

Murugan Devotional Guide



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Lord Murugan is a popular tradition in the 21st century has rapidly spreading around the world. However, a small section tamilarkalilum still do not understand, do not support. Murugan, a devotee of the country, Lord Murugan's origins, its history, character, and devotion to the worship of all the experiences of the first year of the study in 1970, and described by this article.

Lord Subramanya or Murugan or Skanda kumara full commitment or devotion to the ancient Sangam period from the date the various ways through which spiritual path to be moved. The Tamil-speaking people around the world in the 21st century, not only is the population prevalence of this tradition.

Unlimited abundant global economy, the growing alienation from the current level of ancient customs, traditions and way of life balancer Murugan devotion and study, it is the need to support the purpose of

this article is kattuvate.

My story

I was born in the family of European descent. Pirantavarkalo with me any more than I ஆக்கிரமிக்கப்பட்டவர்கள் potanaikalinalum not religious. At the same time, my perrorkalo கட்டாயப்படுத்தாமல் us, encouraged us to take our mind to the religious neriynai.

In 1970 it was known as Ceylon, India, and on to today's Sri Lanka, Buddhist turaviyakum created feelings within me. But I wanted to make a spiritual way to go to Ceylon

Unexpectedly changed direction and went. At that time vetta local ethnic groups, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists, all praises most sacred temple in the jungle, who called katirkama or Kathirman heard me, and there was such a desire to see makattuvamana place.



Patrick harikan,

1971

Change of direction in my life it was. I went there with my American friend who had embraced Buddhism in yokacsramat stayed there. After taking a bath in the river Ganges there Manik fruits, flowers and incense sticks with all that modest, simple display of the temple was skantan katirkama.

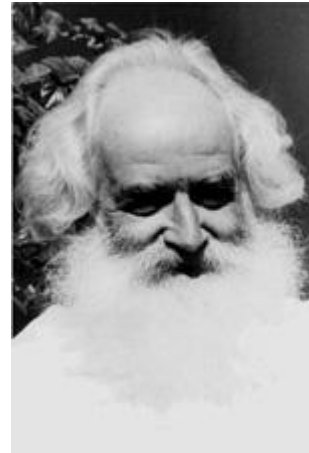
Fulfilled our request to go on katirkama vanankin was a widespread belief everyone. So the devotees and everyone there, came there with every request. The students must pass the exam, their diseases பீடிக்கப்பட்டவர்களும் disease that must be, and must be available to work overseas devotees there was a wide range of korikkaiyutanum. With such requests according to their power to bring their offerings to

the Temple கொண்டிருந்தவர்களைக் seeing I go there, I decided to make my request.

There is a need to work in the country, something that I decided to make a request to Kadirgamar. What if I do not want to do what everyone else catankukalaip (worship) and valipattarkalo the same time, all I did follow them.

An American friend of mine who was staying in Ceylon long after the priest told him to meet me again and told me to go ullat. They japna I was in the region to meet the German Swami wonder. It was another turning point in my life. Then I met him by the German svamiyana kelaripala became a spiritual mentor.

German Swami Swami kelaripala like modern disciples around him, always thought that there must be overcrowded. For the past 35 years as a priest and Ceylon Andy was the first to bring support from himaya up the hill, he came to the famous Nallur trusted guide to yoga swami. Kelaripala and many disciples of Swami Yoga Swami of Nallur on the register of the seals was alamakave.



German Swami
kelaripala

And his disciples came to him in German Swami ninaippavarkalai First off, beaten, and on to the horror and contempt as you do other than pavla vitattin who told him a few days to a few weeks or a few at a time, he had disciples. He gives me a few such experiences, there still allowed me to stay in his asramamana cummastan. He would drive me back ettanaitan, died in 1984, he went to him again and again I was told to get some experience.

Was in the ancient practice, he and his asramattai paramarittu, iruntavarum listening to his discourses, he has been following him iruntavarum daily walking to my acanana he had served. To set boundaries for themselves, likes and dislikes to develop, he was with the disciples of mamatai mamataiyai serious condition such as a hammer to break the throw cisya master of the ancient way of life to me, and I was unconscious. Effect, or devotional service to the Lord meyporulai I was able to get the shots.

