

Shree Peetha Nilaya

SERVE A DEITY NEWSLETTER

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BhaktiMarga
JUST LOVE

JAI GURUDEV

This is the third of the new series of Serve a Deity newsletters aiming to connect you deeper with Sriman Narayana and Tulsi-devi.

Enjoy!

**Shree
Peetha Nilaya**



TULSI-DEVI PUJARI TEAM INTRODUCTION



Jai Gurudev Everyone,

Often Guruji asks, 'What is the most important thing in life?' and many times He doesn't receive the answer from us that He expects. One time, though, He answered that question Himself:

'The most important things in life are the Feet of the Lord...to be focused on the Feet of the Lord.'

Traditionally, Indian temples symbolically represent the body of the Lord. In fact, if the plan of a temple was superimposed on a scale body, generally they would match. For example, the head would correspond to the main altar, the heart to the *mandapa* (hall) where the devotees pray inside the temple, the navel to the *dhvaja-stambha* (flag pole) and the feet to the *gopuram* (entrance).

So, what about the Bhutabhrteshwarnath Mandir? Can we also associate it with the body of the Lord? Yes, we can! We associate it with a specific incarnation of the Lord: the Vamana-avata, since, unlike a normal temple, the navel (*dhvaja-stambha*) is not very far from the feet (*gopuram*),

what body could it be but that of a dwarf?

And it is exactly here, between the *dhvaja-stambha* and the *gopuram*, that we want to bring your focus with this journey: on the feet of the Bhutabhrteshwarnath Mandir, because again, as Guruji said, 'the most important things in life are the Feet of the Lord.'

What you will always find on the Feet of the Lord is a leaf of Tulsi. And what is at the feet of the Bhutabhrteshwarnath Mandir? You guessed it: the altar of Tulsi-devi!

This altar of gleaming gold is the smallest one in our temple, but inside, as Krishna says in the *tulabhara* story, sits the greatest treasure of the universe: Tulsi.

So, together, let's start this journey to the feet of the Lord realising the value of what we will find there: 'the greatest treasure of creation'.

SRIMAN NARAYANA PUJARI TEAM INTRODUCTION



Jai Gurudev Everyone,

For this Serve a Deity spotlight, we are excited to share with you stories, quotes, and experiences about Sri Ranganatha and Tulsi-devi, both of whom represent Lord Narayana and devotion. Ranganatha, the incarnation of Sriman Narayana, is the manifested deity of the Lord Himself, the ultimate Supreme Cosmic Lord, and that which includes everything. As for Tulsi-devi, She embodies that love and devotion which brings one to the Feet of the Lord.

Lord Ranganatha (meaning, the 'leader of the place of assembly') is peacefully resting on Adishesha, with His eternal consort, Maha-Lakshmi, gently massaging His feet. From this position, He patiently watches over His creation and His devotees, awaiting the opportunity to serve them. His given name is Sripitshwar, the eternal consort of Maha-Lakshmi. Thus, Lord Ranganatha is the leader of our hearts,

where He resides with Maha-Lakshmi.

Guruji once said, 'Removing all the drama, removing all the *samskaras*, removing all the karmic things around, your atma shines only one thing: the light. It shines the light of Sriman Narayana.' Whether we serve through donation or serve physically here in Shree Peetha Nilaya, it is Ranganatha, the direct representation of this light, that Guruji has given us an opportunity to serve.

Directly serving the deities living at Sri Bhutabhrteshwarnath Mandir at Shree Peetha Nilaya is a privilege and an honour. It is an experience that fills our hearts with a kind of joy that cannot be put into words. We hope that you find, even just a little of that experience, here in this newsletter.

DEITY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: TULSI-DEVI

AS MYSTERIOUS AS SHE IS FAMOUS

Tulsi-devi (also seen written as Tulasi) is one of the most famous and worshipped deities in India. It is common knowledge that She bestows the ultimate goal of life: to obtain the Feet of the Lord.

As the name suggests, Tulsi, the incomparable one, is the plant of devotion par excellence. She is vital in the worship of Lord Vishnu. For example, devotees must offer food to the Lord accompanied by a Tulsi leaf because He could not accept it without devotion, and Tulsi is the devotion itself. So, She is worshipped by Vaiṣṇava devotees all over the world and is revered by all the saints and people of India. She is considered the Queen plant in Ayurveda and is recognized in the *Vedas* as the object of knowledge and knowledge itself.

What did Guruji add to our *tilak* that we do every day? A leaf: the leaf of devotion. It is a

constant reminder of the ultimate example of *bhakti*: the best and easiest path to reach the Feet of the Lord. And one way to make this same unique feeling for the Lord grow within us is to know better those who have already experienced it. So why not get to know Her better?

Paradoxically, even though She is very popular, She is one of the most mysterious deities because there are not many scriptures that speak of Her, not in a plant form!



THE STORY OF TULSI-DEVI



Tulsi-devi was a pure devotee and wife of Maha-Vishnu as well as the sister-in-law of Maha-Lakshmi. But, prior to Her marriage to Maha-Vishnu, Tulsi married a great demon named Jalandhara whose power was derived from the faith that Tulsi had in Maha-Vishnu. His power was further enhanced by a garland of purity given to him by Tulsi, the ever-loving and pure wife who would never touch another man.

Wherever Jalandhara went, he would conquer all. In time, he became blind to reality, and pride arose inside of him. Such was his pride that he proclaimed to Shiva that he would marry Parvati, Shiva's wife. This declaration led Shiva's family to wage war against Jalandhara, but they were defeated because of the faith and purity of Tulsi-devi.

After the defeat of Shiva, Jalandhara tried to force Parvati to be his wife. However, she refused, and threatened to burn him to the ground with her *Shakti*. Later, Parvati forgave Jalandhara for his misdeed and told him to go away. Realizing his mistake, Jalandhara went away.

When Tulsi and Maha-Lakshmi heard about this incident, they expressed sharp disapproval and criticized Jalandhara for his behaviour. Rather than humbly accept Tulsi and Lakshmi's rebuke, Jalandhara became angry and he blinded Tulsi by removing Her eyes. However, Maha-Vishnu replaced Her eyes, and She could see again.

Defeated by Jalandhara and knowing that only Maha-Vishnu could stop the effect of the garland, the devas asked Maha-Vishnu for His help to stop Jalandhara. Maha-Vishnu agreed, whereby He disguised Himself as Jalandhara and approached Tulsi-devi. When Tulsi saw Maha-Vishnu, disguised as Jalandhara, She touched Him and the moment She touched Him, the garland of purity withered and became old and black.

Immediately, Shiva chopped off the head of Jalandhara and it fell at the feet of Tulsi. Before dying, Jalandhara proclaimed to all that Tulsi had cheated on him with another man. Tulsi, confused, turned to Maha-Vishnu and demanded that He show His true form, which He did. Realizing the truth, Tulsi was furious! Using the power of Her devotion, She cursed Maha-Vishnu to become a stone. The curse was pronounced, and He became a stone.

When Maha-Vishnu was transformed into a stone, there was imbalance in the universe. Because of this, everyone begged Tulsi to save them, but She was not moved by anyone. Then, Maha-Lakshmi came to Tulsi and expressed Her grief at the loss of Her husband, (Lakshmi was wearing a white sari representing that Her husband Vishnu had died). Knowing that the world would remember Her as the one who made Lakshmi a widow, Tulsi realized Her mistake and forgave Maha-Vishnu who reappeared in His real form.

Because of Her error, Tulsi resolved to leave the world. Thus, with Her devotion, Her power, She burnt Herself to ashes. Everyone felt ashamed because Tulsi-devi, a great devotee, left the world in such a way; but it had to be this way. From the ash, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva blessed Her, and the holy basil, which you see today, is Tulsi that grew from Her ash.

Feeling sorrowful for His deception, Maha-Vishnu materialized a *Shaligrama* and placed it at the feet of Tulsi. Then, He proclaimed that He will always be at Her feet and that He would only accept *prasad* that has a Tulsi leaf on it. This is why a *Shaligrama* is seen under a Tulsi tree and that when anyone prays to Maha-Vishnu, they must put a Tulsi leaf on Him and His *prasad*.



