

Saivite Hindu Religion

The Master Course • Level One • Book One

Professional Teacher's Guide



First Edition

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by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

1995

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Introduction

This detailed lesson guide has been prepared at the request of teachers of Saivite Hindu Religion. It is meant as a series of suggestions for each class from which the teacher can develop his or her own presentations.

Welcome to the *Book One School Guide*. This guide was produced for the professional school teacher, as well as for individuals involved in education programs within Hindu organizations and individuals who are conducting their own *Saivite Hindu Religion* course in their community. Additionally, it can effectively be used by parents teaching their children at home. The guide itself is written at a level of language that even teenage youth can digest and use as their guide for classes. It has been Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's observation from many decades of teaching Saivite Hinduism that the best way for a person to deeply learn their religion is to begin teaching—including talking and writing about—what they have learned. And of course, this is the challenge of all educating: how to get children excited, thinking, talking, self-creating in the subject.

This *School Guide* is a work in progress. It is the fruit of many years of teaching Saivite Hinduism to children by many people—including professional Saivite teachers and the Saiva swamis in the monastic order of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. We are continually looking for feedback and suggestions of how to make this *School Guide* better and as useful as possible. Any and all suggestions are welcomed and encouraged.

The *School Guide* is set up on a lesson format, called the lesson guide. The lessons correspond to the pages of Book One. But we also combined lessons that logically belong together, such as the entire story on Semmana Selvi (which takes up ten pages of Book One) or the lessons on the sacred cow and the temple elephant. There are 33 lesson guides all total here. Each one is two pages long, and additional pages can be added. Each lesson guide is clearly labeled at the top of both of its pages. And, in most cases, all of the illustrations from the Book One pages appear in the "Visual Interpretation" illustration box. So it is very easy to reference this guide to Book One.

Each lesson guide is written as a reference for the teacher. Often it is written largely as if we were talking directly to the children. At other times, it is speaking, again in simple language, right to the teacher, giving special instructions or helpful hints or specific points to emphasize. In other words, the guide itself is in largely simple language, and is making a painstaking attempt to step down the lesson to the level of the 6 to 8-year old child. It is written to the child's point of view. It is written as a sentence-by-sentence reference guide 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. This is not the intention 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. In addition, there are occasional sentences, or paragraphs, in each lesson that may (or should) be used verbatim, because they were specifically written as a very good way to present an idea to a young child.

The major intention is for the teacher to creatively study and expand upon this *School Guide* so that an inspiring, animated presentation with the children takes place. This means at least two hours of preparation must go into a one-hour class. Again, we have taken great pains to provide the teacher with a step-by-step discussion of the lesson topic, and with the language and concepts necessary to present

it, as well as an assortment of analogies and illustrative descriptions that make presenting complex spiritual ideas to children much easier. In fact, the teacher will probably find there is so much included in each lesson guide that it cannot all be used, unless the class is very long or divided up into several days over a given period.

On occasion we used words such as *realization* or *enlightenment* that the teacher needs to give creative thought to in order to explain. We didn't attempt to step down every word we used, though we did much of the time. It is up to the teacher to creatively explain these concepts, and there are many helpful aids in this guide, as well as the references in *Dancing with Siva*. Study out how we approached this guide. For instance, *enlightenment* directly relates to "seeing light—the spiritual light of Siva" inside the mind in meditation. It is actually much more than this, but the idea of bright light in the mind is a good beginning place to start explaining this to children. This opens the door to use "light" imagery, to make some kind of light demonstration.

Each lesson guide is divided into a number of sections. But not every lesson has all the sections. A brief description of the sections is as follows: *Lesson Focus*: a brief statement on what is being covered in the lesson. The teacher must cover what is in the lesson focus. *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 8 or 9-year old in a different country, 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 One—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. Many lessons do not have a homework assignment, but the teacher can create their own if they wish. *Activities*: experiential games designed to demonstrate the lesson dramatically. Each one of these activities is custom-created for these lessons. The activity is one of the central focuses of the class.

One thing not to do in this class. Please do not use any of the puranic stories or the popular epics (*Mahabharata*, etc.) 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

This simple statement is very important in Saivite Hinduism. It is important to every Saivite. No one outgrows worship. For a young child, worship is the first experience of their closeness to Siva, Murugan and Ganesha. The main focus of this lesson is to explain what worship is. Second, is to explain when and where we worship.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

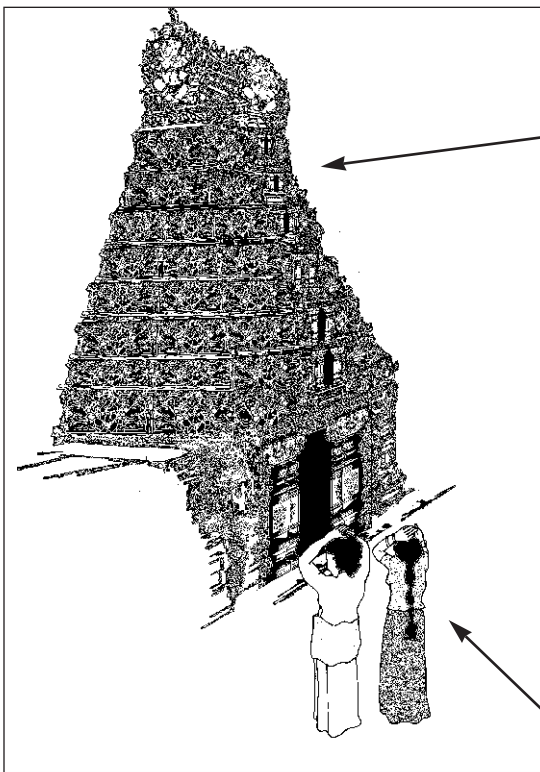
Worship means to love God. It means to think of God. It is awe and wonder. This love is our most powerful emotion. It is called devotion. It makes us feel good and pure. It is a love that goes to Siva. He can feel it. We feel this love mainly in our chest area, which is why it is said love is from the heart. When we worship, our love of God is strongest. It takes the place of all other feelings. We don't feel angry or jealous or tired or worried. We feel great joy.

Our worship brings us close to God. It works automatically. God loves us too. His love is for every person and animal and for the whole world. He does not worship us. Worship is love to God or a God much more spiritual than we are. The only person we worship is the Sat Guru. It is important to make this clear.

Worship has color. If we could see the color of worship, it would look light blue. When we worship this color surrounds us like a big egg or cocoon that stretches out farther than our outstretched hands. It is a beautiful color, soft and pure and makes us feel good to people and animals.

To Saivites, there are many locales of worship. Ultimately, Siva is everything, everywhere. But there are special places where the worship contact between God and devotee is deepest. The most important places of worship are our home shrine and the Saivite temples of Siva, Murugan and Ganesha. These holy locations naturally bring forth our worship devotion. We always behave at our spiritual best in these locations. We also worship at Saivite ashram shrines, Saivite guru samadhi shrines, and any nature locale—river, lake, mountain—sacred to Siva, Ganesha or Murugan.

Times of worship: the early morning before the sun rises is the most common time for the daily worship period. Families worship



We worship.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Most often we worship at the temple. Depicted here is a large, ornate temple gate through which the children are about to pass. Like a gate into a large mansion, the temple gate (called a gopuram) takes the devotee from the outside world into the inside realm of the temple. Our worship of Siva begins the moment we see any part of the temple. We see the temple gate or main sanctum tower rising into the sky. We worship Siva. In many countries the temple may not have a gate or tower. But you still worship at the sight of the temple building. This applies even if you are not entering the temple, but just passing by it.

The children are worshipping by doing the namaskar salutation over their head. This signifies the higher spiritual consciousness of the head region. It says the children are entering a state of worship for the highest Being. When you are riding a bike or driving a car, where the hands are occupied, it is customary to briefly touch the right hand to the heart area.

together in the home shrine. Monks living in ashram monasteries worship together in the ashram shrine. Then the day begins. Often people on their way to school or work will briefly stop outside a favorite temple and worship. It used to be that Friday evening was the customary time for the family to attend their favorite temple. But that is changing to the weekend.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The simplest analogy of worship is a child's love for his or her mother. Love of God is like the total, surrendering love of a child to mother. Mother is the supreme comforter in the child's universe. There is nothing a child can do, that the mother is not there as a source of love, comfort and kind direction. But much higher than mother is God. If a child can love God with the same love he or she feels for their mother, that is worship. Imagine how it feels

when you are in a large store and become separated from your mother's hand. She disappears into a large crowd. Suddenly you are alone and lost. Strangers surround you. You look around in fear. And call out in panic. There is only one thought in your mind, and one emotion, finding mother. Worship is such a state of single thought and emotion.

2. Doing a good deed for someone also stimulates devotional love. We feel selfless and good. This same devotion from a good deed, when expressed to God, is worship. For instance, let's say a young child picked some flowers for another child who is sick, and is at home in bed all alone. For the friend there is a very special joy in choosing the flowers and then giving them to another to bring cheer. This same special joy is experienced in worship.

3. Worship is also like the awe of watching

the night sky. We look out into this immense stretch of stars and space and are struck with wonder. Billions of galaxies, stars and the solar system planets circle overhead. Shooting stars streak across the sky. It fills us with wonder and makes us feel both large and small at the same time. This wonder is worship. It is the wonder of standing in the presence of God.

STORY READING

Three children once lived in a kingdom in India. There were wide rivers with ships and mountains often covered in clouds. There were towns and farming fields. Every town had a big Siva temple at its center. Its tower reached into the blue sky. The three children were best friends in a town in the mountains. They played with goats and climbed trees and threw rocks in lakes and built dams like the beavers. Everyday they walked on the road that passed the tall and thick walls of the stone temple. It was made of a pinkish red granite. They were on their way to study arithmetic and writing in the forest. Two of the friends always paused at the gateway of the temple. It was huge and they were so small. But it was comforting, like a castle of God. They peered into the shadows, into the inner courtyard and in to where the image of Siva stood, all aglow with flickering lamps. They didn't step in through the gate, but just stood outside. Their hands were held together at their chest and their eyes widened. Little crystals in the stone caught the sun and glistened like diamonds. A shadow of a large cloud moved over the inner temple courtyard, creating a sense of motion to the Siva shrine. The boys leaned in through the door to see better. Suddenly, the two friends felt a warm breeze wrap around them. But there was no wind blowing. Everything was still. No leaves moving. Their clothes didn't move. But the boys felt a force pushing on them, coming from the shrine, out toward them. It was gentle and almost like sunlight. They both felt it, and they looked down at their chest, where this blessing from Siva was tingling their skin. Then they looked at each other and laughed, for they felt very happy, more happy than when they were eating as many sweet balls as they could stuff in their mouths.

The third friend didn't pause in front of the temple gate each day. He didn't worship. He felt no love at the temple. It was like God was very far away, and the image of Siva in the temple was just stone. He

thought the temple was empty, and he didn't believe in the power of God. His heart was a little hard and his mind was a little cold. He had his two friends. But he was somehow lonely. Everyday his friends stopped at the temple. They always seemed to get a little brighter, like their cheeks had been rubbed with winter's snow. And they were smart. They understood the teacher more often than he did. Now, as his friends were laughing with such delight, he became curious. He walked over to the tall temple gate. And he suddenly felt a great feeling of love come into his chest. It made him feel so happy. It felt like Siva was right in front of him. From then on, he worshiped every day with his two friends.

WRONG THINKING

When we worship in a shrine or temple, we are *not* worshipping the stone or metal image of Siva or the Gods. That is wrong thinking. Saivite Hindus do not worship statues, even the statues enshrined in temples. If we are not worshiping the image, then what is it we are projecting our love and devotion to? We are worshipping the Soul Being that uses the image. Siva uses the image to send light and blessings and communications to the devotees. The image in the temple, therefore, is a tool. It is an instrument of the Gods. Here is an easy way to explain this to youngsters. The stone image is like a television set. When we watch TV we do not watch the television set itself. That would be like watching a piece of furniture. But we do watch the pictures on the TV screen that are being electronically sent from long distances away. The TV is a tool, an instrument. In the same way, we don't worship the temple image, but we do worship the God who sends energy from the worlds of light through the temple image to us.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson will connect with many in the future weeks and months. Since much of Book I covers the Deities we worship and a number of devotional practices it is important for the teacher to occasionally review this lesson.

HOMEWORK

Have the children practice watching their TV at home. First they watch the TV set, while it is off, as a piece of furniture. They just see the TV unit. This is like worshipping the temple image itself. Then they turn

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Color in the drawing of the children and temple. While the children are coloring have them try to feel love of God. They should color around the children with the color of light blue. That is what *worship love* looks like.

2. Have the children stand up and hold their hands in the namaskar greeting slightly above their heads. With eyes closed and breathing deeply and slowly they feel worship to God inside themselves. Their clasped hands above their head shows they are worshipping somebody much higher than themselves. Repeat this several times. Ask the children to tell what they felt when they did this.

3. Ask the children to briskly rub their hands together for a minute or so. This creates warmth by friction. Then they touch their right palm to their left arm and feel the warm glow from their palm. This is like the feeling of love. It is warm and healing.

4. Bring several large flashlights. Carefully cover them with a blue plastic material so blue light shines out. Darken the room with the flashlights on. Explain that our worship love shines out from us like this light. Pass the lights around so everybody can hold them and see the blue light coming from them.

on the TV and just look at it like a piece of furniture, like it was a book shelf. They ignore the shows on the screen. Again, this is like worshipping the stone or metal image in the temple. This is unnatural and wrong. Then the children watch the TV shows on screen as is normally done. You are not normally aware of the TV set itself. This is the correct understanding and practice of worship.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

The temple bell represents several themes for the young worshipper. First, it is often a prominent feature of the temple architecture. Second, it is a source of beautiful and powerful sound. Third, it sets the timing of worship.

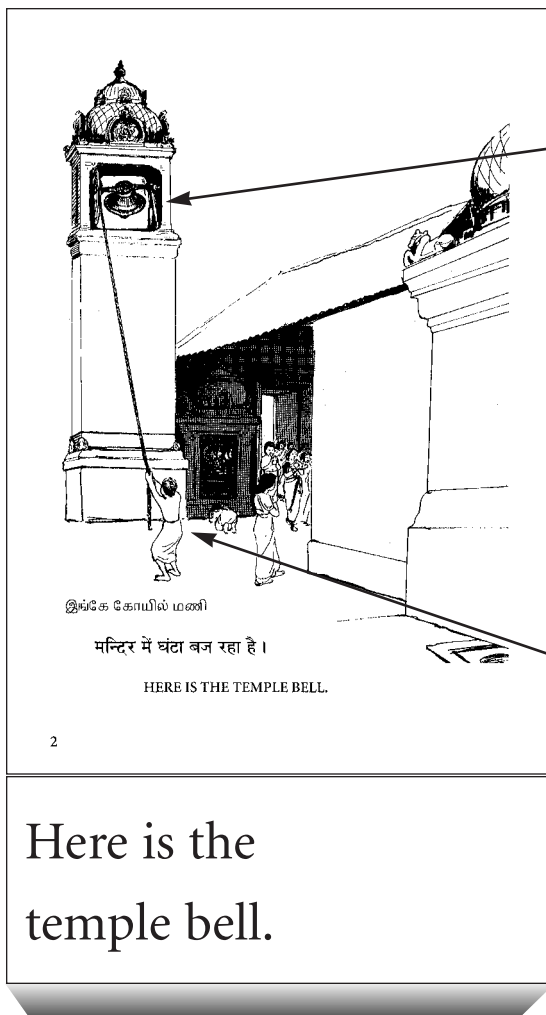
KEY PRESENTATIONS

Just as there are many sizes of houses, there are many sizes of temples. Big, medium and small. The large and medium size temples have special rooms or even tall towers for their large bells. Small temples may have a small hung bell or use hand bells. This is common in north India. But they all have bells. No temple is without bells of some kind. Anywhere a young Saiva Hindu may travel in the world, the temple they visit will have bells.

Often today the sound of the bells are played on speakers. This is a little sad. Recorded sound is not the same as real cast metal bells. And it means no one, not even little children, can actually ring the bells. One of the pleasures of going to the temple for a young boy or girl is to pull and hang on the big ropes to ring the bells. In Sri Lanka many large temples have tall towers for their bells. They are hung way at the top. People from a long ways away can hear them and see them moving back and forth. The sound of the bells ringing tells us that worship is starting at the temple. The sound of the bells can travel very far. Anyone that hears them, whether it be in the early morning, afternoon, or evening, will know it is time for puja. They will turn their attention to the temple. They may worship and offer a prayer. They may pause and think of Siva for a few minutes.

Bells are rung during the performance of the puja. The priests ring the bells as they wave incense and arati lights before the deity. When the main arati is offered to the deity, many or all of the bells in the temple are rung together. This marks the high point of the ceremony.

Some bells cast in India's ancient history are so large you can actually stand up in them. On occasion bells are carved entirely of stone, rather than metal. Many small temples have a large metal ring with numerous small bells attached. This ring of



Here is the temple bell.

bells is hung on the inside of the temple near the main sanctum. When the ring is shaken, all the bells wondrously sound together.

Hand bells come in many sizes, from so large it takes two hands to lift them to tiny bells that can be rung with two fingers. In the island of Bali, the Hindu priests use tiny bells that they ring during ceremonies with lots of intricate hand gestures. Hand bells are used in the home shrine. Often children will wake up at the sound of the morning puja bell being rung in their home shrine.

The sound of bells is especially lovely and uniquely powerful. Bells create a unique sound called chiming. Chiming bells sound naturally good to us, like listening to rushing water or singing birds. The bell tones are full, far-reaching, angelic, joyful. It is a spiritual sound. It inspires. The ringing

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is a temple tower as found in Sri Lanka. It is a common architectural design feature of temples in Sri Lanka, or of temples built by Sri Lankans in other countries. In India, this style is not common. But it is now becoming more widely spread in countries where Hinduism is fairly new.

Because it is high in the air, its sound can travel a long ways. People can also see it from distances. It becomes familiar to the townspeople. It is a landmark of security and well-being in God Siva.

For children, the opportunity to pull and ride on the bell ropes is a daily delight. Boys and girls are often lifted off the ground as the weight of the swinging bell takes the rope up. The youth become part of the temple experience as they ring the bell. They know it is part of the temple ceremony. They know people listen for it, even time their day around it. To have a real temple bell, rather than a recorded bell on a speaker system is far more desirable.

bells say that God is present. Chiming bells help children tune in to worship. They generate a vibration that is carried as waves through the air. The sound surrounds the youngster's body. It even goes inside their body, vibrating the organs and cells. This is easily felt along the spine of the back and neck.

Bell chiming also makes changes in the subtle atmosphere. The bell sound not only vibrates the air, but vibrates the astral atmosphere at the same time. The ringing bell causes the astral air to become clearer, less foggy. As a result the astral world deva people can see the physical world people more clearly to help them. The bells can be heard in the heaven world.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Hearing the temple bell, which alerts and reminds us that puja is about to begin, is like our alarm clock that we all use at home to wake up by. We set the clock to the desired time to wake up. We fall asleep assured that the clock will noisily buzz to wake us up for a new day. The temple bell always is rung at the same times of day. It is the temple's alarm clock. When we hear the temple bell we are "woke up" from our usual daily activities and remember to turn our minds and worship to Siva, Murugan and Ganesha.

2. To children, smaller bells often seem to talk. It is like they have voices, or like the deva angels talking through the bells. As the bell is ringing, a child can hear a message being said, some guidance to be good or to help someone, or to learn something new or to see life in a different way. So every time they hear a bell, it is like the deva angels speaking to them.

3. Often bell handles will be decorated with images of the faces or figures of Gods or the animal symbols of Gods. This is another reminder that the bell serves as a direct connection to the world of Siva, Murugan and Ganesha.

STORY READING

Ananda was an 8-year-old boy with dark black hair and brown eyes that squinted because he often stared into the white hot flames of a fire. This was not a cooking fire like his mother used at home. Ananda thought of the delicious smell of the cheese and garden pea curry his mom was cooking for lunch that day. It would taste so good, he thought. He had picked the peas himself that morning. His brown eyes looked at the orange and white wall of fire he was tending now. It was for melting metal. Ananda was in his father's metalsmith shop. It was huge, with several fire furnaces, lots of heavy black tools and neat stacks of metal like copper and tin. It was the largest metal shop in the city. His family was in China, where a large temple to God Siva was being built. His father was in charge of all the metal work. Today they were finishing a huge metal bell. It was as big as two farm carts stacked on each other. All the boys in the shop could easily fit inside. It would weigh as much as an elephant. The pouring of the bell had been two days ago.

It had taken all day since early in the morning and went late into the night. The hot fires and bubbling metal had shot orange light into the sleeping neighborhood. At times Ananda just wanted to lay down and sleep. But he was brave and strong. This temple bell was important. It was for Siva. Its booming sound would be heard all across the city, and even out to an island in the nearby bay. Not even in India did they have a bell like this. Ananda's job was to keep tending the bees wax that went inside the mold of thick clay. He did his job without complaining. And he sang Siva songs as he worked. He ate his meals on the run, chewing on a chapati, and some honey and roasted peanuts for energy. His mom had thought of that.

Ananda's father was over at the great bell mold. He directed workers who took down tall bamboo ladders. Today the mold would be carefully chipped away. The bell, called Siva's Voice, would be seen for the first time. There was a lot of excitement. Crowds of Hindus and Chinese Buddhists were outside. Slowly the mold was broken away. The golden brownish bell began to show through. It glowed as if it had its own light. It was perfectly smooth. Ananda ran his hand down the metal sides. It was like smooth ice. Finally, after several hours, the bell was free. It was magnificent. Everybody was silent. A great feeling of awe came over everyone. Even the crowds outside fell quiet. Ananda's father came up to the bell with a small hammer. It would be the first strike. The first sound from the bell. His father swung the hammer and it struck. Instantly, the bell gave off a wondrous chorus of sound. It was like musical thunder in slow motion. All the other metal in the shop vibrated. All the people could not help but smile at the beautiful sound. The one strike lasted for ten minutes, then died away. Ananda sat down as he heard it. To him, it was the voice of Siva.

CITIZENSHIP

Just as we as Saivite Hindus enjoy and look forward to the sound of chiming bells coming from our temples, we also respect the ringing bells of Christian churches, the beating of drums of Buddhist temples and the prayer call from Muslim mosques. It would be wrong for a Hindu citizen of a country to try and discourage another religion's daily calls to worship and prayer.

ACTIVITIES

1. Bring in several sets of hand bells. Set them in a line. Have the children form a circle around the bells, all sitting. Call up a child at random and have them go to the center and ring one of the bells of their choice in a rhythmic pattern. The other children close their eyes, listen to the bell, and then try to sing the same note and pattern as the bell. Make this a fast game. As soon as the bells is rung and children start to sing, call up the next child to ring the bell.

2. Direct several of the children to ring the bells together. The other children go outside, listening for the bells at a distance. They continue to go further way until they can barely hear the bells. They sit and just listen for the bells for a few minutes.

3. Make a circle of the children. They are the outside of a bell, the bell rim. Make a smaller circle of children on the inside. They are the bell knocker. The inside bell knockers move to one side of the bell rim circle. When they get real close to the bell-rim children on one side of the circle they sing out "ding" like a booming bell. When the bell knockers get to the other side of the bell rim circle, they sing out "dong." The bell knockers go back and forth.

CONNECTIONS

Bells are a standard feature of temples, home shrines and festivals, all discussed in Book 1 lessons. They can also be used at the beginning of a yoga meditation period to help create a pure atmosphere. The making of bells is also an art. It is a skilled craft. As well as sounding pleasant, bells are often quite beautiful to look at. It is good to appreciate the people who make the bells, especially if they are handmade. Bells at home should be polished often. They should shine with brightness. If a bell has been in the family for a long time, it should be treated as very special.

Notes:

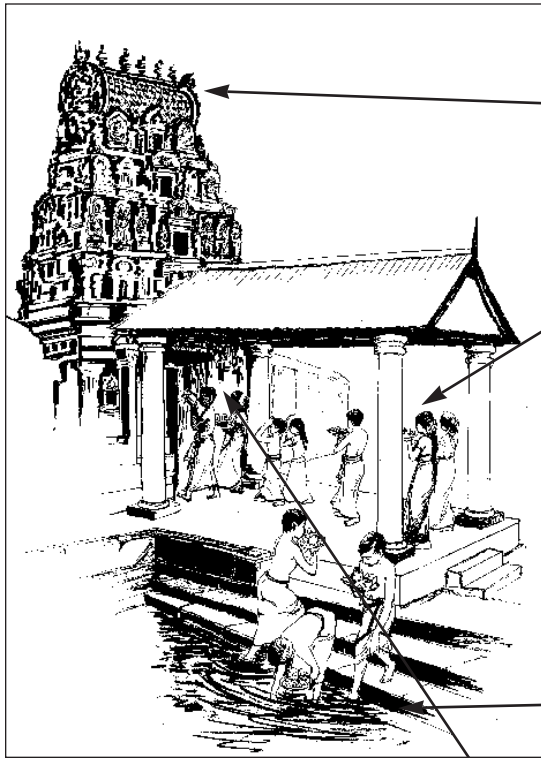
LESSON FOCUS

We go to the temple because it is a nice feeling to be near God. The temple is a sacred, holy, magical place, very different from any other place.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

1) We go to the temple because it is so happy and joyous to be near God. Most children will not expect much of an explanation—content that because their parents think it is important to go to the temple is reason enough. But some children will benefit—not to mention be really interested in—some useful and imaginative explanations of why going to the temple is important and such a joy. Of course there are many ways to describe the spiritual beauty and power of the temple experience, so feel free to share the feelings with them that impressed you as you grew up. They carry a special strength.

Before going too deep into the importance of going to the temple to be near to and enjoying being in God's home, remind children that actually God is in all things, lives everywhere and can be felt everywhere, not only in the temple. You should always keep repeating this idea that God is all-pervasive throughout the lessons as it is the foundation of many important principles, especially ahimsa (nonviolence) and compassion. Then explain that it is easiest to feel God's presence at the temple. And everyone loves to feel the presence of God. The feeling of God is of love and joy. The feeling of God at the temple is wonderful. Go ahead and be exclamatory like this. Let them have the highest expectation of the temple. Say sometimes the temple makes us feel like a bird soaring high in the sky, free. Sometimes it fills us with the warmth of bright sunshine. Sometimes it is like a soft, cool, nice wind. Sometimes it makes us feel like we are diving in a high mountain lake on a hot summer day. Sometimes it has a totally magical feeling like the first time we see snowflakes falling from the sky. Sometimes being in a Hindu temple is like like going deep-sea diving, diving into another world, so different, silent, deep, mysterious and filled with amazing colors and beauty. And sometimes it makes us feel like we are flying in outer space, weightless, among bright stars and galaxies and waving to all of them. And sometimes it is like being at a birthday party with lots of sharing, love, laughter and joy. But always it makes us just



Let us go to the temple.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

1. **Gopuram**, a temple entrance tower. It usually has many carvings on it. It is high so devotees can see it from a distance and think of God even if they are not going to the temple when they see it.
2. **Offerings in baskets.** We always bring a gift to the Deity at the temple when we go. It is just like taking a present when we visit someone we love. The gift to the Deity can be as simple as a flower or as much as a big basket of fruit and flowers, coconuts, incense sticks and camphor on special occasions. Usually, the priest will return some fruit and flowers blessed at the puja that we can take home with us as prasadam.
3. **Washing feet first in the temple tank.** Most temples have either a tank or a water faucet outside where you take off your shoes and wash your feet before entering the temple. This practice shows respect for how sacred the temple is.
4. **Knocking forehead.** It is an ancient custom to knock one's temples on either side of the forehead, especially when entering a Ganesha temple.

feel happier inside. Like God was inside of us suddenly, smiling, and we had to smile too because His smile was so strong.

So, for the Lesson “Let us Go to the Temple,” we have put some images in their minds of why going there can be so special and looked forward to.

Now for a little deeper discussion. What makes the temple so special and why do we say it is easiest to feel God at the temple than at other places? This will be gone into much more in later lessons but we want to make some simple explanations in the beginning too. Compare the temple to a telephone booth, a divine telephone booth. The priest calls up God using Sanskrit mantras like God's telephone number. Children will enjoy that visual image and it also gives a nice simple picture of what the priest is doing. Children are often unsure of what the priest does and this can lead to criticizing what he does because it is not understood. So comparing his chanting in Sanskrit to an operator calling God on a

divine telephone line gives children something concrete to use to understand what the priest is doing.

Minor point #1: God does not live only in the temple. Because a connection with God is made so often at this one spot, a feeling gets created, a Godly feeling, that is stronger than at other places. Tell them every time a puja is done and God is contacted or a devotee contacts God through heartfelt prayer or bhajan, some of this bhakti/shakti is left at the spot. After many years, the spot, or the temple, has a big invisible balloon of God's energy and feelings. So when anybody comes, they first can feel the big spongy balloon of God energy that has built up.

God does not live only in the temple. Every soul in the universe has a private, 24-hour cellular phone service with God. (You should explain what wireless mobile cellu-

lar phones are to the children if they don't know.) Our cellular phone connection to God is in our heart and we can reach God anytime 24 hours a day. This cellular phone image is important because we want children to always feel God is always with them, even when they are not at the temple. *“Most easily felt at the temple, not only felt there. For older children, you might add more subtly by explaining how private mobile cellular phones are not as reliable as an established telephone booth with permanent wiring etc. The temple is permanent, and very reliable. With cellular phones, if you go into a tunnel, they don't work. You can say how a tunnel is similar to when we get mad and dark and have a hard time contacting God at these times, but if we went to a temple it would still be easy. And sometimes with cellular phones, the batteries go dead, which you can compare to when we are tired, and don't have enough energy to call God. But temples always have energy so we can go there to be with God. So that is why God really likes temples, because they are very dependable—like a very fancy telephone service center where they have the best professional operators—the priests—placing long-distance calls to God for you.*

Minor point #2: God's energy is at the temple even at times pujas are not happening. Although we have called the priest an operator who calls God, we do not want to say that God is not at the temple at all unless a priest is there to call Him. You can also compare the temple to a reservoir, a big dam of water. Use one by name from your area or country and say how a temple can be compared to a reservoir. Just as a reservoir stores up water, so do temples store up God's energy. This reservoir image is valuable so children know that the temple has the sacredness of God all the time, not just during puja times.

Also we should encourage bathing and dressing nicely to go to the temple. Nowadays Hindus go to temples dressed very casually, even in logo tee-shirts and shorts. They treat the temple like an ordinary place and they lower the feeling of the place when they dress like this. If we go to the temple unbathe, wearing tee-shirts and sportswear, etc. we are not treating it special. But if we bathe first and dress nicely—men in a *kurta* shirt and women in a *sari* or *punjabi* outfit wearing flowers in their hair—this shows a lot of respect for the temple as God's home, and it makes the

temple feel really nice because everyone is looking so nice. Give some examples of how we can treat the temple like a special place: walking around the temple at least one time before entering, placing our shoes neatly, bringing an offering, flowers, etc. not talking loudly or joking, not running around, etc.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. One of the most beautiful images of a temple that can be created in a child's mind is that of a bubble. Tell that if they could see a temple with their third eye—and maybe some of them can and have seen this—they would see a beautiful big bubble surrounding the temple. This is the bubble that is created by all the times the Deity comes and all the love and joy that the devotees bring each time they come and all the light that comes from the temple devas—souls like us, who are usually between births, who are helping and serving at temples and live in the invisible atmosphere. So tell them each time they go to the temple not only are they entering a physical place but they are going inside a bubble, like into another world, into another dimension. This bubble is very real and forms the astral protective sheath of a temple.

2. A second beautiful image that helps unfold the magic of a temple for a young person is telling them that Hindu temples have a ray of light that goes through this bubble and into the earth. This ray of light is cosmic force from the Deity's shakti which is magnetized by the temple—like lightning is attracted by a lightning rod—and then goes down into the earth. Those rays of light actually bring peace to a whole community.

STORY READING

Here is a beautiful story to tell. In the 1970's in New York City, a Hindu man had an amazing dream. He was flying over New York City. Many, many Hindus who moved from India to the US were living in New York City but they had no temple. As he was flying, he was looking down and then he saw an old Christian steeple, a pointed tower that Christian churches usually have. All of a sudden, he went down and straight into the steeple and down inside the Christian church. When he was inside, it was all empty except that Ganesha was there sitting up in front looking at Him with a

ACTIVITIES

1. We are going to make a temple. Have the class, except for 6 of them, form three circles, one inside the other. Put four students in the very middle—three surrounding a fourth. The very middle one is Lord Ganesha. The three surrounding Him are Ganesha's spiritual energy. Then tell the fifth extra person that he (or she) is the pujari and should be positioned between the most outer and middle circle. The 6th extra person is a temple devotee and starts by standing outside all three circles. Ask all to Aum very softly. This is the sacred feeling of the temple. The outer circle is the temple wall. Have the devotee-student walk through outer circle, the temple wall. He is now inside the temple. Then have the pujari chant Aum Ganesha three times. As he or she does, students forming the middle circle and inner circle create openings in their lines so that the devotee can look into where Ganesha and His shakti is and Ganesha looks out to the devotee. Then the three students, Ganesha's shakti, rush out through the two gaps in the circles and go around the devotee auming, blessing her or him. The idea here is to show that the temple is not just physical, but is a way to open windows to the inner world where Siva, Murugan, Ganesha and other Mahadevas live.

smile. Then he woke up and called a friend who was in India and told him the dream. The friend knew that this was an important dream and flew to New York and the two men drove around that part of the city and actually found the old Christian church he saw in the dream. It was for sale. Very soon they bought it and tore it down and built a beautiful big Hindu temple there for Lord Ganesha.

HOMEWORK

Tell them that the next time they go to a temple, to try to feel at exactly what point they enter the temple shakti bubble. Even if they don't feel it, just trying to feel is fun.

WRONG THINKING

1. **It is ok for Hindu temples to be unclean, run-down and unlandscaped.** No. This is not OK. We all know both temples that are cared for and others that are not nicely cared for. Tell them that the temple should be the most beautiful place, nicer than a fancy hotel, and that if it is outside in a forest or by a lake, still, it should still be beautifully surrounded with flowers and plants. There is no excuse for not doing this.

LESSON FOCUS

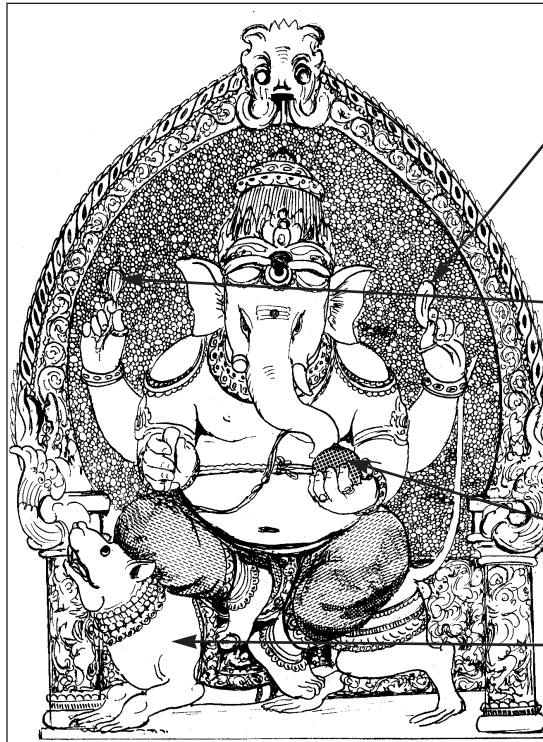
The main focus of this lesson is that Ganesha protects dharma. Dharma is a giant word that means many, many things—like spiritual conduct, duty, truth, inner laws—but the most useful definition at this age level is: “Dharma is the path to God.” Ganesha keeps this path, the *dharmā*, open and clear so there is always a clear path to God. Because Ganesha loves dharma so much, He is even sometimes called the Guardian of Dharma, among his many, many other names.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

1). Lord Ganesha, who He is. Ganesha is an amazing God who lives in the Third World, a real world of light where all the Gods have bodies made out of light. That is what the bodies of the Gods are like, very bright, light, and shining, but still looking like us. Tell the children to think of all the sunshine from the sun and moon and putting it inside one person and all the love of all mothers and fathers on the earth and all the intelligence of all the wise people on the earth and putting all that into that same person. And then add super all-knowing intelligence like a cosmic computer might have. That is like Ganesha and also like the other Gods too.

But Ganesha is a very special God. He has an elephant head. Isn't that amazing? We don't know any humans with an elephant head, (or elephants with human heads!) but this God really has one. Ganesha decided He would give Himself a second form—a form with the head of an elephant. One main reason He did this is so that when humans saw Him in visions and dreams they would know it was Ganesha immediately. Because Ganesha wants us to be able to know who He is easily and quickly—and Siva told Him to love, communicate and stay close to humans on earth—Ganesha took this form.

Another reason He took the form with an elephant head is because He is the great Godfriend of all the animals, fish, trees and flowers, etc. on the earth. He loves animals and flowers and fish and birds just as much as humans and took the form with an animal head, so animals would feel as close to Him just as humans do. And He chose an animal that everyone loves, an elephant. Also, everyone respects an elephant because they are so strong and also very smart. So Ganesha is a God for humans and animals



Lord Ganesha protects dharma.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

1. **Noose.** He uses this implement (which is actually a power of His mind) to pull positive conditions/situations/opportunities/events/lessons/people into our path that will help us grow spiritually.
2. **Goad.** He pushes negative conditions/forces/events and people away with this implement (which is, again, a power of His mind) that will slow down or stop our spiritual growth are not necessary for us to experience.
3. **Modaka ball.** This is a very sweet sugary pastry goodie that represents the idea that Ganesha is full of sweetness.
4. **Mushika, Ganesha's Mouse.** All the Gods have an animal or bird to travel on. Ganesha rides on a mouse. An elephant on a poor little mouse! Actually, though Ganesha is big, He doesn't weigh anything. In the Sivaloka, the world of the Gods, people and things are weightless. Ganesha chose a mouse because mice can get into very hard-to-get-to spots. Ganesha is like that because He too is extremely able and agile in getting into every little detail and corner of our minds and karma to better help us in our lives.

too.

Ganesha can appear, in dreams and visions, either with His human-like face or with His elephant head. Usually His elephant head. But whichever head He appears with, He always has the same human-like eyes. They are soft beautiful brown eyes—full of love, tenderness and intelligence.

Of course, small children have no real reason to question that a God would have an elephant head, but as they get older, they might hear people say who don't believe in the Gods things like, “Oh, Ganesha is just an abstract symbol of wisdom, not a real Being.” Or they might hear teasing comments from non-Hindus such as, “You don't really believe in a God who has an elephant head, do you!” So it is good now to assure them that Ganesha is real so that later questions and teasing will not affect them.

Defining dharma. We need to give the children a very simple definition of dharma

that will serve as the main foundation on which they build a deeper understandings they get older. “Dharma is good conduct, doing what is right, like obeying our parents.” Impress the children with the fact that even the sun and moon and stars observe dharma. Tell them that the sun always comes up in the morning because it is the sun's dharma. Imagine if the sun decided to sleep late and not come up and it just stayed dark until the sun decided to rise sometime in the afternoon. Aren't we glad the sun follows dharma, good conduct, and comes up on time each day? Think how unhappy all the vegetable plants would be who need the sunshine to grow if the sun didn't do its dharma and come up each morning.

Then tell them to visualize a long, beautiful road that had a magical golden glow and wound through valleys, through forests, over rivers and mountains and up

into the sky, up through the clouds to the Third World where Lord Siva lives. This path is dharma. When we tell the truth, and do things that our parents tell us to do and are nice to people, and say nice things to other people, then we stay on this happy path of dharma and reach God. When we tell lies, and do things that our parents tell us not to do and say things that make other people unhappy, then we go off this beautiful path called dharma and get lost until we get sad enough and come back and get on the path again.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. To help the children understand how big a mind Ganesha has, tell them to visualize a computer that is 100 kilometers wide and so high it touches the clouds. Think how much information can be in that computer. Now tell them Ganesha's mind/memory is even greater than this, and faster. He has instant access to all knowledge about our past lives and the way we feel and think, our hopes and fears, even at this very moment. But computers of course have no soul and are not intelligent. They just store information, tons of it and process it. Ganesha has information but He is also immensely wise and intelligent. The point here is that the analogy of the computer is useful only to help children visualize how much information and knowledge Ganesha has immediate access to all the time.

2. To better appreciate how bright and joyous He is, tell the children to visualize a sun inside Ganesha. See Ganesha as sort of see-through and all this brilliant sunlight coming out of Him in all directions is pure love. Remind them how big the sun is and how bright it is. Tell them that just as the physical sun cannot stop shining, Ganesha can never stop sending love out from Himself. There is no way He can stop waves of love flowing out of Him to all beings, humans and other creatures, in the whole universe. Isn't that fantastic? Then tell them that this feeling of a sun inside oneself will happen to them one day too as they grow spiritually and their soul body grows and burns away dark karmas, like the sun burns away the fog in the morning.