His acanana Yoga Swami as German Swami, in 1940, the first 25-year period, Everybody year, they needed essentials only a parcel of the tumor with the japna from the Kathirman up even without a foot pilgrimage to the state, in 1970, even with the foot joined the pilgrimage. He was first in his Ashram Kathirman. He was in the region of its wealth and its shrines and prayer asramattai japna we set up near the temple. Throughout the year, hundreds of devotees who had come to the poor, was organized to provide daily Sweets.

Now we just stay away from it cisya guru devotion and ancient history of the dynasty, mental status, etc. Let's see. West - East of the features I was, however, a theory of how Lord Murugan further in my life that I'll still say first.

What is faith? Maintaining it?

The root of the word bhakti in Sanskrit language has been spoken. If so, what is the meaning of sharing. If the religious component to participants. God of his own choice, that is unique to their participation in the sense that God's goodness and devotion is its high teyvika. Therefore a devotee, he accepted a divine bow, praises, without coming venerate the participation tiviram is in its high teyvika sense.

Bhakti or devotion in the manner of a man who markat celkinrano, Bhakti yoga, or devotional Sadhna boy himself fully to God's promise that debt. The best way to achieve yokame devotion to God in the Kali yuga. Malunki cognitive, aesthetic, emotional upper hand in speed, akantat devotion in

this interminable disputes only involve the same level of excitement as the horse dung locked into a teyvattitan to us.

It's very easy in this generation yokakkal, safe, natural features only paktiyokam. It is not only viruppu and hate yourself buried in the deep sand, hiding yourself stuck in the middle of the desert is not such knowledge is the best markam.

Events - short history

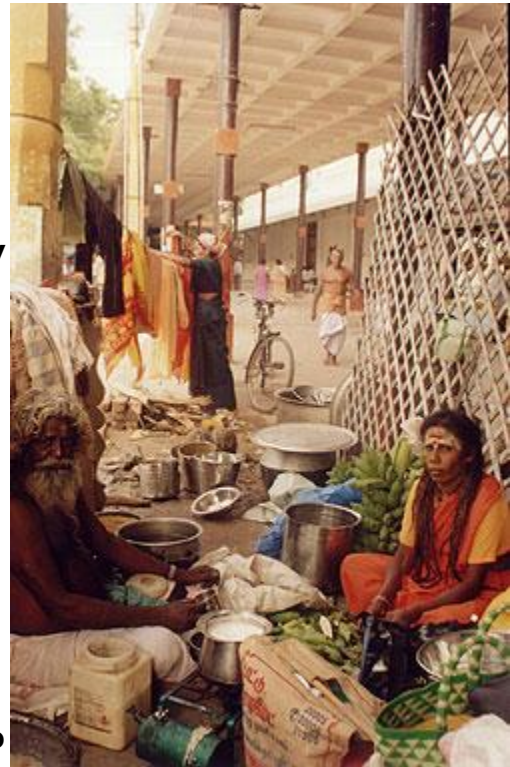
Ancient and modern scholars are united in one concept. The thoughts of everyone, Tamil devotional tradition panpattiltan appeared, moving slowly toward the north, the ancient Hindus not only in India's northern state of Jain, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian matattinaritamum devoted a major impact on later. So that's a significant Bhakti Yoga is the method.

Bhakti Yoga is the ancient Vedic Brahmins who follow different rites is the practical method. It has not been given the importance of rituals. At the same time, in a simple way without the ritual satisfactory result can be achieved through a system of Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti yoga, and the amount of available puranattuvat aunt fights as approved by the wish to get from their experiences with God is and will depend on the nature of totarppukkal.

In general, through the devotion of South India, held in the northern states is different from the quiet devotion and worship. South India's devotional worship பைத்தியக்காரர்களோ that sometimes they have to make us think. This shows that the need to find a good guru.

