



Dear Yagya Friends,

None of the yagyas we organize are quite as picturesque or interesting as the Hanuman and Rahu/Ketu yagyas. This issue of our monthly newsletter focuses on these two beautiful yagya series and the temples in which they take place.

The story of Rahu/Ketu and The Churning of the Ocean of Milk comes from the Shrimad Bagavatam Purana. It is a fascinating tale and one which I have presented in condensed form. After you read this story Rahu and Ketu will make a whole lot more sense.

There are two extensive photo galleries from the April Hanuman and May Rahu/Ketu yagyas. They are exceptionally beautiful and I've included some descriptions so you'll know a bit more about the yagya itself.

Next month we have a special yagya planned for the total Lunar eclipse on June 15th. Our Rahu/Ketu yagyas this month are a great preparation. Following the eclipse we have nine days of Mrytunjaya yagyas for health and enlightenment.

A few words about technology. These newsletters are published using Acrobat PDF format because it can be read by anyone on any computer or operating system. I've had many requests to "keep it simple" so that file sizes are small for faster downloads. So that's what I've done, less fancy stuff like buttons and audio...just photos and text. Happy to accomodate everyone!

As always thanks for your interest and support. I'm always open to suggestions and comments so please don't hesitate to email me - BenCollins@puja.net

Enjoy your month!

Ben Collins



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

Traditionally an eclipse, particularly a total eclipse, is especially valuable for spiritual purposes. It is said that mantra repetition has a unique power while the eclipse is taking place.

Some traditional sources say that each mantra repetition is equivalent to 1,000 at any other time, some say 10,000 and a few sources even say 100,000. In any case, it is a valuable opportunity and we intend to take full advantage of it!

The eclipse will be visible throughout in India and will take place late at night. We are planning on having at least 11 priests performing pujas and chanting mantras during the entire eclipse.

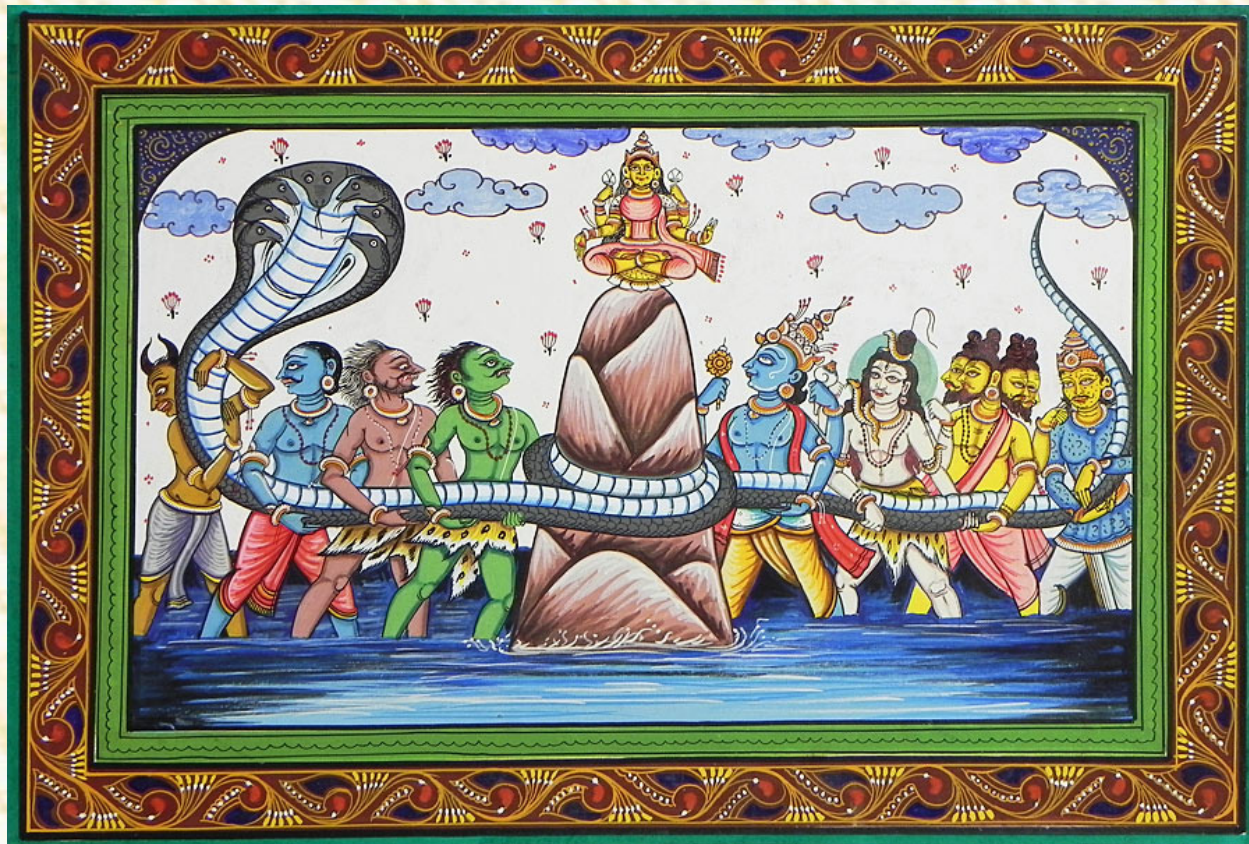
Our recent yagya themes have been Dharma in April, Rahu/Ketu in May, leading up to our nine days of Mrytunjaya yagyas in June.

