



# Sri Chakra

*The Source of the Cosmos*

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY



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March 2009

# March Newsletter

## Since the last issue...

The beginning of December saw Aiya come up to Toronto to teach the kids' class and Kitchener/Waterloo to teach a class and make personal visits. He was back in Rochester for Karthikai Deepam on Dec. 11. The temple hosted large crowds later in the month when it hosted a Rudra homam workshop on the 27th and the annual kids' Matangi homam on the 28th.

The next big event after that was Thiruvempavai for the first 10 days of 2009. After Ardhra Dharshanam, Aiya and Amma briefly visited Delaware before embarking on a two-week trip to India.

They were in Kanchipuram and Nemili on the 16th, where they received a wonderful welcome. Aiya's rendition of Bala Kavacham was playing as they entered the Nemili peetam. From there, Amma and Aiya went to Thiruvannamalai, and then Chidambaram.

They then came back to Chennai, where they visited several temples including Kashi Vishwanathan, Marundheeshwarar, Kapaleeshwarar, Malikeshwarar and Theerthapalishwarar, who was once worshipped by the sage Agastya.

Aiya and Amma were then in Hyderabad on Jan. 24-25 for a Sri Vidya conference on mantra, yantra, and tantra, which Aiya chaired for the afternoon session of the first day.

The paper he presented was fairly well received, but Aiya was very impressed by a very knowledgeable aghori named Kula Avadhuta



Clockwise from top: Aiya was honoured by Nemili Ezhilmani; Annamalai temple and mountain; Aiya and Amma at the conference; Aiya delivering his address on mantra, tantra and yantra; our gurus hanging out with their gurus.



Satpurananda.

After the conference, Amma and Aiya flew to Visakapatnam to see Ammah and Guruji and also to visit Devipuram. After that, they went to kumbhakonam and later met Sri Shanganarayanan to discuss items needed for the SVTS kumbhabhishekam in 2010.

Upon returning from India on the evening of Jan. 30, Aiya and Amma immediately flew to Dallas the next morning for a week, then New Jersey on Feb. 5, and then for a grihapravesham in North Carolina Feb. 7.

The President's Day long weekend saw them visit Toronto to teach a kids' class, but they soon returned to Rochester to prepare for Shivarathri.



## Past Events

### Karthikai Vilakku, Dec. 11

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

At the temple, this event was done by lighting hundreds of deepams and candles throughout the yajnashala and inner temple, as well as a puja to Lord Shiva.

### Kids' Matangi homam, Dec. 28

This perfectly organized homam is run entirely by the temple's youth group, comprised of kids 20 years of age or younger. Several other children sponsored and offered ahutis into the homam with the Laghu Shyamala mantra as their parents watched from behind a barrier.

The youth group did everything from decorating the yajnashala, to readying the purnahutis, to dressing the Devi and every murthi inside the temple.

In all, about 130 kids showed up and sat for the homam, which is done to pray to Matangi Devi for all success in education, the arts and any type of intellectual endeavour. After the homam and mahaprasadam, Aiya and some of the kids held a bhajan session to wind down the day.

Left: Sreekant and Vyshna put their purnahuti into the fire  
Right: All the children sat right up against the homa kundam (in pre-assigned groups) and gave ahutis with their own hands



### Thiruvempavai, Jan. 1-Jan. 10

Every morning, Aiya and whomever was at the temple performed the 5 a.m. pujas to Lord Nataraja. The 10th and last day of Ardhra Dharshanam gave all devotees the chance to perform milk abhishekam to the Lord and Devi Sivakami while everyone sang the holy verses from the *Thirupalliyezuchi*.

That morning, the divine couple was royally bathed in viboothi, bilva leaves, and honey, which everyone was later given to take home as prasadam.

Spontaneous bhajans in Lord Shiva's name broke out while volunteers dressed the murthis. The festival also saw a dance performance from Purvaja to honour Nataraja as the Lord of the dance, as well as an elaborate bilva archana. Little Seyon held the texts penned by the Nayanar saint Manickavasagar as devotees pulled his mini-chariot around the temple in procession.

That evening was also poornima, and featured a rare treat. Aiya himself sat for a grand Navavarna



Top: Sivakami and her Lord bathed in viboothi  
Bottom: The final chariot procession



puja, which lasted almost four hours.

### Shivarathri, Feb. 22

The night started out with Pradosham puja, and eventually settled into the continuous chanting of 11 Rudrams, accompanied by bilva archana for 11 Shiva shrines throughout the temple and yajnashala.

Devotees were kept on their feet all night long and given an unlimited supply of bilvam to offer Lord Shiva in his many forms. The Rudraksha Stotra Namavali was also chanted, and rudrakshas were offered to the Lord as they were last year.

