



Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY



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February 2006



THOUGHTS

It's unlikely that many people can find serious, ongoing faults with Hinduism. It's part of a colourful culture, has a rich pantheon of deities, and with cultural modernization is gradually eroding the importance of the out-of-date caste system. But there is one reason why Hindus should be envious of our Catholic and Muslim neighbours--they are educated in a standardized way about the rules of their respective religions. Because the spread of knowledge in Hinduism is slow, at best, in most places, many Hindus grow up not knowing their rules, and not having a clue about the reasons behind those rules.

It's for this reason that Hindu youth often think it's okay to partake in certain activities in which Hindus shouldn't participate. One such activity is the ingestion of alcohol, which is the feature topic of this issue. Muslim kids know for sure that intoxication is bad in their culture; Catholic kids know that wine is okay for them to drink because it represents the blood of Christ. But do Hindus know *why* they shouldn't be drinking?

Many Hindus probably don't even know *at all* that they shouldn't be drinking. To make a long answer short, alcohol is part of a group of items that could either enhance one's spiritual progress or damage it (and one's life) beyond repair. One must make fantastic advances in their sadhana until they are at the point that they have full knowledge of how to use alcohol effectively as a tool, instead of letting it take over the sadhana. Until then, alcohol will, in most cases, cause steady damage to one's spiritual and physical self. So to sum up: in Hinduism, social drinking = bad. This month's writers are more articulate in their articles.

But alcohol isn't the only topic this month. Recently, the *Sri Chakra* staff became aware that there are too many untold stories within the Rajarajeswari Peetam, whether the stories happen at the temple or to the people connected to the temple. These stories will be documented from now on in a section called *Temple Lore*, and devotees are encouraged by Aiya to volunteer their experiences. Anonymity will be granted upon request. Anyone wishing to share their skills or stories with their fellow bhaktas may contact the *Sri Chakra* at our new e-mail address, sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org.

A very heartfelt thanks goes out to Guruji, Aiya, Kathy Allen, Ramesh anna, Prasad Balasubramanian, Sonia (Sandeep) Chadha, Aparna Hasling, Lily Karnischky, Dharshan Logendran, Ravikumar, Tharuman Thavakumar, and Soumitra Sengupta for contributing to this issue, as well as to all the devotees who selflessly shared their personal miracles and experiences.

Thanks also to the contributors of the December 2005 issue: Sonia (Sandeep) Chadha, Lukshmi Jeyakumar, Sudha Priya Kearney, Navin Parthasarthy, and Soumitra Sengupta.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

The *Sri Chakra* staff



FEBRUARY

NEWSLETTER

Since Last Issue...

The end of November saw Aiya and about 20 U.S. devotees travel up to Ancaster, Ontario for the grihapravesham of Raj and Sunanda's new home. Aiya travelled back up to Canada again two weeks from then for a special bhajan session in Toronto to release *Dravida Vedam IV* on Dec. 8. The following week saw Karthikai Deepam, as well as the release of Corinne Dempsey's book about the temple, *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York* (see reviews on pg. 7-8).

Aiya's next engagement was a bhajan on Boxing Day, for which he and other devotees travelled to Alfred University, NY. On Dec. 30, Aiya presided over a Sri Suktam homam that was performed only by the temple children. The next night was New Year's Eve, which saw an all-night bhajan session at the temple. Shortly after the new year began, Aiya stayed at the temple for 10 days for the Thiruvempavai festival, immediately followed by Pongal.

On Jan. 17, Aiya left for New Zealand for two weeks to meet the devotees there and teach a puja workshop. He returned to Rochester on Feb. 2. While Aiya was abroad, four inches of rain water forced all the books out of 33 Park Circle and into the temple's newly built library facility. Though the move was not slated for at least another year, it was nonetheless a historic moment for the temple, requiring close to 6 hours of non-stop work.

