to the children's knowledge of reincarnation. Our karma that we are creating now builds the experiences of our

next reincarnation. It is like a bank account of karma that we are depositing into now and withdrawing from in the future.

We as children and adults are continually making karma. If we are thinking and feeling and doing good actions, then similar happenings of goodness and good fortune will return to us in the future. On occasion we may think or feel or do something bad and that karma too will return in the future.

All the children in the class have families and relatives and friends, neighbors and classmates. Each of these people has their own karma, for they are all karma-creators and teachers of themselves through Siva's law of karma. But they also share karma with each other, a group karma, or for the children, an octopus-karma because the octopus' eight legs are always working together.

The closer you are to other people the more you share in group karma—the family is the tightest bond of group karma. Your family's karma is part of your karma and their karma is part of yours. Group karma reaches out to professions—fellow doctors or lawyers, to whole towns, states and countries. Think of the karma as a lighthouse with a powerful light that is continually circling around. Sometimes the light only lights up you, but at other times it lights up many people or even many millions of people.

Finally, the karmas of the past that you have made as a karma-creator and self-teacher can be changed. The strength of the karma is not like unbendable steel. You can bend and soften it. The original act that you did in a past life—for example, you ate your little sister's dessert, causing her some disappointment and mental hurt—would normally return to you as a similar event in this life: your older brother uses your favorite stuffed animal to sit on and squashes it. If that happened to the child, he would know that in a past life he had done an action that took something away from someone for his own personal use. We would say that you are experiencing the full impact of the harsh karma you created in the past.

However there is a way to soften and change the karma into a less harsh impact for yourself—either physically, emotionally or mentally. This is done by penance, which is also presented in Book One. It is very important to learn well the power of penance. It is like first aid for karma. Penance is a magical, spiritual way to change the quali-

This is the "Suitcase of karma" game. Bring to class a supply of ordinary thickness paper in a variety of colors. And bring one medium size box. Be sure scissors are on hand. Have the children each bring in a simple square of cloth. These are their suitcases in which they will tie up their karma. Have the kids cut up the paper into small squares, circles, triangles, stars and different shapes. They are making "karma gems." All of these "karma gems" go into the box, and they are all mixed up. These are all the karmas that the kids have stored in the Antarloka. Now, all of the kids are preparing for their next life. The now live in the Antarloka, the deva world. Each one of them has to go to the box, put in their hand and grab a whole bunch of "karma gems." They then take their "karma gems" and carefully wrap them in their cloth suitcase. These are the karmas they will take with them into their next birth.

ty of our personal negative karma. Penance means to do a spiritual act to ourselves that absorbs—like a sponge—some of the bad karma. Fasting from food and only drinking water for a day is a common penance. Doing 1,008 prostrations before Lord Ganesha or Lord Muruga is another good penance. Carrying *kavadi* or pots of milk for Lord Muruga is a popular penance. Staying up all night in prayer and meditation can be a penance. There are several penance "spiritual first aid" practices for children. A child may fast for the day, only eating fruit, or only drinking water. A child may sit still without moving in prayer to Lord Muruga or reciting the "Aum Saravanabava" mantra for half an hour. A child may spend extra time in the temple or an ashram or a Hindu institution doing cleaning.

STORY READING

Namaste to all of you, my friends in foreign lands who are reading this lesson. My name is Yasmin Neelakantha. Yasmin is the name of a special flower, a Chameli flower. I live near Kathmandu, Nepal. You will have to look at a map to find me but I can give you a hint—I am in the Himalayan mountain range in the far north of India. I am 11-years-old and my father works as an officer in the forestry department protecting our

forests from overlogging, erosion and robber treecutters. I have two younger brothers, Yatindra (“a great rishi”) and Yogin (“yogi”) and a younger sister Yuri which means “a beautiful water lily.” I think my parents liked the letter “Y” although I never asked them. They both like to meditate so they chose names that were about yoga and they love beauty so they gave us two daughters the names of flowers. From our house we can see giant snow-capped mountains all year long way off in the distance. But although snow is very beautiful especially when it is falling in a snowstorm, and lots of fun to play in, I love springtime the most with all the millions of wild flowers and the little streams trickling down the rolling rocky hills behind my house. When I go for walks, which I do quite a bit after school, I often see many different kinds of wild animals like small mountain deer and long-eared rabbits and even little reddish foxes with very black, sharp-looking eyes. But they don’t scare me. Actually they are usually more afraid of me. As hobbies, I like drawing and painting—which I learned from my mother, a very good artist—and I like going to school. It is about 9 kilometers away from my house. I ride there every day on my bike with two friends. We don’t have a car and the old, small school bus doesn’t come to my village.

Almost a year ago I was asked to write something about karma for this course. To be honest, I didn’t know what to say and I waited a long time thinking about what I should say. I wasn’t even sure I knew exactly what karma meant. Then I asked my mother and father and a priest we know, the father of one of my friends at school, what karma exactly means. I got different answers and many stories but basically everyone told me that karma is the idea that whatever I do comes back to me. So I tried to think what to write to all of you and decided to tell you about some things that I saw happen last year that proved to me the law of karma.

One day at school I was sitting in the big outdoor courtyard with some of my girlfriends eating our lunch, some curry inside a piece of hard fried bread. It was an autumn day and the air was very chilly but the sun was very bright. We were laughing watching a boy running after his hat which had blown off and was being spun down a path by the wind, rolling it along like a wheel. Every time he got close to it, the wind blew it further. It was very funny.

As we talked, we noticed sitting a little distance from us three girls, sisters, who

were also eating lunch. Very often we noticed they brought big apples to eat with their lunch. We always envied them. Apples and all fruits are very expensive but they have an uncle who works in the market who gave them apples because he thought they were very healthy for them.

Before the sisters had started eating their apples, a boy ran over to them and said very excitedly that one of their teachers needed to speak with them immediately. He said they should run in the schoolhouse right away. So they jumped up and ran in and left their bookbags and lunch bags on the bench under the tree. Then two other boys came sneaking up and joined the boy who told the girls to run inside. Then all three boys opened up the girls’ lunch bags and took their apples and ran away. When the girls came back, I went over and told them what had happened. They said that when they went inside they found no teacher was waiting for them. They realized they had been tricked. But they were too afraid to report the boys and I knew if I said I saw them do it that they would just deny it and say I was making it up. Most of the boys at my school are very nice and would never do things like this, but these boys are always doing tricks and things like this. It bothered me that they always seemed to get away with doing these things, and that we all seemed helpless to change the matter.

Then I forgot all about them for months until one day when I was going with my family to Pasupati Temple, our big very famous Siva temple in Kathmandu town. As we got near the temple I could see these three same boys outside the temple sitting on a big stone wall at the top of the staircase. Even from a distance I could see they were eating something. I knew it was temple prashadam they had gotten from the temple priest who is very, very nice. In fact, I could see that they had three big leaf plates of more prashadam beside them. I knew what they had done. They had gone in after the puja told the nice priest that they needed some extra prashadam to take back to their family members and relatives who were too old to walk to the temple. This was not true. They just got the prashadam to eat themselves. The temple prashadam from Pasupatinath temple is very good and once a month they offer nice fruits such as apples to Shiva which are blessed and given back out to the devotees as prashadam. So on each of the boys’ plates were three apples and lots of sweet prashadam. Then when we were about 50 meters away, I saw three young monkeys

sneaking up the wall behind them from far below. The wall goes down to a small stream. Pasupatinath temple is very famous for the hundreds of monkeys that live and run around the temple. They sometimes act like they own the temple and can bother you, but nobody ever chases them away. These monkey characters are also very famous, actually infamous, for being very sneaky about getting food from devotees.

