

# patrika

*the voice of the Hindu Centre, Singapore*

## March 2024 Issue

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## President's Message

Dear Friends and Supporters of Hindu Centre,

As promised, March 2024 has been full of activity for children, youth and adults.

While our Balagurukulam classes have commenced their Sunday morning classes, our older students were provided with stress-busting tips for their examinations using vedic principles of pranayama and yoga in a fun-filled afternoon.

Meanwhile 26 people are enjoying their North India Yatra, visiting the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, as well as visiting many other holy places such as Kasi. They also went for a dip in the holy Triveni, the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati at Prayagraj.

Hope you enjoy reading about the activities at your Centre and the other articles. Your support is always appreciated, either with a one-time donation or a regular monthly contribution.

May I take this opportunity to wish Iswara's blessings upon all of you dear friends with good health, happiness and more Jnana, Bhakti and Seva.

**Dr N Varaprasad**  
**President**



Hindu Centre yattris at Ayodhya

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## Prayer

### Sarvesham Svastir Bhavatu

ॐ सर्वेषां स्वस्ति भवतु

सर्वेषां शान्ति भवतु

सर्वेषां पूर्ण भवतु ।

सर्वेषां मङ्गलं भवतु

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

#### Transliteration:

Om Sarveshaam Svastir-Bhavatu |  
Sarveshaam Shaantir-Bhavatu |  
Sarveshaam Purnnam-Bhavatu |  
Sarveshaam Mangalam-Bhavatu |  
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih | |

#### Meaning:

- 1: May there be Well-Being in All,
- 2: May there be Peace in All,
- 3: May there be Fulfilment in All,
- 4: May there be Auspiciousness in All,
- 5: Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

#### Note:

Origin of this mantra is believed to be from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads though not in the present form.

## The Nature of Truth and the Relevance of the Bhagavad Gita

By Manu Kohli

There is no dearth of Scriptures and philosophies in the world today. Some minds attach to these exclusively and passionately and deem that the philosophy they endorse can alone be the final word of any reasoning intellect. In some quarters, discoveries of physical science have been elevated to a creed, with religion and spirituality being discarded as superstition.

Through painful experience, mankind has now grown humbler and is willing to concede that no single view can have dominion over the Truth. There is still a tendency though to affirm that our truth alone gives us the supreme knowledge which others have missed.

In such a scenario, it would help to develop an understanding of the spirit in which one may approach an ancient text such as the Gita and how it may enrich our lives in today's world.

First, there is a Truth one and eternal which we are seeking, from which all other truth derives and finds its rightful place. But for that reason, it cannot be found in its entirety in any single philosophy. Sometimes a fervent rejection, is just a testimony of our unwillingness to understand the truth underlying other thought systems.

Secondly, this Truth, one and eternal is expressed in Time and through the human mind. As such, any scriptural text contains two elements. One is temporal, relevant to the time and the place where it was produced, the other is eternal.

Thirdly, as the human intellect renews old expressions from time to time, it will always be difficult to ascertain the sense and spirit which an ancient text bore to its contemporaries. What is of enduring value is that which is universal and has been experienced and lived with a higher than intellectual vision.

It is neither possible nor desirable to extract from the Gita, the exact connotation in which it was understood by the populace of the time. This is demonstrated by the divergence of commentaries on the Gita which have been written and are still being written.



What we can do is to extract from Gita the living truths it contains and express these in a form suited to the mindset and spiritual needs of our present-day humanity. Needless to say, this attempt may be full of errors borne out of our personalities and times, as would have been the attempts of many greater seekers in the past. However, if we earnestly immerse in the spirit of this great text, we will find in it as much of the real truth as we are capable of receiving.

We study the Gita not for academic scrutiny of its thought, but to discern its eternal living message, which humanity ought to seize for its highest spiritual welfare.

### **Acknowledgement**

This essay is drawn from the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo Volume 19, titled 'Essays on Gita'. It is paraphrased, but with fair use of the text as it originally appears in 'our-demand-and-need-from-the-gita'/'Essays on the Gita'

<https://incarnateword.in/cwsa/19/our-demand-and-need-from-the-gita>

Image credit: <https://www.facebook.com/KrishnaConsciousComics>.