STORY READING

In the middle of the black night when there was no moon the volcano came to life. The

top of the volcano exploded with orange and yellow streamers of flame and big hot rocks and hot mud shot high into the night. It was volcano fireworks. It lit up the whole island of Bali, home of the Balinese Hindus. Bali is a small island with steep cliffs on most sides, off the coast of the big island of Java in Indonesia. Lovely stone temples built with tall pagoda-like towers lie all over this jungle island that the people call the meeting ground of the Gods. The main Siva temple, a huge area of multiple temples, large courtyards on terraces, and steep stairs was on the mountain slope of the volcano itself. This volcano was sacred to Siva. And it was still alive, erupting every one hundred years or so.

The roar of the volcano woke up Dharma instantly. All the houses in Bali were built of wood and bamboo and were open air—very few walls so the cooling breezes could blow through. Dharma jumped up from his grass mat on the floor and saw the volcano shooting up a giant fountain of fire and smoke. A huge river of red lava was flowing down the north side of the volcano. Dharma was 9-years old with a thick body and long black hair. He knew he had to get up to the great Siva temple and help protect it or save the sacred items. He had just woken up from a dream, a bright, rainbow dream. In the dream Lord Ganesha appeared, like a beautiful, pinkish elephant face on a big TV, and told Dharma that his dharma right now was to run up to the Siva temple and rescue the sacred Bell of Dharma. Then, the blast of the volcano woke him. He knew he had to do the good thing right now, the right thing to do in this good moment. It was a good moment because it was a time of need, and of testing. He liked being helpful and following the way of good conduct. That was Dharma's thinking of the way of dharma. He thought to himself, "I can't be afraid. I have the strength of Ganesha, the Lord of dharma, in my mind and muscles." He was already dressed in a white and yellow wrap-around verthi. So he quickly jumped through the house entrance, paused briefly before small, black stone Ganesha and ran for the road that led to the Siva temple up on the fiery volcano. He ran up the road as fast as he could, breathing hard. He found the steps, so very steep, that led up the volcano to the grand temple. He could feel the heat, and a black rain was falling on him. It was black ash from the eruption. His chest hurt from

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring a very lightweight, big plastic beach ball to class. (Blow it up at class.) It should be at least two feet wide, very light. bigger is fine. The ball is going to represent dharma, "acting in truthful, good ways." Have all the students form a big loose circle (single file is not necessary) and put one student in the middle, sitting down quietly, who is Ganesha. Tell them to throw the ball in the air and everyone tries to keep bouncing it back into the air, not letting it hit the ground. If it does, it means that dharma stopped. No one person is blamed but someone, anyone, quickly takes the ball and hands it to Ganesha and says, "Ganesha, please forgive us for letting dharma fall." Ganesha smiles, hugs the ball, aums three times and says, "Let dharma bounce high again!" and throws it back into the air for the group to keep up in the air as long as they can.

running and climbing, but he kept going. Lord Ganesha was giving him strength. He reached the first stone courtyard of the huge temple. It was all lit up with orange light and covered by black ash, but the lava flow was turning to the right. There were other people up there too. Many were priests. He followed one priest up more steps into a small stone shrine. Here was kept the Bell of Dharma. It sat on a deep red cushion with gold tassels. The bell itself had a long gold handle carved into an image of lightning. The bell was beautiful bronze and made a sound like rolling thunder. This bell started all the grand ceremonies. It could not be lost to the lava. Dharma took the bell carefully with both hands. It was heavy. He wrapped it in a thick white cotton cloth. Then he headed home, his dharma mission done.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

The main focus of this lesson is to tell the children that by going to, and/or praying to Ganesha first before starting anything new, our trip or project or event will be blessed and it will happen more smoothly than if we did not go and get Ganesha's blessings. It also introduces the biggest festival for Ganesha, Ganesha Chaturthi, His birthday.

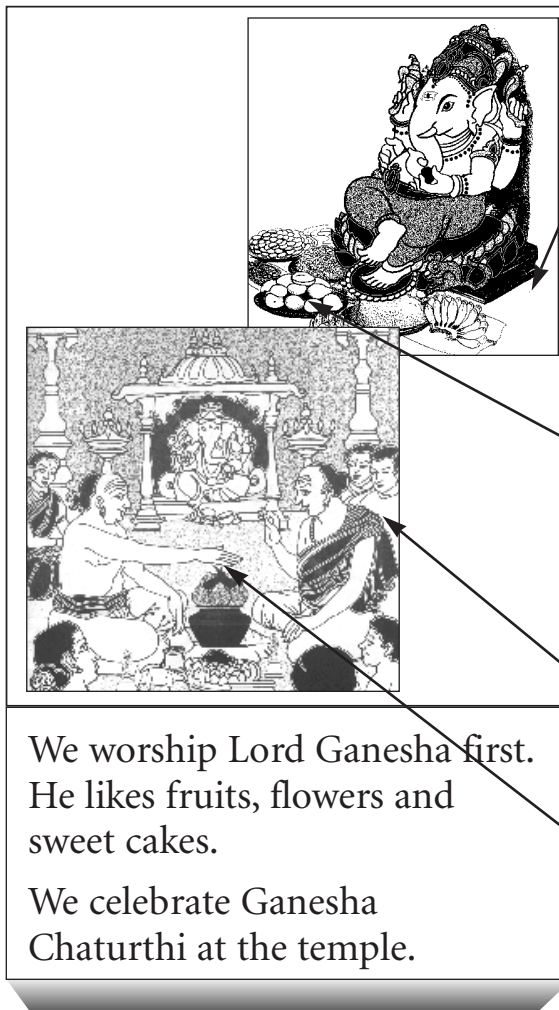
KEY PRESENTATIONS

We take all new new things we plan to do to Lord Ganesha to bless them and help make them successful.

We go to Lord Ganesha first before starting something new because this wonderful God has special powers to clear the path of our projects of various obstacles. He can see with His powerful mind by looking into the patterns of the future. This does not mean that just by praying to Him that automatically there will be no problems that arise in a project we have. We still all have our own karma to experience, both positive and negative. Ganesha does not ignore or erase this, nor does our prayer erase it. So the best teaching to the children will be that by praying to Ganesha for the success of an event, we assure that it will be more smooth, more successful than if we had not gone to Ganesha at all. But we don't want to tell the children that just by going to Ganesha and asking His blessings that a project will be without challenges. That is not true. Lord Ganesha loves it when we use all our own God-given divine will power, intelligence and creativity to make our own projects successful. Then He is very happy to assist.

But why do we pray to Lord Ganesha first, and why not Lord Murugan or even Lord Siva? The reason is that Lord Siva appointed Lord Ganesha the Gatekeeper. This is a very nice name for Ganesha, the Gatekeeper—one of His hundreds of names, by the way—and it means that He stands at a gate (not an actual gate, that is just an image to understand) between the inner worlds and outer world, our *Bhuloka* world and the inner world of the Devaloka. This makes Him close to us, just like a gatekeeper is close to visitors of a palace. A gatekeeper is the first one you see and the first one you would tell what you need or who you want to see.

But Ganesha is more than just a gatekeeper of a palace, the inner worlds. He is also like a king in many ways too, even sometimes called *Ganapati*, Lord of the *Ganas*. He is the inspirational guide for so many devas of many inner realms. Millions



We worship Lord Ganesha first. He likes fruits, flowers and sweet cakes.

We celebrate Ganesha Chaturthi at the temple.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

It is traditional to offer fruits and flowers to all the Gods, so in this respect, Ganesha is like the other Gods who enjoy fruits and flowers too. But Ganesha, even more than the other Gods, likes to be offered sweets—pastries and candies and cakes etc.

The round *modaka* ball, (seen in the picture in Ganesha's hand and in the plate in front of him) which can be made many ways, is one of his favorites. You can tell the children one of the reasons Lord Ganesha likes to be offered sweets, is that He knows that all that is offered to Him is blessed and then offered back to the devotees.

Notice that the men and boys are on the right, the women and girls on the left. Lesson 46 discusses this.

Here the priests are using their hands in special *mudra* "seal" positions to channel spiritual energy into the kumbha pot. The pot contains water. Water absorbs spiritual energy. Then the water is poured over the Ganesha image in the background.

of devas of all shades of spiritual capacity help Him. Ganesha can, for example, even send messages to raincloud devas and ask them not to rain at a certain spot on a certain day if one's karma is really good and a person has prayed for sunshine. Or He can ask the raincloud *devas* to rain for a farmer who prays to Ganesha for rain for his vegetable plants that need water. The raincloud deva, the farmer and Ganesha are all mystically one in this magical process.

Ganesha Chaturthi is the biggest festival for Lord Ganesha. It is like the birthday of Lord Ganesha, the time when we celebrate His creation by God Siva. Now the creation of Ganesha by God Siva would have been very long ago, far beyond any time frame the young children can imagine. It is so long ago, it was before the Earth and our moon and our stars were created. Since Ganesha is so close to us, helping us with many of our interests and goals in life, Ganesha Chaturthi is one of the best times to offer our love and thankfulness to Him. This fes-

tival is celebrated at His temples all over the world by Hindus all over the world. This is a world-wide festival. It is a very fun festival for children. There is usually plenty of good sweets and birthday cakes to eat. There are more birthday cakes for Ganesha than any other person on Earth.

Minor point #1: Give Ganesha as much advance notice as possible. Say a child was going to start a new little flower garden in the back yard. Then it is good to say a prayer to Lord Ganesha at least three days before. This gives Ganesha time to make adjustments that will help remove obstacles in the future success of the garden.

Minor point #2: No project or plan is too small to pray to Ganesha first for. Some children always say "Om Ganesha" before they go anywhere on their bicycle—just the same as their parents do when they get in a car and say "Om Ganesha" before they drive

anywhere. This is asking Ganesha to make the trip safe so neither does the child fall off the bike, nor does the child bump into someone and hurt someone else.

Minor point #3: If a project, plan or trip worked out really well, we should thank Ganesha afterwards. Lord Ganesha and His helper devas are just like us in the sense that they too like to be thanked. So it is nice when we have first prayed to Ganesha for blessings and our project, plan or trip then worked out really well, that we thank Ganesha for this. This can be done by a visit to the temple with a little offering, or a prayer before we go to bed in our home shrine room or a letter/note burned in a temple homa fire. Being thankful is part of Hindu culture.

Minor point #3: Ganesha does not help negative prayers. If Ganesha gets a prayer from someone who asks Ganesha to hurt somebody else that this person is mad at, Ganesha does not respond. Ganesha responds only to prayers that are positive, thought up with a feeling of love, helpfulness, joy or sincere need.

STORY READING

This is the real-life story of a Hindu girl who lived in Hawaii and had a vision of Ganesha. She was living with her parents and brother in a very simple, tiny wooden house perched high up on a lush green mountainside that sloped down to the Pacific ocean which was so big it looked just like an upside down sky. Looking out from her porch, the view of the emerald-green and sapphire-blue ocean was so beautiful, she felt like she was in heaven. She felt like a princess looking out from her "palace." This was a coffee farming region. Her nearest neighbor was very far away. It was very, very peaceful and very quiet. Her father was a hard-working farmer.

When the school bus dropped her off at a spot on the highway, she would hike up the mountain on a bumpy dirt road to her house about half a mile. Then after she left her books at the house, she would hike even further up the slope to a bamboo grove where a swami had blessed a spot for a temple to be built. She had asked him if she could do a little daily puja every day to help bless the spot until the images of the Deities arrived from India to help keep the vibration sacred. So each day, she would pick flowers and get a little fruit like papayas or bananas that grew around her house and walk up and did a little *arati* at

a rock the swami said was where the Deities would be put. She kept a little camphor, incense and an arati lamp at the site. She was all alone and never missed doing this, not even once for six months. Many times it would rain very hard in the afternoons. Still she hiked up and did the puja, always smiling. She loved Ganesha. Her puja always felt magical.

Then one day something amazing happened. (Years later, she told the story to some children who were wondering if the Gods were really real. It was recorded. These are her words.) "It all started with a funny feeling that something really unusual was going to happen. I was on the telephone and was telling one of my friends that something unusual was going to happen. Just as I was saying that the electricity went off. So I got kind of excited and thought that maybe that was what was going to happen. It was just after dark. Later I found out that the two murthis of Ganesha and Murugan had arrived at the dock on our island just that afternoon. I was in the kitchen helping my mom. We had candles. It was dark. And up there in the mountains where we live it gets really pitch black at night. Then all of a sudden, I just had this feeling come over me. You know, where you almost get chills when you know something is going to happen. I looked up. I wasn't looking with my two eyes, but it would seem like I was. I was looking with my third eye. I just started talking and saying what I saw. First it was just a little tiny light as big around as two fingers put together. It was blue and it had white on the outside of it. I thought I wonder what that is. I kept talking to my mom and as I telling her what I was seeing. She was right next to me. She kept saying, "Where? Where?" She couldn't see it. I kept describing every detail. My family got real worried. The ball kept getting bigger and it was coming from the direction down toward the ocean toward where the murthis arrived at our island's little seaport that day. I found this out later. It was coming straight for the bamboo forest. I remember very clearly that I wasn't using my two physical eyes because I remember being able to almost see the trees and things but at the same time there was this ball of light, a bubble. As the bubble got closer, I could see two somethings inside of it, two figures. As they got closer and closer I saw Ganesha was on the left. Murugan was on the right. The thing I remember the most about it was the specialness of the feeling of what they were

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Tell the students beforehand to bring flowers, some little sweet and a piece of fruit to class. Choose one of the students to be Ganesha. a boy or a girl. Have Ganesha sit down with legs crossed and smiling. If you have a ganesha mask, which is quite common temple item for dramas, bring that, too, and the student can be wearing the mask. Then everyone comes up and offers fruit, flowers and sweets to Ganesha as the rest sing "Ganesha Saranam" or any simple Ganesha song they know. The fruit and sweets are put in front of Ganesha. Let the students put the flowers all over Ganesha, decorating Him nicely. this will, of course, be very funny for most and cause a lot of laughter. this is fine. Then Ganesha eats a sweet and a bite of a fruit. He waves His hand over all the offerings and says, "Thank you for your love offerings. Here, now you enjoy too." And Ganesha hands out a piece of fruit and sweet to all.

enclosed in. It was almost as if it was a time capsule from outer space. Ganesha had on a white cloth tied in the front at waist level and they both had on a *lot* of flower garlands, really lots, like about ten, with really incredibly beautiful flowers. Murugan was wearing orange, and really tall and just beautiful and smiling. He had his peacock. It was walking on the left hand side. I remember that they were walking inside this ball of light. Their feet were moving but they weren't touching any surface. They had anklets around their feet with flowers. They just smiled at me. And I'm looking at them and I'm going, "Oh my God, I can't believe this is happening. Then it started to pass over our house and right up toward the bamboo and disappeared from my sight. I had a real strong feeling that they had come to bless me for the pujas that I had done. I felt really privileged. I did this for six months and never missed one day. A couple times when I was up there I saw Ganesha, just His eyes, smiling at me"

WRONG THINKING

Ganesha will remove all obstacles if we pray to Him first. No. The Gods are not like puppets who do everything we tell them. Neither do they have us and human events on strings that they just pull according to what they want. Each human being has to experience his or her karma. The Gods help us in that experience, softening difficult karmas and making positive ones brighter. But the key is that they help us help ourselves. That way we grow, get stronger. Our soul grows.

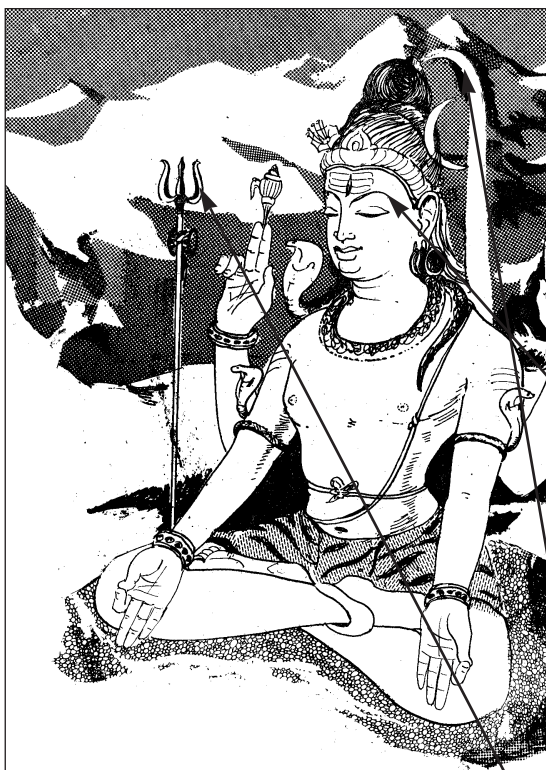
LESSON FOCUS

The idea of a supreme God, what it means to be supreme. The course's first introduction to "Aum Namah Sivaya," the most important and powerful spiritual saying in Saivite Hinduism.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

All the children in the class know from their own experience that there are many, many people in the world. They see hundreds of people every day. Sometimes when they go to festivals or sports events or concerts they see thousands of people. On television they can see millions of people. There seems to be no end to the amount of people on Earth, over 5 billion now. Children are also aware that a few people are very important in the world. They help and guide and protect large groups of people. They could be spiritual leaders or government leaders. These leaders are smart and skilled. They want to improve. They know how to lead. They know how to get things done. They are supreme. They are above the people who have a duty in society to follow. They lead the people who follow them. This could be in a country or a religion that exists in many countries. But on Earth, there is no one supreme leader. There is no leader that is above all the rest. Never in history has there been a one human supreme leader.

Now, just as there are so many types of animals and insects, and so many millions of people on Earth, there are many millions and millions of people who have bodies of light and live in worlds of light. There are so many that we could not begin to count them. We call them *devas* (angels) and Gods. These devas and Gods have many powers. They help and guide everybody on Earth and on many other planets too. The devas or angels are obedient to the Gods or Lords. They follow the leadership of the Gods. The Gods are very spiritual people of light. Their bodies give off light like a very bright rainbow. They are so smart they know all knowledge and even our future. There are many Gods. Lord Murugan and Lord Ganesha are Gods. But there is only one supreme God. There is one Lord who is the highest, the first God. He is the brightest, the most powerful, with the greatest mind. He is Siva. He is God. Siva is the supreme person. His mind is everywhere. His love is everywhere. His power is everywhere. Siva's light completely goes through



The Supreme God is Lord Siva.
We say "Aum Namah Sivaya."

everybody on Earth. He is the supreme leader of earth and all worlds and all people. He leads by love and wisdom.

Siva's name is very powerful. It means perfect goodness. It is always favorable. *Siva* means that which is always good for us. *Siva* is the beauty of a sunrise across the mountains. *Siva* is the power to push our planet Earth around the sun. Often, during the day we want to talk to God Siva. We want to call His name. It makes us feel good to say His name, which is also His power. The best way to say God's name is to say, "Aum Namah Sivaya." This means, "Adoration to Siva." "Aum" is the sound of the universe. Adoration is our highest love for God. If we see something good or beautiful—a mother and child, a gift to a beggar, a man petting a dog, moonlight on a pond—we can say "Aum Namah Sivaya." Or if we want to change something from bad and ugly into goodness, we can say "Aum Namah Sivaya" and know their lives will change in the future.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is a picture of Siva that is commonly seen. There are many symbols in it. Lord Siva is seated in meditation in the Himalayan mountains of north India, His traditional earthly home. Siva's spiritual light is inside the Himalayas. Sometimes we can see Him through the rock and snow of the mountains. Siva is in meditation. He is one with everything and everybody. He knows all knowledge of the past and future. Out of his meditation Siva creates all worlds and all people from His own mind. We see that by his Third Eye symbol.

The river Ganga pours from Siva's hair. This means Siva is the creator of the entirety of Earth's environment. Siva made our planet with oceans, rivers, lakes and all the mountains, plains, deserts and coasts.

The trident of Siva tells us He has three supreme powers. He has supreme Will, supreme Knowledge, supreme Energy. Siva is Lord of the entire universe.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Supreme generally means something or somebody that is over others by virtue of power, position or ability. For instance, Mt. Everest is the supreme mountain on Earth because it is the tallest. It is higher than all other mountain peaks on Earth. When standing on the peak of Mt. Everest, and if there was a clear view, you could look down on all the other mountains and valleys and glaciers and see everything about them. Because we are higher we have more knowledge. We see more. We know more. We can do more. If we are on a lower mountain and are looking up at Mt. Everest we cannot see everything about the Everest peak. Our knowledge is limited. The supreme does have mystery about it.

2. There are many Gods. But there is only one Supreme God. This is like the British

system of government. There are many ministers, but there is only one Prime Minister. He or she is the supreme minister, the one with the most ability, power and command.

3. When we say “Aum Namah Sivaya” to ourselves it is often to make us feel better if we have been hurt. Someone said something that hurt our feelings. Called us a name. Or if mom got mad at us because we didn’t eat a certain vegetable. Or if we sprained an ankle. At these times of sadness, Siva’s name can make us feel better. It is like an ointment that makes the pain go away. It is like aspirin that relieves the headache. So we say “Aum Namah Sivaya” and start to quickly feel better.

STORY READING

The ocean waves came crashing against the dark rocks. Spray jetted up like water fountains. The blue and silver water rolled up into long waves. Foam bubbled at the top. With a great roar the waves hit the wet rocks. Every day and every night as the moon drifted overhead the waves hit against the rocks. It never ended. A little boy loved to watch the waves. His home was on the coast of South Africa. He lived near a beach that had lots of huge rocks. They looked like shipwrecks. Seaweed hung from them. Seals played around them. Starfish clung to them. The beach was the boy’s private place. He came nearly every day. Even when grey clouds covered the sky and sheets of rain poured he came to watch the sea waves, to watch the life of the sea. His family was Hindu. They had a nice store that sold grocery items for the coast town. But they didn’t sell any meat or fish or fowl or eggs. They were devotees of God Siva. The boy had been taught that Siva was alive in all creatures. To even take an egg to eat was wrong. He liked those ideas. At the beach, she knew all the crabs and mollusks and starfish and tide pool fish. They were his friends. The tide came in, and the water flowed around his feet. And he watched all the tide pool creatures sway with the silvery rush of the water. Then, he would move on to the rugged brown and grey rocks. He had a secret passage that took him up through one rock that was like a house. It had little rooms in it made by the waves constant crashing. If the waves were small, he sat in one of these rooms, looking out. It was evening. The sun’s fire was dripping into the ocean. Clouds driven by wind had the sun’s sunset fire painted on

them. And the waves were mirrors. As the waves hit, hid rock house shook. His body trembled. To him, this was the living power of Siva. Every few minutes another wave rolled in, rising like a horse and kicking at the rock. The rock thumped like a drum. He thought this is how Siva is supreme. He is the waves traveling through all creation. His power never ends. He is the ocean of life. And with the rhythm and sound of the waves, he would start saying softly to herself, “Aum Namah Sivaya.” Each time a wave rushed toward him he said Siva’s name. He felt as if part of him became the waves and ocean. He felt part of Siva.

BACKGROUND

Many non-Hindus have interpreted Hindu primary scripture—the *Vedas*—as invoking many Gods, but not recognizing a single supreme Deity. This is called polytheism. And even today, Hinduism is often presented by non-Hindu educators and texts as being polytheistic. This interpretation was begun by Christian clergy and researchers to show that Christianity was superior to Hinduism because it had a one God. Historically and psychologically, this was a purposeful distortion to help the Christian conversion campaigns. In reality, the *Vedas* clearly and repeatedly describe a one Supreme Being who creates and guides all Gods, devas and people, whose energies and mind wholly are the universe.

CONNECTIONS

Compare Siva to Ganesha. Lord Ganesha is not the supreme God. Lord Ganesha is one of many Gods who have special powers and duties. Ganesha looks to Siva as the ultimate God.

HOMEWORK

Ask the children to think of God Siva each night before they go to bed and fall asleep. They should see Siva in all the stars in the night sky. If there was one brightest star that suddenly lit up so bright it filled the entire night sky, that would be Siva. That would be the supreme star. Its light is the power behind all the other stars. Have the children think of this as they fall asleep.

WRONG THINKING

Many Hindus think of Siva as the destroyer, following a wrong notion that Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Siva the destroyer. This would mean there are three co-equal supreme Gods—a very wrong and unenlightened understanding.

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring a strong flashlight. Arrange for a large box, big enough for one, two or more children to fit under, to be at the classroom. It must be totally opaque to light. Place it with the bottom side up, and the top side open to the ground so the children can go under the edge and be inside the box. Cover it with a thick dark cloth that drapes down and over the floor around the box. But leave one small area on the edge of the top side open. In this area, take a small nail or thick needle and make a pin-size hole. Cover the hole tightly so no light gets inside. One, two or more children crawl under the box. Turn out all the lights in the classroom. It should be pitch dark for the children inside. They start to chant Aum Namah Sivaya, and after a short while the other children quickly remove the covering of the pin hole while shining a bright flashlight into the hole. The incoming light to the children in the box represents Siva as the supreme God in the universe as they chant Aum Namah Sivaya. The children take turns under the box.

2. Split the class into four groups. One of the groups is the Supreme God Siva. The other three groups are Gods. The Supreme God group thinks up something for the other Gods group to do that is good and helpful, like helping poor people get better homes. They tell that to the other Gods groups. The Gods groups then think what they can do to accomplish that helpful task. As the other Gods groups are thinking and planning, the Supreme God group move around in a circle saying Aum. They are maintaining the power of the universe.

God Siva is the Supreme Being, the First Soul who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of all existence. Destroyer is not the best word for understanding this process. It is more like *changer*, for one thing is changed into another thing. For example, water is changed into snow. Ice is changed back into water. Also things are changed into more fundamental forms. For example, a dead leaf breaks down into soil.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

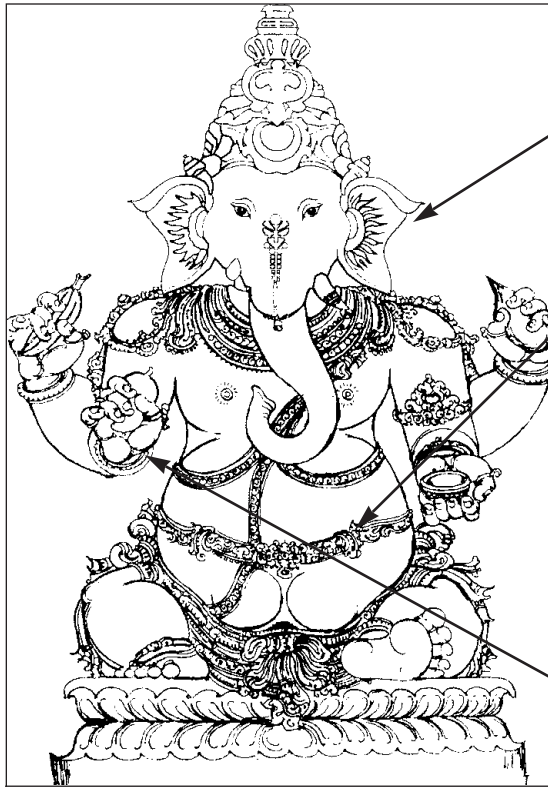
The focus of this lesson is very, very simple—we want to impress on the children that more than any other idea or feeling they should hold of Siva, it is that He is pure love and happiness.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Love and happiness are the two most sought after feelings in our world. If a person has love in their heart and is happy that person is considered very fortunate by all. Many people feel that love and happiness are something outside of them. Love and happiness can be gained by having a lot of money, a big house, very expensive cars and clothes and perhaps even power over other people. That is what many people think makes them happy. Many people think that love is a feeling other people should give to them. They think that to give love to someone else depends on how they are treating us. If they are mean to us, or don't give us what we want, then we don't love them anymore. So most people go through life with love and happiness as kind of thin clouds they are trying to grab hold of, but their hands just go right through.

Now, actually the children all have a very deep ocean-like feeling of love and happiness and joy and bliss already inside of them. Love and happiness are already there inside of them as a part of their soul, as a part of their divine nature. The children don't need to have the latest popular toy to be happy. The children don't need everybody to like them and do them favors to feel pure love. Happiness and love are within us. They are as real a part of our mind as thoughts. All we do is move our mind into the "happy" land of the mind. We send our thoughts, like bubbles, to the "happy" land. And in doing this the children are actually working with the very fabric of consciousness itself. They are moving their consciousness—this is like a personal ball of mind—out of a sad area into another area, a happy area. If the children were to continue moving their personal ball of mind into deeper and deeper, and more intense layers of happiness, they would come right into the very Mind of Siva. Riding their personal ball of mind—their consciousness—the children would bump right into the very source of love and happiness: God Siva.

God Siva is the source of love and happiness. He is the Supreme Soul. The very powers of love and happiness are ever-streaming



Ganesha says “Lord Siva is love and happiness.”

out of Siva. Siva means “auspicious” or “ever good” and the purest love and happiness is always radiating from that perfect goodness. The soul is made of light. It is a kind of light that we do not see in our physical world. This light is so pure, so powerful that a giant star far bigger than our sun could be made from one very tiny, tiny flash of this light. It is like white diamonds and red rubies and green emeralds and blue sapphires turned to light that is stronger than our hardest steel on Earth. This is the light of our soul body and of the Siva Supreme Soul. If we were to barely touch that light with our fingertips, we would instantly be filled with an indescribable love and happiness. The intensity of love and happiness we would feel coming from God Siva would be so great that the children could not sit still. They would literally have to get up and jump for joy. They would be filled with the very energy of love and happiness.

When we even think about God Siva—just have the children begin to think about

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

1. **Big ears.** Yes, very big ears. Ask the children what ears are for. Yes, listening. Ganesha has big ears because He is the very best listener. He never get tired of hearing all your worries, problems, hopes and dreams. Talk to Him often.
2. Ganesha is often shown in pictures with a **big round belly.** His big belly tells us that in a magical way the whole world is inside Him. Or, you could say it another way—He is inside the whole physical world. Have the children visualize both the round earth inside his stomach and have them visualize the planet earth and Ganesha inside it. In both images, you can impress on the children how close He is to us, not “way far away somewhere.”
3. **Mango and banana.** Never miss the opportunity to repeat how much Ganesha likes sweet candy-like fruits. If He likes fruits and sweets, children figure He is at least a little like them!
4. Good to just remind the children that this is a drawing, an artist's drawing of Ganesha. We are not a comic book religion and the Gods do not look like every artist's painting. Pictures just help us a little visualize the Gods.

Siva— they will automatically begin to feel a warm love and happiness. It is automatic. In the shrine room at their home, this feeling is even stronger. At the Siva temple, it is very strong. When we sit in personal yoga meditation, it is even stronger. When we sit in front of a satguru—who personally experiences the full power of Siva's love and happiness—then it is extremely strong.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

Ask the children to remember the happiest moment of their life. Then tell them to multiply that a trillion times. Siva is even happier than that all the time. Amazing isn't it!

Have the class visualize a tidal wave. First, make sure everyone knows what a tidal wave is—a huge wave on the ocean created by an earthquake or volcanic eruption un-

der the ocean. Make it about a mile high. Then say it's coming toward the coastline of whatever country the children in the class live. A mile high means that no matter how far inland they live it's going to reach them! Now, tell them to turn the tidal wave into pure love and happiness. It is sparkling energy, twinkling lights, like the electric lights at Diwali time. It is all colors of the rainbow. There are magical fish jumping on the top of the wave and thousands of beautiful little beings of light dancing inside the wave. Let the children describe this visualization from their imagination. If this doesn't work well, don't worry, just go ahead with the image. Let the wave finally reach land and start flooding the first towns. People who were not nice, started to say nice things. Storekeepers who would never give anything away for free, gave away things to the hungry.

STORY READING

Namaste! My name is Shantini. I am 9-years-old and I live in Nadi, Fiji. For those of you who are reading this story of mine and have never heard of Fiji, don't feel bad. I don't know a lot of places where other Hindu children like me live. So we are both "in the same boat." But just so you know, Fiji is a little island/country in the South Pacific and is a beautiful place to live—except for one day last month. I tell you what happened.

I was at my bus stop waiting for the school bus and some girls who were not Hindus were giggling. Then I heard them say something about "God with an elephant head" and they looked over at me and laughed even harder. I knew they were making fun of Ganesha, making fun of my religion and laughing at me for being a Hindu. I had just read the lesson the day before that says, "Ganesha says God Siva is love and happiness," and then this! Just the opposite of love and happiness. I felt like asking Siva why, if He is love and happiness and He lives inside everyone, why are some people so unloving and try to make others unhappy. How could this be in Siva's universe? I was also mad, angry, and part of me wanted to say something just to "get back at them." Anyway, I went to school that day and felt rotten all day and came home and went to my room and sat in front of my picture of Siva and asked Him to help me figure all this out. I was sitting there looking at His picture and thinking about those girls giggling at me and how awful it made

me feel, when the most amazing, incredible thing happened. A giant wave of love came right into my body—flooded me, totally, head to toe. My anger washed away. It's hard to explain if it's never happened to you. But I suddenly felt like loving everybody, not even like I had a choice, more like I was just love itself and it is was coming up from inside me like a fountain, geyser or volcano and just pouring out of me and making what felt like a sparkling bubble around me a little bit like that shower of sparkling energy in *Star Trek* when they say, "Beam me up Scottie."

Anyway, there I was sitting in my room and I had turned into love. If you asked me my name at that moment, I would say "Love." If you don't believe me, I don't blame you, it sounds really weird. But you should believe me because it really happened.

As I as sitting there, I thought of those girls. I now had zero hate for them. In fact, I felt sorry for them. Really sorry. Can you believe it? I could see that the unkind way they treated me—and probably others—actually blinded them to the core of themselves, love, Siva. This sounds pretty complicated, but when it happened it was so simple, so clear. I could just see that they were sort of blind, almost like crippled people. And I could "see." I felt sorry for them.

I continued to sit there feeling this totally absolutely amazing giant bubbling feeling of love thrilling me for about twenty minutes. It then became less strong but the feeling stayed in my body for several days.

The next morning at the bus stop I saw the girls again. As I approached them, they started to giggle. I walked up to and said "Good morning" and smiled a smile about as big and happy and full of warmth as the sun. They said, "Good Morning" real softly back to me and started to talk about something else.

Now I didn't become a saint or anything and I didn't even tell me Mom about this right away it was so incredible. I don't even know if this story has a clear lesson because the problems that we children have with other children are different for each of us and things still happen to me that can get me annoyed or kind of down. But what I can tell you for sure is that love and happiness are very, very real things, the core of life, the center of me and you, God Siva. I know that now for sure. So when I get unhappy about anything, I always think back

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Tell the students to all think of something that they have done wrong, or an action that someone else has done wrong or some action that they just think up. (Examples are: refusing to eat some food at a meal that they didn't like, crying about having to go somewhere that they didn't want to go, complaining that they didn't have a toy that a friend has.) Then select someone to be Siva, who sits in lotus position and smiles. Any kind of costumery to make Siva look more like Siva is good. then have each student go up to Siva, sit in front and relate out loud to Siva some action that was not very nice to do and then ask for Siva to forgive them. To each, Siva smiles and says, "Thank you for telling me this. I know you will now act better. Because my nature is love and happiness, I am never sad and always full of love. I love you and send you my happiness now and always." The fun for the children is thinking up, relating from personal experience and hearing other's actions they think would make Siva unhappy and unloving and then seeing how Siva remains pure love and happiness no matter what He hears.

on that day and some of that feeling of total infinite love lifts me up. I know it is Siva. One day I hope you have an experience like I had. It can happen anywhere to anyone, anytime.

WRONG THINKING

Siva is married. No, Gods are not married like humans. Sometimes they are shown with wives and husbands. These consorts represent their various powers and abilities.

Siva is a man. No, God Siva is not a man. Nor a woman. God has a soul body, the first, most magnificent soul body—totally perfect, beautiful. The soul body is not male or female, though it looks like a nice blend of both. The soul body is made of light and naturally they have no digestive and reproductive organs like we have who have physical bodies for life in the first world. Our soul body is also sexless, like Siva's, neither male nor female. This is an important point to tell the children.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

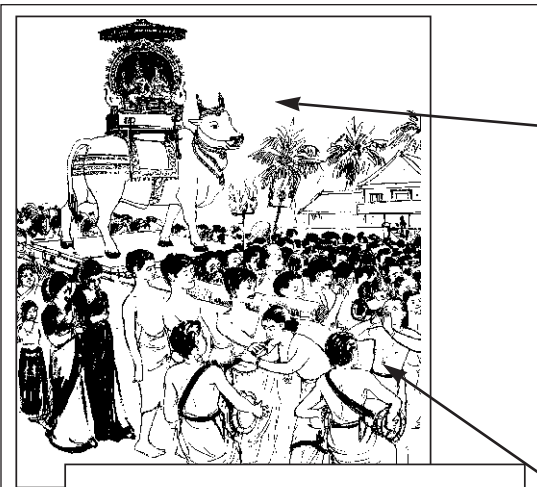
The festival is a time of celebrating God’s presence in our lives. For children it is a time of spiritual joy and fun activities that promote their spiritual growth.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

In Saivite Hinduism there are many festivals that are celebrated throughout the year. Festivals are a community event of creating spiritual awareness and gratitude among many people. A Saivite Hindu festival can be celebrated by millions of people all over the world at the same time. Worshipers of Siva in Toronto, Canada are joining worshipers of Siva in Duesseldorf, Germany and Chidambaram, India. Each temple in every village, town or city holds its festival in its own way. Each year the Saivite citizens look forward to and help with these great festivals. Festivals are celebrated by people who believe the same way. They all believe in Siva as the supreme God. They all believe that Siva is present everywhere. They all believe that all people will know Siva in oneness. Festivals bring people together who want to grow spiritually. It is also a time of fun, of games, gift-giving and good food, of music and dancing and drama. Fireworks are shot off. New friends are made. Old relatives are visited. Swamis and yogis and elders give spiritual instruction. Therefore festivals are very unique events. Another word for festival is holiday. They are holy days. Often, they are national holidays. Children are out of school. Adults are off from work. Everybody is happy. Everybody is thankful. Everybody is hopeful for the future. Everybody wants the blessings of the Deity and the deva angels.

The festival takes place inside and outside the temple. Often it goes for a great distance away from the temple. Parades go down streets. Lines of booths sell food and trinkets. Conferences and performances may be held in indoor halls. So the festival spreads out. But the center of the festival is the temple. The highlight of the festival is the grand puja finale.

In each season Saivite Hinduism has a festival, or often two. This means every few months there is a holiday celebration. Because so many millions of people are celebrating these festivals, God Siva and the Lords Murugan and Ganesha can give lots of help to all those people at the same time. Because everybody is being kind and generous and more spiritual, they become more aware of Siva. They feel a new love in



Festival

When we meet each other we say “Namaskara” or “Vanakkam.”

their hearts. New ideas come that may lead to success. They want to help others. They are creating good karma. The festival creates a mood of openness: “God is helping me. How can I help God?” people ask themselves. The temples and ashrams, which need money to keep going, receive many donations. Everybody gives how much they can afford. The gift of the peasant farmer is as valuable as the gift of the millionaire doctor. During festivals, homeless and poor people are fed and given clothing. This is a time when Saivite Hindus take care of the unfortunate. This also inspires us to regularly provide for the poor and homeless. Siva may inspire us to volunteer to work for a religious or social service that provides meals and shelter for homeless folk.

Almost everyone helps in the festival preparations. The wives and mothers are cooking for great feasts. They are decorating. They are making garlands. Often the children help with this. The men may go to the temple and help clean, or they may

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Small versions of the temple deities, called parade deities, are being carried around the temple. The parade deities are temporarily charged with the spiritual energy of the temple deities. These parade deities carry the power of God and the Gods to people who may not be able to enter the temple. For instance, those who are not vegetarian.

Often the parade is led by a group of musicians playing the large temple drum and the nagaswaram, a loud reed instrument with a piercing sound. Groups of women may be singing bhajan and men may be keeping up a steady chant of the God’s sacred name. Conch shells are blown into the air. It is like a circus of sound.

Here, two girls are greeting each other. Their hands are in a special position, palms together, hands facing skyward. Putting hands in special positions like this is called *mudras*. *Mudra* means “seal” as in making a seal of psychic energies flowing through the hands.

build stalls and stages. They may make arrangements with town officials for use of roads and park land. They may invite swamis to give talks. There is always lots to do for the festival.

Often festivals are the best time that we see cousins or friends that we have not seen for a long while. It is an occasion of greeting and friendship. As Hindus we have a special way of greeting each other. It is a spiritual greeting. In fact the way that we greet our fellow people is the same way that we worship Ganesha, Murugan and God Siva. We place our hands with the palms together and the right thumb over the left thumb. The fingertips are pointing up to the sky. This means we are seeing that the soul in front of us—either a soul in a physical body or a God soul—is in truth one with the Supreme Spirit. We salute with our hands the Siva Perfection that is in everyone. This is called the *namaskara saluta-*

tion. *Namaskara* is a beautiful Sanskrit word that means “I see the Divine in you and I bow down to the Divine in you.” Thus, this greeting which we should use everyday turns an everyday “Good morning” into a spiritual “seeing” and reminder that we are all souls of Siva Spirit.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. When we hold a festival, it is like a grand party for God and the Gods. They are the chief guests to this great party on Earth. It is held at their temples and the surrounding countryside. Imagine all the preparations we would go through to have the best party for Siva. The temple should be very clean and spotless.