Past Month's Events

Karthikai Deepam 2005

By Kamyā Ramaswamy

This festival celebrates Lord Shiva's dharshanam in the form of a deepam in the south Indian town of Thiruvanamalai. The Rajarajeswari Peetam celebrated it this year on Dec. 14, 2005 with the construction of a make-shift "mountain" by placing the temple's large silver-coloured Shivalingam on top of the wooden shankam platforms.

The structure sat in the yajnashala in front of the homa kundam, and devotees placed small lamps

throughout the mountain and the rest of the temple.

The children decorated the garbha graha of the temple with 1008 tea candles, as well as the window ledges of the yajnashala. That night also saw a full moon, so Aiya integrated the Karthikai Deepam puja with the Sri Chakra homam.

The homam started at 7 p.m. and concluded at 8:30 p.m., after which the assembled devotees partook the divine prasadam. Later, Aiya turned off the lights so everyone could view the temple by the glow of deepams and candlelight.

Toronto Bhajan—Dravida Vedam IV release

By Kamyā Ramaswamy

Devotees in the Greater Toronto Area who can't often visit the temple got a treat on the evening of Dec. 10, 2005, when Aiya and a group of area musicians held a concert in a Scarborough temple.

It was for the fourth in a series of Dravida Vedam albums—this one focuses on the music and rich history of the Thiruketheeshwara

temple on the Northwest coast of Sri Lanka. This particular temple was borne of the devotion shown to Lord Shiva by Kethu bhagavan, the ninth of the navagrahas.

Like many other sacred temples throughout Sri Lanka and India, this temple has survived concentrated European efforts to pillage its wealth and convert its believers to Catholicism. Its deities have seen ordeals from the theft of valuable ornaments and jewels to complete burial in a sand storm. The temple's land was also seized during this period to build a church.

Aiya said during the bhajans that the destruction is still going on, albeit not in such an obvious nature. Sri Lankan military forces are trying to erode the religion and destroy the remnants of the ancient Shivalayam that exist today. Both Aiya and Mrs. Vasantha Natarajan spoke about the history of the temple between songs in the three-hour bhajan session.

Ardhra Dharshanam 2006

By Vijitha Mahathevan and Kamyā Ramaswamy

At the crack of dawn on Friday Jan. 13, the committed devotees at the Rajarajeswari Peetam began the Ardhra Darshanam celebrations the same way they began each day of Thiruvempavai—with music.

Aiya first invoked Ganapathi and Devi and then started singing the daily songs to awaken the deities, beginning with Dattatreya. The volunteers moved Nataraja and Sivakami into the center of the temple in front of the dwajastambham, along with the festival kalasam and Saint Manickyavasagar.

Aiya then began the Thiruvempavai songs for Nataraja and Sivakami, performing the first abhishekam with his wife, Amma. A different devotee or family of devotees performed each of the abhishekams and pancha-upachara pujas to accompany each of the 20 verses. Each puja came after a pradhakshanam of the inner temple and yajnashala.

For the final procession, the kalasam, silver Guru padukas, Thirumurai books and Saint Manickyavasagar all went around the temple before Nataraja and Sivakami were bathed in the kalasam's contents. Aiya also showered the deities with honey and vibhuthi and then allowed some time for volunteers to get the holy couple clothed and ready while rest of the devotees took a small break.

The puja finished with Aiya



Nataraja after viboothi abhishekam on Ardhra Darshanam day.



Aiya and Amma contribute to the pot during the Pongal ceremony, Jan. 14.



chanting a padhikam, offering naivedyam and the karpura deepam. The puja lasted about four hours, and was followed by the devotees partaking the holy prasadam.

Upcoming Events

MahaShivarathri 2006

By Kamy Ramaswamy

Mahashivarathri will happen on Feb. 25, starting at approximately 9 p.m. The festival is especially auspicious because Shivarathri falls on a Saturday this year, coinciding with Sani Pradosham. The festivities will include a Turiya Sahasranama homam, and will see the offering of 1008 names of Shiva into the fire during Shiva Sahasranama homam.

Nataraja's blessed foot, drenched in honey.



