Ayyappa and Shakti Pilgrimage 2018

With Douglas Brooks, Vishali Varga, Jagannath Babu and Rajanaka India

June 9th – June 20th , 2018

For the past ten years our temple pilgrimage of south India has introduced the generous culture and spiritual heart of the Tamil people. Our growth has evolved our experience and opened access to these worlds with extraordinary opportunities. This June 2018 we will lead a pilgrimage unlike any other we have made. Together we journey from our landing in Chennai to great Temple of Shiva Natarajar in Chidambaram. After visiting with the Dancer in the company of our Diksitar priest family we’ll proceed to Kumbakonam, where the group will four days become *vratya*s, two distinct bands of committed pilgrims each making a special journey.

The women will embark on Shakti Pilgrimage to explore the world of the goddess, with special focus on the Great Mother, the Kali form known as Mariyamman who for Tamil women becomes the mirror and prism of life’s rich experience. Vishali and Bharati (Rajanaka India) will lead the group to Mariyamman’s temples, opening to the world of Her distinctive and evocative puja. In addition, a day will be spent with expert teachers learning Tamil devotional songs of Mariyamman and the goddess’s stories. With so many personal contacts now established, we’ll also enter into the lives of Tamil women in the home, hearing their stories, learning about their lives, entering into the sanctum of food. A day of cooking will create an extraordinary chance to delight in Tamil culture.

For their part, the men of Ayyappa will take journey with Douglas Brooks and Jagannath Babu to top of the pilgrim’s mountain, to Sabaramala in Kerala to visit the shrine of the Son who is Harihara, born of Vishnu and Shiva, the One Who Bears the Jewel. It’s an arduous journey, with real challenges worth the effort: the simplest of food, the black dhoti and mala ceremony, the carrying of the *irumudi* on our heads, river bathing, and a long walk for days without shoes. Honestly, these are the kinds of pilgrimage I had never thought possible for either women or men. But now we have the experience, the resources, and the access. In addition we will also see together important shrines of Murugan in both Swami Malai and up the 600 steps to Palani and reconvene as a group for more time with Natarajar. This pilgrimage is forty years in the making and what we can accomplish now will change your life.

Twelve days total and the experience of lifetime. I’m betting once you take *this* journey, you will return to do it again with us. Join us. We are creating something like nothing else you’ve experienced.