2. During the festival we are trying to improve ourselves spiritually. We join a bhajan group and sing to Siva. We learn to play the cymbals. We get up a little earlier in the morning just to say Siva’s name as the sun rises. We are more selfless. We try to help as much as possible. If we get an allowance of money, we give some of it to the poor. We go to be with the swamis and spiritual leaders. We bring them a gift. We try to understand a little more of our religion. We ask questions. And we also have a lot of fun.

STORY READING

Shanti woke up by himself this morning. Usually his mother had to come in and whisper to him to wake up. Sometimes she had to give him a little shake too. But Shanti came out of dreamland by himself. It was cold outside. He looked out the window. In the pale moonlight he could see white drifts of snow. The trees of his yard had arms of snow. He really liked the snow. He was born in Toronto, Canada. And that is where he still lived, out in a suburb. So snow was a fun friend each winter. Still it was early in the morning and he was glad to be indoors, in his bed. A huge mountain of cotton blankets covered him. Ok, he thought, time to jump out of bed and see if his sister Shakti was awake. He quickly shoved the blankets aside and leapt up. He put on a robe to stay warm and headed down the hall to his sister’s room. But then he heard her singing a lovely Siva bhajan in the bathroom. Gee, she woke up before I did, he thought to himself. And she beat me to the bathroom. “Don’t use all the hot water,” he said cheerfully. And he went back to his

bedroom. He made his bed, tucking in all the corners nice and neat. He was extra careful today. This was Maha Sivaratri, the great night of Siva festival. It was late February. There were a lot of devotees of Siva in Toronto. He would be up all night till early in the morning. Last year he fell asleep. But this year he wanted to try to make it all the way. He would be worshipping and singing. He would try to sit still in meditation. He would talk to his friends. He would eat all kinds of good food when the late night worship was finished. Today, he would just be eating fruit as a part of the spiritual practice for being close to Siva. But he also knew he could have hot milk with honey this morning. He was looking forward to that.

Shanti had a pet hamster. It was in a cage in the corner of his room, on a desk. He turned on the desk lamp. The hamster woke up and blinked his eyes at him. Shanti gently petted his soft fur. He was struck by the thought that God was in this hamster too. It was still dark outside. The sun wouldn’t be rising into the cloud-filled sky for another hour. But Shanti could see a faint reddish glow in the east. He went over to the window that faced east. There was a bit of frost on the window. With his finger, he wrote out the word SIVA. He wrote it backwards so it could be read by people walking by outside. And he began to think what he could do at the temple that morning. He really wanted to help make this the best Maha Sivaratri ever.

Later that morning he and Shakti put on their winter clothes and boots. They jumped out into the snow banks laughing. It was a good day. The sun was out. The snow was powdery like sugar. He and Shakti had decided to walk to the temple. No need for dad to drive the car and cause more pollution they decided.

So they walked and threw snowballs. They saw a few adults along the way and they greeted them with their palms in the namaskara salutation. The Siva temple of Toronto wasn’t too far away. They were meeting a bunch of other children to help with cleaning the temple. Shanti really liked the Siva temple in winter. It rose like a white castle out of a field of snow and evergreen trees. It had high towers, all made of white granite. In the distance Shanti and Shakti could see their friends standing outside the beautiful temple. They were all smiling, and they all had buckets and cloths and brushes to clean with. Shanti went in, and with a group of boys began to polish

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring a picture of Lord Siva, a strong portable fan, a big bowl of honey-sweetened popcorn, and arrange for the children to bring flower petals and bells, cymbals and drums from home. The Lord Siva picture is placed at the center of the classroom. Place the fan so that it is facing towards God Siva, but a ways away. While most of the children are making as much noise as possible with the bells, cymbals and drums, the children take turns releasing flower petals in front of the fan so they blow toward Siva (like a helicopter dropping petals out of the sky). Then the popcorn is offered to Siva (fan off), and everybody eats the popcorn.

2. Bring to the class a variety of different colored ribbons: yellow, red, blue, orange, green. This can be ribbon used for wrapping gifts. Or it can be yarn, if that is more readily available. The children help each other tie one color of ribbon around their hands that are in the customary greeting gesture of the palms and fingers face-to-face and the right thumb over the left thumb. As a result, each youth has their hands in namaskara greeting bound by a single color of ribbon. That is their color. Now, all children with like colors cluster together in groups. Then the teacher calls out two combinations of colors: red and yellow, for instance. All the children with red and yellow ribbons have to go over to each other and with their hands still in namaskar, do a slight bow and say “Namaskar.” As that is happening the teacher calls out another pair. They rush over to bow and greet each other. The teacher keeps calling out different pairs of colors, so all the children have to pay attention to which color to seek out next. This is a fast, colorful game.

the floors so they shone like mirrors.

HOMEWORK

Have the children think of several ways they could help clean and prepare a temple for a major festival. The temple should be super clean. What would they do to make it like a beautiful temple out of a fairy tale?

LESSON FOCUS

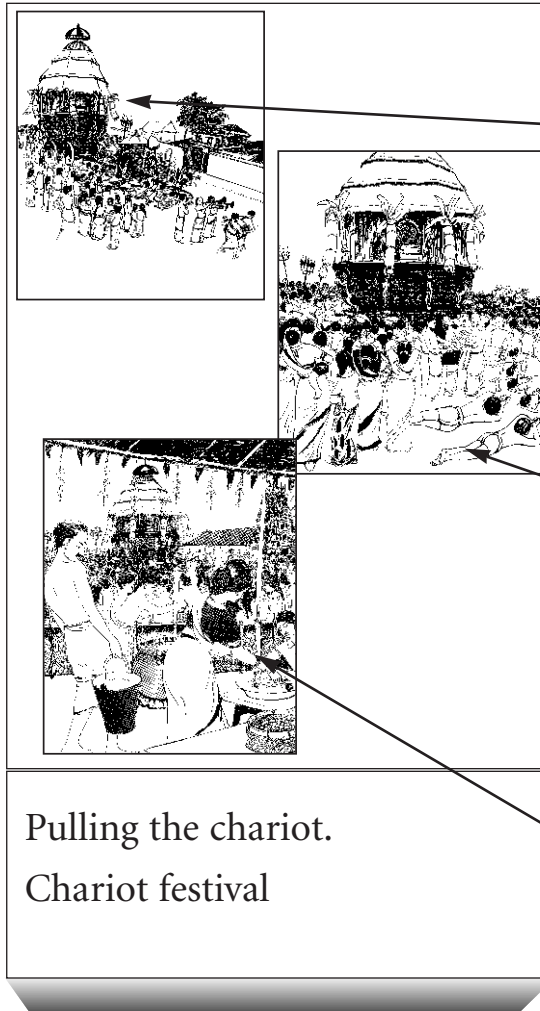
The chariot festival and pulling the chariot are an important annual event at many temples. The chariot, holding the parade deity image, becomes an extension of the temple into the greater community. The community is blessed and benefits through worship and service.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

The chariot is a large, wheeled vehicle used to carry a special deity image from the temple around a parade route. Usually the chariot is ornately carved from wood and rolls on four large wheels. Some smaller chariots are gilded with precious metal at wealthy temples. A large chariot can stand several stories tall and carry many priests and devotees who tend to the parade deity. Many temples, both large and small, have chariots for the chariot festival. This is especially true in South India and Nepal, and where the Hindus from these regions have settled around the world. But also many temples would not have chariots, depending on their locale and traditions. But they would have some kind of parade palanquin for festivals that parade a deity outside the temple. Some ancient temples have chariots carved in stone as part of the temple architecture.

The chariot is usually stored in a special shed built for it near the temple. For most temples the chariot is only used rarely during the year. Then it is taken out of the shed, cleaned and polished. It is decorated with bright cloths and beautiful patterns of flowers and leaf decorations. The idea is to make the chariot beautifully visible for long distances. People will be able to see the chariot from far away. Then they too may worship. The chariot's height makes it visible in large crowds. Often, the chariot is made taller by the addition of large and brightly colored cloth sails at the chariot's top.

The chariot is pulled by thick, long ropes. Temple chariots are never pulled by animals, such as bulls or oxen. It is men who always take up the rope and pull the holy vehicle for the God. Since chariots can be so big and heavy, it often takes hundreds of men and women to pull the chariot. It is considered a great honor and spiritual practice to be among those who take the rope and pull the mighty chariot. Sometimes there is an established selection



Pulling the chariot.
Chariot festival

process for each year's chariot pullers. You must remove your shoes before pulling. when you first approach the rope, you touch it with both hands and touch both hands to the eyes, in respect.

Stored inside the temple is the parade deity, which like the chariot, is only used several times a year. It is often a smaller version of the main deity in the temple shrine. After elaborate pujas inside the temple which charge the parade deity with spiritual force, it is placed on the chariot outside. The idea is to temporarily transfer a part of the power of the temple to the deity on the chariot outside. A colorful psychic beam of energy connects the temple to the chariot. This brings the power of the temple to many more people than could normally worship in the temple or who may travel a great distance to be at that temple. Once loaded with the parade deity, the chariot begins its slow route around the temple, often going out into streets a great distance from the temple. The chariot parade is awash in

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

See how strongly these men and boys are pulling the chariot. They use all of their strength to pull the power of God on the chariot. We should put this much strength into our daily spiritual practices. There are musicians leading the chariot parade.

Sometimes devotees roll on the ground in front of the chariot. This is a way of saying they are sorry to God Siva for whatever they did wrong over the past year. They hope that rolling on the ground will help soften their karmas for the coming year. We can also see in this picture that women are prostrating on the right. They are surrendering to the power of Siva and hope His love and light will be in their lives.

Perhaps this is a family of father, mother, son and daughter who have set up a water shed. They give out water to thirsty devotees for free. It is often very hot during the festival. Food is also given out for free. And the poor are fed a grand meal.

singing, drumming, chanting, bell ringing. It is a very joyous, physical festival. Because of its extroverted nature, often this festival is the most popular among devotees. At large temples, tens of thousands of devotees participate. Each temple will schedule its chariot festival according to its own calendar, so there can be chariot festivals all during the year at different temples.

With the chariot festival outdoors in the sun as a lengthy parade, many people get thirsty and hungry. As a special service to the devotees, water sheds are set up by caring people. Other sheds serve free food. It is a special time to allow the poor to worship and to feed them a hearty meal. This is typical of the many good karma services that are performed as part of the chariot festival. Often children help with this service.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The chariot festival extends the spiritual power of the temple to the surrounding town and countryside. This is like if we had a single room with small windows but with a very bright, pure flame burning inside. Very little of the fire light goes outside through the windows. This analogy represents the temple. Normally, not a lot of its power spreads out. It is contained in the temple. During the chariot festival's temple pujas, a part of that fire burning inside the room is actually brought outside through the parade deity, placed on the chariot and paraded around for long distances.

STORY READING

As the three boys ran up the steep stairs of a narrow lane they could see a milk white dome rising into the morning sky. The walls of houses rose up on both sides of the stairs. So all the boys saw was the dome at the top of the stairs. It was large and made of stone blocks. The blocks fit together like a puzzle. A carving of a face—the face of Siva—stood out from it. It was a face of peace and power. This was the central temple of the capital of Nepal, a kingdom carved into the Himalayan mountains. Out of the top of the dome came a gold spire, a straight rod going through golden balls that grew smaller toward the point. It was solid gold, and had been there for many hundreds of years. The three boys saw it shining, catching the orange sun light. A yellow cloud passed behind the sacred spire. The winds that came out of the Snow Jewel mountains near the city had shaped the cloud into a horse. The boys stopped their jumping. They stared. The horse cloud swept overhead. It pranced right over the gold spire. “What do you think of that?” said 9-year old Devanathan. He was the oldest of the three, a big lad who liked to eat sweet candy and wear a red scarf tied neatly around his curly black hair.

“I’d say it was a wonderful sign. An omen that today’s chariot festival will be good,” said Guhaji, whose round, somewhat sad face was still looking up. He was the youngest, but the smartest. While his warm cotton blue shirt and long brown pants stirred in a quick blast of cold wind he was hoping another magical cloud would float by. Among the three he was the most spiritual. The great Siva temple they were

climbing towards always made him feel big and light, like he was a bubble of water growing into a lake. That was the way he explained it. Most children didn’t understand what he meant. But to him it meant he was experiencing Siva. “Hmm, looks like that was it. No more horse clouds,” he said. The third boy, Srinivas—with a wide smile and mud brown hair that always brushed his forehead—shook his head, “Yes, yes. It might be a holy day, but its also a fun day. I hope to pull on the ropes today. Let’s get going.” The children ran up the narrow stair lane, laughing and giggling. Out of nowhere some monks in dark, thick orange robes suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs. They were old and wrinkled like walnuts, with silver hair. Through their hair snaked a strand of Siva’s rudraksha beads. These were special monks, from a rare order. The boys knew them from a distance but had never met them face to face. Their faces looked frozen, like a man who spends too much time in the snow fields of the mountains. But their eyes were clear pools of kindness and love. The boys stopped like a bull running into a fence, nearly tripping over each other. They did not wish to offend the holy monks. They also did not know quite what to do. Then the old monks started to laugh, their faces wrinkled even more over wide smiles of missing teeth. Guhaji, relieved that the monks were not disturbed by their play, respectfully approached them and touched their old brown feet. The monk in the lead leaned forward on a thick pine wood staff and whispered, “You saw the sign, eh? The cloud that became a horse?”

“Yes,” whispered back Guhaji. “We all saw it a few minutes ago.”

“Only from the angle of this lane could you see it. It was meant for you,” the old man said. “You will all get your wish today. Now let some old men down the stairs.”

The other two boys touched the ancient swamis’ feet and they all three pressed up close to the wall to let the monks pass. They walked noiselessly by. The boys went up the remaining stairs and stood at the top of a courtyard, wide-eyed. They overlooked a giant crowd of people that filled the whole city. They could see a great line of people walking down the main road through the countryside. Coming around the corner of the beautiful white and gold temple was a huge chariot with wheels taller than a warrior guard. It moved slowly, pulled by six-

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring to the class two ropes, about 15 feet long. Divide the class into about two-thirds and one-third. The group of two-thirds become the chariot by grouping together in the design of a chariot vehicle, complete with wheels. This group holds onto both ropes, one on the left and one on the right side of the group. The one-third group are the devotees who pull the chariot just like in the picture. They pull on the right and left ropes and guide the chariot around the classroom or outside. Redivide the group so everybody gets to pull.

2. Bring to class some cardboard boxes of large, medium and small size, and two sheets of cardboard that can be cut into wheel shapes. Have the children create a chariot out of the boxes and cut out the wheels, and stand them next to the chariot. Then they gather around the chariot and sing a few bhajans.

3. Bring some water containers , and some of the children bring some popcorn or some other simple snack. In one part of the class area the children set up a mock water and food stall. Here they pass out water and snacks to the pilgrims and poor people, who are played by the rest of the class.

ty men. Srinivas said, “I’m heading for the rope to help pull.” And he ran off. Devanathan went to a food stall to offer his service in caring for devotees. He worked hard without eating himself. At the end of the day a priest gave him a huge bowl of sweets blessed in the Siva temple. Guhaji found a nice corner in the temple and meditated more deeply than ever before. All three boys got their wish that day.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson connects in important ways to the lessons on festivals, worship and the temple. Note that the chariot festival makes larger the area of power of the temple for that day. It allows huge numbers of devotees to worship. Some Hindu children may never see a big and massive temple chariot, but you the teacher must help them imagine what a spiritually charged and entertaining time the chariot festival is.

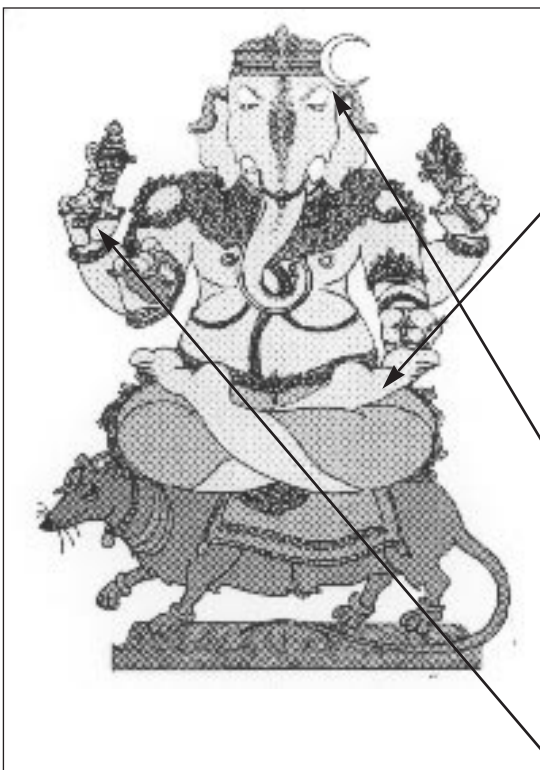
LESSON FOCUS

Yoga is a method, even a science we should say, for directly finding and experiencing God Siva. Siva is one with us. How to personally find this oneness is through yoga. People who practice yoga are called yogis. Since yoga is a union of the yogi and Siva, yogis are very close to God Siva. Children should practice simple yoga.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

As children know from their own view of the world, there are many pursuits in life. There are many people doing many kinds of activities, from work to entertainment to sleep at night. Life is so rich with experience and activities that most people do not know what the purpose of life is. An entire life of 100 years can come and go without the person knowing or pursuing the real purpose of that life. Children should ask themselves early in life: why am I on Earth? What is the purpose of my life? They should ask themselves this because there is a clear, definite answer. The single purpose of a birth, and life, on Earth in a human body is to find God. We are here to discover our innate oneness in and with God Siva. It is like we are searching for something. Many people do feel they are searching in life, most usually after they have found success. They have a good job, a beautiful family and lovely house and car and they take a vacation once a year. But is that enough? Most people don't think so, even if they are very wealthy. They need and search for something deeper. What they are looking for is the presence of God. Children are especially open to this truth. Trying to find God and feeling the presence of Siva is a very natural expression for youngsters. So, if the final purpose of life is discovering our oneness with Siva, there must be a method or means of discovery. That method is called yoga. It is the oldest, most powerful, science of our human civilization. Yoga means to yoke, as in the wooden yoke that binds two bulls together to pull a plow. Yoga is a union between our mind and the mind of God. And in that union, we discover we are one with Siva. We find God. God is in us, in the perfect stillness of our mind. And we find that God is everywhere, in all people and all animals, in all skies, mountains, valleys, rivers and oceans.

A person who practices yoga is called a yogi. Even children who practice yoga are called yogis. During childhood is one of the



Ganesha says, “Yogis are very close to God Siva.”

best times to learn yoga. Often a young child can be successful at beginning yoga because he or she has a pure mind, uncluttered by the ego and mental clouds that arise at puberty and into adulthood. Many children in the world do practice yoga, which is also called meditation. Their parents practice meditation, so naturally they teach their children meditation. In the United States and Europe, there are many tens of thousands of children that do yoga.

Children like to learn yoga, because it is like a game. For one, it is a search. You are trying to find something. Children love to search for treasure. For another, yoga means you have to sit still. Children do not normally sit still for long, but giving them a challenge to sit without moving is often enough to motivate them. The best time for yoga for children is after they wake up and shower, and just before they go to sleep.

Yogis, the great master yogis who have dedicated their lives to seeking and realizing

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the Ekakshara Ganapati form of Ganesha. He is very beneficial for helping us in yoga. His feet are in the *padmasana*—lotus pose—where the two legs are bound so the two upturned feet look like lotus flowers. This is the best seating pose for practicing yoga. So here Lord Ganesha Himself is being an example of a great yogi master.

The crescent moon is usually seen on God Siva, but here it is part of Ganesha's symbols. It reminds us of the passing of time, that we need to use our time well. It also signifies the best time for an occasion, as in the most cosmically favorable time.

In this hand Ganesha is holding the goad. This goad moves us along when we are going too slowly on the spiritual path. Perhaps we are spending too much time in play or even school study, without giving enough time for daily worship, divine learning and meditation.

God, should be revered and honored by all children. There are people who practice yoga as a daily or weekly part of their lives. Then there are the master yogis who live yoga. Children should be taught that the lifetime yogi is a very unique person, a person deserving of great respect and awe. They can give wise advice and powerful blessings to people and to the Earth itself.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. What do we do when we have lost something of priceless value, or something that we absolutely need: an ancestral heirloom or the car keys, for instance? We stop everything and look for the lost object with total determination. It is vital we find what was lost. We ask people if they have seen the car keys. Who had them last? We look

everywhere. We retrace our steps mentally and physically. It is the same in our search for God Siva. We have temporarily lost our identity as God. That identity is actually always there inside us. Our search for Siva is in our mind. We need to search for Siva with all the determination and energy we would put into searching for a lost diamond. We look in our mind. We ask gurus, where is Siva in our mind, and follow their advice. We retrace our steps of misplacing our Siva identity, and find that Siva is in the perfect stillness of mind.

2. Yoga is like a bridge. A bridge brings together two pieces of land, separated by water or a steep valley or chasm. The two pieces of land are actually part of a one landscape, a one terrain. The chasm floor or the river bed that the bridge crosses is a part of the whole terrain. Yoga is the bridge that crosses from our individual mind to the mind of God. But like the oneness of the land terrain, our mind and God's mind are a one whole. They are only separated by our feeling that we are a physical body with emotions and a human mind.

STORY READING

Yellow, red and orange leaves floated from the sky. Dozens sailed from the great oak tree. To Hara, a nine-year-old boy with curly brown hair and dark brown eyes, they were sky-boats. Turning and twisting the leaves were caught by the wind. They sailed right and left, up and down. Hara lay on the grass of his home's front lawn. His home was in Hamm, Germany, and it was the fall season. He was on his back. He watched the colorful leaves break loose from the oak tree a hundred feet in the air. He was smiling. It was such a simply joy to lie there, on his back, watching the leaves come down. The oak branches were dark against the sky, a pale shade of grey blue, filled with horse-shaped clouds. The leaves were landing all over the ground. He turned his head to try to listen to hear the leaves hit the grassy lawn. He heard it. A soft, brief swish. One leaf landed right next to his face. It was caught at the same moment in a single beam of sunlight that shot through the tall oak. The leaf lit up like it was a window. A stained-glass leaf window filled with rust and golden colors. Wow, Hara thought to himself, what a beautiful sight. It reminded him of a deep thought his older sister, Meenakshi, taught him recently, "The enjoyment of beauty is a way

to be close to God Siva." So as the leaf lay in the grass, still glowing by a sunbeam, Hara silently said in his mind "Aum Namah Sivaya." And he thought I am surrounded by beauty this morning. I must be surrounded by Siva. And with that fine thought, a few leaves landed on his chest. Hara was raking up the leaves on the lawn, and was now taking a rest. He had worked hard. There were piles of sunset-colored leaves around him. Piles of leaves, like piles of hay, invite children to jump into them. Run, yell and jump into the air, land in the leaves, like a big, bouncy bed. Normally, that is what Hara would do. But this morning, his thinking of Siva brought another idea. I want to do yoga, Hara thought. He had attended a class with a Saiva swami recently and all the children had been introduced to yoga. Hara liked it. Now, in a happy mood on this fall morning, yoga was the thing to do. He sat in a welcoming pile of leaves. He crossed his legs and sat up straight, like an oak staff was against his back. His hands, covered by cotton gloves, went into his lap, the right hand on top of the left, palms up. His brown eyes closed. As he had been taught, his breathing became deep. Leaves fell around him. The wind whistled by. He didn't move. Hara was a yogi. He thought of beauty. He saw the stain-glass leaf in his mind. The beautiful image stayed with him. It was his yoga, his bridge to Siva. The leaf looked as real in his mind as on a television set. And then, as Hara watched in his mind, the leaf turned transparent, faded and brilliant white light washed into his imagination. The nine-year old Hara had touched Siva.

BACKGROUND

Historically, yoga is so old that its origins are unknown—predating the ice ages. It is the oldest, most powerful system of psychology and mind development. It is like Hinduism itself, with no human founder. It is understood that yoga is a system developed by the God Murugan, Lord of Yoga, in the inner worlds and given to humanity in a far, far past, as a technique for spiritual unfoldment and Siva Realization. The earliest known writings on yoga occur in the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. Yoga is Hindu.

CONNECTIONS

Lord Murugan is the principle deity of actual spiritual practice, and yoga is the primary spiritual practice. Our highest worship of Lord Murugan brings us into yoga,

ACTIVITIES

1. Bring something small of value to the classroom: a coin, piece of jewelry or a crystal. Hide it someplace (anywhere, including on yourself or on one of the children) in the classroom. All the children sit in a yoga posture, close their eyes and try to mentally find the item you hid. They don't look for it physically. If they think they found it, they raise their hand. Then you ask them where it is. If they get it right, then everybody goes outside while you hide it again. If no one gets it within a reasonable amount of time, then tell them where it is, and hide it again. This is like yogis searching for God.

2. Have the children sit down in a cross-legged position—preferably a half-lotus pose, and breathe deeply through the nose for nine counts inhalation, hold the breath one count and breathe out for nine counts. They should try to remain perfectly still. Place a book on each child's head as they breathe. The object is to be so still that the book remains on their head for five minutes.

and He then guides each yogi on the yoga path. Worship itself and temple attendance create the proper mood of spiritual love for yoga to be successful. The energy from puja can be used by yogis—even children—for sustaining deep yoga into the Mind of Siva.

CITIZENSHIP

A simple practice of yoga for children is one of the best contributions to good citizenship. Yoga creates a peaceful, kind, tolerant person. The youngster who practices yoga will feel responsible and compassionate for the situations of his country and his fellow citizens and his environment. It is proven that people who meditate generate a psychic energy that positively influences large groups of people around them.

HOMEWORK

Have the children practice sitting still in a yoga pose at home for five minutes every day. They can mentally chant Aum to themselves, or try to feel the Love of Siva coming into them, or simply allow the mind to quiet like the surface of a lake that is perfectly still, not even a ripple on it.

LESSON FOCUS

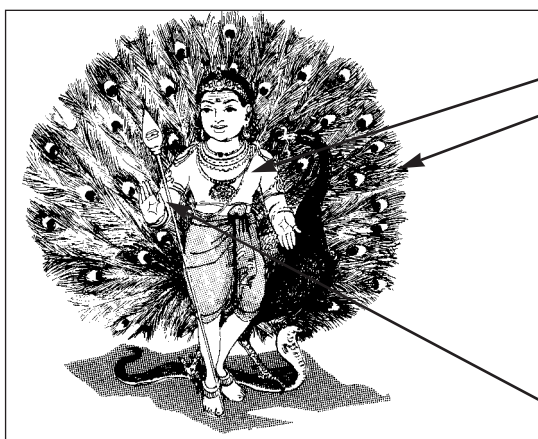
The focus of this lesson is to introduce Lord Murugan to children as the brother of Lord Ganesha and let them know that Lord Murugan has really wonderful temples that Saivites love pilgrimaging to. Another focus is that Lord Murugan was created by Lord Siva.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Saivite Hindus understand Lords Ganesha and Murugan as brothers. We know from previous lessons that souls—including the Gods—are not male or female. So Ganesha and Murugan are not really male. They both are special super soul creations of God Siva. Siva created Ganesha and Murugan as super souls to help with all other souls. Hence we look at them as brothers, because they are both special souls from Siva. They were among the first souls created by God Siva so long ago that it is beyond our Earth time. Both of these Gods have specific duties to do in the universe, and they both have incredible spiritual powers to carry out these duties.

Lord Murugan is the God who most steers us on our spiritual journey. He is also the God who oversees the political rulers of countries so that religion and spiritual life are made an important part of the country. Ganesha guides us especially in dharma: our path of good conduct and mindfulness in earthly life. Murugan guides us especially in our spiritual life. Murugan is approached by tens of millions of devotees every day for help at His powerful temples. Many Saivite Hindus do not distinguish between the celestial duties of Ganesha and Murugan. Often they pray to Murugan for very speedy help in matters of health, or success in a business venture. Girls often pray to Murugan for a handsome and virtuous husband. Murugan is revered as being extremely quick in responding to the needs of devotees. And so many people pray to Murugan at His temples for all kinds of help. But Murugan's main responsibilities and interests are in guiding and providing for us spiritually.

Murugan is revered in scripture and poetry as the God of celestial beauty. It is a beauty that is enchanting, like in a fairy tale. The children should understand that no artist or sculptor is able to capture exactly what a God (in this case Lord Murugan) really looks like—i.e. the beauty, radiance, spiritual presence and energy. So, if the children ever see Murugan in a dream/vision themselves that is the “right” picture.



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Lord Murugan

The peacock is Murugan's vehicle, or *vahana*, that he chose to be associated with. The peacock is very beautiful and reflects Murugan's spiritual beauty. Murugan likes to fly. So He chose a bird. This is how he travels from star to star, from the Pleiades, his star home, to earth.

Murugan's lance. This is his “jnana shakti” weapon of love and intelligence to conquer the ignorance which covers the soul.



Siva creates Lord Murugan who emerges out of His third eye and appears in a lotus in the Saravana Lake. This lake represents divine essence or primal consciousness, the very first and primary state of consciousness.

Lord Murugan—brother of Lord Ganesha. We pilgrimage to His great temples.

Lord Siva creates Lord Murugan.

He is full of sun-like Self-confidence. “I can, we can, you can, we are able!” are expressions He might say to inspire devotees.

Murugan is very beautiful. His name translated literally actually means “beautiful one.” Those who have seen Him in vision say He

is extremely beautiful to look at. Like a celestial movie star! He also loves beauty, all kinds of beauty. Love of course is the purest form of beauty and he loves the beauty of love the most. That is the most wonderful kind of beauty. What is more beautiful than a happy smile on the face of someone pure and loving?

Look at the beauty of nature all around us. Murugan loves this too. Think of a wave swelling up on the ocean—curling up higher and higher and then rolling forward and finally crashing and then gliding up gracefully on the beach. That is beauty. Or a small bud on a fruit tree turning into a white flower and then slowly turning into a big round red apple. Or drops of water falling from the sky and splintering into a shower of trillions of snowflakes. These are natural wonders of beauty, the work of trillions of deva spirits in love with the energy of God.

Murugan likes it when we humans create

For children, we need to keep a description of Him quite simple. Here are a few very general insights into Lord Muruga's nature to help children feel closer to Him. Murugan is very energetic, “full of pure spiritual force, cosmic power, Siva's pure primal energy.” You can sense that He is a Being who never gets tired, never thinks, “Oh “I'll do it tomorrow when I have more energy” or “I'll do it when I feel a little more inspired.” In His presence, you feel He is standing inside the source of inspiration itself, like someone standing inside a giant waterfall and has all that energy pouring on them. He is also like someone who just reaches the top of a giant mountain and immediately says, “Let's climb another one!” You feel in Him the most positive outlook—a “We can do it!” approach to everything. “We can solve anything, heal anything, help anyone, accomplish anything” are phrases He might use. He is very, very positive. He never worries or doubts.

beauty too—a *kolam* design in front of a house, a beautiful marble temple, a beautiful bronze murthi, a beautifully hand-sewn dress or a beautifully prepared meal. He loves refinement and elegance.

Murugan loves beauty in all forms because beauty uplifts us. It fills us with energy, with joy, and makes our soul light up.

Murugan is also very courageous. He likes it when you have the courage to be happy when it would be very easy to be sad, defend people who are unfairly treated when it would be easy not to defend them and say nice things about people when it would be easy to say things that are critical or judgmental. This is the courage to act like our soul which loves.

Pilgrimage to Murugan's temples

We can come right to the side of Lord Murugan by thinking about Him. The children can see Murugan in their imagination, and He will travel to them much faster than a bolt of lightning. He will be there, immediately. We want His powerful assistance in our spiritual life. But besides calling Murugan mentally from anywhere in the world—even down in the snow-frozen world of Antarctica—there is another great way of visiting Murugan. This is the ancient tradition of pilgrimaging to His temples. Murugan has six great temples in South India. The children are familiar with oases in the desert—pools of fresh, clear water surrounded by date trees in the otherwise parched vastness of sand. Murugan's six temples are oases of spiritual power in the desert of worldly life. To pilgrimage to Murugan's temples is a great spiritual event for the Saivite Hindu. All Saivite Hindus all over the world wish to come to these very old palaces of Murugan in India. The children should hold this dear in their hearts.

Created by Lord Siva

Murugan was created right out of Siva's third eye, or out of the energy of Siva's own being. The third eye is the center of "divine sight." This eye sees the divine, the light and God-energy inside the physical forms that the two physical eyes see. Ask the youths to imagine themselves creating a being out of their mind, spirit, inner divine vision. This way they will get an idea of how amazing being able to do this is. And this is what God did. But for God, creating a being of light of out His own being of light is actually similar to your mother giving birth to a baby physical body out of her physical body. Even physical reproduction and the

birth of babies is very extraordinary when you stop and think about it. We tend to forget how amazing that is—one body coming creating another. Murugan's creation was just quicker, came from the third eye instead of the womb and was made out of light rather than flesh.

ANALOGIES/ ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Here is an image we can think of when trying to visualize Murugan—as a powerful volcano that is erupting, but the lava that is erupting is pure white molten energy, pure love. This image of power and energy is very good to catch and convey as Murugan has this kind of energy. You can add your own images like thunder, lightning, fusion generators, meteor showers, geysers, etc.

2. A dramatic visual image for the creation of Lord Murugan by Siva to think of the first rays that shoot out from a rising sun over the land. Take a thousand of those sunrises and put all their rays of sunshine bursting out and then multiply all this a million times, squeeze it together, and that is like the light that came out of Siva's eye when Murugan was created.

STORY READING

Avinash lives in Himachal Pradesh, India, a state nestled in the lap of the Himalayas, North India. His home is in a beautiful green-carpeted valley with snow-capped mountains behind it and wildflowers all around. Gushing streams and thousands of little paths are everywhere. It is a peaceful land, not much electricity, but the people are happy. Avinash loves Siva and Murugan (whom he calls Kartikkeya) and Ganesha. His father has a very big herd of goats that Avinash and his three sisters milk every day after school and their father sells to the village nearby. One day when Avinash was with the goats on a hill, he took a nap and dreamed. He dreamed he was running up a hill and then just kept running up into the air, into the sky. In the dream it seemed so natural. He could feel a tingling feeling in his spine as he left the ground. Sort of like an anti-gravity booster rocket. He soared above the earth and then swished through space. He looked back. Earth was a little speck. He felt very bright and wonderful and was passing many bright stars. Then ahead he saw an extremely bright cluster of stars. He was heading right into them. The

ACTIVITIES

1. Bring to the class six fairly large squares of colored paper or cloth. These represent the six temples of Murugan in South India. Also bring a small box. Scatter the colored squares randomly around the class area as if they are pilgrimage destinations, and number them 1 through 6. In the box place a large number of pieces of paper—each single piece bearing a number from 1 to 6—so that when each piece is picked out of the box a single number is written on it. These are pilgrimage tickets. Have each of the students pick a pilgrimage ticket. They read the destination on the ticket and then pilgrimage to the correct colored square. This can go fast, so there are several rounds played.

2. Bring to class a video tape that displays solar flares, giant jets of plasma gas erupting from the sun millions of miles out into space. We want to show this to the children as a small display of the kind of power that went into the creation of Lord Murugan, who was created as a jet of energy from God Siva. After watching the video, or watching that section several times, have the children sit down and think about the awesome power of Lord Murugan.

brightness was so bright it was like diving into a giant world of light. When he got inside, He saw Murugan standing there and behind Him was a land so beautiful you can't describe it. He went over to Murugan and gave him a hug and just as he did, he woke up. One of the goats was pushing him and trying to wake him up to take them home for milking. Avinash still felt a tingle in his spine as he went home and later found out that Murugan's home is the Pleiades star cluster.

WRONG THINKING

1. Murugan is a warrior. Some of the Puranic stories about Lord Murugan and some festivals revel in the idea of Lord Murugan as a warrior, a killer of demons and asuras. No God is more a God of peace than Murugan. He was born in the lake of Saravana, the mind in a state of absolute tranquility, peace, no ripples. The idea of Him being having a "warrior-like" nature is only true in the sense that He fights for peace and harmony but He fights using love and intelligence as weapons. Murugan does not murder. He combats darkness with light, impurity with purity, hate with love.

LESSON FOCUS

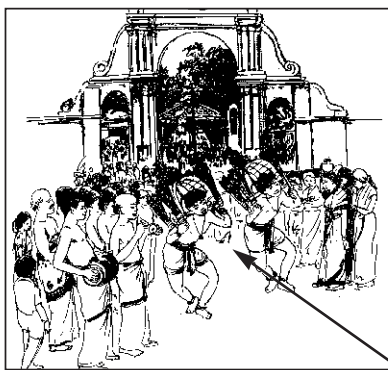
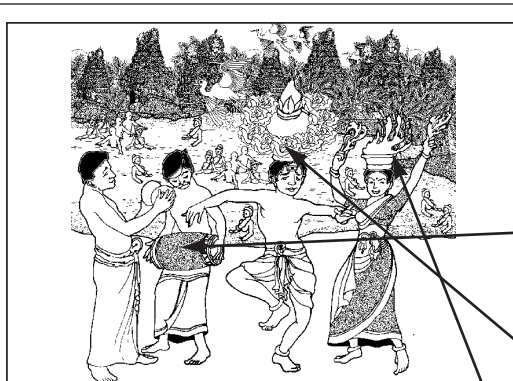
These two lessons present two ways to bring Lord Murugan's grace and power into our personal lives. These are chanting or singing a special spiritual phrase, and dancing as a form of self-changing penance.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Lord Murugan is the God of spiritual advancement. He oversees your 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 Murugan who oversees all religions on our planet and many other planets as well. In all religions, singing and dancing are popular and powerful ways to create a sense of God's nearness. Singing and dancing also bring us into our own personal spiritual nature. They create devotion and surrender. Divine singing and dancing take the devotee out of their normal feeling of body, emotions and mind. The devotee, when singing or chanting a key phrase, or dancing as an expression of surrender, is not very aware of body or intellect. The devotee is much more aware of their soul nature.

There are many styles of singing in Hinduism. One that is spiritually potent is bhajan. Bhajan is devotional singing by an individual or a group. It uses a series of simple lyrics that often express simple philosophical truths. The music is fairly simple, easily memorized and repeats itself. In the case of this lesson's illustration, the singing is part of the kavadi dancing. It creates the rhythm and the mood for the dancing. The repeating of the lyrics and melody has the steady power of a train on tracks. It is hypnotic. People, including children, can go for hours in singing bhajan.

It is important to understand the meaning of the words. In this instance, the man in the picture is singing a song to Murugan with the lyrics, "Vel Vel Muruga, Shakti Vel Muruga." Vel is the spear of spiritual light that Murugan carries to bring God knowledge and wisdom to people. Shakti is the tremendous power of the Vel. There is more power in Murugan's Vel than in all the stars of our galaxy. So when we sing about Murugan's Vel, we are inviting Him to protect us and to give us spiritual ener-



We sing, "Vel Vel Muruga, Shakti Vel Muruga."
Kavadi dance in the temple.

gy so we can live good lives and know God Siva through yoga. We should always know the meaning of songs or chants.

Sacred dancing is a great expression of devotion. Because it is physical, the normal feelings of the body are left behind. A new, fresh energy comes into the dancer. Children can especially feel this. Children love to dance, and they quickly abandon themselves to the joy of dancing. Kavadi is a very special dance to Lord Murugan. 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 Murugan, feeling sorry for any wrongdoing he or she might have done, and vowing to Lord Murugan to live religiously in the future. At the same time, the dancer carries a heavy arch on the shoulders decorated with symbols of Lord Murugan. 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 phys-

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Here a man and woman are doing the kavadi dance at a Murugan festival near a river. The timing and message of the dance is set by the singers who are playing the drum and cymbal. Kavadi dancing always has some sort of weight that is carried by the dancer. On top of the man's head is a large pot with a coconut encircled by a wreath of leaves and flowers. The kavadi dance is a simple dance, with very few steps, and often the dancer is inspired to make up his own pattern of dance. The lady is carrying a small pot with camphor burning in it, making it a beautiful sight, especially at twilight.

These are professional kavadi dancers at the famous Kathiragama Temple in southern Sir Lanka. This is a performance kavadi dance that entertains and uplifts the devotees, but is not a true penitent kavadi dance. Kathiragama is dedicated to Murugan, and is as popular with Buddhists Muslims as it is with Hindus. Buddhists also do kavadi.

ical 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. Kavadi is also done as a performance.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Singing a devotional song to Murugan is very much an act of worship. The words and melody, often repeated, are like a bubble of rainbow colors that surround the singer. Since bubbles can float, the singer floats in the song bubble to the great Mind Bubble of Lord Murugan. The surface of the two bubbles come together and the spiritual power of Lord Murugan comes to the devotee who is singing.
2. People are not the only ones who sing

sacred songs. Whales deep in the ocean sing long songs of spiritual joy, and they are among Murugan's helpers on Earth. Thousands of species of birds sing very beautiful and unique songs of sacred purpose. Even the wolf howling at the moon is a song of spiritual beauty. Streams and rivers murmur with a constant song of spiritual celebration. Children can easily hear songs and melodies in nature's waterways, or the ocean waves.

