

Path to Dharma

தர்ம நெறி

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பெருமை மாயை



News Letter

2

செய்தி மடல்



கேதத்திர(வயஸ்)நாயகர் ஆலயம்,
ஸ்ரீ முக்தேஸ்வரம், சீலாபம், இலங்கை.

Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka.

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வீரம மாதிரி



News Letter 2 செய்தி மடல்



**கேசுத்திர(வயல்)விநாயகர் ஆலயம்,
ஸ்ரீ முக்தேஸ்வரம், சீலாபம், இலங்கை.**

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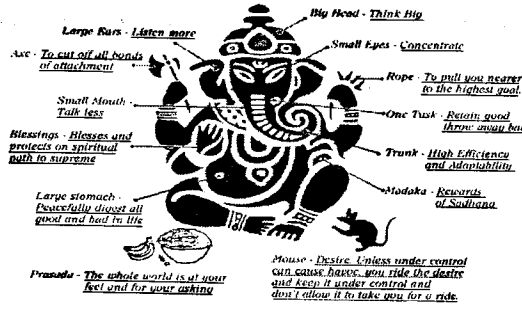
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This news letter solely contains the questions and answers of a series of discussions held on the full moon day of January 2008, at this temple with the devotees which will be useful to all.



1. What are the main Beliefs of Hinduism?

The main beliefs of Hindus determine the thoughts and attitudes about life, which in turn direct the actions. Because of these actions, our destiny is created. Beliefs about sacred matters as God, soul and cosmos etc. are important for the approach of a person's life

1. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
2. Hindus believe in the divinity of the four Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Agamas as equally revealed. These hymns are the basis of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion.
3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.
6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
7. Hindus believe that an enlightened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation and surrender in God.
8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, no injury in thought, word and deed.
9. Hindus believe that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

2. What is the significance of a Hindu temple?

The architecture of a Vedic Hindu temple is a divine and yogic representation of a human being. The feet represent the spire (rajagopura). The hands represent the walkway (prakaara) encompassing all around the temple. The main hall (mandapa) represents the abdomen. The entrance porch (antaraala) represents the heart. The sanctum sanctorum (garbha griha) represents the head. The deity is consecrated with religious rites in the sanctum sanctorum. There is proportionality between the size of the deity in the sanctum sanctorum and the sizes of the temple construction details.

3. What are the qualities of God?

God is one and indivisible, indescribable, inexhaustible, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, original, first, eternal, both transcendent and immanent, of absolute infinite existence, and the ultimate principle who is without a beginning, or an end. He is the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss who is hidden in all and which is the cause, source, material and effect of all creation known, unknown and yet to happen in the entire universe. The Vedas depict Brahman as the Ultimate Reality

4. What is the purpose of maintaining a shrine room at home?

Sacred feelings and sound vibrations pervade in the shrine room and control the minds of the devotees participating in the holy activities in the shrine room. Spiritual thoughts and vibrations accumulated by meditation, veneration and chanting performed there pervade the a shrine room. The devotees who participate in worship here feel calm, rejuvenated and spiritually uplifted.

5. What is puja?

Puja is a devotional (multisensory) experience for a real devotee. It involves the offering flowers, lighting oil lamps, ringing the bells, performing other holy musical instruments reciting sacred hymns offering smells of the incense, and tastes the blessed food offered at the end of the ritual. At the temple, where the gods are believed to dwell as royalty, puja is usually performed at sunrise, noon, sunset, and at night.

6. What is the reason for lighting an oil lamp at any auspicious functions?

Light symbolizes the knowledge, and darkness, the ignorance. Knowledge removes ignorance just as light removes darkness. Also knowledge is a lasting inner wealth by which all outer achievement can be accomplished. Hence we light the lamp to bow down to knowledge as the greatest of all forms of wealth. The oil in the lamp symbolizes our *vaasanas* (negative tendencies) and the wick, the ego. When lit by spiritual knowledge, the *vaasanas* get slowly exhausted and the ego too finally perishes. The flame of a lamp always burns upwards. Similarly we should acquire such knowledge as to take us towards higher ideals. A lamp is lit at the prayer room and the Almighty is worshipped daily in almost all the houses of Hindus.

