

[Gracious Guru](#)

Category : [April/May/June 2002](#)

Published by Anonymous on Apr. 02, 2002

GLOBAL FELLOWSHIP

Gracious Guru

As satguru, I am in exclusive intimate spiritual communion with each of my devotees. I am at the center of each seeker's life, beating in each heart, aware in each thought, good, bad or indifferent. I keep the threads of every devotee's karma. I am the spiritual voice of dharma in their lives. To those seeking to understand our subtle tradition, it must be openly stated that the satguru is the keeper of all the intertwined threads, the repository of all intimate knowledge, the knower of the continuities of all his followers' karmas and dharmas, the confidant of each one's secret heart, the listener to their most painful confessions in sealed confidentiality, the giver of their mind-quieting penances, or prayaschittas, the interpreter of their transcendental, light-filled breakthroughs, visions and dreams, the guardian of the future of each sishya." So said Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami in the 1995 edition of Saiva Dharma Sastras, The Book of Discipline of Saiva Siddhanta Church.

Gurudeva began teaching and picking up these inner threads of devotees' karmas in California in 1957. He quickly cognized the need for an external structure with which to manage and nurture a growing congregation. So, over many years he developed Saiva Siddhanta Church, the first Hindu institution in the world to embrace and mold the Western church structure into a strong religious organization with an ethnically diverse international congregation. Its headquarters is at a traditional South Indian style monastery-temple complex in the Hawaiian islands known as Kauai Aadheenam, or Kauai's Hindu monastery. According to Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Gurudeva's successor and disciple of 37 years, "Gurudeva always did the same thing. From 1957 to his mahasamadhi, his core teachings didn't change, his organizational concepts didn't change, the essence of what he was trying to do did not change. What did change were the people."

As a spiritual leader committed to teaching an Eastern religion in the West, Gurudeva always

responded to the people who came forward, which evolved through the decades into a deeply sincere group of Saivite Hindu devotees. "In the 1950s Gurudeva was working with people who had been studying metaphysics and whose background was Christian. In the '60s the group changed. It became young people, some with Christian backgrounds and some with no religious upbringing, exposed to the concepts of the '60s," said Bodhinatha. "The people in the '50s didn't understand expanded consciousness. People in the '60s knew about it, by reading about it or by personal experience. The whole mentality became one more of inner experience and meditation." Gurudeva's teaching of Eastern concepts was like nectar, and many discovered their spiritual identity in Hinduism.

Beginning in late 1969 and continuing through the '70s, Gurudeva traveled extensively throughout Asia, frequenting India and Sri Lanka to expose his devotees to Hindu culture. While visiting Jaffna on a voyage in 1972, Gurudeva met Sri Sita Ram Shastri, a leader

among priests and a renowned mystical pundit of the island nation. Gurudeva told him that he wanted his Western devotees, the truly sincere ones, to become Hindus. Shastri told Gurudeva that it was fine to do. It is within the sastras. But it would take three generations before this lineage is fully established. Gurudeva took that prediction seriously. He kept it in mind over the next 29 years as he carefully guided the lives of his first group of householder devotees who had converted to Saivism. The third generation to which Shastri referred is now being born in several of these families.

The core of Gurudeva's Church, the monastic ministers, were the first to enter Hinduism. "Those who were brought up in other religions had to go through a severance process. Some ran into religious conflicts and didn't continue," explained Bodhinatha, who supervised the process. In the late '70s and early '80s Gurudeva and

his monastics guided the householders through the same process who wished to continue under the stricter guidelines he had established.

As Western devotees entered Hinduism in the 1980s, born Hindus from Asia started coming forward. If they were Vaishnavas, they, too, had to formally convert to Saivism and take on a Saivite name. This marked a significant permanent change in the makeup of the congregation. Says Bodhinatha: "We went from teaching yoga to Christians to teaching Saivism to Hindus; from a group based in California to a global group with members on every major continent."

Though students and members came and went through the years, Gurudeva's message did not change. Bodhinatha said,

"He started talking about the Self; he ended talking about the Self. He started with knowledge about the monastic path and the family path; he ended with that knowledge."

Gurudeva's vision of a Hindu church never wavered either. He recognized the advantages of the church paradigm as an organized social structure, not to mention the legal and financial freedoms and protections granted in the US. So, with the help of San Francisco attorney Alvin Buchignani, on February 12, 1962, Saiva Siddhanta Church became the first Hindu institution to be granted church tax exempt status by the US Internal Revenue Service.

