

Sabka Maalik Ek

SAI SANDESH

The Official Monthly Newsletter of **OM SAI MANDIR**

NON PROFIT ORGANIZATION, EXEMPT UNDER SECTION 501 (C) (3) OF INTERNAL REVENUE CODE

June 2006; Volume 3, Issue 6

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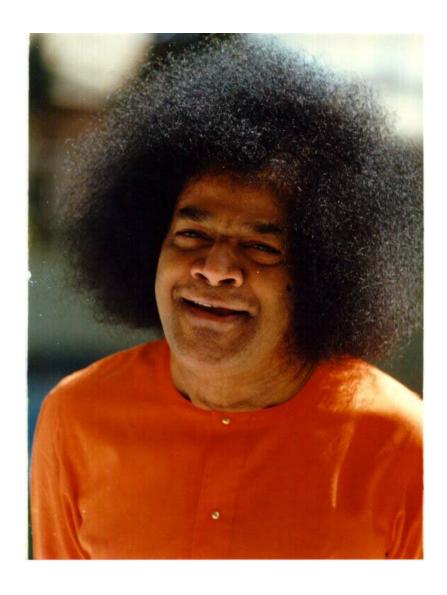
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Love All, Serve All

JUNE 2006 ISSUE



WISH YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

HAPPINESS IS ELUSIVE

BY THE SAI SANDESH TEAM

Guiding almost every human endeavor as its underlying motive, the quest for happiness is as eternal as creation itself. Happiness, however, it appears, is elusive, easily slipping away the way water does through the fingers of the very palms that attempt to restrain it. Despite our best efforts, permanent joy reveals itself like the horizon, always visible but never within reach.

Isn't it an irony that we continue living our old ways without inquiring into the reasons for our grief?—moving from activity to activity, from relationship to relationship, from attachment to attachment, from fear to fear, from worry to worry, from desire to desire, and from disappointment to disappointment. Each attempt grounded in the fond hope of securing lasting joy. How tired and frustrated we feel when all our attempts give us moments of gaiety, neatly packaged like wrapping paper over an unopened box of sorrow. The external package appears so beautiful and the real thing, when discovered, so unwanted; and yet we fail to grasp the hidden lessons underlying these traumatic experiences, continuing as if we know the road ahead very well.

Should all activities and efforts be shirked, then? No! We must continue on the royal road of duty, but armed with the knowledge of the way to true happiness—the kind that won't diminish. Yes, there is such a way—the very way that Swami has come to demonstrate though His own life. One cannot but help notice how Swami is always happy even in the midst of so called tough times. One may argue that Swami is God; that is true, but He has assumed a human form and has subjected Himself to the same trials and tribulations that concern ordinary humans. Do you think His job is easy? Nay! When we see one of our children suffer, we feel unbearable grief; imagine Swami who has so many children bearing the pangs of their karma. Yet, He is like the wise mother who knows her children are suffering from a bitter medicine, but that the suffering is momentary and once the cure is affected, the children will be fine. She quietly suffers the pain of seeing all this with the fond hope that the children will change their ways soon and won't need medicines again. How much worse to see the children repeat the same mistakes again and again.

Once, a loving follower requested Swami to grant him the boon of seeing the world through God's eyes; Swami sternly refused. The devotee persisted, however, until the Lord relented. He was allowed to experience the world through God's eyes. Within a moment, the devotee could see the whole universe and our world with millions of people; some crying and praying for relief, some for gifts, some suffering, some screaming, some indulging in bad acts, some acting foolish, while others blaming God for their own mistakes. A loud commotion and heartwrenching feelings of joy and sorrow ensued, causing the devotee to almost lose his sanity; the feeling was too much for any human to endure. The experience lasted less than a second, but in that short time he was so overwhelmed that he screamed, begging for the vision to vanish immediately. The merciful Sai immediately withdrew the experience. In that short moment, the devotee had realized what Swami is always doing for all of us. Yet, despite bearing the burden of the entire universe, Swami is always blissful; it is strange that we complain for the little duties that have been allotted to us.

We have been created in God's own image and are not in essence any different from Him. Why, then, are we always so dissatisfied? The answers have been given by Swami during numerous discourses. Let us consider a few causes.

