



Chinmaya Mission San Jose

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SYMBOLISM OF A TEMPLE VISIT

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The body is a temple. The Jiva is the deity. In a temple, through the process of seeing the deity, the method of realizing the Self is revealed. The Scriptures have indicated that the external worship or archana that we perform will bring us inner joy and satisfaction.

When entering a temple, we first cross the main steeple or gopuram. It is very tall. On it are carved the images of various deities or devas, the guardians of the directions, the five elements, sages, demons, animals and others. Man's mind is like the temple tower. Just like the carvings on the gopuram, there exist mental images carved in the mind. The entire creative mechanism is represented in the sculptures on the tower. Man's mind, like the carvings on the temple tower is a mix of the good, the bad and the ugly. Negative human tendencies are mirrored in the depictions of the demons on the tower. Going beyond the tower, these negative tendencies should be given up and the mind should be turned inwards; it should become more introverted. Thinking should be turned within, not on external objects.

After crossing the gopuram, we come across the bali peetham - the sacrificial seat or spiritual dais. In the act of bowing before the bali peetham, the devotee sacrifices his ego and surrenders before the Almighty. This is the inner meaning of why devotees prostrate in front of the bali peetham.

Beyond the bali peetham stands the dhvaja sthambam, which means the pillar of the banner. Atop the pillar we see a flag, which directs us and shows the way to the sanctum sanctorum or the garbhalayam. Here, the devotee burns up his ego and surrenders to the lord completely. Such a person secures eligibility and has a place in the heart of the Almighty.

As the devotee proceeds towards the sanctum, he comes across the vehicle or vahanam of the lord, which may be in the form of Nandi (the bull) in a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, Gaurda (the eagle) the vehicle of Lord Vishnu, Hanuman, in Lord Rama's temple, a mouse as the vehicle of Lord Ganesha, a peacock for Lord Karthikeya etc. These vehicles, usually animals, have shed their ego by always carrying the lord. Therefore, they are fit to be worshipped. Likewise, devotees who surrender completely and shed their ego should devote their entire time and energy to the lord through meditation.

It is said that there should be no obstacle between the vehicle of the lord and the deity. There are many paths to reach God, according to one's individual inclinations and preferences. Considering someone else's path or method as wrong is a sign of intolerance. One should not stand in the way of another's relationship with God. This is the reason for the belief that one should not stand between the vahanam and the deity.

When we enter the sanctum, which is usually dark, we are not able to see anything. The inner sanctum is covered with a curtain and this is one of the reasons why we can't see the deity. At this time, we find that the whole atmosphere is peaceful. When the curtain is drawn, the bells ring, and the priest offers kalpuram (the burning of camphor). Now we see the deity in the light of the neerajanam. At this moment, as a devotee we feel that our search for the Lord is finally over; we feel the presence of the Lord. We stand before the deity with hands folded at the heart, eyes closed and head bowed. The darkness in the sanctum is symbolic of the darkness of ignorance within us. With patience and perseverance, this ignorance vanishes in the light of knowledge just as the bright form of the Lord is revealed to us after we wait for the curtain to be drawn in the sanctum. We are eager to see the Lord within. Through the light of knowledge, the realization dawns on us that the Lord is within us.

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At the sanctum, the sound of the bell outside awakens us. Within us too, the bell of anahata, which means the unbeaten bell, awakens the seeker. Just as the neerajana outside reveals the Lord, the light of knowledge shining within reveals the Self. The devotee is in a trance with his eyes closed. He feels a union with the Lord. In this ecstatic state – unmatha sthithi, the devotee places his hands near his heart and bows his head. This is called Jiva Brahma Aikhyam – the union of the soul and the Supreme Being. This union happens only in the sanctum where the devotee prostrates before the lord in complete surrender. Until then the mind tends to wander all over.

The five senses can be controlled - the panchendriya nigraham, only in the sanctum. The first sense is that of sight – Drigendriyam. When the sanctum is covered in darkness we cannot see anything but the deity with our eyes. The other four senses are completely dormant at this time. Our entire concentration is on our eyes, which are eager to see the deity alone, nothing else. The atmosphere in the sanctum thus controls the eyes.

The second sense is that of hearing – Shrotrendriyam. The sound of the mantras, vedic chants and bells creates a spiritual state in the devotee's mind. In this state of mind the devotee understands the necessity for the Almighty's guidance in leading a righteous life.