WHAT ONE CAN LEARN BY OBSERVING TULSI



If we observe Tulsi, we can learn so many important lessons of how we should live our lives.

First, we can observe Tulsi's **humility**. She is the Queen of the Universe and yet She happily lives in a pot of soil. If the Queen of queens is content living in soil, then shouldn't we be content with what the Divine has given to us?

Next, we can observe Her unyielding **positivity**. We can neglect Tulsi and not water Her, nor wash Her, nor pay much attention to Her for some time, yet once we do, She is immediately thrilled and throws boons at us. If Tulsi has not been watered in some days, She will be wilting and sickly; yet once we water Her, in no time at all She will be upright and healthy again. The same is for when She has many pests and yet we do not wash Her. She will become sick, but once we wash Her, it almost appears that She has gotten a new life. If Tulsi can so quickly forgive and forget our insults to Her, then should we not do the same to others?

We can also see the importance of **perseverance**. Tulsi can become very sick and lose even 99% of Her leaves, and yet, if there is still even one leaf left, there is hope that She will grow back. This has happened many times. Tulsi is *bhakti* and faith, and if, like Her, we can in the worst of times have just a bit of faith, we will see once the time is right, our *bhakti* will grow back stronger and more plentiful than ever before. Like Tulsi, we must never give up.

Tulsi also shows us that **life is transitory**. The world is not eternal and nor are we. Tulsi, who is eternal, mystically incarnates, grows, suffers, and then dies, going back to the Lord. If we fix our minds on the Divine, just like Tulsi, we will be non-attached to this world and its mediocre pleasures. Surrendering ourselves to the Divine we will find the true everlasting happiness inside our hearts.

Tulsi is the perfect example of one who constantly **sacrifices** for others. Tulsi happily allows Herself to be plucked and eaten for the betterment of Her children. We can also see that She sees everyone and everything equally with the same Divine Love. Not only does She sacrifice Herself for us humans, She will also happily die for animals and insects too. If the Mother of all is willing to die for us, can't we also

sacrifice a bit of ourselves for Her and for Her children?

And, ultimately, we see the never-ending joy of sacrificing Herself to **be close to Her Lord and God**, Narayana. Nothing makes Tulsi happier than to be placed at the Feet of Her Lord. Of course, to be placed there, that means that Her leaves need to be plucked off. She needs to go through physical pain to do that, yet with no second thoughts, She joyfully does it. If Tulsi can happily lose Her limbs to be closer to the Divine, can't we learn to sacrifice just a bit of ourselves to be closer to our Devata, too?

Tulsi is the perfect example of a **true bhakta** of the Divine. If we take these few examples to heart and implement them into our lives, our path to self-realisation will be completely ensured.



SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF CARING FOR TULSI

The benefits one receives, spiritually, of caring for Tulsi are remarkable. In Her life as the queen of Shankhachuda, Tulsi was the epitome of faith and *bhakti* (Love for the Divine). It takes such faith and *bhakti* to have self-realisation, and Tulsi gives it happily and freely to Her children. The best and foremost benefit of caring for Tulsi is true, pure *bhakti* for the Divine (any form you feel close to).

To do this, Tulsi continuously purifies Her caretaker by taking *karma* from them onto Herself.

- By simply looking at Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply watering Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply misting Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply washing Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply planting or transplanting Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply touching Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply taking the soil from which Tulsi is planted in as *prasad*, She takes *karma*.
- By simply ingesting Her leaves or flowers, She takes *karma*.

- By simply praying to Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply talking about Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply listening to stories of Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply bowing down to Tulsi, She takes *karma*.
- By simply thinking of Tulsi, She takes *karma*.

And most importantly, by simply offering one of Her leaves or flowers to the Divine, She will bless you with more grace and love than you can imagine. At the same time, the form of the Divine you offered Her to, will be extremely pleased with you, as Tulsi (*bhakti* itself) has been offered to Them. Tulsi, with Her endless *bhakti*, intercedes for us, and asks the Divine to accept this small leaf as if it has been offered by a saint. With so much sweetness and mercy, how can the Divine say no?

Even though *bhakti* is the most important benefit, Tulsi also freely blesses Her caretakers with anything they desire, e.g.

wealth, children, husband, wife, good job, or knowledge. All the Devas and Devis dwell within Her, so She has the power to give absolutely anything.

When one has Tulsi in their home, all negative *vastu* (the Vedic science of architecture, layout and placement) is immediately destroyed. Tulsi protects the home and those who live within it from all sorts of negativity. Negativity from others, negative entities, and even death itself runs from Tulsi. That is also why we wear Tulsi *kunti malas* (small beaded necklaces) around our necks. She protects us from all negativity.

Having Tulsi in the home will ensure a peaceful and loving atmosphere to raise children and have a family. If one has children, try to have them support in taking care of Tulsi, even if it is only misting Her once a day. She will bless them, helping them with their schooling. As the *Vedas* dwell within Her, She is the storehouse of all knowledge and wisdom, too.

Tulsi is the only *puja* paraphernalia that can be offered more than once: Tulsi can actually be offered an infinite amount of times. As She is purity incarnate; She can never become impure no matter what has touched Her or where She has been.

- Tulsi is the sweetest of the sweet.
- The kindest of the kind.
- The wisest of the wise.
- And the most merciful of the merciful.
- Never doubt Her ever-willingness to help Her children.
- She will always be with those who look after Her.

Narayana knew the power of Tulsi's *bhakti*. He also knew that the universe and its inhabitants would need Her to incarnate on Earth as a plant, so that everyone could worship Her and by Her grace attain the Divine. He also added that since She would stay on the Earth, so would He. He took the form of the *Shaligrama* (black stones) so that, 'I may always sit below you.'

So you can see, Tulsi is the epitome of faith and *bhakti*. And it is Her greatest joy to bless Her children with this same type of faith and *bhakti*. In Her boundless mercy, She accepted Narayana's request and continuously incarnates as a plant so that anyone can serve Her. One does not need special initiations or mantras. All one needs is to serve Her as a plant to the best of their ability. This is more than sufficient to gain Her grace.

Truly the most important thing needed to take care of Tulsi is love. Just love Her. Remember, although She appears to be a plant, She is not. She is the Queen of the Universe and your Mother. Treat Her with respect and tenderness and She will treat you similarly a thousand times more!

VARIETIES OF TULSI

There are three main varieties of Tulsi: Vana, Rama and Krishna Tulsi.

VANA TULSI has large green leaves with purple flowers. (photo 1)

RAMA TULSI has smaller, lighter coloured leaves with white flowers. (photo 2)

KRISHNA TULSI has medium sized purple leaves with purple flowers. (photo 3)

Caring for all three types is virtually the same. The only major difference between these three is their speed of growth.

Based on the booklet 'Caring for Tulsi' by Bhakti Event GmbH.
Available in the online Bhaktishop:
bhaktishop.com



DEITY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: SRIMAN NARAYANA

WHAT GURUJI SAYS ABOUT NARAYANA

'Actually, there is no difference between Krishna and Narayana. Krishna is Narayana. Of course, the mood that the *bhakta's* are attached to, the *lila* they are attached to, is different. You can see that for example, in South India, where the people are mostly focused upon Sriman Narayana, and they have that same *bhava* towards Sriman Narayana.

In the North, they will say, 'Yes, the *gopis* are excelled devotees and great devotees.' It's true, Bhagavan Krishna Himself praises the *gopis*. But in South India, there was Andal who worshipped Sriman Narayana with the same mood.'

WHO IS NARAYANA

- Narayana is the Supreme.
- Narayana is the Ultimate.
- Narayana is the First Cause.
- Narayana is the indweller of all things.
- Narayana is immanent and transcendent.
- Narayana is the Brahman the *Vedas* talk about when they utter '*sarvam khalvidam brahma*', 'All this is Brahman'.
- Narayana is prior to all this (the world) and produces all this (the world).
- Narayana is the Vasudeva the *Bhagavad Gita* talks about when in Chapter 7, verse 19, Krishna says '*vāsudevaḥ sarvam*', 'Krishna is everything': Narayana is everything.
- Narayana is the Bhagavan the *Srimad Bhagavatam* talks about when in Canto 1, Chapter 3, verse 28, Suta says '*kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam*', 'Krishna is God': Narayana is God.
- Narayana is the Purushottama that Ramanujacharya talks about in his commentaries: the Supreme Person.



