



Dear Yagya Friends,

As summer comes to a close, it is time for our most elaborate yagya series - Navaratri - the nine nights of the Divine Mother.

We have an expanded program that includes a full day-long Ganesha yagya to begin the program, followed by nine days of very elaborate Chandi Yagyas (108 different offerings each day) including Chandi Path recitation and Lalitha Sahasranam every evening. Of course we have special celebrations on the final day - Vijaya Dashami to celebrate the victory of knowledge over ignorance.

Simultaneously we are conducting a 35 day long series of Navagraha planetary yagyas in preparation for Shani Peyarchi - the time Saturn changes signs and moves from Virgo into Libra.

The cost of all nine days is only \$51 and you can add 35 days of Navagraha yagyas for a total of only \$68.

This issue of the newsletter contains so many great photographs from all the Ancestor related yagyas in September. Be sure you see them all!

Due to time constraints, there was no newsletter in August, but one will be distributed this coming week so you can see all the photos from the August Lakshmi and Navagraha program.

As always, thank you for your on-going participation and support. You make so many good things possible.

Enjoy the yagya programs!

Ben Collins



Feeding Sanyasi in Varanasi

In this issue

- * The October 2011 Navaratri Program
- * Upcoming November Yagyas for Divali, Skanda Shasti and Sani Peyarchi (Saturn changing signs)
- * Three Day Shiva/Shakti Yagya Photos
- * Ancestor Yagyas in Varanasi
- * Ganga Yagya in Varanasi
- * The Importance of Ana Daana - the Gift of Food, from the Mahabharata

Navaratri - 9 Nights of the Goddess

September 27 - October 6
for developing prosperity, power, and removing obstacles



Navaratri - Nine Nights for the Divine Mother Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati

Full 11 Day Program - (\$51)

Tuesday, September 27 - Thursday, October 6

Navaratri (9/28 - 10/6), Ganesha Yagya (Sept. 27) and
Vijaya Dashami (Oct. 6)

Navaratri celebrates the power of the goddess as the Divine Mother who manifests as Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati in order to bring power, abundance and wisdom to those who honor her.

We begin this 11 day yagya series with a day long Ganesha Yagya, complete with 1008 offerings into the sacred homa fire.

Then for the next 9 days, our priests perform an elaborate Chandi (shakti or goddess) yagya for 5-6 hours every morning, followed by 2 hours of special evening pujas during which the sacred mantra called Chandi Path is recited along with the 1008 mantras (Sahasranam) of Lalitha; the most beautiful form of the goddess.

The effect of this yagya is to develop our consciousness and power by actualizing the shakti (goddess power) we all have within. This enlivening attracts success, accomplishment, inner and outer abundance, and the deep silence and wisdom that growth towards enlightenment brings.

The final day of the yagya program is called Vijaya Dashami and it celebrates the victory of knowledge over ignorance, affluence over poverty, and power over helplessness.



We begin with a full day-long yagya for Ganesha



The preparations for the yagya are extensive and include the acquisition of hundreds of traditional offerings that include spices, seeds, roots, leaves, twigs and fruits from a huge variety of plants and trees, not to mention bushels of fresh flowers and malas every day.





The rituals associated with Navaratri include performing pujas and offering traditional gifts of clothing, bangles, and a special meal to women; young girls, mothers, and grandmothers.



The final offerings each day are quite elaborate with coconut, saffron, flowers, mustard seeds, bananas, turmeric root, kumkum powder, pomegranate, honey, and sugar cane. A flower mala (left) is offered into the fire (below).



November Yagyas

Because the Navaratri yagyas took place so early this year, the October/November schedule will be a bit spread out, but includes a several significant events.



Diwali - The Festival of Lights
Wednesday, Oct 26th.

This festival centers around the lighting of hundred of little oil lamps to signify the triumph of light over darkness. It commemorates the return of Rama and Sita after their 14 year exile, and the defeat of the demon Ravana. It is also strongly associated with Lakshmi and is the day when she is most willing to grant the wishes of her devotees.