The duty of a good Guru

One of the great experiences in life, good, good friend, who is an adviser. What is the meaning of the Sanskrit adjective is very badly. If you master the specialized, knowledge center that brings meaning to control itself. Many years ago, Jain, Buddhist and Muslims in Asia and spread to



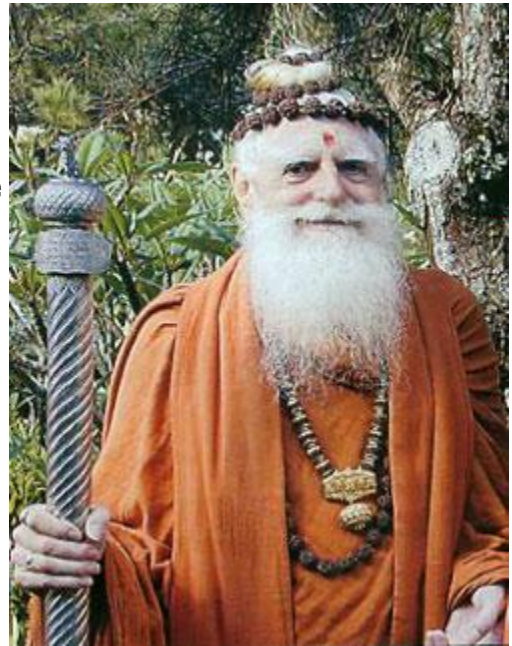
many parts of the center has been a source known as the guru of all camayankalukkume. But it's alien to the Western community and nakarika bush in life may be considered. Here it is important to give a description.

Themselves in the world of contemporary spiritual master himself boasted that he was the spiritual teachings of the advertising business has become strategic. But to live a long and served as a mentor to him from the proper methods of spiritual well-pundit ullavare catanakkalai can be a proper guru. Debit in the spiritual is all instinct. But it is well understood, and in its deep spiritual enlightenment, I came away from the deep needs of the tunaiye.

He called the doctor ponravartan anupavacaliyana many years. Harm comes to their level of understanding of the spiritual, medicines and curing certain diseases such as, according to the mental state of those who have spiritual influence pakkuvapatutti spiritual practices will take them to be.

Catanakkal same level solution for a wide range of impacts associated with spirituality. Their mental and spiritual implications of each position will be located on a different level. The only cure for all diseases, like that of all spiritual catanakkal takattirkum that one should be cautious of going to the preaching semi saints.

In traditional methods, such as the pure teaching of Guru potikkappatamal themselves with self-promotion, identification must be shown to be unique in the world of spiritual wandering clergy come with dangerous ideas. Rather than being a person without any Guru. If you need to identify a proper guru Guru their ancestry to be the first to know. To see his greatness in the people around them do not see the connection, another master of the spiritual guru for many years, is catanakkalai pundit to see that.



If you need to identify a guru, he must rely not only kuruparamparai mean, would not agree with his sentiments and feelings of the Guru is a need to examine. Is not limit his love and respect for one's looking, he can express his spiritual

feelings without hesitation to understand that there is a certain amount of energy each.

That is a Semitic ethnic Jew - pinisiyar - arapiyar including non-human genus Sanatana Dharma Hinduism relate Unlike the so-called holy markattai only one teacher, or belief includes the distinction is not all the time.

Sanatana Dharma is enormous, with many different spiritual and religious traditions pirivinarkalai itself is suppressed. Karma, reincarnation, caste, color (sub-caste), ponravarrilana faith, and agreed that a superior level of vetankale ponravaitan they have brought everyone together.

Murugan devotion with some combination of that, the ancient origin clergyman people, themselves identifiable disappearance from the point, but innovative methods themselves have demonstrated, the screen behind the poverty, promote shedding, and other valiyinaro traditional way-fashioned marapaik accepted explains there. The original spiritual master, a horse like cenankalai their camayattaiyo ornamental, spiritual tanmaikalaiyo and are expressed, in the absence of a large number of followers, so, too, even without being a volunteer. For dinner, there is a wave falls monks wearing robes only religious spiritual spirituality that does not reflect reality.

Elimaiyaki traditional religious practices around the world go by, it is going down under religious முக்கியத்துவங்களும் is the position of the modern world. Hindu religions other religions is not an exception. Sanatana Dharma means we need to find the section in the well.