DEITIES AT THE ALTAR OF SRIMAN NARAYANA

VENKATESHWARA SHALIGRAMA

Venkateshwara is an *avatar* of Narayana and the presiding deity of the Tirupati Temple. This *Shaligrama* arrived on our altar about one year ago after Guruji received Him and we were so happy! He is so beautiful and there is always the feeling that He's looking at the devotees and blessing them!

This form of the Lord is very close to the devotees' hearts as they go every year to His temple donating offerings so that He can repay His debt to Lord Kubera. (Number 1 in the photo)

MAHA-VISHNU

He is Guruji's family deity. He travelled all over for a very long time until Guruji placed Him here in Shree Peetha Nilaya! Guruji loves Him very much and also we *pujaris* have a very deep connection and love for Him as He's the Chaturbhuja form of Narayana and He's super sweet! (Number 2 in the photo)

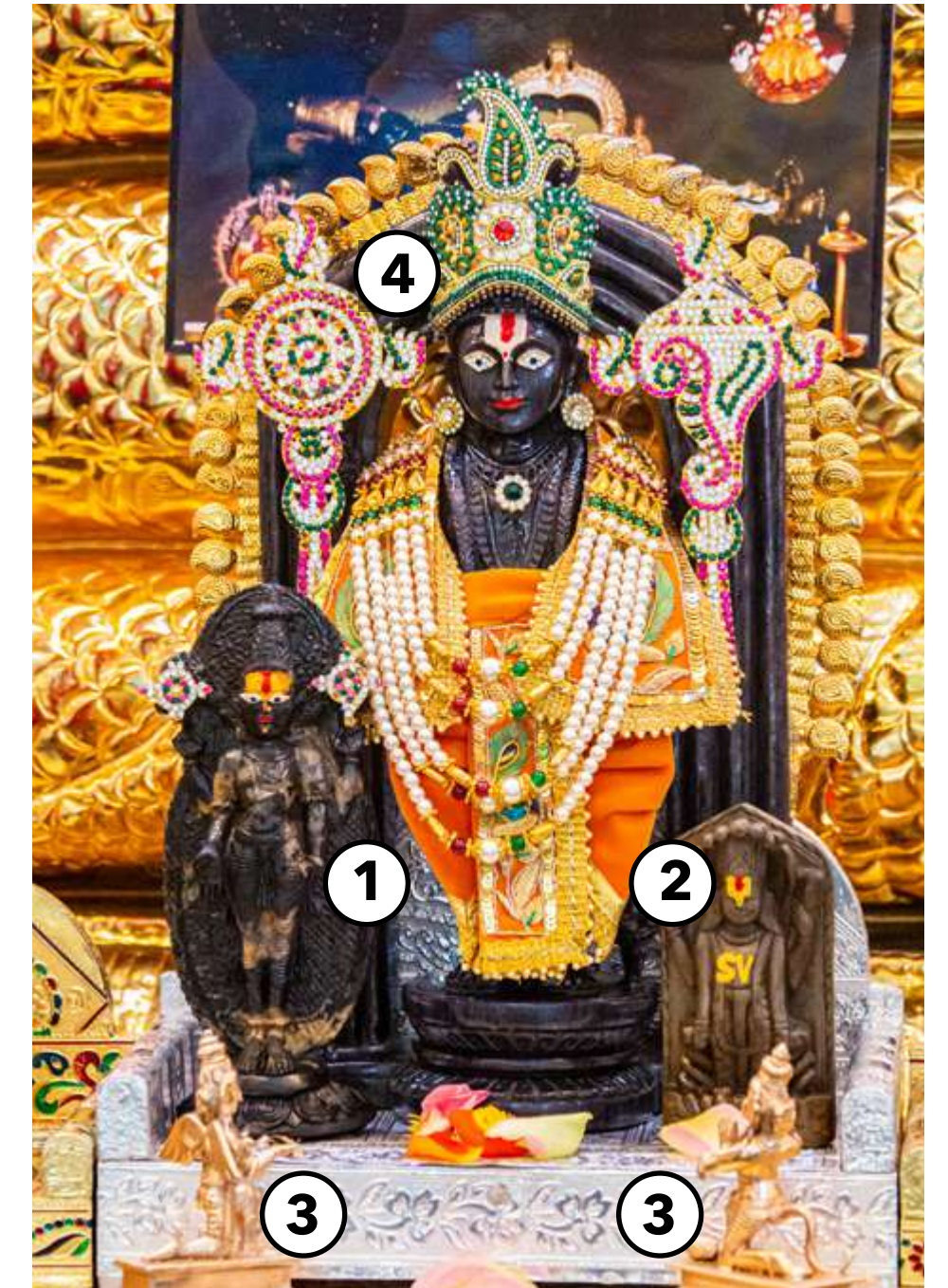
GARUDA AND HANUMAN

They are the companions of the Lord with different stories but with the deep service and love for the Lord that connects them to Him. Hanuman is always serving the Lord and always with Him. Garuda is the *vahana*, or the vehicle of the Lord, and is always carrying and serving Him. (Number 3 in the photo)

GURUVAYURAPPAN

Sage Dattatreya said that the *murti* of Guruvayurappan was originally worshipped by Brahma. Brahma gave Him to Vishnu. Krishna, as the incarnation of Vishnu, brought the *murti* with Him to Dwaraka. As the time of His leaving the Earth approached, He commissioned His friend and disciple, Uddhava, to save the *murti* from the impending flooding of Dwaraka and to erect Him in a similarly holy place so that He would continue to shower His devotees with His blessings and to protect them from the evil effects of the approaching *Kali-yuga*.

Uddhava entrusted the task to Guru, the protector of the gods, and Vayu, the god of the wind. They took possession of the *murti* and set out to find a suitable location. Ultimately, they decided to put the *murti* near a lake, full of lotus flowers, on one side where Shiva and Parvati were present. This is Guruvayur, the place got its name from Guru and Vayu who set up the *murti* together. The beauty of Guruvayurappan in our temple is stunning and brings tears to the eyes of the *bhaktas* that meditate on Him. (Number 4 in the photo)



INTRODUCING THE DASHAVATARS ON OUR MULASTHANAM

MATSYA

In the form of Matsya-avatar, the Lord tells King Satyavrata a deluge will flood the Earth, and to take a huge boat to carry all forms of life. Matsya guides the boat through the storm and provides them all with advanced spiritual knowledge.

Like Matsya, the desire for devotion in your life may appear very small at first, but soon grows with your attention and love. The Master guides you through life transformations, and soon you become a true devotee, worthy of advanced knowledge. (Photo 1)

KURMA

In the form of Kurma-avatar, the Lord manifests Himself during the Churning of the Milky Ocean and prevents Mount Mandara from sinking by supporting it from underneath.

Like Kurma, the invisible hand of the Divine is always there supporting you. When you go through challenges in life, you may think you are alone, but the Master is always there, hiding Himself, doing everything invisibly, quietly, and giving you strength. (Photo 2)





3



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VARAHA

In the form of Varaha-avatar, the Lord dives down to the bottom of the Cosmic Ocean to rescue Mother Earth from the demon Hiranyaksha. Digging His tusks into the seabed, He raises Her up and then kills the demon.

Like Varaha, the Master saves you with two tusks: *bhakti* and love. The Master comes to show the way, to remove you from the ocean of ignorance and the delusions you are attached to. The Master takes you out of the mundane reality and raises you up. (Photo 3)

NARASIMHA

In the form of Narasimha-avatar, the Lord bursts out of a pillar to rescue His little *bhakta*, Prahlad. He eviscerates the demon Hiranyakashipu, but nothing can calm His continued rage except for Prahlad's love.