## **Brahmotsavam**

*By MC Vaijyanthi*

We have all seen (at least in pictures and videos if not in person), giant rathas bearing a deity and being pulled outside a major temple and surrounded by thousands of people. In this article, MC Vaijyanthi explains the importance of this ritual, Brahmotsavam, for our deeper understanding.



Brahmotsavam is a major festival usually held in South Indian Shaiva and Vaishnava temples where the utsava vighraha or the processional idol of the principal deity is decorated, and regular processions mounted on various vahanas, traditional mounts or vehicles around the streets surrounding the temple or on specific routes across the temple town.

Brahmotsavam as the name denotes is a festival initiated, conducted by Brahma himself - literally “the festival of Brahma”.

A Brahmotsavam ideally is conducted over 10 days though agamas also approve of shorter duration. The main mounts like a Garuda Vahana in a Vishnu temple and a Rishaba Vahana in the Shiva temples are very significant and the Rathotsavam is another important festival, the chariot procession that draws devotees from all the surrounding villages and towns.

Having darshan, worship of the deity during the Brahmotsavam brings great merit to the devotee. Before understanding Brahmotsavam let us understand what an Utsava is. A festival that is conducted annually or periodically is called Utsava.

The term Utsava means joy, merriment, delight, pleasure and such emotions. Ishvara Samhita explains the removal of “sava” (misery), the destroyer of misery as Utsava. “Utsutheharshamithi” says Sriprasna Samhita. “The utsava is so called because it gives rise to delight and God is much delighted by it.” The performance of utsavas bring delight to the God and the worship, participation creates joy and delight to the devotees who rejoice in that celebration.

Dhwajarahana or the Kodiyetram (flag-hoisting) wherein a ritual flag is hoisted accompanied by rituals, music at an auspicious time marks the beginning of the Brahmotsavam. There are also pre-Dhwajarahana rituals like the procession of Vishwaksena, Mritigai, Ankurarpana. Following the Dhwajarahana and the first mount/procession an interesting ritual takes place known as Beri Tadanam. It is a formal invitation extended to all Devatas to come and participate in the Brahmotsavam, and agamas prescribe specific musical instruments and talas to be played for invitation extended to each of the devatas. The knowledge of the

music and the talas now mostly lost, and it is just a beating of drums that accompanies the priest reading out the invitation.

In the Vishnu temples, on subsequent days the deity is placed on mounts such as Garuda, Hanuman, Sesa, Hamsa, Elephant and Horse. On the final day after the prescribed procession, the utsava murti returns to the temple and the Tirthavari or the ritual Avabrita Snana is conducted. After all the ritual processions, the flag is lowered, symbolising the end of the festival.

In this article we take a brief look at the Brahmotsavams of two major Vaishnava Temples, the Varadaraja Perumal temple at Kanchipuram and the Tirumala Tirupati Brahmotsavam. The Kanchipuram temple follows the Pancharatra Agama and the Tirupati temple the Vaikhanasa Agama.

Hence there are variations in the mounts, processions and certain rituals. Agamas are sacred texts that specify rules from temple construction, installation of the deities to daily and regular pujas and utsavas. There are 108 Pancharatra agamas, and within that the Sattvata, Jayakhya and Paushkara are considered the ratnatraya, the most important.



Agamas prescribe temples to have at least one Mahotsava in a year, and multiple Mahotsavas can be done, as is still prevalent in some temples like Srirangam. The Tirumala temple history says how so many endowments added to taking up the number of Brahmotsavams in the temple at one time to ten Brahmotsavams in a year. Disturbances, decline in patronage, passing away of the patrons, or the discontinuity in the lineage all ended the 10 Brahmotsavams in Tirumala in the sixteenth

century to just one in a year by the nineteenth century. Agamas use only the term Mahotsava, and we saw earlier how the term Brahmotsavam came to be used.

Brahmotsavams form part of the fixed temple calendar so much so we have the practice of calling the utsava by the name of the month in which they are celebrated. The Purattasi Brahmotsavam at Tirumala, the Vaikasi Utsavam at

Kanchipuram, the Chithirai Thiruvizha at Madurai, Aani Thirumanjanam at Chidambaram to mention a few.