We are seeking in the wrong places. Real bliss has already been planted within us since eternity; the problem is that we try to secure joy from external influences while ignoring the happiness that already exists inside. By depending on outside variables, we become like the boat that sways easily with the storms [of life]. If I get a new car, I will be happy; if I get promoted, I will be content; if such and such happens, I will find peace ... our conditions are numerous; when fulfilled, we experience momentary satisfaction, but like a child who after finding a coveted toy, wants another, we instantly set our eyes on a new target, making it a new condition all over again.

What if these conditions are not fulfilled? Discontentment seeps in.

The nature of the universe is such that everything precious is buried deep within. It takes some effort to dig these coveted treasures. Gold, diamonds, minerals, fuel—all of these—and also the secrets of the universe already exist; all that is required is human effort to discover them.

The same applies to the bliss that we really are—it is our true nature, getting in touch with which requires turning our vision and senses inwards. Once we realize this truth and stop depending on externals, their occurrence or non-occurrence will cease to influence us. We will be happy no matter what the situation. When we learn to act with equanimity (indifference to joy or sorrow), we become like the heavy rock that does not sway with the direction of winds. Prayers, *naama smarana* (chanting the divine name), and *seva* (selfless service) are the means for achieving permanent peace and fortitude.

The lives of saints provide a glimpse into this truth; even during the worst periods of their lives and the toughest of trials, they demonstrate undiminished joy and unwavering faith. Mira, the famous saint-devotee, was poisoned by her own family members. Yet, she cheerfully accepted the poison as if it were her beloved Lord's blessing. The result? Poison was miraculously transformed into nectar. It was her reliance on God, and not the world, that granted liberation from painful circumstances.

We may not be able to control external circumstances, but we can certainly control our reaction to them; it is in our hands to feel happy or otherwise. Contrary to popular belief, such a state is not difficult to achieve.

Not inquiring about our real nature. We often say, "This is my body." What is the implication of such a statement? We are essentially saying that the claimant "I" is the owner of the body, and is hence different from the body. So, who exactly is this "I" if it is not the body? The truth is that this "I" is much grander than the physical body. This is the "I" that was made in God's own image—light, perfection, and bliss. The great saint of Arunachala, Ramana Maharishi, always advocated the pursuit of one simple inquiry: "Who am I?" The answer holds the key to the secrets of the entire universe; the aspirant who discovers the answer will never return to the state of sorrow again, ever.

Excessive desires. The root cause of all our sorrow is excessive desires; the fewer the desires, the lesser the reasons for suffering. Swami often says that the lighter the burden (the lesser the desires), the happier the journey of life. Isn't that a wonderful maxim?

Desire for instant gratification. In a fast moving world, we want things to happen yesterday—literally. Dreams, goals, and aspirations are not inherently bad; what causes anxiety and disappointment is the desire for them to fructify instantly and not at the designated time.

Everything in this universe happens at an allotted time; a seed will become a tree only after a certain process of growth; when the tree is fully grown, it will bear fruit. The same analogy can be applied to human actions; any action—good or bad—is essentially a seed that will bear fruit at the appropriate time. Persistence can be compared to the soil in which the seed grows, and patience, the act of watering. It is only when persistence and patience are combined, that the seed of action will bear the desirable fruit.

Swami has given us the formula of three Ds—discipline, devotion, and determination. The three can help us succeed in both spiritual and worldly pursuits.

Not realizing oneness. Forgetting the unity of creation and the oneness of all beings, ill feelings and a sense of competition and animosity is harbored against brethren. Such ill feelings can only lead to discord, disharmony, and sorrow. Swami's dictum "Love All, Serve All" alone can ensure lasting peace and happiness in this world.

Disharmony between thoughts, words, and deeds. In our blissful [real] state, there is a perfect equilibrium between thoughts, words, and deeds. Whenever this balance is disturbed, feelings of unhappiness will surface.

Ensuring perfect harmony between our thoughts, words, and deeds as taught and practiced by Swami is the only sure way to heavenly bliss and everlasting joy.

Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu (may all beings be happy).