7. What is the purpose of worshipping a flame or Jothi of a lamp?

A significant form of worship is prayer to a flame or Jothi of a lamp, instead of a Vighraha or a picture. God as *Nirguna Brahman*, comes to take the forms of various Avatharas as Saguna Brahman and also manifests Himself in the phenomenal Universe as its five elements - "**Pancha Bootha**." Vedas confirm that God exists in the five elements. Agama Sasthras and *Bhootha Suddhi* Manthras state that God manifests in Sky [Space] as *Sound*, in Air as *Sound and Sense of Touch*, in Fire as *Sound, Sense and Shape of things*, in Water as *Sound, Sense, Shape and Taste of objects*, in Earth as *Sound, Sense, Shape, Taste and Smell*. ("*Thvam, Bhoomi, Aapo, Anilo, Analo Napaha*"), which means that God is in Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Sky. Hence, people worship the Lord as the various elements and receive the Divine blessings. As light or fire, the Deepa Jyothi represent one of the five elements (*pancha Bhuutha*) as a manifestation of God.

8. Why do we apply the holy ash?

The holy ash (Bhasma) is the residue of the sacrificial fire (homa) where particular type of wood (samiththu) along with ghee and other herbs is offered as worship of the Lord. Homa (offering of oblations into the fire

with sacred chants) signifies the offering (surrender) of the ego and egocentric desires into the flame of knowledge. The consequent ash signifies the purity of the mind.

The holy ash (Vibuthi) is applied on the forehead. The word bhasma means, "that by which our sins are destroyed and the Almighty God is remembered". The application of the holy ash signifies the destruction of the immorality and protects the wearer from evil. The fire of knowledge burns the oblation and wood signifying ignorance and inertia respectively. The ash we apply indicates that we should burn false identification with the body and become free of the limitations of birth and death. This is not to be misconstrued as a morose reminder of death but as a powerful pointer towards the fact that time and tide wait for none.

9. Why do Hindu devotees fast (upavaasa.) on special occasions?

All the systems need a break and an overhaul to work at its best. Rest and a change of diet during fasting is good for the digestive system particularly and for the entire body generally. Fasting helps us to cultivate control over our senses, sublimate our desires and guide our minds to be poised and at peace. Fasting should not make us weak, irritable or create an urge to indulge later. The Bhagavad-Gita urges us to eat appropriately (neither too less nor too much). Food is made up of five elements. The water, earth, air, fire and space. Hence to maintain the health condition one must consume these five elements through food items. The foodstuff we consume should have earth (solid matter, the minerals), water (juices), air (the gases), fire (spices) and space. Space is eventually an important ingredient, which is the space we leave in our stomach.

There is a saying in Sidebar songs in Tamil about eating habit as follows:

One who eats one complete meal a day is a YOGI (yogi is a healthy person)

One who eats two complete meals a day is a BOGY (Bogy is a connoisseur)

One who eats three complete meals a day is ROGUE (Rogue is a sick guy)

One who eats four complete meals a day is DROOL (Drool is a mean person wasting food)

10. What is the purpose of circumambulating sanctum sanctorum (pradakshina –walking along in clockwise manner) in a temple?

The God is at the center (in *Grabha graha*) in any temple. He is the source and everything to our lives. Recognizing Him as the focal point in our lives, we go about doing our daily chores. We cannot draw a circle without a center point. Also every point on the circumference of a circle is equidistant from the center. This means that wherever or whoever we may be, we are equally close to the Lord. His grace flows towards us without partiality. As we do *pradakshina*, the Lord is always on our right. The right side symbolizes auspiciousness. Hence circumambulating the sanctum sanctorum is to show that to lead an auspicious life of righteousness, with the Lord who is the indispensable source of help and strength, as our guide the right hand.