3. Sacred dancing creates many new feelings in the body. There is a rush of energy and happiness that comes to the dancer. The body feels lighter, stronger, more in balance. Think of what it feels like to come out of a rain or snow storm, cold and shivering, and warming up next to a big roaring fire. We immediately feel better. We are warming up and getting comfortable. We think happy thoughts next to the fire. We feel like there is a glow inside of us. Our mind, not consumed in the coldness, is free for higher thinking and spiritual awareness. This is how dancing affects the dancer.

STORY READING

Anjali was walking in a large and thick forest one day with her friend, Deepa. Her brother was a few steps ahead. The tree trunks rose up like giant wood columns at a temple. Dark, twisted roots reached out across the ground. They looked like they had muscles, like the arms of warriors. It was dim in the forest. Very little sunlight came down. The leaves and branches of all the tree tops formed an umbrella that stretched far over the land. This was a land in the northeast corner of India, where the great Himalayan mountains touched China. Anjali lived in the low lands, near the steaming jungles fed by heavy rains and rivers. Many children would be afraid in the dark green jungle. But not Anjali and Deepa. They liked the green glow of light coming down, and the huge boat-shaped flowers and thick vines that stuck to the trees. Anjali and Deepa looked alike, midnight black hair and moon-like cheeks with almond eyes. Their people worshiped Siva the Supreme Soul, and many of the mountains in the distance, wearing cloaks of snow and cloud, were sacred to Siva. But this jungle was kept sacred for Lord Murugan, or Kartikeya as Anjali's people knew Him in the north.

Anjali and Deepa walked along the jungle trail, happy in their freedom and listening to all the buzzing and screeching

sounds of the jungle. Big dragonflies with purple wings flew around them and monkeys with white faces swung on vines through the trees. Anjali and Deepa left the worn foot trail at a special marker they had placed. They headed north swiftly, going to their secret spot. In a few minutes they came upon it. It was a group of rhododendron trees that formed a circle. It was a ring of trees. At the east side of the ring was an entry way, like a door, through two wrinkled trees. The girls knew it was a magic circle for Murugan. In the middle was flat ground, all clean and smooth. But a carpet of flowers lay across it, for the trees were all blooming with ruby red flowers. Anjali, Deepa and her brother wordlessly stepped into the ring. A large beam of golden light shot into their circle. They carefully undid their packs and brought out two pairs of beautiful bronze cymbals. They sat in the flower carpet and began singing their favorite bhajan to Lord Kartikeya. Their voices were like fairy whispers and the cymbals sounded like wind turned to metal. Birds flitted nearby to join in the song. Butterflies with butter-colored wings wove and dove around the pair, now in their song as if in a trance. Then, Anjali and Deepa rose, and with cymbals beating like clocks, began to dance a Murugan dance. The cymbals beat very steady: claaang, clang-clang, claaang. They were barefoot. They danced in a circle inside the circle of trees. A sudden wind blew across the tree branches and they whispered. But they were totally unafraid. Their faces glowed like moonlight, and they laughed for they were happy dancing on the red flowers for Lord Murugan. Anjali and Deepa felt that anything they had done wrong that month melted into the saltiness of their tears. They were sorry. Murugan lifted up their feet like wings of rainbow light.

CONNECTIONS

Every lesson on Lord Murugan will try to awaken the power and knowledge of this great God in the children. But it also takes the children being open to Murugan's wisdom and the direction He is wanting them to go. Temple worship is one easy way, and yoga is the most advanced way. Singing bhajan and kavadi dance are often done as part of temple worship. Murugan is our spiritual teacher, as many lessons discuss. Intelligence and devotion go together. Think of this as learning and love together. When we are expressing devotional love, we are better able to understand the teach-

ACTIVITIES

1. Bring a large bundle of incense (the type that will really smoke a lot) to the classroom. And also provide plenty of stiff cardboard squares, about as large as a piece of paper. Put the incense in the center of the room and light it so that lots of smoke is created. Half of the class, with their cardboard squares lined up on one side of the incense, ready to fan the smoke up to the ceiling as it comes at them. They represent Murugan and his Vel which dissolves bad conditions. They sing Vel Vel Muruga. The other half of the class lines up on the other side and with their cardboard tries to fan the smoke directly to the Murugan side. They represent people on earth creating bad conditions like wars and animal slaughter and pollution. After awhile they switch sides.

2. Each student brings an object that feels heavy, but not too heavy it can't be lifted comfortably. Cymbals are needed. Everybody sits down with their heavy object. While a simple beat is maintained with the cymbals, the children lift up their heavy object, still sitting, and raise it to shoulder level. They then begin to sway in time to the music, keeping their object in the air. As they begin to get tired, or feel strained they pray to Lord Murugan for strength. They should expect a new strength to come to them from the prayer. When they are really tired, they put the object down and rest. Then try it again.

ings.

WRONG THINKING

Since kavadi dancing is a spiritual dance of feeling sorry and wanting to improve our future, it is often said by people who do kavadi that their suffering pleases Lord Murugan. This is wrong. The physical discomfort caused by carrying heavy arches or by having spears through cheeks, tongues and other parts of the body is not to please Murugan. These are acts the devotee does to himself as a self-inflicted karma to soften future karmas. Murugan is pleased with this karma-changing process and the willpower of the devotee, not by the suffering. Also, for the devotee properly tuned to Murugan's mind, there is little discomfort.

LESSON FOCUS

The making of garlands, both for use in the home shrine and temple, is an enjoyable and beautiful act of worship. For the most part, garland making is simple, yet it can be a very intricate art in the hands of a master. It gives the devotee the opportunity to work with living forms. Garland making focuses the mind of the devotee, for it demands a pure mind that is thinking of spiritual well-being.

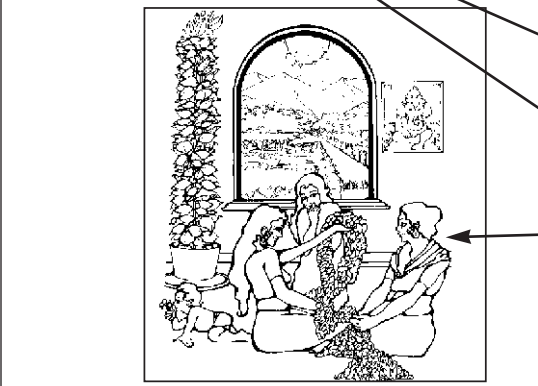
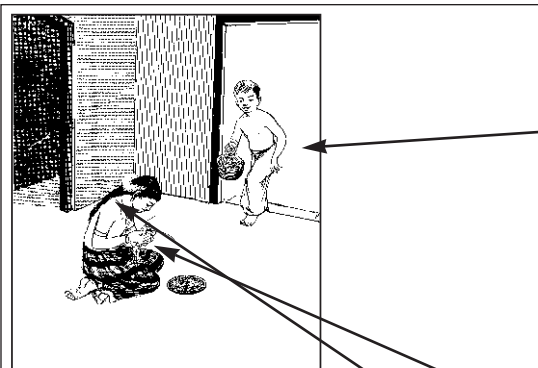
KEY PRESENTATIONS

Devotion is our love, our spiritual love, for God Siva and the Gods. Ideally, devotion should be a natural part of our emotions all day long. And devotion should be at its height when we are in the home shrine or the temple. But devotion does come and go for most people, including children, as daily activities occupy us. There are many, many ways to spark devotion within us, and certainly garland making is one of the finest and most ancient ways.

First, garland making places us in the lap of nature—the flowers must be gathered. This is an opportunity to express friendly and grateful feelings to the nature devas of the deva world. They are the ones who create the flowers from their invisible region. The nature devas' flower creations come out of a combination of spiritual life force, divine love and a caring intelligence. The child who is picking flowers for a garland should have this same type of awareness. This creates a spiritual bond between the child and the nature devas. Picking the flowers allows the child to select ones that he or she feels are beautiful, and that will look pretty in combination. It is a time for creativity. The child is trying to craft a garland that will be an expression of love and beauty. Children in different countries will have many different varieties of flowers to choose from. In many countries, this depends on the season. If it is winter in one locale, then devotees buy their flowers from merchants who grow them in hot houses.

If while picking the flowers, any one drops to the ground, that flower should not be used. It is considered as already offered to the earth spirits.

The actual crafting of the garland is a very pleasurable pastime of devotion. Garland making is often taught to the children ear-



Let us string a garland.
We make big garlands for
the festival.

ly in life by their mother or grandmother. When learned young, it can become a life-long devotional practice. Girls and boys alike should learn this spiritual art. When young men reach adulthood, garland making can be a very peaceful way to unwind from work into a spiritual mood. Eventually over time more and more skill is acquired. Ultimately, the very thick and plush weavings of flowers into rope-like thickness and balls made of flowers can be mastered.

Making garlands can be done in many different places, from the home to the temple itself. Often people will gather together to make garlands. Several people can work on a single garland that is very big. While stringing the garland, that is placing the flowers on the string with a needle or knots, it is best to be thinking about God Siva or the Gods Ganesha or Murugan—whichever God the garland is meant for. The sacred sound Aum can be silently chanted, or a bhajan can be sung. Kind and

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

The brother is bringing in a basket of fresh flowers he has just chosen and collected. Perhaps he has permission from certain neighbors to pick flowers from their yard garden. Or he went to a wild area of flowers that is available to all the town folk. It is good to have permission before picking flowers in someone's yard.

The sister is beginning to weave her garland. She is tying the flowers with knots. In her hair is an arrangement of flowers, another skill of flower arranging to be mastered by girls.

Here, a group of friends are creating a very nice, large garland for the temple festival. This garland is very thick. What color are the flowers?

good thoughts should be in the mind. A child can think a good thought each time they string a single flower. Young children should be supervised by an adult if needles are being used. Garlands can be made for the home shrine and the temple. They can also be made for special guests, for swamis, or most importantly for the spiritual master *satgurus*.

When the garland is finished, it is usually placed in a basket or on a fine tray, perhaps with several others. They are best offered fresh, but can be refrigerated overnight. If there is a water cleansing area at the temple, the garlands are sprinkled with water before they are taken into the temple. The garlands are given to the priest of the temple. It is he who actually places the garland on the diety's image in the temple. In the home shrine, a young child may offer their own garland to the diety before the daily puja. Or the father may place it as part of the daily puja.

Garlands bring living beauty to the temple's innermost shrines. Flowers and stone are a

beautiful combination. The subtle forces of the flowers drift through the atmosphere of the shrine. Visiting devotees like to see lots of flowers and garlands on the deity. It makes them feel more spiritual, that their community shares in deep devotion.

During festivals, there will be thousands of large and intricate garlands crafted by devotees. Or devotees will buy masterful garlands made by the professional garland makers. But to buy a garland is not the same at all as making one yourself. In creating the garland yourself—including choosing and collecting the flowers—there is much good feeling and karma.

It is a true spiritual joy to see your personally made garland hung on the deity. The Gods can sense the subtle vibration of the devotee through the garland. Buying a ready-made garland is an act of devotion, but it has nothing of the devotee's personal love, sacrifice of time and creativity. Therefore, the good feeling and karma are much less.

STORY READING

Near the top of the world is a country called Norway. It is far north, and the cold sea is on one side of it, with beautiful silver rivers that drop through steep, stoney valleys into the sea. In the northern countryside of Norway the winter snows stay as if time stopped. The winds moan coldly through forests and villages. The skies often stay gray for weeks.

On the edge of a large river was a town with lovely wooden houses that had very steep roofs and small yards with gardens. Many of the streets were made from old red brick. Along the streets were trees and brick boxes to grow flowers in. The town was called Red Rose. It was famous for its red roses, and for the smell of roses that filled its friendly streets. A number of Hindu families had moved to the town years ago. They were merchants and inn keepers where tourists could stay.

"Oh mummy," begged Devi, turning with wide gold-brown eyes while her mother braided her straight black hair. "Let Shakti and I go out today after school. Look. The sun is out. The snows are melting. I think spring is finally here. That means flowers are coming up in our secret places. I heard a meadow bird singing this morning."

Her mother finished a long braid and replied, "Yes, it looks like the spring thaw is here. Ah, sun and warmth and birds singing. That should make us feel better for

the Siva festival tomorrow. So you want to find flowers for a garland. Good luck. I haven't seen any." Here in Red Rose, Norway, lived Devi and Shakti. They were born here, and had seen eight years of white winters and brief, bright summers. The Hindu families saved their money and built a Siva temple from tree timber and rock carefully fit together. It was as big as a house, with a tower the height of a juniper pine tree. Inside were giant wood columns carved in India. The main deity was a greenish black Siva Linga, a perfectly polished stone from the Narmada River in north India. A large stove that burned wood was kept in one corner of the temple to provide heat over the winter chill. As a service for good karma Devi and Shakti liked to collect fire wood for the temple. They knew the woods well. They knew all the flowers. In the summer and fall they helped their mother grow a vegetable garden. The garden provided many fresh vegetables for their vegetarian diet. Devi and Shakti looked so healthy, and were so smart and good natured that other people in Red Rose gave up eating meat.

"Let's go," Devi called to her sister impatiently. "The sun is still setting early. We have to be quick. We need to gather 108 roses for our garland. We will string the garland tonight. Full moon tonight too."

Shakti was still putting on her coat and mittens. It was cold outside, but as they moved, they would warm up. "Yes, yes, sister. I know. I'm ready. Grab the basket to collect the roses. I'll get the scissors to cut the rose stems."

Since the town was famous for its roses, there were patches of rose bushes all over. Many had become wild during the years. They grew in the grassy meadows outside the busy town. When the two sisters and their brother searched the snow covered forest for firewood, they had found seven rose bushes that seemed very lonely. They were far away from any other rose bushes. They rose out of the snow like bare deer antlers. But Devi and Shakti were delighted to see many buds on them. These roses were producing flowers even in the end of winter. Despite the thorns, Devi and Shakti gave the bushes a little hug and said, "You are brave roses. We appreciate your strength. Your blooms will be very dear to us. And we will bring your flowers to the temple of Siva."

Buried in warm clothes and waterproof boots, the sisters and their brother flew down the brick streets. They headed due north, quickly jumping over an icy stream

ACTIVITIES

1. Bring colored paper to the class and string. The children all cut out lots of different shaped flowers from the variety of colored paper. They can also fold smaller pieces of the paper into flower-like shapes. As they cut out flowers or fold them, they carefully punch small holes through them and string them as a paper garland. Each child takes their garland home to offer in their home shrine or to their mother.

and climbing over large logs. They were both full of energy. "Let's sing a little song as we go," said Devi. So they sang a favorite Siva bhajan, their high voices echoing through the trees and up the valley like crystal bells. "There they are," shouted Shakti excitedly. "Look. See the red blooms." And in the yellowish afternoon light spreading a golden blanket over the milky snow, the sisters saw many deep red roses. They were like red butterflies floating in air. "I can smell them," said Devi. "What a divine fragrance. God Siva will really like these." And so the sisters approached the seven rose bushes. They said thanks to the rose devas, and carefully cut 108 rose blooms, putting them in their basket. There were many rose blooms left, so they also cut some for their home.

Later that evening the two girls sat in their living room, a roaring fire in the fire place. With their red roses they created a beautiful thick garland. It was a rope of roses. While placing each rose on the garland they thought that God Siva would help a family who just lost their home in a fire. The next day, at the temple festival, their red rose garland was placed on the Siva Linga. It was the only fresh flower garland. The two sisters were very happy. And word quickly spread through Red Rose that the Hindu sisters had found red roses when all other roses were still in their winter sleep.

HOMEWORK

Have the children go out to their own yard, or a neighbors' yard or from wild flower bushes and select what they think would be beautiful flowers for a garland. The children should think of the nature devas that live inside the flowers—the flowers are like their houses. The children should offer thanks for the beauty of the flowers to the nature devas.

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 spreading of love, light and energy through all.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Create is an important word. It is a key concept to understand. 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. They use their mind, their hands and the crayons to *create* a picture. If we tell the children to do a good deed for an old person, the children have to think of, or create, a good deed. They are being creative. The children have to generate a new idea where one did not exist before. However they do this, it is being creative. 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. 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 num-



Ganesha says, "God Siva created everything and everyone."

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the *Bala Ganapati* form of Lord Ganesha. It is the childlike image of Ganesha. It reminds us that even as children we need to fully understand and appreciate that God Siva created everything and everyone. Also, it is a reminder that adults need to keep a childlike view of life, that everything is perfect in the great spiritual progress of things.

All of the different items that Ganesha is carrying in this form represent the great variety of life on Earth and the vigor of Earth life. When we think of the term *everything*, we must realize that there is always new life and new things that are being created in the great cycle of Earth life. This means God Siva is creating all the time.

already provided. Also, through our senses of sight, hearing and touch, we feel things are outside of ourselves. God Siva does not do this.

His creation is all from His unending and all-powerful Mind. And everything is a part of Siva, not outside of Siva. To see what this is like, have the children try to create something, like an apple, completely out of their mind. They think about the apple. They imagine it. Then they create it with their mind as a physical apple in our world. Then they feel the apple is part of their sense of self. Can they do it? Probably not. The physical body and mind are very limited.

However, children and adults can create from their own energies in more subtle 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.

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

bers, 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 continues to create. It is not just a single event of creation. God-Creation is all through time.

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 children creating a picture. They are given paper and crayons. They have also been given intelligence by God Siva. The children 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

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 children's pictures. The children 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 children magic fingers. These children 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.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. One of the neatest analogies for understanding God Siva as the creator of everything and everyone is a puzzle. A puzzle is a picture made of many pieces. All the pieces fit together to make the whole scene. When the pieces are apart, there is no picture. When the pieces are all fitted together, the picture is seen. If possible, bring a nice puzzle to class. Tell the children that the puzzle represents all the people and animals and things in the world. Each puzzle piece is created by God Siva. But each puzzle piece must fit with the other pieces. They can not be separate. They must be together. So when the puzzle is put together, this shows God Siva creates the whole and that everything is together through Siva's light.

STORY READING

The bright blue and gold helicopter flew smoothly over the grey stone ground that had great black cracks in it. It was like a spider's web of stone. Some of the cracks were so wide and deep they could swallow a jeep. The helicopter turned slightly east, flying over a couple of wind-bent trees and went right over the edge of a cliff. Whoosh. The helicopter dove down. The cliff rocks went rushing up. Mahadevan and Sruti pushed their faces to the window. "Wow, what a ride," said Mahadevan. "Look at those rocks. Dad, look at those rocks. They're carved aren't they?" he asked his father who was sitting in the seat in front of the them.

The rocks came up the cliff like round columns, smooth as ice and the color of red sand. "No, perfectly natural," replied Dad. "This place is a wonderland of nature. This is nature creating poetry in stone." The pilot was busy working with hands and feet on the controls. The helicopter stopped its dive and stood still in the air. It was a big dragonfly with four people in it, stopped right next to a cliff that formed a solid wall for as far as they could see. Sruti could hear the whine of the blades, sounding like a giant food blender she used at home to help Mom with the vegetarian cooking. Mom wasn't here. She was back in Malaysia, their home. Sruti missed her mom, but this was a true adventure. Her dad was an expert in jungle flowers. She and her brother—he was 9, she was 8—came with father on a trip to Brazil in South America. When they went over the cliff she closed her eyes. Now she opened them. "Incredible," she said softly. "What a creation." The cliff went straight down hundreds of meters into a great sea of green. The green carpet stretched across the horizon, lifting here and there by low mountains. It was called the *rain forest*. Mahadevan pressed up to the window and looked down with his sister, saying, "The largest rain forest in the world. Here in Brazil. And we are going to walk into it, exploring for new flowers." The helicopter was now going down, like an elevator with windows. They could see some smoke rising a long ways away and what looked like fire.

"Those trees down there are hundreds of feet tall," said Sruti. "So much life. Dad told me the other day that here in the rain forest of Brazil there could be over one million types of living plants, insects and animals. He said the rain forest creates a huge amount of the oxygen for Earth so we all can breathe and live. That's amazing."

Mahadevan gulped some air and his gray-brown eyes gleamed. He said, "One million kinds of life. Hard to imagine. This kind of creation has to be from a very great Being. A Being that reaches out everywhere and creates with pure love. Remember what we were taught a few months ago. About God Siva as the creator. If we tried to find the original force that created all of this, it would be Siva." The helicopter continued its slow fall. The top of the rain forest began to look like a golden green roof, a giant home for Siva's living creation. But the smoke and fire worried the children.

They knew what it was. Slash and burn.

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring to the class a roll of aluminum foil. Also bring a medium size glass or metal bowl (semi-spherical kind) that is completely covered with aluminum foil. Make a little stand in the center of the class and place this aluminum bowl in its center with the opening down. This makes a silver, round half-globe shape on the table. This represents Siva. Then pass out fairly large squares of aluminum foil to the children. They are told they are going to help Siva in creating everything. Encourage them to create any image or object they like out of the aluminum foil: birds, animals, people, houses, trees, snowflakes, stars, etc. Then as they finish their creation they place it around the Siva globe at the center. If they finish quickly, they can make another creation. Once all of the images are finished and surrounding the globe, all the children sit and appreciate the silvery images. You can even darken the room and shine a light on them. Then they all go forward and undo their artistry and spread the flattened aluminum foil over the globe, returning the images that were created out of Siva to Siva.

The rain forest was being cut down and burned. Once cleared, the land is used as pasture to feed cattle. The cattle are killed to supply meat all over the world, particularly to the fast-food restaurants. Sruti looked at the pillars of fire in the distance and said, "Scientists estimate 100 species every day are lost forever from the slash and burn. God Siva's wonderful creations of plants and insects gone forever."

"Yea," said Mahadevan. "Just for meat. We are destroying our planet just for meat. Siva has created, and we, people, are destroying." And the helicopter landed. The engine died down. The children jumped out. It was like being in a giant green dome held up by brown tree trunks. It was not silent. The rain forest was alive with a million voices of Siva. Mahadevan and Sruti listened. It was forest music. They stood still. They prayed the rain forest would be saved.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

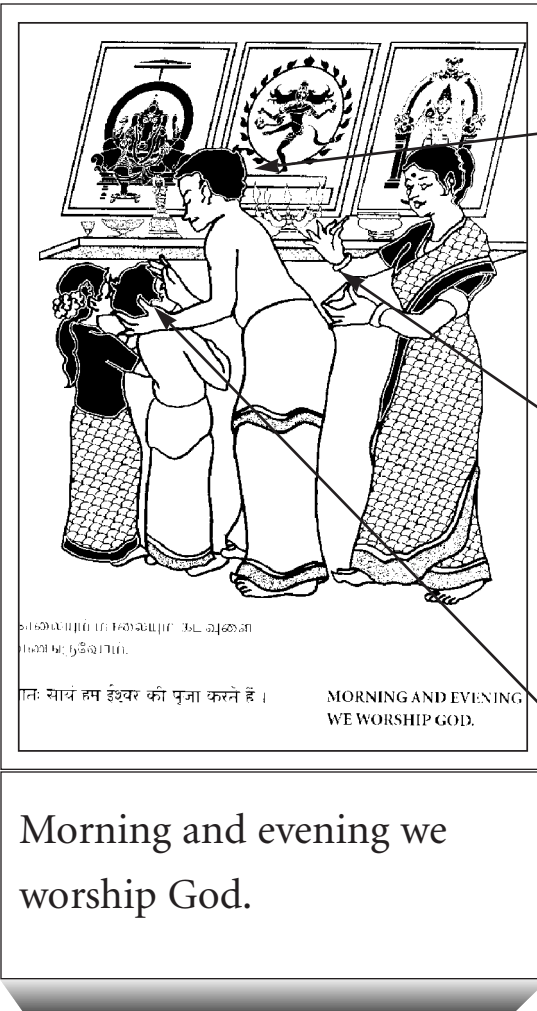
Worship of God is an important part of our daily family schedule. Twice a day, during the dawn and twilight, the whole family or individual student/career person dedicates some time to puja, study and meditation. Usually this is done in the home shrine room.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

While the temples dedicated to Ganesha, Murugan or Siva serve a large community, the shrine in the family home is for the members of the family. It is their spiritual sanctuary inside the home. The home shrine should be the center of the home. All the interests, activities, life pursuits and growth of the family come from the home's center: the dedicated shrine area or room. For our spiritual life is part of everything we do, and God is the life of our life. There is nothing that is outside of the Siva Light and Love that goes through all of life and Earth. It is the family that makes a house a home, and it is the God altar that makes the home a sacred abode for the Supreme Being and the Gods and devas to assist the family. Children often like to set up their own personal altar in their room or create a temporary altar as play. This should be encouraged.

All land species and most aquatic species follow a biological timing set to day and night. But there is also a spiritual timing in the change from day to night and night to day. The morning dawn and evening twilight are very spiritual hours. The rising sun brings gentle solar life force and the deep night, which is good for sleep, gives way to sunrise beauty and a quiet among humans. At twilight, the business and sharpness of the day is over, and again gentle, peaceful, beautiful energies are around us. Sunrise and sunset are the best times for family worship, or for private worship for students or young adults who live alone. Monks and lone yogis find these times among the best for spiritual practices. At these hours, we are naturally spiritual, more filled with life's purpose and beauty. We feel religious gratitude and the reality of Siva wells up in our heart.

In an ideal Saivite Hindu home, whether it be for a family or individual, there would be a worship/meditation time in the home shrine at dawn and twilight. Ideally, the



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is a simple home shrine room with pictures that serve as the worshipful images. Here, there is a picture of Ganesha on the left, Murugan on the right and God Siva in the center. On the shelf are kept some items of ceremony: camphor burner, incense, water bowl, vibhuti and kumkum vessels.

Some families keep an oil lamp lit all day and night. It is important to keep the shrine room very clean, and not to allow oil smoke and drips to build up. Spiritual beings of light called *devas* live in the shrine room and they like to live in a spotlessly clean room.

Father is applying Siva's vibhuti or white sacred ash to the forehead of his son and daughter. Can we tell if this is morning or evening worship? No. There is no indication. It could be either one. After this, the family sits down for a short meditation.

Morning and evening we worship God.

family would rise from sleep before the sun actually rises, and the father, after a shower, would prepare the Siva altar for puja. The children may help gather flowers or fetch fresh water. The family would gather and the father performs a short puja. The children may join in at times if they know the Sanskrit. The whole mood is worshipful love. The altar is the focus. The family concentrates on the spiritual energy of the altar. The devas who assist the Deities send their energy to the altar. From there it fills and surrounds the home. The shrine room should have a very special feeling. It should feel holy, slightly electric, like a tingling on the skin. After the puja or a simple showing of the arati, the family may sing bhajan, or the father may read from Saivite scripture. Then father, mother and children sit still for ten minutes, meditating on the spiritual energy of God Siva. At twilight, a brief arati flame is passed and a longer study and meditation period may occur.

Temples with their regular puja and trained priests are the dedicated places for the Gods. The home shrine is not spiritually empowered in the same way. The altar in the home is designed to attract and hold devas (the angelic helpers of the Gods) from the temples. The celestial communications of the Gods is relayed from the temple to the home by the devas. Thus a supercharged atmosphere is created in the home shrine. The devas can actually live and work with the family as long as the shrine is kept holy, regular worship is performed and there is harmony among the family.

In the case where the family or individual has no shrine area or room, then the same schedule of morning and evening worship and meditation should be established in a nice, clean area dedicated to that purpose.

ANALOGIES &**ILLUSTRATIONS**

1. A nice thought that all children can appreciate is that all during the day where the child lives, there is always a sunrise and sunset at another part of our world. As Earth turns there is always a sunrise and sunset somewhere. So there are always Saivite Hindus worshipping around the clock, so to speak. It is like everybody is taking turns worshipping Siva, and at dawn and twilight where the children live, it is their turn.

2. The home shrine is central to the family's well-being. It should be a special place for children. Children should look at the home shrine as a magical place, the area or room in the home where magic can happen. Children can psychically see the deva people in the shrine. Children may see bright colored astral light in the shrine. They should feel free to talk, either out loud or mentally, to the devas. Talk to them about their cares, problems and successes.

3. There are many activities that children do at the same time each day. Eating, brushing teeth, showering, studying, watching TV, sleeping, talking to friends. Every day we follow set times for certain activities. Children learn this at a very young age. The times of morning and evening worship to Siva should become one of, and ideally, our most important, daily activity.

STORY READING

Wild, fluffy banks of clouds rolled in over the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. The clouds were splashed with pinks and purples and a silver yellow. And they were moving fast, as fast as a herd of kangaroos. "Wow, look at those clouds. Aren't they wonderful," cried Arati as she spun in the sand of a beach near her home. She spoke with an Australian accent. In Australia, the sun appears very big and it was sending out a fiery show of color as it met the sea. Arati was 8 years old, old enough to know that the sun did not sink into the ocean. But she enjoyed the magic of the sun and sea touching. "It's not too late to splash in the water," she yelled against the blowing wind to her friend Anandi. "Let's go." And they ran down the sand with crabs scurrying out of the way. They ran into the dark water, shooting up fountains of silvery sea water that also became painted with purples and

pinks. Of course they got a little wet, and small waves were breaking across their knees. The water was warm. The air was warm. The sky and ocean were like mirrors. "Wait. Stop. Look," cried Anandi, breathing hard. "A seahorse washed up on the beach." And there was a little tan-colored seahorse struggling for life. "Let's save it," said Arati. "It is one of Siva's beautiful creatures. A seahorse created by Si-va. See, it rhymes," said Arati to her friend, and they laughed. They both said together, "Siva's seahorse." Arati reached down to pick up the seahorse and drop it back into the ocean. She saw the time on her watch. "Oh, Oh. I'm going to be late for puja at home," she quickly said. "See you tomorrow," and she ran north for the road that would take her quickly to her house. She ran up to the gate, then slowed down, and walked through the door. "Hi mum. Sorry I'm late. We found a seahorse washed up on the beach," she said to her mother, dressed in a red and silver sari, all ready for the worship time in the home shrine. "Alright dear. You still have a few minutes to shower and change. Hurry." Arati said, "I picked these daisy flowers on the way home. I'll bring them to the shrine room after I'm changed." She then skipped down the hall, chanting "Siva, Siva. Siva is the seahorse." She showered, changed, gathered up her flowers and entered the shrine room. It was all polished wood, with beautiful oil lamps and a dark red carpet on the floor. Her father and mother were there. Her father passed a camphor flame and chanted softly before the bronze Siva Nataraja. It was now dark purple outside. The night was falling. Arati eyes fell shut for a short time of yoga.

BACKGROUND

The *Vedas* devote many hymns to describing the spiritual environment of the home. The connection between devas and the family was an important Vedic relationship. Turning a house into a holy domicile where the family could spiritually advance and receive aid from the devas is a recurring theme. Much family wealth has gone into creating home altars that go on for generations. In ancient times, when wood, stone and metal craftsmanship excelled, the shrine room was elegant and harmonious with nature and human nature. The *Agamas* contain detailed instructions on where and how the shrine room is to be built in the house. It is vital to keep the home

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring two small, thin pieces of wood. Cross them in the middle of the room and have the children determine which direction is north, south, east, west and correctly position the wood. One half of the class faces east, sits down and each one draws a picture of their family worshipping during a sunrise. The other half of the class sits facing west and draws a picture of their family worshipping with a moon rising at evening time.

shrine extremely clean, not allowing it to become oily or grimy or dusty. Everything, every wall and the floor must be spotless and polished.

CONNECTIONS

Temple worship and home worship relate closely. Home worship, of course, is much more frequent than temple worship. Worship at the temple may be once a week or once a month. Any art or expression of devotion that is done for the temple can be done for and in the home shrine. For instance, weaving garlands or singing bhajan. If the family is guided by a spiritual guru, a satguru, then the home altar would include a section dedicated to the worship of the guru. This appears in a future lesson. The shrine room is often the best place in the home for personal yoga practice.

CITIZENSHIP

A daily time of worship in the home is one of the best ways to promote family unity and well-being, which most countries and societies consider the heart of citizenship. All religions have a daily routine of spiritual practice, of drawing close to God. In Saivite Hinduism, our daily worship, study and yoga create a daily opportunity to renew compassion and ahimsa nonviolence and to see Siva everywhere, in all people, all life, all worlds. Daily worship also cultivates a spiritual willpower that can serve the good of the family's nation. It makes a person who is responsive to needs and responsible in meeting problems with intelligent solutions. As the devas work through the home altar, they can help in all these ways.

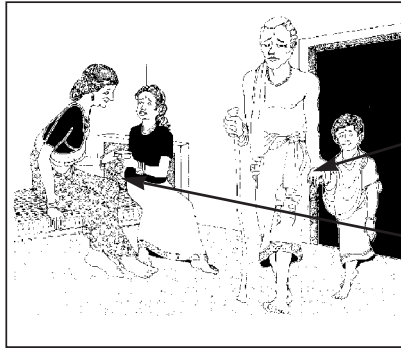
LESSON FOCUS

Serving in a volunteer and selfless spirit is one of the best ways to help others and to help ourselves spiritually. To serve means we are giving of our time, energy and intelligence to help other people or to help situations. Naturally, this makes us more spiritual because our sense of personal self is lessened. Service awakens the higher qualities of giving, compassion and strength. Service is necessary to see to many needs of the local Hindu community. Service is a necessary foundation for success in yoga. Helping elders is a necessary service for youth. Elders need caring. They represent the vault of life wisdom stored from many decades of experience.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Certainly one of the great acts of human life is service. To volunteer to serve in some way “makes people feel good,” as the very popular saying goes. Many people testify that volunteer service is the most important part of their life. And many people make a life out of selfless service. This includes helping the poor, the ill, the homeless, the environment, disaster victims, orphans, refugees. Their life is dedicated to helping others. Obviously, this is a very advanced life, and stands out to all spiritual people as a great example. That “makes me feel good” is actually a first feeling of the soul, of the soul lighting up the physical body. For anybody who has done a selfless act out of kindness or compassion, their soul is coming forward. And this is actually a great spiritual event to be emphasized to children. Do a good, selfless act, and you will feel your own soul light.

Selfless means that the children are not thinking of themselves. They are not concerned about their body. They are not mentally bored. These are what we could call the “small self.” The soul is the “light self.” The young children are not thinking of being someplace else, or playing, or eating, or watching TV. They overlook discomfort. They think helpful thoughts. They try to do the best job they can. They think of others, rather than themselves. They volunteer for other services. They learn to like volunteer service, to make it a regular part of their lives. Selfless is a special state. It is a spiritual state of mind. When there is less self, there is more soul. It is that simple, and that profound. Volunteer means to do something from our own decision and strength. We are not asked to do it by someone else.



Let us serve.
We help elders.

The child sees a way to serve in the home, school, temple or in the community, and says “I want to help.” Spiritual service also means that there is no payment. No money is given for the service. Ideally, the person who spiritually serves is not even expecting a “thank you.” Gratitude may come, but it is not expected. Why? Because the “you” is the small self, the personal body and mind. It is the soul that is serving, and the soul does not feel a sense of being a physical body and mind. It does not feel small and different from everybody else. It feels as large as light and at one with everybody.

Service is good karma. It is creating actions that are good, kind, helpful, inspiring. All of these acts of service are recorded in our karma bank, and they will return to us in future lives. In future lives we will have acts of goodness, charity and wisdom come to us from our good deeds we do in this life, even as a young child.

Service for the young child starts in the home. How can he or she help? What

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Here, the mother, daughter and son are all working on cleaning the floor in their home. Service starts in the home for children. They should offer to help their parents often, and not wait to be assigned chores. This son and daughter volunteered to help their mother with this work. They are looking at it as a spiritual service. It will make them more selfless. It is a good karma.

Here, the son and daughter are helping their grandparents. The grandfather is holding the grandson’s hand for guidance.

The daughter has prepared a nice cup of tea for her grandmother. One day these children will be the elders.

chores are there to volunteer for? Is there a special service they can do often, like bringing flowers for decoration? Service is beyond the normal chores of home life, or expectations of the parents, such as making the bed. It is a volunteer service. Outside of the home, the temple or local Hindu society often needs a lot of volunteer service. Young children can volunteer to help under adult supervision for groundskeeping, landscaping, polishing the inside floors, polishing metal trays and pots, collecting recycle materials for fundraising for the temple, helping to put out mailings. There are always many ways to serve. The children need to be encouraged to look around and to ask around for service needs.

One of the most important caring acts for children and young adults is to help elders. Children enjoy a special relationship with older people. Quite often their most liked relative is grandfather and grandmother. The grandparents offer a perspective on life, and humor and compassion. Elders have gone through family life, raising a family, and they can look backwards and see how they could have improved, or made better decisions in life. An elder person will generally be more spiritual. They have lived life, and now feel a need for spir-

itual experience. They want to prepare themselves well for their next birth in reincarnation. Because they are more spiritually inclined, the elders can offer good advice—advice that has the spiritual, cultural and character development of the child more in mind. They can see more opportunities for the child.

Children and elders are at the opposite ends of the age range. The elderly are in bodies old with age. Children are in bodies young, strong and energetic. It is natural for children to aid the elderly, and to show respect for their age and wisdom. Children can help elders in many ways. And if a child can see no obvious way to aid an elder, they can always ask, “Is there some way I can help you?” That alone would be a wonderful gesture to the elder. Helping elders is another good karma deed. Every time we assist an elder, we are creating good karma for ourselves. Again the good karma is stored for the child, so in a future life their elder stage of life may be filled with helpful assistance from kind-hearted children.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The heart of spiritual experience is feeling and identifying with our soul body and intelligence. The more we in human form can feel our soul, the more spiritual we become. Suppose we had a window that looked on a magical scene of a tall, red stone mountain, a Siva temple made of diamond, and streams of liquid gold flowing through a forest of emerald trees. The window is perfectly clear. This is the beauty of our soul nature. But on one side of it, the window is covered with dark dust. It is so thick we cannot see through it. This is our limited human view. Everytime we do an act of service, we wipe a little dust from the window and can see a little of the beauty of our soul nature.

STORY READING

The doors of the subway train slid back with a quiet hiss. The subway was underneath Paris, France. Through the metal doors stepped an old man. He walked strong and stepped into the bright lights of the subway station and looked around. His face was the color of a bronze pot, his hair as white as salt. There was a crowd of people around him, but he stood out. His white hair was long, and it was partially tied in a knot at the back of his head. On his fore-

head was a red dot and three lines of white ash—the marks of Siva sight. He looked noble, like an old king. He stood straight. He wasn’t tall, but he looked tall. In his hands were a map and a briefcase. He looked around, turned the map sideways, and said to himself, “Ganesha, I’m lost. I am definitely lost.” He was in the middle of the subway station. People rushed by him, carrying shopping bags and briefcases. Tourists were talking in many languages. Another subway train came in at high speed with a whoosh of wind. All the doors in the subway opened at the same time. Out poured many people moving fast, and the old man was pushed a bit in a crowd heading for the subway stairs. The old man held onto his map, and gripped the edge of a pillar to steady himself. He was being squeezed in the crowd. It reminded him of riding buses in Delhi, India. “Time to ask for directions,” he thought. He didn’t speak French. He was in Paris on a trip to raise money for a Hindu monastery. He started to look around at people’s faces. Perhaps a kind face that looked helpful. He had bright eyes, like flashes of moonlight on lake water, for he had practiced yoga much of his life. In fact he had started to do yoga when he was 8 years old. A very old man with thin white hair, over 100 years old, gave him his first lessons in Siva yoga. He was always grateful for that, and had never forgotten the ancient one’s gentle face and wise words. So, now lost in Paris, he looked for a gentle adult face. Then two small hands grabbed his map. “Do you need some help,” said a young child’s voice in English from down below. The old man looked quickly down. He saw a young boy and girl looking up at him with kind smiles as their hands held his map. They were both fair skinned, with blondish hair and sea blue eyes. And they both had small red dots between their eyes.

“Why yes, I need help,” the old man said in English. “I need to get here by six o’clock,” and he pointed to a place on the map. “Are you Hindus? You don’t look like you’re from India,” he said loudly, because the crowds were very noisy. The boy quickly replied, “Of course we’re Hindus. This red dot means we try to see Siva in all people. It’s like a game. Quite often we just stop and help people, or talk to them. You have nice white hair. We were born here in France. Our parents lived in India and became Hindus.” The girl added, “We just got off that subway that came in. I saw you looking at the map like you were lost. You

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Locate a park nearby and have all the children pick up trash and litter into garbage bags or nearby garbage cans. The idea is to be thorough and to be joyous in an activity that is serving others rather than serving ourselves. Have the children think of other ways they can serve others while they are doing this.

2. Invite an elderly person to the class; a relative or friend. Ask the elder to give a talk on what their life is like, their interests, what they did as children of 7 or 8 years old. Then encourage a dialog between the elder and the youths so the children can offer ways to help their elders.

want to go here?” and she pointed at a street on the map.

“Yes, that’s it,” said the man. “You two are like devas. Namastivaya to you both.”

“Well, it looks like we’ll have to take you to another subway station. It’s a few blocks away,” said the girl. “Here, I will hold your arm so we don’t get separated in this awful crowd.” The boy reached for the elder’s briefcase, adding, “I’ll carry this for you. Let’s go.” So the two youngsters and the elder went up the stairs into the Paris traffic, crossed a busy street, walked two blocks north and one block east and went down into the cave of a subway again. “Here,” said the girl. “Take this subway, and it will take you right to your street. We wish you well.”