The boys on the wall didn’t see the monkeys climbing up behind them. They were now laughing very loud about something and not watching their plates of prashadam beside them. All of a sudden, the three monkeys got to the top of the wall and with their long arms reached over and quickly grabbed all the boys’ prashadam and apples back over the wall. It happened so fast, by the time the boys realized what was happening, the monkeys were already scampering back down the rough stone wall with all the apples and sweets tumbling down around them. The boys yelled at the monkeys and shook their fists, but a few minutes later the monkeys were now back up the ravine in a tree above the boys with all the apples and sweets in one arm and eating them with the other arm and making a lot of screeches that sounded like laughter. The boys were really mad and yelled at them some more and finally left.

As I watched the whole thing, I thought back about the apples these boys had stolen months before from the three sisters. Now the monkeys stole apples from them. I remember thinking how maybe there is a sort of nature-made kind of justice besides human policemen and courts of law. I think you know what I am talking about. Right, karma. But you might be wondering what about the girls who lost their apples? What happened to them? Well, let me tell you about them and also more about the boys.

First, I found out that the boys had been taking these girls’ apples many times. In fact, for a year they used to take them and then make threats to them so they would continue to bring them with their lunch and give them to them. The sisters were afraid to report the boys. But a few months ago, a teacher saw them do it and they were finally were stopped and had to apologize to the girls and also promised not to do it anymore.

Then last month, the three sisters told me something else. Near their house on a hillside was a small fruit orchard of apple and cherry trees. They always loved to go to the orchard. The lady who owned it like these girls and always invited them to play

there and eat any fruits they wanted. The girls used to make apple and cherry chutneys, jams and pies from the fruits each summer and always made sure they gave plenty to the nice lady. Then last month the lady moved to India to live with her relatives. But before she left she gave the little end of her property with the cherry and apple trees to the family of the girls because she knew how much they loved the trees. I think they got back all the fruit that they lost from those boys plus thousands more for many years to come.

But you are probably thinking of all the times you saw someone unfairly get something or be mean to somebody and nothing ever happens back. Or, all the times you were nice to others but nothing really specially nice happened to you. Well, I say just wait and watch. For me, I am sure that it is just a matter of time before the natural law of fairness, karma, brings back to us in the future how we treat other people now. I hope telling you about watching the karma of these three sisters, three boys and three monkeys helps you as you explore for yourself the amazing magic of karma. Maybe I will even meet you one day if our karmas connect. Bye for now. Om Shanti. Love, Yasmin.

ANALOGIES/ILLUSTRATIONS

1) Every action, thought or word we create has a rubber band on it. It is easy to think that what we say and do and think just goes off somewhere and fades away into space and is totally disconnected from us after we do it. Many people think this. But this is not true. We should always think that there is a rubber band connecting it to us and that no matter how far away from us it seemingly goes, or how long it takes, the rubber band will never break (that is a cosmic law. The same act, word or deed will return to us in a similar form and intensity. So you can have the children visualizing themselves with thousands of rubber bands and thoughts and actions and words connected on the ends of them stretching out and going away from them and then springing back to them sometime in the future. 2) Here is another visualization image to understand karma. Visualize that every thought, feeling or action creates a magnet that stays with the creator, you. So, although it seems like our thoughts, words, or actions go outward, actually there is a homing magnet that pulls it back to you sometime, now or in the future. So have the children think of having all these magnets inside them that will pull all their actions

back to them. The magnet is a good image because children know the power of a magnet. But be careful not to tell them that all their magnets are pulling only bad karmas. There is a great tendency to always talk about karma in a negative way. Tell the children that they have thousands of magnets pulling back to them all the smiles, love and happiness that they send out to others. That is positive and puts a positive image in their minds. If you don't do this, you might let them create an image in their minds of magnets in them that are going to bring back thousands of black scary karmas. So don't allow scary or fearful images to be created in their minds. Keep the images positive.

WRONG THINKING

1) Some people think karma is predestination, fate, the idea that our future is 100% already determined, solidly set and we have no choice or will. People say, when something unfortunate or tragic happens, "Well, that's my karma." They say this with the feeling of helplessness, resignation, as though they have zero free will, control of their life conditions and that everything that happens is totally predestined. It is a depressing, discouraging, sad way to live. Life is not like this. We have free will all the time to change our nature and our conditions around us and even to soften the return effects of old karmas through such ways as: apology, feeling sorry for things of the past, really wishing we didn't do them and promising ourselves we won't repeat them, penance, talking to the Gods and going to the temple asking even the Gods to forgive us if the people we hurt are not living near us. Yes, old karmas of a negative nature can be softened this way so they do not come back full force and when they do, we are ready and prepared for them and that makes them even easier to handle.

2) Another wrong idea is that karma means only all the bad things we have done. That is not true. All our thoughts, words, feelings and actions—loving, neutral or unloving—are our karma.

3) Another wrong idea is that you should be afraid of living life in a full dynamic way because maybe you might accidentally or indirectly create bad karma. Karma is our friend. We should not be afraid of living in a dynamic, self-confident spirit—to do all the wonderful, loving, productive, intelligent, serviceful things we are inspired to do in bold fashion and be as soulful as we can in doing them. Just being scared and passive and uncreative in order to be safe that

we do not accidentally create bad karma, is wrong. We do not teach this. The karma we then create a karma by sending out vibrations of fear. We become unproductive people and, by example, making others scared of their actions. Also, our friends, family and society and nation loses too. They do not benefit from the giving, talent, service and contributions that we would offer when we live life not afraid of karma. Understanding karma is the right approach, not fear.

CONNECTIONS

One of the most powerful connections of the law of karma is the associated law that it operates with—the law of interconnectedness, the fact that the whole universe is connected by cosmic love/light, Siva's energy. The story that partly illustrates this is the story of Semmana Selvi and the king hitting the laborer in Book One. You can explain to the children that the reason karma works is because everything is connected. If the universe was not interconnected, karmas would not come back to us. Karmas would really get lost so to speak. This is a simple explanation, but it allows you to again impress the children that everything in the universe is connected. Children like to hear this as it gives them a loving understanding of a world and universe that can sometimes seem like cold and disconnected atoms.

There is a beautiful quote by a Hawaiian priestess that we used in the big Hinduism Today center section poster article on karma that is very helpful. The Hawaiian religion's understanding of karma is the same as in Hinduism. Here is the quote: "The ancient ones believed that all time is now and that we are each creators of our lives. Any situation we might find ourselves in is brought about by us—in learning the many pathways of life. Any time we wish to change our circumstances, all we have to do is let go of our present condition, and it will be gone. The early ones believed there is one body of life of which we are all a part. Everything that grew on our land and swam in our ocean we called brother and sister. We are a part of all things and all things a part of us, and the one ones knew this and lived accordingly. The early ones taught that there is no dividing line between two people. You cannot hit your brother without hitting yourself, your father and your mother. It is best, then, to hit no one." Isn't that nice. So simple and earthy. Your students will like it.

LESSON FOCUS

There are four focus points of this lesson that combine the themes of pages 60-66. They are all about the preparing for and going to the temple. The spirit is to teach the children that visiting a temple is a special experience, each time new and more wonderful than before. It is God's home. It is a magical place, a place of very high vibrations. It is very different from other places. It is not a playground, a business building, a schoolhouse, a normal family home or a social hall for dinners and weddings, etc. So we take time to get ready for such a special visit. We are going to meet a very important person. So we want to dress nicely and act nicely and do all the necessary acts of respect that are part of this visit.