Mrytunjaya mantra is wonderful and is the subject of an in depth article in the next newsletter. 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 be resuming forward motion in June).

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

Complete details will be available around June 1st.





The Story of Rahu and Ketu

Both parts of this month's yagyas are related to the story called the "Churning of the Ocean of Milk" from a collection of stories called the Shrimad Bagavatam Purana. There are several different versions of the story because it is quite long and as a practical matter, everyone has to shorten it somehow. This article is loosely based on the version contained in "The Greatness of Saturn" by Dr. Robert Svoboda. (available from Amazon).

Our priests and pundits picked the first of these two yagyas because Rahu and Ketu changed signs earlier this month moving into Taurus (Ketu) and Scorpio (Rahu). This movement will bring some degree of change to everyone depending on the specifics of their Jyotish chart. The second set of yagyas for Lakshmi was chosen because near the end of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk story, Lakshmi emerges from the ocean just before Dhanvantri - the Divine Physician arrives holding the pot of amrita.

Amrita, the nectar of immortality was needed by the gods because of a curse by a rather foul tempered rishi named Durvasa who was the brother of the Moon. He cursed the gods to lose their health, power, and wealth. This meant that in

their never ending battles with the demons, the gods could now lose their lives and not being immortal, there were severe consequences for the universe.

Perceiving the seriousness of their situation, the gods first appealed to Brahma, the creator. He was stumped and so appealed to Vishnu who is the protector of the universe. Vishnu told them that time was against them and that they were going to have to find a way to cooperate with the demons to churn the ocean of milk to obtain the amrita.

It seems that in the process, the gods were a bit duplicitous and promised the demons half of the nectar in exchange for their cooperation; a promise they had no intention of fulfilling. The Ocean of Milk was so vast, that they had to use Mount Mandara as a churn. Being so large, it needed a pivot on which to turn, so Vishnu assumed the form of a turtle who's shell was so hard that the mountain could rotate on it. To help, Vishnu danced invisibly on the top of the mountain in order to press it down.

In order to turn the churn, the devas and demons obtained the services of Vasuki, a Naga or divine snake. They wrapped him around the mountain and the demons took him by the head, leaving the tail to the devas. Back and forth





they pulled whipping up huge waves in the process. The pain was so great that Vasuki began spewing poison from his mouth making the demons so ill that they couldn't continue. Vishnu stepped in and made Vasuki immune to pain, and revived the demons.

The churning resumed and the first thing that emerged from the ocean was a powerful poison called halahala. It was so powerful that it threatened to poison the entire universe. Everyone was afraid, but Shiva took the poison into his mouth intending to swallow it. Parvati, fearful that it might kill him, grabbed him by the throat and prevented him from swallowing. The strength of the poison was so strong that it turned his throat dark blue, and to this day Shiva is known

as Neelakantha - the blue throated one.

As the churning continued, treasures began to emerge; Kamadhenu the wish fulfilling cow was claimed by the rishis. Next came a horse who was claimed by Bali, a demon King. Airavata, the divine elephant was taken by Indra, the King of the gods. Kausthubha, a beautiful gem was taken by Vishnu to be worn on his chest and Parijataka a wish fulfilling tree was sent to heaven. The eighth treasure was Lakshmi, the goddess of abundance. Her radiance filled the gods with energy and simultaneously deprived the demons of theirs. She herself chose to become the wife of Vishnu after a heartfelt plea by Indra who wrote Lakshmi Ashtakam in her honor.