“You’ve been very kind children. To take me all the way here, out of your way. Thank you so much,” the elder replied. “Much good karma will come your way.”

CITIZENSHIP

Volunteer service, especially toward needs of the religious community and the elders, is one of the great expressions of citizenship. If each religious community of a nation is practising selfless service, there would be greater harmony and respect. Also religious organizations can operate a number of social charities that are of a great help to society in general. Caring for the elderly is a primary concern for many countries, as the population of the elderly is on a steep rise.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

There are certain festivals that celebrate our human dependence upon and gratitude for the bounty of our planet. This also extends to our vital and delicate relationship to the sun. We are indebted to Earth and sun for our water, food, resources, energy. Harvest festivals also renew the bond of cooperation between humans and the spirit world.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

There are many harvest festivals around the world. Every ancient civilization and culture had at least one major harvest festival. Our modern nations and cultures all have harvest celebrations too. Nothing is so important to humanity as its agriculture. People must have food, sleep, clothing and shelter before the path of spirituality can be walked. Harvesting the season's crops comes at different times in different areas of the world. So there are many harvest festivals at different times of the year. Tai Pongal is a harvest festival held in South India and Sri Lanka. In those areas, the first rice harvest is over by January. Tai Pongal is a celebration held at home, outside in front of the home or in the house's courtyard. Everybody celebrates it, not just farmers. Doctors, lawyers, politicians, soldiers, policemen, engineers, housewives, executives, taxi drivers, temple priests—everybody. Everybody is dependent upon food for survival. As rice is the main crop for Asia, it becomes the focus for celebrating the cycle of growing and harvesting all food crops. So Tai Pongal is not just a rice festival. It is a giving of thanks for all grain, vegetable, fruit, legume and nut crops from anywhere that are part of our diet.

Since Tai Pongal is a celebration of harvesting farming crops, it is also a celebration of our Hindu vegetarian diet. Tai Pongal does not celebrate the killing of animals for people to eat. It does not celebrate the killing of chickens or fish for people to eat. Tai Pongal offers personal gratitude to the nature spirits that create the vegetarian crops that nourish us. Thus Tai Pongal for Saivite Hindus is a statement of our *ahimsa* non-violence lifestyle. Because Tai Pongal reminds us of our ahimsa consciousness, it also reminds us of our relationship to all humans and life on Earth. And it reminds us that Siva is truly in all life, that He is life itself. This creates for children a feeling that even the environment—the forests, mountains, valleys, lakes, rivers, meadows, prairies,



Tai Pongal festival in January. We celebrate the first rice harvest. We thank the sun and earth for giving us food.

farm lands and oceans are all sacred. They are all part of Siva. They are all filled with spirit beings, guided by the Nature Mind of Ganesha.

The Tai Pongal ceremony is performed outside under the energy eye of the sun. Central to the ceremony is the boiling of rice in a pot to the point where the bubbling rice boils over the side of the pot. Often, there is also a *kumbha* pot with a coconut representing Ganesha, God of Nature. The purpose of the festival is a to give thanks. It is a mood of love to the Earth and food spirits and sun for nourishing us.

The Earth orbit is in an exact position from the sun to breed and sustain life. If we were a little closer to the sun, all of our oceans and fresh waters would boil away. If we were a little further away from the sun, our planet would freeze. So we are in a perfect orbital dance with the sun. Light from the sun fuels plant growth and causes vital changes in the soil. Heat from the sun

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

A family is preparing for the Tai Pongal rice harvest ritual. The son is putting rice from the recent harvest into a large pot. The daughter has flowers. The mother is making sacred kolam designs. Father is finishing the creation of a Ganesha vessel.

Notice it is outdoors. There is an arati lamp lit. The nature spirit devas enjoy the fire and life force of the offerings.

Father is raising an arati flame to the great star of our solar system: the sun. Thus, humanity is asking for the continued sustaining energy from the sun for all life. Through the devotion of the ceremony, we give thanks for another year of life on Earth.

Mother is prostrating as the arati is offered. The children are holding their hands in the divine salutation of *namaskar*. They are using the same *mudra* hand position as discussed in Lesson 55 on how we greet each other.

maintains a temperature ideal for life. Heat from the sun turns water to cloud to rain. Seasons come from Earth's orbit around the sun. Our energy sources all come from the sun, including oil. In all ways we are linked to the sun. At the height of the Tai Pongal harvest ceremony, an arati is passed directly to the sun Deva. It is a moment of prayer, thankfulness and wisdom that the being of the sun makes our physical and spiritual progress on Earth possible.

ANALOGIES & ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The act of harvesting has much meaning for people. The crops have grown from seed, a remarkable, even miraculous event in itself. Water, soil and sun grow the crop. Or more precisely, the nature devas of the water, soil and sun worlds grow the crops. We humans tend it. Then, when the crop is

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring in a picture book from the library on the sun. Or show a video on the sun. Talk to the children about how powerful the energy of the sun is, and how important it is to life on earth. The sun should be understood as much more than a massive, gas sphere undergoing constant nuclear fusion. It is as an intelligent, powerful being, a star deva.

ready, we harvest it. We reap the final glory of Ganesha’s bounty. Thus harvesting is like receiving a gift from nature. Nature gives to us a gift of food, of water, of resources. We receive the gift with a smile and words of thanks.

2. Offering our thanks and kind appreciation to Earth and the nature devas is of course an act we can do everyday. Once a year on a special occasion is good. But naturally, every time we sit down to a meal we should be bonding to our planet, sun and their bloom of life. In Saivite Hinduism, there are such meal time ceremonies, including Sanskrit chanting. If we don’t offer daily thanks, but wait till only once a year, this is like only thanking your mother and father once a year. And look how much they do for you everyday.

3. The Earth and sun are like a ball (earth) tied by a wire to a central pole (the sun). The earth flies around the sun at always about the same distance away. Along the wire from the central pole (the sun) travels all the energy for the ball (earth) to host life. This goes on for billions of years.

STORY READING

The weather forecast came over the radio 9-year-old Shankara was listening to: “expected showers today, but clearing by tomorrow,” the weatherman reported. Good, thought Shankara. At least we’ll see the sun tomorrow. It was January in Madras. The air was cool. Shankara pulled his jacket around him. Clouds that looked like black chalkboards lay thickly overhead. Shankara was on the rooftop of the apartment building his family lived in. The building was tall. It was near the beach area of Madras. Despite the brownish haze of pollution in the air Shankara could see for miles. This pollution is awful, he was thinking. It is in nearly every city of the world. How can people allow this to happen? We are destroying our world. Killing species. Making ourselves sick. He kicked at the cement of the rooftop. Wish there was something I could do, he thought. Ganesha, he often vowed to himself, I will help save Earth. And he coughed as a big cloud of auto exhaust fumes came up from the street below. Tomorrow was Tai Pongal. All over South India families were preparing for the harvest festival. Shankara’s family would be up on this rooftop holding the ritual. Shankara loved the sky, the sun, the stars and planets

that shone at night. He read books on the night sky. For his birthday, he wanted a telescope. So he was relieved that the storm overhead would be clearing. He liked the ceremony of Tai Pongal. It made him feel tied to the Earth and sun. He was part of nature. Nature was part of him. This year his father was going to let him pass the arati flames to the sun. Shankara had been reading about the sun and looking at pictures of it taken through telescopes. It was clear to him that the sun was a powerful and great star. A Saivite swami had taught him that the sun was also a being with a vast mind. Shankara wanted to come close to the sun mind. Tomorrow, he thought, my mind will join the sun. I will feel the light and heat. I will talk to the sun. Maybe some idea for helping Earth will come to me from the sun mind. Here on the roof Shankara was also growing some vegetables and herbs. He walked over to his garden near the roof’s north edge. He leaned over and took some soil in his fingers. It smelled good. The peppers and cauliflower were doing well. He was a vegetarian. There were some smells of potatoes in a tamarind sauce drifting on the wind. It made him hungry. He talked to other children about being vegetarian. Most weren’t interested. That made Shankara sad. People who eat meat are killing animals and hurting the Earth. But some children had decided to be vegetarian because Shankara talked to them. That would be part of tomorrow’s Tai Pongal Shankara said to himself. Bringing people to the vegetarian diet is a great gift to the world.

CONNECTIONS

In Hinduism, there are many different harvest festivals. Tai Pongal is just one. It is a home celebration. It relates to our daily home worship. Harvest festivals are for honoring the devas, as well as bringing the Gods close to us. Ganesha is the Lord of Nature. His knowledge and power guide all the spirits of nature creating the world around us. Because Ganesha governs nature, our harvest rituals reach into His realm. He is happy that humans express gratitude and honor to the nature devas. That makes humans less selfish, more spiritual and more a part of the three worlds discussed later.

CITIZENSHIP

A nation’s most vital concern is water and agriculture. Every government has min-

istries and departments that oversee and develop water resources and land and crop management. This is usually done through science and civic responsibility. Religious ceremonies and practices such as vegetarianism do have a great contribution to citizenship. Tai Pongal and other harvest festivals are ecological celebrations. They teach of man’s delicate place in nature, the world and in our solar system. They bring a sense of sacred oneness to the citizens. The farming industry is appreciated. Such celebrations can awaken new thinking about using energy sources directly from the sun, rather than from polluting oil fuels.

WRONG THINKING

It is wrong to judge the old harvest rites as being superstitious or outdated. These rituals are supernatural. They tap into a super power within nature, that of the nature spirits. These spirits are intelligent and caring. They create our food and forests and flowers as an expression of their Sivaness. They like to be acknowledged, to be thanked, to be honored with love as fellow beings in the universe. Further, chemical-based methods of farming are being found destructive of land, whereas old farming ways are in balance. Sometimes “modern science” has ignored the great spiritual truths held by our ancestors. As a result the natural balance of our planet has been upset. This balance will be restored when all men again start to work with the greater inner forces that guide and guard nature.

Notes:

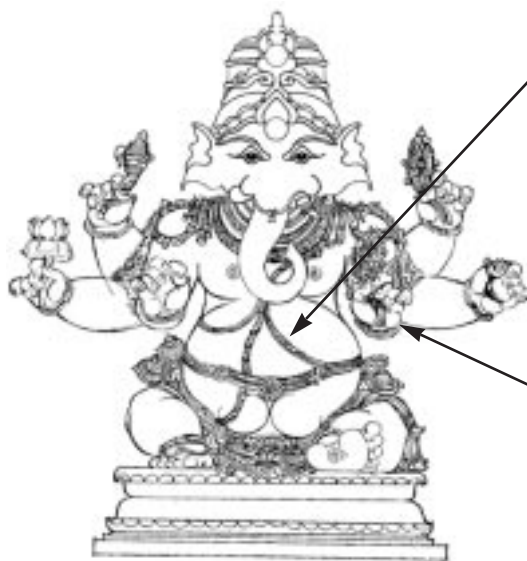
LESSON FOCUS

God Siva is the creator of all souls, all spirit beings, all life, all planets and stars, all places high and low. All of Siva's creation is in three very large universes. These are called by ancient scripture the three worlds. This lesson discusses what the three worlds are and the act of Siva creation.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Every child lives in a home that has rooms. There are rooms for cooking, for eating, for sleeping, for cleaning, for enjoying company. The home is where we experience our world the most. Our world is what we see, hear, touch, smell and taste. We call this world the physical world, because it is the world that is real to our physical body. We live in the home in our physical body, our body that we see in the mirror every day. We see the walls. We hear the voices of our family. We smell flowers in the shrine room. We taste mother's food. We feel the blankets of our bed. When we step out of our home we see the neighbor's homes and the towns of our country, and the sky, mountains, trees and flowers. As we travel further away from our home, all that we see, hear, touch, taste and smell is part of our physical world. Earth, the planet we live on, the sun and all the stars, and all of space is part of our physical existence. This physical world is solid to us. It has certain laws. Falling from heights can hurt us. Fire can burn us. We cannot walk through closed doors. We need air and water to live.

So the physical world is what our physical body experiences through the senses. But there is another large world that exists through and inside the physical world, but we can not see it with our physical eyes. We can not hear it with our physical ears. This world is there, all around us, even going through our bodies, like fine light traveling right through us. It is a very large world, much larger than the physical world. It is called the devas' world, because the people who live there have bodies that shine with light (the meaning of deva). While our world is physical, this devas' world is mental. It is built from thought. But to those who live there, it is very solid. Yet its laws follow the power of thought, rather than the forces of physical matter. Let's go back to the rooms in the child's house. The child steps into his or her bedroom and sees the bed. At the same time, the child is actually standing in the devas' world, and the child



Ganesha says, "Siva created 3 worlds: our world, the devas' world and the Gods' world."

has a deva world body, a body that has different colors of light shining from it. This deva world body is actually the more important body of the child. It is the child, with full intelligence and abilities of spirit thought. The physical body only exists because of the life force from this deva world body. When we sleep, we live at night in our deva world body. When we die, we live for a long time in our deva world body, helping great spiritual souls and preparing for our next birth in the physical world. The deva world has many levels, like vast steps going from down to up. One level is all the spirits of nature. On the lower steps are beings and people who are not spiritual, but enjoy being mean, ugly and instinctive. On the middle levels, or steps, are people who are helping humanity with new discoveries, new ways of thinking, new ways of healing, and with art and culture. On the top levels, or steps, are great spiritual deva people who guide humans in their spiritual search and practice.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the *Kshipra Prasada Ganapati* form of Ganesha. His big belly symbolizes all of the physical world. Ganesha is the God who guides nature and humanity, who gives high culture and great ideas. He also directs the activities of much of the deva world. Ganesha is a great God in the Gods' world. This is where Ganesha lives and views and helps all the happenings in the physical world.

In this hand Ganesha holds a twig of a wish-fulfilling tree. We can wish directly to Lord Ganesha in the Gods' world. If our wish is good for us, then He will advise the deva people in the devas' world to make your wish come true.

There is one more world, or universe, that is even larger and much more spiritual than the deva world. This is the Gods' world and it is so vast, so beautiful, so filled with wondrous light and bliss and divine intelligence that it is even beyond our imagination. This is the world of God Siva, where He exists as the Supreme Soul. This Gods' world is also where all the very advanced souls that we call Gods exist and perform their great cosmic functions. Deep inside each child's deva world body is the soul body of pure light. It looks a little like a human body, because the human body is a dense copy of the soul body. The immortal soul body is the child's true identity. This soul body grows and learns more of its God-like nature through the experiences of the physical world and devas' world.

God Siva, the Supreme Being, creates all three of these worlds from His Mind. He keeps all the worlds going with perfect order and purpose by His Mind. Therefore, even our physical world exists in His Mind.

All we see and hear and touch is part of Siva's Mind of light, love and pure energy.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Let's imagine three rooms that are inside one another, like a Chinese box with boxes nested inside each other. We walk into the first room, the largest room. This is the God's world. It surrounds and contains the other two rooms. In the God's world room we can see the walls of the next room. A door opens and we walk into the next room, the door closing behind us. This is the Deva's world room. It surrounds and contains the physical world room. We can see the physical world room's walls. A door opens. We walk through into the physical world room, the door closing behind us. All we see now is a single room with its walls. We don't see the Deva's world or the God's world from this physical room. Yet we know they still exist.

2. Children are very familiar with the spirit world, or the devas' world. This is because up to age six many children can naturally see into the devas' world. They see nature spirits, like fairies, or they see, talk and play with deva world children their own age. These are the famous "invisible friends" that many young children have. Often children will be visited as they are falling asleep by high deva or angel people. These devas guide the children, offer them excellent advice, or teach them some fine spirit skill.

STORY READING

Jnani lay on her bed, smelling of freshly washed sheets, under a brown and red blanket with Indian designs. She shared this room with her younger sister, Tara, who was four. Jnani was 8 years old. She was just relaxing, her hands behind her head. Her head rested on a pillow that matched the blanket. Her bed was not soft. She didn't sink into it. It was firm. Jnani had learned some yoga postures which she did on her bed. She had told her mom, "I want a firm bed so I can do some yoga on it and sleep well." So there Jnani lay on her firm bed, floating on it like on a raft drifting lazily down a river. She lived in Fiji, near Nadi, where a new Murugan temple was recently built. She could hear the temple bells chiming like metal birds in the distance. It was nearing the evening puja time. The last of

the bell tones echoed into silence. The room was almost dark and Jnani could only see faint outlines of the pictures on her wall. A feeling of sleepiness passed over her. But she wasn't tired. Her bluish-grey eyes were open. But, as if she had stepped into a movie theater, Jnani suddenly saw yellow and blue light fill her room. It seemed to come from the center of the room, a great circle of yellow with blue shooting out of it. She watched the light with incredible joy, a happiness she had never felt before. The yellow light surrounded her, sparkling like fireworks and feeling like warm bubbling water. She no longer felt or saw her body. It was like she had become a cloud, floating and airy. The room was not lit up by the yellow and blue colors, but the golden and blue colors seemed to go through the walls, like they were made of glass. Jnani was frozen in joy, not moving, breathing slowly. Her only thought was, "Devas. Spiritual light. This must be the deva world. I am seeing the deva world." Then the yellow and blue light became very soft. A room appeared before her vision. It was solid, real. She could touch the surface of the walls that were made of dark, shiny stone that had a soft green glow. Yet Jnani knew she was also in her own bedroom. She was in two worlds at once, she thought to herself. Then two people walked into the room, one young man and one young woman. Their faces were kind and beautiful. They wore very fine Indian-style robes and their whole body gave off orange and deep blue light. "Yes, Jnani," the lady said. "You have seen the deva world while still in your physical world body. This is so you can remember, and tell other children about the reality of the deva world." Then they walked out, and Jnani's eyes closed. When they opened, all she saw was her room in darkness. But in her mind, she still saw, as true as life, the deva world.

CONNECTIONS

Notice how this lesson closely connects to the *Ganesha says lesson* on Siva created everyone and everything. Everyone and everything have to exist somewhere, and each according to its purpose and spiritual advancement. Also, this lesson nicely compliments the lesson on home shrines and worship, and on temple worship. In the home shrine, we are tuning into the deva world. In temple worship we are tuning into the Gods' world. In learning yoga, we are also functioning in the higher devas'

A C T I V I T I E S

1. The ideal prop for this activity would be to have the kind of balloons that have one or two balloons nested inside of the main balloon. When you blow them up you see through the main outer balloon to a second balloon inside and a third balloon nested inside that one. The outer balloon represents our world which looks into the Deva world and deep inside of the Deva world can be seen the Siva world. This is the best three-dimension representation of this abstract concept. If this kind of novelty balloon can't be located then bring in a supply of balloons of different colors and sizes. Have the children blow them up so there are three different sizes. The largest size is the Siva world. The next largest is the Deva world. The smallest is our world. As three different sized and colored balloons are blown up, the children line them up in a close row and try to see through the smallest one (our world) into the Deva world one and Siva world one. Then they can let them float around and appreciate that Siva created them all.

2. Gather the children into the middle of the room and have them form a circle. The lights are on in the room. The children are directed to look around at everything in the room. Then the lights are turned out so it is dark. The children jump up to a standing position and take in a deep breath. As they breathe out they see the room being created from their own body energy. When the lights go on, they children have successfully created the room. Repeat this a few times. This is like God Siva creating the three worlds out of His own Mind.

world and occasionally entering and going beyond the Gods' world.

HOMEWORK

Have the children practice lying on their bed or on a comfortable mat on the floor with the lights out or very dim. They should relax their normal eyesight so they are not staring or focusing on anything, but are just looking. They should be having good thoughts about the devas' world and deva people. In this state of receptivity the children may experience psychic images of light in the room, of beautiful places or of very kind spiritual people.

LESSON FOCUS

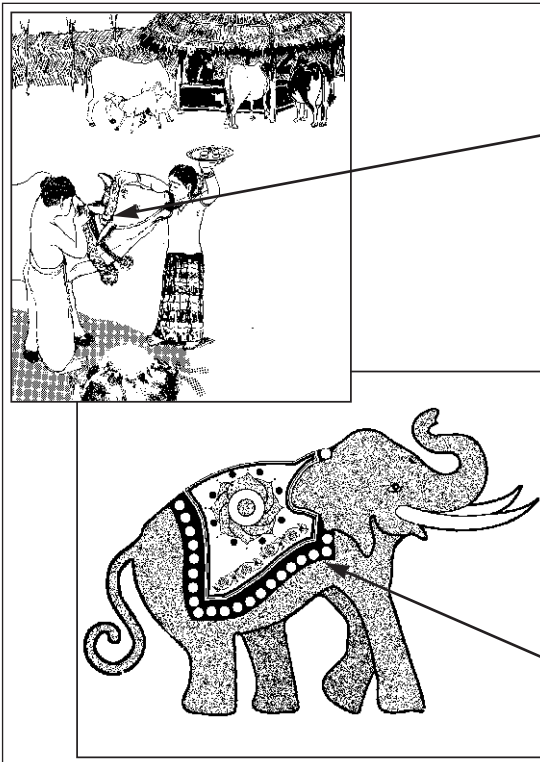
The world of animals is a beautiful and important part of God Siva's creation on Earth. Saivite Hindus view all animals, including dolphins and whales, as being the body homes of souls. Souls live in animal bodies, just as souls live in human bodies. Humans are friends with many animals, such as the dog, cat, cow, goat, horse and elephant. Among the animals that are our friends, the cow and elephant are the Saivite Hindus' best friends. The cow and elephant give us many good things for our lives. They symbolize spiritual truths. They teach us certain good qualities. All life is sacred. All life helps in Siva's plan of life.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

The animal kingdom has many kinds of animals, from antelope to tigers, from sea otters to dolphins. We can make a very long list of all the animals in the world. Our list would cover lots and lots of blackboards. What would our world be like without animals? It would be lonely. We people would be by ourselves. It would be silent. No cows mooing. No dogs barking. No wolves howling. No bears growling. No cats purring. No horses whinnying. Without animals, the world would be less beautiful. The world would be boring and dull without the running, jumping and playing of animals. We need all animals to make our world spiritually complete. The animals help our world be full of Siva's beauty, and each animal is a part of Siva. The animals help teach us, for they live in nature. Animals only take what they need. Animals do not harm nature. Most animals are vegetarian. The animals that hunt, like tigers and wolves, are smart enough to know which is the weakest animal to kill for food, and they have *devas'* world (see lesson 22) permission to do this. We humans do not do this. We can be selfish and harmful. Very sadly, we humans have made extinct many animals. That creation of God Siva does not exist any more on Earth. All gone, and none of the children will see them.

For Saivite Hindus, we try to see the best in animals and honor that best. We learn and we are thankful. We see Siva in all life. All life is spiritual. All animals are filled with Siva's light.

To Saivite Hindus, all animal life is holy, as is life itself. Further, non-life—such as the soil, rocks, sky, clouds, water, mountains, volcanoes, deserts—is also holy. It is very good for children at this age to realize



Baby, see the milking cow. She is so good to us. She is like our mother. We never hurt the cow. In India, all big temples have an elephant.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Here we see two children expressing their joy and fondness for the cow. Being close to a cow like this, or close to a herd of cows, it would be impossible to think of harming such a beautiful animal. And it would be very difficult to even think for one second of eating a cow for dinner. Most children around the world have a difficult time eating meat when they actually meet the animals face to face. Notice in this picture that the cow has been given a garland. This is a fine gesture of our seeing the cow as sacred and so generous to humans.

Here is the temple elephant. The temple elephant is dressed in fine clothes and ornaments and in many cases has designs painted on its hide. The elephant is a great example to us of how to take care of our own family and community. Elephants are very caring.

this. Everything has a purpose in Siva's plan. Everything is connected to everything else through mind consciousness. Everything is bursting with Siva light. To symbolize this sacred existence, Hindus see the cow and elephant as perfect examples. For thousands of years of history the cow has been a generous friend of man. No other animal has provided so much for human benefit, and with such a gentle spirit. All over the world, in many different times and societies the cow has served humans with precious milk, with dung for fuel, with a friendly nature. Besides Hindu India, many old societies—from Egypt to Europe to China—regarded the cow as sacred, as a gift from the Gods. Every day, all over our planet cows are providing millions of gallons of milk that is made into butter, cheese, yogurt and even ice cream. Cows give tons and tons of dung for fuel everyday. And the children should not think that

cow dung is an unscientific fuel. In California, USA, a very large electricity power plant uses only cow dung fuel to produce enough

electricity to power a small city. Cow dung is very antiseptic—it kills germs. For thousands of years cow dung has been smoothed over kitchen floors in India as a kind of instant tile. It creates a solid surface and helps keep the kitchen free from germs. Finally, cow dung is burnt down into its fine ash form for *vibhuti*, the holy ash that is a mark of Siva's pure white light that shines through everything and everyone.

The elephant is one of our most beloved creatures. The elephant is majestic, smart, strong, and is among the most caring animals on our world. We have learned much about elephants in the past ten years. Elephants talk to each other through a very low tone language (it is below the human range of hearing). Elephants grieve for their dead, and actually hold ceremonies. Elephants are so close to each other, so caring and loving, that if elephants in a herd are away from each other for over twenty

minutes, they greet each other as if they were parted for 20 years: noisy trumpeting, dancing with their big feet and wrapping their long trunks together.

Like any higher intelligence animal, the elephant can be trained from childhood to perform services for man. Unfortunately, this training can be cruel, and often is. All young Hindus should protest cruel treatment of animals. But if an elephant is raised with love, gentleness and respect for its intelligence and generosity, the elephant can be a great friend and help us in our spiritual lives. Such are the special elephants that are kept at the very large temples in India. Children that visit these temples love the elephants. Their eyes are deep and smart. There is no fear. The elephants are trained to reach down with their trunks and give a blessing on the top of the head.

The children should be taught that the elephant is in very grave danger now. The elephant population in Africa has been reduced by 70% due to deadly poaching for the elephant tusk, or ivory.

STORY DISCUSSION

With dust flying everywhere the black jeep pulled up quickly into the house yard. Skidding on the red dirt, the jeep stopped. Grabbing to unhook his seatbelt, 8-year old Ganesha jumped out of the jeep into the dirt. He was skinny with a big floppy hat over his curly black hair. He was smiling and his black marble eyes were quickly looking at everything in the hot morning sun. Over next to the log house was a long thick leash that disappeared around the corner. The leash was moving like a snake. "Something very interesting must be on that leash," thought Ganesha. His father had been driving the jeep. He was in a big hurry, and had already run into the house. This was the home of the game warden, the man who took care of the animals in this huge park. The park was so big it would take a week to drive through it. They were in Kenya, Africa. Home of elephants, lions, giraffes, zebras and many other beautiful animals. It was also Ganesha's home. His father, a good Saivite Hindu man who loved animals, was the assistant game warden. Ganesha had a camera around his neck. It was a good camera. He loved photography and he really loved elephants. In his room at home stuffed elephants were spread all over. Often he dreamed of elephants. After all he was named after Lord Ganesha. Ganesha moved the camera to his

shoulder. The leash was moving again. "I have time to check this out," he thought. Usually the game warden didn't have animals around his home, except for the big sheepdogs. The game warden, a tall, African man, liked to have animals in the wild. Free as the wind. So something on a leash was unusual. "And it must be big, at least as big as a cow," said Ganesha as he neared the house corner. "I think it is a..."

"Yes, a baby elephant," he shouted in triumph. Staring him right in the face with curious, friendly eyes was a kid elephant, dark gray and dusty. His trunk, looking like a living vacuum cleaner hose, was sniffing at Ganesha. Sniff. Sniff. The trunk waived in the air and was right in front of Ganesha's face. "Hey fella. You want to know me? This is so neat," he said to the elephant. They were nose to nose. The elephant trunk, slightly moist and smelling of fresh hay, was touching the boy's nose. The elephants big ears were fanning the air. The ears went back and forth. Ganesha said, "I bet you'd really like a bath in the river." The baby elephant's head went up and down. "Hey. You understand me." Then he noticed the elephant was wounded in his leg. Ganesha had been to India last year, and he'd been to the Meenakshi Temple in south India where a huge elephant greeted pilgrims. The temple elephant was gentle, but no one approached him unless the mahut, his keeper, was right there. This elephant was decorated with fine cloth and even had jewels as a necklace. The temple elephant picked Ganesha out of a crowd and brought its great trunk down to Ganesha's head. It felt like a wet butterfly landing on him. It was a blessing. Ganesha knew somehow his karma would bring him to help the elephants. Siva is in this elephant as much as He is in me, Ganesha knew. With tears in his eyes, Ganesha looked at the wound on the baby elephant's leg. The elephant's skin was thick and a little rough. Ganesha slowly petted the elephant. He started chanting, "Aum Namah Sivaya." The wound was healing. But still it was a bad wound. A deep voice said from behind him, "He was shot." Ganesha turned quickly. It was the game warden and his dad. "What? How," cried Ganesha.

"Outlaw hunters," said the African man. "They were killing elephants for their white tusks. This little guy was in the way. But he will get well." Ganesha was happy at that news. But he was angry with the hunters. Right now, he and his dad and the game

A C T I V I T I E S

1. If possible, locate an educational video on dairy cows to show to the class. If this isn't possible, bring in a library book on the subject of dairy cows (not beef steers) and show the children the pictures and read some of the text. The idea is to present to the children all the bountiful products that come from the cow. Then ask them to repeat together in a loud voice three times, "I will never hurt a cow or any other animal."

2. This is the elephant game. Bring to class some brown or gray cloth material. A large portion of the cloth is draped over four children who are lined up and crouching over. The idea is for them to form the shape of an elephant. Make some kind of trunk out of a piece of cloth. The child who is the elephant head uses the trunk. The elephant walks around in the class, then stops and gives blessings with its trunk to the other children. Everybody gets a turn at being the elephant.

warden were driving out to check on an elephant herd. There was little rain this year. The elephants needed water. It was another big problem for helping the elephants. Ganesha jumped in the jeep. He was very glad he was helping.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

Among world religions there are many child saints—children who show a path to God through their artless devotion and non-intellectual yet deeply spiritual view of the world. In Saivite Hinduism, Saint Sambandar is such a spiritual prodigy. He is honored for his lofty songs to Siva.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Children are naturally open to the spiritual realities. It is easy for them to believe in the nature spirits. It is easy for children to see the spirit beings in nature. Life is full of mystery and discovery, and God is part of a child's search for answers. It is part of their natural wonder that they easily see God Siva in everybody and everything. Children very readily accept teachings about sacred knowledge, about the magic power of ceremony. Worship wells up freely in a child. Contact with the deva people of the deva world for children is as natural as adults watching TV. So childhood is a magical time. Some children have special experiences that set the course of their lives. Some children have extraordinary experiences that are then forgotten as they grow older. And the experience, usually of a vision nature, is only remembered late in life—then becoming a sign of direction in life. Of course, if a child is wrongly raised by the parents or becomes clouded by cares and desires too early in life, then these natural perceptions are dimmed.

There are children famous in history for their musical or artistic gifts that blossomed while they were only five or six years old. This is often used as a demonstration of reincarnation, for a child manifesting such incredible talent at an early age indicates a mastery gained through several past lives. In the history of south Indian Saivism, Sambandar is revered as a saintly child, a child who unfolded a strength and beauty of Siva knowledge far beyond his years. Undoubtedly, he had achieved a high level of spirituality in his previous births. He lived over twelve centuries ago. This should not seem such a long time to the children you are teaching, for they too were alive at that time. Sambandar was born into a Saivite Hindu family. As a three-year-old boy, he became separated from his father at the temple. He cried to Lord Siva for help. Lord Siva appeared to him, blessed him and fed him with milk. Finally his father found the young boy again, and when



The child saint Sambandar.
He sang holy songs.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Sambandar is standing inside a temple hall here. The outline of a Siva Lingam is seen in the back. As we can see Sambandar is very young. He is wearing three stripes of holy ash on his forehead and a pottu mark. He is wearing earrings as was the custom in those times. Around his neck is a collection of sacred necklaces, including rudraksha beads and Siva symbols made of gold.

In this scene Sambandar is singing one of his songs. He is keeping time with the cymbals. Sambandar has a nice smile on his face because he is happy. When he sings of Siva or sits in yoga to find Siva inside himself, Sambandar is happy. Even as a young boy he knows that the happiness that comes directly from love of Siva and Siva's love for us is more important than happiness from physical things we may like to have, like new toys or a car for our family.

he asked him how he got the milk, the child immediately sang a song describing his experience. he had seen Siva.

After this spiritual meeting with God Siva the young Sambandar was inspired to sing more songs to Siva. He traveled from temple to temple. Through his songs he inspired the people of South India that Siva was a loving and ever-present Supreme Being in their everyday lives. Soon, he was becoming known as a saint, a person whose life is dedicated to God and who is very virtuous in conduct. He composed many songs, the melody and words coming spontaneously from his devotion. His songs covered many topics, often relating to the everyday needs of Siva's followers. The songs often carried Sambandar's assurance that God Siva would respond to the pleas in the songs. Because of his youth and the practical nature of his songs, a large group of people accompanied him on his pilgrimages to Siva temples and other holy sites. Eventually Sambandar began travel-

ling with the elderly saint Appar, the old man and youthful boy enriching the lives of hundreds of thousands.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The holy songs that Sambandar sang are different than the bhajan type of song discussed a few lessons ago. Bhajans are usually a simple phrase or set of lyrics set to a repeating melody that is easily memorized. Sambandar's songs are more rich in their verses and melody, though it must be stated that the original melodies Sambandar composed are lost. They were not carried down generation to generation. But the melodies and lyrics we have now represent a spiritual school of singing that is very precious in South Indian Saivism. In fact, these songs are like windows into a time of tremendous spiritual change in South Indian Saivism.

The songs tell of people's concerns that are as real today as 1,200 years ago.

2. Imagine a child that is so enchanted or enthralled by the beauty of a bird singing in a tree or of a butterfly flitting from flower to flower in a meadow that he or she bursts out into song. The child simply starts to sing as a scene of beauty or a gesture of friendliness is observed. They make up words and melodies. Spontaneous singing is common to children. And it is delightful to listen to. Children are not shy in this way, or have adult inhibitions, so they sing freely and airily, a spontaneous expression of happiness. This is a very spiritual moment for the child. This does not include a youngster singing some rap or rock or pop song they hear in movies or on the radio. Some children, like Sambandar, are so involved in God's hand being in all things that they sing directly of a God experience. Certainly, this is to be encouraged in children.

STORY READING

It was over one thousand years ago. Up at the top of India, inside the cradle of the Himalayan mountains was a kingdom called Kashmir. At the center of Kashmir was a very large and deep lake. It was greenish blue and had lots of fish and ducks and geese. All around the lake were great forests of pine and birch trees and piles of old, gray rock. The rock sparkled in the sunlight for it had many quartz crystals in it. At the edges of the lake, which was called Sivamana—Siva's Mind—were lovely temples built of the quartz-filled rock. The temples came out over the water. They seemed like they were floating right on the water. Often devotees would feed bread to the golden and brown-spotted fish swimming around the shining rock temples. All the temples were to God Siva. Kashmir was known throughout India for its great love of Siva. There were many Siva yogis in the frozen mountain caves of Kashmir. In a beautiful wood-and-rock house near the lake lived 8-year-old Parasiva. His father was an administrator at one of the large lake temples. Parasiva was lean, but strong like a mountain lion. His blackish brown hair was very long, often tied in a knot on the top of his head. His large grayish brown eyes were unusually keen. He could see very long distances. He liked climbing up on the rock ledges high above his home where he could see the entire valley, and watch the

great road that led to the city near the lake. Many strangers entered the land by this road. One day he saw a tall man with very brown skin walking along the road. He had a staff. He could see a small image of Siva on the staff. The man was dressed very different. And he was singing something. He seemed very joyful. Curious, Parasiva jumped from his rock and ran full speed to the road. He leaped onto the road and waited for the tall stranger. And soon he heard a man's voice singing a very lovely song. The melody was unusual, much different from the songs of Kashmir. Parasiva could only understand a few pieces of words. He spoke Dogra, the language of Kashmir, and knew some Sanskrit. The tall man had a kind face so Parasiva called to him, "Noble sir, the song you sing is new here. It is very beautiful and I hear the word Siva in it." The man stopped walking and leaned on his staff. He knew Dogra because he traveled to Kashmir often. "Umm. You like this song? Yes, it is beautiful, full of wisdom. It is from the south, in the Tamil land," the tall man said. "From Tamil land. That must be very far south. They worship Siva there?" the boy asked. The man smiled, "Of course, they are great worshipers of Siva and do much yoga. This song you like was composed by a young boy your age. His name was Sambandar. He was a Siva saint, and his songs are very popular in the south. Do you want to learn it?" The boy eagerly replied, "Yes, I will sing it in the temple and the woods." And so Parasiva was the first person to sing a Sambandar song in the land of Kashmir.

CONNECTIONS

Many of Sambandar's songs, as well as the other Saiva saints, are sung as part of temple worship in South India. They are often sung when the doors are closed or the curtain is drawn for the dressing of the deity during the puja. This is an example of how something new in Saivite Hinduism—it was new 1,200 years ago—gradually became an accepted custom in the temple. In this case, the singing of the Saiva saints songs. In many of this book's lessons we talk about Siva being everywhere in everything, as the creator and as the creation itself. This is a philosophical truth. For many people (including children), they may not be able to understand this as a philosophical truth, but in a song this suddenly becomes understood. It has personal meaning through the song, and through the song's

A C T I V I T I E S

1. If everyone knows a Sambandar song, then that can be sung as a class activity. An alternative or in addition to this, have the children compose a simple song by themselves. Divide the class into several groups, each group to compose a very simple song of love of God Siva. They do not have to create a melody (if they want to, they can set it to a well known melody), just the lyrics. Then they recite the song to the class. Explain that Sambandar, as a young boy their age, composed his songs out of such spontaneous inspiration as the children are doing now.

2. Bring in three tennis balls, or small balls that bounce. Arrange the class into a circle. Pass out the balls around the circle. The children with the balls stand up. In some simple melody they sing "Aum. Everything I see is Siva, Siva." Then they bounce the ball over to someone sitting down. The child catches the ball and jumps up and sings the same phrase, while the other child sits down. The idea is to keep the ball bouncing around to different children at the same time, each one singing the phrase and then bouncing the ball away.

composer. Sambandar's songs are sung daily by millions of people.

CITIZENSHIP

While singing alone does not make one a better citizen, Sambandar the child saint does represent someone who was a good citizen and also worked for helpful change in his country. For instance, the young Saivite Hindu youth of today could be better citizens by working to see that all the Hindu temples were always clean and beautiful. Youth could volunteer to do selfless service (karma yoga) at a nearby monastery or ashram. Youth could work to bring Saivites back to vegetarianism.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

Rebirth, taking a physical body many, many times, is a fundamental knowledge in Saivite Hinduism. We emphasize the word *knowledge*, as this is not just a belief that can be held to or rejected. It is a law. The children must learn it as a very important fact. Everybody is experiencing a long series of births. It does not matter whether they believe in rebirth or not. Rebirth is a key fact to understanding our spiritual life and purpose. It is called *reincarnation*, meaning to *re-enter* a flesh body. This means we have had past lives, and we will have future lives. Each life is like a stage of growth. It takes many lives to grow from ignorance—where we live only for physical enjoyment and can do bad—to enlightenment, where we know our spiritual soul nature of oneness with God Siva, and serve others in goodness.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

What a delightful, fun knowledge to know that we have lived many lives before. This is an extraordinary knowledge. Children very naturally agree to the law of reincarnation. It makes perfect sense to them. It is children who most easily remember their past lives. Researchers into reincarnation have found their best cases to be young children born in India who remember their immediate past lives. Teenagers also very eagerly accept the law of rebirth. And they are very curious about what their past lives were. Children like to dress up and pretend they are other people. They easily enter into drama roles, and spontaneously act out being a princess or a pirate or a priest. They enjoy pretending they are adults, doing adult things. This demonstrates a natural inclination for the minds of children to be intrigued with other bodies, other lives.

Reincarnation means to re-enter the flesh. That is, we experience birth into a physical body many times. The physical body we are born into may live for a hundred years or it may only live a few months. Each life is different in many ways and similar in many ways. Each life builds on the previous lives, like building a pyramid with blocks. We may be born as a man or a woman. It all depends on the purpose of the life—what is the reason this particular birth is taken. It also depends on the karma lessons of the life—that is the acts we did in past lives return to us in our present life through karma. The laws of rebirth and karma are very closely connected. When we are born into a new body a certain amount



Ganesha says, “Everyone is born again and again.”

of our karma travels with us into the new life, like a suitcase, a suitcase of karma. It is there with us all the time.

So reincarnation means we have a long series of lives that have purpose and direction. We are not just born by accident. We are born with purpose. Our lives are going toward a goal, like a mountain climber climbing toward the mountain top. What is the goal of our many lives? Well, there are many small goals that we must obtain in our lives—from becoming smart and cultured, to being nice, kind, generous and unselfish. There are many small goals, all of them good. They develop us as a physical body, our minds, our emotions, and finally spiritually. But there is one big goal that our lives go toward. That is knowing our identical oneness with God Siva through yoga. That is the final goal of all of our lives. It is the reason why we are born again and again on planet Earth. Obviously, to children and adults, there are many wonderful reasons for physical life. There are also many things we want to do and be in

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the *Nritya Ganapati* form of Lord Ganesha. In this image He is the happy dancer. This tells us that our long series of lives through rebirth is like a spiritual dance. In our beginning lives, we are just learning about life and we make lots of mistakes—mistakes in our dancing. In our middle series of lives our spiritual progress is limited as we go after physical and emotional pleasures—our dancing is selfish. Finally, in our very last lives on Earth, we are making much spiritual progress, and our dance is beautiful and serves others.

