

## [Build Those Temples!](#)

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### BREAKING GROUND

## Build Those Temples!

Gurudeva emboldened communities all over the world to establish holy sanctuaries for God and the Gods

We wanted to build a temple in our area," said Arumugan Saravanapavan, one of the founders of the multi-million-dollar Murugan Temple of North America in Maryland, a few miles from America's Capitol. "Since we didn't have land, or a clear idea of how to proceed, someone suggested we see Subramuniaswami in Hawaii. The next week my wife and I went to visit him, in 1982. I explained the problem, and the next day he presented us with a three-foot-tall Ganesha. He said, 'You take Pillaiyar with you, and He will show you the way to build the temple.'" As instructed, they began the worship of Lord Ganesha, first in homes. The community's devotion came to the fore. Gurudeva visited several times, helped with the planning and personally blessed the land they purchased. When Gurudeva spoke at that blessing, recalls Mrs. Guruswamy, wife of the temple's first president, "The children were carried away. He was able to explain our religion in a way they could understand." A recent newsletter from the temple said, "With his monks,

Gurudeva helped every step of the way in building the Murugan Temple, from the community to the structure. As busy as he was, he made time to take phone calls from the temple devotees. He inspired the young and grew himself in many of our hearts." In May, 1999, Gurudeva was the honored guest at the temple's mahakumbhabhishekam, or grand opening.

In a similar way, Gurudeva has guided 36 other temples in the United States, Canada, Guadeloupe, Denmark, England, Fiji, Germany, Mauritius, New Zealand, Reunion, Russia, Sweden, and Sri Lanka—giving each community or temple an icon of God, usually Lord Ganesha, and guidance when needed. He has also helped dozens more with direct advice or by publicizing their project in Hinduism Today.

Some temples, such as the Maha Ganapati Temple in Edmonton, Canada, he guided very closely. "The conception of the Edmonton temple came right from Gurudeva," recalls Aran Veylan, a lawyer from Canada. "It gives the temple a special power to be connected to Gurudeva in that way. He brought the whole community together and defined the community as 'Tamil Hindus' because in the early 70s, the 'Tamils' were a Tamil cultural group—Christians and Hindus together. Now the community has matured into a Tamil Saivite community, and that is all because of Gurudeva's

influence." The community has gone so far as to make the constitution of the temple state that one has to be a Saivite Hindu in order to be a member. Because of this, according to D. Selvarajah, one of the founding members, the temple now has a very clear and strong power. People from all over Canada come to this temple and have told Selvarajah it is the best temple in Canada and an example for them to follow.

Selvarajah recalls, "Gurudeva told us in the beginning, 'You have all built temples in Sri Lanka. Now, because of the children, you have to teach them what you know. The temple is what will bring the families together and the children together.' "

In Denmark, Gurudeva helped establish the Abirami Amman temple. The priestess, Sri Abirami Upasagi, is deeply psychic. While in trance, she channels the Goddess to heal and bless people. In the beginning she was criticized. She appealed to Gurudeva, as she felt these channelings were good and caused no harm. Gurudeva assured her that what she was doing was correct, and that he would put her under his psychic protection. Gurudeva gave her a small Ganesha in 1995. The icon arrived on the Ganesha Chaturti festival day in August. They commenced the worship that same day, and milk began dripping from Ganesha's eyes. A month later the famous "Milk Miracle" happened around

the world, and this tiny statue began drinking gallons and gallons of milk offered before it with a small spoon. For many days after, hundreds of Hindus and local Danes came to feed Ganesha, including national television reporters. No one could explain the phenomenon witnessed by so many.

A few months later, Gurudeva sent a three-foot-tall Goddess Amman Deity to that temple. With Gurudeva's support, the priestess has become a respected spiritual leader. In August 2001, Gurudeva's travel-study program "Innersearch Europe" visited their land, and Gurudeva laid the first stones of the new temple with his own hands.

In 1982, he visited Chicago and met with a group interested in starting a temple. Previously, one of the trustees, Dr. N. Janakiraman, had visited Kauai. They were having a great number of problems, Janakiraman explained, and couldn't agree on what to do next. They did, however, agree to do whatever Gurudeva told them to do. Gurudeva told them to start the worship of Lord Ganesha. "After receiving Gurudeva's blessings," said Janakiraman, "We returned home and, to our utmost surprise and ecstatic joy, Lord Ganesha had already arrived at the O'Hare airport." Gurudeva expedited the delivery as a surprise gift. A handful of devotees greeted the 2,000-pound statue and decided to start

the worship in Mr. Rajagopalan's home. The house soon proved too small to accommodate the crowds, so they moved Ganesha to an industrial complex in 1983. Gurudeva assigned one of his close local devotees, Dr. Devananda Tandavan, to work with the community and keep him in touch with the progress.

Gurudeva was a great fund-raiser for temples. He attended a few fund-raising meetings as the guest of honor in Chicago and gave an inspiring discourse each time, telling those gathered to get out their check books and write down a number—then "add a few more zeros."

When he visited one temple being renovated in Singapore, the trustees explained their fund-raising strategy to sponsor each square foot of the new temple for \$100. Immediately he reached in his bag, took out a \$100 bill and bought one sponsorship. It was likely from the trustees' astonished look that he was the first visiting swami to ever contribute to their temple fund. Then he appealed for funds to the temple congregation during his speech. "I gave \$100," he said, "because I need the good karma of that gift to come back to me one day, maybe in the form of \$500." The same promotion was repeated to bolster temple fund-raising around the world. People were impressed to see him raise money like this for others, without saying a word

about his own fund-raising needs.

Gurudeva wanted the temples to be accepted in the local communities, especially among the indigenous people. In Anchorage, Alaska, reported Shyamadeva Dandapani, "Gurudeva insisted we obtain the blessings of the Alaskan native spiritual leaders and elders." The Pipe Carriers, as the chiefs are called, joined the rites, honoring the Anchorage Hindu community with songs and chants. They shared the sacred peace pipe with Gurudeva and gave him a sacred drum. Gurudeva similarly invited native Hawaiian priests to bless the Iraivan Temple site and foundation at Kauai Aadheenam.

Sometimes a new temple represents a local revival of Hinduism. In Fiji, for example, the community had to move the 100-year-old Murugan temple in Nadi after losing the land lease. They had already chosen a prime piece of land but couldn't get the project going. Gurudeva told them to begin the worship and sent a granite icon of Lord Ganesha. It was immediately installed on the new property. As in Chicago, the temple trustees had decided to do whatever Gurudeva directed. One trustee later commented that upon the temple's completion, "everything Gurudeva told us to do worked." The huge edifice symbolized a positive new identity for Hindus in a country in which ethnic relations

had become strained. Even Christian representatives told one of Gurudeva's monks they realized the temple stood for a resurgence of Hinduism in Fiji. Gurudeva also responded to the local request for a Hindu children's course.

Now that hundreds of temples have been built all over the world, many trustees have asked, "What's next?" Gurudeva gave the answer, "I want to see the stewardship of each temple take their leadership responsibilities seriously. The temples are built, the temples are dedicated, the Deities are there, the priests are there, the congregation is there. It is up to the core elected leadership, the trustees of the temple, to actually become full-time spiritual leaders and make a difference in the lives of the parents and children and change the community into a model community."