Visitors were also given the chance to do milk abhishekam for the main murthis, and the chance to witness a Rudra homam.



Left: Everyone did milk abhishekam during Pradosham puja and Shivarathri puja  
Right: All Shivalingams were covered in bilva leaves by the end of the night.

## Upcoming Events

### Tamil New Year/Pratyangira homam, April 19

This tradition of celebrating the new year with a Pratyangira homam for devotees began about four years ago. It typically takes place on the Sunday closest to the new year's day and features the offering of several kilograms of red chillies in all shapes and sizes.

In the week leading up to the homam, devotees may sign up to prepare a *palaharam* (a cooked snack) to be offered into the fire.

All palaharams must be made at the temple and devotees must sign up for a cooking slot well ahead of time. Please call the temple and let Selvan or Aiya know what you wish to prepare.



Venu bhaya helped distribute more than 50 types of palaharams into plate-sized offerings at last year's Pratyangira homam.

### Chitra Poornima, May 8

Devotees whose mothers have passed on gather at the temple on this day to offer tarpanam to the one who gave them life. Tarpanam is typically not done on poornima (full moon) but on amavasya (the new moon). At a temple that follows the Sri Vidya tradition, however, mothers hold an exalted position as the very embodiments of the Devi.

Those who wish to participate must call the temple to register.

### Annual Pratishta (May Festival), May 15-17

This will be the temple's 11th year, and the Pratishta will run as usual—the first day will feature a Vancha-Kalpa Ganapathi homam with 1008 modakams offered into the fire. Utsava Ganapathi will also circle the temple in the evening.

The second day will begin with a Chandi homam at 5 a.m. and continue with a full kalasa sthapana and concerts in the afternoon. Devi's massive chariot will go around the temple after the evening puja.

On the third day, the children will do the puja to the lineage's guru, Lord Dattatreya. Usually, abhishekam with 1008 shankams takes up the full day. In the evening, the children dress a small Dattatreya murthi and pull him around the temple in his own special lightweight chariot. All are welcome to attend and join in!



Top to bottom: The Chandi homam draws a large crowd; anna-pavadai is offered to Devi; 1008 valampuri shankams are set up for abhishekam; the 2-storey electric chariot goes out after the second full day of puja.



### In Three Months

Devi willing, the next issue of the *Sri Chakra Magazine* will be up on the temple's website ([www.srividya.org](http://www.srividya.org)) at the beginning of June 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 May 9. Please e-mail us with your contributions or feedback about this issue at [sri\\_chakra\\_mag@srividya.org](mailto:sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org) or talk to Kamyā or Abhi at the temple. We want to hear from you!

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

A big thank-you to this issue's volunteers: Aiya, Gratus Devanesan, Sudha Priya Kearney, Dr. Seyon Sathiaseelan, Dr. A. Somaskanda, and Shobana Sudhakar.

# K u m b h a b h i s h e k a m

The Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam will be hosting its  
Punarutharuna Kumbhabhishekam July 1-11, 2010.

The chosen event has only been attempted on this scale once  
before, and only then by the devatas: Athi Rudra homam.

Over 11 days, 11 Rudra homams will be performed daily in each of 121 homakundams.  
More than 2 million ahutis will offered by the event's end.

First preference for yajamanis and yajamanas goes to those who have received mantra  
diksha within Aiya's lineage, and can correctly chant the Rudram.

Volunteers are always welcome. The youth group is training kids for various  
duties. If interested, contact them at svtsyouth@hotmail.com right away.

Several sponsorship opportunities are also available: sitting for homam,  
required puja items, food, kalasams, etc. Call 1-585-533-1970.

## Update



# Parents' blessings

by Dr. Seyon Sathiasaelan

Sri Sathya Sai Baba once said,  
"Blood, food, head and money are  
all the gifts of the mother. So, first  
and foremost, one should show  
gratitude to the mother.

"You should never forget your  
mother who gave you birth after  
carrying you in her womb for  
nine months and brought you up,  
providing all care and comfort,  
unmindful of her own discomforts.  
The mother always has your well-  
being uppermost in her mind in  
whatever she says or does.

"You may be highly educated  
and your mother may be illiterate  
but still you should have utmost  
regard for her. You should consider



the teachings of your mother as the  
Veda itself."

It is important to realize as  
spiritual aspirants that our parents  
are our human deities. They are a  
link toward truth, righteousness,  
love and peace. We must respect

and care for our parents who have  
done so much for us. They have  
worked hard to educate and provide  
a better life for us.

