Monk's India Pilgrimage
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Follow the Dharma. That's what four monks set out to do in India. By plane, train, hired car, bus, bicycle rickshaw and on foot, the monks found Dharma's dusty face, though a smiggin modern, is really eternally the same.

The eight-week journey began in Hawaii in early April. Siva Murugaswami, Siva Kathirswami and Siva Devaswami flew to Singapore, visiting the Saiva Siddhanta Church Mission there and the five Churches in Malaysia. They were thoroughly inspired by the high level of dedication and activity at every place. Sadhaka Dandanatha, a young monk from Malaysia who has been training for a year at the Church's Aadheenam branch in Mauritius, had set off from there to meet the Swamis in Kasi.

Flying to India on April 21st, the Swamis spent some time with the Madras Mission. Then off by train to Kasi - undeniably the most sacred city for Saivites. Joining up with Sadhaka Dandanathan, they stayed at the Kumarswami Mutt, run by Tamil sannyasins who are in charge of the famed Kedhar Siva Temple at the elegant Kedhar Chat. Exploring the Holy City for nearly two weeks, they saw the sacred shrines and burning ghats, visiting the swamis and mutts which abound and daily meditated and bathed at the Holy Ganga. One sad note: despite being Sannyasis of a traditional order, they were denied entrance one day to the famed Kasi Vishvanath Temple because of color.

Together the four continued on to Karnatika for a two-day stay at the Adi Chunchanagiri Mutt in the Mandya District by invitation of the Abbot, Swami Balagangadharanatha. They were blessed with the profound shakti of this Natha mutt with its thousand-year-old Siva Lingam Temple. On to Mysore, to visit the gigantic granite Nandi and the Maharaja's palace. A bumpy bus ride took them to Bhavani, the sacred city at the confluence of the Bhavani and Cauveri river. There they sought out the Bhavani Mission, a fledgling mission started by elderly Subramuniyaswami, a namesake of Gurudeva.

Next stop was Palani Hills, then Madurai, where they received the blessings of Meenakshidevi and enjoyed this clean, huge, magnificent temple with its multitude of carvings, courtyards, halls and prakarams. Then to Rajapalayam, "deep in south Tamil Nadu, and on to Ramesvaram, the enormous Siva temple at the end of India. They bathed at the 21 wells located throughout the temple's inner walls and meditated near the central sanctum receiving the profound shakti of this holy place, leaving behind their past as they sought purification to serve God, Gods and Guru.

Chidambaram was their last major temple. The Swamis and Sadhaka met and talked with Ananta Natarajan Deekshitar and several of the other priests, discussing the ancient traditions of this special priesthood solely at the service of Siva Nataraj.

Two more sweltering days in Madras (temperatures throughout the trip ranged from 103 to 110!) brought them to their departure back to Kauai Aadheenam via Singapore. It was a trip none will ever forget and which delivered Sivanadiyar Dandanatha to Kauai Aadheenam to be at the feet of his Guru.