After Lakshmi came Varuni the goddess of liquor whom the demons happily took for their own. Lastly, came Dhanvantri who emerged from the ocean carrying a pot of nectar which was quickly snapped up by the demons. As they gathered to distribute it amongst themselves (intending



to deny the devas their share), Vishnu assumed the form of the most spectacularly beautiful and sensuous woman ever seen. Her name was Mohini and she distracted the demons while the gods distributed the amrita amongst themselves.

As the gods were consuming the amrita, Rahu, the son of the sage Viprachitti snuck in line and was about to consume his portion of amrita when the Sun and Moon who had been watching from above called attention to the imposter in their midst. With

lightning reflexes Vishnu threw his discus and severed the head of Rahu from his body. But it was too late. A few drops of the divine amrita dripped down his throat instantly making him immortal even though cut in two. As he left, Rahu cursed the Sun and Moon to be periodically each consumed by him and indeed they are to this day because Rahu and Ketu are the cause of eclipses. They swallow them up only to have them emerge a few hours later.

Rahu is responsible for the eclipse of the Moon and Ketu for that of the Sun. In an individual's Jyotish chart, these planets are called chaya grahas; or shadow planets which take on the effects of the planet who owns the sign they are in. If other planets are in the same sign, Rahu and Ketu take on the flavor of those planets, many times magnifying their effects. When well aspected Rahu can give great fame and good fortune. Ketu, when powerful and positive is the giver of deep insight, transcendent wisdom, and ultimately enlightenment.



Some of the photos in this article are of the spectacular sculpture of this story in the Suvarnabhumi International Terminal in Bangkok. Everything is there; Mount Mandara resting on the turtle form of Vishnu, and Vasuki the snake wrapped around the mountain being pulled back and forth by the demons and devas. Vishnu is dancing

happily on the top of the mountain. If you fly to India from the west coast, it is well worth taking Thai Airways just to see this.



After the churning was completed and the gods had obtained their immortality, Vishnu was left with this big turtle shell on his back spoiling his usually divine appearance. Of course, he had a new wife in Lakshmi, and she did not wish to be married to a turtle! So Vishnu went to the sacred site of Kanchipuram, sat down on the ground, made a Shiva lingam out of sand and performed Rudra Abishekam. In response, Shiva appeared and removed his shell.

As might be expected a temple was constructed on this spot and the sand lingam is (supposedly) preserved in the main sanctum of the temple. The name

of the temple is Katchepeshwara and it is located in Kanchipuram about 10

minutes from our yagya facility.

In one corner of the temple grounds, is a very very old pipal tree under which there are several hundred Rahu and Ketu statues with an occasional Shiva lingam mixed in. For our Rahu/Ketu yagya, our priests carefully washed each one, coated it with sesame oil, made offerings of many gallons of milk and then applied turmeric, sandal paste and kumkum (red powder symbolic of Lakshmi).

Astrologically, Rahu represents things that are foreign, and Ketu represents the search for enlightenment. It is appropriate that we, a collection of foreigners who pursue enlightenment, are taking good care of this temple. When you visit it in person, the power and purity are unmistakable and undoubtedly something profound is happening.

After a puja, it is customary to walk around the temple in a ritual of respect called pradakshina. At the Rahu/Ketu area it is usually done outside the raised area where the nagas are. But if you are really daring, you walk up among them and walk around the tree nine times. You are guaranteed to have strange dreams that night and deep meditations the next day. Always works, every single time. This is indeed a intriguing temple with more than its share of mystery.



May Rahu/Ketu Yagya Katchepeshwara Temple, Kanchipuram



The temple is located just off one of the main streets in Kanchipuram. As soon as you step through the doorway, there is silence because of the large open space. The clutter of the city is immediately left behind, and the spiritual atmosphere predominates. It is a peaceful place.

Most temples have a water tank, but few are as clean and soothing. The gopuram you see in the background of this photo is for the Shiva temple where you see the sand lingam that Vishnu used when he needed Shiva's help.



The Rahu/Ketu area is located under an ancient tree in the southwest corner of the temple, because Rahu/Ketu rules that portion of the compass.