Gurudeva made his objectives very clear: "We urge members and other devotees to 'Know thy Self' through self-inquiry,

meditation, traditional temple worship, scriptural study, guru bhakti and selfless service. We strive to bring members, devout sishyas of the parampara, into a pure, ethical life and guide them toward enlightenment and a direct consciousness of the Divine within."

Membership in Saiva Siddhanta Church is no trivial association. Students are required to study the teachings for several years to become intimately familiar with the mystical monistic-theistic philosophy. They must adjust their lives to traditional disciplines, adhere to a strict vegetarian diet, tithe on their income and follow the character-building yamas and niyamas, 20 Vedic restraints and observances.

Paramacharya Palaniswami quips, "The only thing harder than becoming a member of the Church is remaining a member." Indeed, Gurudeva required each to

requalify and rededicate himself or herself annually during the Guru Purnima festival in July. And he continually raised the standards, prescribing new sadhanas to goad members onward, never, ever allowing them to let down.

Gurudeva recognized a balance between meditation, or internalized worship, and external worship of the Gods as necessary for consistent spiritual unfoldment. He encouraged his followers, and all Hindus, to fulfill the five traditional obligations: daily worship in the home shrine, attending a temple once a week, pilgrimaging to a far-off temple annually, celebrating festivals and observing the essential samskaras, rites of passage. Samskaras sanctify crucial events in life: from name-giving to first feeding, beginning of education

to marriage, entrance into elderly life to funeral. Gurudeva dusted off and breathed new life into samskaras, many of which had been all but left aside in cosmopolitan Hindu society.

He had searched for years for just the right place to establish the ashram that would become world headquarters for a complex Hindu ministry. Having considered locations in Asia and Europe, he landed on the Garden Island of Kauai in December, 1968. This, he felt certain, was the ideal place, situated half way between East and West. In January, 1970, he returned to Kauai and purchased the 1927 Japanese-designed island home turned resort and its surrounding acreage where he and his students had sojourned in '68.

"Kauai Aadheenam is a traditional, male cloistered Hindu monastery," Gurudeva wrote in 1995. "This is the site of the Kailasa Pitham, the seat of spiritual authority for this ancient guru lineage, formerly located in northern Sri Lanka. Here we protect the purity of the faith and decide matters of education, publication, innovation, theology and Church law. Here young men are prepared to eventually take holy orders of sannyasa."

Kauai's Hindu Monastery is a full-featured religious sanctuary replete with sacred forests, paths and ponds and two temples: the Kadavul Nataraja Temple founded in 1973, and the San Marga Iraivan Temple conceived in 1975, a traditional, all-granite, Chola

style, Agamic Siva temple which will be the crown jewel of the Aadheenam.

Carving on Iraivan Temple began in 1990 when Gurudeva chipped the first stone. Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami of Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt in Bangalore, India, generously provided 11 acres outside the city where hereditary temple architects and site manager Jiva Rajasankara from Malaysia built homes and worksheds and dug wells, creating a village where 100 men and their families could carve this elaborate white granite edifice in the traditional way—by hand.

Ten years later, on May 31, 2001, chief

temple architect Sri V. Ganapati Sthapati and priest Sri Kandaswamy Gurukkal of Ontario, Canada, presided over the ceremonial placement of the first stone on the giant concrete foundation at Kauai Aadheenam [photo above]. Gurudeva declared at the event, "The vision of the Iraivan Temple as a place of pilgrimage for devotees of Siva throughout the world is becoming clearer and clearer and clearer as the days go on. It is a temple of boon-giving, a life-giving temple, a wish-fulfilling temple. Temples such as Iraivan are built on the sacrifice, sadhana and tapas of the people that are allowed to participate. Six thousand devotees of Siva from thirty to forty countries have contributed and sacrificed to bring Iraivan Temple to this stage of completion, and it is now being placed upon the foundation." San Marga

Iraivan Temple is now manifesting as the fulfillment of one of Gurudeva's most profound mystical visions.

For over 30 years he shaped the ministry and character of his dynamic monastic order and family congregation and guided Hindu groups worldwide from his seat of authority as guru mahasannidhanam of Kauai's Hindu Monastery, his tropical island home. The wholeness of the Aadheenam as it exists now registers as an incredible, indelible experience in the minds of visitors from all over the world. One pilgrim remarked, "Gurudeva has preserved the pure Jaffna Tamil culture and all of its refinements here."