Do we know how old these Brahmotsavams are, that is from the historical point of view? We know from the Sthala Puranas and from ancient literature like Agananooru which speaks about the Panguni Uthira Utsavam at Srirangam, that the antiquity of the festivals are beyond doubt. When speaking about history, the Tirumala temple has an inscription - A tenth century inscription in Tamil that makes the earliest mention of Brahmotsava at Thiruvenkadam – Thiru Venkatanatha or Vekateswara is also how Srinivasa Perumal or Balaji is known since antiquity. The details of the Kanchipuram Brahmotsavam are found in the Varadaraja Panchasat written by Acharya Vedanta Desikan (13-14<sup>th</sup> CE), and epigraphical evidence from 14th century records the routes to be taken for the processions during the utsavam.



The Brahmotsavam has been celebrated by many famous Carnatic music composers who have composed many sahityas and also acharyas who have sung about them. Annamacharya, the 15th century poet describes the entire Tirupati Brahmotsavam in a single song “Tiruveedhula merise devadevudu” song. Later in the 18th century Matrushi Tarigonda Vengamamba describes the Utsavam in her Venkatachala Mahatmyam: “When the Sun transits Virgo and the star is Chitta, Dhwajarohana; when the star is Uttarashadha, Rathotsava (the car festival); and when the star is Sravana, Chakrasnana must be performed.”

The songs also highlight the significance of specific vahanas and also the atmosphere, the coming together of devotees, their immersion in the festivities. For instance on the Tirumala Sesha vahana Annamacharya has

written the song “Veedugade Seshudu Sri Venkatadri Seshudu” describing the splendour of Sesha. Sesha is the bed on which Vishnu sleeps in the milky ocean, he is the Adishesha. In the Vishishtadvaita Siddhanta God is seshi, the saviour and the rest are sesha, the ones saved. They say the Lord preaches this concept of Sesha-seshi bhava appearing on the Sesha Vahana.

Sesha was born as the hill on earth protecting Perumal, the Seshasaila. Garuda is considered the soul of the Vedas - “Vedatma vihageswarah.” Garuda has limbs that are symbolic of Sama and other Vedas. Vishnu seated on Garuda is considered the quintessence of Vedas.

Composers Muthuswami Dikshitar, Tyagaraja Swami and his student Walajapet Venkatramana Bhagavathar have all sung beautiful songs on Kanchi Garuda Sevai.

A verse in Kathopanishad can be quoted to show how the rathotsava teaches a philosophy, the affinity of the body and the soul, comparing it with the car festival. It is believed that darshan of rathotsavam, pulling of the chariot cuts the cycle of birth and death. “Rathotsavam Kesavam drishtwa punarjanma na vidyate.”

Completing the Brahmotsavam is akin to completing a Yagna and brings great joy and punya to the devotees. That is how the end of the Utsava is also celebrated with Avabhrita Snana. As Srinivasa promised Brahma the devotees who witness the Rathotsava “will easily cross the insurmountable ocean of ‘samsara’ and will be blessed, liberated from the cycle of birth and death.” Participating in the Brahmotsavam is an experience to cherish, elevating and the joy is beyond compare.

## Talk on Tiruvasagam



Vijayalakshmi Krishnamoorthy, spiritual speaker, writer and astrologer, spoke on the “Glory of Thiruvassagam” at Hindu Centre’s MahaShivaratri celebrations on March 8. Here are excerpts from her speech.

Thiruvashagam, a Tamil work composed by Saint Manickavasagar, is all about bhakti towards Lord Shiva. It comprises 51 chapters, 658 verses and 3,295 lines.

The first word of Tiruvashagam is "NamahShivaya". This word reveals the secret of the universe, a word which sustains the body, mind, and soul of all. A word which helps the soul to become enlightened. This is very powerful word and is a universal code.

Thiruvashagam is the only work which was written by Lord Shiva as Manickavasagar recited the verses. Lord Shiva not only wrote them but also signed it as proof that he has written the verses. This palm leaf was kept by him inside the Natarajar Sannidhi or shrine in Chidambaram.

In the first chapter called as ShivaPuranam, Manickavasagar praises the cosmic divine power (what we call as Lord Shiva) in the first twenty lines by greeting Him six times (use the word "Vazhga), hailing his victories five times (velga) , and praising his glory eight times (potri) .

He explains about the origin of the universe, the purpose of birth and its types in the Shivapuranam. He concludes that the solution to get rid of all suffering is devotion to Lord Shiva. This is the gist of Shivapuranam as explained by Manickavasagar. All the 3295 lines of Tiruvashagam explain how Manickavasagar channelised his inner journey experience and the secret of universe and its science.