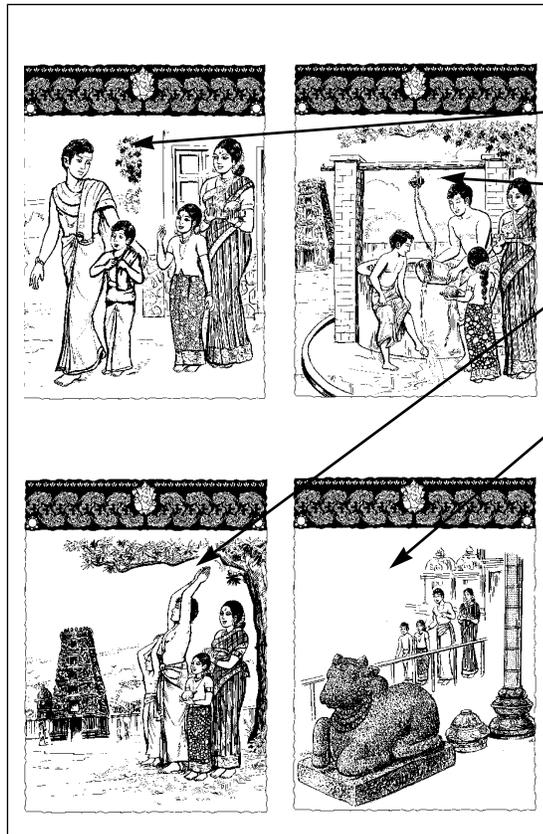
The first focus (from page 60) is about preparing for a temple visit: a) bathing first and dressing up nicely and b) preparing a nice offering tray.

The second focus (from page 62) is about what to do when we arrive at the temple: a) wash our feet and hands b) wash the fruit that we have brought.

The third focus (from page 64) is to namaskar to the gopuram before entering. The fourth focus (from page 66) is when approaching Nandi, the bull, to think of him as Siva's perfect devotee, and next to pay respects to the balipitha and then to prostrate to the kodimaram.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

The first presentation (from page 60) is about preparing at home for a temple visit. For most families, little need be said, because the protocol of bathing and dressing in clean clothes etc. is well established, understood and enjoyed, even by the children. But increasingly, especially in the West, Hindus are visiting temples dressed in very casual attire—tee-shirts, shorts, sportswear, blue jeans, tourist costumes, even swimsuits. This slowly gives the temple a very different vibration, a very casual, social vibration and invites ordinary social behavior, chatter and feeling. In the long run, it takes away from the rare, refined vibration of a temple and the puja and makes the temple more of a social gathering place, catering to and cultivating ordinariness rather than keeping the temple a powerful sacred place where everyone is trying to elevate their consciousness to magnetize and attract the close presence and shakti of God, their own superconsciousness and at-



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

A family is all dressed nicely and leaving home to go to the temple.

The family first stops at the temple well and washes their feet.

The family sees the temple tower, the gopura, and raises their hands over their heads and do namaskara to God.

The family stops at the big Nandi bull, the *balipitha* (offering place) and the *kodi-maram* (flag pole) and offers respect.

flowers and fruit that they think are really nice to put in the basket. How big it is is not important. The most important thing is that each flower and piece of fruit is put in the basket with love, with the love that you feel when you are gathering or preparing something to give to someone you love and want to make that person smile and be happy. It is good if the children find and pick the flowers themselves and prepare the basket rather than the parents buying the flowers.

2) Regarding washing our feet and hands and our fruit offering when we get to the temple. Just so you know, this is to wash off any odic, astral energies from your body and also from the fruit so that you and the fruit enter the temple with clean auras and surrounding energies. It is for the same reason as we bathe at home before coming. But of course the feet and hands have picked up both dirt and odic energies on the way to the temple. This allows for this to be washed away.

You can convey the subtler side of this in any simple way to the children if they are old enough to understand. Otherwise, just tell them they are washing their hands and feet and fruit for cleanliness and respect to God Siva.

3) When we approach see the gopuram of the temple, we raise our hands in namaskar. The gopuram, even from a long distance, represents the temple, God's home, and so whenever we see it we salute in respect with *namaskaram* hand gesture. Very simple.

Top left: Father says: "I hear the temple bell. It is time for puja. Have you all bathed and dressed in clean clothes? Then, come, we are going to the temple." Kamala. "Mother has prepared the offering plate for the God. On it we have a coconut, fruit, flowers, areca nut and betel leaves, incense, camphor and money. Let's go."

Top right: Father says: "This is the temple well. here we wash our feet and hands before we enter God's home."

Mother: "Kamala, today you can wash the coconut and fruit that we are offering to God." **Bottom left:** Father says: "See the gopura, the temple tower. The gopura always reminds us of God. We raise our hands over our heads and do *namaskara* to God." **Bottom right:** Father says: "The priest does the puja. Facing the Deity during puja, the men and boys stand on the right side. The women and girls stand on the left. When the priest holds the flame high, we feel God's power. After the puja, we receive sacraments: holy ash, water, sandalwood, kumkuma, flowers and blessed food. We take these home.

tention from the devas who reside in the temple atmosphere.

That is background information and explanation. For the children, just tell them they are going to a special place to be with the Self of themselves, God, and we should all try to dress our best just like we would do whenever we go see someone very special we really like at a very special elegant place.

Preparing the offering basket. Encourage the children that it is important to find

4) Regarding protocol toward Nandi, balipitha and the kodimaram. Yes, it is nice to remind the children that Siva rides on Nandi, the bull. Tell the children to think of all the animals that Siva could have chosen to be the most special animal He rides. Of all of them, he chose the brahman bull. That is because it is so docile, kind and gentle. No need to say too much about the balipitha as it is not a major focal point in temples. Just say it is a minor place of offerings, the first place is of course right at the main sanctums. Regarding the flagpole, no need again to say much. The kodimaram does serve a subtle purpose in the more powerful temples. Technically, it helps catch and return the shakti of the puja, to the sanctum sanctorum, thus recycling the puja energy, rather than letting it just disperse. Very rudimentarily explained, it makes a sort of circle/cycle of the puja energies. This is too subtle for most children so better just to say to young children that the flagpole is considered sacred and it serves a sacred purpose and that is why we prostrate to it.

ANALOGIES/ILLUSTRATIONS

The two best analogies or images to help appreciate the puja are the telephone and the window. The analogy of the telephone is explained in the short “advice for teachers and parents paragraph.” The window analogy is similar. It is the image of puja as opening a window into the next worlds, the Second and Third Worlds. At the high point of the puja, visualize a window opening into the Second World, the Antarloka world of devas. Then another window opens from that world into the Third World where the Deity resides. As long as the puja is powerful, the window can stay open. It takes great energy and devotion to keep it open for the few moments at the high point of the puja. But during that time, the love, energy and blessings of the Deity flows out as the prayers and thoughts from the devotees flow in through these openings to the Gods and devas. When the puja is over, the windows close, so to speak. A connection remains of course, but the intensity of direct contact between the worlds is again temporarily closed. Another image besides a window is to visualize the divisions between the three worlds as a very lightweight fabric, partially see-through fabric, like light scarfs and shawls that are partially see-through. Another cloth like this is called sheer gauze. Well, visualize lots of this semi-see-through fabric hanging between each world, reducing visibility to

near zero (except for clairvoyants). Now during the high point of the puja, the devas use the energy of the pujari and the devotees to stretch all the fabric very taught, so that you can see through it with about 75% visibility. Because the weave is very loose, when it is stretched tight like this, it becomes porous and allows the shakti to flood through and visibility, mostly from the deva side looking to the First World side, becomes quite clear. Again only those with clairvoyant natures would see, rather than only feel. the Second and Third World at these times. But this image is actually quite accurate. It was an analogy that originated from the the devas themselves explaining how they can see much better during the puja.