Ganesha is dancing under a *kalpavriksha* tree. This means that in every birth we should strive to be joyful and be very active in realizing God Siva, so our birth cycle ends.

a life: king, president, scientist, doctor, lawyer, jet pilot, designer, wealthy businessman, company executive, famous actress or musician, peace negotiator, priest, monk. In fact, through our long series of lives, we experience all of these, and much, much more. But, like a mountain climber using his tools, all these contribute to the final goal of yoga enlightenment.

If the physical body dies in each life, and a new body is given to us each birth, then we need to know who is it that is being born. Who is it that is re-entering the flesh? It is our soul body of light that is re-entering the flesh. Our soul takes on the new body, and uses it to learn and grow as a soul. Our soul uses the physical body to experience karma and to experience the limitations of the body, emotions and human mind. This is like an astronaut (the soul) who uses a space suit (the physical body) and is limited by it to work on the moon. But the soul also shines through two other bodies: a mental body and an astral body, both of which are invisible to our eyes. But we live in them all the time. At night, when we sleep we use these two bodies. When the physical body dies, our soul continues to grow through these bodies until the next birth.

Now, when the soul is just beginning to take on physical lives, the physical body and its desires blot out the natural goodness and light of the soul. The physical human body is an animal body. It has strong desires, and can be bad, selfish and greedy in fulfilling those desires. In the beginning lives, the physical body and mind will act bad because the soul's light can not get through the desires. This is why we see so-called evil in the world. It is not an evil force. It is the physical person ignorant of its own soul/God nature and selfishly seeking only low desires and power. Everybody goes through this stage, then grows out of it. The more lives a soul has experienced, the more we see the soul shining through. The person is said to be good, honorable and spiritual. Spiritual people are people who have lived many, many lives on Earth. They have learned from many karmic lessons.

All the children in the class are in their present life. They have all lived hundreds of past lives. But they will also have lives in the future. The children's actions in this life directly effects the quality of their future life and lives. Each child is building his or her future now, at every moment. This means we are each responsible for our future, a very important teaching.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. One nice illustration for our series of births is a string of pearls that is laid out flat rather than joined in a circle. Each pearl represents a birth. At the beginning of the string the pearls are very tiny and dull, meaning we are small in spirituality. But each pearl is progressively bigger than the last. This means that we are growing spiritually in each birth. Toward the end of the pearl string, the pearls are very large and bright. The last pearl is the largest and it glows with light from within. This is the life in which we know God Siva in yoga oneness.

STORY READING

It was a very long time ago. Out of a town in the steep, cold mountains above India a caravan of horses and camels walked slowly north. The horses had big muscles and you could see hot breath steaming out from their nostrils in the cold. It was early in the morning. A few stars were still holding

onto the dawn sky. On the backs of the horses were large packs of spices, gold and rare, carved wood. The camels, looking like furry gold in the rising sun, stepped along the trail with big, round feet. They carried rubies and sapphires, incense, and ornaments for Hindu puja rites. At the front of the caravan was a girl on a beautiful brown horse with a star on its forehead. The girl was young with pretty brown hair and she wore a thick, dark red coat over a long blue blouse and white pants. On her forehead were three white stripes, meaning she was a devotee of Siva, Lord of Beginningless Light. Her cheeks were high and proud, making her thin silvery brown eyes flash like jewels. Her name was Priya, and she called her horse Starshine. Alongside her rode her father on a very big, white-as-snow horse. He was the owner of this caravan. They were leaving a Hindu kingdom called Khutan. They were leaving the cold mountains for a hot desert of sand and little life. This caravan was going to China. It would go around a great desert that had cities on its edges where water flowed in from the mountains. While Starshine walked along on the trail, Priya often thought of her life. She was now very interested in her past lives. She knew she had lived many times before. "Perhaps I was a boy in my past life," she thought. "Look at me. I can ride horses and camels well. I can live in snow storms and sand storms. I know how to read. And now I am learning to write. If I was a boy in my past life, those things would carry over to this life."

The caravan went through valleys and low hills. In three days it came into the desert road. Priya could see endless waves of hot, white sand go off forever into the distance. It was a sea of sand. But on her left were dusty cliffs of rock and tired trees thirsty for water. Priya wore a scarf over her face to protect her from the desert wind that was filled with sand. On her head was a white turban to guard against the very hot sun. By the end of the day she and her father could see sparkling yellow lights, the lights of the first city. But also on the side of the road, buried in the desert sands were the white bones of a horse that had died. This reminded Priya that each life ends, and then there is another birth. "Starshine," she spoke to her horse. "I don't want you to die. I love you and I know I would miss you." In response Starshine looked back at her with moon-like eyes and went nee-ee-ee in horse talk. "But we are all in a

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Have the children bring in whatever old clothes, costumes, hats, wigs or other drama-type items they can locate. The teacher can help too by bringing costumes, etc. All the clothes are arranged in stacks somewhere in the class. The children sit down and quickly think about who they were in their last life. Then, without telling who they were, three of them go to the clothes and quickly try to assemble a costume of who they were. It could be an American cowboy, Egyptian princess, Greek philosopher, Indian warrior, Hindu yogi, European noblewoman, Chinese sailor, Roman priestess, Arabian camel merchant, German scientist—whatever the children think of. The girls become boys and the boys become girls. For a short time they act out the part of their last life. Then they quickly remove their costumes and the next group dresses up as their former incarnation.

long line of births and deaths. You and I, we are souls of light flickering in these bodies. In this life I have many opportunities," she said outloud to the night sky. "I may marry a wealthy trader. But I will make sure he is a very spiritual Saivite Hindu. I want this life to be close to Siva and the God's world. I want to find a yogi master who can teach me yoga." The lights of the city were getting closer, and now she could smell the fires of caravans camping outside the city. She thought to herself that all of these men, and some women, were in the wheel of rebirth. Most of these were rough men. They could be cruel and selfish. But they were honest. They had learned to be honest and to help each other. She knew they'd advanced that far in spirit law. These traders were better men than the robbers that swooped down on caravans. Priya knew the robbers were real beginners in the birth cycle. It would be near impossible to see the soul in the eyes of the robbers. Priya's caravan settled into a camp and she went into the city with her father. It was alive with all kinds of people. And there were flowers here and wonderful green trees. Priya went into one of the garden parks. There, sitting against a large fig tree was an orange-robed yogi, middle-aged. His face shined with Siva light and Priya knew this was his last life.

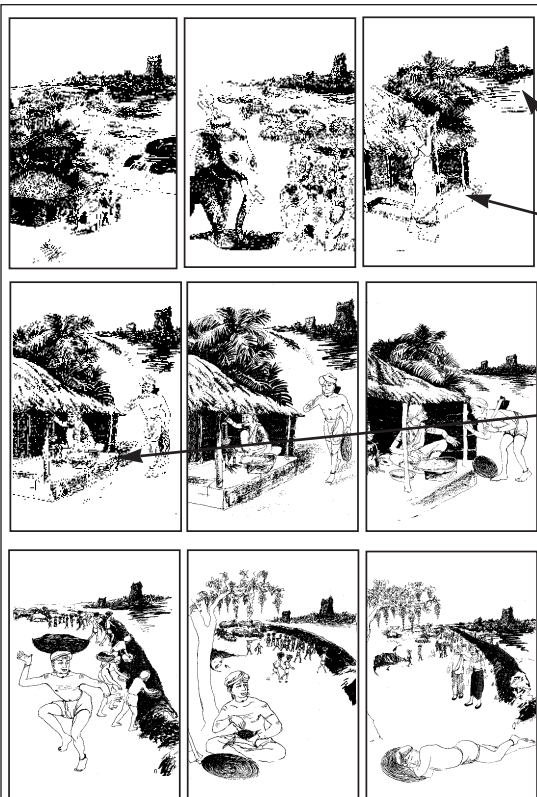
LESSON FOCUS

This is a famous and popular story among Saivite Hindus in South India. This story demonstrates the reality that Siva is in everyone, and that an act done to one person does indeed impact everyone, all life forms—for Siva is fully present in all life. This tale also demonstrates the power of spiritual faith—that by fully believing in the divine realities and through prayer, God and Gods can assist us in many ways.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

In this story, drawn from the life of Saint Manickavasagar, Semmana Selvi is facing a sudden crisis. Everybody is needed to help build a dam to protect the village from the river's flooding. The entire village could be washed away and many people and animals hurt. So everybody is needed, even the elderly. Obviously Semmana Selvi is not the only old person in the village. There are many, and perhaps most are saying "I'm too old to help—what can I do?" But she really wants to help. And knowing she is too frail to be physically active, she prays. She prays with the power of one who is desparate, who is really expecting something to happen from the prayer. Her crisis drives her to a state of super-belief, of spiritual expectation. And her prayer is answered by a temporary physical embodiment of God Siva. All people face such crises in their lives, including children. There are major and minor events in our lives that place us in jeopardy, misery and unhappiness. In today's TV world we see news everyday of natural disasters, man-made disasters and war tragedies. Men, women and children are in peril. During these times of trial, religious people turn to deep prayer as a way of comfort and aid. But there are many small events in our daily lives that bring us to deep prayer to God Siva. Prayer is a form of communication, of talking. We are talking to God. Semmana Selvi's plight drives her to mentally approach Siva for help. But she has a genuine need for help. That is a key. If we are in need, that is the time to pray deeply. If we, as adults or children, are simply desiring something—a new car or toy for instance—than such praying will not be answered. It is too selfish of a prayer for spiritual aid from God, Gods and devas.

Prayer needs absolute belief and sincerity. Semmana Selvi was totally sincere and fully believed in the love and power of Siva.



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Notice that in each one of these scenes there is a Siva temple in the background.

Semmana Selvi is praying with all of her heart. She is looking toward the Siva temple. She is fully expecting that God Siva will somehow help her.

Here Semmana Selvi is on the porch of her house, preparing rice pittu when Siva as the laborer offers to help for some food. Semmana Selvi is very happy to feed the laborer, but she does not yet know He is Siva.



Semmana Selvi is an old lady. The river in her village is in flood. The king announces, "The river is flooding. All citizens must come to raise the banks." The old lady prays to Lord Siva, "I have no help to build the dam." Lord Siva comes as a laborer. Laborer says, "I will build the dam for you. I am very hungry. You can pay me with food." He digs the earth, he takes the basket on his head and dances. Often he eats. The dam is not finished, but the laborer goes to sleep. The king comes. The king hits the laborer with his cane. The laborer disappears. Everyone feels the hit, because Siva is in everyone.

When children pray, they should firmly believe in the power of their prayer, as long as it is good and unselfish. They should believe that Siva will somehow help them. Help from the Gods' world or devas' world comes in many forms. And it always follows this law: the help given to a prayer must be in accord with the karma of the person praying. This is very important. The help must fit the child's karma, and it must somehow relate to the spiritual growth of

the child. Prayer can be used for all kinds of genuine needs. Personal prayers for help in our lives are expected by the Gods and devas. They want to help. When we pray we are asking. Because we are asking, we are giving permission to the Gods and devas to help us in our karma.

In Semmana Selvi's story, when Siva is hit by the king's cane, everybody feels the strike. This is a powerful and beautiful truth. God is in everyone, indeed is everyone. God is fully all people, animals, insects and microbes. Therefore the blow is instantaneously felt by all. In this story, God

Siva uses a physical body to make a lesson for Saivite Hindus. But let's take this truth of God's whole presence in all to the next level. Since God Siva is in us if we hurt another person or animal, then everybody feels that hurt. Everybody feels the bad act. If we do good to someone else or animals, then everybody feels the good. Normally, we do not fully feel the pain when another person is injured. But actually we do. We cringe. We feel bad. We may actually feel

pain or a little sick. In an invisible way, we all feel everyone else's pain and joy. That is because we are all God Siva inside of ourselves.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Prayer is talking to someone who can help us but we can't see them. They are invisible to us. We can't hear them either. But they can hear us. Have the children imagine they are sitting in a beautiful meadow with tall grass and yellow buttercup flowers. They are praying. As they pray, their words form into bright bubbles that float across the ground and up into the sky. Their prayers are a stream of silvery bubbles. These bubbles travel a long ways and are very fast, faster than lightening. The bubbles arrive to the prayer devas and Gods, the beings who can best help us. The bubbles glow with light, then burst with the prayer words going into the mind of the devas and Gods. They then help us with our prayer, as long as it is good for us. But they rarely send bubbles back to us. They answer our prayers through helping with opportunities mostly.

2. God Siva being in everyone everywhere is a wonderful concept. Let's imagine that there is a beam of white light that goes from God Siva to every person and every living being. God Siva is at the center of a vast, unending net of light bridges to each person and being. If an act, painful or good, happens to one being on the net of light, it goes to Siva and from Him to all. This is a constant, unending process.

STORY READING

The large Boeing 747 passenger jet lifted steeply into a cloudy sky. The clouds swept by like streams of milky water. The jet's engines were quiet inside, but the climb was so steep that 8-year old Selvi was gripping her chair arms. Her back was pressed against the seat. Her seatbelt was tight. The plane was going so fast. Most of the passengers were relaxed, talking or looking out the window. Selvi's uncle and aunt were nearby, reading magazines. They were traveling from Singapore to Madras. Selvi lived in Singapore. She was visiting relatives in south India. This was her first air flight. The jet's climb ended and the plane went

level, flying high over a soft sea of clouds, now painted by a pink/purple sun. Selvi let go of the armrests and swept back her almond brown hair. "Well, this is fun," she thought. "I'm safe. This plane is like the big seagulls I've seen at the Singapore ship port." Selvi was next to the window. It was nearing sunset. Through the bed of pink clouds, that reminded her of her bed in Singapore, she could see the ocean far below. It looked like dark green stone, flat and hard. The captain of the jet came on the cabin speakers and told everybody how high they were, how fast the jet was flying, when they would arrive in Madras. Selvi listened as she continued to watch the changing colors on the bumpy clouds below. "So beautiful. Earth is so peaceful from up here. I wish I was up in space, and could look at Earth with its white swirls of clouds over the blue oceans and brown land," she thought to herself. Far to the north she saw a pale brown spread of land that had a flash of white and yellow lights on it. "That may have been a city," she thought. She also knew that very far to the north, far beyond what she could see, there was a large earthquake that had hit in the country of Burma. Buddhists and Hindus lived together in Burma. There were many lovely temples among the country's jungles and rice fields. Now many people were suffering from the earthquake, including children Selvi's own age. She thought of them briefly and with compassion. She opened a little, illustrated book that her aunt had given her to read on the flight. Selvi had been pleasantly surprised to see the main lady in the story had her name. It was Semmana Selvi, and she was an old lady in south India who had prayed to God Siva for help during a flood of her village. Siva came as a laborer, helped repair the village dam, but was beaten with a cane by the king. When the cane struck, everybody felt the blow. "What a fine story," thought Selvi as she finished the little book. "That explains why I felt such pain this morning when I heard about all the children being hurt in Burma during the earthquake. I am a part of God Siva and a part of them. Even though I don't know them, I feel what they go through." Selvi also took a little vow to herself to be sure not to injure anyone, not even to call them a name or tease them meanly. Selvi knew that everybody in the whole world would feel the pain she caused. "Wow," she thought. "I really have to be careful. I don't want to be

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring a roll of string to the class. To demonstrate how one act can effect everyone, tie the string to one finger of all the childrens hands as they are grouped in a circle or several lines. Every finger should be linked by the one string, and all the children hands should remain in front of them so the string does not get tangled up. They are told they represent all the people of the world. When everybody is connected, then they raise their hands out in front of them. The teacher gives a gentle tug on the string, and as the movement is passed down the string each person's finger and hand are moved until the motion reaches the last youth. Everybody's hand moves as a result of a single act.

like that mean and thoughtless king in the story."

Selvi unfastened her seatbelt and smoothed out her yellow punjabi outfit. She folded her legs into a yoga posture, and found it was quite comfortable in the airline seat. She had decided to use the time to pray to God Siva. She closed here eyes and her breathing slowed. She put all of her energy into her thoughts and began to pray to Siva to help the children in Burma. She asked God Siva to help all the Buddhist and Hindu children who had been hurt and were suffering. She knew that those who had been killed would have another birth. And she prayed it would be a good birth for them. Selvi believed in her prayer and knew it would somehow be answered.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

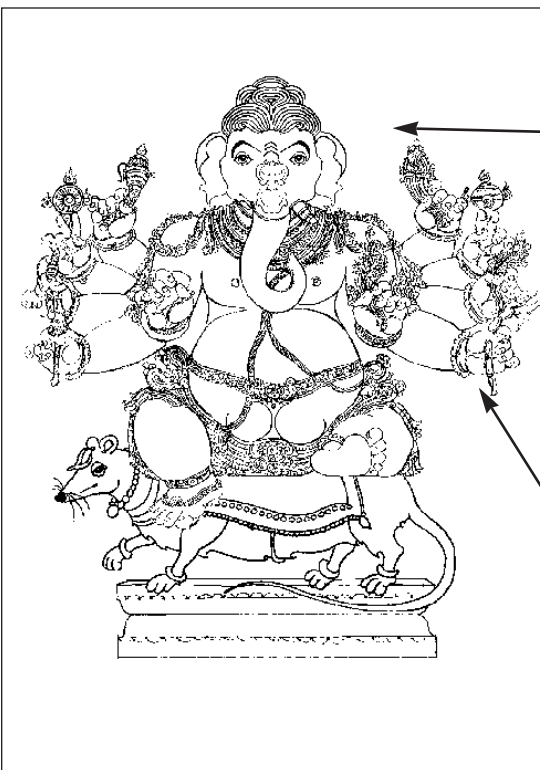
The realization of our oneness with God Siva through meditation is the final goal of life. It is the final achievement of life. After this knowing or realization, there is no more purpose for a physical world birth. The reincarnation cycle ends.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

There are many ways to experience Siva. We can know Siva through learning about Him, as in these classes. We learn or know that God Siva is the Supreme Soul in the God's world who creates all beings, things and worlds. We learn or know that God Siva exists as everything and everybody, for His Mind is everywhere, is all. We learn or know that we come close to God Siva through temple worship and chanting *Aum Namah Sivaya*. We learn or know that God Siva loves us far more deeply than our own mother. These are all very important knowledge that we learn through study. It is to *know* something in our mind of thoughts and memory. So children in these classes know Siva intellectually. They understand who Siva is.

There is another kind of experiencing or knowing. We can say we know someone well. Children know their parents. They see, talk to, eat with, enjoy entertainment and travel with their parents all the time. Children know how their parents think, their habits, what they like and do not like. Youngsters know the emotions of their parents very well. Children know their parents as the parents are around them. But young children or even older youth would not know their parents as they are at work. That is a personality side of their parents they don't see. This kind of knowing is a personal knowing—you know the personality and emotions of someone very well. Children can know God Siva this way when they go to a Siva temple. They know Him in the temple or at some great sacred site as a Personal Being. They can feel His love and spiritual energy. They can feel that He, the Supreme Soul, is guiding and taking care of them. Children feel and sense the loving presence of God Siva, like He is the mother and father of their soul.

These are both very important kinds of *knowing*. But there is a third state of knowing that is much deeper and powerful. It is to experience our oneness with Siva through yoga meditation. This is a spiritual knowing where in our mind we experi-



Ganesha says, "There is just one way to never be born again. You must personally experience God Siva."

ence our identity as one with Siva. This knowing is beyond our physical body and mind. It means we are so still, so peaceful that we become one with Siva's Light and the indescribable Source of that light. It is the spiritual experience of our own perfect soul being that is identical with Siva's perfect being. To know in this sense is to realize. This means our body and mind and spiritual mind are totally in the experience of oneness of God. In that meditation, there is only oneness. That is the discovery, the realization. This can only be achieved through yoga. It can not be done by school learning. It can not be done by temple worship.

When we experience this deepest oneness with Siva, then the true purpose of our lives in many physical bodies is complete. Each of the children in your class have been born, lived on Earth and died many times. Many hundreds of times. This is reincarnation, the cycle of birth and death. The children have been both girls and boys in many

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This form of Ganesha is called Vijaya Ganapati. He is the giver of success. It is success that we want when we are trying to know Siva. At first we want to know Siva from our studies. Then we know Siva personally in the temple. Vijaya Ganapati can help us be successful in feeling Siva's energy in the temple. Finally we want to be successful when we quiet our mind in meditation to feel ourselves as Siva.

In this hand Ganesha holds the golden mango. It is very sweet and delicious. The mango represents the highest spiritual progress for us. Here, Ganesha holds it to remind us that our highest spiritual goal on Earth is to experience our oneness with Siva. Then, we no longer have to be born on Earth and live in physical bodies.

lands leading a great variety of lives. Each of those lives adds to the individual soul's experience, until the person becomes very spiritual and has a series of lives dedicated to spiritual pursuit, to finding God, as was discussed in an earlier lesson. This is the true purpose of life. It is the meaning of life. It is why we are born. Finally, each individual knows Siva through yoga, and there is no more need for a physical body. The cycle of reincarnation ends. This is called liberation or freedom from rebirth. Liberated souls continue their spiritual growth in the devas' world.

It should be explained that when we die, it is only the physical body that is dying. Each person continues to live, learn and spiritual grow in their astral or deva world body as discussed in the lesson on the three worlds. Then, when it is the best time and the best family for the individual is available to enter a physical body and make good progress toward spiritual awakening, the next birth is entered.

Even as water becomes one with water, fire with fire, and air with air, so the mind becomes one with the Infinite Mind and thus attain final freedom.—SAMA VEDA

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Knowing Siva as a complete experience of oneness has many analogies. This complete experience of oneness means that the individual meditating no longer feels separate from God Siva, but experiences his or her true identity as God Siva. First start with a simple analogy. This can also be demonstrated. The children all imagine they are big yellow sponges, the kind their mother has at home for cleaning, or father uses for washing the car. At first the sponges are dry. They think of themselves as dry and small. This is like the child about to meditate. But they are about to jump into a pool of clear, fresh water. The water is God Siva. The sponges all jump into the water. The water immediately completely soaks through the sponges. They are filled with God Siva. And each sponge grows very big. Their mind expands. The sponge has a partial oneness with the water. We say partial because there is still a sponge and water, which is not complete oneness. But this is a good beginning analogy for children.

2. When we say we will never be born again, we are stating that the reincarnation cycle has ended. No more births in physical bodies. No more need to be on the physical planet Earth. This is like we no longer need to be in school. We received our education. We did very well on all of our tests. We graduate from school. That part of our education is complete. Life on Earth is a school. We are in school for many lives. We are learning about our divine nature and our identity as a cosmic soul in oneness with Siva. When that oneness is known through yoga, we graduate from Earth school.

STORY READING

Jai squinted his eyes into the afternoon sun. Out of the west, in the yellow haze of the sun were two bright silver flashes. They moved fast. They turned quickly and split up. Each moved straight up into the blue sky, then flew along the bubbling clouds. They dropped down and flew right over Jai. Two metal ships, looking like aluminum sea shells. There was no sound as they flew by. Total silence. Jai could hear the birds and wind in nearby trees. The beautiful craft went by almost like they had wings. There was just a slight hum, like bees. "Space birds," Jai whispered to himself with

delight. "Must be heading to the Bali Space Port." Jai lived in the future of Earth, in the year 2124. His homeland was Bali, a Hindu island near Java, in Indonesia. The passing space birds caused his brown and blue robes to move. And his sand-colored hair blew into his eyes. On the edge of his upper robe was a large white crescent moon. It was the sign of Siva. Eight years old and curious about everything, Jai knew that learning more about Siva would help him be a pilot of the space birds. That was his great dream. Knowledge of space travel had come to scientists in the practice of Siva meditation. To fly a space bird, the pilot had to enter deep meditation. The pilots became one with the space mind of Siva. In school Jai studied this. But he also studied reincarnation as part of his Saivite Hindu learning. He thought of reincarnation often. "Who was I in my past lives? Where did I live? What did I do? Was I good and kind and did I try to find Siva inside myself?" He asked himself these questions. Sometimes he fell asleep at night thinking about them. Jai turned on his feet, his long robes almost touching the ground. He watched the space birds fade away like silver bees. He practiced the space meditation at home. Just give your mind to Siva as space. However Jai had been taught by a very old yogi, who was one of the first space bird pilots, that the real goal in life was total oneness with God Siva. He told Jai, "Earth is a school. To graduate, you have to know Siva. Not just the space meditation, but the complete identity in the Supreme Siva. Then, no more Earth lives." Jai understood that instantly. He liked that. Jai knew he was much more than a physical boy who might become a space bird pilot. He vowed to strive for Siva oneness in this life, and graduate from the Earth world.

CONNECTIONS

This lesson closely relates to the *Ganesha says lesson* on being born again and again. The reincarnation process is key knowledge to understanding our present life. It makes us realize that we are spiritual beings on a spiritual mission here on Earth. That mission is to know Siva as our own self. This lesson also closely connects to the *Ganesha says lesson* on yogis can find God. Yoga is the way, the method, that we know God Siva. If we don't practice yoga, and keep practicing it more seriously as we grow older, then we will not know Siva in this life.

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring to class a rope, a light prism and two large pieces of thick, dark cloth. Darken the classroom and set up the prism so that a beam of light is striking it and creating the prism rainbow effect. This is God Siva, creating the entire universe out of His white light. In front of this display, put one of the cloths so it hides the prism display. Set up the other cloth close by (or have two children hold it) and pass the rope under it so it is equally divided on both sides. One child comes forward and ties one end of the rope around his or her waist and faces the cloth hiding the prism. This side represents the mind of the devotee. Another youngster grabs the other end of the rope on the other side of the cloth. This other side represents an earth birth. The child facing the prism display stands still, breathes deeply and waits to "know Siva" by seeing the prism light. At first the cloth in front of the display is not lowered, the child does not know Siva and the other child holding the rope tugs him gently through the cloth to a new physical birth. On the second try, the child says "I will know Siva in this life" and the cloth to Siva is lowered and the child sees the prism light display and knows Siva. The rope is dropped and he or she is free.

Every lifetime presents an opportunity to find and know Siva. It is up to parents, teachers, elders and swamis to instruct children so they can make knowing Siva part of their lives. And they should clearly understand that life on Earth has a spiritual goal.

WRONG THINKING

Some Hindus think that since they are in the reincarnation cycle, it does not matter much if they pursue the realization of Siva in this life or the next. This is not healthy thinking. If you are actively pursuing a spiritual goal, you will try to lead a good life that creates good karma, that is selfless and helpful to your fellow humans. You are assured of a more advanced birth in your next life because of striving done now. If you lead an ordinary life with no real spiritual goal, there is no guide to your conduct. Future lives may present no opportunity for real spiritual advancement. In this way, many lives are not fully utilized.

LESSON FOCUS

Among the most important, if not the most important, responsibilities of human society is the raising of children. Each mother and father are more than biological parents of a newborn. They are guardians of a soul who has reincarnated into the parent's pattern of life and karma. During the childhood years, the mother and father are the most significant teachers and guides for the youngster. They are gurus in the sense of carefully giving knowledge and direction in all matters of life and spirit. The young child needs to know and understand this relationship, to respect and cultivate it.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Over the past decade many studies, often utilizing visual or sound imaging, have demonstrated that even unborn babies are learning in the womb. They are very sensitive to movement in their small, watery world, but also very sensitive to sound and voices. Unborn babies know their mother's voice long before they are born. In the womb, babies are learning, for while the body's biological development is unfinished, their astral faculty of intelligence is fully functioning. Of course, this has been known by mothers for thousands of years. Many cultures, including Hinduism, place great emphasis on prenatal learning. Mothers sing, read and talk to the unborn infant. At this time important knowledge of the Saivite spiritual goals and values of life can be given. So the guru relationship is established even before birth.

Newborn babies are superlearners. They learn at a rate that is many times greater than an adult. The mother continues to strongly bond with the baby as the primary comforter, protector and teacher. The mother's responsibilities as the child's first guru are fully needed by the baby. Whereas the father's responsibilities come later, when there are more language skills present. But the father, of course, does nurture a strong bond with the child, and does impart knowledge through talking.

When the child can talk and walk, and has a sense of ego identity, then the relationship of the mother and father as teaching gurus can be understood by the child. Everyday the young boy or girl is learning or being guided, perhaps gently corrected. The child can begin to see his or her parents as gu-



Mother and father are the first guru.

rus—the parents answer questions, offer new knowledge, shape the youngsters's ethical sense. This introduces a new responsibility to the child, that of obedience, respect and honor. Even at an early age the Saivite Hindu child should look at the parents as gurus. What is a guru? Simply stated, it is anyone who teaches from experiential knowledge. The guru has personally been taught and then experienced the knowledge. Young children need to understand that their parents do have lots of experience in life. The parents know much about life that they need to teach their children. The children obey and respect their parents out of love, for mother and father are their growing-up gurus. Obedience and respect should be a natural part of a child's attitudes. Children also need to express gratitude—thankfulness to their parents.

In Saivite Hinduism, obedience means a genuine willingness to follow advice and instructions. Children are obedient because

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

In this scene the children are prostrating to their parents in the shrine room. It may be a special occasion. The children may be seeking the blessing of the parents for some new event in their life. The young girls is prostrating in the manner of women, and the boy in the manner of men, with a full body prostration.

Father and mother are reaching down to their children to pull them up and toward them. This shows their humility and love for their children.

The prostration is mainly an act of being open. The children are open, intelligently willing to follow their parents advice. The prostration sets aside the human identity to allow the spiritual identity to come forward.

they know their parents as gurus are trying to teach them and guide them into a good social and spiritual life. Children should also be encouraged to ask questions, to be curious, to want to know the whys and wherefores of what they are taught. Obviously, the parents have a serious responsibility of being knowledgeable enough themselves to give good answers to their children. Or the parents must guide the child to another person, another spiritual guru who has the answers.

The child's respect to his or her parents is shown in Saivite Hinduism in many ways. One old and still valuable custom is the son or daughter touching the feet of the parents on a daily basis, or during special times when parents are honored. This demonstrates humility and affection and gratitude. It puts the child in the mood for ac-

cepting advice and instruction. It also reminds the parents that the young person in their family is a soul born into their caretaking, and that spiritual unfoldment is the highest purpose in life. Children can bring flowers to their parents as a sign of love and respect. Often this softens the heart of a parent who may be upset or angry and would not in such a state give good advice or good correction. Children do not argue with their parents. But they should ask intelligent questions. Children should show honor and respect to their parents by volunteering to do chores and be helpful.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. One of the best analogies of the guru is the mountain guide. The mountain guide knows the mountains very well, so well that he can safely guide someone in life and death situations. He knows all the paths, all the bridges, all the secret routes, all the hidden dangers. He can take someone who has never been into that mountain region and successfully and safely guide them. He is at home in the mountains. He knows how to live there under all conditions. The guru is like the mountain guide—knowledgeable and experienced in the area of his or her expertise.

STORY READING

Over a thousand years ago a huge wooden sailing ship was on the seas. It had tall masts and great white sails as big as clouds. Stitched across the main sail with thick red and gold thread was a very large Siva Nataraja figure, the dancing Siva, Lord of the universe. When the wind shifted or gusted the sail, the Siva Nataraja would dance on the wind. Kavita and her brother Gurunatha enjoyed standing under the sail, feeling the sea-smelling wind across their face and watching with fascination the Siva move across the white cloth. One early morning the captain had put a safety rope around them and let them climb up the main mast. Kavita and Gurunatha were twins. They were exactly the same age, born in June, and now almost nine years old. Up in the ropes of the mast their chocolate brown hair blew around large grey eyes. They were a striking pair. Everybody noticed them and liked them. Together, like a pair of doves, they looked out at the dark green sea and purple blue sky. There was

not much light. But they could see a lightning storm in the distance. Giant hammers of clouds gathering on the horizon. Pinkish streaks of lightening shot into the sea. The ship raced across the choppy seas heading east from India to an island far away and very strange. Kavita and Gurunatha came down the mast like jungle monkeys and started to run for their parents' room on the ship. "Hey children," the captain yelled. "Don't run on the deck."

"Yes, captain," said Kavita as the twins stopped their run. "But we just saw a lightning storm on the horizon. We are going to tell our parents." They ducked down a hatchway to the dark rooms below. The twins were traveling with their parents. Their father was an important official in the king's court. The family would make a new home in a Saivite Hindu city now being built on a very large island called Java. Father had told the twins a few days ago, "We will be strangers in this new land, and you will have to learn well from me new customs and ways. Remember the laws of karma I taught you. You both will have fresh karmas, new lessons. Everybody you meet will have some karma for you that you created in a past life. Karma is your greatest teacher. Always tell me everything that happens to you. Then I can help you understand it."

"Wait Gurunatha," said Kavita as they walked against the ship's rocking motion. "Let's bring some sweet coriander milk to mother. We can visit the cows and ship's cook."

"Good idea. That would be a nice early morning gift," agreed Gurunatha. "But let's greet father and mother first. We got up very early this morning." The passenger area on the ship was cramped and smelled of old wood and sea water. But the family had created a nice area made comfortable with cotton pillows and brightened with dyed cloth and oil lamps made from brass cages. The twins ran into father as they made their way around some ropes and barrels. They both immediately touched his feet, and said perfectly together, "Good morning, father." Normally they would wait for father to greet them back. But today with the excitement of the lightening storm, they both quickly said, again in chorus "Father, there's a lightening storm. Come and see." Father, holding a barrel to steady himself against the roll of the ship, said, "Really? We must see this. Perhaps there is land nearby. Go and tell mother."

A C T I V I T I E S

1. All the children make a circle. Going around the circle each child tells of what recent knowledge or advice their parents gave them. Then going around the circle again, each child states aloud a good deed they plan to do for their parents over the coming week.

And the twins, quick as deer, jumped off to see mother, touch her feet, and tell her about the beautiful pink lightening. The family went together up on deck. While the ship leapt into the sea waves they watched a great lightening show of Siva's power. Father quietly said, "Inside that lightening, deep inside its heat and force, is the light of Siva's Mind. It is like golden lightening that fills the whole universe, and never ends. Think about that." The twins looked at each other, their eyes big and thoughtful. Then they happily went off to get some sweet coriander milk for their mother.

CONNECTIONS

It cannot be overemphasized to the children the importance of the guru, or that their parents are their first gurus. If children look to their parents as gurus, then the parents will be obligated to continue their spiritual education and advancement so they can be the best possible guides to their children. The law of karma operates here. If parents are good gurus to their children, in the parents' next life, they will have parents who are good gurus. Have the children consider that it was a great guru who produced this children's course for them to study.

CITIZENSHIP

Family education and guidance is vital in any society. The function of the parents as educators and guides in life is fundamental to a stable, morally healthy country. Viewing the parents as gurus, as teachers, as part of our culture certainly is the most profound way to develop the family education process. In this approach the parents are responsible to raise spiritual citizens who value ethics and the principles of compassion, tolerance and respect for all.

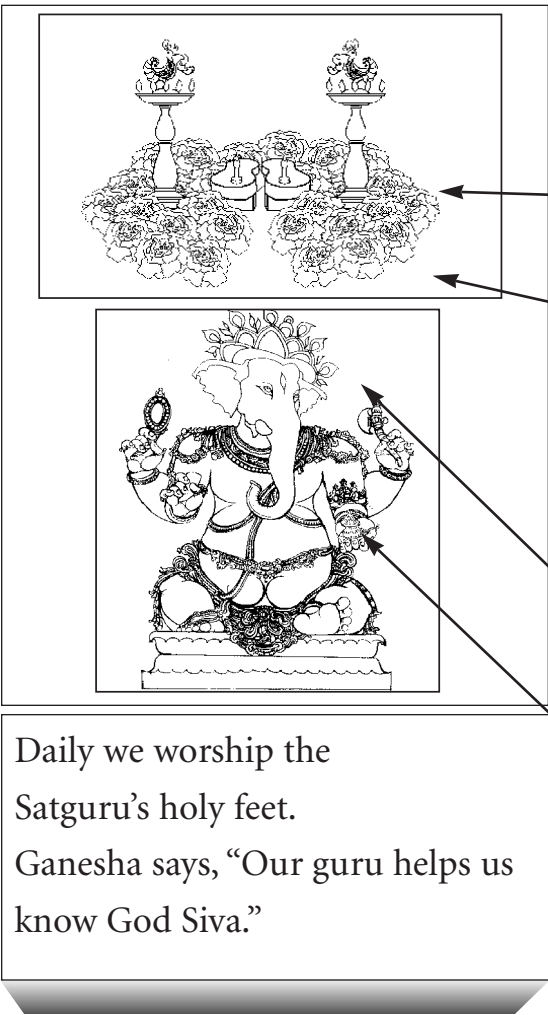
LESSON FOCUS

Besides God Siva and the Gods Murugan and Ganesha, the only other person we worship is the satguru. Again, as in worship to God and the Gods, we find our deepest divine love given to the satguru. 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. The satguru is the only person who can guide us to our own realization of Siva. The satguru's feet are symbols of our following his footsteps.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

We taught the children in a previous lesson that the father and mother are the first gurus of the son or daughter. 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. But these gurus may not have personally experienced their 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 can guide worthy disciples to that same enlightenment.

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 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,



Daily we worship the Satguru's holy feet. Ganesha says, "Our guru helps us know God Siva."

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Here are a pair of bronze sandals that represent the feet of the satguru. These sandals are in the old style, with round pegs that come up for the toes to fit around. These sandals are in a shrine room, surrounded by fresh flowers that are changed every day. The sandals tell us that we follow the guru's steps very closely. They also tell us that the power of the satguru's Siva knowing goes all the way to his feet. The satguru is completely filled with Siva. This is the *Dhundhi Ganapati* form of Lord Ganesha. It is the image meaning "sought after," and of course this reminds the children that it is God Siva that we are seeking after. Here is a small pot of precious gems in the left hand of Ganesha. This symbolizes the spiritual awakenings of our future.

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. At this stage, the shishya is in the most advanced relationship with the satguru. He or she is 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, often 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

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 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. For these Saivites, the satguru is a distant beacon of light, like a lighthouse. They do not relate personally to the 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 daily honor his picture and seek his blessings through this simple worship. As a spiritual law, all Saivite Hindus honor all satgurus. However, when the person is very advanced in the reincarnation cycle, and spirituality

all important matters. Finally, and most importantly, the shisya seriously practice the spiritual disciplines of puja, mantra and yoga so they attain Siva knowledge in this life.

The satguru's holy feet are important symbols for the children to understand. The holy feet mean that we follow very closely the footsteps of the satguru. He has attained Siva consciousness. He has climbed the spiritual mountain. He knows the trails to the top. He knows the dangers on the path. So we follow very carefully where and how he guides us. The holy feet also tell us that we need to be humble, egoless, as we pursue spiritual enlightenment under the satguru's direction. Our thinking of "I" and "mine" and "me" are left outside the gate of the satguru's wisdom. So we humbly touch the satguru's feet and prostrate before him or his sandal symbols in the shrine. This creates a feeling of surrender and openness to the spiritual forces within him and us.

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.

STORY READING

The blue smoke lifted into the gray sky and seemed to stop, like a tree made of smoke. There was no wind. Not even a tiny breeze. Everything was still. A few birds tweetered a birdsong from the deodar trees. The fire that 9-year old Jai had built was made of young wood. It made a lot of blue smoke and there were tears in his light brown eyes as the smoke drifted into his face. He coughed, pulled his thick, black cotton coat over his red hair and turned to his sister, Shanti, "Next time I'm searching harder and getting old, dry wood."

"That's alright brother." Shanti said. She was ten, with hair like shiny brass and a thin face that almost looked like a cat. Her eyes were ice blue. She could have been a princess. "You didn't have much time. That rain storm came over the forest faster than a running tiger. Everything got wet. I'm glad you got this fire going." She took off her gloves and put her hands up to the crackling fire that was built in a circle of round stones. She had found the stones. Jai found the wood. Night was falling quickly.

She was wet, and wanted to dry out. Their traveling companion, Skanda—a big, kind man and a trusted friend of the family—was now fetching water for making dhal and chapatis.

It was spring in the country of the Mahadeva River. The river was sacred to Siva, and the river was so clear it was a window. Green moss stones and black rocks with gold and red streaks lined the bottom. Brown and rainbow-colored fish swam in pools the color of turquoise. There were water falls like liquid silver. A few temples, made of great deodar beams, and roofed with gold tiles, were built on great flat stones in the middle of the mountain river. Bridges of wood and rope strung across the silvery waters like spider threads to the temples.

The winter grip of snow was gone. Yellow, purple, pink, red, blue and white flowers, looking like fairy faces, danced in the grasses of the meadows. But it was still cold. And sudden storms brought sheets of rain and hail—little white balls of frozen rain. Jai rubbed at his face where a ball of hail had hit him. As he rubbed, he smeared some charcoal from the fire across his cheek. Laughing, Shanti, said, "You look funny, Jai. You could be a raccoon. Let me do the other side for you."

