Namaste, Greetings! It is our pleasure to welcome you to Temple Balavihar program (Deva Gokulam) conducted at Hindu Temple of Central Illinois here in Peoria.

We as parents want the very best for our children. We want them to be better than us in every possible way. We have the rich, fulfilling Vedic heritage that our forefathers preserved and gave us and it is our duty and privilege to pass it on to our children and their children. Thanks to Temple Balavihar, this is possible. The best time to inculcate the Vedic spiritual values and heritage is when the children are still moldable. The seeds sown can take roots and strengthen their moral and value based upbringing. It is particularly important for them to recognize that religion has a place in their life in addition to the academic learning.

Any religion is better than no religion; having said that our children are born into a rich inheritance of Hinduism, Hindu values and culture. A formal approach to inculcating this heritage is necessary to bring out the benefits of self-confidence, self-esteem, personal discipline, pride in individuality and love, respect and pride in all of us and with everything that surrounds us. The inculcation can bring strength to resist distractions, stay focused and endure difficult times. The youth can set high ideals and work hard to make this world a little better than how they found it.

Balavihar classes help explain that there is one God but many manifestations. The thought that God comes to earth to reestablish righteousness helps understand and respect other religions. An understanding of the immensity of God and the universe and His existence in all beings, forms and things makes us humble, respectful and loving. This Vedanta learning occurs in a loving, nurturing environment with storytelling, skits, singing, playing, and celebrating events and festivals with dedicated and loving teachers providing coaching. The children learn the relevance and power of Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga and Gnana yoga. Activities based learning makes everything fun while the children soak up powerful Vedic knowledge.

The Temple Balavihar curriculum is derived from Hindu scriptures, Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Gita and the great epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana. The story telling and interactive teaching approach emphasizes value based living. Texts and teaching material are provided as appropriate for the age group. Some of the stories are enacted in skits during festival celebrations. Many methods of learning keep children engaged and they look forward to coming to the Temple for Sunday sessions or festival celebrations.

Parents are the key to the success of the program. They invest their time bringing their children to the classes and also encourage their learning at home. While at the Temple, the concurrent adult study program is intended to engage the parents while the children are attending their respective classes. Most parents will have inherited knowledge though their parents and by osmosis growing up in India where such religious immersion is natural. However, through participating in the study group the parents take a formal approach to learning like their children. This will help the parents address questions children may bring up at home. While most adults have a good feel for the ritualistic facet of Hinduism, this study group will present the philosophical and spiritual side of Hinduism. Parents can also gain a lot through a formal process of learning and through discussion forums. Some parents may choose to be in Temple's Bhajan program or help out with the kitchen food program.

There is a small fee for enrolling your child or children. You are making an investment of both time and money in bettering your children. The return on this investment is easily quantified short term as you see a huge learning growth in your children but the true return is long term as these children are better prepared to face life than they would be otherwise. The children see that their Christian peers are attending Sunday school at their churches and this is their Sunday school at the Temple. They start to see that they are getting their learning in their religion and start to respect their peers from other religions. We require that children be registered and also that the parents attend adult study group.

We hope you see the benefits and take advantage of this unique opportunity for your children. Those of us that brought up kids in Peoria in the 70s, 80s and 90s did not have this opportunity; there was not a facility for worship like the Temple we have today and neither was there a formal Balavihar program such as what we are offering today. You parents should feel very fortunate that you can offer such a formal inculcation to your children.

Sincerely,

Prakash babu