Like Narasimha, the Master protects you, even if that means attacking your own negative qualities. Those qualities must be completely torn out and destroyed before the Lord can reveal His presence in your heart. (Photo 4)



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VAMANA

In the form of Vamana-avatar, the Lord appears as a *brahmana* dwarf to the demon King Bali. When Vamana asks for just three steps of land, the king arrogantly accepts, but is humbled seeing that just two steps span all the worlds. For the third step, the king offers his head to the Lord's Feet.

Like Vamana, the Master is sent to remind you of the important steps on your spiritual path. The first step is to surrender the world of duality (with its attachments). The second step is to surrender the world of spirituality (with its gifts). The third and final step is to surrender the ego and offer oneself with humility to the Lord. (Photo 5)

PARASHURAMA

In the form of Parashurama-avatar, the Lord takes His axe and vows to kill all the warriors that exist. He goes 21 times around the world to eliminate the greedy and protect the devoted, but as soon as He meets Rama, He knows His time is over.

Like Parashurama, the Master cleanses you of all greed or impurity. Twenty-one steps are necessary for this process, purifying the organs of perception, the senses, the organs of action, and so on. (Photo 6)



RAMA

In the form of Rama-avatar, there are many *lilas*. In one, the Lord visits Shabari, who has longed all her life to see Him. To Lakshmana's horror, she tastes each berry before feeding it to Rama to ensure it is sweet enough for Him.

Like Rama, the Master accepts the love, in whatever form it is offered, from a heart filled with devotion. Your spiritual practices help to purify your heart, and when your heart is fully purified, the Lord not only reveals Himself to you, He runs to you. (Photo 7)

BALARAMA

In the form of Balarama-avatar, the Lord is the elder brother of Krishna. He takes part in most of Krishna's *lilas*, from childhood pranks to defeating demons, and is Krishna's constant friend and companion.

Like Balarama, the Master accompanies you as a constant friend in every lifetime, supporting you and helping you, regardless of whether you are aware of His presence or not. (Photo 8)

KRISHNA

In the form of Krishna-avatar, the Lord has 16,108 wives, including Rukmini (Maha-Lakshmi) and Satyabhama (Bhu-devi). Lord Krishna is renowned for awakening true and enduring love, not only in His wives, but in the *gopis*, in the *gopas*, and in the heart of every *bhakta*.

Like Krishna, the Master comes to reveal the personal love relationship that everyone has with Him. By building up a love relationship with the guru, you realise how close Krishna is. It is only through that love that the Lord can reveal Himself. (Photo 9)

KALKI

In the form of Kalki-avatar, the Lord is foretold to appear at the end of *Kali-yuga*. This *avatar* rides and controls the mind, and manifests Himself in the heart of all the *bhaktas* who control the senses to awaken Divine Love.

Like Kalki, the Master helps you attain a single-pointed, focused mind and the control of the senses. It is only when the mind and senses are controlled that pure Love awakens, and it is only then that the Lord reveals Himself within the heart of the devotee. (Photo 10)



TULSI-DEVI QUOTES FROM GURUJI

'A devotee should be never away from Tulsi, you know. Tulsi *mala* is very important for a devotee. It protects you. You don't realise how much it protects you, but it protects you so much. So, *tilak* and Tulsi should always be there. Whether you wear the *tilak* like this or with water it doesn't matter, but that must be always there.'

Satsang, SPN, 02.01.20

The Holy Basil, which you see nowadays as Tulsi, grew up from the ash of Tulsi. Actually, the Tulsi is Her; the Holy Basil is Tulsi-devi. As Maha-Vishnu felt so bad for what He had done, He blessed Tulsi and said "From now on, I will always be at your feet, because you have made me a stone - the *Shaligrama* - and everybody will remember me. Whenever they pray to me, they have to put your leaves on me."

Kartik Purnima, SPN, 02.11.09

'You see, in India in front of everybody's house, you will see a small pot with a Tulsi plant in it. I don't know whether you have noticed that in India. If you go through villages you will see that all the Hindu houses have it, same in Mauritius. Why do we do the service for Tulsi? Because we consider Tulsi to be a model of devotion.'

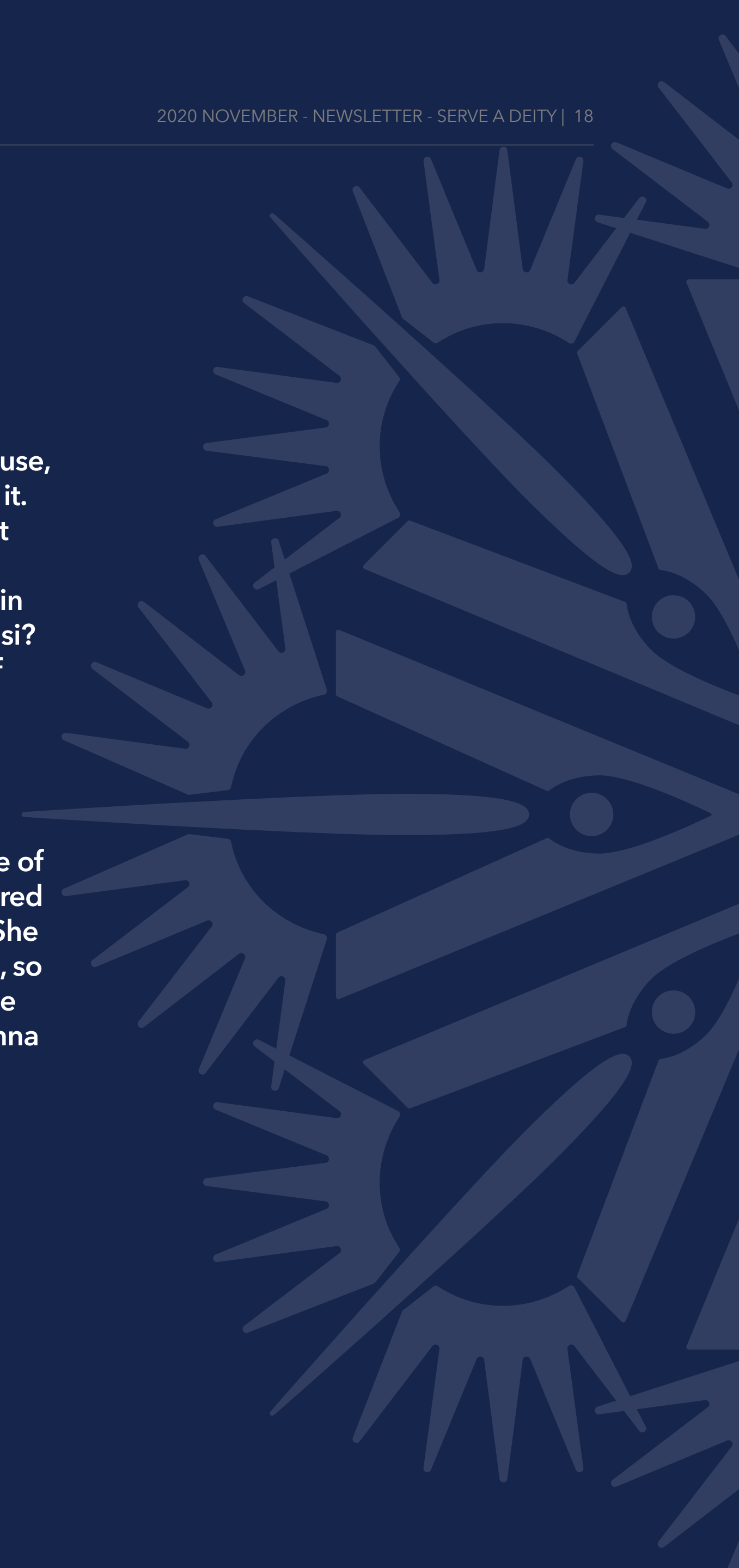
Kartik Purnima, SPN, 02.11.09

'The power of Tulsi, you see it also in the life of Krishna later on, when Maha-Vishnu appeared as Krishna, all around Him there was Tulsi. She was Vrinda-devi (when Krishna incarnated), so She was always around with Her aroma. She was always making it smell so nice for Krishna and Radha.'