11. What is the aim of ringing the bell in a temple?

The ringing sound of the bell produces what is regarded as an auspicious sound. It produces the sound AUM, the universal resonance of the Almighty. There should be auspiciousness within and without, to gain the vision of the Lord who is all-auspiciousness. As we start the daily ritualistic worship (*pooja*) we ring the bell, chanting:

Aagamaarthamtu devaanaam gamanaarthamtu rakshasaam

Kurve ghantaaravam tatra devataahvaahna lakshanam

The meaning of above hymn is that I ring this bell indicating the invocation of divinity,

So that virtuous and noble forces enter (my home and heart); and the demonic and evil forces from within and without, depart.

12. What is the purpose of installing a *kalasha* (*poorna kumbha*) in any auspicious occasions?

A *kalasha* (*poorna kumbha*) is a metallic or mud pot is filled with water. Mango leaves are placed at the opening (mouth) of the pot and a coconut is placed on it. A red or white thread is tied all around it in a intricate diamond-shaped pattern.

When the pot is filled with water, it is known as *puṇakumbha* representing the inert body which when filled with the divine life force gains the power to do all the auspicious activities and makes life what it is. A *kalasha* is placed at all-important religious occasions. It is placed near the entrance as a sign of welcome. The water in the pot symbolizes the primordial water from which the entire creation emerged. It is the provider of life to all and has the potential of creating innumerable names and forms, the inert objects and the conscious beings and all that is auspicious in the world from the energy behind the universe. The leaves and coconut represent creation. The thread represents the love that "binds" all in creation. The consecration (*kumbhaabhisheka*) of a temple is done in a grand manner with elaborate rituals including the pouring of *kalashas* of holy water on the top of the temple and the deity. Thus the *kalasha* also symbolizes immortality.

13. Why do we wear marks (tilak, pottu and the like) on the forehead?

The tilak cover the spot between the eyebrows, which is the seat of memory and thinking. It is known as the Ajna Chakra (Yogic point of view). The tilak is thus a blessing of the Lord and a protection against wrong tendencies and forces. The entire body emanates energy in the form of electromagnetic waves mainly the forehead and the subtle spot between the eyebrows.

14. What is Pranayama?

Pranayama (rhythmic breathing) is respiratory exercise to hygienically freshen the lungs, keep the heart beat steady, purify the blood components and strengthen the whole nervous system. The performance of Pranayama is extremely beneficial to the health of a person. According to the yoga system Pranayama is a way to concentrate the mind. The concept of Pranayama is to perfect the physical body in a healthy condition, in addition the mind and the spirit. Pranayama is performed with a traditional religious manner with pranava and Gayathri mantras.

15. What is Samsara?

Samsara is the cycle of births and deaths through which the soul of every creature passes prior to it attains Moksha (liberation). Hinduism teaches that all creatures are involved in this cycle of time process. The position of each creature in any particular life depends upon the karma (the good and evil thoughts and deeds) of its previous lives. The law of karma is a distinctive and characteristic feature according to Hindu dharma.

16. What is the law of karma?

Every thought and every act of a person, as it were, weighed in the scales of eternal justice according to the law of karma. As a man sows, so shall he reap.

As Nature is subject to irrevocable laws, moral nature of us is also subject to law of Karma. Our characteristics and destinies profile themselves from life after life, not according to random commands or whims. The acts of a former life does not get eliminated with the death of the body. They leave an indelible trace on the mind, or the soul.

17. What is Pratyahara?

Pratyahara is retraction the senses from their related outward objects. Because of this performance the mind is shut against all impressions from the external world. Hence the mind ceases to be affected by external influences. Thus the achiever (*sadhaka*) qualifies for contemplation by bringing his body, his senses and his mind methodically under control. The achiever is at this moment qualifies to go into the elevated stage known as Raja-yoga which comprises the last three steps of discipline-dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

18. What is dharana?

Dharana is the concentrating the mind on a given object. The performer (sadhaka) concentrates his mind on some physical point of an object, on a spot of the flame of light, in his own heart beat or on the figure of his Ista-devata so as to gain perfect steadfastness. By this act the mind gets concentrated into the phase of meditation (dhyana). This condition is known as the continuous stream of thought towards the object of devotion. The final outcome of meditation results samadhi in which all self-consciousness is vanished and only the object of meditation shines forth. The mind of the performer (sadhaka) loses its sense of identity and assumes the form of the object which it contemplates. Two phases known of this conditions in Samadhi are conscious samadhi and superconscious samadhi. In the conscious Samadhi state the object meditated on is still distinct from the meditating subject. In the superconscious samadhi state this distinction disappears.

