Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

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December 2008

Photo by Sairuban Senthilrajan

Our Thoughts

Dear Devotees,

In every issue of the Sri Chakra, as well as in every temple e-mail sent out about the magazine, there is always a statement of some sort asking for devotees to volunteer articles. Sometimes it even dares to claim that any article on any topic even remotely related to spirituality will be accepted.

Although I sometimes include that last bit because I'm desperately looking for volunteers, a better reason for the open call for articles is to encourage conversation and debate on issues surrounding the temple. This is a throwback to Aiya, who, to many people, will always be the original master of rocking the boat in an attempt to get people to open their minds and question why we do the things we do.

Of course, the Devi always provides for Her children, which is why She chooses certain remarkable people to write for each issue—thus keeping the magazine alive and my own desperation in check. And once in a while (as is the case with this issue), She'll even throw in a healthy dose of contemplation.

One article this month challenges a ritualistic practice within Hinduism that is arguably as old as Lord Shiva himself. Although the opinions expressed in this article aren't necessarily shared by Aiya or the temple, it was Aiya who went out of his way to make sure this particular piece was published.

The crux of the debate highlighted by the author is whether certain practices in Hinduism (or any religion, really) should be adapted to fit into an ever-changing world. More specifically, the author believes that the way milk abhishekam is done at the temple should be changed, stating that it indirectly supports the abuse of dairy cows and is ecologically unhealthy for today's day and age.

There are many things that could be said about this idea. Sometimes a decision that is environmentally sound is a no-brainer because it also happens to be a smart way to go for several reasons. Take for instance a few years ago (around 2003 or so) when the temple acquired a set of steel plates in all sizes to replace the Styrofoam on which visitors were given mahaprasadam every day.

Considering that hundreds of people passed through the temple every week (especially Saturdays) and each Styrofoam dish could only be used once, the steel plates were a smart investment for nature as well as the temple's budget. Ditto for the sets of steel cups and microwave-safe mugs that soon followed.

The answer isn't quite so clear-cut for many other aspects of the temple's daily operations. In most cases, decisions are either made out of sheer practicality or because the Devi expressly indicates that She wishes for something to be done a certain way. The environment typically ranks low on the list of things that motivate daily decisions, especially since an entire generation of volunteers were never raised to actively think of the environment as a priority.

Today, limiting one's carbon footprint is a high priority for many people—but is it important enough for a devotee to change his or her prayer habits? Would a Ganesha bhakta stop chanting *Ganapathi Atharvashirsam* in the shower every day to conserve water? Would Lakshmi bhaktas avoid turning on all the lights in their house despite their tradition to dispel darkness? It all comes down to priorities and beliefs.

Aiya recognized that the milk abhishekam article would be at least a little controversial but he chose to print it because the horrors he witnessed in his native Sri Lanka made him a staunch advocate for free speech. Those readers who have something to say about the author's opinions are challenged to e-mail the magazine and put their thoughts and name in writing instead of picking up the phone.

You ought to know by now that all submissions will be published.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

The *Sri Chakra* staff

December Newsletter

Since the last issue...

At the end of the summer, Aiya and Amma returned from their stay in Vancouver, where Aiya presided over several pujas and gave a series of talks. As soon as he walked into the temple again on Labour Day, he performed another wedding and prepared for Ganapathi Chaturthi Sept. 3.

However, Aiya and Amma had to travel again within that same week, all the way to Australia. There, they visited Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. The highlight of that trip was a MahaRudra homam (11 Rudra homams performed throughout 51 homakundams) in Sydney, which drew about 1000 people. The event unfolded over one weekend, during which 650 Rudrams were chanted. At the very end of the last Rudram, a hurricane-force storm seized the makeshift yajnashala and almost ripped the roof off the tent!

As it only lasted 5 minutes, the crowd knew it was a show of Lord Shiva's blessings.

Aiya and Amma returned to the U.S. on Sept. 21, a day before the dvajarohanam for Navarathri. Eight days later, the festival officially commenced and was again graced with the presence of Sri Shangaranarayanan of the Matangi peetam in Chennai.

The morning after the last day, Aiya had to take an early morning flight out to Calgary, Canada, but was back within a couple of days.

About two weeks later, he and the temple's musicians made their way up to Toronto. The event on Oct. 25 was a bhajan session and a double CD release of Ganapathi songs and the Vancha Kalpa Ganapathi mantra.

