

["Prayer is the Greatest Medicine to This Body and Soul" is Motto Of Chatsworth Prathnay Khootam](#)

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## "Prayer is the Greatest Medicine to This Body and Soul" is Motto Of Chatsworth Prathnay Khootam

The Indian Hindus migrating to South Africa back in the 1890's obviously could not carry all of the vast facilities of their religion with them. They came with what they could, and in their hearts they carried what could be called "the essence," their love of the Gods and the faculty of prayer. Even today, nearly one hundred years later, talk to a South African Hindu about his religion and you can be sure that the word prayer will soon enter the conversation.

It was around this central part of Hinduism that the Chatsworth Prathnay Khootam formed in 1970 in Chatsworth. "Prayer is the key for a day's work and prayer is the lock of the night," and "Prayer is the greatest medicine to this body and soul," are two of its guiding principles, which dovetail with a third which states that "God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble arguments or by reason for or against His existence. He is to be gained and felt only by self transcending, absolute consecration, aspiration and experience."

Just as were the early temples built up in South Africa out of necessity in the years after the migrant workers settled in the country, so was this society formed by members of an entire Asian Indian community residing in and around central Durban which was asked to settle in a new township, now known as Chatsworth. This community was rich with Tamil scholars who were set on preserving the Tamil religion and culture. Under leadership of Mr. M. Govindaswami, this spirited group joined hands with the "Magazine Barracks temple Tamil School, Old Boys Society," then residents of Chatsworth. Scholars of this society helped the newcomers establish their khootam, or prayer society, to continue to practice and promote their religion. Subsequently, Mr. M. Govindaswami, spiritual head, initiated ten men and taught them meditation and faith healing, a highly prevalent phenomenon in South Africa, especially promulgated by the Christian sects. Khootam Secretary P. Murugan explains that the society now runs a free counseling and outreach service whereby devotees' needs are ministered and Saivite Hinduism clearly outlined. Various pujas are held in the temple by the society. On every full moon, the

members arrange for the bathing of the murthis in the temple and sponsor a large yajna (an offering or sacrifice: a homa fire ritual invoking divine blessings). Prayer services are held every Sunday morning at 9:00 and each Wednesday evening at 6:00 at the Chatsworth Magazine Vishnu Temple in Westcliff. Hymns of Thevaram, Thiruvagam, Thirupugazh, Siva bhajans and Hari bhajans are sung as a group with musical accompaniment. The society has over 150 regular members, and often over 1,000 devotees come to Sunday Services on festive occasions. Out of the bhakti of the community, in recent years two new temples have sprung up in Chatsworth, a Shakti temple and a Ganesha temple.

The Khooram teaches and promotes Saivism and the Tamil language and culture while at the same time expounding religious tolerance, teaching that "Every religion springing from the word of God is acceptable to Him. The different religions its from the 'great torch' are the products of different grades of intelligence of different time," and therefore none of them is to be despised." What benefit does a member derive? One devotee testifies, "It makes me feel the presence of God, teaches me to conduct my life in an orderly manner and helps me to further my worship of God.