As important as it is to worship  
any deity, it is equally important to  
take care and receive the blessings  
of our parents, the human deities.  
You will notice that those who  
prosper in life were good to their  
parents

In our fast-paced society, it is  
important to be good to our parents  
and receive their blessings in our  
lives.

# *Devi Prabhavam*

recorded by Gayathiri & Sahana



CD review

by Dr. A. Somaskanda



The soaring and complex vocals of Gayathiri Senthilrajan and Sahana Sivakumaran on their debut album prove the two singers have lasting talent.

During Navarathri 2008, Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam released a CD, *Devi Prabhavam*, featuring a very talented duo of rising stars hailing from Toronto, Canada, Gayathiri Senthilrajan and Sahana Sivakumaran.

From listening to the work on their debut album, the two artists sound like seasoned professionals, and the strength and skill of their voices greatly betray their ages—Gayathiri is only in her first year of post-secondary education, and Sahana

is completing her final year of high school.

The two are cousins and avid volunteers and devotees at the SVTS temple, and it shows in their work. Their choice of repertoire has a strong bias in favour of Devi Sri Rajarajeswari, the presiding deity of the Rush temple.

Their melodious voices are imbued with an uncommon tonal harmony and a timbre that has an earthiness and solidity that does not drift in the upper scales. This bears testimony to their dedication, and years of arduous training.

On the evidence of the recording surveyed here, they strictly toe the line in terms of their style of rendition. In the fullness of time, they will no doubt blossom into virtuosas with their unique style and imagination.

The first kriti is “Siddhi Vinayakam,” in Shanmukhapriya raga, composed by Muthuswami Dikshitar. It is a major raga with a pleasing effect and an ample scope for alapana. It was executed faithfully and flawlessly.

The second composition by Swathi Thirunal is one this writer has never

listened to before but the raga as essayed by the duo is more akin to Hamsanandhi than Hamsadhwani. I wonder if this was a typographical error.

“Akilandeswari” in Dwijavanti, and “Kamalambam Bajare” in Kalyani were marked by the brilliant delineation of the ragas, touching on the nuances without resorting to elaborate frills.

“Narayana” in Suddha Dhanyasi was indeed a delectable treat partly because it is one of my

most favourite ragas. They have captured the essence of this raga in all its ethereal beauty and abiding sweetness.

“Karunai Deivame” in Sindhu Bhairavi, and “Ramanai Bajithal” were both mellifluously articulated with delightful color and grace. “Sutrum Vizhi” by Subramaniam Bharathiyar and the concluding Thillana by Maestro Lalgudi G. Jeyaraman were hypnotic and sublime.

A. Jayadevan on violin was impressive in his sensitive interpretation of the ragas. Mridangam accompaniment by Vasuthevan Rajalingam was marked by vigour and finesse. Morsing by Surenthar was pleasing and unobtrusive.

All in all, this is a commendable maiden effort by the young artists and an unqualified success.

At the end of the release

concert in October, Aiya said a few words about the dedication of the girls and the instrumentalists who accompanied them. He said that every person on the stage that day excelled at what they did, and that it was inspirational to see a group of young people who were born and brought up in the West commit so fully to our Eastern traditional arts.

The temple encourages every music lover to purchase a copy of *Devi Prabhavam* not only to witness the prodigious skill level of the artists involved, but also to contribute to a very important upcoming event. The singers Gayathiri and Sahana have requested that all proceeds from their first professional effort go toward helping fund the temple’s kumbhabhishekam in July 2010.



Gayathiri and Sahana performed during Navarathri with full instrumental accompaniment. All proceeds from their debut album will go toward funding the temple’s kumbhabhishekam in July 2010, upon the singers’ request.





march 2009

# 63 Nayanmars

## Dhandiyadigal Nayanmar

by Gratus Devanesan

Dhandiyadigal was blind from birth. He lived in Thiruvavur during a time when a large part of the population consisted of Jains. The Jains would go into the Shiva temple also and use up all the space at the temple tank.

Dhandi felt that somehow the water was not enough and the tank needed to be expanded if it was to accommodate so many people. Being a single person and unable to assemble a team that would rebuild the temple tank complex, he thought there must be something he could do himself. Although he was blind, he swam to the center of the temple tank and planted a pole. He then tied a rope connecting the pole to a pole outside the water. Using this rope as a guide, he slowly dug into the temple tank and removed soil from the bottom, so as to increase the depth of the tank.

Some of the Jains flared up in anger upon seeing this, and proclaimed that he was killing countless beings that lived at the bottom of the tank. They rushed to Dhandi and told him to stop. He was trying to explain himself, upon which they just further insulted him—calling him dumb and deaf as well as blind.