Skanda Shasti
Monday, Oct 31st.

There was a time when a powerful demon by the name of Soorapadman was tormenting the universe. He had earned a boon from Brahma that he could only be killed by the son of Shiva, who was at the time, an ascetic and unmarried. The devas conspired to get Shiva to marry Parvati so they would have a son who would then take care of this demon. After much trouble all of this took place and the son, named Subramanya was born.

He personifies the power of Mars - bright, charming, optimistic, and powerful. In time, Subramanya (also known as Skanda or Murugan) defeated the demon after fighting with him for six days.

This yagya celebrates that event and is good for increasing spiritual and material power, and for balancing the qualities of Mars in our Jyotish chart



Sani Peyarchi - Monday, Nov 14th
Full Yagya program 11/14 through 11/23

Saturn changes signs every 2 1/2 years, and on Nov 14th will be moving from Virgo into Libra, where he will be exalted. The effect of this will be different for each individual, so we are performing this series of yagyas for Saturn - the planet of obstacles, Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, and Hanuman, the embodiment of purity and dedication.

Saturn, when well disposed, gives structure, stability, perseverance, and financial benefits that do not fade.

Ganesha removes all obstacles to the accomplishment of what we desire, so he is a good counter-balance to the negative effects of Saturn.

Hanuman is traditionally a good antidote to Saturn, mostly because the purity and devotion that he personifies isn't vulnerable to the effects of Saturn.

Our yagya program will focus on these three; Saturn, Ganesha, and Hanuman with temple yagyas for each as well as seven days of special vedic yagyas to maximize the beneficial aspects of this time.

Three Day Shiva/Shakti Yagya

Prior to the Ancestor Yagya and Ganga Yagya, our priests and pundits spent three days performing a special yagya for Shiva and Parvati (Shakti). This yagya was performed in our countryside facility about an hour outside of Varanasi just a few yards from the Ganges.

The purpose of the yagya was to invoke the power and purity of both Shiva and his wife Parvati so that the other yagyas would have maximum effectiveness. Each day, the priests chanted Rudram, from Yajur Veda. Then they performed Rudra Abishekam where various ingredients were poured over the Shiva lingam.

In the evenings, the pundits chanted Chandi Path, the primary text that tells the story of the goddess. Chandi Path is also considered to be a 700 verse mantra of exceptional power and effectiveness.

The yagya series concluded with a large fire yagya called havan or homam.