BEACON LIGHTS

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI: THE SAGE OF ARUNACHALA

THE SAI SANDESH TEAM



Christened Venkataraman (December 30, 1879 to April 14, 1950) at birth, The Sage of Arunachala, as he was known, was [is] a towering spiritual giant. He was born on an auspicious day when the Nataraja image at the temple at Tirucculi was being taken out

ceremoniously; the birth miraculously coincided with the precise moment of the image's reentry.

Early life. The initial years were not in any way prophetic of the life of an exemplary saint; they were rather characteristic of an average child that did not offer much promise.

At the age of twelve, he lost his father, following which, the family moved to Madurai under the protection of Subbaiyar, a paternal uncle. Although disinterested in studies, he attended Scott's Middle School and the American Mission High School.

The seeds of renunciation. At the age of sixteen, Venkataraman accidentally heard the name "Arunachala," a sound that almost instantly stirred a magical effect on the young mind. Immediately following this incidence, he came across a copy of Sekkilar's *Periyapuranam*, an epic portraying the lives of *Saira* saints. The work sowed powerful seeds of renunciation by confirming his intense attraction to the way of a detached and saintly life.

Venkataraman soon underwent a profound spiritual experience at the age of seventeen. He was sitting alone on the first floor of his uncle's house. Although in good health, a powerful fear of death suddenly overtook him; he felt as if he was going to die soon. Gathering calm, he said, "Now, death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? The body dies." Lying stiff, he held his breath and stretched his limbs as if imitating the state of physical death. "Now what would happen?" he thought. "Well, this body is dead. It will be carried to the burning

ground and in the tradition of the *sarira* (body), be burnt and reduced to ashes. But, with the death of this body, am I dead? Is the body T? This body is silent and inert; but, I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the T within me, apart from it. So, I am the spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the spirit transcends it and cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless spirit." The internal conversation was not an exercise in reasoning, but rather a realization that came to him in a flash, a byproduct of the highest truth that he had intuitively perceived. As a result of this realization, fear of death left him instantly.

The transformation from an ordinary lad to an enlightened sage had taken effect, rendering worthless all that was once perceived valuable. He spent the subsequent days in intense solitude, deeply absorbed in meditation on the *self*. During his daily visits to the Meenakshi temple, he would experience an exaltation that defied all verbal description.

The lad's elder brother was quick to notice this change and strongly objected to the premature yogi-like behavior.

The epic journey. On August 29, 1896, Venkataraman's English teacher punished him for his indifference to studies; he was to copy a grammar lesson three times. After two attempts, the boy realized the futility of the task and resorted to deep meditation instead. The elder brother reprimanded him and said, "What use is all this to one who is like this?" The brother then handed him Rupees five for college fees. There was no verbal response or reaction to the rebuke; instead, the Maharshi made a strong resolve to leave the place and settle at Arunachala.

Knowing the potential reaction to his decision, the sage left quietly, leaving just a short note that read as follows: "I have set out in the quest of my Father in accordance with His command. This (meaning himself) has embarked on a virtuous enterprise; therefore, no one need grieve over this act. And no money need be spent in search of

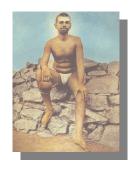
this. Your college fee has not been paid. Herewith rupees two." The saint referred to an atlas and noted the nearest railway station to Tiruvannamalai.

What ensued was a tiring journey that exhausted all his resources (Rupees three). On the way, there was a temple of Arayaninallur that was built on a large rock. On his arrival there, he waited for the doors to open and settled in the pillared hall for a session of intense mediation; during the meditation, he experienced a vision of brilliant light enveloping the entire place. The meditation continued until Venkataraman was roused by the local priests who wanted to lock the doors and visit another temple nearby. The lad followed them and, while inside the temple, found himself lost in the experience of ecstatic samadhi. The priests woke him from this state but did not offer food. A temple drummer, who had been witnessing this behavior, requested the priests to hand his share of temple food to the strange youth.

Gokulastami marked the next morning when Venkataraman resumed his journey Tiruvannamalai. In order to raise the required funds, he pledged his gold earrings that were valued at over Rupees twenty, for Rupees four. The last worldly possession was given away in the spirit of true renunciation. He took the train to Tiruvannamalai and hastened to the temple of Arunachaleswar. The gates of the temple stood wide open, including the doors of the inner shrine; Venkataraman entered the sanctum and experienced sanctorum a state of transcendental bliss.