Aiya was back in Rochester soon after for the final puja of Kedaragowri vratham on Oct. 28, and Skanda Sashti from Oct. 29 to Nov. 3.

Two days later was a very happy event—the valaikappu ceremony for Kavitha and Dhinesh, who are expecting their first baby boy. Congratulations to the new parents!

Later in November, Aiya did a half-day workshop in Philadelphia on puja, Lord Shiva and Sri Vidya. He also performed several weddings at the temple throughout the month.

The end of November saw a beautiful and grand event on the 27th—congratulations to Seyon and Priyanga on their wedding celebrations!

Past Events

Ganesha Chaturthi, Sept. 3

This event is a full-day festival that usually takes place outside—this is to commemorate the property's very first Ganapathi murthi installed where the deck stands today.

Utsa Ganesha on his palanquin.

The festival began with tarpanams outside on the Ganapathi deck and continued into a Vancha Kalpa Ganapathi homam. The homam included the offering of 1008 modakams into the fire and lasted well into the day. Ganesha was soaped down, bathed, and then dressed by volunteers. After the final aarthi, all were given mahaprasadam for lunch (with a generous helping of jackfruits).

Evening puja saw the alankaram of the Utsa Ganapathi murthi, a full puja to him by Aiya, and Ganesha's palanquin procession around the temple.

Sharada Navarathri, Sept. 29-Oct. 11

Every day of the Brahmotsavam featured a Lakshmi-Kubera homam that was designed to pray for the temple's prosperity.

Each morning saw a Kamadhenu and Digdevata puja, followed by a full kalasam puja, abhishekam and alankaram of Devi. The Utsa Rajarajeshwari went out every third day as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.

Thirty-six kalasams sat in the yajnashala within the wooden "frame" set-up around the homakundam. Eight represented the Ashta-Lakshmis, 16 were the sodasa Lakshmis and 12 were the dvadasa Adityas.

Navarathri this year lasted 10 days, after which came a jam-packed Vijayadasami on Oct. 9. The day started in the wee hours of the morning with a Chandi homam, followed by a kalasa sthapanam for eight sponsors. The large, clay kalasam was then taken in procession and emptied with the rest onto the Devi.

Then came Devi's chariot procession in the afternoon, and about an hour of archanas. That evening saw the first night of Kedara Gowri pujas, and a special Vidyaarambham puja for small children starting their education.

Friday Oct. 10 was the water-cutting ceremony with the major deities being bathed outside with water from the river. The festival flag came down that night but Kulurthi was still on the schedule for Saturday—and it drew a crowd of hundreds of people.

Only then were all the 36 kalasams poured on the Devi, before she received abhishekam with various substances, including honey, chandanam, kum-kum and viboothi.

After another hour of archanas that afternoon and a final Bhairava bali at both ends of the property, another fruitful festival came to a close.

Three special guests from India added great colour and insight to the festival. The temple was honoured by the presence of Sri Shangaranarayanan from the Matangi peetam in Chennai, Dr. Sunandhini Lakshminath, and Dr. Shanmukhavel.

See our Navarathri photo spread on pages 6 and 7!

Kedaragowri vratham, Oct. 28

Kedaragowri vratham begins on the day when Navarathri traditionally ends—Vijayadasami.

At our temple however, Navarathri lasts a couple of days past Vijayadasami, which meant it overlapped a little with Kedaragowri. More than 100 women sponsored the vratham this year and went out of their way to attend the final puja that fell on a weeknight, Tues. Oct. 28.

Lord Ardhanareeshwara was given a full abhishekam and alankaram as the puja went on. At the end, there took place an elaborate gift-giving period during which all the ladies who sponsored were given a special prasadam package. Also distributed were the *sharadu* threads that hung on Ardhanari throughout the vratham.

Aiya prepares the festival kalasam on the very first night of Kedaragowri vratham.

Skanda Sashti, Oct. 29-Nov. 3

Muruga and his wives Devayani and Valli were given milk abhishekam and puja on each of the six days of this festival.

The last day traditionally marks Shanmukha's conquest of Surapadman, as well as his wedding to Devayani and later Valli. In the evening, the three were carried around the temple in procession, with their pradakshanam re-enacting their story.

Subramaniam stood with Valli as the ladies who carried Devayani made her turn away from the newly married couple. This was to show her anger, as she did back then when she discovered her husband had run away with another woman.

However, Kartikeya explained to Devayani that she and Valli were sisters in their previous lifetime, and that he had promised back then he would marry them both. Devayani forgave all and the three were united.