All these images are useful and have proven very helpful to youths of all ages, even adults, in appreciating that the puja is quite a magic happening, not just an old ritual that worldly-minded Hindu youths tend to call all temple rituals.

The analogy of the window, or door, between the worlds being opened by the puja can be drawn, or created with sticks and cardboard or even fully staged as a little play. This furthers strengthens the understanding of the way a puja actually mystically works.

You already have an activity in the activity box, so this is both an illustration and also a possible second activity for the class. First, find three rooms of the building where you are with two doorways that line up. One doorway is between rooms one and two and the other between rooms two and three. These rooms represent the Three Worlds. Then take some children and put them in the room number one. They are devotees in the temple. Make one of them the pujari. Then put a few less in room number two. They are devas, beings of light without physical bodies. Then put a few in room number three. They are very advanced souls that live in their soul bodies of light. Choose one to be Siva, Muruga and Ganesha. Have at least one flashlight and give it to Siva. If you can bring more flashlights give them to the devas in room number two. Close the doorways or pull a curtain if there is no door. Make sure they can't see each other between the rooms. Then have the pujari start the puja. They can just act anyway they want. It might be funny. You, the teacher, can chant something in Sanskrit, or just ring a bell. Then the door between rooms one and two opens and the devas from that room peek

A C T I V I T I E S

The perfect devotee is super-responsive to the guidance and wishes of God Siva. This is the Nandi game, a game of fast reflex and response. Bring in a supply of tennis balls or rubber balls, any ball that is of medium size. You will need at least six or so. Also bring in a fairly large box—the kids will be tossing the balls into the box. Put a label on the box that says God Siva so everybody can see it. Divide the kids into three groups of Nandis around the box, but about ten feet or so away from it. The Nandi game object is to roll the balls out to the three groups, one child per groups catching the ball, then calling out some good deed or good practice or good thought that they can think of and then trying to gently toss the ball into the box. If the ball goes in the box they go and get it and roll it out to the next person. If the ball misses they go and retrieve it and put it in the box by hand, then roll it out to the next person.

into room number one. The pujari keeps chanting or ringing the bell, and then the door between rooms two and three opens and the Mahadevas and great souls from that room peek out and look far off to the souls in room one, the First World. Then at the height of the puja when the bell is being run the loudest, or the chanting is the loudest, and the door to the Third World opens, Siva turns on His flashlight and shines it onto the First World devotees and the Second World devas too can shine their flashlights onto the First World devotees as well when the door to their world opens. It is good if the lights of the rooms are a little dimmed so that the effect of the flashlights is stronger. Then the bell and chanting stops and the doors slowly close again. All can sit for 60 seconds and practice feeling the shakti of God.

STORY READING

Vanakkam. You will be a little amazed but you are now reading a letter from a girl, me, Selvi, who is a temple dancer, in the Tanjavur Siva temple in the year 1050ce. Hmmm. Hard to believe? Yes, even for me. But read on, slowly. You will understand. I was asked to write this letter by one of the old priests of my temple, Nagalinga, a very wonderful person who has known me since

I was born. He said he would burn my letter in a homa fire and it said it would reappear in the next world and would get stored in a fantastic library by a deva librarian in the heaven world. And that other girls and boys would read it one day in about a thousand years. I could hardly believe it when he told me this, but he said it very seriously. Everyone who lives and serves here at the temple, all the other priests and other dancers and musicians like me, all know and like and respect him, and we know he is extremely spiritual and knows many mysterious things, so I went ahead and wrote this short message at his request about my life at my temple and dancing all the time at the pujas before Shiva.

He told me that there would be a day when dancing would be banned from the temples and girls like me, Devadasis, would not be allowed to dance for God as we do now at the pujas, at the little shrines in the temple courtyards and for all the big parade city festivals and for many other community and family occasions and ceremonies. He said it was quite complicated why this happened but that it would have to do with peoples coming from other countries to our country with foreign beliefs who made our people change their way of looking at dancing and made it a bad thing and that dance after that got a bad reputation and dancers got a bad name and so they made dance illegal in temples. He said there was other complicated factors that made this happen but said it was too hard to explain as I was young and would not really understand how anyone could ever think dance was bad or we were bad or that dancing was not the most wonderful way to offer love and devotion to God. You should see how much we love it and how much the devotees enjoy it too with all the music and everything. I know God Shiva loves it. He's a dancer too! Why would he want us thrown out of His home where He dances all the time? Oh well. I am young, as Nagalingam said.

But I did ask him how he was going to put a letter from me in a library in heaven as it seemed so incredible, I just couldn't resist asking him how he would do it. I wasn't sure he would tell me. Maybe it was a secret. But actually he was happy I asked, and told me that he would burn it at in the homa fire pit and that when he chanted at the same time, that when the paper burned and disappeared, that it reformed exactly the same in the next world, and that the *devas* there—who he said live and serve in our temple—receive it. They will take it to a

great library that everybody there in that world knows about called The Lord Subramaniam library. It would be catalogued and neatly added to the millions of books and letter documents there and would be loaned out to the right people interested in the life of a temple dancer and in what is was like in the time period when I am alive. These people would usually read it when they left their bodies at night during sleep time. Or, it could be read by a person who had the gift of clairaudience and can listen to the *devas* of the next world and they would write it down. He told me that my letter would be read by someone like this.

Well, let me go ahead and just tell you a little about my life. He said to keep it simple and short for now. Well, I am 16. I have always lived here at this gigantic Shiva temple complex. I don't live inside the temple. Just right nearby, where all the dancers live. All kinds of people who serve at the temple live near it. There are many priests and different kinds of musicians and craftsmen and lots of various helpers. There are over 100 dancers, some older, some younger. We all take turns and some specialize in different pujas, different shrines. Some mostly do the big parade Deity festivals and some mostly dance in the temple's inner sanctum.

There are 8 girls in my house and one older lady who is sort of like our mother. I am the second youngest girl in my house. The others are mostly between 15 and 30. They are all like my sisters. We get up very early. We nap in the afternoon, just so you know. The first temple bell starts ringing around 3:30 am. But we don't have to do our first devotional dances until 5:30. Shantini, our Godmother, is up first. By the way, she has always been an amazing dancer, but only dances once a year now as she is older now. The older dancers like her help the *nattuvanars*, the male music/dance master teachers, teach us. These older lady dancers also care for all our other needs, and problems when we have them. Shantini is the one we think of as mother. She gets a small stove fire going right away and heats water and makes a sweet beverage for all of us. And after we are all bathed and dressed, she does an arati for Shiva in the corner of our main center room. We all pray.

By five am, we are entering the temple. The perfume of the incense is always so nice. The priests and their helpers are getting all the shrines ready for the first main early morning public puja. Musicians are always up early and they are playing and practicing different ragas sitting in the dark behind the pillars. Veena, bamboo flute,

tambouras, nageswarams, mridangams. Each musician always sit in the same spots that they like and they don't need any light except just a tiny bit from oil lamps to see their strings and drums, etc. They play only morning ragas, slower, but like the sky at dawn, full of color and feeling. I know all the ragas as we are all trained in singing, even veena.

So as they play, and I walk past them, I sing very softly different songs I know in the different ragas that they are playing. Suddenly, the waves of fragrance of marigold flowers wafts into me. I love it. About twenty ladies are behind some pillars sitting right in the middle of mountains of marigolds and other flowers. They are sewing garlands for the days' pujas. I always love walking past them in the morning. I don't know these ladies very well.