Rev G.U. Pope, who translated Thiruvashagam into English, said about the text, "The one who is not melted by Thiruvashagam cannot be melted by any Vasagam!". Pope was amazed and impressed with every line of Thiruvashagam. It has become one of the best known and most influential Hindu bhakti literature worldwide through translation and transliteration in many

languages. Mrs Vijaya end her talk with a quote from the Thiruvashagam "Praise the Lord Shiva of the south, Praise the Lord of all the worlds!". In this quote, Manickavasagar explains that the universal divinity of Shiva in the south is reflected in various forms of divinity throughout the world.

## Yoga Therapy

Manoj Thakur, head of Vyasa Yoga Singapore gave a talk on “Integrated Approach of Yoga Therapy” on March 17, 2024 at the Hindu Centre. Manojji explained how and why Yoga Therapy works for a healthy lifestyle. The talk was followed by some loosening exercises, Asanas and breathing exercises. There were around 20 participants in the session and they left the session wanting Hindu Centre to organize more such therapy sessions.

Here are some excerpts from his presentation:

The human body comprises of Five Layers (Panchakosha). These are Annamaya Kosha (Food Layer), Pranamaya Kosha (Energy Layer), Manomaya Kosha (Mind Layer), Vijnanamaya (Intellectual Layer) and Anandamaya (Bliss Layer).

Each layer needs a different approach to address any problem as follows:

- A problem at the Annamaya Kosha manifests in the form of lack of stamina. A good diet, loosening exercises and Asanas can help to rebuild stamina.
- A problem at the Pranamaya Kosha manifests in the form of speedy and irregular breathing. Pranayama, Kriya and Pranic Energising Techniques can help regularise breathing.
- A problem at the Manomaya Kosha manifests in the form of agitation, stress and tension. Meditation, Mantra chanting and devotional activities can ease the mental tension.
- A problem at the Vijnanamaya Kosha manifests in the form of conflicts and confusion. Scriptural knowledge on what is right and wrong can reduce the conflicts and confusion.
- A problem at the Anandamaya Kosha leads to disharmony. Understanding one’s true nature and having a cheerful attitude should restore harmony.

The Manomaya Kosha is most important for a healthy living as any problem at the mental level can affect the body and the breath of a person. Any disease

first arises at the mental level and then manifests at the physical level. Hence it is very important to keep the mind active but calm.

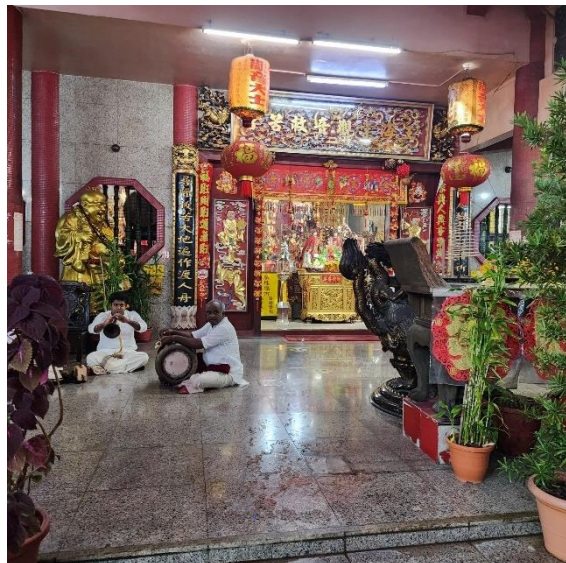


Satisfied attendees after yoga therapy

## Only in Singapore

According to a Pew Research Study some years ago, Singapore is the most religiously diverse nation in the world. But what would count as a very unique and significant achievement would be the close harmony exhibited among the adherents of each religion here. There is respect for one another's faith and beliefs and this is evident especially during religious celebrations.

For example, during the recent Mahasivarathri celebrations of Sri Sivan Temple, the ratha or chariot carrying Shiva and Parvati stopped at the Chong Teck Siong Tng Temple at Bedok Reservoir Road, to be greeted by a lion dance, as well as Chinese residents in prayer to Lord Shiva. These pictures speak for themselves. Let us remember that such harmony is hard-earned and can be dissipated with just one wrong word or action.