Catcan sitting in front of a spiritual mentor, spiritual truths through his lectures to understand the wishes of the people and the place is overcrowded. His pride would have been the first in the oral language vartaikalinalaye parappattu. Takartterintu ancient etiquette, making vegetarian food, Warranty and hymns like to start promoting the campaign to delineate all through ukkiye catcan involve such lectures or films. Kitantu steeped in the world of life, the desire to go on a new path for a long time to accept the teachings given by such means hold on, be strong patintita spiritual life, it would lead to their feet.

Pavakkal

With feelings of devotion and deep sentiment of the people attending the vituvatin, it unknowingly expose themselves devotees express them with different faces. One of those conditions is pavakkal. The expression of the emotions is Bawa faces. Its size, position arising from their devotion or sentiment of the mind is the subject of inspiration.

Vaishnavism, Saivism, cakta and Kumara pavakkalai express all that is theology. In the tradition of the Guru is one of the deepest or the mental flexibility. Pavakkalilum peace and quiet made in God's love and external displays, DASARI Bawa such a Guru to disciple expressing behavior, cakya Bawa mean friends, such as the attitude of Revelation, vatcalya Bawa the child of a mother's attitude, and Madurai Bawa ie, his heart no longer one that promotes the mental aspect as there are levels .

Shantha Bawa Murugan devotion to the launch, somewhere in the far distant as to not disturb Murugan, while advancing a step towards him in order that he might be with his ideas entiyapati in mind. He started to feel his grace, he began to realize that the silly, she thought as his master, and the servant he gets manappakkuvattai. And when he rises to the close, we are one of the commanding officer, he is very close to her, feel supported and feel like friends.

How ariyavilum closer to him that, he reveals himself to come to us at the appropriate time, we work closely with us in order to become parttitata.

ஆசிர்வதிக்கப்பட்டவர்கள் see him as a child of God. Tamil ethnic mothers, their children and pavippatin if we cuttukirarkal them their names. People with high levels of emotional stress penkalukke vacappatum status because they have more of bhakti yoga.

At the level of the unit, unable to bear his மனதிற்கினியவர்கள் or after a long period of euphoria similar to each other when the devotees of Bawa is more revealing. Bawa



habit that can continue to practice, or have the opportunity to set up takuntarpola the expression, or in a manner appropriate to a particular skirt tamakke cemmaipattutti it can bring himself tertetuttu.

You remember the deep meditation, or even staying firmly on the outside and it Bawa. Although Bawa any level, at the level of the heart and its people, however, coincides with the Baba's condition not to prolong a long time. The level of devotion that we play an important role in the question of the extent to which a person is awakened Sadhna.

Process-oriented devotion Murugan, who is this, what is his body, his life and what he can and he's number, such as how to get out of Murugan devotion and kaumaram went on. I know all about Murugan, ancient songs, ceyyutkalilum has written a lot about him from under emalittanam not imagine thinking. You imagine that, beyond remote from us, the great God, who is not a puzzle, and, in life by his grace, we can not experience directly from the ideas in our mind as to be thrown.

If life is the right time, we'll humiliate ourselves, our users, we can not make them go away from us in such a bad idea, given the nature of the skills we need to go forward together. One Sanskrit, English or Tamil language is not important that you know or do not know. But from the kalankamal, a word, a thought, and that a way must be getting used to at first.

There is no way to yoga and virayame. Each of which is received, it will take us to the above condition. As for me, I was living in Ceylon velinattavan. Very impressed by the knowledge of the Buddhist Dharma anmikattin first came here. God across the continent, but the grace of arcane puzzle nampavumillai rain was said, he was not counting on the devotion to my family.

So I had him by my intuition is not emotionally able to learn first. German Swami kelaripala was alive, he learned from his master and began with a sermon I had accepted that I was not in the mood.



Like me, he was philosophical ideas. He came to pay his complete devotion to his mother that he thought acanana Nallur yokasvami and paracakti concerned. Gauri Bala Swamy and cakta hearted and full of hope that the children of all uyirinankalume paracakti.