Under the tree you see many images of snakes intertwined. These represent Rahu/Ketu and the imagery is very much like that of the Kundalini. Around the tree you will see yards of thread and twine as well as little beds that are hung there by young couples desirous of children. Astrologically Ketu is powerful in denying children when poorly placed in the jyotish chart of the mother.



Each of the over one hundred murtis is carefully cleaned and coated with sesame oil. Then they are washed with water.

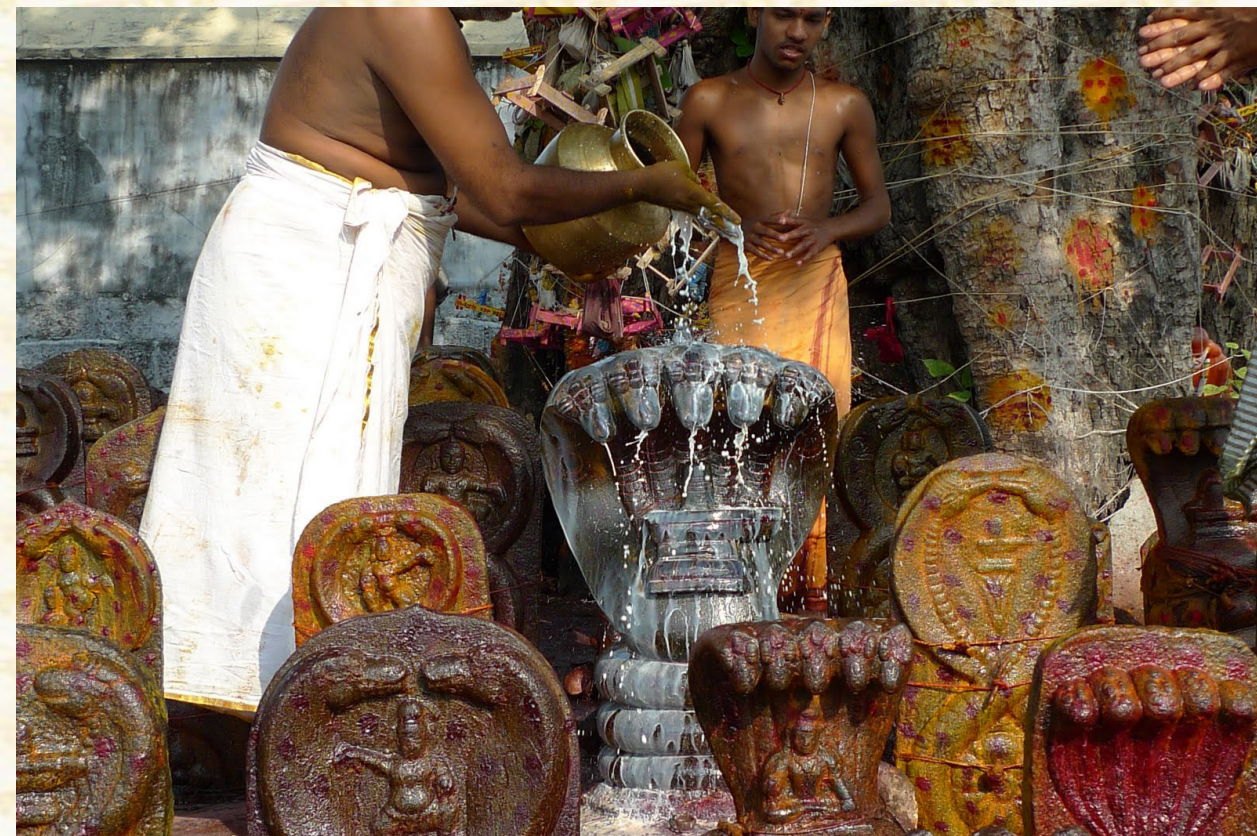


Meanwhile, other priests are mixing tumeric with water. This will be used to coat each statue. Afterwards, their hands will be yellow for several days!