There is a little curtained off room where the other girls are dressing in our dance costumes. Beautiful bright cloths with gold embroidery and also jewelry that sparkles when the deepa lamps reflects on it. Some girls are decorating other girls hair with lots of flowers—jasmynes, plumerias and roses, all colors. I dress too.

The puja starts and goes on for 45 minutes and then it is our time to dance. I am junior to most of the others who perform although there are two girls who perform at this early morning puja also that are only 15. The three of us only go out very briefly.

I wait and watch from behind the pillars in the half-darkness while the others dance before the Deity. They look so beautiful, really like Goddesses. Three of them are waving arati lamps, called *alankaram deepas*, and moving more slowly. The other four are moving their arms rhythmically in perfect unison in all the various *mudras*, as well as their torsos and feet, etc. They are facing the Deity and the music—mridangams and flutes and veenas—is now quite loud. There is suddenly a tingly feeling in the air. I don't know how to say it. Its just a great feeling, like liquid happiness mixed with pure energy poured inside you. You feel like you are glowing, from inside out.

Now my turn comes. The others move to the side, partly behind the pillars, with just their arms and a little of their bodies wavering visible to the devotees who number a few hundred and extend way back into the dark temple. It is still before sunrise. I go out right in front of the Deity Shiva, who is ahead of me deep in the sanctum. Many priests are seated near Him and still chant in a drone that the devotees can barely hear. This is my favorite moment each

day. I do the same dance. But it is always exciting, like a big bird diving off the edge of a big cliff into the oncoming wind. You spread your wings and just soar up in consciousness for what seems like hours although actually my dance is only three minutes. I first dance fast and rhythmical. Two other girls younger dance just behind me. The drummers know me and I can dance perfectly to the beat. I can feel the devotees behind me as the devotional feeling surges. Then I slow down and move very slowly, very gracefully. I am very flexible and can bend and curve quite a lot. Inside me, it is very peaceful, just like a big bird in flight. Again it is hard to tell you about this feeling of peace which is not exactly like a quiet lake, but more like a big wave. I know it sounds confusing, a big wave that is peaceful, but that is what it is like.

Next comes the final arati. Lots of waving of lighted oil lamps mix with the shrill high gliding notes of the *nagaswarams*, long wooden horns. Drums are racing like galloping horses. Now the *shakti*, God's energy is really flowing. It is like the sap that comes out of trees in the hot midday sunshine, or nectar oozing out flowers for the bees. You just feel total happiness like you have no worries in the whole universe and everything is good and wonderful. Like a sponge, I soak up that feeling and it stays in me day after day, year after year.

I could go on and on about me and my life being a temple dancer and tell you about some how much we have to train and practice and also and some spiritual experiences I have had and maybe one day you will read more about me. I am not special by the way—all my sister dancers here have had neat spiritual moments and experiences from time to time. It's just considered normal, though we don't talk much about these experiences. Nagalina said I can continue this letter and write a whole book about my life as a temple dancer if I want so girls and boys and all Hindus in the future will know a little about what our life is like. I'll see.

Anyway, Bye for now. Nice talking to you and lots of love to all of you whoever you are, wherever you are, way out there in the future. I just thought—what if I am one of you out there reading so-called “me” back here who wrote this in the the now that is now the future? Wow! Isn't life amazing?

HOMEWORK

Ask the children to notice next time they go to the temple how bathing and dressing and dressing in nice clothes changes the way

they feel. Have them think about how they feel in their minds before they bathe and dress and then how they feel after they put nice clothes on etc. Let them give some testimonies at the next class. This exercise will help more deeply impress them that dressing nice does help uplift consciousness.

WRONG THINKING

1) **It doesn't matter how you dress when you go to the temple.** Some people argue that it doesn't matter how you dress when you visit the temple. They argue that God doesn't care what clothes you wear. He is always happy when you come to the temple, in a jogging outfit, tee-shirt, blue jeans etc. In the very deepest sense, yes, they are right. God always loves us and doesn't love us less when we don't dress nicely when we visit his home. But God will also notice that these people want to make the temple a social place with a casual ordinary atmosphere. God does not want this for us. He knows the temple can uplift everyone more if it maintains a very spiritual, high vibration and dressing in refined, elegant dress helps this to happen. Dressing nice makes us feel nicer and when we are dressed nice the temple is like a bouquet of flowers. This uplifts other devotees and makes it easier for God to uplift everyone with His Shakti, Presence.

NOTES

LESSON FOCUS

The focus of the lesson is to explain that puja helps us feel God's power.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

The major presentation is to impress on the children that pujas help us feel God's power, God's *shakti*, energy. Minor presentations are: 1) The puja is conducted by a priest. (This should include giving an explanation of who a priest is, someone trained in Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy etc.) 2) that boys and men stand on right and girls and women on the left. (This includes a very simple explanation why this is.) 3) that when the arati flame is held high that that is the time we feel the shakti of God at the temple the most 4) saying a little bit about each sacrament that is received and 5) although it is not in the main paragraph under the picture, it is good to make a key presentation point that we should sit at least momentarily after the puja and also say why we should do this.

Pujas help us feel God's power. It is very simple. The temple is the First World home of God. So we go there to be near Him and the puja is the way that we connect up His First World home to Him where He is in the Third World. (An important sidenote here: be sure to tell the children that although the temple is where it is easiest to feel God's power, we believe God is also everywhere, in all things, in us, in rocks and flowers, and oceans, and trees and birds. We always have to preserve the understanding that God is all and in all, that God is all-pervasive. Not only is this the mystical truth but, especially for children, it makes the whole world, not just the temple, a wonderful, sacred world. God is everywhere!)

Regarding the puja, primarily use the image that is given already in the short teacher's guide paragraph, about the Deity image being like a telephone. Just as we use a telephone to call someone who lives elsewhere, so do we have a priest dial the temple telephone, the Deity image, using Sanskrit chants, to reach God. Another image that will help is the image of a door or a window. When the puja is at the height a window, or doorway, opens into the Third World, so that God's shakti can flow to us. It is open as wide and for as long as the puja is powerful.

Minor presentations:

1) The puja is conducted by a priest. It is



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is inside a temple attending a puja. Girls and women are on the left and boys and men are on the right.

The arati lamp is being shown before the Deity at the high point of the puja by the priest. Afterwards the flame is passed to all the devotees.

Father says: "The priest does the puja. Facing the Deity during puja, the men and boys stand on the right side. The women and girls stand on the left. When the priest holds the flame high, we feel God's power. After the puja, we receive sacraments: holy ash, water, sandalwood, kumkuma, flowers and blessed food. We take these home.

nice to tell the children that a Hindu temple priest has to spend many years learning from another older priest how to do pujas and that the language that he uses, Sanskrit, is thousands of years old. Tell them how amazing this is, that we are still using the same prayers that our great great great great, etc. grandparents used in 3000 BC. It was such a special language, everyone took a lot of care to preserve it, like a great jewel, a diamond, that never got broken or lost. This gives them a nice respect for Sanskrit rather than letting them think it is just old. 2) Boys and men stand on the right and girls and women stand on the left. The reason to keep the sexes separated is to help minimize the generation of emotional energies between men and women. But for the children you can just say it is an old custom we have that helps keep the temple very calm and peaceful. To older youths you can explain why. 3) We feel God's power the most when the

flame is held high. Just say that this is the high point of the puja, the moment when there is the most energy being used to open the door (or window) to God and the Second and Third World. This is the moment when the telephone line connection is the best and when God is the most present to us. This is the time to really be attentive to feeling God's power, open our heart and minds. We don't look around the temple, or up at the ceiling, or back behind us. We look at the image and try to feel God's *shakti* and love flowing out to us. You can say that they may just feel the love and shakti bubbling up inside them very softly, gently, or other ways. Be careful not to tell them that they should feel a big blast of energy from the sanctum, like an invisible fire-hose spraying out cosmic force.