Kartik Purnima, SPN, 02.11.09

'Tulsi grows only where there is *bhakti*'

Sri Gopi Gita, Canto 10, Chapter 31, Verse 1



SRIMAN NARAYANA QUOTES FROM GURUJI

'...Sriman Narayana can't be moved by just *sadhana*. He can be moved only when there is intense longing for Him. Here I'm saying intense longing. Not just today you long for Him, tomorrow you long for something else, no!'

Satsang, SPN, 11.02.18

'*nāga-śayana*' is the one who is resting on Adishesha. Here, again, He said He is the only Supreme Lord: Sriman Narayana. You see, Sriman Narayana is lying down on Adishesha. Here when we look at Ranganath, He has only two hands. He is not like Maha-Vishnu with *chaturbhuja* (four arms). He has two hands like everybody. He is reminding that how He is, you are also. And He is not far away, He is not a Chaturbhuja-Vishnu. He has two hands to hold you, to bring you near and dear to Him. That's why He hides all of His thousand hands.'

Mukunda Mala Stotram commentary, SPN,
17.10.20

'The Gita is about the Self, you know? It is about seeing the Lord within you. When you see Him within you, then you will perceive Him everywhere: in the flower, in the deity, in everyone. Know that deep within, it is the same Narayana who is seated in each one's heart.'

Shreemad Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 1, Verse 26

'Hey Janani, I am not sleeping. Even if My eyes are closed, in reality, when My eyes are closed, I withdraw Myself into My Cosmic Being, which is Narayana. In that Cosmic Being, My energies are always flowing, energising every universe, energising all, energising everyone. That's how I maintain everything in balance.'

Shreemad Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 1, Verses 28-30



PUJARIS EXPERIENCE OF SERVICE TO TULSI-DEVI

Miracle with Tulsi Jagatpathi Dasananda

One year ago, I became a *pujari* for Tulsi. (For those of you who don't know, being a *pujari* is similar to being a priest in a church – someone who takes care of a deity.) In Hinduism, this is a great honour because you are able to build a relationship with a deity on an everyday basis. You wake up the deity, you dress the deity, you put jewellery on the deity, and so on. All of this makes the deity much more personal and close and this results in feeling closer to God.

Why *puja*? Because in all other religions, God is some faraway superior being, and yet our path is all about building a relationship with the Divine. And to tell the truth, building a personal relationship with a superior being that is far away or is just an energy, the cosmos or whatever, can be quite difficult. After all, we are human beings and human beings know how to build a relationship

only if we are able to see, hear, feel the other person. Otherwise, I dare say, it is nearly impossible!

So, *puja* is all about expressing this love towards the divinity, and in my case, to the Divine Mother. The relationship deepens with each interaction and what matters is 'how' we do things and not necessarily 'what' we are doing. So, we can be in a bad mood in front of the deity, we can do *puja* and take care of the deity only because we have to, or we can take our time and make sure we are mindful in the moment and then, and only then, can we feel that this divine aspect is truly there. Each aspect of God has certain attributes and certain energy we can feel, but only when we are present in the moment.

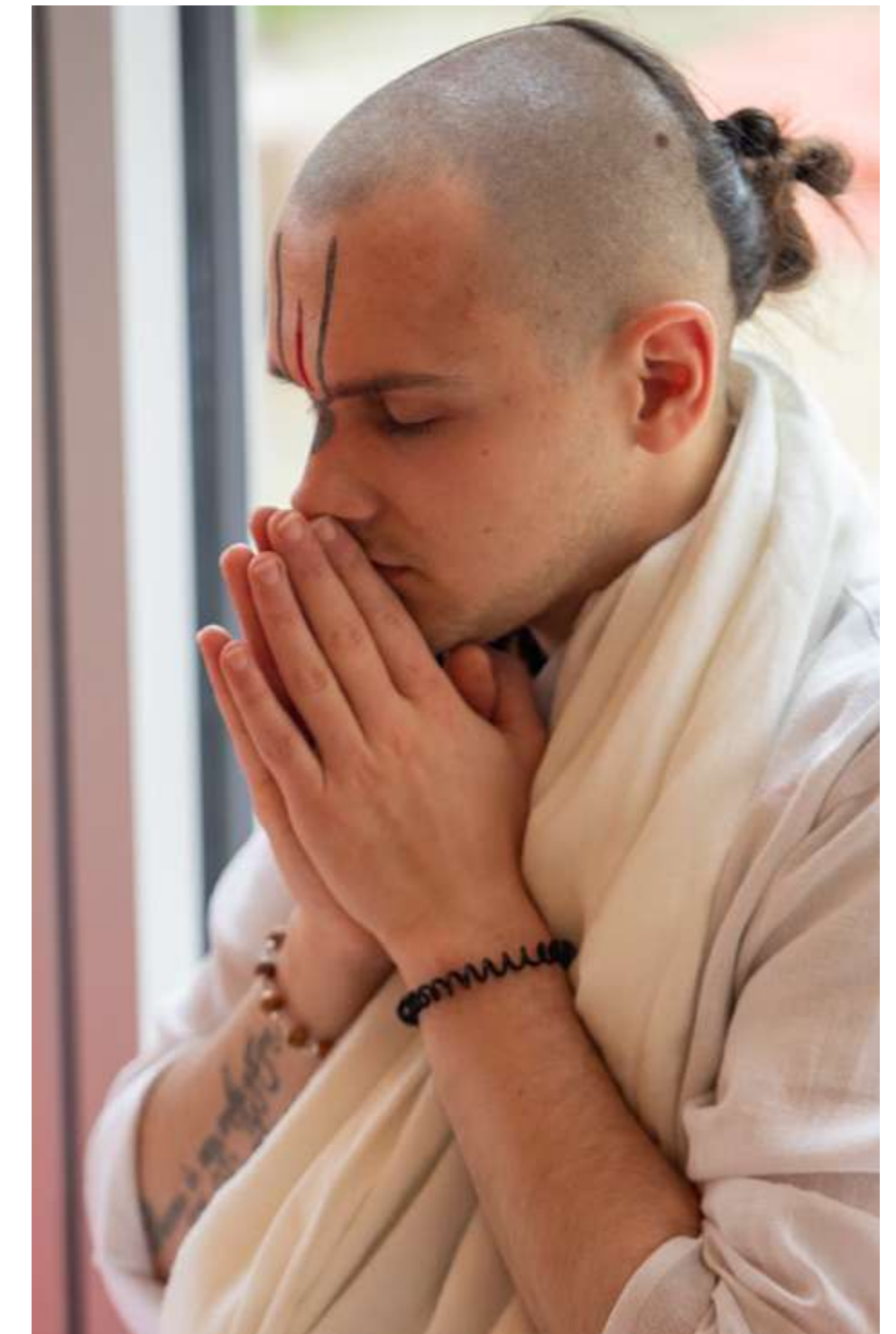
So now that you know what a *puja* is, and why we perform it, let me tell you a story.

Tulsi, who represents the Divine Mother, is taken care of by two *pujaris*. Since the other *pujari* went on a trip with Guruji, I was left alone with Her and I

have to say that such times are always special, because my mind is much more focused on Tulsi than on me. And in my experience, there is no better feeling in the world than forgetting about oneself and serving.

These few days were incredibly special, but there was one specific day when, I swear, I could hear and feel Her much better and more strongly than usual.

Now, every day when I put Her to sleep, I put a flower on Her feet and replace it with another flower in the morning. But one day I came and there was no flower on Her feet. My first thought was that I must have forgotten to put a flower on Her feet, but then I remembered that I took a photo of it and had sent it to Swami Tulsidas. I looked around the altar but there was no flower anywhere and that was very strange. But ok, I didn't dare to think even for a second that a miracle happened.



On this very special day, I couldn't stop thinking what happened with Her in the morning, so I kept going to the temple to check on Her and every time I got tears in my eyes just by looking at Her (pretending to be a 'real man' didn't have any effect on this). With Her, my heart just melted.