In quest of realization. The rest of his life was spent mostly in meditation. During this time, street urchins would often pelt stones at the queer sanyasi who resembled a madman in the worldly sense. To escape their constant disturbance, he resorted to an underground vault (Patala Lingam) where he continued the austerities despite the constant pain caused by vermin and pest bites. Around this time, Sheshadri Swamigal, a senior monk, spotted him and realized the divinity that manifested through the young boy. The monk would often guard the lad engaged in penance.

Though silent, Ramana would intently listen to the expositions of holy texts like the *Vasistham* and *Kaivalyanavanitam*.



The number of pilgrims visiting *Brahmana Swami* (as he was fondly addressed) increased steadily. One of the visitors was his uncle, Nelliyappa Aiyar, whose entreaties for a possible return met a deaf ear. Soon, Alagammal, Ramana's mother, visited

the place with her eldest son. Her tearful requests were ignored as well and met with the same silence that others had experienced. A devotee who was witnessing the mother's struggle, requested the Swami to at least write out a response. He wrote: "In accordance with the prarabdha (prior acts shaping destiny) of each, the One whose function it is to ordain makes each to act. What will not happen will never happen, whatever effort one may put forth. And what will happen will not fail to happen, however much one may seek to prevent it. This is certain. The part of wisdom therefore is to stay quiet." With a heavy heart, the mother returned Manamadurai.

The crowds had now increased manifold; many were earnest seekers who sought clarifications on topics of spiritual significance. At times the saint wrote out explanations while during others, his grace was sufficient. Among the visitors were suffering souls who experienced peace at his feet.

In 1903 Ganapati Shastri, a Sanskrit scholar, visited Venkataraman. Shastri had undertaken intense devotional austerities to please the divine mother. He came with the intention of seeking clarifications on issues relating to his own spiritual practices. Once he expressed his doubts as follows: "All that has to be read, I have read; even Vedanta sastra, I have fully understood; I have done japa (chanting) to my heart's content; yet, I have not up to this time understood what tapas (austerity) is. Therefore, I have sought refuge at your feet. Pray enlighten me as to the nature of tapas." Ramana replied, "If one watches whence the notion 'I' arises, the mind gets absorbed there; that is tapas. When a mantra is repeated, if one watches whence that mantra sound arises, the mind gets absorbed there; that is tapas." This was a great revelation to the scholar who experienced powerful grace emanating from the Swami. It is this Shastri who showered the titles of Maharshi and Bhagavan on the sage; he is dited with composing the Ramana Gita.

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Ramana's mother lost her eldest son on her return. Soon, the youngest son, Nagasundaram, paid a brief visit to Tiruvannamalai. She visited the Maharshi on two occasions thereafter. During one of her visits, she fell ill and suffered from a long bout of typhoid fever. The sage tended her with great care and miraculously restored her to good health. He even composed a Tamil hymn, beseeching Lord Arunachala to cure her not just from the physical illness, but also from the fatal disease of worldliness; both prayers were answered soon.

The mother returned home; within a short span of time she lost the wife of her youngest son, Nagasundaram. The mother and son then made a mutual decision to join Ramana and resort to renunciation. She assumed responsibility for the ashram's kitchen, while the youngest son assumed the name Niranjananda (Chinnaswami).

Around 1920 the mother's health started failing and she gave up her mortal coil in the divine presence. After six months, Ramana Maharshi came to stay at her tomb, thus sowing the seeds of Ramana Ashram as ordained by divine will.

Great writers and philosophers now started visiting the Maharshi; among the luminaries of the physical world, was Paul Brunton, a writer, mystic, and philosopher in his own right. Sadhus and yogis would also frequent the ashram often. Once a band of thieves came there in search of loot; on their second visit, they were infuriated to find nothing valuable. Their anger found expression in the form of blows that they mercilessly showered on the saint. When a devotee sought permission to punish the thieves, Ramana Maharshi forbade him saying, "They have their dharma, we have ours. It is for us to bear and forbear. Let us not interfere with them." When one of the thieves gave him a blow on the left thigh, he told him, "If you are not satisfied, you can strike the other leg also." For the Godrealized sage, these blows were the same as pujas offered by other devotees. Not only humans, animals and birds also befriended the Sage of Arunachala. He attended them with great care and respect.