1972 katirkama foot yattirait started. Following three months of knowledge between older Murugan devotees of Lord Murugan at the root diameter of the yattiraiye my heart. In 1988, 19 years after that first brought the foot yattirayai continues each year.

Experiences as mothers with chronic Swamikal and Swami had two months to continue the journey on the way to the foot pilgrimage to the holy places visited every fifteen days after the end of the reach katirkamanai held. With mass mind, I cherish katirkamanai heart had brought with them at the foot of the pilgrimage. In the next nine months, but what I did not foot the pilgrimage?

Swami kauripala choice of three American college studying South Asian countries for many years, I learned the language. Initiation of the study of ancient guru Kathirman valimuraiyilana the education that I have to do. I finished my degree in the Indian Mail. I lost them in the East to the West was the first ethnic kalappup tradition of specialized study did katirkaman.



In the study, the food industry has to taruvittu as bogus beliefs number of Murugan Murugan paktarkalaik seen in the eyes of those who, through local vetakkal the ancient period, through a combination of traditional ideas through their thoughts. Especially if they do something as important, or actually believe that there is a reason for them, so they had a global vision, I saw a well-researched.

Western researchers, human society's development - physical and arayntavarkalum the methods in contrast to the first Sri seriously worship the katikama God's worshipers him, and with him their position on the question, before I do that, he claimed that the purpose of the permit him to make.

I assume that such research frank, saying it justified peciyatin, and in 1989, California perkili University My research studies the members of his hatred earned, and appeal do not inappropriate for me in the industry out there. The temporary interruption, now I conduct my research without restriction katirkamane erpatitti I think I have given cantarppamakave.

Bhavana Shantha is the first stage of my research. It left her with a goddess tarava respect, but at the same quiet, away from him from a distance, and her little mind and confidence in the kontirunte started my research. But after some time I'd heard that the job is provided katikaman I felt, I was told that he had become Bawa Bawa tasya.

Skanda tirkama of my employer. Whatever the job, however, I want to do. What is a good method to improve the Baba thinking that I felt that we should be talking. We will not talk to others, but we should be talking to. Maybe he did not hear that from us, and we understand each number, within our heart as he imagined it to be sitting, listening to every word we speak about ourselves as we should understand that.

Say what you want to say in any language, can be anything. But before that, you're talking like that and you'll have to change expert with the palakkapatutti. Because he is before you snap the tonrivit, a servant master to increase Listening to you to ask for something when you need to (Murugan Central norms way to pay attains, but rather he's credentials are huge. Eventually, the pension is the world turappate is).

Once I spoke to the courage of the way. I worry about that with him pecuvaro mattaro thinking of him as I spoke to my boss. Bawa cakya the condition, such as a friend, he felt it was enpataip. Nowadays I can not even talk with him perversion. I am going to go with him. In some cases, a hacker, a parody which will goon. You are on this skirt with a close friend that is in the midst of such a feeling.

See that you are talking to at the time, who may have forgotten himself. Bhakti yoga, but even in that case will come out. Behaving like a mother to her child is the vatcalya Bawa. Murugan in the use of the woman, her child would have been if the time, however, the people in my position using her divine child, they choose to exchange him with. If you choose to use me as a child to the Skanda Murugan, like a child playing with another child playing with a child, he will be too.

The question now before us two levels. If we believe that a child in the first place, he must understand that the child pincile mature potential. Hitting the ball as hard and fast as we want to show in his life he had Thiruvilayadal. Consider it as a step in tiruvilaiyat kanri effects that may occur in our life. So he is going to have to bear such Thiruvilayadal.

What if the second stage, if we want to be with him, and he put his Thiruvilayadal way to go. But for how long to run Thiruvilayadal time. He and other celestial devas Thiruvilayadal We recognize that we have no energy. Fortunately we have the most fruit and bridge, has been porumaiyutanum to show us his Thiruvilayadal.

So playing the game he knows he can not beat him, we certainly do, we note that a variety of sensor and for the game was divine rather more closely with him to make him understand the way for us to understand that shows.

He stayed in Palani and katirkamam places such as his favorite game. If you go to a sports stadium as it vaittullatin he must obtain from their experiences. But the heart of everyone who is sitting on the foundations Guha, hidden in the heart of the crypt, it's easy to feel her heart will not seek to avoid their devotees to his favorite sports game.