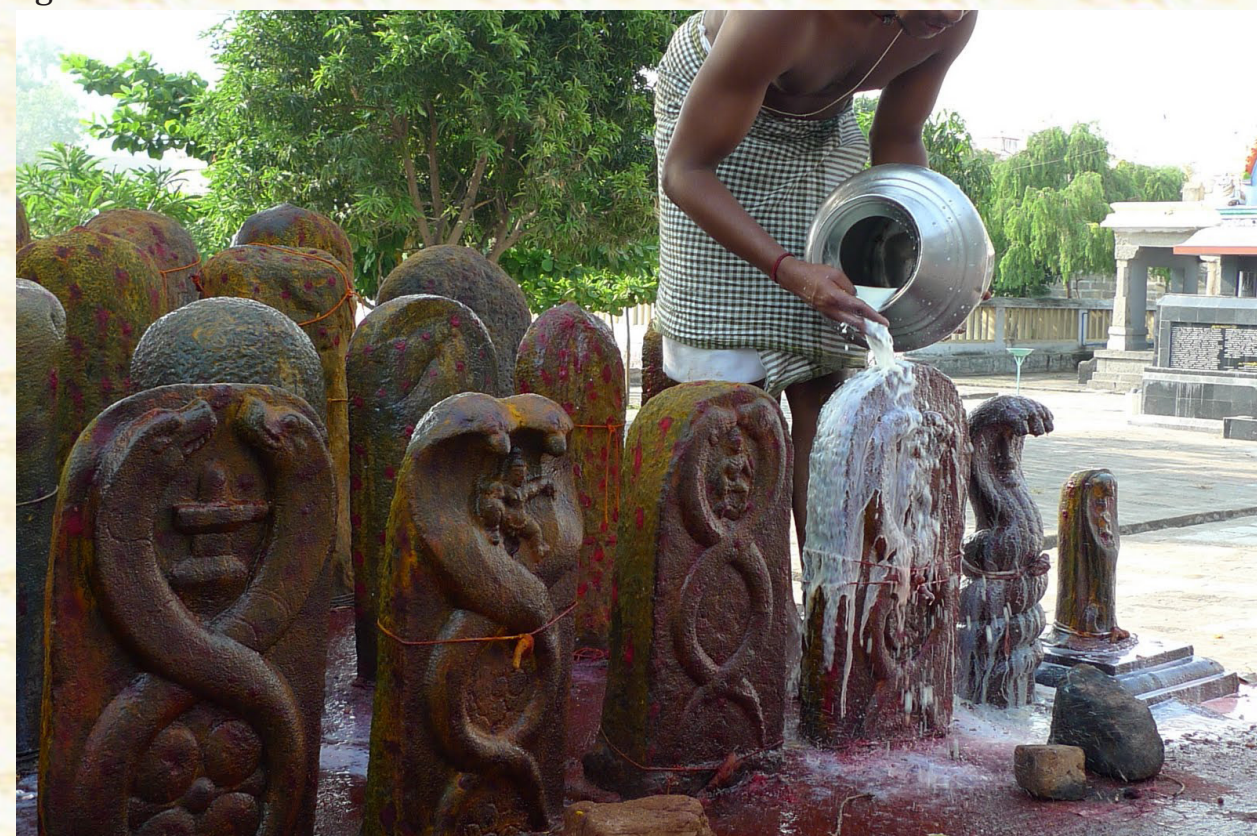




After being washed with water, milk is poured over them as a offering of food and purity, while mantras are recited. It takes many gallons of milk to complete this stage of the yagya.



You can see the amazing variety of carving on these stones. The theme is usually the same with intertwined snakes, but note how some have a Shiva lingam, some have a dancing Shiva, and some have a meditating Shiva. The snake images are varied as well.





Each naga is coated in turmeric (haldi in sanskrit) as a symbol of purification.



Then red dots of kumkum are placed on each. Kumkum is made from turmeric mixed with lime juice and heated in a special way to turn it red. It is symbolic of Lakshmi's blessings. Then, each naga is decorated with a little flower mala.





The decorations bring each murti to life, especially the Shiva Nataraj above.



The last step is to offer the light of burning camphor while the concluding mantras are recited. Camphor burns with a purifying scent and leaves no residue, so it is symbolic of the way that the limited ego is absorbed into the infinite. Ketu is depicted as having no head and thus no place for the ego, so Ketu is another symbol of the state of enlightenment.