Manickyavasagar in procession on Ardhra Dharshanam.



The holy couple decked in gold and finery after abhishekam on Ardhra Dharshanam.

In Two Months

The next issue of the Sri Chakra Magazine

Devi willing, the next issue of the Sri Chakra Magazine will be up on the temple's website (www.srividy.org) by the beginning of April. The next issue will focus on the topic of "Temple Property." We will be covering maintenance of the temple's vast landscape, and we'll discover the depths of nature right in Devi's backyard.

If you are interested in writing on any of these topics, please email us at the address given in the front of the magazine (sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org). We are also looking for anyone who would like to submit or take photographs to go along with the topics.

If you would like to contribute, the deadline for submissions (photographs and/or articles) is Monday, March 20. Please be a part of this effort and we look forward to seeing your contributions and suggestions to help make this magazine the best it can be!

Sri Gurubhyo Namah!

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One Devotees Perspective of Thiruvempavai

Ardhra Darshanam 2006

By Ravikumar



Nataraja and Sivakami before abhishekam January 13, 2006.

I was originally planning to come to our temple for Sri Chakra Puja, which falls on Poornima—this Poornima is very special due to the Indian celebration of Pongal. I had an idea that Thiruvempavai chanting was going to be completed on this day early in the morning, but I was not sure about Ardhra Dharshanam, which is celebrated at the conclusion of Thiruvempavai.

I was fortunate enough to get three days off from work and arrived here at 5:45am after a six-hour drive from Michigan. All I heard was the bell sound and the shanku blowing the moment I got down from the car. Then I did not waste a single minute to get into the temple. By the time I stepped in, I was really amazed and felt very happy to see that I was on time to

see the beginning of the program. I am sure whoever reads this article would have the same experience.

We moved the Nataraja statue together and Sivakami statue in front of Devi. I immediately recollected my experience for the same Ardhra Dharshanam in Chidambaram, India around six years ago. This was my first experience at our temple, and naturally I was unaware of the proceedings. Aiya started the puja by chanting the first song of Thiruvempavai and we sang along with him.

As per Aiya's instructions we were going around the Nataraja, Amma and the homa kundam with all of us singing Thiruvempavai together. It touched my heart very deeply as we proceeded, including the devotees' performing the abhishekham for Nataraja and Sivakami. The reason I felt so deeply was because in Chidambaram or any other temple, the abhishekams are performed by the pandits, and not by the devotees. When devotees are able to perform the abhishekham personally, they get the involvement of oneness with the divine.

As we sang the songs with Aiya, the meaning of this Thiruvempavai reached my brain and started to make me cry, but I controlled myself. The meaning of the songs combined with the way Aiya was singing them made me feel the

ecstasy, the most happiness, as well as the feeling of being present in Chidambaram, which I really missed for the past few years. This experience made me feel that I was really in Chidambaram, with a few differences.

I was given an opportunity by Aiya to perform the abhishekham to Nataraja and Sivakami. Though I went through a lot of challenges in my life, I felt very worthy of being alive and being at the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam for this occasion. See, we all go through a lot of challenges in our life, but feel glad to be alive when we get these experiences. Of course the crowd in Chidambaram would have been enormous, but the personal happiness of being present and participating in this celebration at our temple was also enormous.

After all the devotees finished the milk abhishekham, Aiya started performing the elaborate abhishekham to Sri Nataraja and Sri Sivakami. The way he performed the abhishekham and the way he chanted the mantras gave off an immeasurable divine vibration. And I was able to see all the devotees were so joyful during the complete puja. I am very sure of myself that this memory will stay in my mind with the blessing of Aiya, Sri Nataraja and Sri Sivakami.

At the conclusion of the puja, Manikavasakar and the divine Thirumurai were taken around the temple.

Book Reviews

Review by Aparna Hasling

Corinne Dempsey has done a great service by writing *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York*.