Dhandiyadigal, hurt by these insults said, “Though my bodily eyes are blind, my mental eye sees Shiva always as riding his bull accompanied by the mother of the universe.” The Jains scoffed, “If

Shiva was to give you back your eyesight, then we will all leave this town itself!” And they laughed aloud.

Dhandiyadigal walked home in tears unsure of what to do. He prayed to Shiva, his heart weeping—even worse than the insults he suffered would be bringing down Shiva’s name by



his actions. If he didn’t gain his eyesight, the Jains would not only continue to insult him, but they would insult and belittle Shiva. He eventually fell asleep with tears in his eyes. The Lord appeared to him in his dream and told him:

*Shed the grievance you are harboring  
in your mind*

*You will see that you see with your  
own eyes*

*And the perfidious Jains’ eyesight  
fades;*

*Fear Not!*

The Lord also appeared in the King’s dream and told him how Dhandi was digging for everyone,

and that the Jains had insulted him and belittled his efforts. He told the king of how they had used force to obstruct the work he was doing. “He is angry and shamed,” the Lord said to the king. “Go to him and do what he asks.”

So the next morning the king woke up, and recollecting the dream went to Dhandi. He also sent for the Jains and together they all went to the tank. The King in the presence of all the Jains then turned to Dhandi and said, “Oh, man of great *thavam*. Do show us how you will gain your eyesight by the grace of our Lord.”

On the Lord’s bidding, Dhandi spoke:

*If it is true that  
I am a suitable slave unto Shivan  
I will gain today my eyesight  
And the Jains all through*

*Thiruvavur,  
Will lose their eyesight  
In the presence of the King!  
The choicest of all wealth are the Five  
Letters!*

Saying so, he dove into the crystal clear water of the temple tank and rose out of it with clear eyesight. And the Jains, one by one, in the presence of the King, then and there itself, slowly lost their sight and soon of their own accord left Thiruvavur.

# Endless Grace of Sri Vidya

by Shobana Sudhakar

We live in Syracuse, and we came to the U.S. in August of 2007. One of our neighbours brought us to the Rajarajeswari Peetam for the first time. When we first entered, the homam was going on and it was an amazing experience for us in the very first visit itself.

Actually, we are from the South of India and we have seen many homams and pujas in our temples back home as well. But we have never seen such a grand and orderly homam where the mantras are chanted so well and mudras are also performed. My husband and I both felt very powerful vibrations within us on that first visit alone.

We felt like this temple was our home—not like it was a new temple or an unfamiliar place. Our first visit was about one year ago. From that day onwards, my husband, myself and our two kids come to see Sri Rajarajeswari Amman at least once a month. For the past year, I have heard and read about lots of miracles that have happened here by the grace of the Mother, and Sri Vidya.

Each and every time we come to the Sri Vidya temple, we experience a difference incident during our stay. Last December, my father completed his 60<sup>th</sup> year and we planned to go back to India for his Shastiabhapurthi. My father and his co-brother (my mother's sister's husband) haven't talked or communicated for years due to some disagreement they had a long time ago. I really wanted them to make up their differences during this trip. If they did, my mother and

her sister would also be able to see each other again.

The week before we were to leave on our trip, I came to the Sri Rajarajeswari temple with my family. After all the homams and pujas were completed, we had our prasadam. Usually, we'll sit for a while in front of Devi before we



leave, and on that day I was sitting in front of her and closing my eyes when some nice music began to play.

As I closed my eyes, I prayed and begged the Mother that my father and his co-brother should be united again. I told her that it was her responsibility and I would leave it up to her. Suddenly, I saw Amman's eyes come close to my own eyes. With her eyes came her thilakam or third-eye shakti. Her eyes merged with my own eyes and her thilakam

merged into my forehead.

From that point in my forehead, I felt a large amount of heat spreading all over my body. Tears automatically began falling from my eyes. I tried very hard to open my eyes, but I couldn't—it was as if they were glued shut. After about five or 10 minutes, they automatically opened on their own and the first thing I saw was Devi's face. I felt that Amman was with me and would take care of everything.

During the trip, it was a miracle that my father's co-brother not only attended the function, but also took care of the video recording for my parents. Before leaving, he met with my mom and father and talked to them heartily. He told them everything about why he behaved the way he did and what his problems were. Now there is no misunderstanding between them. All this happened only by the grace of Sri Rajarajeshwari Amman. I am so thankful to her.

We feel that even before we came to the U.S., somehow we got her grace. That's why we only came to stay in Syracuse, which is not a long drive from Rochester. Even my kids become happy when we say we are going to Amman's temple. We are very happy to be a part of the temple and we know that whatever is happening in our life, it is all because of her wishes and grace.