Though this might occur, feeling the shakti at the height of puja is very much an individual experience and everyone can experience it differently both in nature and in degree. It also always depends on the power of the puja. So it is advised not to create in the mind's of children that there is one type of puja experience. Doing that would only create anxiety if they don't experience the shakti like they are told it "should" be experienced. Just tell them that if they feel more peaceful, then they have also experience the shakti. God is peaceful. God's power, God's *shakti*, gives a feeling of great peace.

4) It is nice to say a little about each of the sacraments. Say that the flame carries some of the shakti around the room and that sometimes devas, shining beings of light that help the Mahadeva, can even ride on the arati lamp and help spread God's shakti to each devotee when they pass their hands over the flame. In the fire glows the light and shakti and love of God. It is mag-

ical. The vibhuti is a sacred substance prepared by burning cow dung and other substances including ghee, milk and honey. It has a special phosphorescent astral glow. This means that it has a glow that can be seen by the devas and the Mahadeva. So when you put it on the forehead, the devas and the Mahadeva can see it on one's forehead, which can act like a magnet and help attract the blessings from the puja.

The tirtham, or blessed water, is quietly sipped from the right hand. Tell the children this water is charged with the blessings from the puja and is sacred. If there was an abhishekam—where the Deity is bathed in water and other liquids like lime juice and milk, etc. the tirtham offered the devotees will be this, not just water. Having been poured over the Deity, it is then even more charged and special.

Sandalpaste is put on the forehead between the eyes a little higher on the forehead, where the third eye is. Just say to the children that sandalpaste comes from a sacred tree, the sandalwood tree, also called the Asian evergreen, and that the paste from it is put where we have an invisible eye that can see many deeper things. The kumkum, the red powder, is made from turmeric and lime and is put as a dot on top of the sandalpaste smudge also between the eyes.

Sometimes a little prashadam is given as well, a piece of fruit or a sweet food. This food has been offered to the Deity, blessed and now is being given to the devotees. You can tell the children they can all learn how to make traditional prashadam recipes and bring them to the temple for the priest to offer to the Deity. This is always appreciated.

Sometimes also a flower, or flower petal, is passed out to the devotees. This flower was also offered to the Deity and now is blessed. All flowers have a natural astral radiance, glow that can be seen by the Devas. That is part of why they are so beautiful and loved. When girls put them in their hair when they go to the temple, it is like they have lots of little deepa lamps in their hair. This makes their aura glow and the devas can better see them and hover around them more easily. When a flower is received from the pujari, it is put in the hair usually. Even boys and men put the flower usually behind their ear. Girls usually put it in their hair in the back with other flowers that they have already put in their hair.

ANALOGIES/ILLUSTRATIONS

As we have already seen in the Master

Course there are many analogies for the process of the puja. A spiritual window and a metaphysical telephone are two analogies used before. In this lesson we see that when the priest raises up the flame high in relation to the Deity image, that is also the high point of the puja.

A good analogy for this process is the power switch. In the home we have electric light switches. We turn the light switch on, up to its high position, and the light bulb is energized with electric power, and we see light in the room. In powerful electric stations, switches will be turned on that light entire cities. This is like the priest waving the arati flame before the Deity. There is a build up of power as the arati is rotated in front of the Deity, then the arati flame is lifted high, and the spiritual energy from the God soul being, is in a sense switched on in our world. And indeed, invisible beams of light are sent by the God or God Siva into the temple chamber to the worshippers. Ask the children to remember when they return home that the light switch they turn on to illumine the room is like the puja arati flame being held high.

At the end of the puja the sacred substances are passed out to the devotees. The substances—called sacraments—are charged with the power of the puja. To get a visual idea of what this is like, have the children close their eyes and see a large mound of gold that has been ground into very fine powder. It is fine gold dust. Each piece of gold dust glows with fiery metallic yellow light. Then have the children see the holy ash, holy water, sandalwood paste, kumkum and offered fruits and foods sitting in a shadow, unlit by light, with the mound of gold dust floating behind the sacraments. Then the gold dust bursts into a dazzling thick cloud of golden particles, each shining with green (for healing) and blue (for divine intelligence) light. The cloud of gold dust swirls all around and through the sacraments as the puja reaches its finale. The green and blue light comes into each devotee as they receive the sacraments.

STORY

Waves the color of blue-silver broke onto the beach. Birds were circling and diving for sand crabs. The sand of the beach was black. Not pearl white or light tan, but endless, tiny grains of black sand, gritty and glassy. It was the only place in the world where the beach sand was black. The beach was called Kona, a Hawaiian word sounding like the 'co' of coco and 'na' of nut. The

1. Create a fake telephone booth. It can just be imagined or, with a little effort, you can use a few simple objects to create a fake telephone booth with the phone inside. Tell all the children that the temple is just like a telephone booth. At the temple, the priest calls God just the same way as in a telephone booth we call another person. Now choose someone to be Siva, Muruga or Ganesha. This person stands off to one side, a little out of sight or a little higher but close enough to the booth to just be able to hear a little. Then surround the telephone booth with several children. They are devas who are like the devas in the temple who hear prayers very clearly when they are made there at puja time. Then let different ones take turns going inside the booth and being the priest and dialing the phone to call the Deity. Then this person says they have reached God. The person who is the Deity doesn't answer with her or his voice. Then the priest hands the phone to someone who says a wish or anything they want through the phone. Normally, in a temple, this is not said aloud. But they can say it aloud if they want. It is more fun that way. The devas around the booth listen to the prayer/wish and then run over to the Deity and tell the Deity everything. Then let the Deity send back a nice response about how to respond or answer the prayer. If he or she doesn't know what to say specifically, this person can just say out loud, "I now send you radiant love, shakti and intelligence to help you in your request, and in your life now and in the future."

Kona coast was at the southern dark and dry lava side of the large island called Hawaii, where two brother volcanoes rose several miles into the sky. One volcano was dead-extinct like the dinosaurs-and in winter its top cone was so cold it was covered in snow. The other volcano was alive-the rock inside so hot it turned to liquid like fiery red tomato curry. The red hot lava flowed out at great speed and when it cooled, it was black. It was new land. Black land created from the red liquid rock deep inside Earth. Black glass too, for volcanoes create small and large pieces of glass the color of dark smoke.

From the Kona beach the huge volcano's

ash-colored cone and thin clouds of light grey smoke rose darkly against a smiling blue sky. Only three people were on the beach: one girl, an older boy and a man. And there were two large golden-furred dogs. In the black sand they had made a large circle with a triangles joining together, a symbol of Siva energy. The waves were crashing near it. Laughter and cries of delight and dog barks could be heard. The people made fast bursts of motion with their hands, almost like a dance.

The waves on Kona beach were very high and so powerful they crashed with slow whooshing thunder. The three people on the beach were talking about the waves. The little girl was explaining that the blue waves traveled a very long, long distance to the black beach. Thousands of miles they traveled, rolling through the ocean, one wave after another. Every two minutes they rolled on. She said if you could dive under water and hear the waves it would be like a great clock of the ocean, ticking every two minutes. The blue waves traveled from the south. The cold south, where the salty sea waters were frozen into ice mountains and land as large as India and Russia and huge blue whales and black sea lions lived under the ice. The blue waves traveled far north to the middle of Earth's Pacific Ocean, where the waters were warm and grey whales, dolphins and seals and green sea turtles and sharks and many fish swam, ate and went to sleep with their eyes open. The little girl, who had a small red dot between two starry black eyes, said yes, fish sleep with their eyes open, but dolphins, who are not fish, sleep with one eye closed, one eye opened. As she talked, the waves crashed with their water thunder, but strangely, the roaring noise did not interrupt the conversation. They didn't stop talking when the waves broke. And they didn't shout. No voices were raised.