The third sense is that of smell – Ghranendriyam. It captures the fragrance of the flowers and the perfume of sandal sticks and incense in the temple. The nose may also pick up some undesirable smells. When we breathe in, we breathe in good air. The air we exhale is bad; it doesn't stay with us. The inner meaning of this is that the soul surrenders to the Almighty by dedicating all actions – good and bad – at the feet of the lord.

The fourth sense is of taste – Rasanendriyam. It is the tongue that tastes the sacred water and the offerings made to the deity – the prasad. By this acceptance the devotee obtains generosity and peace. The lord's prasad is given to everyone equally irrespective of their past actions. The devotee also learns the virtue of forgiveness and to treat everyone with fairness. This action controls the tongue and in doing so teaches the devotee to accept his lot in life just as we accept prasad, without any preferences – prasadabuddhi.

Tvagendriyam, or the sense of touch, is the fifth sense that is controlled in the presence of the Lord. In the temple, the priest offers us sandal paste, vibhooti (sacred ash), and flowers. We apply these on our skin, and keep the flowers in our hair or behind the ear. This indicates that our devotion for the Almighty is completely absorbed by us. We are satisfied after receiving the prasad.

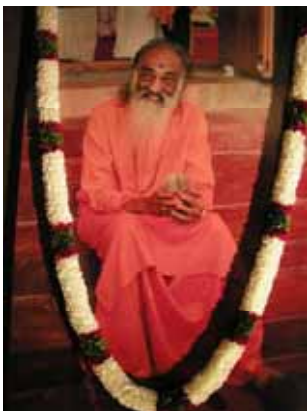
With all these actions, the devotee feels that from the time of entering the temple with determination until coming out of the temple after accepting the prasad, all his efforts have merged into ananta chaitanyam (the supreme spirit).

After worshipping the Lord and accepting the prasad at the garbalayam, the devotee sits in a calm, peaceful place for a few minutes to meditate on this spiritual experience. He achieves a purity of mind and the realization of the significance of what he has experienced during this temple visit.

Hari Om!

GURUDEV'S ARADHANA

We observed Gurudev Swami Chinmayanandaji's Maha Samadhi on August 3rd. Gurudev left his mortal body on this day in 1993, and we observe this day through Gurudev's Paduka puja and Arathi.



JANMASHTAMI

We celebrated many festivals and occasions at Sandeepany, San Jose during the months of August and September. Lord Krishna's birthday was celebrated in Sandeepany on August 16th. The festival is celebrated in the month of Shravana Krishnapaksha Ashtami (8th day of dark fortnight). Here is a picture of Lord Krishna from the Krishnalaya Ashram's temple in Piercy, California.



VINAYAKA CHATURTHI



Vinayaka Chaturthi was celebrated on August 27th. According to Indian Calendar, the festival is celebrated on Bhadrapada Shukla Chaturthi (4th day of bright fortnight of 6th month). The Ganesha clay model seen here was made by a devotee family. The Chinmaya Dhvani group offered melodious bhajans in praise of Ganesha. After that there was a beautiful pooja followed by lunch. Later in the afternoon many devotees went to immerse the idol in the Pacific Ocean.



NAVARATRI

Nava-ratri literally means nine nights. Navaratri is divided into sets of three days to adore different aspects of the supreme goddess. On the first three days, the Mother is invoked as powerful force called [Durga](#) in order to destroy all our impurities, vices and defects. The next three days, the Mother is adored as a giver of spiritual wealth, [Lakshmi](#), who is considered to have the power of bestowing on her devotees the inexhaustible wealth.



The final set of three days is spent in worshipping the mother as the goddess of wisdom, [Saraswati](#). In order to have all-round success in life, we need the blessings of all three aspects of the divine mother; hence, the worship for nine nights.

NAVARATRI, THE KEEPING OF GOLU & THE LALITHA SAHASRANAMA ARCHANA

We celebrated Navaratri by performing Lalitha Sahasranama Archana on September 29. The devotees performed their own puja as a family and received a beautiful framed picture of the goddess after the puja.



A wonderful golu display, both in the traditional form with steps on which dolls were displayed representing all aspects of creation, and a model of an Indian village, framed both sides of the altar. The model, in three levels, with amazing attention to detail, complete with hills, temple, river and hundreds of tiny people, animals and structures was entirely hand made by a devotee and fascinated both adults and children alike.



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