From that day on, I felt that our relationship really deepened, and I knew that something had happened. But I couldn't understand what happened to the flower, so when Guruji returned from the trip I told him the whole story and asked Him what happened. (Just to make it clear, since I have been living in The Ashram, I have witnessed many miracles and manifestations around Guruji - this is something that most people find hard to believe and I don't blame them. I probably wouldn't believe it either if I would not have seen it with my own eyes.) So, when I asked Guruji about this, He looked at the sky, closed His eyes, looked at me and said: 'She heard your prayers.'

This moment was so incredibly precious for me, because I knew that it was true and in the same second, I became joyful, and my eyes flooded with tears. I felt such great peace and gratitude. Among other things, I also knew that I really didn't deserve this yet, but She

had poured Her mercy on me and showed me that She really was present.

I know there is a lot of people out there, who do not believe in anything bigger than themselves and things they can see, and I didn't either. Not until I met Guruji, who still shows me every day how lucky I am that He pulled me out of my former way of life and showed me how much more that exists, and is possible, and gave a meaning to my life. And that Tulsi is the most merciful one and a prayer offered to Her always comes true, no matter how impossible we think that is.

The change always starts on the inside and people who want to change will always receive Her grace and attention, and with just a little effort, She will show us how amazing life with a purpose is.

Jai Tulsi Mata, Jai Gurudev!



SAINTS WHO WORSHIPPED SRIMAN NARAYANA

TONDARADIPPODI: THE 'DUST AT THE FEET OF BHAKTAS' ALVAR

Birth

Tondaradippodi Alvar, born in the 8th century AD, took birth as the incarnation of Vishnu's Vanamala, the *Vaijayanti-mala*, meaning 'the garland of victory'. He was born to a Vedic *brahmana* in a place called Thirumandangudi, located in the Chola kingdom on the bank of the Kaveri river.

His original name was Vipranarayana and even as a young boy, he was devoted to Vishnu. At an early age, he was schooled in the languages of Tamil and Sanskrit and he studied the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *shastras*. It is said that he had no pride and was humble and modest and that he was respected by everyone.

Home Life

After leaving his parents' home, Vipranarayana lived in Srirangam in a hermitage on the banks of the river Kaveri with his disciple Rangaraju, where, as a staunch devotee of Lord Ranganath, the presiding deity of the nearby Srirangam temple, he devoted himself to the service of Lord Ranganath.

At his modest home, Vipranarayana established and maintained a beautiful flower garden that he used to serve Sri Ranganath by making garlands with the flowers he grew. Each morning, he would wake up early in morning, do his morning rituals, then begin plucking flowers and Tulsi leaves to make beautiful garlands for adorning Lord Ranganath, while singing hymns in praise of Him. Totally absorbed in his service, Vipranarayana had no other thoughts and lived the life of a *brahmachari*.

Devadevi

On the northern side of Srirangam was a place called Tirukkarambanur. There lived a woman called Devadevi. One day, while returning with her elder sister after getting a lot of gifts from the Chola king for dancing and singing, she was attracted to the beautiful garden of Vipranarayana and entered it.

Immersed in divine contemplation, Vipranarayana was watering the plants without paying any attention to Devadevi and he completely ignored her beauty.



Devadevi's Pride

When Vipranarayana did not even throw a glance at her, Devadevi's vanity was hurt and she felt humiliated. She enquired of her sister about this man who paid no attention to her. Her sister replied that he had dedicated his life to the service of Sri Ranganath and that he did not bother about anything else.

Mistaking Vipranarayana's devotion towards Ranganath as arrogance, she decided to teach him a lesson, so she vowed to entice him with her charm. Hearing this, Devadevi's sister threw a challenge to Devadevi saying that if she could ensnare him with her beauty, she could have her as a slave for six months. On hearing, this Devadevi took an oath that she would ensnare him or be a slave to her sister.

Devadevi Removes her Jewels

Devadevi removed her costly dress and jewels and handed them over to her elder sister and, in the guise of a poor woman, approached Vipranarayana with a request to stay at the hermitage as she was an orphan, unmarried, and unable to support herself.

Despite Rangaraju's objection, Vipranarayana agreed and Devadevi was allowed to stay

outside the hermitage. She became his disciple and supported his garland-making efforts. However, Rangaraju realised her intention and tried to convince Vipranarayana of Devadevi's true purpose. Vipranarayana was not swayed by Rangaraju's words and he expels Rangaraju from the hermitage.

Afterwards, Vipranarayana continued his service of offering garlands to Sri Vishnu while Devadevi patiently waited for the right opportunity to distract his mind.

The Day it Rained

One day, it rained heavily and Devadevi got drenched. Lightly dressed, she was cold, shivering, and unable to warm herself. At the sight of her distress, Vipranarayana took pity on her and allowed her to come inside his hermitage and even gave her his own clothes to wear.

Vipranarayan's hermitage was small, forcing Devadevi nearer to Vipranarayana than usual and this closeness compelled Vipranarayana to notice Devadevi's beauty. The sight of Devadevi's cold and shivering body slowly aroused his sensual desires and soon Vipranarayana was overtaken by desire and lust.

In a short time, Devadevi virtually made Vipranarayana a slave for her beauty. He was trapped; he forgot about his service to Lord Ranganath. His thoughts were only about Devadevi and he could not bear even a moment separation from her.

Devadevi was very happy that the time had come to allure Vipranarayana and that she was successful in her attempt. However, once her ego was satisfied, Devadevi began to regret her act.

Devadevi Leaves

Satisfied that she had fulfilled her promise, Devadevi returned home without even taking leave of Vipranarayana. Unable to be separated from Devadevi, Vipranarayana went in search of her. At last he found her, but Devadevi's mother Rangasani, knowing that Vipranarayana was penniless, forced him to leave. Vipranarayana's only chance of seeing Devadevi was to give money to Rangasani.

Vipranarayana felt isolated and lamented the separation from Devadevi. He did not know what to do for he had no money and he knew no way to get money. Regardless of his situation, he continued to hover around the house of Devadevi.





Sri Ranganath Takes Pity

Sri Ranganath took pity on His devotee and wanted him to realize his fault and to continue his service to Him. So, Lord Ranganath assumed the form of Rangaraju and in this disguise, He took a big golden plate from the Srirangam temple and brought it to Devadevi's house. He presents the gold plate as a gift from Vipranarayana to Devadevi. Rangasani, very pleased to see the gift, sought out Vipranarayana and invited him to meet with her daughter.

The Missing Golden Plate

The next morning, the temple priest found one of the golden plates missing and the theft was reported to the king. It had been determined that the plate had been stolen from the temple. The king ordered a thorough search for it.

Eventually, it came to light through a servant of Devadevi that the plate was in her house. Knowing this was a 'gift' from Vipranarayana, Rangasani accused Vipranarayana of stealing the vessel. Immediately, the king had Vipranarayana arrested and brought to court where he was tried and convicted of the crime of theft. As punishment, the king ordered that Vipranarayana be sent to prison and that his hands be amputated as a punishment for theft.

The King's Dream

Before the hands of Vipranarayana are amputated, the Lord appeared to the king in a dream and revealed the truth. He narrated the whole incident, saying that Vipranarayana is none other than the human form of *Vaijayanti-mala*, the garland that adorns Him, and that Devadevi is a Gandharva who had taken a human birth due to a curse.

Lord Ranganath went on to say that it was He who had Vipranarayana imprisoned in order to exhaust his *karma* and that the king should release Vipranarayana and allow him to serve the Lord as usual. Afterwards, the king released Vipranarayana and begged his pardon.

Madness Gone

Vipranarayana felt greatly moved by the Lord's mercy and by the grace of Sri Ranganath that got rid of his madness for that woman. He became a staunch *bhakta* and called himself 'the dust at the feet of *bhaktas*': Tondaradippodi.

He washed the feet of the devotees with water and consumed that water to purify himself, realising that it was through the service of the devotees of the Lord that he could attain salvation.

Tondaradippodi Alvar continued his service like before. Until he left his body at the age of 105, he sang only about Ranganath.

Praises to Sri Ranganath

Tondaradippodi Alvar praises to Lord Ranganath were compiled as Triuppalli Ezhucchi (Waking Up the Lord) and Tiurumalai (A Garland for the Lord).