# Temple Lore

## Babaji's dharshan in Sri Nagar, Kashmir

by Sudha Priya Kearney

***The stories of the devotees at the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam create the very essence of the temple's soul.***

***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***

In 1984, I went to India with my family to attend my younger sister, Naina's wedding. After the wedding we all took a family trip to Kashmir in North India to visit my father's friend and his family in Sri Nagar. This friend had made arrangements for us to go sightseeing with his sons in the area, and on the last day of our trip he planned for us to go for a *shikara* ride on Dal lake (the shikara is like a large canoe with 3 seats).

When we arrived at the lake there were two shikaras on the shore. One of the boatmen specifically came up to me and asked me if I would sit in the other shikara since that boat man was new, actually his first day at the lake, and it would be nice if we gave him his first sale. I agreed and since there were six of us we had to go three per boat. My older sister Usha, my niece Pooja, who was four years old at the time, and I stepped into the new boatman's shikara.

The middle seat was for two people and there was one seat on each end. The boatman rowed the shikara from the back. My sister and niece sat in the middle facing him, and I sat on the first seat facing them. The shikara gently broke through the lake's calm water, which was scattered with clusters of blooming lotuses and reflected the splendor of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks. We quietly absorbed the beautiful scenery, while in the other shikara not too far from us were my sister Naina, her new husband Yogesh, and my cousin Nitin.

Inside I was anything but serene. I had decided to end my marriage of five years, and was making this trip alone in many ways. Absorbed in the majestic beauty surrounding me and preoccupied with the pain and mental anguish of a difficult and overdue decision, I was unaware we were gently gliding towards the middle of the lake. Suddenly the shikara stopped close to the middle of the lake and I heard the boatman ask my sister and niece to move aside a little and he stepped in between them and came near me and placed the most beautiful lotus garland on my neck.

As he was placing the lotus garland on my neck I heard him say in English you look like you need cheering up. I was astonished as I looked up at him—I heard him say something out loud in Hindi but I heard the words clearly in my mind in English. How strange I thought but it all happened so fast that I did not give much thought to this. I was very surprised so I just looked at him and all I could say was thank you. I had not noticed that while he was rowing us around the lake he had been plucking lotuses and weaving a huge garland.

My family in the other boat was looking on and my brother-in-law took more photos of all of us as the boatman brought us back to the shore. As I sat there looking at the lotus garland around my neck I felt so very happy at this unexpected gesture. We returned to shore and I thanked the boatman again as we got off the boat.

I took the lotus garland to our friend's house and asked him how I could keep it fresh to take it with me to Bombay the next day. Our friend said the flowers would wilt so I should leave it at his house but I insisted on taking the lotus garland with me. It was such a special gift that I felt I could not leave it behind. So he placed the garland in a bucket of water overnight and in the morning we wrapped it in a newspaper and I brought the garland with me to Bombay. In Bombay the next evening we had reservations for dinner with some family and friends at the Taj Hotel near the Gateway of India. When we went to the restaurant the attendant informed us that our table

would not be ready for about 20 minutes and suggested we look around in the stores near the hotel lobby. There was a bookstore nearby so my sister Usha and I decided to look at some books.

In a few minutes my sister reached up and brought down a book and said, "Look Sudha, you will find this interesting." She knew I loved to read about spiritual stuff and the book she held out to me was called "Living with the Himalayan Masters" by Swami Rama. I took the book she handed me and randomly flipped the pages and all of a sudden a photo of some Baba got our attention. We both gasped in unison as we recognized the Baba—he was our boatman in Sri Nagar!

He was the new boatman who had given me the beautiful lotus garland. We were so excited we immediately purchased the book and started reading about him. There, he was called Babaji and also known as Hariakhan Baba. Just then, our friend came in and said our table was ready so we had to stop reading and head out for dinner. Of course all we could talk about at dinner was how wonderful it was that this Baba had given me a lotus garland and how lucky we all were to have been blessed by Babaji's dharshan. We were looking forward to having the photos of



our trip developed. A few days later while still in Bombay, we were very disappointed to see that all the photos of our trip came out, except for the photos of our boat ride. For some reason, only the photos on the lake were blank and overexposed.

We received darshan of Hariakhan Baba in May 1984 but on doing some research, I found that Hariakhan Baba was known to have reincarnated as Haidakhan Baba who had left his body in Feb. 1984 just a couple of months earlier! In *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda also mentioned this very soul by the name of Mahavatar Babaji, who is believed to be sustaining his human body for about 85,000 years now. He appeared to us as our boatman as Hariakhan Baba, who lived during the 1800s and early 1900s. In the Kumaon region of North India, he is also known as Hariakhanwalla Baba. There are many different names and faces to describe this swami, but all are one and the same.