MONASTIC ORDER

His Living Legacy

Twenty-three monks, strong and united

For four decades Sivaya Subramuniaswami carefully trained, strictly tested and lovingly molded a small,

tight-knit group of men into an effective, orthodox yet joyous monastic order. The Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order is of the Natha Sampradaya, an ancient tradition of Saiva yoga mysticism that began in the Himalayas and migrated south to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. It is based on striving for Self Realization and service to Siva, guided by a mystical understanding and practice of brahmacharya, celibacy and transmutation of the sexual forces. Personal sadhana and the service of bringing Saivism into the modern age by disseminating

the deep, inner teachings of Saiva Siddhanta have always remained the foremost work of this group of disciplined monks. They follow strict vows, own nothing, sleep on the floor, work very hard, live a cloistered life, don't visit family or former friends and perform worship, yoga and meditation sadhanas for at least two hours each day.

Because they live the simple life of the renunciate, it didn't matter that the Order grew from very modest beginnings. As Paramacharya Palaniswami, a

disciple of Gurudeva since 1966 said, "In the early days monks couldn't eat three meals a day, couldn't buy new clothes when old clothes wore out, couldn't pay electric bills and phone bills on time. Gurudeva had to use all of his considerable skills to bring us into having the present-day resources and self-sufficiency that we have. And he worked really hard at it."

From an old house in San Francisco to a 458-acre monastery on the paradisiacal island of Kauai, world-renouncing

aspirants continued to come forward and dedicate themselves to the search for the Self and service of Siva under Gurudeva's large, graceful umbrella. But why? Palaniswami explained, "They've reached a maturity in their own searching in their spiritual life, in their quest for Truth, their quest for God."

"Each one has his own story," continued Palaniswami. "That story might be that he started at a young age searching through the many paths, trying to reduce them to the one that felt right to

him, felt like his dharma. Another, perhaps, had an inner experience and wondered what that experience meant. Someone else might have gone to India and been adopted by the Gods, transformed in a temple and given inward directions. Others might have just met Gurudeva and seen in him the light and the wisdom and the profundity of the Self and wished to experience and taste that beautiful illumination that he wore so gracefully in his being. This is an order of great discipline and striving, so everyone who comes here comes with that kind of

spiritual intensity, spiritual eagerness, and a search for God."

The mix of ethnicities is as diverse as the ways in which Gurudeva's mathavasis chose to leave the world and live as Siva's men. Though it began in San Francisco in the 1950s and 60s with American Hindu converts and adoptives, in the 1980s born Hindu aspirants from Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Malaysia began to join the Order, balancing Gurudeva's monasteries with a rich blend of cultural

backgrounds.

This diversity has proven to be a great asset to the Order, one which helps them fulfill the myriad projects that are part of their greater mission. And theirs is no ordinary, social mission. "Gurudeva felt that there are enough Hindu institutions in the world dedicated to the noble enterprises of social and humanitarian relief. He saw that very few are fully dedicated to the profound enterprise of spiritual, personal transformation of people. To him the highest

calling is spreading knowledge of the Self, service to Siva and sacred work, rather than secular work. Building the temples, translating the scriptures and promoting knowledge of the highest form was the highest work to do, and he wanted his monks to do that work."

To My Dear Monastics

Excerpts from Gurudeva's
Letter of Introduction to

His Sannyasins' Vows

In Holy Orders of Sannyasa, Gurudeva enjoined his monastics as follows: The first part of your life was lived for yourself; the second part will be

lived in the service of others, for the benefit of your religion. You have been tried and tested through years of training and challenges and proved yourself worthy to wear the kavi, the orange robes, and to fulfill the illustrious Saiva sannyasa

dharmā.

The sannyasin harkens
close to Siva and
releases the past to an
outer death.

Remembering the past
and living in memories
brings it into the
present. Sannyasins

never indulge in recollections of the forgotten person they have released. The present and the future—there is no security for the sannyasin in either. Like writing upon the waters, the experiences of the sannyasin leave no

mark, no samskara to generate new karmas for an unsought-for future. He walks into the future, on into the varied vrittis of the mind, letting go of the past, letting what is be and being himself in its midst, moving on into an ever more dynamic service, an

ever more profound knowing. Be thou bold, sannyasin young. Be thou bold, sannyasin old. Let the past melt and merge its images into the sacred river within. Let the present be like the images written upon the water's calm surface. The future holds no

glamour. The past holds no attachment, no return to unfinished experience. Even upon the dawn of the day walk into your destiny with the courage born of knowing that the ancient Saivite scriptures proclaim your sannyasin's life great above all other

greatness.

Let your life as a sannyasin be a joyful one, strict but not restrictive, for this is not the path of martyrdom or mortification. It is the fulfillment of all prior

experiential patterns,
the most natural
path— the Straight
Path to God, the San
Marga— for those
content and ripened
souls. Leave all regret
behind, all guilt and
guile; others will
preserve all that you
proudly renounce. Let
even the hardships

ahead be faced
cheerfully.