Let us adore and worship the feet of Tondaradippodi Alvar who served Sri Ranganath through garlands of flowers and garlands of hymns.

PILGRIMAGE PLACES OF SRIMAN NARAYANA VISITED BY GURUJI



RANGANATH TEMPLE IN SRIRANGAM

The main pilgrimage site for Sri Ranganath is the Ranganath Temple in Srirangam, and it is famous for being the most important pilgrimage location for Sri Vaishnavas.

This place is no small temple that is hidden in an alley—it is the largest temple complex in all of India! It was visited by Guruji in 2016 and again in 2019, and I had the grace to participate with Guruji both times.

It was awesome to be with Him where Ranganath resides. I have to be honest, though: during my first visit in 2016, I was so new to Bhakti Marga and Guruji, and so focused on serving Guruji for the first time in India, that when leaving the temple complex I realised that I had barely even looked at the deity, so I couldn't remember Him at all!

But by His grace, I had the opportunity to go back with Guruji in 2019 and, not wanting to repeat my past mistake, I stared at the

beautiful form of Sri Ranganath for as long as I could. He is very big and totally majestic in that form.

The complex is massive in size, and it is always filled with crowds of people. Yet, every time we arrive, the priests are so happy to see Guruji and all the devotees that follow Him. The priests allow Guruji to go inside and they always give Him special treatment so that He can view and enjoy the beauty of the Lord in the most comfortable way.

To be in the Sri Ranganath Temple is always inspiring. Not just for the size and grandeur of the deity and of the temple architecture, but because you can feel the devotion of all the *bhaktas* that have passed through those doors, walked down those hallways, and had the *darshan* of the Supreme Lord Himself.





In Giving, You will Receive Shradha Das, Switzerland

Jai Gurudev,

Here is my short story about how I found myself joining the Serve a Deity program.

I always had it somehow in my mind that it would be good to contribute in some way to The Ashram or to a deity. But there was never a good time for it.

Then, in the beginning of the year, the virus in the name of Covid-19 came onto the scene, along with problems in work and financial areas too. During this time, I was very attached to money and so-called 'financial security'. How did I overcome it?

I had an idea that instead of saving up my money, I could do the opposite: spend it in an efficient way and, by doing that, I could prove it to myself. Sri Ranganath seemed congenial to me. And so, by not looking at what I would get out of sponsoring but by merely by looking at Lord Narayana, I knew He was the one.

After sponsoring Sri Ranganath, a beautiful thing happened: I was thinking of Him often

during the day. Visualising Him and talking to Him appeared very normal to me. In other words, I was building a relationship. And of course, after some time, the worry that I had before about the income and job came back again. Even though I knew that the virus situation will sooner or later disappear, I got into the trap of worry.

However, as it was, in my case, by supporting a deity, I received more than just a good feeling. There was an ability to perceive life differently in a positive way and to not focus on negativity, but on Sri Ranganath instead!

This is what I learned from this experience: by giving with Love, even when you think your resources are limited, one receives even more than one had before.



BEHIND THE SCENES WITH OUR DEITIES

Saved from the Fall Rajilochana Das, Italy

This is a true story that happened during the last renovation of the Shirdi Sai temple in 2019. While Guruji was away from The Ashram, we decided with His consent to renovate the Shirdi Sai temple because new flooring and updated walls were needed. Our little team of three included myself Rajivalochanadas (Angelo), my wife, Prasannavadanadasi (Arianna), and Ragupatidas (Archangel), already a master builder of both temples. We had only five days to do the job in order to not stop the *pujas* for too long and so we immediately started the work.

We went to a specialty shop and found a whole stone and marble floor - a true gift of the Divine - wonderful, but simple, just as Shirdi Sai Baba is. We brought it back and immediately began to destroy the existing floor. While Archangel was out on the patio of the temple destroying the threshold with the jackhammer, Prasannavadanadasi and I were inside, with the door closed. We were covering the *murti* and the arch with plastic sheeting, so I was standing on the very top step of a high ladder leaning against the wall while Prasannavadanadasi assisted me from below. I'd finished the job and moved to go down but misjudged the distance to

the next step and put my foot where no step was!

In that moment, I had only one 'God' thought, and 'Baba help' came out of my mouth (I didn't remember saying it, Prasannavadanadasi reminded me later). I fell on my back, landing on the *murti* tank and hit my head on the floor from almost 2 metres up. My wife helplessly witnessed the whole scene and saw me on the ground, not breathing. She called for Ragupatidas, who hadn't heard anything because he was outside with the jackhammer. He rushed in, also feeling helpless and frightened at the scene.

Immediately after I heard my head hit the floor, I saw a light and I felt like I was wrapped and suspended in the air. I wanted to breathe, but I felt that the air did not enter the lungs. After a few minutes, I regained consciousness and sat up, saying it was all right, that they didn't have to worry. This was my thought during those minutes: I wanted my wife and my brotherly friend not to be scared and not to worry about me. When I got up, I checked myself and there was nothing broken, just a small wound on the inside of my right arm. Observing how I was injured, I looked in the tub and I saw that a glass vase was broken in many sharp arrows of glass, and I had only one small wound.





My first thought was to send a message to Guruji to thank Him for saving my life. His response was, 'Listen to your heart! You don't stand with both feet on the top step of that ladder.'

I was so happy and surprised! Only my wife knew the specifics of the fall and Guruji had precisely described the scene to me. He was there, even if He was physically hundreds of miles away.

We went to the reception desk where Ratnamanjari gave me first aid by giving me a dressing on my arm and immediately called Dr. Ramayotee. I had back pain but nothing was broken, which was miraculous compared to the fall I'd had. After leaving the doctor, we went to the Light Hall and met Swami Paranthapa to whom I told the story. He immediately said, 'You went for a moment to Vaikuntha and you came back' and then he continued joking with Prasannavadanadasi, saying that she had kept me so as not to let me go without at least leaving her the credit card! We all laughed. He also made this an immediate therapy for the shock.

In the following days, there was a competition of solidarity towards me by many devotees who offered to give me therapies, rather than helping in the temple, and so all together we managed in five days to finish the work.

Then, when I met Guruji physically, He stopped me right in front of the two temples and said 'I was there and I saw everything: Baba saved your life' and smiling, 'Well, you know how nice it was that you died at the feet of God and you went directly to Vaikuntha' and then He went on seriously, 'See Angelo, you did all this (indicating the two temples). Did you want to see that God does not take care of you?' and I said to Him: 'Guruji, from that moment on I see everything differently. I just want to achieve the purpose of life' and He said, 'You are already doing it by serving God and the *guru*. I bless you!'

Now every time I have a problem, I think that since Guruji saved my life, nothing can happen that He doesn't want. Now I am serene, entrusted to Him like a wolf cub in the mouth of the mother wolf who carries it. Another very important teaching for me was that there is no difference between Him and Baba. He is Baba, as well as all forms of God. The *satguru* is God himself, with all His names and all His forms.

Sadgurudev Sri Swami Vishwananda Mahaprabu
Ki Jai!

FEEDING SRIMAN NARAYANA HIS FAVOURITE FOOD

PANJIRI

This recipe is very simple. So simple that it might seem strange. The ingredients are few and foreign to taste. I'd like to say that I can give you a background about this recipe, but I don't have much.

Some years ago, an older woman taught it to me in Vrindavan. As we cooked it, roasting the flour in an old beat up iron pot, she told me it's a very old, old recipe; that it's traditional and necessary to have at Narayana *pujas*, hence we had to make it.

The ingredients are simple because that is what they had thousands of years ago. That is what I know of Panjiri and somehow, for some reason, it seemed like the right one to share with all of you to honour Sri Ranganath.

Ingredients (8-10 persons)

- 2 tablespoons ghee
- 100 gm whole wheat flour
- 100 gm white sugar or caster sugar
- 50 gm grated coconut
- 10-12 black pepper corns, freshly ground

Preparation

1. Dry roast the flour in a heavy pan until the color begins to change and the smell is distinctly toasted. Let it cool down to room temperature.
2. Now put in a grinder or a mortar and pestle crush the black pepper. In the same grinder, grind the sugar until it resembles a coarse powder.
3. Combine all ingredients, including the grated coconut and melted ghee. Mix and panjiri is ready to be offered.