Everyone, with his sweet heart, I do not have experience in participating Bawa fixed it. But Valli and teyvanai them knowing about it. They had reached a state of grave sin as it is a very small scale. They were all very, very humble. I admit my ignorance on this matter.

The Bhāvas

Since *bhakti* is grounded in human emotions, *bhaktas* have long recognized different emotional attitudes, termed *bhāvas*. Traditional literature speaks of five different *bhakti bhāvas* (moods or feelings) which are essentially different attitudes that one takes to express devotion to one's *iṣṭa-devatā* according to one's individual temperament.

The *bhāvas* find application in Vaiṣṇāva, Śaiva, Śākta, and Kaumāra theology, where they are enumerated in a hierarchy of emotional intimacy and intensity. These are: *śānta bhāva* or a calm and peaceful love for God; *dāsya bhāva* or the attitude of a servant to his or her master; *sakhya bhāva* or the attitude of a friend;

vātsalya bhāva or the attitude of a mother towards her child; and ***madhura bhāva*** or the attitude of a person towards his/her lover.

In Murugan ***bhakti***, for instance, one typically starts out in ***śānta bhāva*** where Lord Murugan seems like a remotely looming figure whom one definitely does not wish to disturb, so one steps around Him on tip toes, as it were. As one realizes the extent of His greatness, and one's own relative insignificance, one naturally comes to regard Him as one's Superior and oneself as His servant.

With greater familiarity, however, one realizes that Lord Murugan is not only one's supreme commander, but one's closest and dearest friend at the same time. We do not know how to approach to Him, yet He knows ways of revealing Himself to be closer to us than we previously could have imagined.

Those who can relate to Him as the child-god Bāla Murugan are blessed. Tamil mothers may see Bāla Murugan in their children, and often name their boy children after Him. Because women have a greater emotional aptitude and capacity, it seems that the highest levels of ***bhakti yoga*** are especially intended for them. This is especially true of ***madhurya bhāva*** where the ***bhakta*** may experience by turns either an intense mood of separation from the Beloved, or ecstatic union while maintaining a degree of separateness in order to enjoy the bliss of love play between them.

The ***bhāvas*** may be practiced in succession, or alternately according to the opportunities presented in one's daily practice, or one may settle upon one ***bhāva*** and cultivate it exclusively. Even ***dhyānam***, or quiescent contemplation of Lord Murugan and His mysteries, is made to be firm and illuminating by incorporating the ***bhāvas***, since the heart is inexorably drawn to explore one's current ***bhāva***, whatever it may be—and even the highest and most intimate ***bhāva*** never remains static for long.

Bāla Murugan



This brings us back to the question of how Murugan *bhakti* plays out in my own *sādhana*.

Applied *bhakti*

Central to Murugan *bhakti* or *Kaumāram* is the desire or curiosity to know more and more about Murugan: who He is, the patterns or profile of His personality, and the ways of interacting with Him. One should never entertain the conceit that one already knows Lord Murugan, or that the ancient sacred poems and songs have already described Him completely. And aspirants should resolutely discard the notion that Lord Murugan is unreal, or so distant, or so great, or so mysterious, that one can never actually experience His grace in this lifetime.

This much said, the proper attitude is to set aside any misgivings about oneself, including any sense of unworthiness or inability, and stride forward using whatever natural abilities that one may possess. One may not know much Tamil, or Sanskrit, or English for that matter. But remain undaunted and learn one word, one concept, one rule at a time. For in yoga there is no wasted effort—everything contributes to the unfolding of one sublime state succeeding another.

In my case, I started out as a young foreigner living in Ceylon, who felt spiritually and intellectually attracted at first to Buddha Dharma. Belief in, let alone devotion towards, a mischievous yet benevolent pan-Indian deity, was not a part of my family heritage. So I had to approach Him thoughtfully or intuitively at first, rather than emotionally.