"Hah, hah," said Jai, but he was smiling as the fire cast a comforting warmth on him. It was good to be on this journey up the Mahadeva River. "Well, it shouldn't be long before we find him. We are far up the river now." Jai said. "Yes," said Shanti. "We are close. It feels like there is lightening in the air. It could be the storm. But this feels more magical." Jai and Shanti were trying to find a man who lived where the Mahadeva River began as a lake. The man was a legend, a living Siva satguru. He was tall, wore long orange robes and his hair was the color of morning frost: white silver. Most Saivites of this country saw him from afar. He carried a pine staff as tall as he, walked as sure as a mountain goat and always had several men in yellow robes behind him. When the country Saivites saw the satguru, they would often prostrate on the ground even though the guru was a mile away. They knew the satguru had the unlimited brightness of Siva inside him. They hoped some of that brightness would shine into their lives. Jai and Shanti wanted to meet the satguru face to face. He walked into their dreams. They both knew the aged guru was their spiritual guide for this life.

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring numerous blindfolds to the class. Have several of the children tie on the blindfolds so they can not see. Then one other youth acts as their guide, telling them where to step as they walk around the classroom and outside. The blindfolded youngster is totally dependent on the guide, who in turn is totally responsible for the welfare of the blind person. This represents the guru guiding the student toward knowing Siva. The person who is being guided is obviously very grateful for the help, and offers deep gratitude to the guide. This represents the daily worship of the Satguru.

Skanda had finished toasting the chapatis and cooking the yellow dhal as night fell into purple darkness. Shanti had made some tea. The food was hot and steaming, and smelling of good spices. Jai and Shanti were very hungry. All three of them prayed in Sanskrit to God Siva to bless the food. The plates of food were in their laps.

Then, an owl hooted. There was the fluttering of bird wings. Twigs cracked not too far away from their camp. There were footsteps. They were regular, like men walking. Jai and Shanti peered into the wall of trees covered in night black. Then, they heard a deep, wonderful voice that sounded old and new at the same time, "Aummmmm. Namah Sivaya, young children." Jai and Shanti were startled, and almost dropped their food on the ground as they jumped up. Out of the trees, and into the gentle red light of the fire, stepped the satguru. His eyes were like two full moons, full of power and kindness. Jai and Shanti immediately prostrated on the ground, covered with stones and pine needles. But they didn't even feel them. All they felt was the Siva love and light coming from the tall satguru in orange robes. "Now children, get up. You will get all dirty there," said the satguru. Jai and Shanti stood. Then Jai spoke, "Great guru, we want to be your shisya,"

"Oh, yes I know," said the guru. "But first let's have some nice dinner. Then we will talk of the path to Siva bliss." And so the children served the guru, and he began to learn more about Jai and Shanti.

Notes:

LESSON FOCUS

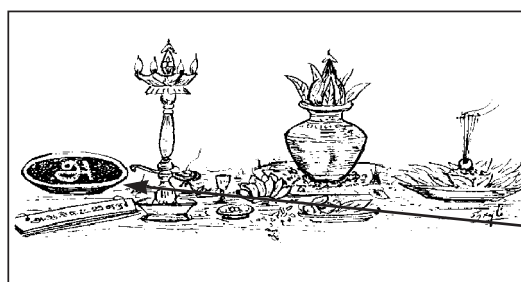
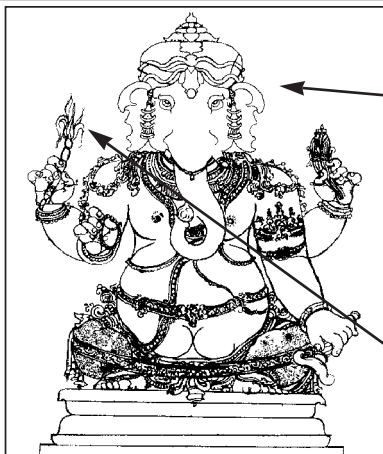
There are very important times in our life when we really need the guidance and blessings of God, the Gods and devas. These times usually mark a major change in our life, such as starting our education or marriage. We experience these times as young children through old age. The *samskara* ceremony is a specific ritual to invoke the presence of the divinities during these important periods of change. One of the most important samskaras for childhood is the beginning of the child's education. This is marked 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 children, 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 physical abilities or growth: such as having teeth grow in or learning to walk. Or the child



Ganesha says, “A samskara is a ceremony done to bless us at very special times.”

We write our first letter in the temple.

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, and that name is ceremonially given to the child with a priest conducting the rite. This samskara is usually done in the temple. This samskara is one of the most important rites, because it is considered 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 kar-

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the *Yoga Ganapati* image of Lord Ganesha. He is doing mantra chanting and is sitting in a meditation posture. This shows the power the Gods have in helping us at very important changes in our life, when we have samskaras. Because of their great powers of mind, the Gods can help many millions of people at the same time.

Here, Ganesha is holding a sugar cane stalk. He loves to see children happy with sweet things in their lives. The samskaras bring children a sweetness and success in life that would otherwise not be there.

Here the Tamil character for “a” is written in a tray of rice. The first character of any alphabet—Hindi, English, etc.—is written into the rice.

ma. 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. If a child did not have a name-giving samskara held in a temple, then there would be no guardian deva for them. Also they would not have formally entered the religion. There is a common misconception that you are born a Hindu by simply being born into a Hindu family. Actually, to be a Hindu means you have joined the religion through the name-giving samskara. This is why and how people who have not been born into a Hindu family can formally become Hindus. Even people who have been in other religions can formally enter into Hinduism through the name-giving samskara. The name-giving ceremony can occur at any time in life. It does not have to

A C T I V I T I E S

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. This means that the education plan has the greater spiritual progress of the child (and later teenager) at heart. This samskara holds many keys to this process. The parents and child must be open to divine guidance.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. A normal calendar marks out the days of the months of the year, with holidays noted. But let’s say we have a *samskara calendar*. This calendar marks all the important changes for our whole life. It marks the month, day and year these changes take place. It actually starts from before we are born, for there are samskaras for the women pregnant with a child. And it ends at our death. At each of these major events of change, it is a personal holy day. That is a holy day just for each of us. It is a day on which the forces of the holy Gods and devas are sent directly to us personally.

STORY READING

Premila looked out the window of her house. Tall coconut trees moved in the wind. Their branches swayed like large fans across a pink halo around the rising sun. Premila was a talented 9-year old girl with hair like waves of midnight and soft black

eyes set wide in her face over a pretty nose. She had the eyes of an artist. She made hand fans from fine strips of palm frawns and from finely split bamboo. They were sold to shops in the city. One of her fans was so beautiful, with delicate brown, green and gold threads sewn into a banyan tree picture, that it was given to the Siva temple in her town in Sri Lanka. Premila gave it to the temple on the day one of her friends had her ear-piercing samskara ceremony.

It was the dancing palms in the dawn light that gave her the idea of making fans. She always watched the palms through the window, chanting *Aum* softly to herself to start the day well. In front of her jackfruit wood and thatch roof home was a garden of flowers and a walkway through a row of palms to the beach. The surf was small in the lagoon she lived on. But storms at sea often washed in wood from India, which was just over the sea waters. Often she went to the beach to look for old creamy-white wood that had animal shapes. These she would take home. She would polish them and keep them in her room. Her younger sister, Tara, shared the same room.

Today Premila watched the palms as the pink halo melted into a sky touched with soft blue. She had her favorite deep red dress on, and her hair fell in a long braid down her back. Bunches of small white flowers hung in her hair. Her 5-year-old sister Tara walked in the room and looked out the window. “It’s very pretty today,” she said in her young girl’s voice.

“Yes, and you’re late as usual. We need to leave soon. Are you ready to write your first letter?” asked Premila, as she straightened out part of her sister’s dark green dress. Tara had yellow and red flowers in her braided hair. This morning the whole family and many uncles, aunts and cousins were going to the Siva temple for Tara’s samskara of writing her first letter in rice.

“I’ve been practicing all week,” said Tara confidently. “Now, it is just perfect. Everybody will see that it is a perfect letter. And I hope that Lord Ganesha in the Gods’ world sees it. I really want Him to help me with my studies.”

Premila said, “He will. Lord Ganesha loves to help us with the growth of our mind and heart. But He doesn’t do the study for you. You have to work to be as smart as possible. I do very well in school. And my fans are becoming very popular. And now I am learning to play the vina.” She turned to Tara, who was sitting and still

1. Bring paper and crayons or markers, scissors and scotch tape. Instruct the children to draw and color in anyway they want the first letter of the alphabet they currently write in. It could be English, Tamil, Hindi, Gujarati, etc. The letter should be very big, a giant single letter all colored in. When the children are finished, they cut out their letter. Then all the letters are set out side by side and scotch taped together so they form a long line. This is then displayed. A more fun alternative is to divide the class up so that each group of children is producing the letters that spell out Siva in the language they write in. Each of these Siva’s is then taped together and displayed.

2. We are re-creating the ear-piercing samskara. Choose one, two or more of the girls who already have pierced ears (and a boy if one does). They should take out their earrings before it begins. the boys will be the priests, one to ring the bell, the rest to chant “Aum Namah Sivaya” in unison. One student writes on the blackboard, “This will bring you health and wealth.” The rest of the students repeat this phrase softly as the earring is put in by the teacher. This can be done for each child. taking five minutes or so apiece for the chanting and bell-ringing. It should be emphasized that no actual ear-piercing is done. It is a play using children with already pierced ears.

watching the palms in the orange-blue light. “I remember my first letter-writing. It felt like Lord Ganesha was watching over me, like mother does when we go to sleep. And it felt like there were a lot of invisible people—devas—at the temple. Like I knew them. I think you will also experience this,” said Premila, and she smiled.

Tara smiled back. “That’s my prayer. But I want to help the animals as I grow up. Not to just learn about them in school. But help them so they are not harmed,” she said. “Mother said there is a lot we can do for the animals. They are Siva souls like us, right,” she said brightly.

“Yes, Tara. They are. And it is wonderful you want to help others. Well, we need to go. Time to join everybody.” And the two sisters left the seat before the window and palms, and walked out the door. A great gathering of family was waiting.

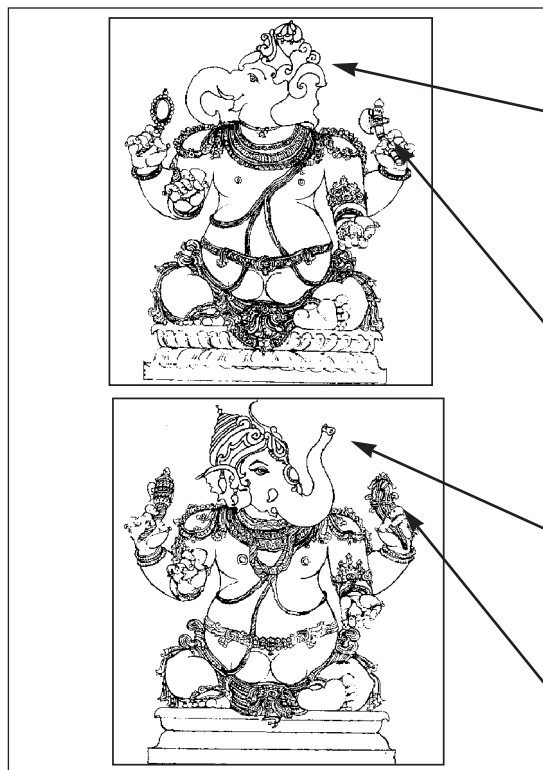
LESSON FOCUS

Karma, like reincarnation, is a fundamental law of Saivite Hinduism. It is one of the great invisible forces of our world, and the devas' world and Gods' world. Karma states that whatever action we do, good or bad, returns to us in the same or a similar way as our original action. This is very important knowledge. It means that everything that happens to us is of our own doing. We did something in a past life. Now it is returning to us for us to live through. What we do to others, or to ourselves, comes back to us. We live through it, and hopefully, learn from the karma. This is key knowledge. Karma is our teacher. It makes us careful and responsible for our actions.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Karma is one of the most widely known of Asian spiritual laws. Many millions of people in the West believe in the law of karma. And they guide their lives by it. However, it is not necessary that someone believe in karma. It still exists as a law. Just as we don't have to believe that we need air to breathe. But if we run out of air, our life ceases. So whether one believes in karma, or not, it still operates. Thus, our entire world is experiencing all the time the law of karma. If you were to show a map to the children (which is a good idea) or to show them a picture history book (another good idea), all people in all the places on the map, and all the events of history are constantly shaped by karma. This is a very big and crucial idea for children to grasp. If this class is successful, it means the children are beginning to examine their young lives in the light of karma.

Of course, guiding our lives by spiritual truths is why we learn spiritual knowledge. You learn something as true, then guide your life on a daily basis by it. We learn about karma, then we live by its law. There could really be nothing so simple or profound as this. Even young children need to follow this basic approach to spiritual living. Karma is the most important knowledge for a young person to understand and live by. Karma is not a complicated idea. It is really very simple. Let's say we do something good. We give a coin to a poor person. That is an action. We are giving. We are being kind. We are being selfless. It is a good action. In the future, in a future life, that action of giving the coin will come back to us. Someone will give us something of value when we really need it. Suppose we



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the *Ekadanta Ganapati* form of Ganesha. It means "single tusk." Notice that the word *danta* meaning tooth or tusk is very similar to the English word *dental*, meaning of the teeth. There are many Sanskrit words similar to European language words.

In this left hand is an axe used for cutting through our ignorance. To do good karma we have to be smart, and to understand the spiritual laws.

This is the *Haridra Ganapati*, the "golden one." When we see golden light around us, it makes it very difficult to do bad karma, because gold is a spiritual color.

In this left hand is the noose that Ganesha uses to hold us close to Him, so we do not do bad things.

Ganesha says, "Do good and good comes back to you. This is karma."

Ganesha says, "Do bad and bad comes back to you. This is also karma."

help an elderly person across the street, or give them a seat on the bus. That is a good, kind act. In a future life that act of helpfulness or sacrifice will come back to us. Someone will help us when we are aged. Let's say we get some money for our birthday. Normally, we might spend it all on ourselves, buying things or doing things we like. But on this birthday—our 8th birthday—we decide to give half of our money to an orphanage. We are giving half of our birthday money to children who have no parents and an unknown future. That is a very great act of generosity. This is a very good karma. The law of karma records that act, like a video camera in our personal mind. It is like a video is being taken of the action, and is stored away deep in our mind. Later, in a future life, that act of great generosity will be played back to us, like playing a video on a VCR tape deck. A great act of generosity would come to us from

some person. We may not even know them. Because we were generous in our childhood, the karma may come back to us in a later life when we are an adult. It does not necessarily mean it returns to us when we are a child.

This may mean that, as an adult, we receive a sum of money to help us in difficult times.

Karma also applies to how we think. We are thinking that we want someone who is sick to get well. That is good karma, and a similar well-wishing will come to us in a future life. We are thinking that we want to be a vegetarian because that protects the animals and environment. That is good karma. A similar thought of compassionate concern will return to us. It may be strong enough to dramatically change our future life into deep spirituality and success.

Karma also applies to our emotions. What we feel is recorded on the karma video tape, and is played back in a future life. If we give love to a person no matter what they do, even someone we don't know, that good karma of love and affection will come back to us. We will be loved in a future life, despite our faults.

But what happens if our actions, our kar-

ma is bad? What if we act bad, think bad and feel bad. Let's say that instead of being generous with our birthday money, we find a wallet and keep it without searching for the owner. The karma video camcorder is on in our minds. This bad action is recorded. In a future life, we will lose something that is very important, and it will not be found. Someone else will profit by it. This is karma of a negative nature. Let's say that instead of wishing someone health, we say to ourselves, "I wish that person would get sick," about someone we don't like or are upset with. That is a mental bad karma. In a future life, people will send their thoughts of "get sick" to us, and we could get sick as a result. If we get angry at a person, or if we are jealous of our sister or brother, these are bad feelings. They will return as anger or jealousy toward us in a future life.

We can see that karma is with us every second of our lives. It is an inescapable law. Everything that happens to any person can be traced to their karma. This means we are each responsible for what happens to us. There is no one else to blame. We are the maker of all of our own karma. So, good brings good. Bad brings bad. What does the law of karma accomplish? It spiritually teaches us. Karma is our greatest teacher. We learn to be spiritually good. We learn to sense when actions and thinking are good for us. We learn to judge our future by how we behave now. Of course, we learn hard lessons from our bad karma. Basically, we learn not to act, think or feel bad. Our sense of right and wrong becomes clear. We can sense when an action will be bad. We learn to control our feelings and thoughts. All of this develops us spiritually.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The bouncing ball or push ball on a string, as used in this lesson's activity, is a very good analogy of how karma works.

STORY READING

Ananta opened the back door to his family's new forest green car. He was excited and moving so fast his brown curly hair flew around wildly. At nine-years-old, Ananta looked like a midget soccer player, thin and not too tall. But he never played sports. He was an idea kid. Ideas noisily rumbled through his head like a never-ending herd of elephants. On his nose sat a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, the round kind that an old,

scholar who looked like a white owl would wear. Ananta liked the idea of a scholar, a person dedicated to tracking down old and valuable knowledge. Sometimes at night Ananta fell asleep with his gold, round-rimmed glasses falling off his nose. Tonight, after going with his parents to see a movie as part of his birthday celebration, Ananta was buzzing like a loud cricket. He jumped in the car and slid onto the soft seat, and shut the door with a loud thud. "Okay, dad, let's go," he said. "I've something really important to do at home," as he locked the door and buckled the seat belt across his favorite grey-blue kurta shirt. He sat back to take off into the night time traffic of San Francisco, California.

"Sure, Ananta. But, first let your sister in the car. You shut the door before she got in," said his dad, chuckling. "What's the hurry?" They were parked so only one back door could be opened. His sister was standing at the window, a street lamp lighting up the frown on her face.

"Oh gosh," said Ananta, as he opened the door to let his 8-year old sister, Amala, in. "I forgot all about you. Sorry about that."

Amala hopped up onto the seat and stared at him with her butter brown eyes and her red pottu dot, which she already knew was her eye of spiritual sight. "Hmm...Ananta. You were just going to leave without me. I'd say that was a bad karma. Leave your sister alone in the big city." Amala was learning about karma, and so she looked at everything as whether it was good or bad karma. "But, that's alright. You'll learn. Your own karma will teach you. What is the hurry, anyway?"

"Well, for one thing I forgot to feed Yogi Turtle. I was watching the movie, munching on my popcorn and I remembered I hadn't fed Yogi Turtle. Poor guy." Yogi Turtle was Ananta's pet turtle that he kept in a large rock-and-grass tank in his room. He called him Yogi because the turtle liked to withdraw his head and legs into his shell, like a yogi withdrawing into Siva's mind.

"See," said Amala turning to him as the car pulled out into the headlights of other cars and went up one of San Francisco's steep hills. "Another bad karma. You know in your next life you will miss a lot meals. People will just forget to feed you. You can't blame them. It's your own karma. If you neglect Yogi Turtle now, you will be neglected in a future life." Ananta was looking at her red pottu as she spoke. He knew she was right. He was studying the law of

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1. Bring to class two balls or other light round objects, one white, one black, with a rope or twine securely fastened to it. Tie the two balls to the ceiling so they can swing freely. One child stands by each ball. Have the children suggest an action which is good karma. the child by the white ball pushes it away from himself and says, "Good karma goes out." Then, as the ball comes back and the child catches it, everyone says in unison, "And good karma comes back." Then the children suggest a bad action. the child with the black ball pushes it away and says, "Bad karma goes out." Then, as the ball comes back, all say, "And bad karma comes back." They should suggest at least six good and six bad actions, and turns can be taken pushing the ball out, relating a specific negative action to each black ball push and a specific positive deed to each push of the white ball.

karma. To him, it was a truly great idea, a law that built a bridge from the past to the future. Ananta had even created a karma map, or actually a karma web, on his computer. It was a picture that looked like a vast spider's web of all the different ways karma tied to a person, in the past, present and future. They were driving across the Golden Gate Bridge now, hundreds of feet over the Pacific Ocean, all black in the night. But Ananta knew there were whales swimming down there in the ocean waters, and they were surfacing for air. That was what was on his mind. Whales. Saving whales.

"Yes, yes. You're right. I know. I need to be more careful. That is bad karma. And I have no excuses," he said to Amala with a smile. "Keep reminding me." Then he leaned forward in the seat and said to his parents, "I need to make a phone call when I get home. Is that alright?"

"Sure," said dad. "What's up?"

The family had just seen the movie "Free Willy," about an Orca whale that had been freed from captivity by a young boy. At the end of the movie was an offer and phone number to adopt-a-whale. "I want to take all the money that I received for my birthday and give it to the adopt-a-whale program. Isn't that good karma, Amala?"

"Oh, yes. Very good karma," said Amala. "And by the way I fed Yogi Turtle. I noticed he hadn't been fed, so I fed him. Now, that is also good karma." And they all laughed.

LESSON FOCUS

Scriptures are the instructions from God Siva in how to live a truly spiritual life. Scriptures are the teachings of God Siva and the Gods given directly to humankind. Scriptures are the holy guidance of God Siva and the Gods. When scripture is written, we call it holy books. They are like spiritual school books for people. We call our scripture the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. Originally our Hindu scripture was spoken from Siva's Mind to the spiritual minds of great yogis in meditation. They then memorized the teachings as a spoken and chanted book, and later wrote them down to be passed down from one generation to the next. Now, in our times, reading scripture needs to be continued in the home with the parents reading holy books to the family.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

When we go to school we use text books to study from. We use text books in our classes. The teacher talks to us about the text book to help us understand. We often take the text book home to study at home. Text books were written by people to teach us certain knowledge. The knowledge is given to us at a level we can understand. Scripture are the text books for spiritual life. The word *scripture* comes from the same root as *script*, which means to write, or a group of writing characters. All the children in the class are learning to write in script. It is one of the first things a child learns in school, to read script and write script. If one of the children went up to the blackboard and wrote out the word *SIVA*, (a good demonstration) that would be putting the name of God into script. It is a holy name. It is part of our Saivite Hindu scripture. And indeed the young student would have written a word—*Siva*, the name of God—that appears very often in our Hindu scripture. Scripture in Saivite Hinduism are the text books, the school books for us to study, to live by and be made happy by in the most important aim of life: spiritual living and personal knowing of God Siva. We call our scripture holy books because they are books that teach us how to be good and holy. They teach us how to pray, worship and do yoga. They teach us how to build temples, and even how to build homes and towns so they are more spiritual and close to the devas' world. They teach us how to live close to God Siva and the Gods and devas. They teach us about our soul, and how to live as a soul being of light on our physical world. They teach us about the

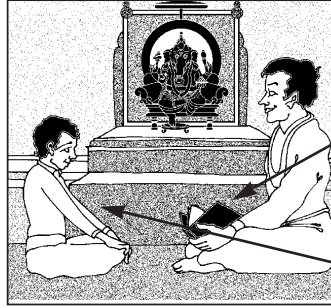
Father reads holy books to me.

God Siva spoke our scriptures.
Wise holy men called rishis
wrote down His words.

soul's journey to Godness. They teach us about caring for all beings and our planet. They teach us how our universe of stars, worlds and time was created, and who the Creator is. These are very holy books. The scriptures for Saivite Hinduism are the *Vedas*, which means "Wisdom from white light," and the *Agamas*, which means "That which has come down"—this in itself refers to the process of scripture coming from Siva's highest consciousness to our world. Our scripture is the oldest in the world. Out of all the religions, Saivite Hinduism has the oldest scripture. It is over 8,000 - 10,000 years old.

Children—and adults too—think of money and gold and jewels as being of very great value. But the children and adult Saivite Hindus should think of our *Vedas* and *Agamas* as truly priceless treasure. Our scriptures are large, very, very old treasure chests of diamond and gold wisdom that would fill a giant vault. It is our duty to re-

VISUAL INTERPRETATION



The father and son are seated on the floor in a nice shrine room. Father is reading from the *Vedas* to his son. But Father also reads to his daughter and mother reads the scriptures too. At least once a week the whole family gets together to study Saivite Hinduism.



Notice that the son is sitting in a good yoga posture and his back is straight. This is good for studying the holy books.

The *rishi* is the yogi with spiritual sight, the same psychic sight that wearing of the red pottu symbolizes. The halo of light around the rishi's head means he is experiencing Siva. Perhaps Siva is talking now. The rishi is writing down in an alphabet called *devanagari* the *Vedas*. The language is Sanskrit. The script is devanagari.

vere our sacred scriptures as a priceless treasure that must be studied, guarded and passed from this generation of children to their children. Protecting and preserving the *Vedas* and *Agamas* is an important point to make with the children. In the old, old past some of our scriptural texts were lost. They are gone. Fortunately, so much is still with us now that Saivite Hinduism still has the greatest treasure of scripture in the world. The children should think of themselves as guardians of our scripture.

Our holy scripture were written in the language of *Sanskrit*, which is a most sacred language. It is a holy language that has the power to connect our world with the subtle worlds. It is also such a precise language, that it is being used by scientists as a programming language for computers.

How did we receive these great scriptures? Well, they came from Siva, the Supreme Being. Have the children imagine that Siva is talking into their mind. He has the most beautiful, powerful voice, a voice as peaceful as rolling ocean waves and as comforting as the bright, twinkling stars. The children close their eyes and hear Siva's voice mentally in their minds. Siva says into their mind, "You are a soul of brightest

A C T I V I T I E S

white light. You and I are one. Simply sit still, be still in your mind and you will know Me.”

This is similar to the way our scriptures were projected from Siva’s Mind into the minds of the great yogis that we call rishis, which means “one with spiritual sight.” The *Vedas* and *Agamas* were projected from Siva—like a slide projector—onto the slide screen of the minds of the *rishis*, the wise yogis. This spiritual voice of Siva was not like ordinary talking. It was a projection of a complete idea—a vision—including pictures and feeling. The wise men we know as rishis received this projection permanently into their memory. They then taught it as a spoken or chanted Sanskrit scripture, and later it was written down. Today, our scripture is available for reading and study as holy books. If we were to collect all of our *Vedas* and *Agamas* together as books, they would fill up many large shelves.

We have learned that our father and mother are our first gurus. One of the duties of the father (or mother) is to begin introducing our scripture to the children. This is done at home, during a special time set aside for such reading. It is usually a weekly event, and all the children attend. Besides the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, there are other Saivite Hindu scripture that help explain or add to our supreme scriptures. These are also holy books. Among them are the sacred songs and writings of the Saivite saints of South India.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Above, we used one analogy of the slide projector and slide screen to explain how Siva projects knowledge to the rishis. Because *rishis* means “seer” or one who sees, it important to stress the vision or *seeing* reality of this process. The television is another good analogy of this process.

STORY READING

About three meters up on the face of a steep rock cliff was a secret cave. Long boulders hung over the cave like stone guards. Hundreds of years ago, maybe thousands, a part of the cliff had fallen. Boulders and rock and dust tumbled down like a river of earth. The cave was almost sealed. But a sliver of the cave entrance remained open. Mahesvara put his hand to his honey brown eyes to shield them from

the white glow of the sun. He had a large nose and thin eyebrows and his black hair was very long and loose. It fell over a deep red Hindu shirt that today was very dusty. He wore a large brim hat that he had bought at a stall in the capital city of his country. His country was part of the Indian empire of long ago. It was the land next to northern India—due west—a bleak and rocky land with a few small rivers and great cliffs that looked like castles of giants. It was a lonely land. But it was here that long ago Siva yogis had come to be alone and seek the Face of Siva. The yogis lived in caves that drilled into the cliffs. On this day, Mahesvara and his friend were looking for a special cave, a cave so secret it had been long forgotten—except by one man.

“Look. There’s the opening. Right there between those four big boulders. Very narrow. We can climb up that way,” and he pointed to a pile of stones that formed a narrow chute they could crawl up.

“It’s steep. Watch your step,” said Kashi as his foot slid on some gravel, and a shower of grey stone fell to the ground below. Kashi was the same age as Mahesvara, nine years old. They were both very curious, natural explorers. Kashi looked down at his yellow tunic, also covered with grey and red dust. He checked for the map. It was still tucked into his thick black sash. The map had been given to them by an old man who lived alone in a rock hut in a valley of red stone and one gnarled old fig tree. Mahesvara and Kashi went to the old man, who was known as Saint Veda, because he knew the *Vedas*. The two boys wanted to learn more of the *Vedas*. So he taught them over a period of one year, and they learned much soul knowledge and spirit laws. Then one day he gave them a map—an old, wrinkled piece of dried leaf with strange marks on it. He told them: “Learn to read this map. Seek the cave that has guards of stone. It is a Siva cave. It has a secret treasure.”

After months of making hard trips out from their village to try and figure out the strange map, they had finally found the hidden cave. They could have given up. But they didn’t. They knew this search was important. It was part of their life’s karma.

The cave was just a slit, like a large cat’s eye. It was pitch black. Kashi came up to where Mahesvara was standing on a narrow ledge. They both looked in. Nothing. Pure darkness. Mahesvara put his hand into the blackness. “It feels cool,” he said to Kashi, raising his eyebrows into a look of ques-

1. Bring a copy of the Upanishads to the class (or Dancing with Siva if you have a copy). Have the class gather around, sit down and chant Aum three times. Then read from the Upanishads or Dancing with Siva scriptural quotes the easiest sections to understand.

2. This is a mental game. Divide the children up into pairs. One of the pair is God Siva. The other of the pair is the rishi. The child playing God Siva thinks of a nice thought about religion or nature. Then he or she mentally projects that thought to the youth playing the rishi. The rishi sits with his or her eyes closed and tries to mentally hear the thought being sent by God Siva, and speaks it out. It may be similar to the projected thought, or it may not be. The intention is not to catch the thought exactly right, though that may occur. The purpose is to have the children experiment with this kind of psychic transference, which is similar to the process that brought through the *Vedas* and *Agamas*.

tioning. “Unusual. It’s so hot out here.” Kashi put his hand into the black cave. “Hmm. Very cool,” he said. “Well, let’s go.” They both slipped through the cave entrance, disappearing completely into a black passageway. Behind them unwound a strong rope from Kashi’s sash, so they could find their way back. It was totally quiet, an unearthly silence except for a tiny tinkling sound of running water. They followed the narrow cave passageway, which made many sharp turns and seemed to be climbing up. Behind them was the blackness. But, now in front of them was a pale blue light, like sun light going through very deep blue water. They made one more sharp turn, then they stood at the entrance of a huge cave room. They gasped. It was as big as a palace, and filled with a beautiful blue light that seemed to come from a pool of water in the center. On a small island in the center of the pool sat a very old, old yogi. He had large eyes, like green emeralds, and he said, “So, you have found me. Now I will teach you how the *Vedas* and *Agamas* came from Siva’s mind into the minds of men like me. Breathe deep and make your mind like clear water,” and his old voice echoed through the cave. A thin bridge of stone dropped to the island, and the boys walked across, already slowing their breath.

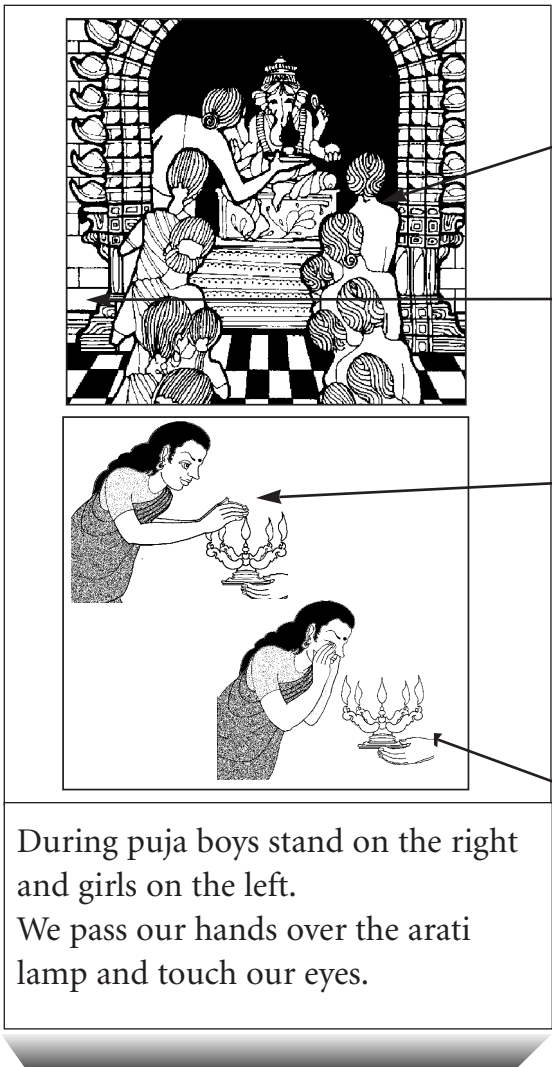
LESSON FOCUS

When we go to the temple, we are stepping into a spiritual palace. We prepare ourselves. We dress a certain way. We do things a certain way. We behave a certain way. This is just as would be expected if we were visiting the emperor of India. We call these temple customs. Two very important temple customs are how we stand in front of the deity for worship during puja and how we receive the arati lamp when it is offered to us after the puja.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Our world is obviously divided into boys and girls, into male and female. There are millions of species of life forms on Earth, including animals, birds, reptiles, bugs and plants. All, with a handful of exceptions, are divided into male and female. And it is obvious to children even at a very young age, that there are big differences between girls and boys, between men and women. There are differences in male and female bodies, even in faces. Simply by looking at the face it is easier for a child to tell the difference between a girl and boy human, than between a male rabbit and a female rabbit. Children also know there are big differences between what girls like to do, and what boys like to do. They have different interests, and they think about things differently. They also feel about things differently. This means in body, mind and emotions girls and boys, adult men and women are very different. Boys like to be with boys. Girls like to be with girls. This is natural. And this division continues into adult life. Marriage does not change the natural bonds of men and men, women and women.

The temple is the most important place for this natural division to be followed. The temple is the place where we want to be as much a soul as possible. In the temple, we are more a soul of light, and less a human body of flesh. So, if the girls and boys, the men and women were a mixed group in the temple, it would create a strong sense of humanness. The identity of soulness would be clouded by the feelings of attraction or unattraction (in the case of children who don't like to get too close to the opposite sex) between boys and girls. The children will understand this quickly. Let's look at the temple as a ship that takes us to Gods' world. Boys and girls are together on this ship. The ship is sailing through space. It will take a while to reach the Gods' world.



During puja boys stand on the right and girls on the left. We pass our hands over the arati lamp and touch our eyes.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

The boys are lined up on the right side facing Ganesha in the shrine. The girls are on the left side. Often too, for many religious classes, the boys sit on the right and the girls on the left.

When we enter the temple, we walk around the inside of the temple from the left to the right, in a clockwise direction.

Notice how the hands of this young women are coming over and partly through the flame. Her face is about eight inches away from the flame. This same custom applies to any kind of flame that is passed before the God. It could also be a single flame, rather than an arati lamp.

She takes the energy of the flame which has been charged with blessings from the God right up to her eyes. On the third pass, her eyes are closed and the eyelids are touched.

side is our emotional force, our feeling and physical health force.

It is rose red in color. It is called the moon current. Girls are in this current

On their own, the young boys and girls would form separate groups. Boys would be on one side of the ship. Girls on the other side. Which side would they choose?

Well, boys would feel drawn to the right side. They could not even explain it. They would just feel comfortable there on the right side of the ship. It feels natural to them. Girls would be drawn to the left side. They would be more comfortable, more relaxed and secure. But they won't be able to explain it. So, in the temple, it is a very old, old custom that men are on the right, and women on the left.

But there is an explanation. In all people there are two subtle currents of force that run alongside the spine. These are like neon tubes of light. We can't see them with physical sight. We see them with our spiritual sight. The current on the right side is our mental force. It is sky blue in color. It is called the sun current. Boys are in this current more strongly. The current on the left

more strongly. Boys and girls use both these psychic currents, but, by nature, they dominate in one or the other. In general, girls are more caring, kind, understanding and live longer. Boys are more pushy, more analytical, more brave, reckless, less sensitive to other's feelings. Boys are strong.

Certainly, one of the most beautiful customs in Saivite Hindu temple practice is that of receiving the arati flame after the puja is over. Each devotee passes their outstretched hands over and through the very top of the orange flames and sweeps the energy up to the eyes, touching the upper eyelids. This is done three times, with a slowing down on the third time. This is truly one of the most amazing and powerful practices. Fire itself is a wonderful force, a magical energy. It is complex and mysterious. Even scientists who study fire as a profession cannot fully define what it is or how it works. Fire serves many purposes in the temple, for its energy flames can be seen in

our world, the devas' world and Gods' world. This is an important point. Fire is a connecting door to all worlds. When the arati lamp is passed during puja, God Siva and the Gods send pure color beams of light into the energy cloud of the flame. The arati lamp is then brought to the devotees attending the puja. Each devotee passes their hands three times over the flame, sweeping up part of this energy cloud and the bright color light to their eyes. This brings the power of the God's blessing directly into the body and mind of the devotee. It helps them to see our world and lives as a spiritual adventure. Children should feel open to this power as they receive the flame. Their attention should be in the chest, neck and head. They will feel the energy enter their body like a tingly cloud.

Further, the deva people of the devas' world can see the devotee when the arati flame is passed in front of them. They can see us as the fire flames light up our faces. We usually cannot see the devas, but it is more important that they see us. They are often the ones working directly with our karma, and the detailed progress of our life.

STORY READING

The ferry boat was as large as a building turned on its side and floating in the bay waters of Vancouver on the west coast of Canada. The ferry was huge, a great white hull with red markings—like a floating Hindu temple. It had a wide, wooden deck for viewing the beautiful Vancouver bay with its cold, charcoal blue waters. It could carry hundreds of people and lots of cars. The bow of the ferry opened up, and cars drove right in. “Just like going into a dragon's mouth,” said Ratna to her friend Sarasvati, as they both watched a stream of cars, some honking, slowly crawl into the ferry. Then the bow doors shut with a metal clanking. “That's it. Cars are all in. We should be leaving the dock soon. Canada sure is beautiful. Look at those mountains topped with snow and sunlight. Wonder if Siva is there?” said Sarasvati as she tossed her black hair over the shoulder of her green and yellow punjabi outfit. She had light green eyes, and that's why she liked to wear her deep green punjabi when going to the temple. Today was Sunday, and they were traveling across the bay to go to a Siva temple in the mountains outside Vancouver city. Vancouver was a lovely city, and the temple was like a diamond off to its side.

“Of course Siva's there,” said Ratna very

confidently as she walked beside Sarasvati down the wooden deck that shined like glass. She had on her favorite pink and lavender punjabi. “Siva is everywhere all the time. He's in those high mountains, but Siva's also through this bay and through all the streets of Vancouver. And believe it or not, Siva is even in my older brother,” said Ratna as her brother came up carrying two cups of hot chocolate for them. The hot chocolate steamed into the chill air and formed sweet-smelling clouds. Actually both of the girls' elder brothers were with them to look after them, and there were many other Hindus on the ferry. It was a popular day to go to the temple.

“Yes,” said Sarasvati. “I love my brother and I'm sure Siva is there somewhere, but they are boys. Boys. They can be so...so pushy. Like charging bulls.”

They found some nice chairs on the open deck and sat down. They were on the left side of the ferry boat, looking out to the pine forests and rocky coast where sea otters splashed in the waves. “You know we sat down on the left side of the boat,” said Ratna, looking at Sarasvati with her brown eyes. “Just like in the temple, when we go to the left side for puja.”

“Hmmm. Interesting,” said Sarasvati. “It must becoming a habit. I didn't think about it. The view is very good on this side. Here come our brothers. Now, are they going to sit on the right side?” The brothers, very tall and bundled up in coats over their brown kurta shirts, came up and said, “We're going to sit on the other side. We'll keep an eye on you from there.”

The girls giggled. “Well, they sure took off to the right side fast,” said Sarasvati. “We are moon girls. They are sun boys,” and they laughed loudly. “You know we should watch the moon one night from this ferry. *We are moon girls,*” she sang to a bha-jan melody. Then she jumped up and ran to the railing. “Look. I think I can see the temple from here. See the white tower peaking up over those trees. The sun is painting a kind of mango-colored light on it.”

Ratna hurried over. “Oh yes, I see it. Looks like a little palace. A Hindu temple in Vancouver, Canada. Who would have thought of that a hundred years ago?” she asked into the swirling sea breeze. “I'm going to be practicing taking the arati flames today. Did you know that fire is like dancing energy. Ice is frozen energy. Fire is energy dancing very fast. I used to just fan my hands through the arati flames real fast.

ACTIVITIES

1. Boys, who are naturally of a masculine nature stand on the right in a religious assembly. Girls, who are naturally of a feminine nature stand or sit on the left. Boyhood is represented by the sun. It is warm, brave and adventurous. Girlhood is represented by the moon. It is cool, caring and wise. Bring to class the drawing and scissor materials. All of the boys are going to make a big sun image for themselves. It should somehow depict warmth, bravery and adventure. All of the girls will make a big full moon image for themselves. It should depict coolness, caring and wisdom. When they are finished the boys and girls line up in their correct assembly, all holding their sun and moon images.