Never fail to take
refuge in your God,
your guru and your
Great Oath. Be the
noble soul you came
to this Earth to be, and
lift humanity by your

example. Know it with a certainty beyond question that this is life's most grand and glorious path, and the singular path for those seeking God Realization, that mystic treasure reserved for the renunciate. True renunciation must be

complete
renunciation; it must
be unconditional.
There is no room on
the upper reaches of
San Marga for mental
manipulations, for
play-pretend
renunciation or
half-measure sadhana.
Let your renunciation
be complete. Resolve

that it will be a perfect giving-up, a thorough letting-go. Let go of the rope. Be the unencumbered soul that you are. Be the free spirit, unfettered and fearless, soaring above the clamor of dissension and difference. All that you need will be provided.

If there is any residue of attachment, sever it without mercy. Cast it off altogether. Let this be no partial renunciation, subject to future wants, to future patterns of worldliness. Give all to God Siva, and never take it back.

All in a Day's Work

A balanced life" was Gurudeva's description of his daily routine. He faithfully led the

monks' daily
two-hour
meditation and
worship from
5:30-7:30 AM. He
spent several
hours each
morning guiding
the lives of his
Church members

through personal communication—by telephone for many years, until the mid 1990s when he relied mostly on e-mail. Every afternoon was spent personally editing

his books, the legacy of teaching he knew would last far into the future. In the photos (print edition only) here we see Gurudeva: 1) blessing a new calf born in the

monastery's
pastures; 2)
speaking on the
phone with a
devotee; 3)
greeting the Vivek
Dixit family, one of
hundreds of
families worldwide
who consider

Kauai's Hindu
Monastery a place
of pilgrimage and
spiritual authority,
visiting often to
receive the guru
mahasannidhanam
's darshan and to
seek his advice; 4)
giving mantra

initiation to
Vasanthi
Kunaseelan of
Klang, Malaysia.
Gurudeva was
exceptionally
creative,
spontaneous and
ever available,
ready to respond

to the needs of devotees as well as those of the wider Hindu world with new projects and publications that kept his team of two dozen monastics "on their toes, a little

off balance."

Always staying at the center of it all, one of Gurudeva's most unusual, recognizable qualities as a world religious leader was that he was always

available,
personally
greeting and
counseling
thousands of
Hindu visitors to
his Aadheenam,
speaking
intimately with
them about their

lives, personal
aspirations and
concerns.

FAMILY
COMMUNITY

A Worldwide Congregation

A dedicated band
of devotees
further his

mission, starting
in their homes

An international
group of men,
women and
children, the
members of

Saiva Siddhanta
Church, strive for
personal,
spiritual
transformation
and steadfastly
fulfill the
objectives of the
Church while

living and
working in the
world, tithing on
their income to
support the
Church,
conclaving in
local mission
groups and

gathering in
homes to
worship and
perform karma
yoga. Gurudeva
summarized the
path of these
tried and tested
souls in Living

with Siva,
Hinduism's
Contemporary
Culture: "If both
husband and
wife are on the
spiritual path,
the householder
family will

progress
beautifully and
deeply. Their
love for one
another and their
offspring
maintains family
harmony.
However, the

nature of their
sadhana and
unfoldment of
the spirit is
different from
that of the
sannyasin. The
struggle to
maintain the

responsibilities of
the home and
children while
simultaneously
observing the
contemplative
way, in itself,
provides
strength and

balance, and
slowly matures
innate wisdom
through the
years."

It is this balance

that Gurudeva
taught his
householder
devotees to
accomplish in his
conversations
with them, and
in Living with
Siva where he

addressed every
issue that arises
on the family
path, from the
most spiritually
subtle to the
most mundane.

Kulapati Deva
Seyon, who lives
near the
monastery on
Kauai (only
single men under
vows live inside
the monastery),
had this to say:

"Gurudeva brought the true and ultimate meaning of gotra, or family lineage, to his initiated devotees, whom he saw as his

family lineage.
While Gurudeva
was the supreme
monastic, he was
never at a loss in
advising on the
business, social
or intimate,
personal

problems of his
initiated families,
down to the
smallest detail.
He knew every
family sishya on
a deep, personal
level their hopes
and dreams,

fears and
shortcomings
and never tired
of guiding,
helping and
serving his
congregation."

This fortunate congregation is truly global and diverse, with members in the US, Europe and over 70 percent in Asia mostly Mauritius and

Malaysia, as well as Singapore and India. Though stretched across the globe, they are no less connected than if they lived in a single village.

