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My Turn

Let's Give While We Can

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I was 47 years old the first time I visited India. I had seen photographic images of the great temples that I was about to visit, but nothing I had seen or read prepared me for the sheer magnificence of size and variance of vibration. Every temple that we pilgrimaged to left me in silent awe, completely wordless to describe the grandeur and splendor my eyes beheld and my soul felt. The inner sanctums seemed to pull me toward them. I was absolutely powerless to their magnetism.

We visited many famous Murugan and Siva temples. We passed countless others with deep regret unable to take the time to enter them all. Almost every day a hilltop temple would loom ahead for miles and seemed to beckon, "come visit me," but our little van just kept going to our next destination. So many temples and so little time.

One day, our destination was to a town where murtis are made. We stopped somewhere along the way, searching for drums to bring back home. The drum makers' shop-home leaned up against the outside wall of a huge Siva temple. All ten of us stood around for a while listening to the sounds of drums and bargaining until the temple drew us all, one-by-one, towards its center. The vibration seemed to me to be weak but so very, very pure. All of a sudden I was hit by the thought, "Adopt this temple!" My mind wrestled with the command as I proceeded towards the main sanctum. We were told by the Indian gentleman accompanying us that we were in an especially poor area and only one daily puja was celebrated in the temple. The local people were unable to pay their taxes and the priest was paid very little. I began to realize how important this inner command had been, and I wondered how to follow those instructions. I didn't even know where I was, let alone

how to adopt or sponsor a place in a foreign country.

A few months later I heard about the birth of the Hindu Heritage Endowment. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami had just received recognition of Hindu Heritage Endowment as a tax-exempt public charitable foundation. My prayers of how to obey the simple inner request had been answered. I could create an endowment specifically for the purpose of restoring this temple to a full temple schedule and, eventually, sponsor badly needed repairs. It is my deep belief and faith that if this temple, located in the heart of its community, could turn up its vibration then this area and all its people will prosper and flourish. The health of the people, on all levels, will improve.

Through the journal of a fellow pilgrim, I found out that we had been in the village of Tiruvaruru, Tamil Nadu. Upon making inquiries of Hindu Heritage Endowment, I was told that for a contribution of US\$5,000, an endowment could be set up for that temple. This fund is invested permanently and safely, the income of which is given automatically each quarter to the beneficiary. I'm told that at the current economic rate, that would mean over four million Indian rupees in the next one hundred years!

If other Hindus were to adopt temples in India, either individually or collectively, these magnificent temples could be restored to their former glorious beauty. We are a global Hindu community now and should not let our "temporary nationality" for this lifetime keep us from supporting the temples of our spiritual motherland.

I have always felt so miraculously blessed to live and participate in such a prosperous country as America. It has been said that we spend the first half of our lives accumulating things, the last half of our lives getting rid of those things. There came a point in my life when I realized that I had fulfilled all the desires of my youth. I shall never forget that feeling of accomplishment. And yet, at that same moment, I also realized that all these things will last only as long as I take care of them. I felt the incredibly heavy weight of possessions, things and stuff. The prosperity continues, but it is a wiser and lighter path that I follow with God's money now. This Hindu Heritage Endowment is something that will endure long after I have vacated this blue-eyed space suit.

Damara Shanmugan lives in La Mesa, California. She is a devotee of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami and member of his Saiva Siddhanta Church, mother, grandmother and a retired fiber artist and quilter.