April Rama/Hanuman Dharma Yagya

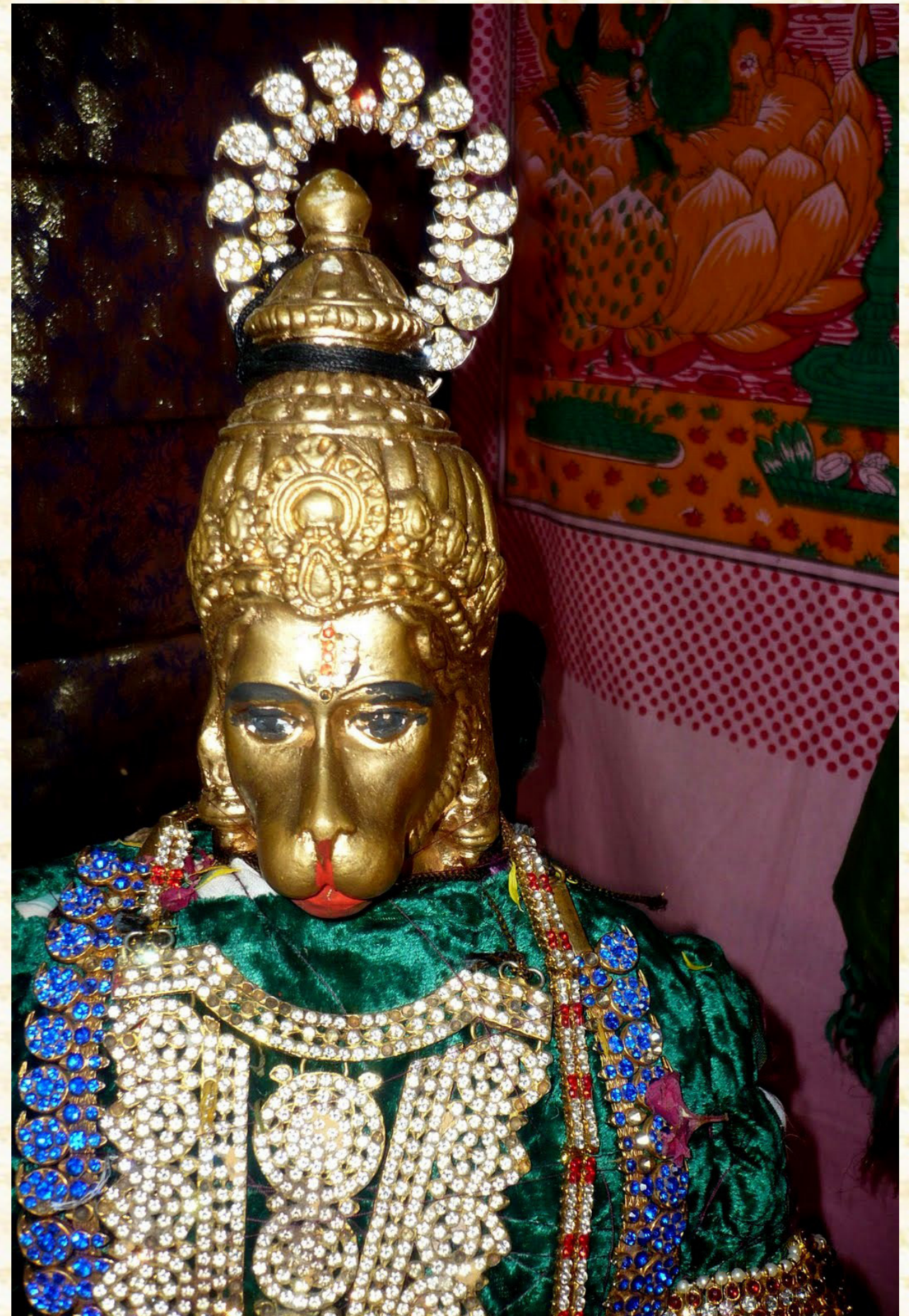
Hanuman Temple, Kanchipuram



At the beginning of the yagya series, our priests performed a series of yagyas for Rama, Sita, and Hanuman. The story of these forms of the divine is told in the epic Ramayana in which Sita, Rama's wife, is kidnapped by the demon Ravana. Hanuman helps Rama to rescue her and in the process helps to restore dharma (natural law). It is a great story.

