



Dear Yagya Friends,

This month is going to be interesting because we begin with a very long and complete lunar eclipse. We have an absolutely amazing program with 27 pundits chanting for us on the banks of the Ganges River during the entire time of the eclipse.

Their focus, and ours for the balance of the month will be on Mrityunjaya Mantra. This powerful mantra comes from the Rig and Yajur Vedas and is associated with the form of Shiva who transcends mortality. The mantra is useful for developing enlightenment, developing inner peacefulness, and specifically supports good health. There is an article in this newsletter that tells the story of the Mrityunjaya mantra and discusses these topics in greater detail.

Next month is one of my favorites with Guru Poornima on the 15th when we celebrate the blessings of the Guru. Our yagya series for July will feature special yagyas on Guru Poornima followed by yagyas for Shiva in his form as Dakshinamurti - the first teacher, and for Veda Vyasa who organized the Vedas and wrote the Mahabharata. We will also have an extensive program of Veda recitation.

Also in this issue there are two extensive photo galleries from the May yagya series for Lakshmi and Jupiter. There are great photos and as always some explanation of the yagyas themselves.

As always, thanks for your participation and support.

Enjoy your month!

Ben Collins



In this issue

- * June Eclipse and Mrityunjaya Yagyas
- * Up coming yagyas:
 - Guru Poornima - July 15
 - July Jupiter and Shiva Yagyas - July 16-24
- * The Story of Mrityunjaya
- * Photos - May Yagya Series
 - Jupiter Temple Yagya
 - Dakshinamurti Temple Yagya
 - Lakshmi Group and Temple Yagyas
- * Verse from Atharva Veda



June Yagyas Total Lunar Eclipse 6-15 Mrityunjaya Health and Enlightenment 6-16 to 6-24

Traditionally an eclipse, particularly a total eclipse, is valuable for spiritual purposes. It is said that mantra repetition has a unique power while the eclipse is taking place and some traditional sources say that each mantra repetition is equivalent to 1,000 repetitions at any other time.

The eclipse will be visible throughout India and we have arranged for 27 priests to perform pujas and chant mantras during the entire eclipse from 10:53 PM on the 15th to 4:32 AM on the 16th - India time. Their work will be performed in our Varanasi facility on the banks of the Ganga River (see photos on left).

The focus of the mantra repetition will be Mrityunjaya mantra. This mantra, associated with Shiva, has many different effects; supporting improved health, removing fear of death, and accelerating progress to enlightenment. It is also an extremely effective antidote to difficulties caused by Saturn, who will finally be resuming forward motion in June.

Of all the different yagyas that we perform, Mrityunjaya seems to bring the deepest sense of peacefulness.

Full details and sign up are available on the Puja.net site.



July Yagyas - Guru Poornima - July 15 - 24



Guru Poornima is the special time of year when we can enhance our connection with the universal principle of the “guru” - one who passes along knowledge and enlightenment and thus greatly speed up our personal journey towards enlightenment.

This month the yagyas will focus on Shiva in the form of Dakshinamurti; the first teacher who passes along knowledge and gives enlightenment, Saraswati who is the embodiment of wisdom and Veda Vyasa, the rishi who organized the Vedas; the source of spiritual knowledge.

For ten days we begin with two hours of Vedic recitation. Then Ganesha puja is performed, followed by Navagraha puja for the nine planets, the nakshatra of the day, and the deity of the day. Shiva is honored with an extensive abhishekam (ritual bathing), as is goddess Saraswati and the rishi Veda Vyasa. The day concludes with the performance of homam; the vedic fire ritual.

We will also sponsor a special event in Varanasi in which we provide a special meal to the sanyasi there.

Full details and sign up will be available on the Puja.net site the beginning of July.



The Story of Mrityunjaya

The Story

The once was a couple who were very devoted to Shiva. Mrikandu was known as a sage who possessed deep spiritual knowledge, but who for reasons related to past karmas had no children. For many years both he and his wife, Marudamati devoted themselves to their meditations and pujas, praying to Shiva for his help.

One day Shiva appeared and asked what he could do for them. They explained their situation and requested a son. Shiva agreed and gave them a choice; they could have a child who would live for one hundred years, but who would be a never ending source of trouble to them, or they could have a very divine child, but whose span of life would be limited to sixteen years. They chose the spiritual child.

In due time, the wife became pregnant and delivered a healthy baby boy. They named him Markandeya and raised him with a deep appreciation for spiritual values and the importance of striving for liberation.