Shiva Yagyas - Day 1



Shakti Yagyas - Day 1



Shiva Yagyas - Day 2



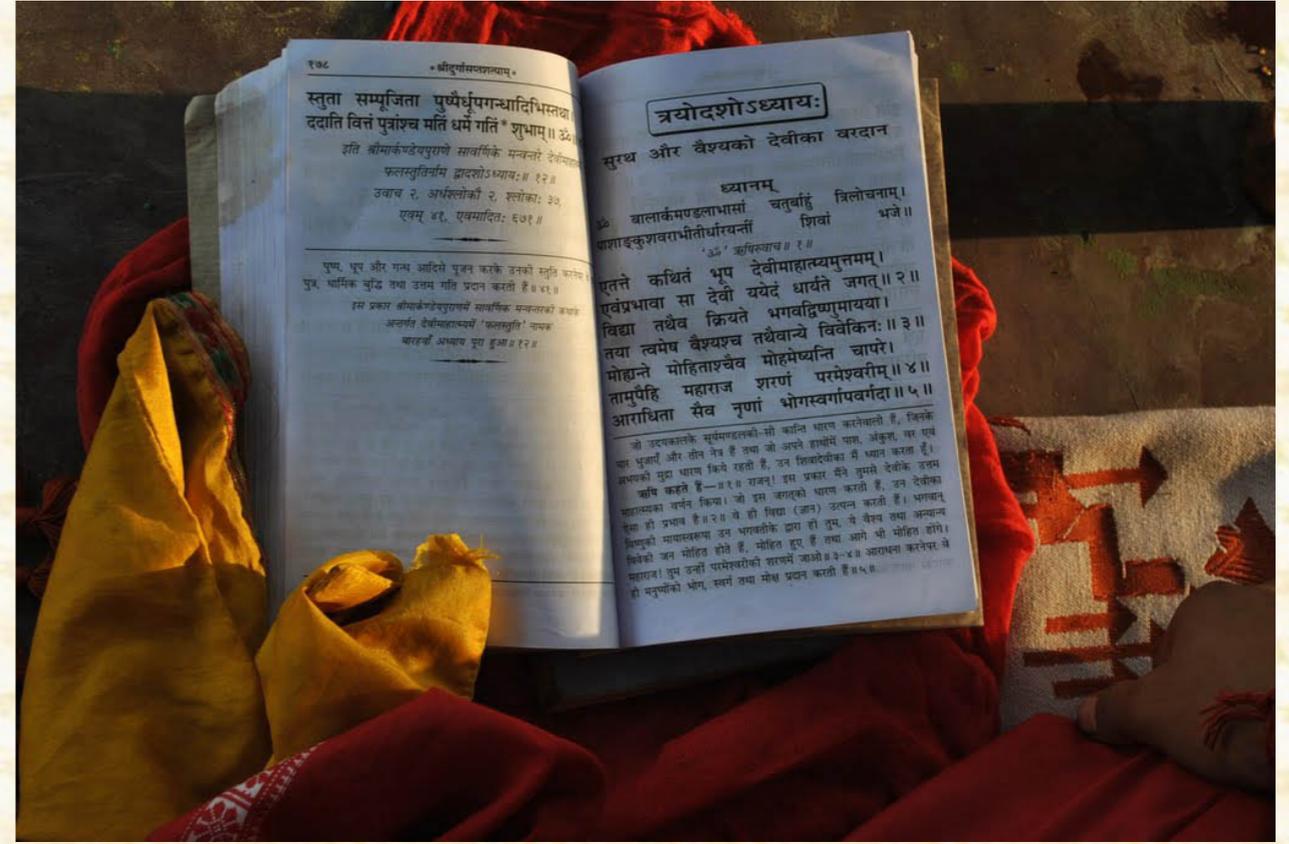
Shakti Yagyas - Day 2



Shiva Yagyas - Day 3



Shakti Yagyas - Day 3



Shiva/Shakti Yagya - Final Day Havan





September Ancestor Yagyas

Every year there is a special period of time in September-October during which special yagyas are performed for the previous generations of our families. These rituals are called Pitru Paksha. We are fortunate to have access to experts in these rituals, not to mention being able to have them performed on the banks of the Ganges in Varanasi, the very best place for them .

In the Mahabharata, there is a story about Karna, who had generously donated gold and gems to charity throughout his life. When he dies and goes to heaven, he is given gold and gems to eat. So he goes to find Indra and asks him why he isn't being served food. Indra explains that during his life on earth, he had donated gold all his life, but never food to his ancestors during Pitru Paksha.

Karna explained that he was unaware of his ancestors, so he never donated anything in their honor. He was allowed to return to earth to perform the same rituals that we performed this month.

During the yagya, there are different offerings mostly in the form of fruit, water, milk, oil lamps, and rice. Towards the end of the ritual you can see the "pinda daan"; balls of cooked rice and barley mixed with ghee and black sesame seeds that are meant to feed our ancestors.







Ganga Yagya

The Ganga Yagya is an important part of the Ancestor series. There are many stories about the origin of Ganga, but she is always considered to be a sacred river in heaven, who descends first to earth and then to the nether worlds in order to cleanse the souls of the inhabitants.

Her descent from heaven was softened by Shiva who allowed her to flow through his hair so she would not sweep away the earth and to this day her purifying pace is slow and majestic.