2. Paint or crayon sets should be provided and thick cardstock paper. Have the children paint a series of flames like they would see on an arati lamp. The flames should be 5 or 6 inches high. After this they cut the flames out of the paper, but being sure the bottoms of the flames are still connected, so they are still one unit. Then the youngsters take these cutout flames around to each other and practice drawing both hands over the painted flames and touching their eyes, right hand to right eyelid, left hand to left eyelid. They do not actually touch the eye itself.

Now I'm going concentrate on feeling the power of Siva in the heat and light around the flames. Take it right into me.”

“Me too,” said Sarasvati. “We're almost at the dock. Prepare to go ashore,” she said like a captain and laughed. The ferry had smoothly crossed the large bay. Now the two sisters and their two brothers got in their car and drove to the temple that was set on top of a hill, and overlooked the whole beautiful bay. They pulled into the parking lot, got out and walked through the temple's outer doors into a large hall where they left their shoes. The temple was made all of white marble with very fine lines of pink through it. The floor was solid Rocky Mountain granite, with pale blue carpet spread in large squares. The girls paused at the entrance to the main temple hall, then went up on the left side. They did their prostrations and sat down. They were happy. The boys walked to the right side and prostrated. It was natural.

LESSON FOCUS

In our physical world we each have a mother and father, two parents who are separate people—one a man, the other a woman. They are the mother and father of our physical body. Our soul body of light was created long ago in the Gods' world, just as our physical body was created a few years ago here on Earth. The creator of our soul body is God Siva. Siva is both our mother and father. Siva is not a man, nor is Siva a woman. Siva is the supreme Soul of light. Out of endless light, love and intelligence Siva created us and cares for us like a mother and guides us like a father.

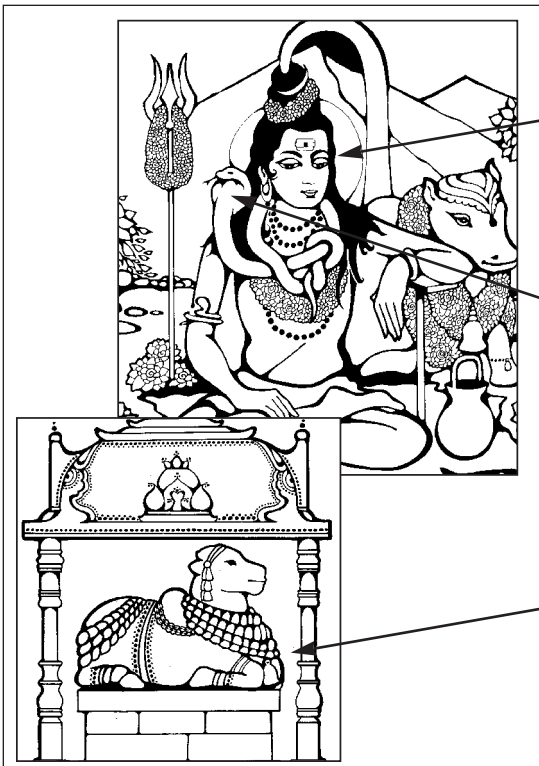
Nandi the sacred bull is a symbol of the perfect soul devotee of God Siva. Nandi is very attentive to Siva, always looking to Siva to serve and seek divine oneness. At temples, Nandi reminds each one of this perfect relationship.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

No one is more important in a child's life than mother and father. It is a precious truth that without mother and father each child would not be in this world. In a very true sense all the children in this class were biologically created by their moms and dads. Out of their union of life came a new life as a baby boy or girl. The baby looks like a combination of the parents. The husband and wife become mother and father. The child has two parents, two different people who live together in a marriage. They make a home. One is a woman. One is a man. Together, but still as separate people, they raise the child. That is the way of nature in our Earth world.

Deep inside our Earth body is the soul body of light. It is our most real body and divine intelligence. It is truly who each of us is. We are soul beings. As souls we reincarnate into Earth bodies of flesh and bone as the class studied in a previous Book 1 lesson. Our soul of light is immortal. That is, the soul never dies. Nothing can destroy or hurt the soul. Each of us as a soul was created by God Siva. Each soul is personally created by the Supreme Siva. Our soul of light, like a glowing ball of light shooting from the sun, came out of the all-powerful light and intelligence of Siva. Every soul, and there are uncountable souls, flashed out from the unthinkable brilliance of Siva. We are soul children of Siva.

The children have explored God Siva in other lessons of Book 1. We know that God Siva is not two different people. Siva is not



Lord Siva is the mother and father of my soul.

Nandi sits in front of every Siva temple.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Often Siva will be depicted wearing a female earring and a male earring, showing that Siva has the qualities of both mother and father in guiding each soul in its spiritual journey.

The cobra snake symbolizes the spiritual force that rises up our spine when we practice yoga. The same spiritual force that is in Siva is in us. Siva controls the force for us, as part of His love.

When Nandi sits in front of the temple or a shrine, he is always sitting down on his knees. The largest Nandi in the world is at a Siva temple on a hill above the city of Mysore in southern India. Many Hindus go there just to see the Nandi. The largest granite Nandi carved this century is at the Kadvaal Siva Nataraja Temple on the island of Kauai, Hawaii in the USA.

beautiful person they could think of that would be close to Siva's perfect beauty. Beautiful face. Beautiful eyes. Beautiful hair. Beautiful body. Beautiful skin. All

made of light that is more brilliant than all the stars. That is Siva the Perfect Soul. When Siva creates each soul, that soul is a likeness of Siva. The soul looks like the Siva soul, only it is very young, a child soul. It is very beautiful, with a face, eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hair, arms and legs—all made of pure tones of light. Our soul is not a travelling ball of light, or a vast misty cloud of energy. It is an actual body with a cosmic mind that is one with Siva's mind. Our human body—as well as our astral and mental body in the devas' world—follows the original form of the soul body. The human form is in the likeness of the soul body.

Siva is our soul's mother/father. Siva's love for us is much deeper and stronger than even our Earth parents. Siva's love is like a gentle, ever-flowing wind all around us. We can feel it all the time. It fills us. It goes into us and comes out of us. Have the children wave their hand through the air slowly. As their right hand passes through the air in front of them they are going

two different beings. Siva is not two different souls. Siva is not like our Earth parents. Siva is not a man. Siva is not a woman. Souls are not male or female. They are beings of super light. Siva is the Supreme Soul. In fact, we cannot really refer to Siva as Him or He. Nor can we call Siva as Her or She. Siva is the One, the auspicious One, from which everything flows, like a one ocean that feeds uncountable rivers. Siva created our soul. Siva creates souls all through time. Even as we study this wonderful lesson Siva is creating new souls. We can know Siva as the mother and father of our soul. The emphasis is on the and. Mother/father in One. Mother is unending love. Father is unending knowledge and power. As a One Soul, Siva is both divine mother, divine father.

Now Siva is the most beautiful soul being imaginable. It is a beauty that is neither fully male or female. If the children were to sit and close their eyes and imagine the most

through Siva's love. It is there. All the time. All around them and through them. Siva is the perfect mother/father. Here on Earth we as souls in physical bodies are growing and learning. We learn through our own karma. We learn from other good people. We learn from gurus. We learn from our own spirit voice. Siva is taking care of us here on Earth, seeing that we get all the right experiences, all the right guidance, all the right goals so we can know our oneness with Siva. The mother love of Siva sees that we are safe, comfortable, provided for, generous, kind, happy and peaceful. The father love of Siva sees that we are brave, strong, smart, adventurous, curious, virtuous, dedicated. Siva does this for us in a thousand ways every day, and all through the night.

The bull is a remarkable animal. It is sacred to many ancient cultures. Stand around a big bull and you can feel its strength and determination in the air. Nandi the bull is a great symbol in Saivite Hinduism. Nandi is the animal mount of Siva. In some scenes Siva rides Nandi the bull. This means Siva is riding or controlling the human body—which is strong and has many desires—toward spiritual unfolding. We could look at this as part of the *father love* of Siva. Nandi the bull sits in front of Siva at every Siva temple or shrine. Nandi faces Siva with a look of ultimate devotion and duty. Nandi symbolizes for us the perfect soul devotee of Siva. Nandi is the spiritual person: humble, ready and eager to strive, strong in faith and practice.

STORY READING

The jungle was so thick that even men with razor-sharp machetes couldn't get through it. The jungle was a thousand shades of green splashed over giant brown tree trunks, twisting vines and flowers as big as temple trays. The jungle went on endlessly across the land called Cambodia, only cut by muddy rivers and narrow animal paths. "Dinosaurs could still be living here," said Jnana in a voice meant to be scary. "One foot of the brontosaurus could crush our jeep like a... well like a Coke can, like when we crush them for recycling at home." Jnana liked to think of himself as a dinosaur expert. He was 8 years-old, with a round, chubby face and eyes so brown they were almost like chocolate candy bars. He was sweet-natured like candy. But he liked to tease his younger sister, Amrita, who had a face like a baby deer. She had seen the

movie *Jurassic Park*, so she knew a little about dinosaurs. She said, "Luckily for us, most of the dinosaurs were vegetarians. They were giantly gigantic, yet all they ate was an awful lot of plants. Veggie dinos," and giggled so hard her sun hat almost fell off her reddish black hair.

"Yeah, but look over there," said Jnana in a hushed, scary voice, and his hand pushed back some huge leaves called *elephant ears*. "Raptors. See. About six feet tall. Huge, sharp claws. Very fast. Very smart. They like meat. Look, they've spotted us," and he turned to grab his sister's shoulders. "Let's run," he said excitedly.

His sister stood still, totally unbothered. "Hah. There haven't been any raptors for millions of years," she said, and smiled.

"Yes," said Jnana. "But they can live in our mind, and in movies. Maybe all the dinosaurs are alive on another world? Maybe Lord Siva just took them to another planet. Well, let's get back to mom and dad."

They walked back to where the black jeep had brought them in. They were deep inside Cambodia, deep inside the great green jungle. And right in front of Jnana and Amrita was a stone city with walls, and gates and towers and palaces and stairs and water ponds that seemed to float. The whole city rose out of the jungle like a giant space ship. But it was real. And it was old and in ruins. No one had lived here for a thousand years. It was called Angkor Wat. It is the largest spiritual temple in the world. A temple city. A temple city for Siva built by a Hindu people a thousand years ago. These people were called Khmers.

Jnana and Amrita stood staring at the stone city, surrounded by a water moat, their mouths open and eyes wide. Together, their heads rose up and they looked at a giant, peaceful face on a tower. It was made of stones as big as cars pieced together. "That is Siva, the mother and father of our souls," whispered Jnana. "When I see Siva, I think everything is perfect. Though I wish the dinosaurs were still around." The sun was sinking over the jungle fast, casting dark orange and purple light over everything. The children couldn't see the sun. It was below the city now. There was a small hole in the stone face of Siva on the tower. Suddenly, a fiery beam of orange-yellow sun light shot through the hole in the stone Siva. The light beam shot out, widened a bit, and lit up the two children standing in front of the stone Siva. They were in a beam of sparkling light coming right out of Siva. They stood,

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring to class a stiff white plastic sheet that you can roll and tape into a tube about 2 feet tall and a soap bubble maker. Up through the tube you will shine a strong light. Also bring to the class a piece of pink thick paper and sky blue paper. Tape the pink paper on the left of the white tube and the blue paper on the right. This represents the Being of Siva: the white tube is His pure spiritual force; the pink paper is the mother side of God's being; the blue side is the father side of God's being. This matches Lesson 46 where we learned how girls are on the left and boys on the right. Yet God is still just one Being. While all the children are watching, have one of the students sit behind the white tube and blow soap bubbles so they float up over the glowing white tube, lit up by the light. The soap bubbles are souls being created by God Siva, out of Himself. They come out of His spiritual energies, and He is both mother and father of the soul.
2. Nandi never takes his eyes off Siva. Bring a beautiful crystal, brass or bronze object d'art to the class. Also bring a soap bubble kit. Place the artifact up high at the front of the class so everybody can see it. Instruct everyone to sit in front of the object and to see how long they can keep their eyes on the object without being distracted. Then have two of the children stand behind the object and start to blow beautiful soap bubbles. Despite this entertainment, the children attempt to remain steadfast in gazing at the object.

frozen. "Wow. Look at this," said Jnana excitedly. "Amazing. It feels like we are right with Siva in the Gods' world. You know... I think Siva has brought us here just for this. Siva wants to personally show us His love." The light, far more intense than a rainbow, continued to light their faces. "See how the light splits into two beams. That is the mother and father powers of Siva," Jnana whispered. "I'll never forget this."

Amrita was like a rock, staring at the stone Siva, the deep orange/yellow light in her eyes. "Aum Namah Sivaya," she chanted. "Like a beam of light, my soul body was created by Siva. I am a soul child of Siva."

LESSON FOCUS

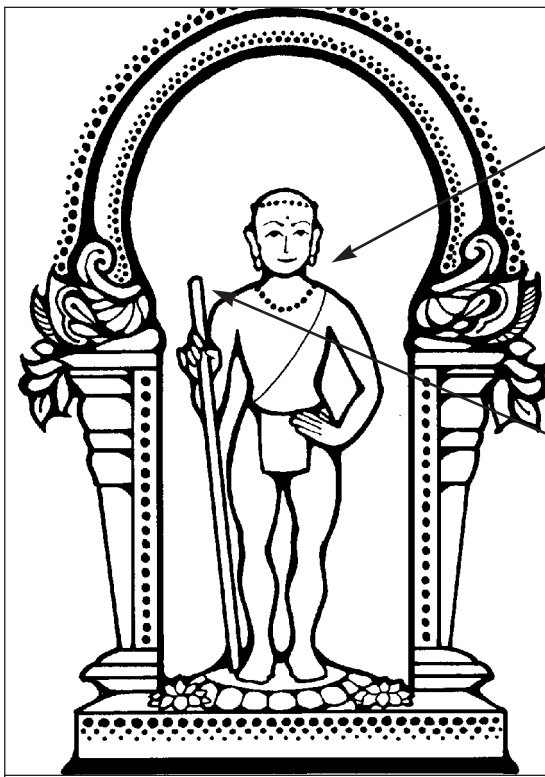
Lord Murugan is the God who guides us in all of our spiritual practices. Murugan is as a monk, a sadhu or swami. He has no home, no money, no clothes, no wife, no children, no things, no hair. Murugan monk guides us out of earthly things and human joys and into the vast spiritual land of blissful yoga. Murugan's highest mission is to be our guide and friend in yoga. Murugan is the God of yoga.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

People, including young children, enjoy looking different for different occasions. Many adults and school children dress differently every day. Women often change their hair style. When they do, it is like they are another person. A girl with long hair can get a short haircut, and the girl suddenly looks like a boy. A young man grows a bushy beard. His parents may not know him. We put on special clothes and hats for all kinds of different outings: going out to a fancy restaurant, going to the temple, going out to play soccer, going to a cooking class, going to see our relatives. In each of these examples, we appear different to others, yet we are the same person. Now, Lord Murugan is a super soul, a God. As a soul being of vast power, age and beauty, Murugan does not change how He looks. But in the temple images that represent Murugan, there are several different ways He looks. These are called *darshanas*, or views. This helps us as worshippers to approach Murugan for help in different matters. Lord Murugan can grant help in many ways and for many reasons. This is like the king of a country. He is king of the people. He is the leader of the ministers. He is the chief judge. He is the commander of the army. He oversees the treasury. The king has many different duties. So too does Lord Murugan have many different duties.

Murugan is first and foremost a monk. What is a monk? A monk is a spiritual man who is totally dedicated to God Siva, to knowing God Siva. A monk lives very simply, so all of his intelligence and action goes to yoga, to oneness with Siva.

Murugan is dedicated to spiritual yoga life. He wears a loin cloth and his head is shaven. There is no wife, no children. He has no home or land or car. The monk has no possessions, no job. He has no money or jewelry. In short, Murugan has given up all the normal goals of human life. Why? Because when you do yoga and seek oneness



Lord Murugan is a monk.
He is the God of yoga.

with Siva, all of that is left behind. It is not there with you when you meditate deep inside of yourself. If it were there, even in your mind, it would distract you. The bridge of yoga would not be crossed. The image of Murugan represents this total drive to Godness. This is in fact how all advanced spiritual people spend their final lives on Earth—as monks. This is an important point for the children. In reincarnation, the final lives on Earth will be as monks. The goal of Earth life is realization of God Siva through yoga. The sure way to achieve Sivanness is through a simple life of yoga practice and spiritual service—the monk's life. A monk is a soul living on Earth, but as if without a physical body with all its needs and desires. Satgurus, whom we studied a few lessons back, are all monks. That is why Saivite Hindus revere, follow and financially support the Siva monks in their spiritual quest. The young children should respect and love all Siva monks.

When we see the image of Murugan-as-a-monk in a temple or shrine, it also teach-

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

Here, Murugan is seen as a wandering monk with a shaven head and a loin cloth around his waist. He wears rudrakshna beads as emblems of Siva consciousness. He also has earrings which for a yogi show that He is using the highest spiritual nerve currents.

Murugan is carrying a *danda*, the yoga staff. It is a sign of the power of the spine, the tremendous spiritual force that flows up the subtle channel of the spine. The children should keep their spine as straight as a staff when practicing meditation. This is the first step in unleashing the spiritual energy at the base of the spine. Murugan helps each child with this.

us that the Gods are pure and powerful Soul Beings. The Gods are very advanced souls living in an unthinkably vast world of the most powerful mind and light forces. The Gods do not have homes as we know them. They do not have wives or children or material things as we know them. The Gods do not live human lives. They live as great souls of light and intelligence, helping uncountable people in uncountable worlds throughout the universe. The Gods do have great spiritual tools, made of spiritual forces, that help them in their service, such as Murugan's Vel.

Murugan is the God whose mission it is to help us with our spiritual growth. This is His duty, given to Him directly from God Siva. Whenever we think of spirit thoughts or do activities that bring out our soul nature, Murugan is there, around us invisibly. Fortunately Murugan can help millions and millions of us all at the same time. Murugan's mind hovers over our mind when we do spiritual practices like study of Saivite Hinduism, puja, temple worship, Aum chanting, praying, penance, religious good karma, spiritual service, deep breathing, yoga poses and yoga meditation.

The greatest and most valuable way Murugan develops us is in our personal yoga meditation. Let's look at it this way. Muru-

gan is the God of yoga. Yoga is the final, highest practice in life. Lord Murugan is the perfect power of yoga. He holds the power of yoga in His soul being. By working directly with us as we attempt yoga, Murugan helps quiet our mind, make us peaceful, and He carefully draws each child into His blissful yoga power. This is a beautiful teaching.

STORY READING

The night sky was deep black with long necklaces of stars running across it. There was no wind. There never was any wind. There was no sky, no blue sky. Even when the sun was seen, like a big ball of yellow gas, there was no colored sky. Just night time black with the glittering stars and the yellow sun. There was no air. No trees grew. No flowers bloomed. No water ran. There was no sound. This was the moon. The moon that circles around Earth.

Chandra was a boy whose name means moon. He stood on top of a very high moon boulder that rose at the edge of a huge crater. He was ready to jump off. It was night time on the moon, a night that lasts for 14 of our Earth days. Yet Chandra could see fairly easily. At his feet was a strong spotlight, casting a light beam far across the crater. Chandra reached up with his thick space suit gloves and moved his helmet a bit so his neck was more comfortable. He had to wear a space suit, and carry his air with him in light metal tanks on his back. Everybody who lived on the moon had to wear a suit when they went outside. Chandra had a special suit for young boys. To mark that he was a Saivite Hindu, Chandra sewed on the right shoulder of his suit a red circle with three white stripes across it—the mark of Siva. He was 9-years old now, and had lived on the moon for five years with his family. Traveling from Earth, a large colony of families from many different countries came to the moon. One of the first things Chandra’s family did was to create a shrine room as part of their new moon home. Among the deity images was Murugan. It was all in gold, gold that had come from the planet Mars. Chandra took very good care of this image, for he knew Murugan was the master Soul of Yoga. Chandra did yoga every day.

Chandra leaped off the boulder, kicking up a small explosion of moon dust as his heavy metal boots left the rock. It was a long ways down. He began dropping gently. On Earth he would fall like a rock. Here on

the moon, he dropped slowly, floating like a puff ball of seeds on a summer breeze. Chandra felt very light, even with the heavy suit. Everything weighed less on the moon. The spot light lit up his sky blue space suit against the dark grays and browns of the moon surface. As he drifted down, it reminded him of yoga experience. As he went into yoga meditation, he felt very light. No weight. And it felt like he was floating in some kind of magic space that Murugan provided for him. It was like swimming in very light water made out of happiness and bliss. Then, he landed in pillows of thick moon dust. He smiled and laughed.

Far off to his right was a yellow glow, with towers of red, white and blue flashing lights. It was the moon village. It was a large group of metal buildings popping out of the moon like silver mushrooms and copper bubbles. He headed there, to home.

Hissing softly, the doors of his home opened. He stepped in. The doors shut quickly behind. Off came his suit, which he carefully folded and put away, checking for any damage to repair. Another pair of metal doors swished open. Chandra stepped through, wearing a formal dark green cotton kurta shirt and light brown pants. He had very long black hair and tiny ruby earrings. “Main lights on,” he said outloud, and the room filled with soft white light. It was the living room, full of comfortable furniture, books, valuable Hindu art and living plants. There was a view of the Himalayan mountains on one wall. Chandra crossed the room to a single door that looked like pearl. In the pearl was a beautiful green crystal Sanskrit *Aum*. It glowed with its own light. This was the shrine room door. He said “Namah Shivaya,” and the door opened with a series of bell chimes in a Hindu music scale. Chandra stepped through. “Please give me a cave lighting,” he said, and the shrine room was made almost dark. He liked this for meditation. The shrine room looked like carved granite stone, but it was not real stone. In one niche was the gold Murugan. A pale blue light shone on it from behind. Chandra worshiped Murugan, then sat in a full lotus position. He began to feel Murugan draw him into the golden center, a gold-colored force in his spine.

Notes:

A C T I V I T I E S

1. Bring in enough medium size yellow balloons for the whole class. Distribute the balloons to the children so they can blow them up. The balloons they are inflating represent Lord Murugan, who has a golden spiritual force. Lord Murugan is going to help them do “balloon yoga.” With their inflated balloons, each of the children sit comfortably on mats on the floor in a cross-legged or half-lotus position. They hold their balloon in their lap and think of Lord Murugan, God of yoga. Then they rub the balloon on their hair to build up static electricity, tilt back their head and place the balloon on the top ridge of their nose and their forehead, and try to balance the balloon there for as long as possible. Their yoga is to balance the balloon. If the balloon drifts off, they grab it, build up some static electricity, place it back in position and try again. They mentally ask Lord Murugan for help.

LESSON FOCUS

The focus of this lesson is to affirm to the children that singing spiritual songs is an important part of life because it helps the soul shine and grow.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Why do we sing to God, Gods and guru? First, singing is fun. It's happy. It's joyful. At satsang and at the temple, we sing to the Gods because we love them. We want them to know how much we love them.

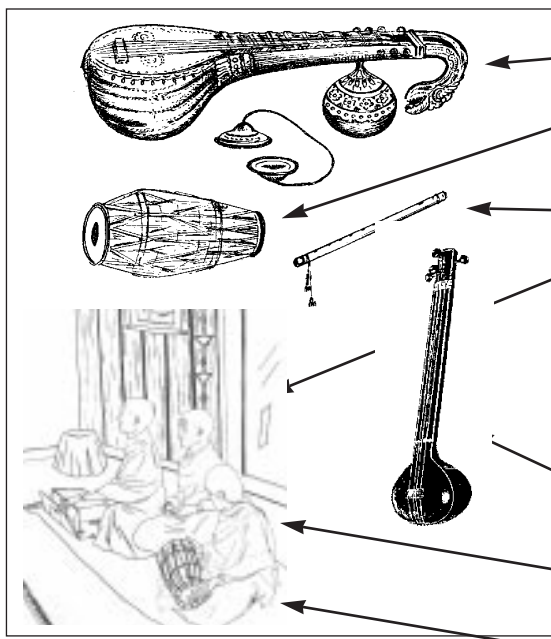
When the Gods hear a song sung to them, they send some

devas immediately to that person or group.

These devas are music-type devas and spiritual too. They sit around those who are singing. They are in the devas' world so usually you can't see them. But then they start singing whatever you are singing. They know all the songs we know and a lot more. What happens when they sing? When they sing along, our inner body, our astral body with its inner ears and an inner nerve system hears them and vibrates. And it feels like a new charge in the vibration. This usually means there are devas present who are attracted by the devotion of those present and they are adding their spiritual energy to the group and it really increases the *shakti*. It turns the vibration of the group that is singing to a combination of physical world and deva's world (sometimes even Gods' world) symphony. As they sing along, the devas fill all the sounds and notes and words and sounds from the instruments with Second world energy, like divine helium (the gas that they use to make balloons go up in the air). (This is a nice image to expand on.)

The most important thing that happens when you sing alone or in a satsang (a group of devotees singing together), is that the sounds stimulate one's devas' world or astral body. The most powerful devotional singing actually vibrates the cells of the soul body.

Devotional sound, devotional singing, has power. It acts like a devaship, a Star Trek transporter chamber and can fly you into the vibration of the Second World. (Both these images can be expanded for the children—devaship and Star Trek transporter. They are good because they show something really happens, we “go” somewhere when we sing, rather than nothing happening except making sounds.



VISUAL INTERPRETATION

1. Vina. A multistring instrument played with the fingers.
2. Drum. The two-headed mrdangam is our traditional drum.
3. Flute. The traditional bamboo flute has a beautiful sound.
4. Harmonium. This is not one of the classical Hindu instruments. It is a miniature piano and is used in bhajan groups a lot nowadays because it is easy to play and helps the singers hear all the notes of the song correctly.
5. Tambura. A four-stringed instrument gently strummed to keep the basic pitch.
7. Cymbals. Used to keep time and rhythm. All children should learn how to play the cymbals.
8. Taval. This is a temple drum. You will almost always see it played at temple festivals and Deity processions. Usually it is played with other musicians playing the nageswaram, a difficult oboe-like wind instrument very common for temple occasions.

We love to sing songs to God, Gods and Guru.

Our traditional instruments are the vina, tambura, cymbals, drum and flute.

One great benefit of devotional singing, especially when it is done for many years, is that by energizing and strengthening the astral body, we are better equipped to handle challenging karmas when they come up.

There are many ways to sing. The way to sing that really creates a beautiful feeling and helps the soul body grow is when you are concentrating on the singing—the sound, the feeling of the sound, the feeling of the rhythm, the words, their meaning with visual images of the Deity. When you sing like this, the magic of singing happens. But when you just say/sing the words and have your mind on something else and/or are letting others do the singing while you just listen, then not much happens for you and you don't contribute much to the spiritual vibration of the group. It is like you are rowing but when you pull the oars you don't put the oars through the water. You just skim the oars over the top of the water. The boat doesn't move. It is sort of lazy. So, be sure to impress on the children that only when their minds are on the singing, when they sing with a full heart—as though the

Deity were right in front of them listening and looking and smiling—does the real magic of devotional singing work.

Our traditional instruments: Our most traditional instruments are the vina, tambura, flute, cymbals and drum. Why? There are dozens of other instruments in India, even ones that considered very classical. Why are these five so special? They are special because they represent in both purity and simplicity the inner sounds that we hear when we meditate very deeply or can hear “played” in nature—like Aum-like drone sound of ocean waves breaking far away or the flute-like whistling of the wind through the trees. The strings of the vina and the tamboura, you can tell the children, represent the nerve currents, long subtle wires of subtle energy of our inner bodies. Playing the vina is like playing the nerve currents of our inner soul body. The tamboura is like the Aum, a never-ending hum, harmonizing all sounds of the universe. The drum represents the primal drum beat of constant creation, the extraordinary power,

beat, dance, force that Siva infuses into the universe every second. The flute is super-consciousness, soft, delicate, ethereal, the high soaring, bird-like feeling of realization, enlightenment, also sometimes equated with the hollow current of the spine where the energies of light flow like wind currents up and out the cranium sahaswara chakra. The cymbals are syncopation, beat, rhythm, and represent living in rhythm with the rest of life, learning to live in rhythm with seasons, with people, with karma, not fighting, but flowing.

ANALOGIES &

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. One nice image you can teach children is that when they sing they are blowing up a balloon, a spiritual balloon. If a group of ten or fifteen are singing in the *mandapam* of a temple, when they start, the balloon is very faint and only as big as they are. It just envelops them. But as they keep singing—and especially when they are very happy and full of spiritual feelings—then the balloon gets much bigger and can even become as big as the temple.

STORY READING

Manisha lived in Rajashtan with her three sisters and four brothers and parents. Her family was poor, but they were never starving. Her father was a farmer and her mother was a very good weaver. She weaved the most beautiful clothes in the world, Manisha felt. They had so many different shades of red and orange. Manish loved to watch her mother weaving. She would sit right beside her and sometimes even fell over in her mother's lap and would rest there. Even the motion of her mother's arms going back and forth as the weaving shuttle block went back and forth wouldn't wake her up. But mostly what Manisha loved about sitting with her mother, was listening to her mother sing. Her mother had the most beautiful voice in the whole world. When she went with her mother to bathe in the afternoon down at the river, her mother would sing. Her mother would wash Manisha and also once a week would massage oil on Manisha's body and in her hair. All the mothers would do this to their daughters and young sons. It was to keep them healthy and keep the hair healthy. Manisha used to notice that when her mother sang, even the birds

would stop chirping and listen. She sang many songs, but mostly ones about Ganesha and some ballads that her great grandmother made up about how you are only as rich as your heart is rich. You are poor when your heart is empty. She knew hundreds of songs.

Manisha learned them all like a tape recorder that was put on "record" and all the songs went into Manisha's memory without any effort. Manisha would sing with her mother when they walked anywhere and sometimes at home. But a lot of the time, she just liked listening to her mother. One day when she was listening to her mother sing, she fell asleep and had a dream. She saw her mother's soul body drift out of her physical body and into the clouds and Ganesha was there and she went and gave Ganesha a big hug. Ganesha was singing the Ganesha song that his mother loved the most!

One day the head of the local orphanage asked Manisha to come with her. They went to a house and went inside. There was a boy lying on the floor. He was very sick. He was the son of the head of the orphanage. In a dream, the head of the orphanage had heard a voice say, "Let the little one sing, wings of wellness she will bring as you strum your strings." She asked Manisha to sing some Ganesha songs while she played her veena. They played very softly for many hours and prayed to Ganesha to help the boy. A few days later he got better and told them that when they played and sang that day that he saw little light green and yellow streams of sparkling energy going all through his body. He was so sick he thought he was imagining it. But now he knows that singing is one of the greatest forms of magic.

Notes:

A C T I V I T I E S

1. These songs can be introduced and learned any time during the year. For the class on these lessons, we want to teach the children two things: How to feel while singing and how to lead. Have everyone sing together each song and concentrate on the meaning of the words. Tell them to really feel they are taking refuge in Lord Ganesha's protection. Do this with each bhajana until most seem to have the feeling. Then have them take turns in leading. One child leads, and all the others respond enthusiastically. After a short while another leads. Those who are shy should be encouraged and told what matters is not so how well they sing, but how they feel when they sing. Everyone should applaud after each one leads and say how well he or she did. There are additional and more difficult Ganesha songs after this guide which can be taught.

LESSON FOCUS

Yogaswami was a very great Saivite satguru of the island of Sri Lanka, just below the southern tip of India. He lived to be 92-years old—dying in 1964—and spent nearly sixty of those years teaching and guiding many Saivite Hindus of Sri Lanka. He took a keen interest in Hindu youth, including inspiring a school course in Saivite Hinduism—which this course amplifies. His simple, one-room ashram was in a small town near Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka. He is called a sage because of his piercing realization of Siva consciousness and his remarkable yoga powers. Yogaswami is in a line of satgurus called the *Kailasa parampara*. Yogaswami is the satguru of Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, the present satguru of the Kailasa parampara.

KEY PRESENTATIONS

Yogaswami means a master (one of the meanings of *swami*) of yoga. When we look at the life of Yogaswami, we are viewing a truly great Siva yogi, a man as familiar with the spiritual land of yoga as the children in class would be familiar with their own home. Now, Yogaswami was once a child. He wasn't always *Yogaswami*. He was born in a village in northern Sri Lanka in the 1870's. This was a time before we had cars or airplanes or refrigerators, computers, radios, TV's, movies. He grew up year by year, going to school like the children in class here. He learned to read and write, do arithmetic, made friends, played games, sang bhajan and went to Siva and Murugan temples to worship. He learned about the Saivite saints of south India. He was a vegetarian and kind to animals. He was an advanced soul, reincarnated on Earth, going through all the happinesses, curiosities and trials of a kid's life. By his late teens a fountain of Siva spirituality was starting to well up within him. A relative started calling him Yoganathan, and the name stuck. Many years later, when he followed very strict, demanding yoga practices, people started calling him Yogaswami out of great respect.

As a young man he decided not to marry. He had no interest in marriage or family life. It simply had no attraction for him. For the class children, this is similar to something they definitely have no interest in or desire for. For example, let's say some of the children in the class have no interest in going to see a circus. A circus is a very exciting event for children, full of wonderful ani-



Satguru Yogaswami was the sage of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

VISUAL INTERPRETATION

This is the right-facing profile of Yogaswami. This illustration is drawn from one of the very rare photos taken of Yogaswami. This particular picture was taken when he was in a state of meditation. This is what he called *summa iru*, "being still."

His hair was very long and white. He tied his hair in a knot at the back of his head, an old Saivite custom for holy men. He always wore white robes. He liked children and children liked him. Many of his sayings and writing are specially meant for children and youth.

mals, people on tightropes and trapezes, clowns, fun food, games, noisy bands, scary rides, flashing lights. Most children will really want to go to the circus. They desire the fun, excitement and newness. But a few will have no interest in the circus at all. They don't want to experience the circus. No desire for it.

So, Yogaswami had no desire for marriage or raising a family. He was beginning to steer his life in the direction of a monk, as in the Murugan lesson. He graduated from college, found a job, and began his serious spiritual experimentation in meditation. He dressed simply, ate simply, slept on a simple bed, kept to himself, did his job with great care and concentration. Years went by of this simple, monk-like life. He was not a satguru yet, but the foundation was being laid. Then, on one unforgettable day he met his satguru at the sprawling Murugan festival at the famous Nallur Kandaswamy temple near Jaffna. Without warning, without an appointment, without

forethought, Yogaswami suddenly met Chellapaswami, his satguru. Chellapaswami was a tall man, thin, dressed in a ragged white verthi and shawl and so full of Siva's light that it was like standing right next to an extremely bright search light. His

knowing of Siva was so full, so complete, that he was always looking at the world as through Siva's Eyes. And with those eyes, Chellapaswami looked straight into Yogaswami's eyes from a few feet away, and asked in a commanding voice, "Who are you?" Now, the children may think this is a simple question, and that Chellapaswami wanted to know who Yogaswami was. "Who are you?" A child may answer, "Well, I am Sivajnana Senapati and I go to school and I live on Royal Street." But is this what Chellapaswami was asking Yogaswami? Was he asking for Yogaswami's name, home and job? No, he wasn't. He was asking Yogaswami to quickly search inside himself for his true identity, his real "you"ness. That identity is as God Siva. Chellapaswami asked "Who are you?" Yogaswami at the time remained silent and did not give an answer. Years later, Yogaswami said Chellapaswami had lifted him out of a period of darkness and into a meditative experience with that question. And here is a remarkable example

of responsiveness and obedience to a satguru. A few minutes later Chellapaswami came up to Yogaswami who was standing on the hot sand grounds of the Nallur Kandaswamy temple and said, "Wait here until I return." Chellapaswami walked away. He didn't return for 3 days. Yogaswami was still there, in the sand, waiting. Yogaswami was now Chellapaswami's shishya. They spent several years together in deep Siva yoga training, until Chellapaswami's death. Chellapaswami made Yogaswami the next satguru in the line of gurus.

Yogaswami then spent five years sitting in yoga meditation under a large tree on a street in a village very near Jaffna. He was there day and night, blazing sun and pouring monsoon rains. He wore white robes and let his beard and hair grow. He ate once every few days. This was in the early 1900's. Then he moved into a one-room hut at the same spot, and this became his ashram. And it became the center of spirituality in Sri Lanka as Buddhists from southern Sri Lanka and the Hindus from the north came to meet with the great sage. Many Saivite Hindu families became his disciples.

Over the years individuals and families would come to see him every day. He began taking a serious interest in the spiritual progress of the Jaffna youth. He often invited youth to ride with him in cars of devotees. He taught and advised them personally, wrote letters to them when they travelled and watched over their karma with his yogi powers. He made up songs of teachings that could be easily memorized. These became known as *Natchintanai*, meaning "good thoughts." Yogaswami worked with a group of adult men who did good karma service for Saivite Hindus. Yogaswami inspired these men to introduce a course on Hinduism into the Sri Lankan schools. The men were successful, and that course was the starting point for this course we are now studying. In 1949, a young American man came to Sri Lanka in search of his satguru. Yogaswami initiated this man as the next satguru in the line, and gave him the name *Subramuniya*. He is now Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who is overseeing the development of this children's course.

STORY READING

There was a slow drizzle of rain coming in over London. Clouds, gray and sad and wet, came in over London Bridge and the Buckingham Palace where the Queen of England and her family lived. Everybody that was

outside on the streets had umbrellas up. London looked like a city of umbrella people. From out of the window of his family's apartment 9-year old Jyothideva was watching the drizzly rain come down. He had opened the window, and cool, foggy air was coming in. It rustled his short black hair and the pale white curtains. On the wood wall beside him was a picture of a man with snow white hair and beard sitting in meditation. He was wearing a white *verthi* and *shawl*. The picture was black and white and kind of fuzzy. The man's eyes were closed. It didn't look like he was sleeping or dreaming. To Jyothideva, it looked like he was traveling somewhere. The man was sitting totally still, frozen like ice. But at the same time he was traveling, probably across Siva's world. The picture was of Yogaswami. Jyothideva missed Yogaswami. Before his family moved to London two years ago, they lived in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Yogaswami's very small ashram was just ten minutes walk from where Jyothideva lived. He used to visit Yogaswami often, sometimes twice a week. Yogaswami sat on a simple wood bed. They talked in Tamil and English. They laughed. Yogaswami was very funny. Often devotees would bring a tray of offerings to Yogaswami. If there were sweet pastries or candy, he would immediately pass it out to the children, softly chuckling. Now, Yogaswami was very far away in Lanka. On occasion Yogaswami wrote him a letter. In the last letter that came, Yogaswami wrote, "You must meditate in the morning and evening at night before you go to bed." Jyothideva kept all these letters in a silver plated box in his room. This morning he had meditated, and he hoped Yogaswami was watching. He knew Yogaswami had the power to see people from very far away. So as he meditated, in his mind he sometimes smiled at Yogaswami.

Below on the street cars and trucks raced by. There was honking and a man with a red face was selling newspapers. He was shouting about the news: Russia had sent a dog on a rocket ship up circling around Earth. "Hey Savitri," he called to his younger sister. She was over sitting on the light green and brown carpet from North India. Crayons were spread all around her and she was busy coloring in a picture of Siva. "There's a dog up in space, going round us in a rocket ship," Jyothideva said excitedly.

"In space? What's that?" Savitri asked, as she selected a bright blue crayon.

1. This is a variation on musical chairs. Bring to the class a tape cassette player or CDrom player to provide music. Also be sure there are enough mats for everybody to sit on the floor. Yogaswami, a great satguru of Sri Lanka, was famous for telling people "Summa iru," which means in Tamil, "Be still." Set up the mats so they are in a wide circle. The children are standing inside of the circle of mats, forming a circles themselves. Start playing the music, something upbeat. The children skip and dance clockwise around the circle next to the mats. Suddenly the music is stopped and the teacher cries out, "Summa iru." And everybody must find a mat to sit on in a cross-legged position and become perfectly still. Not one movement is allowed. After a short while, the music is started again and the children skip and jump going round the circle till the next Summa iru is called out.

"Very, very high in the sky," said Jyothideva. "So high that there is no more blue, just the night time of the moon and stars." He then whistled loudly. There was a low-pitched *woof*. Then click, click, click, click the sound of a dog walking across the tile floor of the kitchen. In came a beautiful golden retriever dog, just about one year old, wagging a big shaggy tail. He was a big dog. And he headed right for Jyothideva's face, to give him a big lick. "Hey, Grihanya. Do you want to go up in a rocket ship?" he said to the dog as he ruffed up his thick fur. Grihanya means gold in Sanskrit. Grihanya had reddish golden fur and very smart eyes. "Who would feed him?" asked Savitri. "He eats a lot, you know."

Jyothideva said, "I wonder what Yogaswami would think of a dog in space. He always had something funny to say. Once he spelled out G,o,d, and d,o,g, and said both are the same," as he petted Grihanya who was batting crayons all over the room with his wagging tail. "The world is a playground of God—that's what he said. I wonder what Yogaswami is doing right now. Let's see. If it's noon in London, it must be early morning in Sri Lanka. He's probably sitting in meditation now. I used to really love sitting with him when he did yoga. It was so much easier for me. It felt like electricity was coming from Yogaswami. So pretty soon, some children might stop in to see him on their way to school. He'll chat with them, maybe sing a new *Natchintanai*."