Despite the ashram's growth, the enlightened one did not stir a bit from his *samadhi*. In 1948, when he was about seventy, a small nodule appeared below the elbow of his left arm.

The concerned doctors cut it away, only to find it reappearing quickly. Surgeons from Madras were called in to perform a surgery, but the wound would not heal. They diagnosed the condition as sarcoma and recommended an amputation. Ramana gave a fitting reply: "There is no need for alarm. The body is itself a disease. Let it have a natural end. Why mutilate it? Simple dressing of the affected part will do." Two more operations were performed but the tumor appeared again. The sage, supremely indifferent to his body, was unconcerned with suffering. He assumed the role of a mute spectator, witnessing the body's approaching end. Despite the physical torment, his eyes glowed as bright as ever and continued showering grace liberally on all visitors.

On his deathbed, the Maharshi instructed the grieving devotees with these words: "You say I am going away, but where can I go? I am always here. You give too much importance to the body." His promised presence is being felt even today. None were required to change their religion or faith; what was required was only commitment to peace, love, and the supreme inquiry: "Who am I?"

The physical end came on April 14, 1950. That evening, the sage gave *darshan* to the assembled devotees who were singing hymns in praise of Arunachala. Bhagavan Ramana asked his attendants to make him sit up, and as a tear of bliss trickled his eyes, the breathing stopped. At that very moment, a comet moved slowly across the sky and reached the summit of the holy hill of Arunachala, disappearing behind it.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"You wear colored glasses and see everything through those glasses. Correct your vision; the world will get corrected. Reform yourselves; the world will get reformed. You create the world of your choice. You see many, because you seek the many, not the One. Try to subsume the many in the One—yourselves and others, the family, the neighborhood, the community, the state, the nation, the world. This is the sadhana of love; for love is expansion. The individual has to be universalized and expanded into the Vishwaswaroopa (the Cosmic Self).

THE FRESCOES

SOURCE: CHINNA KATHA II, 76

Once, a great painter was asked by a king to execute a huge fresco of a scene from the Mahabharata battle on the wall of his palace hall.

Another painter came and asked for permission to execute a fresco on the opposite wall. He said he would within the same period prepare on his wall an equally grand fresco, in fact an exact replica of the other—despite a curtain being hung in between the walls.

On the date fixed for the opening of the frescoes, the curtain was removed. The king was amazed to find an exact copy of the same scene from the Mahabharatha battle down to the minutest detail of lines and curves, tints and tilts, light and shade. He questioned the painter as to how he could do it. The artist said that he had not used any brush or paint. What he did was thoroughly polish the wall assigned to him. He polished the wall in such a way that it shone like a mirror. So, the duplicate fresco was only a reflection of the original.

Drawing from this lesson, we have to cleanse our mind and make it so pure that God's sublime grandeur and beauty may be reflected in—and through—our hearts.

Readers are requested to share articles, experiences, poems, etc. for publication in the forthcoming issues of Sai Sandesh. Please e-mail saisandesh@omsaimandir.org for further information.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

DAILY ARATIS:

Kakad Arati8.00 A.M.Madhyana Arati12.00 P.M.Dhoop Arati6.00 P.M.Sheja Arati8.00 P.M.

SPECIAL BHAJANS:

Every Thursday 7.00 P.M.–8.30 P.M. Every Sunday 2.00 P.M.–3.00 P.M.

STOTRAS (CHANTING SAHASRANAM, BABA'S 108 NAMES, ETC.): Daily.

ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE): Daily at temple ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE) FOR HOMELESS BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Every Saturday at 1 p.m. 29th and 1st Ave. Call 718-461-0454.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

June 2006

Sunday, Jun. 18: Father's Day

July 2006

Tuesday, Jul. 04: America's Independence Day Monday, Jul. 10: Guru Poornima/Vyasa Poornima

August 2006

Tuesday, Aug. 15: India's Independence Day Wednesday, Aug. 16: Sri Krishna Janmashtami Sunday, Aug. 27: Ganesh Chaturthi/Siddhivinayak Chowthi

WISH YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

DEVOTEES' EXPERIENCES THE DIVINE LIGHT

We had organized *Akhanda Naam Jaap* (continuous chanting of Sai's name for 24 hours) on Datta Jayanti, December 13, 1998.