How to eat: It's eaten only by the spoonful.



UPCOMING ONLINE DEITY JOURNEYS



We are quite happy with the Deity Journeys that are planned this year. Due to the Covid-19 situation The Ashram is closed.

We have scheduled the following journeys Online:

- Journey with Sriman Narayana on **13 November**
- Journey with Tulsi-devi on **24 November**

For further information and if you would like to sign up, please go to the BM Event calendar and register on the event.

If you are registered, you will receive an e-mail with further instruction on how to download the material for these two Deity Journeys the day before the Online event.

[Journey with Sriman Narayana](https://bhaktimarga.org/events/event/online-journey-sriman-narayana)

bhaktimarga.org/events/event/online-journey-sriman-narayana

[Journey with Tulsi-devi](https://bhaktimarga.org/events/event/online-journey-tulsi-devi)

bhaktimarga.org/events/event/online-journey-tulsi-devi

UPCOMING LIVESTREAM SPN EVENTS



Live Kartik Night will take place on
7 November.

For more information go to:
events.bhaktimarga.org/livestream-kartik-night-2020

Live Dhanteras-Diwali will take place on
12-14 November.

Live Tulsi Vivaha will take place on
26 November.

Live Mahavatar Babaji Day will take
place on **30 November.**

For more information go to:
bhaktimarga.org/blog/november-events-shree-peetha-nilaya



PREVIOUS DEITY JOURNEY PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK



Some Feedback from the Journey with Radha-Krishna at The Ashram

During the *abishekam*, after pouring the *panchamrita*, I noticed how perfect was the circle formed at His feet by the mixture. Then the milk and then the yogurt – it took the shape of a heart. Then at the end of the *arati*, a flower jumped out of His *asan* from behind His back: I saw He was so happy that He would send all those external signs. I never saw Him smile as much as after the turban workshop. After the talk of the *pujaris*, I asked if I could bring *prasad* to be offered to Gopal. While waiting, looking at Radha and Krishna, I received such a *darshan* that I could only cry out of love. I felt so grateful that they made me perceive Them in such a tangible vivid way.

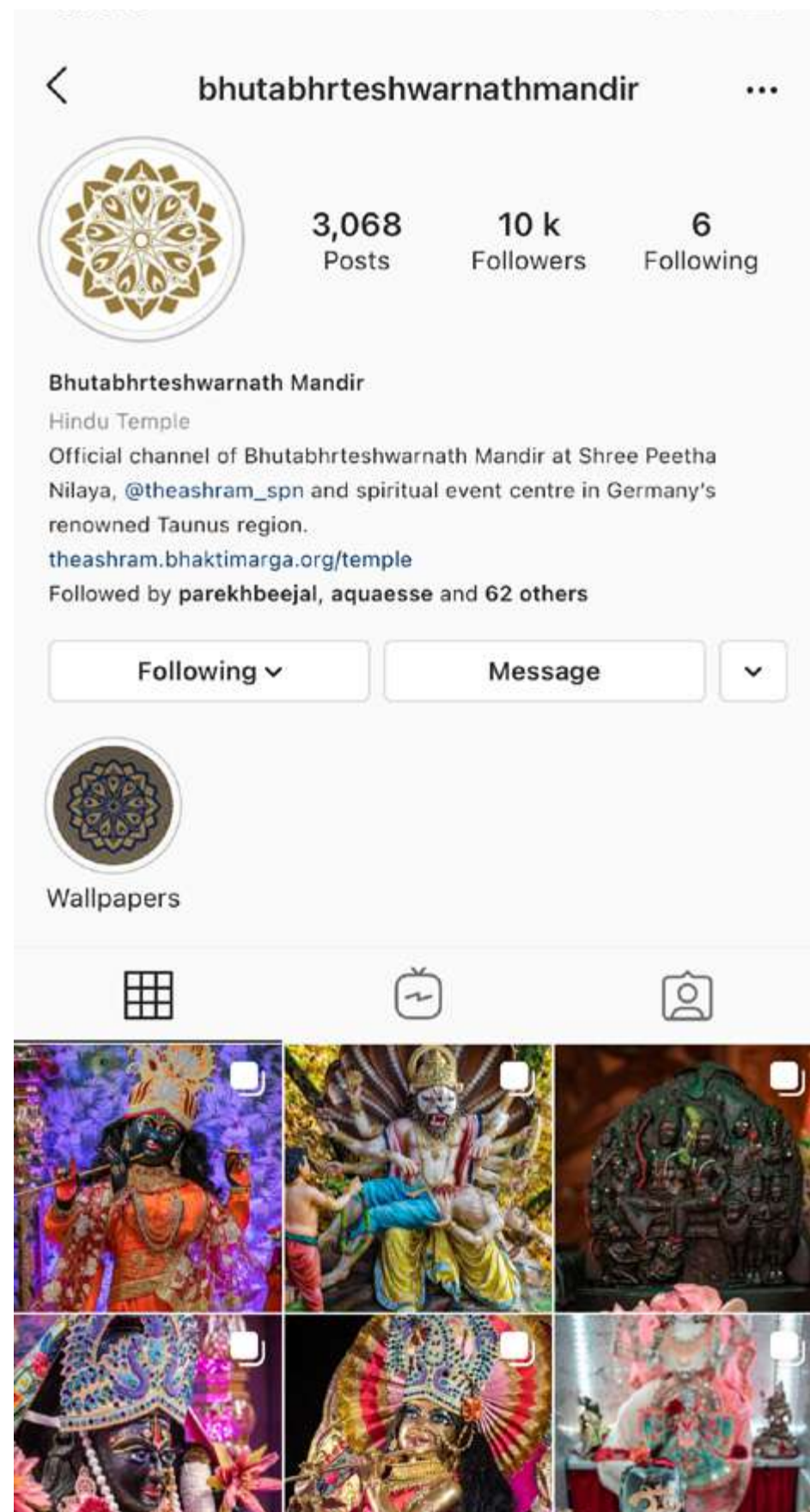
-VenudhariniDasi, Slovakia

Everything was inspiring. To spend time with the *murtis* and care for them was very touching, because normally we have so many things to do in our lives that we don't spend much time with them. I felt very happy because they were very happy that I was caring for them and taking time in the *abishekam* and making my first turban for them.

After this weekend, for sure, I will continue playing harmonium and singing. Actually, I intended to never touch a harmonium again because of some difficult childhood experiences with the piano. But now this Journey with Radha-Krishna has opened up a door!



STAY CONNECTED



We are so happy that you are part of our service to God in the home of Guruji. We invite you to continue to be a part of it and to stay in touch with us daily, weekly and for special events. Here's how:

Connect Every Day

Feel like you are part of our morning prayers and evening *arati* with our livestream.

theashram.bhaktimarga.org

We post 30 stunning photos daily to give you the opportunity to receive *darshan* wherever you are.

[instagram.com/bhutabhrteshwarnathmandir](https://www.instagram.com/bhutabhrteshwarnathmandir)

Connect During the Week

You can also stay connected with our Telegram channel for the Temple Satsangs: morning *Srimad Bhagavatam* and evening *Divya Prabandham* satsangs given in the temple by Swamis and members of the Bhakti Marga Academy. Just sign up here:

https://t.me/SPN_Temple_Satsangs

Note: To connect this way, you will need Telegram downloaded on either your phone or laptop.

We hope that you enjoyed reading this new style of newsletter. Our next Serve a Deity newsletter will be centered around Shiva and should be coming out end of February 2021.

Much Love

Tulsi-devi *Pujari* Team:

LakshmiramanDasananda and JagatpathiDasananda

Sriman Narayana *Pujari* Team:

Rishi Akashananda and Ramdasananda and all contributors of this newsletter.

**NARAYANA IS
THE ONLY ONE
THAT CAN SAVE
YOU, SO ONLY
TRUE DEVOTION
AND SURRENDER
TO HIM WILL
FREE YOU**