Clearly this was a special soul, because by the time he was eight, he had mastered the Vedas and learned the secrets of Gayatri Mantra from his father.



Yama, Lord of Death

Neither parent ever told the son about his abbreviated life span so as his sixteenth birthday was approaching he was surprised to be feeling like something was amiss. On the morning of his birth he arose as he always did and sat to practice his meditation and then performed his morning Shiva puja.

As the hour of his birth arrived, the assistants of Yama, the god of death arrived and attempted to throw their noose around the boy's neck in order to withdraw the prana (life force) from his body. But as fate would have it, they missed and the noose ended up

around the lingam and the boy.

As he started to feel faint, Markandeya clung to the Shiva lingam and repeated the following prayer:

*Trayam bakam yajamahe sugnadhim pusti vardanam
Urvar ukamiva bandhanam mrytyor muksiya mamritatay*

Loosely translated it means;

"I take refuge in the three eyed one who smells sweet and who is worth of reverence. Bless me and free me from the clutches of death in the same easy way a cucumber is picked from the vine"



Shiva emerged from the lingam and in so doing protected the boy from Yama's assistants. They could come no closer while Shiva was there. So they ran off to tell Yama what was happening. Yama returned riding his buffalo and with great indignation told Shiva to get out of the way because the time had come for Yama to take the boy's soul.

Shiva, who has a quick temper at times, was having none of this and he took the noose that Yama's assistants had used and tied up Yama himself releasing him only after he had promised to leave the

boy alone.

Then he turned his attention to Markandeya. "I can not stop the flow of time in the universe, but I can stop you from aging. Therefore I stop your aging process at this moment. You will not age further. Yama can not claim you."

Shiva left, leaving Yama tied up. Over time, this started to cause problems because nothing could die. The universe was getting over crowded and this was

quickly becoming serious. So the gods went to Shiva, explained the situation and Yama was set free to do his necessary work in maintaining the proper functioning of the universe.

त्रयम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारूकमिव बन्धनान् मृत्योर्मुक्षिय मामृतात् ॥
trayambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam ।
urvārūkamiva bandhanān mṛtyormukṣiya māmṛtāt । ।

Mrityunjaya Mantra

This mantra is usually known by the translation of Mrytu as death, and jaya as victory, which makes sense given the story behind it. But in practice, the effects of the mantra are much broader than removing fear of death.

The mantra is certainly of great value to those who are about to make their transition out of this world. Over the past fifteen years of Puja.net we've seen many instances when the mantra, even when just listened to by the individual brought great peace and calm.

Several times Mrityunjaya Yagyas were performed with the outcome that the person recovered sufficiently to comfortably complete their good-byes to family and friends. In other instances, an individual was on the brink of death and a few performances of the Mrityunjaya Yagyas were enough to bring about an unexpected and thorough recovery.

It is safe to say that when serious illness or end of life transitions are concerned, this mantra and the associated yagyas have no equal. However our situation need not be dire in order to receive benefit from Mrityunjaya Mantra or Yagya.

Shiva and Saturn

There is a story that Saturn wanted the blessings of Shiva and so he performed a very long and difficult tapas (austerity) in which he lived only on air for a very long time. Shiva was duly impressed with the strength of his focus and devotion and made Saturn the deliverer of Justice. To this day, Saturn delivers to us the difficult but essential karmas that we'd probably rather avoid, but which are essential for our growth and spiritual progress.

Shiva is considered to be the lord of the Navagraha (nine planets) and symbolically, he wears the crescent Moon in his hair. Because of this, and because of the direct connection between Shiva and Saturn, Shiva mantras, especially Mrityunjaya are an effective antidote to the negative effects of Saturn.