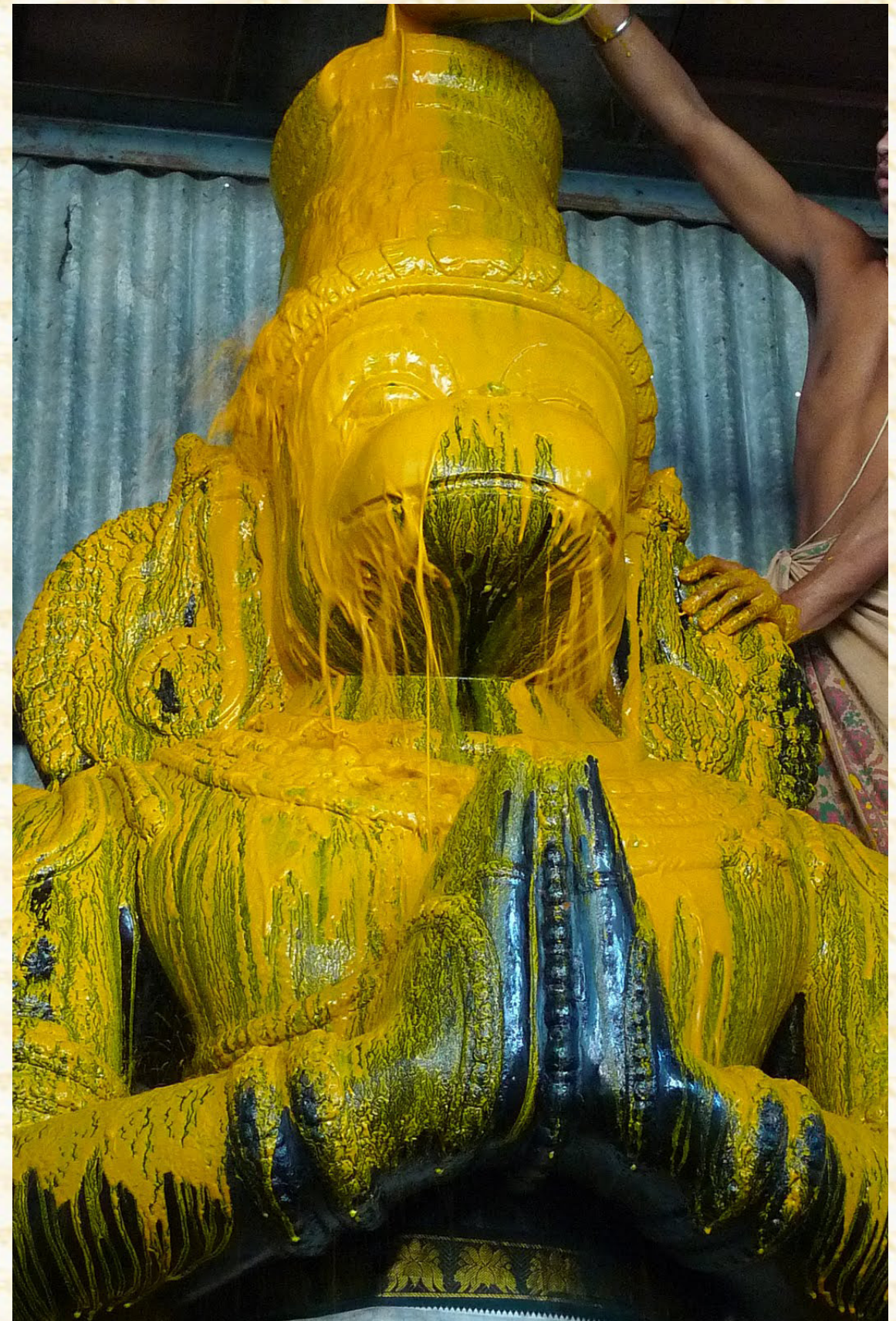
Hanuman is the perfect symbol of devotion, strength, and determination. He is the son of the wind (Vayu) and is considered to be an incarnation of Shiva the destroyer of ignorance. Hanuman yagyas are considered to be one of the best antidotes to a difficult Saturn. By combining Hanuman with Rama/Sita yagyas, we have a powerful way to connect ourselves with the force of dharma.

The last day took place in a Hanuman temple a few blocks from our yagya facility.





First, Hanuman is coated with sesame oil. The South Indian granite is naturally a dark green and the sesame oil turns it a rich dark black.



Then gallons of water mixed with turmeric are poured over the Hanuman in a cleansing shower. He is covered from head to toe in yellow which looks very dramatic.



The priest standing next to the Hanuman gives an idea of just how tall the Hanuman is.