Upcoming Events

Karthikai Vilakku, Dec. 11

Falling on a Thursday night, this short but beautiful festival day marks the day that Lord Shiva settled in Thiruvannamalai in the form of fire.

It is still the single biggest visitor's festival in Annamalai, where people do the 14-kilometre giri pradakshanam that night by the thousands. A massive flame is also lit atop the highest peak on the Annamalai mountain.

At the temple, this event is celebrated with the lighting of hundreds of deepams and candles throughout the yajnashala and inner temple. As well, Aiya will perform a puja or homam to Lord Shiva.

The evening usually begins at about 6 p.m. and concludes around 9 p.m.

Annual Matangi homam, Dec. 28

This homam continues to get grander and grander each year, and is impeccably organized by the temple's youth group.

The tradition of worshipping Matangi Devi (the tantric goddess of education and learning in any form) is now in its fourth year, and all children are invited to come on that day and sponsor.

The children are typically organized into groups, and as each group takes its turn, every child will get to sit around the homa kundam and offer something into the fire.

It takes place on a Sunday morning, beginning at 9 a.m. and concluding around 2 p.m.

If parents wish for to sign their kids up for sponsorship and participation, please call the temple immediately. The popularity of this homam grows with each year and spaces are filling up fast!

Thiruvempavai, Jan. 1-Jan. 10

Every morning, Aiya and whosoever happens to be at the temple will arise and perform the pre-dawn puja to Nataraja. The 10th and last day is Ardhra Dharshanam, which is when Sri Nataraja in Chidambaram gives his devotees a divine glimpse of his radiance.

Daily pujas commence at 5 a.m. and are usually finished by 7 a.m. Songs from the Thirupalliyezuchi will be sung throughout each puja. The last day falls this year on a Saturday morning, so puja will start earlier at about 4 a.m.

Devotees will take turns bathing Nataraja and Sivakami, and volunteers will then dress the divine couple. Please join us for at least one morning of this authentically Tamil festival.

Last year, Shankavi and the sacred texts written by the saint Manikkavasagar were taken in procession around the temple on the final day of Thiruvempavai.

Shivarathri, Feb. 22

The all-night celebrations for Lord Shiva will fall on a Sunday night this year and run into Monday morning. Previous Shivarathris had everything from continuous homams, to shankam abhishekams with 1008 valampuri (right-handed) conches, to devotees offering bilva leaves non-stop to all the Shiva sannidhis in the temple.

Last year featured a first-time occurrence—the bathing of Ganapathi, Devi and the main Shivalingam in viboothi, before abhishekam was offered with hundreds of rudrakshas.

In Three Months

Devi willing, the next issue of the *Sri Chakra* Magazine will be up on the temple's website (www.srividya.org) at the beginning of March 2009.

This magazine cannot keep publishing without contributions from devotees! Articles, poems, stories, and the like about any spiritual topic are welcomed.

The next deadline for article submission is February 6. Please e-mail us with your contributions or feedback about this issue at sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org or talk to Abhi or Kamya at the temple. We want to hear from you!

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

A big thank-you to this issue's volunteers: Aiya, Gratus Devanesan, Aparna Hasling, and Dr. Seyon Sathiaseelan.

Clockwise from left: Homams happened each of the 10 days; 36 kalasams sat in the "frame" around the homakundam; Pravin was one of many who assisted Aiya with daily pujas; Sri Shangaranarayanan shared his experiences with the crowd each day he was present.

NAVARATHRI '08!!

Clockwise from right: The last night of Sri Chakra puja included a kumari puja to all little girls; the large clay kalasam was the centrepiece of the yajnashala; Aiya held a Vidyaarambham ritual for all small kids starting their schooling; the festival featured bharatanatyam performances, including those by Satya Stevens (in red/gold) and Vinitha Navaratnam (in pink/white)

Clockwise from left: Seated on Kamadhenu, the Devi went out as Lakshmi on the sixth night; fastened to a palanquin, she again went out as Saraswati on the tenth night; Vathani and Vadivel offer the final purnahuti and full outfit for Devi into the Chandi homam on Vijayadasami; it looks like Devi received it and was happy to give her dharshanam in the form of flames.

Clockwise from below: Everyone got a turn to bathe Utsa Rajarajeshwari and Vishnu-Durga on water-cutting day; everyone also got a chance to pull the chariot on Vijayadasami; some skilled volunteers carefully lifted Devi out of her ride later on; Aiya took down the flag just before the Bhairava bali on the night before Kulurthi.