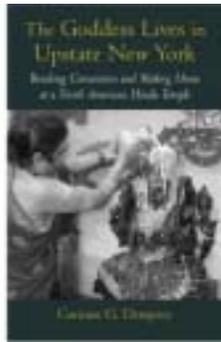
In her ethnographic account of our Rajarajeswari Temple, she has blended the miraculous with the scientific, the human with the divine, and she has created a book that compels both the curious and the initiated. Her recently published book offers insights into Aiya's complex character, his roots of social activism and tantric teaching style, as she documents his life journey from Sri Lanka to Zambia to America.

She brilliantly puts the temple into a larger context by providing academic references that show how the temple contrasts with the Smarta community as well as with other religious traditions. Her beautiful tapestry includes miraculous anecdotes from Guruji, Akka (Sri Amma), Yegnarathnam, and other esteemed visitors who graced the temple from 1998 to 2002. This book offers insightful connections, which even long-term devotees may have neglected to see, and offers a comprehensive insider account of the temple history and philosophy which can be confidently shared with non-devoted friends and family.

The author even shares her own gradual transformation regarding the concept of ritual sacrifice—her early uneasiness of making expensive offerings into the fire and her later acceptance that divine

The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York: Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple By Corinne G. Dempsey

offerings create ritual power and open important doors for others to enter into the mystical world of Sri Vidya. One of the reasons why people come to the temple as a place of pilgrimage is because of the tangible force of divine power, yet very few uninitiated realize how or why divine power is created.



This book makes no assumptions of prior knowledge, and leads a newcomer through the maze of cultural and ritual dilemmas to the feet of Devi, Herself.

This book is especially valuable for devotees who have been coming to the temple for a relatively short time. Corinne relates the full history of the Rajarajeswari murthi: how She was commissioned by one of the jagadgurus of the Sringeri math in 1978, how She came to a Pennsylvania ashram in 1985, how She moved to Aiya's home in 1991 and finally to our temple in 1998. Along the way, Corinne chronicles faith-evoking events that are unique to the history of this temple. And with great sensitivity, she exposes the challenges faced by

close devotees who have made the transition from belonging to an intimate circle of spiritual friends at Park Circle to a managing body of leaders in a public temple. Her commentary is helpful for those who currently face the temple conundrum of offering service or participation when it sometimes seems unwelcome.

Corinne's writing style is eloquent and multi-faceted, a perfect vehicle to deliver Aiya's teachings. Just as Aiya tells us that the practice of pranayama is concealed in the act of chanting, so does Corinne document how Aiya hides deep philosophical truths in seemingly casual conversations. By staying attentive and consistently engaging him with sincere questions, she reveals Aiya as a maverick who manifests tangible experiences of divine power so each person can step closer to the experience of oneness with God. And yet she never presumes to shine the light, but lets the light reveal itself. I recommend this book to anyone who is part of the temple community, is close to someone in the temple community, or someone with a yearning to deepen their relationship to Devi and the temple community in Rush.

The book was published by Oxford University Press in 2006. It is available for purchase at the temple bookstore or www.amazon.com. If bought at the temple, all proceeds will go toward the temple.

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Book Review

by Lily Karnischky

Of the many things I liked about *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York*, the one thing I most appreciated was Corinne's honesty when she relates the personal struggles she had when collecting notes for the book. In chapter one, Corinne openly writes about internal conflicts that arose, which gave me something that I could relate to and made me want to continue reading. She mentions in one passage that she had been so absorbed in an evening stroll with a small group that she forgot her "role as chronicler" (p.162).

As I read further, I noticed many small details that many temple regulars might take for granted but that others might see as an example of how different it is here. Some were cute or playful, like for example, she mentions how Ganesh (at the entrance of the temple) sometimes wears sunglasses, depending on the weather. More serious examples include the fact that since the temple has moved from its previous location at 33 Park Circle, many longtime members have felt that the change has made the atmosphere less intimate.