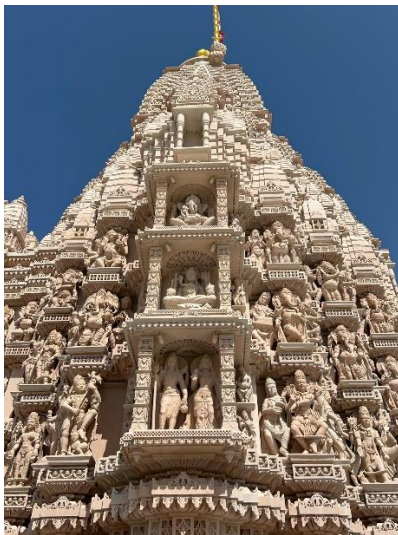


## Opening of BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi

A very significant development in the Arab world which is experiencing terrible human tragedy was the completion and opening of the BAPS Mandir in the United Arab Emirates on February 14, 2024.

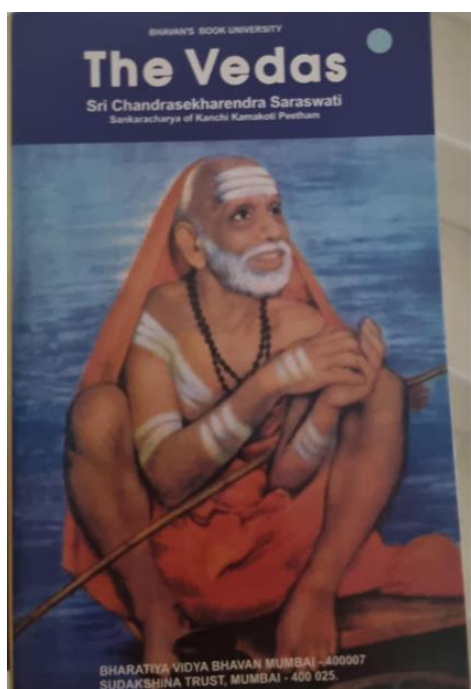
A small delegation from BAPS Singapore was present before and after the inauguration to assist with the crowds and tours over a week of festivities. Here is a sneak preview of the mandir. President Hindu Centre and President BAPS Singapore are seen in one of the pictures.

The beautiful temple is full of carvings of various Hindu epics and parables. It is also noteworthy that all major deities from north, south, east and west of India are present in the temple, such as Rama and Sita, Krishna and Yasoda, Shiva and Parvati with Muruga and Ganesha, Ayyappa from Kerala, as well as Jagannath, Subhadra and Balabhadra from Odisha.



## Book Review

### The Vedas – By Pujya Swamiji Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati



At Hindu Centre, some of us read this book again recently and we were all amazed at how much we learned. This book is a must read for knowing the first principles of Sanatana Dharma, written by Pujya Swamiji Mahaperivaa himself.

Vedas were revealed to the Rishis who were Mantra drishtas - discovered, not invented. Vedas are the life breath of Paramaatma and co exist with him. No beginning, no end.

All matter emanates from Paramaatma and manifests as different forms with a governing law. Paramatma's breath exists in space, but Brahmas come after pralaya, originating from

vibration and chanting the Vedas and creating by the power of his tapas.

Vedas are chanted for the well-being of the world and need to be chanted correctly, invoking the power of the mantras with power, concentration and purity. With faith and intellect with humility to understand the Vedic laws. Vedas contain injunctions for the well-being of individuals as well as society. Jnana Kanda and Karma Kanda, Karma is the flower and Jnana is the fruit, do karma to get purity and understand Jnana. Kalpa - induces Vedic action - details 40 samskaras, including 8 atma gunas. And much, much, more.

This book unravels the content of the Vedas for us in such few pages, it is a wonderful book to be read and re-read! A few copies of this sacred and spiritual book is available for sale at Hindu Centre.