Because the Shiva/Shakti yagya generates great power, and the ancestor yagyas are so purifying, we end our yagya series with thanks to the river Ganga and enjoy her cooling and gentle presence.





18th Century painting of Ganga Devi



The Importance of Ana Daana - gift of food (from the Mahabharata)

“I shall now tell thee what those gifts are, O Yudhisthira, by making which a person, even if guilty of having committed sinful acts, may become graced with merit. Of all kinds of gifts, that of food is regarded as the best.

One desirous of attaining to merit should, with a sincere heart, make gifts of food. Food is the life-breath of men. From it all creatures are born. All the worlds of living creatures are established upon food. Hence food is applauded. The deities, Rishis, Pitris, and men, all praise food.

King Rantideva, in days of old, proceeded to Heaven by making gifts of food. Food that is good and that has been acquired lawfully, should be given, with a cheerful heart, unto such Brahmanas as are possessed of Vedic lore.

Such a man has never to take birth in an intermediate order, whose food, given with a cheerful heart is taken by a thousand Brahmanas. A person, O chief of men, by feeding ten thousand Brahmanas, becomes cleansed, enjoys piety and is devoted to Yoga practices.

A Brahmana conversant with the Vedas, by giving away food acquired by him as alms, unto a Brahmana devoted to the study of the Vedas, succeeds in attaining to happiness here on this earth.

A Kshatriya who, without taking anything that belongs to a Brahmana, protects his subjects lawfully, and makes gifts of food, obtained by the exercise of his strength, unto

Brahmanas foremost in Vedic knowledge, with concentrated heart, succeeds by such conduct, O thou of righteous soul, in cleansing himself, O son of Pandu, of all his sinful acts.

Any Vaisya who divides the produce of his fields into six equal shares and makes a gift of one of those shares unto Brahmanas, succeeds by such conduct in cleansing himself from every sin.

The Sudra who, earning food by hard labour and at the risk of life itself, makes a gift of it to Brahmanas, becomes cleansed from every sin. That man who, by putting forth his physical strength, earns food without doing any act of injury to any creature, and makes gift of it unto Brahmanas succeeds in avoiding all calamities.

Any person by cheerfully making gifts of food acquired by lawful means unto Brahmanas pre-eminent for Vedic lore, becomes cleansed of all his sins. By treading in the path of the righteous one becomes freed from all sins. A person by making gifts of such food as is productive of great energy, becomes himself possessed of great energy.

The path made by charitable persons is always trod by those that are blessed with wisdom. They that make gifts of food are regarded as givers of life. The merit they acquire by such gifts is eternal. Hence, a person should, under all circumstances, seek to earn food by lawful means, and having earned to make always gifts of it unto deserving men.

Food is the great refuge of the world of living creatures. By making gifts of food, one has never to go to hell. Hence, one should always make gifts of food, having earned it by lawful means. The householder should always seek to eat after having made a gift of food unto a Brahmana. Every man should make the day fruitful by making gifts of food. 1

A person by feeding, O king, a thousand Brahmanas all of whom are conversant with duties and the scriptures and the sacred histories, has not to go to Hell and to return to this world for undergoing rebirths. Endued with the fruition of every wish, he enjoys great felicity hereafter. Possessed of such merit, he sports in happiness, freed from every anxiety, possessed of beauty of form and great fame and endued with wealth.

I have thus told thee all about the high merit of gifts of food. Even this is the root of all righteousness and merit, as also of all gifts, O Bharata!”

- Mahabharata, Anusasana Prava, Section 62





“I shall now tell thee what those gifts are, O Yudhisthira, by making which a person, even if guilty of having committed sinful acts, may become endued with merit. Of all kinds of gifts, that of food is regarded as the best. One desirous of attaining to merit should, with a sincere heart, make gifts of food. Food is the life-breath of men.” - Mahabharata, Anusasana Prava, Section 62