



The Hindu Temple of St Louis

Lord Ayyappa Maha Sannidhanam

(www.AyyappaTempleStLouis.org)



Wearing Mala to Begin Mandala Vratham on Nov 16, 2011

A Spiritual Perspective by Shri Shankar Iyer

☆ SAIRAM, SvAmi sharaNam, every one.

☆ Two weeks from now, on **Wednesday, November 16, 2011**, in the evening of the first day of kArtikai (start of vrischikasankramaNam), millions of devotees of our Lord Ayyappan all over the world will start wearing their mudra mAIA and start their manDala vratam. With His Divine Grace and the blessings of my guru paramparai, I have been fortunate to have worn the mudra mAIA since 1977. Drawing on the experience and what I have gleaned from our gurus and other elders, I wanted to share with you my perspective on this physical/mental/spiritual commitment we make for the fulfillment of our desire for His darshanam. [NOTE: There are many other much more knowledgeable svAmis in this forum; humbly and respectfully I invite their comments and perspectives to enhance our understanding and appreciation. Thanks.]

☆ When we wear the mudra mAIA, we are indeed making a physical, mental and spiritual commitment - with the Divine Self within, to prepare our body/mind/intellect complex for the arduous journey through the forests to reach His Divine abode, and to get His darshanam. We commit to observing the vratam for at least a manDala (of six weeks), undertake the arduous journey and present our irumuDi at His Holy Feet - for the few precious moments of His divya darshanam. You can well appreciate how important this process is, in order to experience the bliss of His darshanam for the few precious moments. I have given below the shlokams we chant at the time of receiving our mudra mAIA from our guru, after having worshipped at the Holy Feet of our Supreme Guru, Lord Ayyappan.

☆ *jnAna mudrAm, shAstra mudrAm, guru mudrAm namAmyaham*

☆ *vana mudrAm, shuddha mudrAm, rudra mudrAm namAmyaham*

☆ *shAnta mudrAm, satya mudrAm, vrata mudrAm namAmyaham*

☆ *shabaryAshrama satyena mudrAm pAtu sadApi me*

☆ *guru -dakshiNayA poorvam tasyAnugraha kAriNe*

☆ *sharaNagata mudrAkhyam tvan mudrAm dhArayAmyaham*

☆ *chin mudrAm, khechari mudrAm, bhadra mudrAm namAmyaham*

☆ *shabaryAchala mudrAyai namas-tubhyam namo namaha*



☆ Let us explore the meaning and the import of these four shlokams:

☆ Meaning: I offer my salutations to the symbol of wisdom, the learned texts, the preceptor, the forest, purity and of Lord Shiva. I offer my salutations to the symbol of peace, truth, penance; may the Truth of shabari's hermitage ever protect this symbol. After seeking and securing the compassionate grace and blessings of my preceptor, O Lord, I will wear this symbol of my complete surrender seeking refuge in You. I offer my salutation to the symbol of pure intellect, the celestial beings, and auspiciousness. O symbol of the shabari hill, I offer my salutations to you again and again.

☆ There are a few important words and concepts to understand and appreciate in these sholokams.

☆ First, the word 'mudrA'. Literally, mudrA means a symbol, a seal (as in a royal seal, a seal of authority), a special sign (as mudrAs used in tAntric rituals and our pUjAs), a special pose conveying specific meanings (classical dance has numerous mudrAs).

☆ To devotees of Lord Ayyappan, the mudra mAIA is a seal of approval they have received from Him, their Supreme Guru, through the compassionate grace and blessings of their guru svAmi. It is the onerous duty of the guru svAmi to ensure that the mudra mAIA is given only to the deserving.

☆ It is also the guru svAmi's duty to guide the devotee through the vratam, and then through the journey to attain our Lord's darshanam. Thus, each mudra mAIA represents a symbol of the guru svAmi's commitment and responsibility as well.

☆ The shlokams detail the many aspects/attributes which the mudra mAIA symbolizes, from wisdom all the way to total surrender of the self (ego), seeking refuge at the Holy Feet of our Lord. It is equally important to appreciate that this surrender of self is not just at the feet of our Lord, but also at the feet of the guru svAmi. Which brings me to the next three key words: dakshiNA, anugraha and sharaNAgati.

☆ The word dakshiNA has several meanings - but the most important of them is, "compassionate, ignorance-destroying glance/communication". He is called dakshiNAmoorti, as His compassionate glance and the chin-mudrA He shows completely dispel the nescience of the greatest of sages who had been in penance for thousands of years at His feet to attain Knowledge of the Self.

☆ The guru dakshiNA we offer to our guru is a very humble and a miniscule token offering in exchange for this divine compassion we receive. In fact, in order to be truly deserving of this grace, we need to do a lot more, There is a shlokam:

☆ *dhyAna moolam guror moortih, poojA moolam guror padam*
☆ *mantra moolam guror vAkhyam, moksha moolam guror krupA*

☆ The foundation of meditation is the form of our guru; the foundation of worship are the holy feet of our guru. His words are the foundation of mantrams to us. (By being so) His grace is the foundation for liberation from earthly bondage.

☆ There is another shlokam that describes the dakshiNA to be given to a guru:





☆ guru shushrUshayA vidya, pushkalena, dhanena cha

☆ athavA vidyayA vidyA, chaturthi nopalabhyate

☆ In order to gain knowledge from a guru, you have to servethe guru (by caring for the guru), and offer the guru all forms of wealth including money. Else, you should be able to impart to the guru some knowledge being sought by the guru (for example, I will teach you German, if you will teach me French). There is no fourth way (for gaining knowledge from a guru).

☆ And taitreeya upanishad urges: 'AchAryAya priyam dhanam Ahrutya ...' give as much as needed to please the preceptor. It also states: shraddhayA deyam, a-shraddhayA a-deyam,

☆ shriyA deyam, hriyA deyam, bhiyA deyam, samvidA deyam - with reverence should offerings be given, never with irreverence, and given with liberality, modesty, fear and in friendliness.

☆ So, with the dakshiNA of our guru secured, and through guru's 'anugraha' - which means, through the guru's decision to shower you with grace - you surrender your ego and seek refuge (sharaNagati) at the Holy Feet of the Supreme Guru, our Lord Ayyappan. Note that this shlokam is directly addressing Lord Ayyappan - while the other three shlokams are focused on the mudra mAIA itself.

☆ My prayers to Lord Ayyappan to bless us, his devotees with His mudra mAIA on the day of vrischika sankramaNam, be our constant inspiration and guide through the manDala vratam and our journey to His Divine sannidhAnam.

☆ SvAmi sharaNam, SAIRAM.

☆ SAI :-) November 3, 2011
☆ SHANKAR A. IYER

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☆Love All, Serve All - SAI BABA

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