## Online Chanting Schedule

Hindu Centre is pleased to share the **April 2024 online chanting** details as below:

1. Sivarathri day Thiruvassagam Mutrodhal chanting: 7.4.2024 (Sunday) 6:30 am - 12 noon SGT/4 am - 9:30 am IST via zoom online

2. Amnavasya Abirami Andadi Chanting: 8.4.2024 (Monday) 7:30 pm - 8:30 pm SGT/5 pm - 6 pm IST via zoom online
3. Chathurthi Vinayagar Agaval Chanting: 12.4.2024 (Friday) 7:30 pm -8:30 pm SGT/5 pm -6 pm IST via zoom online
4. Kanda Sashti Parayanam: 14.4.2024 (Sunday) 7:30 pm -8:30 pm SGT/5 pm - 6 pm IST via zoom online
5. Soundarya Lahari (Shlokas 1-100) chanting: 18.4.2024 (Thursday) 7 pm - 8:30 pm SGT/4:30 pm - 6 pm IST via zoom online
6. Devi Mahatmyam (Chapters 1-13) chanting: 20.4.2024 (Saturday) 8 am - 11 am SGT/5:30 am to 8:30 am IST
7. Pournami Lalitha Sahasranamam chanting: 23.4.2024 (Tuesday) 7:30 pm - 9 pm SGT/5 pm to 6:30 pm IST via zoom online

Zoom meeting details:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84059244048?pwd=V3dkTIR3cmRMd1NDWC84RXdyRGIDQT09>

Meeting ID: 840 5924 4048; Passcode: bhakti

8. Mooka pancha sathi (MPS) - (Arya shathakam shlokas, Padharavindha shathakam, stuthi shathakam shlokas) chanting: 28.4.2024 (Sunday) 7:30 am to 9:30 am SGT/ 5 am to 7am IST via google meet link which will be shared nearing the time

All are welcome to join 🙏

## Upcoming Events at Hindu Centre

- Warli Art: Saturday, 23 March, from 4pm to 6pm. Register here: <https://sfh.sg/hcarts>
- Talks by Niloorferji on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> April, 7.30pm to 9.00pm. register here: <https://sfh.sg/hcalive>
- Weekly Tuesday Yoga class, 7.30pm. \$20pm. Join here: <https://sfh.sg/hcyoga>. Free trial for 1<sup>st</sup> timers!
- Rama Navami celebrations: Wednesday, 17 April, 7.30pm. Register here: <https://sfh.sg/hcbhakti>
- Talk on Samskaras, Saturday 27 April, 4pm

## EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

For more details and registration, please call the HC office during office hours at 62918540, or email to [events@hinducentre.org.sg](mailto:events@hinducentre.org.sg)

Subscribe to our calendar of events here: <https://sfh.sg/hcevents>.

### Hindu Centre Membership

To join Hindu Centre as a member, just visit <https://sfh.sg/hcmember>

The fee for Annual membership (12 months) is \$120, and the entrance fee for Life membership is \$2000 (one-time).

### Find your Purpose and Make a Difference

Hindu Centre provides wonderful opportunities to volunteer and help the community according to your talents and interest. From counselling offenders in prison, befriending old folks staying in homes for the aged, to social media and website design, to helping in the library, or joining our bhajan groups. You will meet a group of wonderful people in a common cause.

Hindu Centre is looking especially for a **volunteer librarian** to manage our book collection and library. We already have an online catalogue, but we need someone to develop it further and to manage access to members and seekers. We're also looking for people with website design expertise to revamp our website.

Please register your interest here: <https://sfh.sg/hcvolunteer>.

### Help Us Promote, Protect and Preserve our Vedic Heritage

#### "Every Little Bit Counts"

Hindu Centre Singapore is dedicated to the spiritual progress of Singapore Hindus through the three pillars of Jnana (Knowledge), Bhakti (Devotion) and Seva (Service). We are a non-profit society run entirely by volunteers. HC depends on the goodwill of generous donors and supporters who believe in our work and mission. For more information, please click here

<https://www.hinducentre.org.sg/donate/>



Use your mobile banking app to scan the code.

OR use PayNow to send to UEN S78SS0017J

Thank you for your generous support.

Every little bit counts!

### **Ask Us Anything on Hinduism**

Do you have a question about Hinduism, Sastras, Life in general, Relationships or activities of Hindu Centre? Send us your question at [admin@hinducentre.org.sg](mailto:admin@hinducentre.org.sg) and our panel of respondents will get in touch with you. Please be assured of protection of privacy at all times, regardless of the nature of your questions. Email your questions to at [admin@hinducentre.org.sg](mailto:admin@hinducentre.org.sg)

### **Hindu Centre WhatsApp broadcast Group**

To receive regular event notifications, just follow the steps below.

Your name and number will not be shared with nor visible to anyone else.

1. Save +65 8768 0532 in your phone contacts as WhatsUp@HC.
2. Send a WhatsApp message "I'm in" to the newly added contact with your name.