What is incredibly special is the exalted position this great soul has in our own guru parampara. This same yogi is also known as Katambari Baba in our own parampara, and he is the same Mahavatar Babaji that Paramahansa Yogananda wrote about. Aiyā's guru is Guruji (Amritanandanatha), who was initiated by Guru



Guru (Svaprakashananda), who was initiated by Kalyananda Thirtha. Before him was Rajarajeshwarananda, and before him was Gana Shyamananda. The guru who initiated Gana Shyamananda so many years ago was Katambari Baba.

He not only began this recent branch of our parampara, but also maintained his earthly body for several thousands of years to serve the Devi by initiating other divine people into Sri Vidya. He still travels around India in the form of a young man (despite his 85,000 years), and is often accompanied by his sister who is also a great soul roaming the earth to help Devi's bhaktas.



From left to right: Hariakhan Babaji (who taught from 1861-1924), as Sudha saw him in person and in the *Living with the Himalayan Masters* book; Haidakhan Baba, who taught from 1970-1984 and is believed to be the reincarnation of Hariakhan Baba; and our lineage's Katambari Baba, the original yogi who is several thousands of years old and mentioned in *Autobiography of a Yogi* as Mahavatar Babaji. All are one and the same.

# The Origins of Hidamban

by Kamyā Ramaswamy

Devotees who have been present during festivals may have noticed that certain rituals take place at the very end of the celebrations. Usually, a crowd of people run out the back doors and make offerings to Bhairava. But sometimes, they also walk to the very edges of the East and West sides of the property, carrying offerings to appease a particular *devata* who fulfills a very important duty for this temple and many others.

His name is Hidamban, and he is an eternal servant to Lord Shiva, whom he unknowingly offended during his worship one day. He begged for a way to make amends, and his prayers were answered by Lord Muruga—Subramaniam told him to bring milk, water and other items to do abhishekam to him in *Pazhani*.

Hidamban carried the items on his shoulders all the way there, which later turned into the practice of carrying the *kaavadi*. Even today, there is a hill next to Pazhani called *Hidambamalai*. After fulfilling his promise to Muruga, Hidamban was given the responsibility to forever protect any area where Lord Shiva, Muruga or the Devi are installed.

He holds a staff and stands motionless outside temples, watching the people who enter and exit

all day long. Only his eyes move during the day. At night, he leaves his post and walks around the property, taking massive strides that are equal to five or six average adult steps. He towers over even the tallest of humans at 7 or 8 feet, is pitch-black in appearance, and sports a long beard. His pace is so fast that he almost flies above the ground as he patrols the land.

Hidamban's official posts are at the very front and back of the temple property, where he stays under the trees like one of his counterparts, Bhairava. Both are protective deities in nature, but

Bhairava's involvement with people is a little more direct.

"Anybody who comes unclean and unprepared to a Shiva temple is dealt with instantaneously by him," said Aiya. During festivals, however, he is kept in check. Because a higher-than-usual volume of people visit the temple during a festival and not all may know the proper protocol, the end-of-the-day rituals for Bhairava ask him to forgive peoples' transgressions if they commit them unknowingly.

In terms of their statuses, Aiya says Hidamban is much lower in the ranks than Bhairava (also known as



*Virabhadra*), who has a shrine inside many temples.

At most places where Hidamban is recognized (and there are several well-known *kshetrams* in Tamil Nadu where they give offerings to him), he is not really given a shrine or enclosed area where he is worshipped. The spot designated for him is always outdoors and is usually marked by a trisulam or wooden staff. In some temples in India, the sign that he is present is the distinct sound of a bullock cart in an open space during an otherwise dark and silent night.

“After 10 or 11 at night, you have to be careful if you’re outside,” said Aiya during one of his talks. “You can’t mess around with forces that you have no idea about. If you are completely ignorant that such a thing exists and you go outside for an innocent reason, they won’t bother you. But if you are aware of these beings and you go, you will risk getting scared out of your wits. Knowing that there are risks involved, if you tempt fate, that is your problem.

“But you should also not be frightened,” Aiya continued, “Why should you be frightened? The only reason he is there is to protect the Devi’s temple.”

### Performing bali

Bali is what we call the ritual offerings made to Bhairava and other such deities to eliminate any mistakes made during a puja with or without our knowledge. Symbolically, we also offer our own animal tendencies with the items we give, and pray that our egos and unwanted human characteristics should decrease with every puja we perform. Special balis are made during festivals, and must go according to a very specific process.