The major theme of the book deals

with the Aiya's unconventional approach to running the temple. Corinne gives many details of how Aiya sets himself apart but also mentions that there are many problems that Aiya and temple devotees must deal with. Corinne discusses many topics in-depth, from scientific aspects of meditation and rituals to spiritual power and miracles. She also gives many detailed historical references to the evolution of different philosophies, and cites examples of current trends seen in North American temples today.

Although I had heard many of the stories recounted in the book, reading them again helped me to absorb more of the details. I feel it's also a good thing to have these stories officially written in a book so that Aiya can refer people to a text instead of continuously repeating himself. In fact, Aiya states in one passage in the book that he had recently answered a particular question about 50 times.

One of the many interesting facts I learned while reading was that Kashi, the shrine by the little creek behind the temple, was named after the holy place in India. Also, many other North American temples follow this pattern, where certain parts of a temple are named after

well-known sacred places. I also learned some interesting facts about Aiya and temple devotees about which I was previously unaware.

One thing that I felt was lacking was that there wasn't too much detail about Devi at her previous location, 33 Park Circle. I felt that there were many important things that could have been said about that era. The pujas and Aiya's weekly commentaries were very different then. That location was a major magnet that started the present temple, and an entire book can be written about that place, itself.

Overall, I felt that this book, although academically focused, could be very insightful to anyone interested in Devi worship. I think all of the temple devotees will definitely be able to appreciate this book and I would recommend it to any newcomer or seasoned devotee.



University of Wisconsin professor and author Corinne G. Dempsey

Bala Crafts

The Launch of Bala Crafts

By Tharuman Thavakumar

Bala Crafts was created by kids and is run by kids. It is a creative outlet for kids to raise money for the temple and has yielded a variety of handcrafted items, made by the committed kids behind the organization.

Bala Crafts was the inspiration of a few kids hanging out at the newly completed outside Ganapathi deck in July 2005. While the kids knew they were always included in temple functions and rituals, this idea sparked excitement because it was a way to demonstrate independence and initiative.

After considering other ventures such as a Bala Press or a Bala School, the kids knew in their hearts that the idea of Bala Crafts was their prasadam from the Devi. The kids wanted to use the word "Bala" because the goddess who resides in small kids is Balatripurasundari.

Any venture at the temple needs the blessings of Devi, the Guru, and Ganapathi. So after Devi gave the inspiration, we contacted Aiya to seek His blessings. Aiya sounded like he already knew about the idea before we could even tell him! And he immediately gave blessings for the kids to do Bala Crafts as an independent fundraising event on the condition that all the money earned should be used to build the cabin for the temple's annual Vibhuti camp.

To honor Ganapathi, the grand opening of Bala Crafts was on Vinayaka Chaturthi, Sept. 7, 2005.



Goddess Balatripurasundari is the young girl form of Lalita Mahatripurasundari. Her age is typically three, six, or nine.

The kids unveiled many of their creative items such as various key chains, a Sri Chakra clock, Bala bells and even more! We were able to make all these because of the generous donations from the friends of Bala Crafts.

Bala Crafts seeks help from all temple kids between the ages of six and 16. Some kids are responsible for calling meetings and maintaining order, while others approve creative projects. They meet at least once a month, and other times small groups get together and do small projects.

If you would like to fund something please come and see Aparna akka or myself. You may order a craft by coming to the temple, or sending an e-mail to balacrafts@hotmail.com, and come and pick it up when the order is completed.

(please refer to the complete list of items)

* Suggested Donation List!

ITEMS

Big Bala Bell

\$6

Small Bala Bells

\$3

Sri Chakra Clocks

\$30

Sri Chakra Boxes

\$16

Magnets (4 types)

\$5

Key Chains
(variety)

\$5

T-Shirts

\$12

Stickers

VARIES

Other Decorations

VARIES

Puja Bags

\$10

* Items not for sale. Donations to defray expenses.

Temple Lore

The stories of the devotees at the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam create the very essence of the temple's soul. Starting this month, these stories will be chronicled in a regular section within the Sri Chakra journal. Aiya has verified all these tales for their authenticity, and he urges devotees to share their experiences for the benefit of future generations. All identities will be kept in the strictest confidentiality unless otherwise informed.

