

# DANAM CONFERENCE 2006

## SESSION PW 1

**Theme: Prayer and Worship in Dharma Traditions and Western Religions**

**Sub-Theme Prayer and Worship in Hindu Traditions – Session 1**

**Rita D. Sherma**, Binghamton University, *Convener*

**Lance Nelson**, University of San Diego, *Presiding*

## ABSTRACTS

**Arindam Chakrabarti**, University of Hawaii at Manoa

***What is a Devatā? What is a Yajñā? Can Work be Worship? From Veda, through Bhagavadgita, to Tantra of Abhinavagupta***

The paper will include a brief, but somewhat novel, authentic analysis of the Vedic concept of a Devatā (divinity or deity), and a philosophical and literal commentary on the gāyātrī mantra (om bhūr bhuvah svah, tat-savitur....etc.).

**Gerald J. Larson**, UC Santa Barbara and University of Indiana Bloomington, emeriti

***The Eccentric God of Yoga: A New Approach to 'Worship' and 'Prayer' (Bhakti-Visesa)***

The reference to "bhakti-visesa" comes from Vacaspatimisra's comment on YS I.23. The discussion there and in I.24 by Vacaspati together with Vyasa's discussion of I.23-24 is, in my view, the locus classicus for a unique theology in Indian thought that has never been properly understood.

**Purushottama Bilimoria**, Deakin University & Melbourne University, Australia

***Mantric Effect, Noetics of Supplication, and the Apūrva in the Mimamsa***

The *Srauta*, ritual rules of Apastambha, correspond closely to the *sutras* of the Mimamsa. Other *Srauta* manuals generally presuppose principles of interpretations evolved in Jaimini's systematic treatment *mantras* and their precise recitations used in sacrifices, *krama*, i.e. order of sacrificial procedure, so on. Ontologically, it is the *dravya* (offering material) and *devata* that constitute the *yaga* (sacrifice), and *mantra* is the conduit, in as much as *mantra* (from *mana*, to think) brings forth the deity (say, Agni) to the mind. And by its own inner propulsion, without an external agency intervening, a hitherto unprecedented result is achieved: although in deferral traces in some possible world, namely, *apurva*, which remains *adrsta* (unseen). That is all there is to the deity: an effervescently efficacious symbol that has no substantive signified beyond its moment of iteration. What is substantive is the *action*, the act of sacrifice, the very originary or primal sacrificial act that gave emergence to the universe and sustains its temporality and order. Is this tantamount to 'prayer' or 'worship'? There might be a category mistake in thinking so. Hence, divinity, the gods, the idea of authorship, human beings and their craving, the external world are simply qualia (qualities, properties, attributes, or *guna*) that are judged against another benchmark that has as its signified the sacrificial whole and *dharma*, the sum of all right rituals, ritual relations, and ordering of the universe as well as all right actions and practices.

**Bina Gupta**, University of Missouri at Columbia  
***Can an Advaitin Pray? Role of 'Upāsanā' in Shankara***

The question: Can an Advaitin pray? may be answered in different ways. In this paper, I will examine two possible answers and conclude the discussion with an analysis of the role of *upāsanā* in the process of liberation.

**Anantananda Rambachan**, St. Olaf College  
***Knowing Brahman as Creator and Self: Reconsidering Prayer and Worship in Advaita***

The role and significance of prayer and worship in the Advaita has to be seen properly in relation to the tradition's understanding of the nature of brahman. Many have argued that worship is a stepping stone on the path to liberation and becomes redundant with the attainment of moksha. Such a view rests on a questionable bifurcation in the nature of brahman which deserves to be questioned. This paper will argue that the denial of brahman as creator and the world as creation are neither necessary nor required for liberation.