“When you’re going for bali, the person who’s going to do the bali must walk in front. That’s your protection,” said Aiya. “Don’t run before him or you might get hit. And as a small disclaimer, do not

attempt the bali sequence at home. Suppose you give it once or twice, the day you forget it, you’ll get whacked!”

During Navarathri, only a few people went out with Aiya during the nighttime bali process. The group was mainly men, as women and small children were discouraged from going outside after dark—children because it was cold and they had to run on the bare ground in the dark, and women because the large amount of estrogen in a female’s body acts as an attractive force for spirits and other beings.

The whole group had to maintain a solemn silence and follow Aiya’s instructions to a tee until they re-entered the temple. A large pumpkin ablaze with karpuram was rushed out and smashed at Bhairava’s tree, and later, offerings were made even further out in the field to Hidamban. The only lights available were a few torches and flashlights.

On the very last day of Navarathri (the next afternoon after this bali process) the same thing was done during the daytime. The same offerings took place in the same order, and the group walked to the very eastern and western edges of the property to

propitiate Hidamban. But this time, anybody who wanted could come along to watch—as long as they kept silent and stepped quickly.



# The Ashta-Paashas

## Eight roadblocks on the path to the Devi

### part 2

*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 Shanganarayana, 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 second of four installments detailing Aiya's exact words during that talk with his students, where he talked about the ashta-paashas (or eight forms of the ego) that block a person from self-realization—grna, shanka, bhaya, lajja, juhupsa, kulam, jaadi, seelam.*

Second one—suspicion. **Shanka** is suspicion. [Shankaracharya also had to deal with this among his disciples]. Hastamalakar and another disciple were always suspicious of Thotaka... in the night, while all the other students were lying down and discussing that day's lessons, Thotaka still had housework to do. He goes to the guru's room to fold the garments for the next day—when Shankara has a bath he has to have a change of clothes—Thotaka puts that out.

And he is very meticulous about where he keeps it... he looks around to see if there are any mice or any creepy-crawlies around the place. The other two disciples are suspicious

that Shankara is teaching him something else in the time that he is alone with him. One day Shankara looks directly at those guys and says, 'I don't teach anything during the night! I'm sleeping and the poor boy is making sure there is nothing around me. So get rid of your suspicion!'

Third one is **bhaya**—fear. Always, two of Shankara's disciples were terribly suspicious and afraid of Padmapada. Because Padmapada was the one Shankara called to come to him, and the guy ran across the river to reach his guru and lotuses sprang up to support his weight! That is why he is called Padma- (lotus) -pada (feet). They were afraid that he was going to become the next acharya after Shankara went. So that fear was there inside them.

Whenever they discussed the day's classes, they would be talking but when Padmapada came, silence. So Shankara looked at them again directly and calmly said, 'Nobody knows who is going to take over after me. That is the Devi's will.'

So grna, shanka, bhaya... **lajja**. What is lajja? Shame. 'If I do this, what will people think of me?' If people decide to do *thopa-karanams* in front of Ganapathi, they won't even go down all the way! Now they're looking around to see if anyone is watching them because it's not cool, you see.

Especially if you're working in an office and you have office mates coming and looking at you... when you've come from the office and people

there have expressed an interest to see this place and so they have come. I'll take any bet— would you do thopa-karanams in front of them? This I have to see. Everybody says, 'Oh yeah, I would do it!' Yeah, of course. You know inside your mind what you would do at that particular time.

Next is *juhupsa*, aversion. You're at the temple and there are some guys working outside. You have gotten ready for Navavarana puja and you have your viboothi and you're seated there... someone runs outside and tells the guys viseshargyam is ready and to go get it. So sweat and mud and all, they wash their feet and come inside.

Naturally, they have been physically working, their bodies have been sweating, and you're going to smell some of that sweat. If you feel even a little bit of aversion, She's not going to talk to you.

We have no idea! They were serving the temples. At the temple, they were getting filled.

The other ones are easy... *kulam* is class consciousness: 'I'm a neurosurgeon in the hospital! Why should I mingle with these people... they're just peons!' Right? 'He works in the mailroom at the office; I'm at the top corporate level. Why should I bother with this guy?' It is a dangerous thing even if that thought enters your mind for a moment.

You can extend that out to a number of things... your education, right? 'I am a college graduate with a triple masters and on my way to getting a doctorate.' Or, 'I'm a civil engineer who has passed out of U of T...' God knows what they did to pass, but that is another story. Or, 'I have a master's degree in communications. that guy only went to community college; he's not like me, I studied from

inside the temple with me. If these things at least in little amounts will crop up. If they crop up, you at least have to be aware that you have such shortcomings. If you think that you don't have a shortcoming, then you are in trouble.