Compiled by Kamyā Ramaswamy



It was 2000 when one Toronto devotee first made the long journey through southern Ontario to reach the temple. She arrived in time for the Saturday homam and was watching the puja sponsors assemble the purnahutis to be offered into the fire. When she noticed that a volunteer couldn't reach the flowers to add to the purnahuti, she tried to pass the flowers to the volunteer.

That's when the volunteer told her not to touch anything because she didn't have diksha.

"I felt very sad," the devotee said. "I felt like crying, thinking, 'why doesn't Devi want me to

touch the flowers? What did I do wrong? I just wanted to go inside the temple and sit somewhere closer to Devi."

Before she could leave, Aiya arrived, seemingly out of nowhere. He immediately asked the devotee if she had diksha. "I was in shock," the devotee said. "I told him no." Aiya then said he was going to initiate her that very day. He then turned to everyone else assembled in the temple and announced that the Toronto devotee had the right to touch everything. He made her sit near the sponsors and help them with the rest of the items.

"Devi just answered my prayers," said the devotee. "I really don't know if I was talking to Devi or Aiya. "It was a very touching moment for me, and a very unforgettable day."



Nivetha Pushpanathan

family have already been touched by Devi and Her magical acts within the temple.

Nivetha often helps set up for the regular pujas performed three times a day, usually putting out fruits for the naivedyam at the sannidhis. She once placed a banana in front of the Utsa Ganapathi, who sits in the Southeast corner of the inner temple. However, Nivetha's mother switched the banana for an orange, telling Nivetha that the main Ganapathi already had a banana and that she should vary the naivedyam.

Night fell and the family went to bed. That's when Nivetha's mother had an experience with Ganapathi that left her unable to move. According to Nivetha, Ganapathi held her mom down with his trunk while telling her that the naivedyam for the Utsa Ganapathi must always match the one given to the main Ganapathi.

In a separate incident, Nivetha was one of the children present at a private Chandi Homam sponsored by a Rochester devotee in 2005. After the homam was finished, the devotee presented new saris to 18 women.



Nivetha Pushpanathan is only seven years old, but she and her

Some of the children noticed that there was one lady present who no one had ever seen before. She was wearing a gray and orange salwar kameez and was looking around for a bag to carry her sari. One of the children looked around and noticed that there were 18 ladies present, and there were 18 saris and 18 bags that were set up and ready to go by the volunteers—the lady should have had a bag.

Nevertheless, she stood behind Aiya and Nivetha while they tried to find her a plastic bag. But when they turned around again, she was gone. They couldn't find her in another room and no one had left through the temple's front doors.



A New York devotee was one of the first people who visited the Devi at Aiya's house before the larger temple was built. When Devi arrived in 1992, this devotee took it upon himself to set up the power for the puja room, but he had no prior experience working with electricity.

He was struggling one day with bringing power to the basement, which was a risky and unsafe job. He was about to give up when Aiya's daughter Charu, came downstairs, told him not to worry and offered to run the power lines through the library for him. This devotee felt that Devi, Herself, had come to help him.



As part of the responsibilities that come with having a full-sized moorthi, Aiya said they would have to perform abishekam to Devi every week. This involved a tiring process of constantly moving all the materials from the stage area and moving them all back. The New York devotee, volunteered to build a movable stage and set out to look for wheels that could carry 1000 lbs.

The devotee went to several hardware stores but was told that none of them carried the wheels. After being told by some store employees that he would have to go home empty-handed again, the frustrated devotee told Devi that it was going to be the

last store he visited—if she didn't want the movable stage and the tools to build it, that was fine with him.

He was headed to the store exit when there, hanging beside the sliding doors, were the 1000-lb capacity wheels he had been searching for. He briefly wondered how they were there when even the employees told him they weren't, but he knew it was all Devi's work. He went back to Aiya's house and built the rolling stage.