Matangi's grace

by Dr. Seyon Sathiaseelan

During one of my visits to the temple, I heard Aiya speaking about a great King who lived in Madurai, India centuries ago. This King was liked by everybody in the village for his generosity, kindness and humility. He performed puja for Raja Matangi and it was said that Meenakshi would appear before him and then later return to the temple.

After the story was told, I became fascinated with Matangi. I started listening to the Laghu Shyamala mantra and there it was described the benefits of the mantra: public speaking, singing, writing, drawing, thinking in three dimensions and many more.

Frankly, I thought all of these attributes were things I could have used some work on. So I decided to listen to the mantra for 15-20 minutes a day. At this point, I was thirsty for the Raja Matangi mantra.

During Navarathri of 2007, the focus of the festival was Matangi and Varahi. Ironically, I arrived at the beginning of Saraswati's three-day puja, on the 7th day. That day, I was fortunate to be given the Raja Matangi mantra by Aiya.

Later that day, I went back to the hotel where I was staying and I started chanting the mantra repeatedly. During my chanting, there were sensations of numbness and tingling around my back and lower extremities.

A few months later, I was studying for my medical licensing exams. My residency training was quite busy and I found it difficult to complete all of the material. I was quite anxious but nevertheless I faced the exam, it was a combination of oral and written sections.

To relieve my anxiety, I started chanting the mantra in between each section during the bell ringer. As I would face a station, the answers I needed would appear in my head regardless if I covered the material. Afterwards, I found out that I received a very good mark and passed the exam.

It was at this point I realized the richness and power of this mantra. I continued to practice this mantra with devotion. It has helped me a great deal in my life.

This story was written as inspiration and an example of the Power the Goddess. Faith is god! Remember, Devi is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent!

december 2008

63 Nayanmars

Perumizhalaikurumba Nayanmar

by Gratuz Devanesan

The Shivajnana Bhodam prescribes in the second clause of its 12th aphorism "Consort with the devotees who have apprehended Reality." This is very similar to what Ramana Maharishi prescribed as the single most important step towards obtaining realization.

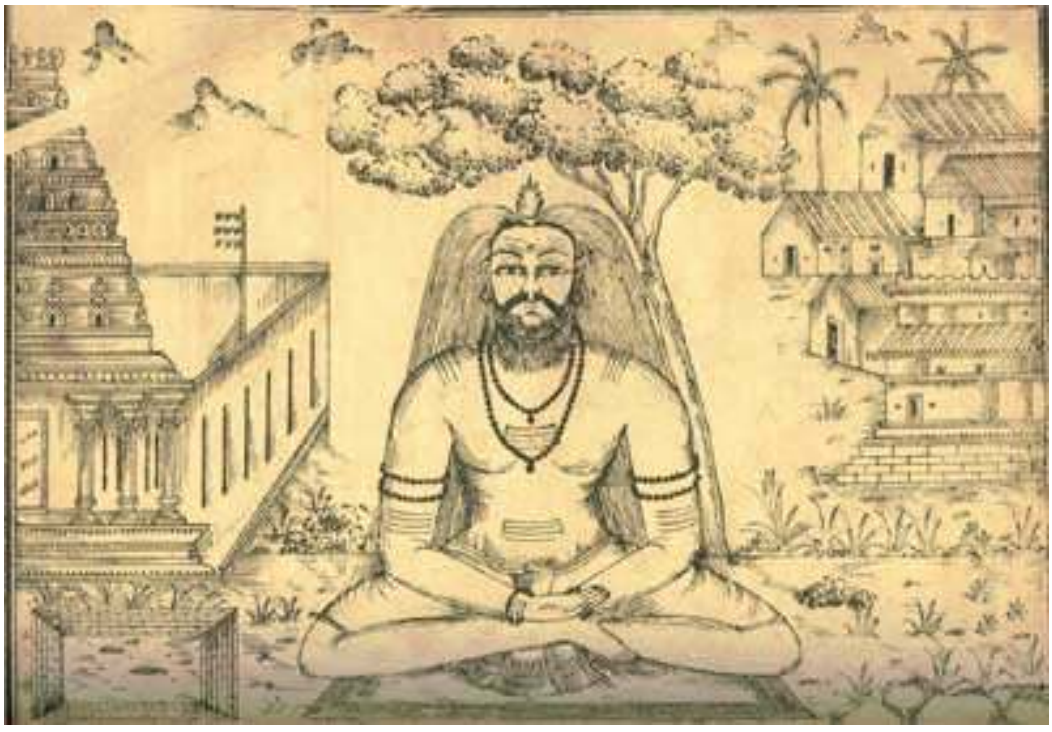
The term Perumizhalaikurumba is roughly translated as the "Great Kurumbar of Mizhalai." Sundarar, who proclaimed his servitorship to the servitors of the lord, sang "Servitor am I to Perumizhalar Kurumbar...".