Take, for
example, the
cross-national
marriage that
brought together
the Deva Seyon
family of Kauai
and the
Manogaran

Mardemootoo
family of
Mauritius. In
1991, Kavita,
Deva's daughter,
married
Sivakumaren,
Manogaran'sson.
Though half a

world away, the
two families
merged like milk
poured into
milk. Deva
recalls,
"Gurudeva's
constant
blessings and

loving care for
the needs of our
family led us to
love and trust
those who also
loved him. His
international
global spiritual
family became

our family as we shared the same goals and priorities in life. In amalgamating our two families, all the big issues regarding the future of our

children were
already settled,
as we shared
the same
kulaguru."

Gurudeva

required his
Church
members to live
strictly by the
traditional and
time-tested
protocols of
Tamil Saivite
culture, which

he detailed in
his 365
Nandinatha
Sutras of Living
with Siva.
Association with
orthodox
Saivites of India
and Sri Lanka

allows
Westerners to
absorb the
subtleties and
depths of this
refined protocol.
Gurudeva also
required a home
life of ahimsa,

tolerating
neither abuse of
a spouse nor
corporal
punishment of
children.

The Saivite
Sastras,
revealed to
Gurudeva in
1973, explain
that "The guru
worked with the
families in the
same way he

worked with a
single
monastery."

Deva Seyon
elaborated on
that relationship
between the
monastery and
family homes:

"The monastery
and the families
of Saiva
Siddhanta
Church work
closely together
on many levels
in fulfilling
Gurudeva's

directives both
within the
Church missions
and with the
public at large.
The families
learn by
watching the
monks— their

attitudes, their
commitment,
their selfless
service." This
relationship is
born out of the
love of striving
through daily
religious

disciplines such
as meditation
and scriptural
study that
Gurudeva
nurtured in all of
his devotees.

The families of
the Church forge
frontiers in
passing on the
traditions of our
Hindu religion
by worshiping
daily together in
the home

shrine, wearing
Hindu clothing,
raising children
nonviolently,
holding daily
family meetings
and spending an
evening
together at

home at least
once a week.
Groups of
families in each
area collaborate
and help each
other live a
meaningful
Hindu lifestyle in

many ways,
such as home
schooling their
children
together,
hosting pilgrims
and special
guests and
going on

pilgrimage
together to
temples in South
India and to the
Aadheenam in
Kauai.

Kulapati
Mardemootoo
eloquently
summarized
Gurudeva's
impact on the
lives of
householder
devotees.

"Gurudeva has exposed us to a way of life conducive to peace, love and harmony in and outside the home. He has given us the

tools to be
peacemakers, to
shine as
examples of
good family
people and
elders who have
been endowed
with wisdom,

able to stand as
respected
leaders even in
the most
difficult times.
He has taught
us by his own
life how to be
strong in our

beliefs and
values and
succeed in life
by planning
carefully and
living fully in the
present. If we
now enjoy daily
the wonderful

experiences of
extended and
joint families,
and we know
how to protect
and keep our
culture and
religion alive
and prosperous,

it is all thanks to
our satguru."

A Sampling of
Sutras on
Family Life

Guiding and Nurturing Children

Those who live with Siva

personally
guide their
children's
spiritual and
secular
education.
They teach
and model

respect, share
what happens
each day,
have fun
together and
shower love
and hugs upon
them. Aum.

(14)

Restraint With Other Women

Siva's married
men, in the
workplace and
in the world,
hold a
courteous
aloofness
toward all

women,
whether
young, older,
single,
married,
divorced or
widowed. They
reserve their

affections for
wife and
family. Aum.
(87)

Holding a Daily Vigil

Worshipers of
Siva perform a
one-hour daily

vigil, ideally
before sunrise,
in a clean,
quiet place,
after bathing
and donning
fresh clothing
and holy ash.

This vigil is
optional on
weekends and
when traveling
or ill. Aum.
(21)

The Purpose of Marriage

Siva's
followers look
upon their

marriage as a
spiritual
partnership for
the purpose of
uplifting each
other and
bringing
through higher

souls. It is a
union not only
of a man and
woman, but of
two entire
families. Aum.
(116)

The Wife's Dharma

Each of Siva's
married
women

followers
strives to fulfill
female
dharma,
perpetuating
the race,
family and the
faith through

remaining in
the home to
nurture, guide
and
strengthen her
dear husband
and children.
Aum. (132)

Teaching and Modeling Good Conduct

Siva's
followers love

their children,
govern them
in a kind but
firm way and
model the five
family
practices:
proper

conduct, home
worship,
religious
discussion,
continuous
self-study and
following a
preceptor.

Aum. (139)