"And when I was done," he said, "the wheels worked so well that all the ladies in the house could sit on that stage and you could still pull it using only one finger."

ALCOHOL



Ever heard of the the phrase, “I drink therefore I am”? Well WC Fields probably wasn’t a Sri Vidya upasaka, but his quote is not far off from the view of some serious Devi bhaktas. As we will find in the following articles, adding alcohol to pujas comes with a great responsibility, both physically and spiritually. Without proper mantras, moderation, and concentration, alcohol can overtake a devotee’s upasana, and force the upasaka off the path.

Alcohol and Puja

By Aiya

There seems to be a mistaken view that drinking alcohol in a social setting and recreational drinking is allowed within the context of Sri Vidya and temple activities. In Sri Vidya there is a definite left-handed path called Vamachara. (*Vama*—left-handed, *Achara*—discipline). In the Vamachara method, five items that are normally prohibited known as Pancha Makaras are used. This includes alcohol.



This path, however, is not for the present-day practitioners of the Vidya. It is rife with dangers and there is every possibility that a devotee could fall into an abyss of indiscipline and deviate from the Sadhana.

While there are claims from practitioners the world over that they adhere to one of the four paths, none of them are clearly defined. The four are:

1. Vamachara—left-handed

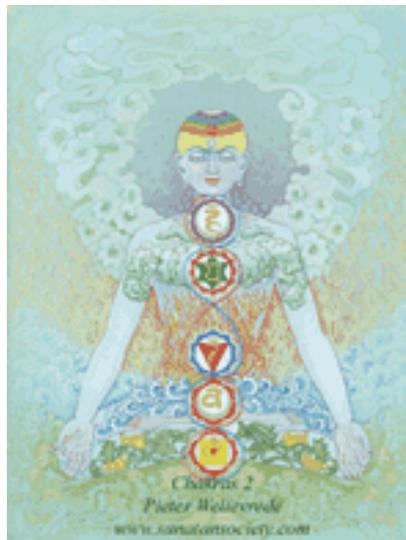
2. **Kaulachara**—belonging to a “kula” or adept at traversing the petals in the chakras of the body through chakra japa.

3. **Samayachara**—internalised worship without the aid of any external implements or other articles of worship.

4. **Dakshinachara**—the strictly right-handed path or pure Vedic way of worship.

What exists today can only be called “**misrachara**” or a mixture of disciplines that contain elements of the different paths mixed in to varying degrees, depending on the Guru Sampradaya that one follows.

In the vamachara pujas the practitioner chants all the mantras with the proper concentration and discipline. This alone will render the alcohol to lose its potency. I, myself, have seen a devotee of Sri Bhagalamukhi cause a half-bottle of pure whiskey to completely lose its inebriating quality, with his mantra chanting and one-pointed concentration. After the puja, I have seen him take the alcohol without any of the usual



effects. I have also participated in a Sri Yantra puja at the residence of a great master, practicing “Kaulachara”, and partaken of the viseshargyam that was offered in the worship (pure brandy, I was later told), without feeling even a trace of the usual effects of alcohol.

Is it possible to bring about the conditions required of the devotee in a bar setting or a restaurant setting to perform the rituals required to eliminate the negative effects of alcohol? I do not think it is possible. The excuse people are used to giving is that in the preparation of the viseshargyam sometimes, two tablespoons of white wine are used; therefore it is alright to consume alcohol. This is similar to people abusing prescription medications that are sometimes used to control certain health conditions. Those medicines are prescribed under carefully controlled situations and are not a license for abuse. The alcohol in the argyam is also similarly administered under carefully controlled conditions and is not to be construed as a license for abuse.

Alcohol has the capacity to relax the inhibitory controls in the brain—this is not a situation a serious sadhaka would want to be in. Therefore it would be sufficient to say that alcohol in the vidya has a definite place and it should be respected at all times and is not to be exceeded at any cost.