Although Sundarar proclaimed himself the servitor, Kurumbar considered Sundarar a great soul among saints and upon hearing that Sundarar was about to leave his mortal self to join Shiva at Kailas, Kurumbar thought he should be in Kailas to congratulate Sundarar for having achieved such greatness.

So, Kurumbar, a chieftain always immersed in giving wealth and comforts to the devotees of the Lord, decided that he must sit in meditation and immediately reach the feet of Shiva, so that when Sundarar came he could congratulate him on this outstanding achievement. He sat down with ardent concentration, convinced that through kundalini yoga he must reach kailas this very moment.

Kurumbar at no point imagined that he should be in Kailas at the side of Shiva. He simply felt out of the love in his heart, that someone should shower praise on Sundarar after the latter had completed his long and arduous journey.

So with this selfless motive in mind, he began his meditation, and through Shiva's grace reached the top of Kailas and Shiva's feet, long before Sundarar.



The Ashta-Paashas

Eight roadblocks on the path to the Devi

part 1

A devotee recently asked Aiya a question that is on every upasaka's mind—How can one truly reach his or her guru, and the Devi? Aiya, along with the input of Sri Shangaranarayana, gave a lengthy answer that described how a person needs to destroy the negative aspects of their mind and soul in order to really hear and see the Devi.

This is the first of four installments detailing Aiya's exact words during that Q&A session, where he detailed the ashta-paashas (or eight negative character traits) that block a person from self-realization—grna, shanka, bhaya, lajja, juhupsa, kulam, jaadi, seelam.

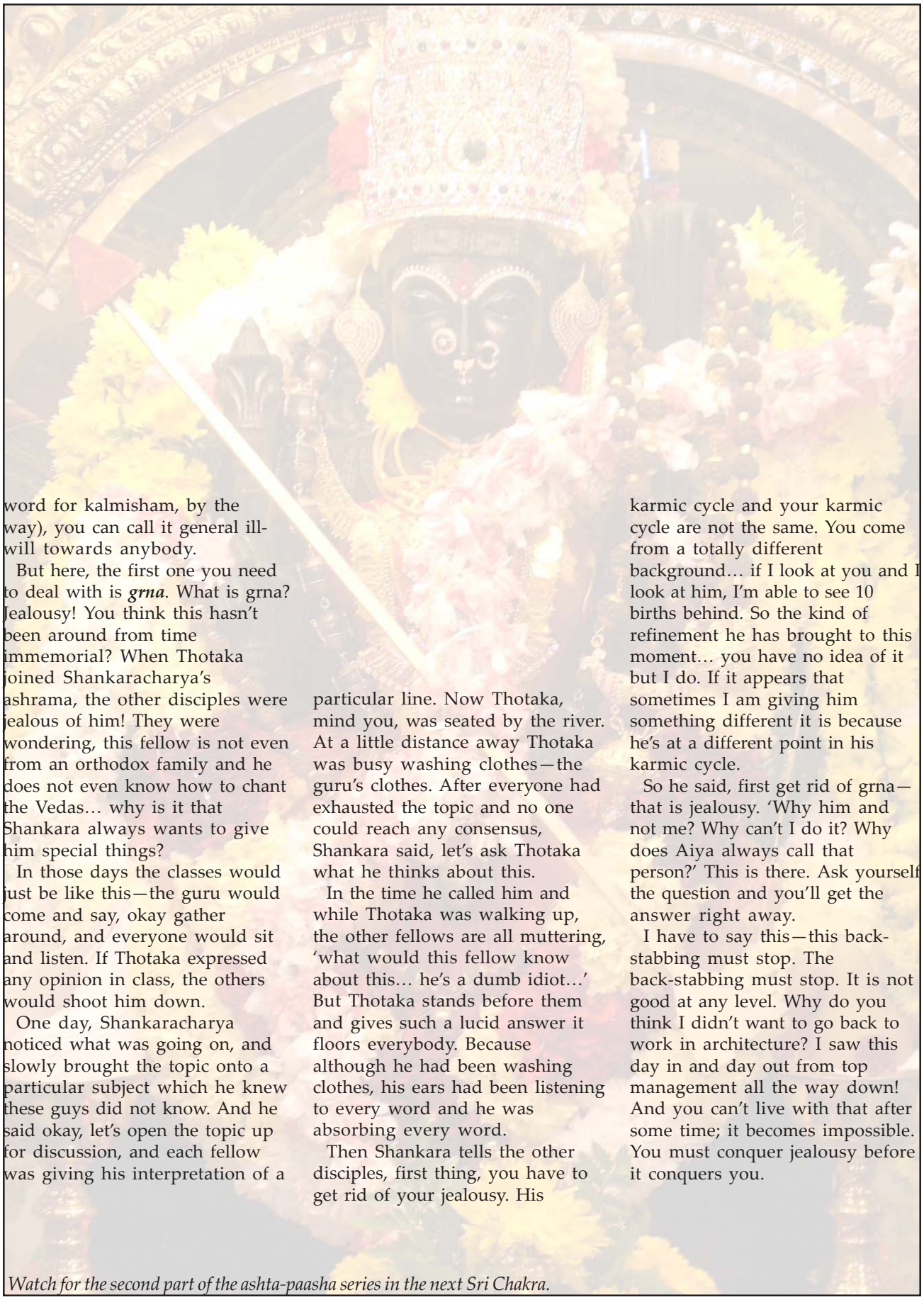
First of all, you have to realize that the guru's affection and love for you is unconditional. Having said that, you also have to be prepared to receive the grace. People always tell me, I'm talking to the Devi and She's not talking back to me—She's talking; you're not listening! That's the problem… when your mind is always involved with other things, you're not able to hear Her voice from inside.

