

## **Board of Directors meeting minutes June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

Present: Uma Ramchandra, Prem Bhardwaja, Vijay Sethi, Mohini Ahuja, Varinder Narang, Kamal Kharbanda, Sonia Rajvanshi, Ravinder Aggarwal

Present on Phone: Ashwani Bakshi, Mamta Gupta (part of the meeting)

Absent: Jagdish Sharma, Vasu Atluri, Snigdha Sharma

Others present: Members of Oriya Association—Navketan Mahanti, Vibhuti Panda, Davashis Panda, Ravi Sahu, Jashowant Panigrahi, Devendra Malik, Govind Satapathy

The meeting started at 2:30 PM.

Some members of the Oriya association had expressed a desire to meet with the board to express the concerns of the Oriya community to the board in regard to the way Shri Jagannath Ji's puja and all associated celebrations were being carried out without the involvement of the Oriya community at large. All members of the Oriya community present (listed above) expressed their concerns and comments individually as well as on behalf of the Oriya community. These comments are summarized below.

- 1) Jagannath Ji's puja takes place every week in the temple but majority of the Oriya community does not take part in it because they feel that the puja is not performed by the temple priest but it is done by certain individuals only and because the Oriya community is not invited to be part of the decision making process with regard to the puja and Rath Yatra etc.
- 2) HTA should establish a Jagannath Ji puja schedule in consultation with the Oriya community and all pujas should be done by the pujari.
- 3) HTA should formalize procedures for special occasions like the Rath Yatra etc. and follow the same.
- 4) HTA puja committee should work in close cooperation with the Jagannath Ji puja committee formed by the greater Phoenix Oriya community for Jagannath Ji puja and other celebrations in the temple.
- 5) Every member of the Oriya community is part of some committee (e.g. Jagannath Ji puja committee) and this way they feel involved in the entire decision making process. This promotes group participation and everybody wants to participate.
- 6) The Oriya community had done Jagannath Ji puja in the temple separate from the HTA scheduled Jagannath Ji puja earlier this year and it was well attended by the community.
- 7) Some questions were raised like who is planning and deciding about the Rath Yatra, who is deciding about the Jagannath Ji puja and other Sunday puja schedule in the temple. They were informed that the puja committee makes decisions on these matters with the approval of the board.
- 8) During the early years of the temple many members of the Oriya community regularly participated in the activities but gradually their participation went down to almost zero because they felt that these events were controlled by individuals who did not want to involve the community at large.

- 9) If HTA puja committee and the Oriya community work together, it shall encourage greater participation by the Oriya community. They shall participate with greater enthusiasm on community basis rather than just a few who now attend Jagannath Ji puja on Sundays.
- 10) The events should be done collectively with Oriya community (Jagannath puja committee) and this will lead to greater wisdom, power and strength of the entire community and the temple.
- 11) Some members expressed the opinion that they were not aware of any correct procedure to do the Jagannath Ji puja but also confirmed that the puja done by the mandir pujari ji was done properly. In case some rituals need to be done differently then pujari ji can be told about the same and he can then start following those rituals/procedures. It was also stated that Jagannath Ji is more towards Bhakti and not rituals. So long as the puja is done with Bhakti and the right intent God will accept it. Whatever way we do the puja , if it is done with devotion then the god will accept it. They also made the comment that when pujari ji did the puja they could feel positive vibrations.
- 12) Since “Pran prathishta” has been done certain minimum discipline must be followed and is required. We can start with some discipline instead of very elaborate plans and then improve upon that with time. The priest from Nashville had written a process of how he does that puja and that is what is being followed now. It is a good process and we can continue to follow the same.
- 13) The mandir priest should do the puja, he should be empowered and we should take necessary steps to prevent any interference from any devotees while the priest is performing the puja.
- 14) It is important to do the puja in a consistent manner.
- 15) Regarding timing for the puja it was stated that there is no fixed time for example the Maha Aarti in the Puri temple is done at night.
- 16) The puja should be done by a person who has no vested interest of any sort and in that regard pujari ji is the best person to do the puja.
- 17) Puja must be started by the pujari ji on time irrespective of how many people are present in the temple at that time. Pujari ji should not wait for anybody and should start the puja on time.
- 18) Jagannath puja committee has been organized to represent the entire Oriya community in the greater Phoenix area in matters relating to the Jagannath Ji puja.
- 19) Puja can be performed as per schedule published by HTA (Jagannath Ji puja on second Sunday of the month) and Oriya community will love to get involved and actively participate in the same.
- 20) Members of the Oriya Association were asked if Dr Hara Misra and Mrs Manju Misra represented the Oriya Association, any of its committees or the Oriya community of greater Phoenix in any way. It was replied that these two individuals did not represent any of the above in any way at all.

The entire board thanked the representatives of the Oriya community for very open, frank and constructive inputs and discussions. They were informed that the board will further review the inputs in the meeting today and the decision taken by the board will be communicated to them shortly.