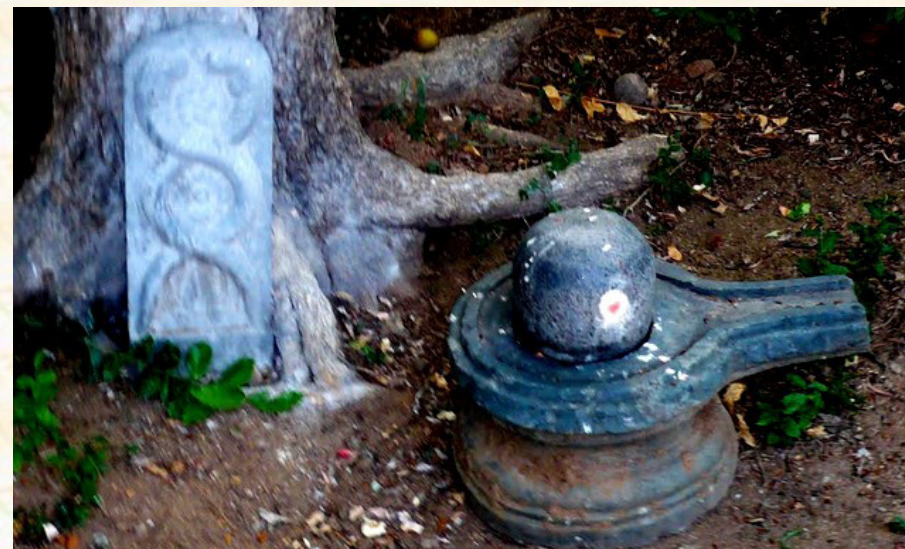
Parashara, the rishi considered to be the father of Jyotish (Hindu Astrology) prescribes Mrityunjaya Mantra as an effective antidote for many different kinds of astrological problems, especially those related to Saturn.

Mrityunjaya and Moksha

What does victory over death really mean? I doubt that it means that we live for ever in a form associated with the personality and body as we think of ourselves now. In fact, the vedic tradition says that in all of creation there are only a few who accomplish this, Markandeya being one, and Hanuman being another.

The vedic tradition would say victory over death means moksha, usually translated as liberation, meaning that we are freed from the cycle of rebirth. Since this state would be one of great peacefulness and freedom, any progress toward moksha would mean more of those qualities in our lives. It's not all or nothing!

I suspect that relatively few people are destined to achieve full enlightenment in this lifetime, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't make the attempt. In fact, even if we fall short of the ultimate goal, the progress we make will mean that our life is better. The benefit of progress is great success, happiness, comfort, and the spiritual fulfillment that is independent from any material condition. Mrityunjaya mantra and yagyas are a great means to accomplish this goal and make a valuable and effective contribution to anyone's spiritual program.



Mrytunjaya Stotra - by Markandeya Rishi

I meditate on that victor over death,
Who has moon, sun and fire as eyes,
Who has a smiling face,
Who sits on two lotus flowers,
Whose hands shine with the sign the rope,
The deer and the garland of rudraksha,
Who has the pleasant shine of the ice,
Who has a body drenched by nectar,
From billions of moons,
Who ornaments himself with several garlands,
Who is very handsome,
Who can attract the entire world,
And who is the lord of all beings.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who is the angry one,
Who is the lord of all beings,
Who is stable,
Who has a blue neck,
And who is the consort of Uma.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who has a blue neck,
Who is the form of death,
Who knows past, present and future,
And who destroyed Yama, the god of death.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who has a blue neck,
Who has a third eye,
Who is clean,
And who is dazzlingly bright.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who judges according to merit,

Who is the greatest god,
Who is the lord of the universe,
And who is the teacher of the world.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who is the God of gods,
Who is the lord of the earth,
Who is the god of devas,
And who has a bull on his flag.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who has three eyes,
Who has four hands,
Who is peaceful,
And who wears matted hair and a crown.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who is covered with ash,
All over his body,
And who wears serpents,
As ornaments.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who is limitless,
Who cannot be explained,
Who is peaceful,
Who is the killer of ignorance,
And who wears the garland of eyes.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who is happiness,
Who is beyond thought,
Who is stable,
And who grants salvation.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who is the god half male half female,
And who is the darling of Parvathy.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who creates the state of deluge,
And who is the god who made the beginning.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Whose hair is the sky,
Who has a different eye,
And who has collected half of the moon to wear.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who carries the river Ganga,
And keeps moon as an ornament,
Who is Lord Shankara,
And who carries a trident.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who grants heaven and salvation,
Who looks after creation, upkeep and destruction.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who can grant a life of an eon,
Who can bless you with a long life,
Bereft of any sickness.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who is Shiva as well as Ishwara,
Who is the great god,
Who gives correct judgments,
And who is always peaceful.

What can death do to one,
Who bows down to that god,
Who takes responsibility,
For creation, upkeep and destruction,
And who is a great teacher.

Any one reading this prayer,
Written by Markandeya,
In front of Lord Shiva,
Would not have,
Fear of death,
Nor fear of fire and thieves.