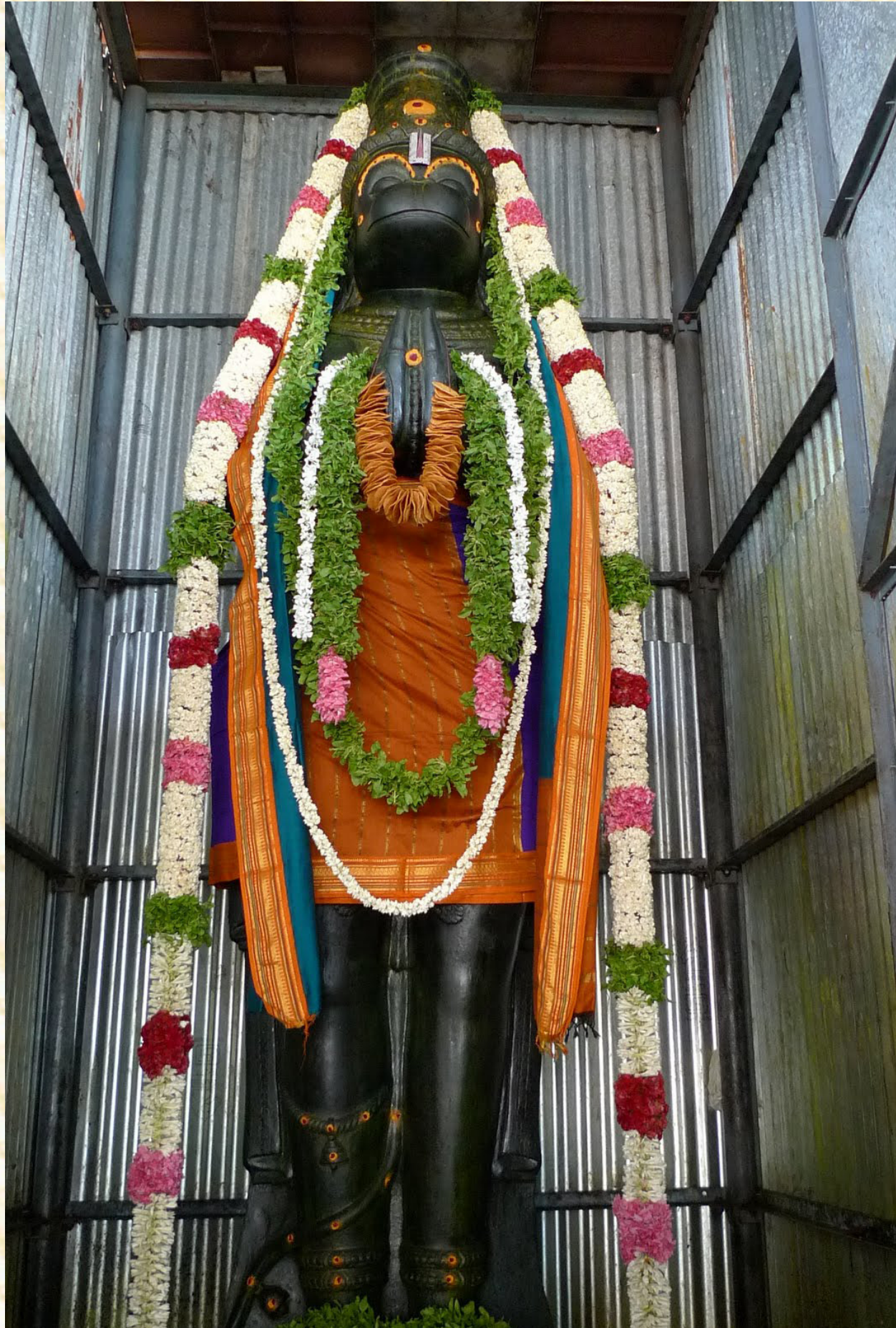
Milk is poured over the Hanuman. We used about 60 litres. The milk makes a wonderful echoing splash as it reverberates in the enclosure.



Yogurt is mixed with water and poured over the Hanuman, including his feet.



The flower mala is over 50 feet long and so large it has to be brought in a truck and takes two to lift! It is made from tulsi (holy basil), carnations, and roses.



The Hanuman is beautifully decorated with flower and tulsi malas as well as a small mala of 108 special lentil crackers that are a traditional favorite of his.



The final aarti or offering of light looks very nice and makes a great conclusion to the 10 day yagya series. Of course when a real monkey shows up and eats the bananas that were used in the yagya, that's considered to be an exceptionally good omen. As the priests say, "Hanuman has accepted your offerings."



**“May the world’s all peace giving things, which the seven rishis know, be peace-giving to me;
may there be peace for me; may there be freedom from fear for me.”**

–Atharva Veda