19. What is the relation of body and the soul?

The body and the soul are two separate entities. The body is in the soul. The body is enveloped and pervaded by the soul which is infinite, all-pervading and eternal. The body is like a container.

20. What are the mahavakyas?

The ultimate identity of the soul and God (of the individual soul and the universal soul) is established by four mahavakyas or great quotations taken from the four Vedas.

The Aitareya Upanishad of the Rg-Veda says, "Prajñānam Brahma" ("Intelligence is Brahman").

The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda says, "Aham Brahmasmi" ("I am Brahman").

The Chandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda says, "Tattvamasi" ("Thou art That").

The Atharva Veda says, "Aham Atma Brahma" ("This self is Brahman").

21. What is the speciality in the lotus in Hindu religion?

The lotus (*Nelumbium –speciosum-nuciferum*) symbolizes the truth, auspiciousness and loveliness (*satyam, sivam, sundaram*).

The bud of the lotus blooms in the morning with the sun rise and closes with sun set. Likewise the mind of a person widens up and expands with the light of knowledge. The rhizome of lotus grows even in mushy areas. It remains beautiful and fresh despite its soggy surroundings, showing that an individual should attempt to be pure and divine under all circumstances.

The round shaped leaf of the lotus never gets wet even though it is in water always. It symbolizes the wisdom (*gyaani*) who remains ever happy, unaffected by the world of sorrow and alteration of the external surroundings. This is expressed in a hymn in the Bhagwadh Geetha. As follows:

He who does actions, offering them to Brahman (the Supreme), abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin, just as a lotus leaf remains unaffected by the water on it.

22. What is the significance of a coconut in Hindu religious rituals

In Hindu religious rituals one of the most common offerings in a temple is a coconut. It is also offered on occasions like weddings, festivals etc. It is offered in the sacrificial fire whilst performing *homa*. The coconut is broken and placed before the Lord. It is later distributed as *prasaada*.

The fiber covering of the dried coconut (*cocos nucifera*) is removed from the nut except for a tuft on the apex. The breaking of the coconut, symbolises the breaking of the ego of the person who thrashes the nut at a sacred site.

In the traditional *abhishekha* ritual performed in all temples several materials are used as sacred *abhishekha* material poured over the deity out of which, tender coconut water is one item. Tender coconut water is considered in *abhishekha* rituals as it is supposed to bestow spiritual growth on the seeker. The three 'eye marks' at the top on the coconut are considered to represent the three-eyed Lord Siva and therefore it is considered to be a means to fulfill our desires.

23. Why the plant 'tulasi' (*Ocimum sanctum*) is considered a sacred plant?

Tulasi (*Ocimum sanctum*) is one of the most sacred plants in the Hindu worship rituals and in aurvedic treatment. Tulasi gives Sattwa, (positivity) and healing power. It smoothns the heart beat, refreshes the mind, increases the sense of spiritual love, and enhances devotion, faith, compassion and clarity. In addition it helps to develop pure awareness.

The juice of the leaf of Tulasi helps to enhance the quality of Rasa Dhatu (nutrient plasma), Rakta Dhatu (blood), Majja Dhatu (bone marrow and nerves) as well as Shukra Dhatu (reproductive fluids). All the offerings in a ritual would be incomplete without using the leaf. The *tulasi* leaf has great medicinal value and is used to cure various ailments, including the common cold.

The Thulsi plant has many medicinal properties. The holy basil is also a herbal medicine for a large number of common sicknesses. The decoction of the green Thulsi leaf obtained by boiling basil leaves in water is taken as a medicine for sore throat in aurvedic treatment. The juice of Thulsi leaves is very valuable for the treatment of skin diseases. It has also been tried successfully by some naturopaths in the treatment of leucoderma.