My excitement knew no bounds because I had always believed that Sai was an incarnation of Dattatreya, the divine Lord. "The opportunity to chant the holy name on such an auspicious day was indeed a great blessing," I thought.

I arose early that morning and left for the temple after finishing my daily prayers.

Many devotees participated in the program, and with each passing minute, the vibrations were intensifying, enveloping the entire temple with an aura of divine bliss.

As night approached, most devotees started leaving; only a few of us remained to continue the *naam smarana* for the remaining duration of the 24 hours.

Although we were only a few, we were chanting with the enthusiasm of a large group. Around 1.30 a.m., I found myself going deeper into meditation.

With each chant, I was requesting Baba to appear in front of us and bless us with His divine vision. Around 3.00 a.m. the prayers intensified to their peak and the whole area was reverberating; even the metal pillar, against which I was leaning, was shaking.

My requests were getting stronger with each count. Finally, between 3.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m., my body lost sensation and I ascended to a white light; the experience filled me with bliss that I cannot ever describe in words.

I lost complete sensation of the body and all I could feel was bliss and light. The entire universe was as if bathed in the divine light.

I almost felt as if Sai was going to appear from the white light and take me away from the bondage of this body. Just then, the remaining devotees were feeling anxious to see my state. They were afraid I would pass away if left undisturbed—it was that intense an experience.

Finally, one of the devotees made a bold move and patted my back. With the pat I felt as if I was pulled back to the level of human consciousness, robbed as if I were from the divine state.

I immediately fell on the floor into the lap of the concerned devotee; tears were flowing from my eyes as I cried, "Baba, Baba ..."

I felt as if I had lost my precious treasure but on reflection saw the hand of Sai in this act. After all, it is Swami's will that guides the functioning of the entire universe and we must learn to accept what he decides for us.

Even though the vision disappeared, I felt blissful for weeks thereafter. My behavior was markedly changed; I felt God in everything I touched and saw.

The divine light had a powerful impact on my young mind, an effect that I feel even today as I recall that experience. I had gained the realization that the happiness of the material world was nothing in comparison to the bliss showered by God.

Devotees are requested to share their experiences with fellow-devotees; they will be published in the forthcoming issues of Sai Sandesh. Please e-mail your experiences to saisandesh@omsaimandir.org

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Sai Ram,

Story on Lord Rama continued...

After Ravana's death, Vibhishana was crowned the king of Lanka. When Sita heard the news she was very happy and quickly came to see Lord Rama. Sita was very thrilled to see the Lord but Lord Rama appeared to be lost in thoughts.

Finally, he spoke to Sita, "I am really happy to rescue you from Ravana but since you have lived with Ravana for almost a year, it is not proper for me to take you back." Hearing this, Sita burst into tears and said, "That was not my fault, I was kidnapped. While in Lanka, every single moment, I thought about you." Sita was so sad that she decided to end her life by jumping into fire.

Sita asked Lakshmana to prepare the fire; Lakshmana looked at Lord Rama hoping that he would change his mind. Lord Rama stood there with no emotions. Lakshmana then built a fire.

Sita walked around Lord Rama with respect and then prayed to Lord Agni, the fire God, "If I am pure, protect me." With these words, Sita jumped into the fire.

Soon after, Lord Agni appeared, and lifted Sita and presented to Lord

Rama, saying, "She is pure; take her to Ayodhya; people are waiting for you." Lord Rama replied, "I know she



is pure,
but I had
to put her
through
this test
for the
sake of
the world,
so that

everyone will know the truth."

Lord Rama and Sita then returned to Ayodhya with Lakshmana.

Hanuman went ahead of them to inform Bharatha (Lord Rama's brother). When they reached Ayodhya, the whole kingdom was waiting to receive them. Lord Rama was then crowned the king and celebrations continued.

Since then every year we celebrate Dassera to remember the victory over Ravana, the evil, and Diwali to celebrate the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya.

Courtesy:

http://www.indolink.com/Kidz/Stories/ramayana1.html

TEMPLE JOURNAL

















Easwaramma Day and Hanuman Jayanti, 2006

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