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



# Q & Aiya

***We all love hanging out with Aiya, drinking tea, and sometimes getting some guidance on how to travel down our own paths to the Devi. Here's an excerpt from one session where Aiya answered a devotee's questions on karma, jealousy, and how to cope with a spiritual rut.***



Q: You sometimes talk about karmic cycles. Where do karmic blocks come in, and karmic cycles come in? Because when you have a karmic block, sometimes you can't let go of a certain jealousy or shortcoming; you have to work through it in its own time. The guru can't remove that for the devotee if the devotee is not ready to have it removed. Am I wrong?

Aiya: Let me tell you something. When a guru gives you *mantra diksha* (initiation), he actually goes into your system and cleans out all your chakras at different places. Then, from the force of whatever *mantra* (spiritual merits) he has done, he will take the ~~mantra and give to you~~

Now, this terminology that you used, "karmic block," is not from the East. It is something that the West has coined to explain away certain weaknesses people have, which they don't want to take care of right away. They don't want to take care of it. So they say, 'Oh, there's a karmic block' and write it off.

But you have to diligently keep the discipline every day. When the guru says, 'Do it like this,' he will tell you the elements that go into the practice. If you follow his words exactly, there is no such thing as a karmic block; he will take it out. But what the guru is able to see is your evolution, way beyond your date of birth and date of death in this life. So he is not dealing with you while only looking at this small starting point and ending point; he is looking at maybe 10 different lifetimes.

Q: I guess my confusion is... you said the karmic cycle of each devotee is going to be different, which will put them each at a different place... right?

Aiya: Think of one lifetime. Most of us, when we say, 'I went to school when I was 18, I got married when I was 28, I had my first child when I was 30,' we are unconsciously referring to our time of birth and growth upto that point.

When someone who is realized tells you something, he is not scanning that small period. He's scanning maybe 10 different periods just like that, all at the same time, and he's able to see the progression as it is coming. And he

knows what has caused you to go up and down before.

So when I say karmic cycle, that's what I mean—that wave. The guru is able to see the wave for you. Therefore, if I give you a set of mantras, and I give this other guy a set of mantras and I give this girl a set of mantras, they'll all be different. And I'll tell different things to different people like, 'You focus here... and you should focus here...'

Now, one sure way of doing it—and this is the way it was taught to me—you consciously sit down and bring the energy up with whatever process you want. Take it way past the Anahata, way past the Visuddhi, and past your Sahasrara. Your guru's feet are there. You come up, into his Muladhara... and by the time you go into his Anahata, you should be in Samadhi. That means you are in your natural state. There is no tension, no residual feelings, nothing.

Once you get there, you know the person who has given you mantradiksha is a realized being. And if you want help further, go further up. Your parameshti guru's feet are on your guru's head. In our case we are very lucky because we know seven gurus in the parampara, all

standing on top of one another.

If you do this, the karmic cycle and blocks you were talking about will get eliminated.

Q: But if that's true, then why aren't we all realized beings?

Aiya: Because you're not trying hard enough. Your mind has slipped back into one of the eight traps I was talking about [*grna* (jealousy), *shanka* (suspicion), *bhaya* (fear), *lajja* (shame), *juhupsa* (aversion), *kulam* (class consciousness), *jaadi* (caste consciousness), *seelam* (superiority)—the eight forms of the ego that must be destroyed to reach realization].

Here's something Gururji told me when he gave me diksha... he said I was one of the few people he had seen with no jealousy in me. And I don't think I have been jealous of anybody; why should I be jealous? Can't I see around me what She has given me and what She has poured onto me?

See, the jealousy... that's a hard thing to cross. Once you do that, you're home—the rest of the things will start to fall like pins, one after the other. But jealousy is a

dangerous thing... it sets off waves of hatred and waves of anger... it's nasty.

Q: So if you're able to understand that another person has what they have because that's the way Devi wants it and that's the way it's meant to be, how can you have any jealousy?

Aiya: Correct. That's another way of saying they've arrived at a certain point already in their karma. If you realize someone is jealous of you, you start to think, 'Why is this person jealous? What is it that I have that this person wants?' Or, 'Am I taking something away from that person?' Then the next thought that will come to you is you'll feel sorry for them.

There are so many people with insecurities. Sometimes they will flare up, and when they do you have to step back and ask yourself *why* it's coming up. If you go headlong into it, you'll get caught up in the emotion and it will start to magnify. That's why I said, when you realize that you are jealous, you've already taken a giant step.





***Sri Gurubhyo Namaha***