The decoction of the green Thulsi leaf helps in activating the function of the kidneys. The leaf of Thulsi is an important constituent of many Ayurvedic cough syrups and expectorants. It helps to mobilize mucus in bronchitis and asthma. Chewing Thulsi leaves relieves cold and flu.

The leaves are considered as a stimulant for nervous disorders. It increases memory power. The leaves encourage the elimination of the catarrhal wastes and phlegm from the bronchial system. The leaves strengthen the stomach and induce bountiful perspiration. Ordinary pediatric problems such as coughs, colds, fever, diarrheas vomiting etc. respond satisfactorily to the decoction of the Thulsi leaves.

The leaves are very effective against all the infections of the mouth. In the rainy season, when malaria and dengue fever are widely prevalent, tender leaves, boiled with tea, act as a preventive against these diseases, and is used in villages as follows; A handful of Thulsi leaves are boiled with cardamom powder in 500 ml of water and this decoction is used to bring down the body temperature. The Thulsi leaf is useful for the treatment of teeth problems. The Thulsi leaves are dried powdered and used for brushing teeth. It can also be mixed with mustared oil to make a paste and used as toothpaste. It is also useful in pyorrhea and other teeth disorders according to aurvedic treatment.

The herb is useful in the treatment of respiratory disorders. A decoction of the leaves, with honey and ginger is an effective remedy for bronchitis, asthma, influenza, cough and cold. A decoction of the leaves, cloves and common salt also gives immediate relief in case of influenza. They should be boiled in half a liter of water till only half the water is left and add then taken. Basil juice is an effective remedy for sore eyes which is generally caused by deficiency of vitamin A. A few drops of the juice taken from the black type of Thulsi leaves are put into the eyes for a few days to over come this problem.

Thulsi leaf has a favorable effect in cardiac ailments. This leaf reduces the cholesterol level of the blood. A decoction of the of the Thulsi leaves can be taken for painful headache. Minced Thulsi leaves mixed with sandalwood paste could be applied on the forehead to cure a headache. The herb is a prophylactic or protective and curative against insect stings (bites). A small quantity of the juice of the Thulsi leaves is applied repeatedly on the wound for a few hours. A paste of fresh roots of the Thulsi plant is also considered as effective for the bites of leeches. Thulsi leaves are regarded as an anti-stress agent. Anyone may chew up a few leaves of Thulsi leaves, daily, which will definitely prevent stress.

24. What is Gayathri Mantra and briefly explain the significance of Gayathri Mantra?

Om Bhur bhuvah svahah

Tat savitur varenyam

Bhargo Devasya dheemahi

Dheeyo yonah prachodayaat

As the Sun annihilates darkness, the Gayathri Mantra destroy ignorance. This Mantra invokes the power and radiance of the Sun to energize all earthly life, to destroy our sins and to reveal the Supreme Self to us. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagvad Geetha that " Amongst the Mantras, I am the Gayathri"

The translation of the Gayathri Mantra is 'AUM, O Lord! You are the all pervading Source of Light, Sustainer, Protector and Bestower of Happiness, Kindle, Enlighten and inspire our Intelligence to possess Eternal Qualities'.

This Gayathri Mantra is considered the essence of the three Vedas (the Rig , the Yajur and the Sama Vedas)The more one contemplates and meditates upon the Gayathri, the more complexities are revealed to one.

AUM Supreme Lord

BHUR Protector of the earth, the material sheath, The Life breath of the Universe. From the feet to the navel center.

BHUVAH One of the meanings is the sky. The Lord who pervades and eliminates all miseries. From the navel to the throat center.

SVAHAAH One of the meanings is the heavens. He is all Bliss and blesses His devotees with happiness. From above the throat center to the thousand petaled lotus.

TAT That (That Thou Art)

SAVITUR The SUN, Creator, Preserver and Self Luminous, the central mantra of the Solar Science.

VARENYAM Most fit to be worshipped. Most choice worthy.