One of the things you need to do is… there should not be any *kalmisham* in you. You should not harbor any of the ashta-paashas within you. What are the ashta-paashas? Grna, shanka, bhaya, lajja, juhupsa, kulam, jaadi, seelam.

If you don't have any of these things, what naturally happens is there will be no residual tension in any of your systems—muscular system, mental system, reproductive, endocrine system—no tension. When there is no tension, the clutter upstairs in the computer room ceases. When the clutter ceases, you will hear the voice of the guru (which is the same as that of the Devi) like a clear temple bell.

So instead of saying 'how can I reach you,' you should say, 'how should I prepare myself to reach you?'

First thing—*kalmisham*. That covers a whole slew of things. If you roughly translate it (there's no English



word for kalmisham, by the way), you can call it general ill-will towards anybody.

But here, the first one you need to deal with is ***grna***. What is grna? Jealousy! You think this hasn't been around from time immemorial? When Thotaka joined Shankaracharya's ashrama, the other disciples were jealous of him! They were wondering, this fellow is not even from an orthodox family and he does not even know how to chant the Vedas… why is it that Shankara always wants to give him special things?

In those days the classes would just be like this—the guru would come and say, okay gather around, and everyone would sit and listen. If Thotaka expressed any opinion in class, the others would shoot him down.

One day, Shankaracharya noticed what was going on, and slowly brought the topic onto a particular subject which he knew these guys did not know. And he said okay, let's open the topic up for discussion, and each fellow was giving his interpretation of a particular line. Now Thotaka, mind you, was seated by the river. At a little distance away Thotaka was busy washing clothes—the guru's clothes. After everyone had exhausted the topic and no one could reach any consensus, Shankara said, let's ask Thotaka what he thinks about this.

In the time he called him and while Thotaka was walking up, the other fellows are all muttering, 'what would this fellow know about this… he's a dumb idiot…' But Thotaka stands before them and gives such a lucid answer it floors everybody. Because although he had been washing clothes, his ears had been listening to every word and he was absorbing every word.

Then Shankara tells the other disciples, first thing, you have to get rid of your jealousy. His karmic cycle and your karmic cycle are not the same. You come from a totally different background… if I look at you and I look at him, I'm able to see 10 births behind. So the kind of refinement he has brought to this moment… you have no idea of it but I do. If it appears that sometimes I am giving him something different it is because he's at a different point in his karmic cycle.

So he said, first get rid of grna—that is jealousy. 'Why him and not me? Why can't I do it? Why does Aiya always call that person?' This is there. Ask yourself the question and you'll get the answer right away.