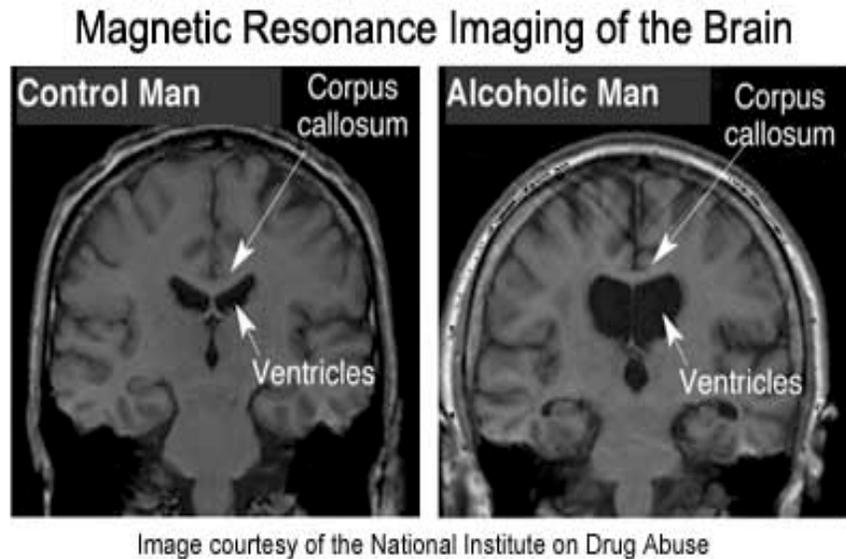
Physical effects of alcohol on the body and spirit

By Sonia (Sandeep) Chadha

Alcohol has different effects on different organs of the body. Let's look at alcohol's effect starting with the brain. The brain is made of nerve cells called neurons. These neurons communicate with each other by transmitting messages and this communication is known as neurotransmission [1]. Alcohol interferes with this method of communication and also causes death of neurons [2].

In long-term users, alcohol reduces the size of brain mass [3]. There are behavioral changes that are associated with alcohol's effect on different parts of the brain. Alcohol affects the cerebellum, the part of the brain, which controls coordination and movement [1]. Memory lapses that are caused by alcohol happen because the substance also impairs the hippocampus, the portion of the brain that stores new memories [1]. Excessive drinking in which death is the result occurs because alcohol inhibits brainstem activity, which controls breathing and circulation [1].

The liver metabolizes alcohol. Alcohol is broken down into fat, carbon dioxide and water in the liver [2]. In long-term use of alcohol, the fat builds in the capillaries around liver cells. These liver cells begin to die and lead to liver damage, which eventually leads to liver disease—cirrhosis [2]. The liver is part of



the body's cleansing system and toxins can build up if the liver is damaged, which can lead to further health problems [2].

At high concentrations, alcohol can interfere with the function of the heart [2].

Alcohol disrupts the electrical actions that control the contraction of the heart [2]. Excessive drinking can also raise the level of certain fat in the blood and lead to high blood pressure [4]. Long-term use can also affect the digestive system. Stomach and intestinal ulcers can develop because extensive use of alcohol can aggravate and eat away at the lining of the stomach and intestines [3]. Constant alcohol use can also result in nutritional deficiencies such as the B vitamins; B6, niacin, thiamin and folate [5].

The American Heart Association does not recommend drinking wine or any alcohol to help prevent cardiovascular disease [4].

[1] "Understanding Alcohol" National Institute of Health. January 19, 2006 <<http://science.education.nih.gov/supplements/nih3/alcohol/guide/info-alcohol.htm>>

[2] "Effects of alcohol on the body" Wikipedia. January 19, 2006 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effects_of_alcohol_on_the_body>

[3] "How alcohol works" Science: How stuff works. January 19, 2006 <<http://science.howstuffworks.com/alcohol12.htm>>

[4] "Alcohol, Wine and Cardiovascular Disease" American Heart Association <<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4422>>

[5] Mahan, LK. Escott-Stump S. (2004) *Krause's Food Nutrition and Diet Therapy* 11th Ed. Philadelphia, PA: Saunders.



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