Reading it one hundred times,
In times of misery,
Will get rid of it,
And reading it with a clean mind,
Would make one get all he wants.

Oh great god, Who has won over the god of death,
Please save me as I bow to you,
From births, deaths, old age and disease,
And also the ties of Karma which affect me.

I appeal to the God,
“My soul goes towards you,
And my mind always meditates on you,”
And the chant of Trayambaka Mantra*,
And salute that Samba,
Who is the inner soul of the destroyer,
And pray, “destroy all life’s problems,
Oh Lord of Yoga, I salute you.”



May Jupiter Temple Yagya

The period when planets change signs, is the best time to perform yagyas to balance and enhance their positive manifestations because they are more receptive to the influence of the yagyas.

This temple is located a short distance from Kanchipuram in the countryside and combines Shiva as Dakshinamurti, the archetypal Guru, and the Navagraha (9 planets).

The Navagraha are oriented so that the Sun is facing east. The other planets face various other directions, with Jupiter facing North and Mars facing South in order to protect the Sun. Saturn is flanked on either side by Rahu and Ketu, while Mercury and the Moon flank Venus.



After being washed with water and coated with sesame oil, many liters of milk are poured over the murtis. The milk is followed by haldi (turmeric) and then sandalwood mixed with water. According to the Vedic tradition the deities are invoked in the murti and the abishekam yagya purifies the murti and feeds the deity.





After the abishekam, the murtis are dried and anointed with sandalwood and dark red kumkum. Then they are decorated with beautiful fresh flower malas and cloth of the proper color. Offerings of fruit and coconut are placed around the feet of each of the Navagraha.

The last step in the yagya is to offer the light of burning camphor, symbolic of the dissolution of ignorance in the flames of knowledge and consciousness. The smell of burning camphor is also noticeably purifying in the temple.



May Dakshinamurti Temple Yagya



The deity associated with Jupiter (Guru in Sanskrit) is the form of Shiva called Dakshinamurti, thus making him perfect for the yagya series celebrating Jupiter's movement into the sign of Aries (Mesha).

This form of Shiva is generally shown with four arms, seated comfortably under a tree facing south. Under his right foot is usually found a small demon who personifies ignorance. His right hand is raised in the mudra of a blessing offering reassurance that the pursuit of knowledge (jnana) and enlightenment (moksha) are all that are needed to solve problems and to receive his blessings and protection.





As always, the priests begin by washing the murti and coating it with fresh sesame oil. Then water, milk, turmeric, and sandal are poured over the deity while mantras called Sri Rudram and Chamakam are chanted.



After the abishekam...beautiful ornamentation and offerings of fruit, coconut, food and flowers are made followed by the offering light in a puja called aarti. (next page)



May Lakshmi/Kubera Yagyas

Lakshmi is the source of all abundance in both material and spiritual forms. Kubera is abundance that can be expressed simply as "cash". So we performed five days of yagyas to attract both the wholesome abundance of Lakshmi, and the more worldly abundance provided by Kubera.

The yagyas were performed for four days in our own yagya facility. Each day the program began with abishekam in which offerings were poured over the crystal murtis (see below). The yagyas conclude with a powerful homam or fire yagya.

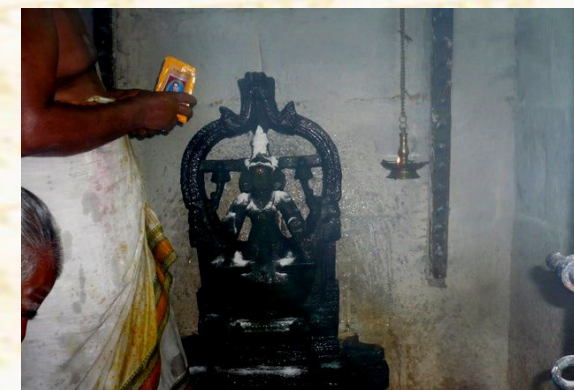
In southern India, this is the summer season and so lotus flowers, the flower most associated with Lakshmi, were in bloom as used for decorations.







The Lakshmi Temple yagya was performed in a beautiful temple that, rather uniquely, combines Shiva and Vishnu deities in the same complex. Note the western style bell tower in the upper left.







“The sacred knowledge rose up with the seekers of sacred knowledge. The enlightened ones rose up with immortality; I lead you forward to that castle; reach it; enter it. May it offer you happiness as well as protection.”

-Atharva Veda (XIX.19.10)