As long as my teacher Swami Gauribāla lived, my attention was devoted to understanding and following the teachings or *upadeśa* that he had passed to me from his guru. Like me, he had a scholastic temperament. His *bhakti* was guru *bhakti* towards Yoga Swami, with another *bhakti* directed towards his Ammā, the Great Goddess, for Swami Gauribāla was a Śākta through and through.

The Kataragama *Pāda Yātrā* of 1972, a nearly three month immersion among mature Muruga bhaktars, planted in me the seeds of Muruga *bhakti* that would sprout years later only when I resumed walking the *Pāda Yātrā* annually for nineteen consecutive years from

1988 onwards. The unbroken association with veteran swāmis and swāmi ammās, visiting one sacred site after another for two months culminating in the indescribable experience of the fortnight long Kataragama festival, undoubtedly fixed my mind and heart upon the Lord of Kataragama.

But what about the other nine or ten

months of the year, when I was not on yātrā? At Swami Gauribāla's behest, I had spent years in South Asian language studies at three American universities, ostensibly to prepare myself to conduct field research into initiatic traditions associated with Kataragama. Armed on the one hand with a traditional initiation to Kataragama, and on the other hand with a postgraduate education in modern Indology, I proceeded to investigate Kataragama from a uniquely hybrid perspective spanning East and West.

To me this meant that I should not look down upon Muruga bhaktars and their traditions as the elements of a "belief system" of superstitious villagers, but rather look up to them all, including and above all the indigenous Vedars, as the custodians of age old traditional knowledge. Most especially, if they consider something to be real and significant, then I too should do the same if I wish to test and confirm their worldview.

This meant that, in stark contrast to modern western sociologists and other researchers, I resolved that first I would approach the Kataragama god, in whom Sri Lankans fervently believe, explain to Him what I wished to do, and ask for His kind permission before proceeding to question His devotees about their activities and their relationship to Him.

Incidentally, it was this attitude and methodology, which I had vocally professed and defended, that got me so thoroughly out of favor with my doctoral committee at the University of California-Berkeley that they finally and unceremoniously banished me from their Department in 1989 with no recourse to appeal. Ironically for them, I accepted this reversal as a green light from Lord Kataragama to return and conduct research unimpeded by disbelieving professors.

This initial phase of my research illustrates the śānta bhāva of treating the deity with respect even when the relationship with the

deity is marked by quietude, distance, and even doubtfulness. Later, when I realized that the Kataragama God had actually granted me the job that I had asked for on my very first visit, my attitude changed to one of *dāsya bhāva*. Kataragama Skanda was now my Boss—and I had better do the job right, whatever the job was.

We now digress into a short discussion of the history and psychology of bhakti and the traditional guru-disciple relationship. We conclude with an introduction to applied Murugan bhakti, that is, how I have applied principles of Murugan bhakti to my own practice both in eastern and western settings on a continuing basis.

What is *bhakti* and how does it work?

The term *bhakti* is a Sanskrit noun derived from the verbal root *bhaj*, meaning 'to share'. Hence, bhakti literally means 'participation', i.e. in the mystery and the glories of a particular *ishta-devatā*, or personal deity. The *bhakta* is therefore a participant, one who not only adores, worships, and glorifies a personal deity, but actively participates in the divinity's own mysteries.

One who follows the *bhakti mārga*, or the bhakti way, is one whose practice (*sādhana*) is a form of Bhakti Yoga, the yoga of loving devotion. Bhakti Yoga is said to be the best approach to God in the Kali Yuga, this cosmic epoch of incessant quarrel, when emotions run wild and intellects are dull, because bhakti yokes or harnesses the emotions to draw one towards the Divine. Bhakti is therefore considered to be the easiest, safest, and most natural of yogas for people of our era, for it saves one from getting lost in the desert of dry intellectual speculation, while also saving one from the quicksand of worldly likes and dislikes.

A short history of *bhakti*

Traditional and modern scholars alike share a consensus that bhakti originated long ago in Tamil culture, and spread northwards to leave a deep influence all across India, not only upon early Hindus but also upon Jains, Buddhists, and even upon Muslims and Christians of later centuries. Bhakti, therefore, may be considered as a quintessentially Tamilian approach to yoga.