The blue waves rose up, a wall of water that became higher and thinner, and the sun shining through the rising wave made it a very light-filled light blue, a divine blue that would be the color of Lord Ganesha's large eyes. The foam blew skyward at the wave tops as they curled downward, the wall of water roaring down in slow motion.

The wave hit the beach, white foam spraying high up above the black sand, a beautiful vision of rare colors in nature: white and black, like zebras or the white tiger. The sound was an awesome explosion of tons of water crackling through the air. The beach shook and groaned. The symbol of Siva energy in the sand was nearly reached by

the water foam gliding quickly up from the wave. The girl dressed in a red swimming suit standing on the black sand shook with the ground, laughing out loud. Her laugh was different-different from other children, a sound like wind-rustled wheat and horses neighing. Other children heard her laugh and wondered why it was so different. Some said, "Her laugh is so strange. Can you believe it?" and they giggled like the mean hyena dogs of Africa. Others, even less kind, said it was weird and spooky. But they didn't really know her or the world she lived in. As the waves thundered to the beach, she raised her right hand and moved it as a wave from her heart—a human wave to the water wave. The girl's long ginger brown hair blew wild in the wind, and she thought as she waved, this is a sign of oneness.

Her name was Akshita, 'the one who sees,' for her large, shining black eyes saw far distances with great detail. She could see a honey bee fly and float into a flower from a mile away.

The warm, bubbly water rushed up to her feet, tinkling the silver bracelets with bells she often wore on her ankles. She squealed with delight. But she didn't hear the tiny bells. A sugarbird, white as sugar, with a very long tail that ended in a kite shape flew by and made a sharp turn. The girl spun in the sand to watch the bird fly toward the distant smoking volcano. Her back was against the ocean waves, but she could feel the pounding of the water like a giant tabla.

"Look out," her brother Anal cried as loud as he could, and he lunged for Akshita, twenty feet to his right hand side. Akshita didn't hear him, but out of the corner of her eye she saw his eyes were wide with fright and his mouth open quickly, forming two words. It was 'look' and some other word she missed. 'Look' at what? she thought. Anal was scrambling in the sand, his heels kicking up wet black sand, trying to come toward her, but not seeming to move forward. He quickly moved his hands in two hand signs: 'big' and 'wave.' Akshita was stone deaf in both ears. She could hear nothing since birth: no music, no birdsong, no surf crashing, no human voices, no puja bells, no wind in the trees. Her brother had used sign language, the hand language that looked like the Hindu mantras of priests and yogis. Sign language gave the art of talking to the deaf. And with their hands moving like a pair of hummingbirds the deaf composed poetry that rhymed. And this was what Akshita was thinking about—her poetry performance at the Kona Siva

Temple tonight, right after the puja.

Kaaawhooosh! The wave hit behind her with thundering force. A giant wave, a cliff of water. Akshita was thrown to the sand and the uprushing water ran over the sand diagram of Siva energy behind her, destroying it with the energy of Siva as the ocean waves. She felt the rushing vibration in the sand beneath her. She turned her head, her brown hair spotted with dripping black sand and her cheek hurting a bit. Her pottu dot was smeared. The sea water was rushing up the beach and would cover her and tumble her underwater in a moment. She was totally quiet. Not even an attempt to scream. All the frightening action surrounding her was Silent, like a silent movie. Yet she had no fear. At nine years old, Akshita had gone to Siva puja at the Kona Siva temple almost every Friday night of her life. In moments of fear or hurt she saw the arati flames of the puja, and she knew and felt Siva's Love and Light were in all things. And she could hear this Siva Love with a special hearing that came from her inner soul mind, not from the air of Earth. It sounded like ten thousand vinas with gold strings playing slow harmonious melodies echoing among the planets.

In a split second the wave water hit her ankles and knees. Akshita jumped up with surprising strength. But the water was sweeping her away. Her brother caught her under her shoulders in his teenage muscular arms and pulled. One of the dogs splashed into the water with a great shout of barking that Akshita couldn't hear. But she felt the barks as thumps on her chest. The dog was trying to get under her, to lift Akshita from the swirling waters onto his wet back. "Got you," Anal cried with relief and his worried brown eyes relaxed as he lifted her completely out of the water and grabbed her legs. Akshita could read his lips, and she said 'thank you' with one hand. Tall Anal stood in the rushing three-foot water and started to carry Akshita up to higher ground on the beach. Their dad was waiting, his face pinched with worry, his pants dripping wet from wading out toward them. The second dog waited beside their father, the dog's long bony face seemed to be smiling and his tail was wagging furiously, making his long ears flap.

Akshita hugged both of the wet, sea-smelling dogs when her brother lowered her to the dry black beach. "Oh you good, wet dogs," she thought to herself. "You smell like fish-dog fish," and she signed this so everybody could see and laugh. "That was exciting," she said with her hands, the

delicate girlish fingers and palms working with quick jabs to accent her feeling. “Got a little scrape on my cheek,” she signed, and pointed at the sandy redness on her left cheek. “We’ll bandage that in the car,” her father signed back to her, handing her a white, fluffy towel that was bigger than she was. “And don’t use the towels on the dogs. You know what your mother would say,” Dad signed with a funny grin. Akshita grinned as she dried herself and slipped on a pair of khaki colored pants, a pale yellow punjabi shirt and some red beach sandals. The Hawaiian sun was hot and burning bright at about 3 o’clock in the afternoon sky. The black lava fields that stretched to the bluish ocean looked like blankets on giants’ beds. No trees grew, but a few small green bushes were struggling to grow in patches of dirt not covered by lava. Hot steam shot up in the distance making a sizzling, rushing sound that Akshita didn’t hear. Anal heard it and signed for Akshita to look.

Their dark green Japanese car was in a nearby parking lot. Father took out a first aid kit as soon as he unlocked the back trunk. Anal was wiping down the dogs with old cloths and they jumped into the back seat. Father, a tall man with thin black hair touched with salty white, quickly cleaned Akshita’s cheek and carefully put on a bandage. He was a chief accountant in a large clothing company on Hawaii. On weekends he often volunteered to polish the tile floors of the Kona Siva Temple and teach Saivite Hindu classes.

Akshita looked in the car mirror while putting her hair into a quick pony-tail. She groaned and her hands sped out the words while she touched her reddened cheek: “Hmm. Now I look like a boy who fell off his surf board. No matter. It will heal quickly, and the energy from the puja tonight should help. Let’s get going. We need to shower and get ready for the puja,” and she made an engine-starting motion to her dad.

Dad started the engine, checked to see everybody had seat belts on, and they drove out onto the old black highway that wound through old black lava beds up away from the fire-breathing volcano. Akshita slipped in a tape cassette of Pandit Shivkumar Sharma playing the sparkling metallic strings of the santoor and turned up the volume knob. Anal smiled and beat a rhythm on the car seat and the dogs’ tails thumped in time. Akshita couldn’t hear the santoor, a beautiful instrument, but she lay her hands on the sound speaker. The sound

turned to touch and feeling, and in her mind the feeling turned back into a crystal waterfall of sound. As the sun baked into the car and the koa and java plum trees rushed by in a hypnotic blur, Akshita fell asleep.