I have to say this—this back-stabbing must stop. The back-stabbing must stop. It is not good at any level. Why do you think I didn't want to go back to work in architecture? I saw this day in and day out from top management all the way down! And you can't live with that after some time; it becomes impossible. You must conquer jealousy before it conquers you.

Watch for the second part of the ashta-paasha series in the next Sri Chakra.

Trust and Faith in the Guru

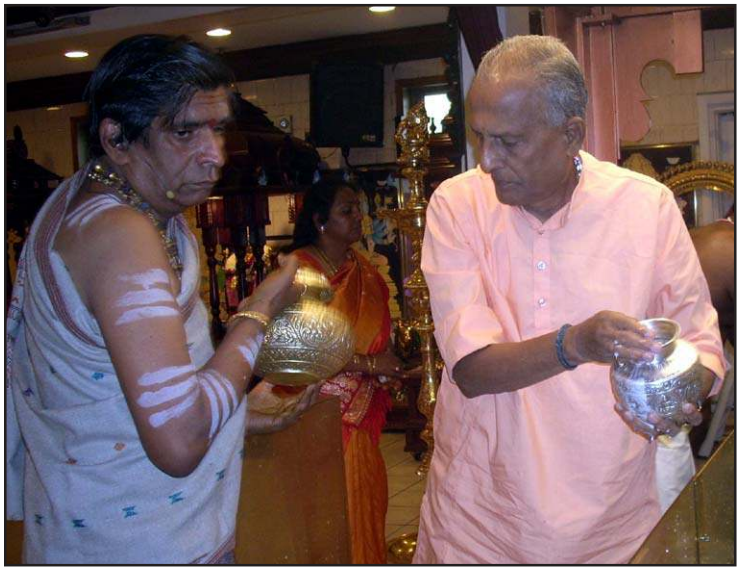
dictated by Sri S. Shangaranarayanan, transcribed by Kamya Ramaswamy

During Navarathri, Aiya gave his view on how one may reach the Devi (see pages 10 and 11), and then asked Sri Shangaranarayana aiya his thoughts on the matter. Here's a slightly edited version of what he said:

To reach the Devi, you need to have unconditional good faith in the guru, first and foremost. What is good faith? Faith is when you go on telling the guru, 'Guruji, Guruji, Guruji, Guruji, Guruji…' and go on pestering him for his blessings like that. Good faith is when you tell him only once.

Good faith always has its base in good trust in the master. The divine master is capable of doing anything he wants. If he wants to build a rajagopuram in 10 days, he will do it whether or not you are there to help him. So cultivating an attitude of understanding and cultivating an attitude of good faith and trust in your guru is a basic factor for anybody to be a devotee of the Mother.

For instance, a child is born. The child doesn't know who is his father or who is his mother. The mother tells him, 'so-and-so is your father and I am your mother,' and the child just believes her and grows. That is the type of faith you must have in your guru—no questioning. You have no right to question his background, you have no



right to question what he tells you to do.

It doesn't mean you should be his slave; you can question him for clarification. See, when we do the *avarana* puja, the first offering is given to the guru. So all your belongings of good, bad, everything is first offered to the guru. The guru takes everything… so please remember the amount of sadhana he needs to do to remove all the unwanted things for you and still be cheerful toward all of you. It's a difficult task. Fortunately or unfortunately, we can't understand that.

If somebody is initiated, like when Haranji is in a good mood and gives whomever wants it Maha Sodasakshari (it happened last year during Chandi homam)… you must understand that Haranji has given this Maha Sodasakshari to someone because he knows what Maha Sodasakshari is, as well as the background of that particular person. So you cannot question him and say, 'You have given Maha Sodasakshari to him and you haven't given it to me. Why?'

That's not our place to ask that. You can also climb up the ladder with even the smallest mantra… after all, all the mantras are made up of the 51 Matruka aksharas, so they are all equal.

How do you talk to the guru and the Divine Mother? With *bhaava*. You must merge yourself with Her in every small act that you do for Her. The guru is nothing more than the physical form of the Divine Mother. She is the energy and he is the speaker. If you understand that point, any one of you can go on talking to Her day in and day out.

I have a question now… all these things that are defects caused by the law of nature—if you want to remove them, how is it done? Suppose I have come to the guru to remove all these defects, the guru will be so nice that he will arrange to have these things removed in the dream state. It is because the body and mind are only relative to all these karmas. The soul has no relativity to those things.