Bhakti yoga, in contrast to ritually oriented Vedic traditions preserved by the Brāhmin caste, assigns less importance to precisely

executed rituals, which by themselves are believed to produce desired results. Rather, in bhakti yoga the measure of success (siddhi) is one's personal experience of contact and interaction with one's chosen deity.

The bhakti of the South, including Murugan bhakti, is unlike the `cool' bhakti typical of the North. Rather, it is described as `hot', as `melting' the heart of the devotee, and even leading to various states resembling madness. At once one sees the importance of a competent guide.

Role of the guru

The guru is the trusted friend or guide who knows the way from experience. The Sanskrit word *guru* is primarily an adjective meaning `heavy'. Thus, the guru is understood as one who is `heavy' with knowledge, which itself is `heavy' in terms of its gravity or significance.

The guru has long occupied a central role in traditional Indian spirituality in Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Islamic contexts, extending across much of Asia. The concept is foreign, however, to people raised in modern or Western societies, and merits special consideration here.

Nowadays there are many who declare themselves to be teachers of spirituality, and some may even hang a sign that they are open for business. However, one does not become a qualified guide without undergoing a long period of training and practice under the tutorship of one who, in turn, has undergone the same sadhāna or spiritual practice under a master's guidance.

A person may be naturally endowed with spiritual proclivities, but to reach the heights, or rather, to plunge into the depths of one's own inner being, one needs direction and guidance from one who has already been there and returned.

The guru has long been likened to a spiritual physician who, after long training and experience under an older physician, can diagnose the particular dis-ease of a spiritual aspirant and prescribe or administer exercises or practices that act as a remedy. There is no one cure-all, no single practice or sadhāna that cures every spiritual malaise. The aspirant, therefore, should beware of well-intending

but half-qualified gurus who prescribe the same remedy over and over to everyone regardless of one's problems or one's constitution.

All too often, spiritual aspiration may be tinged with lingering desires, such as an ambition to be recognized as special or 'spiritual'. Thus, those who promote themselves in the name of spirituality without the explicit consent and blessing of their lineage or *guru paramparā* may be more hazardous to aspirants than for them to have no guru at all.

One measure of a guru's authenticity is his or her *guru paramparā* or lineage of spiritual succession, which again comes not from a fleeting acquaintance with a teacher but from long years of association and submission as a disciple. The guru's past association with his or her *guru paramparā* is a key test of authenticity, but the guru and aspirant must share the right 'chemistry' or personal compatibility also. For this, the aspirant must know himself to some extent, and recognize whether there is a bond of respect and affection, and an open channel of spiritual communication with the teacher, or not.

In contrast to Semitic religions, Hinduism or *Sanātana Dharma* is not a monolithic religion having one sacred book, one teacher or savior, and one orthodox set of beliefs and practices. Rather, *Sanātana Dharma* has been likened to a "league of cults" having a myriad sets of beliefs and practices, and united by a common acceptance of the authority of the Vedas, and acceptance of karma, rebirth, and *jati* or *varna* (natural social classes).

Many ancient lineages, including within Murugan bhakti, deliberately cultivate poverty, anonymity, and even outlandish behavior, while other lineages consciously blend into conventional society. Likewise, genuine spiritual guides do not necessarily display the outer trappings of religiosity or spirituality, nor need they have a large following, or any followers at all. Flowing robes or flowing beards are not indicators of genuine spirituality in Hinduism.

There has long been a global trend to simplify and reduce religions to their lowest common denominators, and indeed this is the hallmark of modern religious fundamentalism. Hinduism has not escaped from this tendency among Hindus and non-Hindus alike. Aspirants should be respectfully aware of the diversity of genuine traditions within *Sanātana Dharma*.

Satsang or association with a circle of other truth seekers often follows when one meets a teacher, since it is usually by word of mouth that one first learns of a spiritual teacher. Satsang is a vital component in the process of breaking old patterns and forming new ones, like vegetarian diet, temple worship, *kirtana* (singing praise of a deity or person), or simply animated discussion of spiritual topics. Especially for one who is entangled in worldly activities, or is new to the path, such long term associations can be the lifeline that keeps one's feet firmly planted on the path.