The Hawaiian sun slipped with a purplish orange explosion of light into the ocean and the first faint stars flickered into view. Akshita watched this every evening from the porch of her home—the vanishing sun and the stars appearing in purple-shadow twilight. It was like a ritual to her. A celebration of Siva and space, of Earth and stars. A puja, with the sun as the arati. She sat in her stone silence, watching with her long eyesight. The sun, she knew from study, was a star, a middle-size star of middle age that was close enough to Earth to give light and heat. And she knew that the stars of night were also always there in the day, just as Siva is always everywhere.

“Akshita, let’s go. We’re all ready,” her brother jumped in front of the porch and signed with his hands, and she felt the spinning cough of the car starting. She signed back, “The volcano’s rumbling. I can feel it when I sit in meditation. Very low. Did you feel it?”

“No, but I may start rumbling if you don’t come right now,” Anal said with a cutting motion in his hands, meaning he was getting impatient. “Bring your flowers and let’s go.” Anal ran off to the car. Akshita quickly picked up a bag of white perfume-smelling plumeria flowers and almost leaped over the wood railing of the porch. Whoa. Better not do that, she thought. She didn’t want to risk putting a tear into the black and gold punjabi outfit she was wearing.

The car drove up to the temple parking area, its headlights casting bright pools of light onto the low lava rock wall in front and the shiny bronze sign that read Kona Siva Temple. The parking lot was full of other cars. Hindu families were walking along the main path made of flat white stones set into grass. It was dark now, a winter evening when the sun set early. The main Siva puja was at 7:30. To the west was the snow-speckled peak of the dead volcano, stars swirling over it. To the east the live volcano spread a reddish glow into low-lying clouds and smoke. Families were stopping to look, talking excitedly and pointing. A helicopter flew overhead, beating the air with waves that Akshita felt like a spraying water jet on her skin. The helicopter was heading for the fiery volcano and Akshita guessed it was a geology sci-

ence team, volcano scientists. One of her friend’s father was on that team. Could be up there now, she thought. And she mentally chanted a prayer to Ganesha for his safety. It was dangerous work. Helicopters were caught in hot winds and crashed. Red liquid lava exploded up unexpectedly. Gases smelling like rotten eggs could knock you unconscious and kill you. To Akshita, the volcano was not something to fear. It was an awesome display of energy and creation, the raw, new creation of Siva as the molten inside of planet Earth. Don’t fear the volcano she told herself, but be careful of its power and admire its beauty. It was like an eternal puja of fire and rock and gold and diamonds made under the Earth that was always happening, but very rarely seen. She could see it.

A bell was ringing through the cool night air. Anal motioned to Akshita with his hands pulling at invisible ropes. She knew. The bell. Time to go in. Tonight was the night for Akshita. Poem night. She was going to recite a poem after the puja. She wrote the poem as a special gift for Siva, the temple and the volcano. But Akshita wouldn’t speak her poem. Nobody would hear it. Her audience would see it, as her hands glided into a huge variety of shape-words. Her poem rhymed. How? By ending every other sentence with a hand gesture similar in shape to the sentence before it. This was the poetry of the deaf. She practiced as she walked towards the white walls of the temple. Anal was just ahead. Akshita sensed someone behind her. An unfriendly feeling. “Hey, deaf girl, you sure are weird,” a boy’s voice said loudly. Akshita didn’t hear the insult, but she felt a rush of hot breath on her neck where her hair braid fell. Anal had turned suddenly with an angry look on his face. She knew someone had said something unpleasant to her behind her back. Anal was by her side and she could see a boy running away into the darkness. She recognized him. A bully. A boy who kicked cats and teased girls. “Forget it,” she signed to him with a smile. “He doesn’t know the sounds I hear inside myself. His karma will catch him, no matter how fast he runs.”

People were moving briskly into the temple now, carrying their offerings and taking off their shoes before passing through the great wooden sanctuary doors. Akshita could see families dividing up between men and boys, women and girls. The menfolk walked to the right, entering the great hall of Siva on the right side. The womenfolk walked left, entering the wide space before

Siva on the left. The black Sivalinga was in the center, covered as by a flag of red and white plumeria flowers. Akshita walked in with Anal after removing their sandals . Anal went right, Akshita walked in a kind of wonder daze to the left. The temple always created this wonder daze in her. She touched her bandaged cheek. A tingle of healing was starting under the bandage. She sat at the same moment the priest, dressed in gold-colored silks, sat to begin the opening rites of the puja. The priests' hands made some mudras, hand signs that changed the forces of his body and mind. Akshita watched with her keen eyesight. Here was something she and the priest shared. He was chanting and ringing the brass bell, and little Akshita didn't hear any of it. But she held up the palms of her hands towards the main shrine and like a human radar she felt the bell and Sanskrit in her fingertips, the most sensitive part of the body. She sat up straight, her back like a stalk of golden bamboo growing outside the temple. And again she felt the low rumble of the volcano. Some people were sitting with eyes closed, saying soft murmurs of prayer. Others sat with eyes open, a look of undying hope. And others eyes were shifting around, not paying any attention to Siva's magic that Akshita could see all around them. But none noticed the low voice of the volcano.

The priest was standing and passing the incense now. Akshita's sense of smell was very good, much better than people who could hear. She smelled the incense even before the priest did and he was right next to it. It was a pure sandalwood incense, a cloud of fine smoke from the yellowish wood and oil of the sandalwood tree. The number five suddenly came into Akshita's mind. She could see it. A big "5." A few seconds later the five flames of the main arati lamp sparkled into camphor fire. Fire before Siva, and off to the near horizon the fire of the volcano. The arati made an orange streaking light before the black Sivalinga. The smell of camphor was rich and calming. Bells were ringing and she could see Anal pounding the temple drum. Those sounds were silent as snowfall to her. The priest held the flame high and Akshita felt a starburst of light in her chest right through the black and gold of her dress. Siva's energy came like oceans of light pressed into a single, wide beam.

The puja was over, the holy white ash passed out along with yellow sandalwood paste and red kumkum-the three colors of white, yellow and red appearing on every-

one's forehead. Slices of bananas and flowers blessed by the puja were given to each devotee.

Akshita was standing to the right side of the Sivalinga in front of everyone. Her brother stood beside her in front of a microphone. He would translate the poem. Her ginger brown hair shined and her face glowed and her smile was like an angel's. Her hands were still. Then with a lift of one finger she began the poem. It lasted for seven minutes, all from memory. The entire temple full of people was silent, as if they were deaf too. Then, thunderous applause broke out and Akshita saw the hundreds of hands clapping with no sound. And she felt at one, and made the hand sign of the ocean waves-her wave in oneness with the ocean waves, the soundless hands, the rumbling volcano and Siva within all. And the volcano burst with red lava and red light into the star-glittering sky. People were safe as they were kept away from the volcano. Red and hot yellow lava rolled out. New land from the hand of Siva.

WRONG THINKING

Some youths, and adults as well, say that Sanskrit is not good to use for pujas because no one knows this language and no one knows what the pujari is saying. This annoys people and so they are critical of pujas and rituals. But Sanskrit is an amazing language, and although many do not know it, its sounds help very much to create the vibration that helps the puja be strong. So tell the youths that Sanskrit is a great and magical language and that you, the teacher, will be happy to tell them what at least some of the chants actually mean, and that there is no reason to stop using Sanskrit. You should be prepared to know the meaning of some of the most common chants that priests use. You can ask any priest. Their meaning is no secret and they will be happy to share this information and the youths will be amazed at what simple things are being said. Such as, "Ganesha, please enjoy this fragrant incense that I am now offering you with my love and devotion."