The meeting continued after the representatives left the meeting room and the agenda items were discussed one at a time.

**Agenda Item #1—Approval of minutes from 5/7/06 meeting:**

The minutes were unanimously approved by all present.

**Agenda Item # 2—Review inputs recd from community members as to who should perform the puja in the temple:**

All inputs recd were reviewed. Following motion was proposed by Ravinder Aggarwal

Effective immediately all puja in the temple should be performed by the temple pujari only.

Pujari should be fully empowered to perform all pujas in the temple.

All puja must start as per the published/ scheduled start time.

Any comments or inputs regarding puja related activities should be given to the puja committee for review. Pujari should not be interrupted during the puja.

Board will follow the Sunday puja schedule already published with the change that Sunday puja will start at 10:30 AM and Jagannath Ji puja will be performed on second Sunday.

The motion was seconded by Kamal Kharbanda.

All board members present in the meeting and on the phone approved the motion. Motion was passed.

**Agenda Item #3—Finalize protocol to be followed when a special occasion puja coincides with a regularly scheduled pujas/event at the temple.**

Following motion was proposed by Prem Bhardwaja.

Timings of puja on such special occasions will be adjusted to accommodate the special occasions and the regularly scheduled puja. Multiple aartis will be performed according to special occasion. For example, if Ganesh Chaturthi day, Ram Naumi day or Jagannath Ji's Rath Yatra day falls on a Tuesday, the temple will perform these pujas as per the rituals. Two aartis will be performed together at the end: aarti for the deity of the day (special occasion) and Hanuman Ji's Aarti. There will be one common Prasad at the end.

For upcoming religious event of Lord Jagannath Ji Rath Yatra, the puja committee recommended the following schedule for June 27<sup>th</sup> Puja:

7:00 PM-8:00 PM	Jagannath Ji puja
8:00 PM-8:30 PM	Tuesday puja with Hanuman Chalisa Bhog Jagannath Ji's aarti Hanuman Ji's aarti Prasad

Board fully supports puja committee's position and puja will be performed as per rituals recommended by the puja committee.

The motion was seconded by Mohini Ahuja.

The motion was approved by all board members present. Motion was passed.

**Agenda item # 4—Alter drawing status and update (item was moved up on the list)**

Ravinder Aggarwal informed the board that the artist's rendition of the plans was ready for review. A board meeting was set for July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at 6 PM in the temple to review the items requested by the board in the last meeting and to get approval to start with the construction activity. All board members are encouraged to participate.

**Agenda Item #5—Status of hiring permanent priest---**

The criteria for evaluation of the priest were discussed. A copy of the same is attached to the minutes.

A motion to accept the criteria was proposed by Prem Bhardwaja and seconded by Vijay Sethi.

The motion was approved by all board members. The motion was passed.

There was a discussion about whether we should place an ad in the paper to look for a priest. It was stated that candidates from India and USA were interviewed on the telephone by the Board of Directors. One of the candidates was interviewed by Ravinder Aggarwal and Bakshi Pita ji. Bakshi Pita ji is a highly respected and esteemed member of the temple who played an important part when the temple was founded and later on as well. He is well aware of the needs of the temple and the community it serves. It was decided that since we had already made a short list of candidates from a list of 6 potential candidates and since Bakshi Pita ji, a founding member of the temple, had also interviewed one of the candidates, there was no need to place an ad in the paper.

Following items were requested

Resume of the priest interviewed by Bakshi Pita Ji and Ravinder Aggarwal  
(Varinder Narang to send to the board members)

A letter from Bakshi Pita Ji expressing his recommendation for the candidate's suitability for the position of temple priest (Ashwani Bakshi to request that letter from Pita ji).

Summary of interview with Jai Gopal Ji and The priest from Chandigarh (to be provided by Ravinder Aggarwal).

**Agenda Item # 6—Status review of Rath Yatra**

Varinder informed the board that Manju Misra had told him that the pandit ji for Rath Yatra was now coming from Nashville and not Chicago, as originally planned.

Manju Misra agreed to send or ask Snigdha Sharma to send a list of itemized items to Varinder on 6/25/06 clearly showing status of each plan item stating what was still open and where any help was needed to pull the event together in a successful manner.

**Agenda item # 7—Puja committee update**

Uma Ji provided the update on behalf of puja committee.

Sidheshwari Devi from Barsana Dham will present discourses in the temple on Aug 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Puja committee recommended and board approved a donation of \$150 to Sidheshwari Devi ji.

Special Bala Ji puja will be held on July 29<sup>th</sup>. Uma Ji will provide detailed information for the flier.

A donation of \$11 will be requested for the special puja thali on this occasion.

Janamashtami will be celebrated on the actual date as per the calendar. The activities and date should be coordinated with the ISCON temple so that they can also participate in the celebrations. An event coordinator needs to be appointed. Rajesh Mehta's name was proposed. Ravinder Aggarwal will represent the board for this celebration.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 PM.