BHARGO The burning splendor of the Sun that dispels ignorance, and therefore sorrows and miseries.

DEVASYA The 'Deva', The God, He who is All Bliss, The Joyful One, The Shining One, The Revealer of All Glory

DHEEMAHİ We meditate upon Him

DHEEYO YO NA Who our intelligence and Wisdom

PRACHODAYAAT Inspires

The essence of the 3 Vedas in three **fragments** are:

Essence of Rig Veda is Tat Savitur Varenyam

Essence of Yajur Veda is Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi

Essence of Sama Veda is Dheeyo Yonah Prachodayaat

The essence of the 3 segments, in the 3 words are :Bhur, Bhuvaha, Svaha

The essence of Veda in its simplest form in one word is: AUM

25. What is the famous *Mrityunjaya mantra*?

The *Upanishads* say that the famous *Mrityunjaya mantra* should be chanted whilst applying ash on the forehead.

Tryambakam yajamahe Sugandhim pushtivardhanam

Urvaa rukamiva bhandhanaan Mrytyor muksheeyamaa amrutaat

The meaning of the above *Mrityunjaya mantra* is the one that recited when we worship Lord Shiva who nourishes and spread fragrance in our lives. May He free us from the shackles of sorrow, change and death, effortlessly, like the fall of a rip pumpkin from its stem.

26. What is the sthuthra (prayer) for the worship of Saraswathi ?

Saraswati namasthubhyam

Varade kaama roopini

Vidyaarambham karishyaami

Sidhirbhavatu me sadaa

O Goddess Saraswati, the giver of

Boons and fulfiller of wishes,

I prostrate to You before

starting my studies.

May you always fulfill me?

27. What are the main cardinal virtues in Hinduism?

The cardinal virtues, according to Hinduism, are amply indicated in The epics and the Puranas show enormous cardinal virtues. They are,

- (1) purity (sattva suddhi),
- (2) self-control (lana and dama),
- (3) detachment (vairagya),
- (4) truth (satyam)
- (5) non-violence (ahirrlsa)

28. What is its authority of Hinduism?

The unique features of Hinduism is that it has no founder. The authority of Hinduism is the Eternal Truth itself. The spiritual experience of an individual stand witness to it .

29. What is Sruti?

The term Sruti in Sanskrit means what is heard. Great Rishis who Experienced (perfect ed themselves) by long *tapas* are said to have heard in their minds eternal truths and to have recorded of them in the sacred books.

30. What are the sacred books of Hinduism?

The authoritative sacred books of Hinduism are called the Vedas, which are the Rig-veda, the Sama-veda, the Yajur-veda and Atharvana-veda.

31. What are the specialities of the Vedas ?

The Vedas are absolutely authoritative and teach an individual the highest truths that he can know and to lead him to his highest good. They claim the Truth is eternal.

32. What do the Vedas consist of?

Each of the four Vedas consist of four parts namely

- (1) the Mantras or hymns;
- (2) the Brahmanas or explanatory treatises on mantras and rituals;
- (3) the Aranyakas or meditations in the forest
- (4) the Upanisads or mystic treatises revealing the most profound spiritual truths and suggesting the ways of realizing them.

33. What is the meaning of cardinal virtues?

All religion emphasizes a few good qualities for the benefit of mankind and to bring these qualities under the cardinal virtues. The cardinal virtues emphasized by a religion determines its individual character.

34. What are the Vedantha-sutras?

The word Vedantha in Sanskrit means the end of the Veda. The Upanishads, being the final portions of the Veda, are called Vedantha. Since the sutras twined together the flowers of the Vedantha passages they are called Vedanta-sutras. There are elaborate commentaries on the sutras written by eminent philosophers and theologians like Samkara, Ramanuja and Madhva presenting different Vedantha-darsana.

35. What are the *Brahma-sutras*?

The *Brahma-sutras* are a number of aphorisms which systematize the whole teaching of the Upanrshads. Badarayana wrote the *Brahma-sutras*. They expound the nature of Brahman (the Absolute) and its relation to man and the world.