So the guru, out of his compassion, will collect these karmas and have you burn them in your dreaming state. Your fate can be changed only by the guru and not even by the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother will obey the order of the guru and follow the footsteps of the guru, and not direct him.

So one has to serve the guru honestly, diligently, delicately and nicely in whatever manner possible, and only then will they be able to speak to the Divine Mother.

Eco Vidya

One devotee's view of how the temple's milk abhishekams affect the environment

by Aparna Hasling

I would like to introduce ***Eco Vidya***, the term I've used to identify an environmental version of Sri Vidya. In this modern age it is ever more important to re-examine the source of our offerings and determine which of our ritual actions may unknowingly be harmful to the Divine Mother, our Mother Earth. It is not enough to just be vegetarian; we should also consider the effect of our purchases at the grocery store. It is time that our temple considers using alternatives to pasteurized milk.

Milk abhishekam has been a divine act of devotion for thousands of years within the Hindu tradition. Our ancient scriptures explain that milk is amritam from a divine being, and so it is respectful to pour it on a deity. But those words were written in an age when milk was pure and cows freely roamed green pastures and ate pesticide-free grass.

Today, the milk we buy comes from agribusinesses, places that house thousands of cows in confinement dairies, where stalls are sometimes welded shut, where cows are fed high-energy grains and restaurant scraps, and are injected with growth hormones and antibiotics. Cows are not permitted their natural grass diet; they are fed only to maximize milk production and minimize cost.

These mistreated cows are subject to frequent illnesses and infections; the milk they produce reflects their own health in that their milk must be sterilized before it is sold for human consumption. The FDA (Food and Drug Administration of the United States) demands that milk be pasteurized. This modern technique was not needed when cows were healthy. In 1888 Louis Pasteur invented a system of heating milk in order to kill

The cow on the left lives freely in Devipuram, where it is allowed to roam around and graze. Many private, family farms in North America allow their cows the same natural life. But factory farms (like the one on the right) keep their animals in cruel conditions, where they sometimes don't even have enough room to move their legs or sit down.

bacteria—but it killed the potentially harmful bacteria as well as the healthy bacteria needed to bolster the immune system.

This technique started as a temporary solution to the problem of contaminated milk in overcrowded cities without refrigeration or adequate sanitation. Raw milk was understood by all parties to be preferred, but unfortunately the focus has never turned back from heating diseased milk to producing and distributing healthy, raw milk.

By purchasing hundreds of gallons of pasteurized Wegmans milk, we are using our consumer dollars to empower these harmful practices. It is as if we are saying "Yes, we want cheap milk at any cost." Agribusiness then responds to our demands by putting more cows on smaller plots, and tormenting them in unspeakable ways to produce more milk.

It is our responsibility to advocate for the sisters of Nandi. The milk-giving cow is the most sacred animal in Hindu religion. She is often understood as the symbol of sustainable life, as well as of the cosmos: her legs are compared to the four Vedas, her eyes to the sun and the moon, her horns to the mountains, and her udders to the oceans. Milk from healthy cows is extremely nutritious for children and is said to delay the aging process in adults.

From milk, we make butter, ghee, and yogurt. Even the dung a healthy cow produces can be beneficial and contains ammonia which can eliminate pathogenic bacteria in the home. It can also be burned for cooking fuel instead of timber. The cow is a symbol of sustainable life. For millennia, the Indian culture has relied on the sacred cow, and now she needs our help.

Yes, milk abhishekam has been a divine act of devotion for thousands of years. But it is time to rethink our basic ritual formulas. Please offer abhishekam with anything *except* milk from cows raised on factory farms: raw milk, diluted coconut milk, fruit juice, turmeric water, rose water or river water. In doing so, the temple will make a bold statement and serve as an example for the community to become advocates for our Divine Mother Earth.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

Overview: http://advocacy.britannica.com/blog/advocacy/2007/06/dairy-farming/

Video, Animated for kids (The Matrix II): http://www.themeatrix2.com/

Audio, NPR: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91843992

TIME:http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1598525,00.html?iid=sphere-inline-bottom

Where to buy raw milk: http://www.realmilk.com/where4.html#ny

Photos: Milk abhishekam is an integral part of pujas, and the demand at our temple is high—especially during festivals. But the author of this article suggests using turmeric water or other alternatives, the way Shankar uncle is doing in the bottom right photo.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha