Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

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Our Thoughts

By the time this issue is published and released, I will have just returned from a quick trip to India, where I will have submerged the remainder of my mother's ashes and tried to do as much annadhanam as I possibly could.

As I write this piece in October, I've been thinking a lot about how annadhanam is one of those funny things that has changed over time, especially in relation to death rituals. Anyone who has attended Chitra Poornima or Aadi Amavasya at the temple will know that during a tarpanam ritual, one will offer something called pindams to the spirits of their ancestors. Pindams are small balls about two inches in diameter that are comprised of five ingredients to symbolize the five components that make up the human body (muscle, blood, etc.), and they are made to symbolically recreate the body during the ritual.

The five necessary ingredients are rice flour, water, banana, black sesame seeds, and ghee. If one is doing a death ritual for a person who recently passed away and she was a sumangali as my mother was (died a married woman), you would add a sixth ingredient—honey.

When my mother was growing up, her father would not only do an elaborate tarpanam ritual once a year on the anniversary of his parents' deaths; he would do a smaller scale one each month on Amavasya (the new moon), along with buying and taking specific foods to give to a priest at the local temple. In this way, a person would be feeding his or her ancestors (called *pitru-devatas*) through the body of a man who had a limited source of income and who had dedicated his life to God.

This was typical of orthodox Brahmin families back then, and is still the custom for many families today, at least in India (however, my last trip to India in 2007 yielded quite a surprise… nowadays the priests make housecalls and hit about 10 houses per morning on Amavasya).

Here, however, we found it was another story altogether. My dad would gather together the same amounts of fresh vegetables and grains and try to take it to a local temple priest each year on the anniversaries of each his mother's and father's deaths. To his frustration and our surprise, no local priests would take the food! He had to beg them to take it, and slip in $50 as well!

I asked Aiya why this was the case, suspecting it had something to do with the transference of karmas. I was partially correct—back in the old days (and this only applies to Shaivite priests; I'm not sure of the case with Vaishnavas), priests would be continuously chanting Rudram several times a day and would therefore continuously be burning off their doshams. Karmically, they could easily afford to take the burden of accepting food from someone who wished to donate, plus, they'd readily have dinner on the table that night. It was a win-win situation.

When priests began to refuse to take the food, however, it was because they knew they were not doing nearly enough Rudrams and japam overall to be able to avoid the karmic effects. Moreover, they didn't need the food anymore, especially when they began to earn more than enough to take care of their families. Eventually, being a Brahmin stopped being associated with poverty and 100 per cent service to God.

So buying the fresh foods on Amavasya and getting the priests to take it started to become a problem and stopped making sense… I mean, why were we trying to feed people who didn't even need or want it? This is where my mother found the perfect solution, which we've been practicing now for years.

Each month, we would go to the supermarket and buy the items we would normally give, but buy them in a non-perishable manner: packages of rice, and canned vegetables, lentils and beans. We'd also throw in pasta and sauce, noodles, baby food, juice, and some type of toiletries like soap. Then we would stop by at any local fire station and drop it off in the bin as she said, *"Pitru-devatam samarpayami,"* all the while feeling like we'd *actually* fed our ancestors through people who really needed to be fed.

Some of the best things my amma taught (and is still teaching) me have to do with keeping the sanctity of traditions, but updating them to make sense and go beyond being empty rituals. In this way, they'll live on throughout generations and not only serve ourselves karmically, but make the world around us a little bit sweeter to live in.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

The *Sri Chakra* staff

December Newsletter

Since the last issue...

Aiya ties the upper half of a veshti onto the flagpole, which is one of many steps to completing the full *dvaja-arohanam*.

The first week or so of September saw Aiya and Amma travelling abroad, but they were back before Ganesha Chaturthi on the 11th. On the 18th, however, Aiya arrived in North Carolina to do workshops and pujas with the devotees there for two or three days.

The temple was packed on Friday, October 1st for the raising of the Navarathri flag (*dvaja-arohanam*), and Navarathri took place another eight days later. After kulurthi, the unofficial final day of the festival, the temple family dispersed once again. That Saturday Oct. 23, Aiya performed a *valaikappu* ceremony (also known as *simanton* or puja for an expecting mother) in the yajnashala.

He and Amma were also present the weekend of Oct. 30 for the regular Saturday puja. That afternoon, temple volunteers worked together to add the final coins on the Devi's Lalita Sahasranamam gold coin mala, which debuted during Navarathri.

On Sunday the 31st, a Boston family sponsored a full Chandi homam, which lasted the entire morning. At the end of that week on Nov. 5, ladies who sponsored the 21-day Kedara Gowri vratam came to the temple that Friday night. It was a very auspicious day as the Devi's silver kavacham made its debut that evening.

There was no rest for the volunteers as the very next night was the first day of Skanda Sashti. After six nights of celebrating Lord Subramaniam, the final Sura samharam and Valli & Devayani kalyanam took place the following Thursday the 11th.

Later in November, Aiya and Amma left on a brief trip to California to visit the devotees in the areas and do pujas at some of their houses. They were back before Karthikai Vilakku and performed the puja on Nov. 20th. The very next day, Aiya was due north in Ottawa for a bhajan session and CD release at the local Sai Centre.

At the end of November, Aiya went to Arizona for a few days to meet with a yoga group and introduce them to the process of puja and details of ritual worship.

The completed flag after the ceremony. This is how it stayed until the end of Navarathri.

Past Events

Ganapathi Chaturthi, Sept. 11

Due to great weather, the entire festival took place outside on this Saturday, with the whole *kalasa-sthapanam* and Vancha-Kalpa Ganapathi homam running its course on the hardwood deck.

Sponsors sat for a total of eight or nine kalasams that day, but only the main sponsors sat for the homam.

Devotees were also given the chance to do tarpanam to Ganapathi on the deck, as well as milk abhishekam on the deck and inside the temple.

After the morning puja wrapped up at about 4 p.m., volunteers hurried to prepare for Utsava Ganapathi's procession around the temple that night.

Kedaragowri Vratam, Nov. 5

This vratam began when Navarathri was not yet over, on the evening of Saturday Oct. 16. It was a most auspicious occasion as Sri Akka was there that first night, and received the first prasadam. Throughout the 21 days, different ladies performed the puja on different nights.

Sharada Navarathri, Oct. 8-17

The temple's *brahmotsavam* was made extra special by the presence of Sri Mathioli Saraswati (affectionately referred to as Sri Akka), for the last 3-4 days.

Until then, it was business as usual with a full *kalasa-sthapanam* being performed by volunteers each morning and the Devi receiving homam, abhishekam and alankaram each afternoon. Every third night, she was carried around the temple by ladies and men alike, in her forms of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.

The third-last day of Navarathri saw the grand Chandi homam and chariot procession; the second-last day was that of murthi abhishekam outside; and the last day was kulurthi. **See some of our festival photos on pages 6 and 7**, and the full gamut at www.srividya.org.

Karthikai Vilakku, Nov. 20

On the last night, about 150 sponsors and their families arrived to do abhishekam to Sri Ardhanareeshwara in the yajnashala. The same *thiruvaasi* background used for Akka was used in the final alankaram.

After the puja, Aiya personally gave out fruit and blouse-piece prasadam and *sharadu* threads to the sponsors.

Skanda Sashti, Nov. 6-11

After five days of Murugan's Sahasranama archana, the sixth day culminated in abhishekam, archana with lotus and rose petals, homam, and Murugan's marriage to Valli and Devasena.

The evening began at 6 p.m. with abhishekam, followed by Murugan's battle with Suran, an asura. After he speared and killed Suran with his Vel, Murugan was bathed in cold water to cool him down. He was then adorned with finery, wedded to Devasena, then secretly to Valli.

Karthikai Deepotsvam is a festival of lights that marks the day that Lord Shiva settled in Thiruvannamalai in the form of fire. On this auspicious night millions of devotees perform giri pradakshina around Annamalai hill that spans around 14 kilometers. Devotees also savor the sight of the flame lit atop the hill, cherishing the age old belief that it is a representation of Shiva himself.

At the temple, this event was celebrated on Saturday night with the lighting of hundreds of deepams and tea candles throughout the temple. The highlight of the festival was the emulation of Annamalai hill using a Maha Meru and it was aptly called "Meru Paravata". As in Thiruvannamalai, eight Shiva lingams (Indra Lingam, Agni Lingam, Yama Lingam, Niruthi Lingam, Varuna Lingam, Vayu Lingam, Kubera Lingam and Esanya Lingam) adorned eight directions around the "Meru Parvata." When all the lights were finally lit, it was a wonderful sight and it provided an out of the world experience.

Upcoming Events

CD release and bhajans, Dec. 4

The temple's followers in Toronto typically look forward to late November and early December, as it is when Aiya and our bhajan group come to Scarborough to release their annual CD.

This year, it will be Dravida Vedam 7—the Thiruvempavai songs sung each year for Lord Nataraja's annual festival during *Margazhi* maasam. The group will be coming to 20 Slan Avenue, at Ellesmere and Scarborough Golf Club Road.

The bhajans will start at 7 p.m. and Aiya will give brief talks in between songs.

In Three Months

Devi willing, the next issue of the *Sri Chakra* will be up on the temple's website at the beginning of March 2011.

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

The next deadline for article submission is February 7. Please e-mail us with your contributions or feedback about this issue at sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org or talk to Kamya or Abhi at the temple.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

Thiruvempavai, Dec. 12-21

This is a uniquely Tamil festival organized around the songs of the Thirupalliyezuchi—songs based on one friend waking another at dawn to come with her and worship Lord Nataraja.

The music and words of these songs are rife with devotion, and dates from the ancient time of the Nayanmars, since the Thirupalliyezuchi was written by Sri Manickyavasagar, himself.

Each morning, the puja begins at 5 a.m., and anyone present will get a chance to participate.

The final day is Ardhra Dharshanam, on which Lord Nataraja and Sivakami will be fully bathed and given alankaram. On this morning, puja will start at 4 a.m. and will also include traditional dancing and plenty of sweet and savory offerings.

Kids' Matangi homam, Dec. 26

The Matangi or Shyamala homam is one of the liveliest times at the temple, and truly a sight to see. It is a homam done exclusively for the childrens' education, and is organized by children for children.

The under-21 crowd organize and sit for the homam themselves, taking turns between offering *ahutis*. In the days leading up to it, they decorate the inner sanctum, all the deities, and the yajnashala.

If your child wishes to sit and be a sponsor for this homam, please call the temple immediately. This is a very popular event and spaces fill up quickly!

Thai Pongal, Jan. 14

Pongal falls on a Friday this year and the puja will most likely be done by Shankar uncle if Aiya happens to be away from the temple. This is typically a short event, but all those who attend will get the chance to add grains to the sakkarai pongal (sweet rice) prepared and offered to the Devi.

Our deepest thanks and gratitude to this issue's volunteers: Aiya, Megha Chatterjee, Ramesh Kutticad and S. Shangaranarayanan. A special thanks to Vilas Ankolekar for making much of this issue possible with his quick efforts to supply two articles and most of our photos.

Upon request of the author, parts 2 and 3 of Aparna Hasling's article, *Dissecting the Rudram*, will not be published in the *Sri Chakra*.

Sri Akka was welcomed with a mini-parade on the property, as well as a full police escort on the way to the temple.

It was a magical moment to watch our two Devis interact.

Navarathri memories

A detailed background of Devi Kamakshi's throne was assembled especially for Sri Akka's visit. Here, she sat with a Sri Meru before her, which was made entirely of rice.

Aiya arranged for two stunningly beautiful Belgian horses, each at least 8 feet tall, to draw Sri Akka's carriage. She was thrilled as she rode in this personal *vahana* as part of the chariot procession on Chandi homam day.

Sri Akka peels vegetables in solidarity with Amma and the temple's kitchen volunteers for Friday the 15th's mahaprasadam.

Everyone participated in the grand chariot festival, as well as the smaller palanquin processions that occurred every three nights throughout Navarathri.

The whole community got into the fun on kulurthi day, on which the Devi was showered with various substances to cool her down from the heat generated from the preceding days of worship.

Top: Sri Shangaranarayanan sat with Aiya for Chandi homam Bottom: Sri Akka gave the children a very special *vidyaarambam*.

Top: Jeilan got the honour of carrying the fiery bali pumpkin outside Bottom: All those who went out for bali got their festival doshams removed.

Temple Lore

Devi talks to us—are we ready to listen?

by Vilas Ankolekar

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 requested.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha.

It was the time when we had just returned to Rochester from three years of living in Maryland. Although we lived in the Rochester area for seven years before we moved to Maryland and we visited the temple regularly, we were not connected that much at all. It was when we moved to Maryland, we realized the value of Sri Vidya temple and could see what we were missing.

When we returned to Rochester, to make up for the three years of lost time, we visited temple regularly. In fact, we started visiting the temple more than regularly. Apart from Aiya and Amma's immense love and affection, we were rewarded with the acquaintances of many temple devotees and their vast Sri Vidya knowledge.

The devotees shared many experiences that they had with Devi. The legends varied from sightings of Devi, devotees conversing with Devi, among many other several real life experiences. It was during this time that I was very fortunate to get to know the late Smt. Shyamala Ramaswamy. Smt. Shyamala amma shared many experiences that she had with Devi. Once she witnessed Devi in tears and it was the day when Guru Garu attained Samadhi. On a hot summer day she felt that the Devi was breathing heavily and was profusely sweating. Smt. Shyamala amma started fanning Devi and apparently that helped Devi cool down.

It was true that these were real experiences by real people. It was also true that our faith towards Devi grew immensely after hearing these incidences. But, there were elements of doubts too. Could it be that the experiences that devotees are claiming to have are far stretched imaginations? Could it be that they are just making up stories? It was almost like I needed to have a proof; that the experiences are not imaginations – they are real.

When I discussed my dilemma with Smt. Shyamala amma, she told me that these are real experiences. In fact she told me

that Devi never stops communicating; she constantly communicates with you. But the only problem, she said, is that we are not ready to communicate with her; we are not ready to recognize the experiences that she gives us.

It was a late summer evening in 2008. Days were long and it was a hot summer day. After work I went to the temple. Aiya was not in town. There were not many in the temple. As usual I went to see the Devi. When I looked at Devi, I felt something strange. I felt that she was in tears. Maybe Devi was in tears because Aiya was not in town? Or was she feeling muggy and sweaty? In any case, I decided to take pictures of Devi and show it to Aiya and to find out what the reality was.

Immediately following my decision, a thought came to me that said not to take a picture of the Devi crying. For a few minutes, I was of two minds. Eventually, I decided to ignore my thought and got my camera from my car. I removed the camera from the bag and tried to click the pictures. Interestingly, the camera would not switch on.

The camera was hot and I felt it was on for a long time. I noticed that the camera battery was completely drained out. It was very strange to me that a camera that had an auto shut-off feature had its battery completely drained out. Now, I was very curious to find out if that was really Devi's work. Normally, I carry a backup camera and I decided to take pictures from my second camera.

Strangely enough, I found out that there was no battery in my second camera. It was missing. It looked as though Devi wanted to prove a point. It was highly co-incidental that I could not use either of my cameras. At this point I realized that it was stupid on my part to ignore the thought that told me not to take pictures. I abandoned the idea of taking pictures.

After offering namaskarams to Devi and begging for her forgiveness I returned home. When I came back home I was still curious to find out if my cameras totally stopped working. I replaced the batteries and checked both of my cameras. Thanks to Devi, they were both working. They were rendered useless only for a short duration.

From that day I am trying very hard to focus and listen to my thoughts. In my humble opinion, I think that's how Devi communicates. I almost did not listen to Devi during that summer day incident. She did a trick with my cameras and I was forced to listen to her. Mrs. Shyamala amma was right. Devi does communicates with us, but only if we are ready to listen!

Left: Shyamala Ramaswamy enjoys May Festival 2009 with her daughter, Kamya, just months before her passing. Below: Vilas Ankolekar during a previous year's Vijayadasami celebrations.

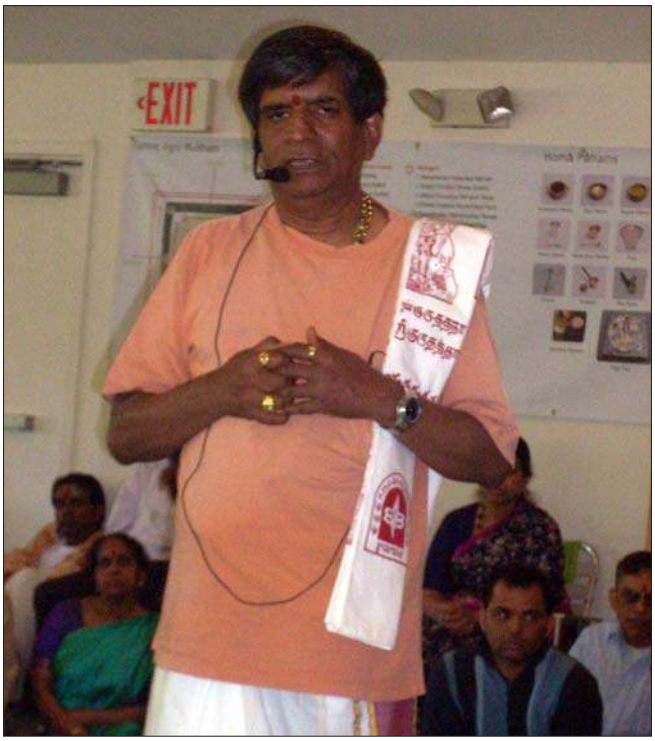
Q & Aiya

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 a workshop where he explained how to properly chant out loud in a public puja or temple setting.

Q: How should a person say mantras out loud?

Aiya: Not mantras—Vedic chanting. There are certain principles one should follow: One, proper pronunciation. Every syllable must be like it is being cut with a knife. Two, the sound must emanate from your belly, not from your throat or higher. You go to some places where they've gotten so used to chanting, everything will sound nasally!

Three, don't be too loud and don't be too soft. Four, your voice must exert the proper pressure on the person who is listening. This chanting isn't only for you; it must apply the proper pressure on the listener's eardrums. Fifth, there's the observance of swaras. *Purusha evedagm sarvam-mmm, yad bhutam yaccha bhavyam-mmm.* When you extend those sounds in the right places, it stays within the mouth cavity for a slightly extended period of time. That is enough to stimulate the right nerves.



Last, there's the shruti. If you don't maintain the pitch, it will sound awful. Very rarely do you have a group of ritviks on the same pitch. When I had my 60th birthday and they did the Rudra-gana abhishekam and homam for me in Chidambaram, my God, I was in heaven. Those dikshitars who came and sat, I've never heard any group so perfectly together. We could learn from them at our temple!

If you have these things, you'll be okay. But don't discount, if your attitude is in the proper place, you'll be blessed.

Q: So if we can make God appear before you attitude alone, why do we need to do puja?

Aiya: There's a famous story about how Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa went to the Kali temple one time and implored her to eat the tray of laddoos he had brought for her. But he couldn't see her eating and he starting crying, saying, "Maa, eat it, eat it!"

And then suddenly she appeared, got in front of him and started eating the laddoos. For the people who were watching, all they could see was Ramakrishna eating the laddoos, himself! So they ran to the priest and told him, "Ramakrishna is eating Devi's prasadam… what's wrong with him? Why are you allowing him to do this in the temple?" So he took a look.

He wasn't able to see the Devi but he saw Ramakrishna there and the laddoos disappearing into thin air, one by one. Then he fell at his feet, doing namaskaram to him. See, Ramakrishna was able to notice the Devi in every ordinary conversation or action or anything going on around him.

When you are able to hear the *pranavam* going on like that, then you know you are ready to internalize the whole thing. Until then, a basic discipline has to be there; you have to do the pujas outside, at least an *aarthi*.

Q: If we did a homam at the Ati Rudram, or if we chant at a Shiva temple, does all the worshipping we do only go to him?

Aiya: To Shiva? He is not an individual. All the forms in this universe—Vishnu, Hanuman, Kamadhenu, Lakshmi, Nandi, Kali, Tara, Sundari, Krishna, everybody's in him. Remember the Visvarupam? See, when Arjuna saw Krishna assume the Visvarupam form, he saw all the deities in all the worlds, and everything inside him.

This is the same, except with a different name. The Vaishnavites would call it Vishnu and Shaivites would call it Shiva. I would call it Amma. It is not only for Shiva, don't think that. Whatever is your *ishta-devata*, whatever worship you perform will reach that devata.

Mantra Japam Meditation on Rajya Shyamala

by Ramesh Kutticad

The Rajarajeswari Peetam is fortunate enough to have come into contact with great Sri Vidya upasakas from around the world. We are even more fortunate to have met those upasakas who share a similar goal to that of our guru parampara—to share out their knowledge and experiences of the Devi.

One of these beautiful souls is Ramesh Kutticad from Chennai, who Aiya has even described as an encyclopedia of knowledge when it comes to the Mother. On a past trip to India, I was lucky enough to meet Ramesh and record his knowledge of how to extract the maximum power from the chanting of the Rajya Shyamala mantra. This is done by meditating on different areas on the Mother while chanting the mantra to the point of complete fluency.—*ed.*

Aim Hreem Sreem, Aim Kleem Souh
Om Namo Bhagavati Sri Matangeeshwari
Sarva Jana Manohari Sarva Mukha Ranjani
Kleem Hreem Sreem

Sarva Raja Vashamkari, Sarva Stri Purusha Vashamkari, Sarva Dushta Mrga Vashamkari, Sarva Satya Vashamkari, Sarva Loka Vashamkari

Sri Rajarajeshwari [Trailokyam]* me vashamaanaya svaha
Souh Kleem Aim, Sreem Hreem Aim

*Our Dattatreya parampara states Sri Rajarajeswari Devi, but a more common form of this mantra slots "Trailokyam" into this spot instead.

Aim Hreem Sreem, Aim Kleem Souh—hrdayam
Om Namo Bhagavati Sri Matangeeshwari—her green-coloured form emblazoned on your heart
Sarva Jana Manohari—the Chandra kala sitting on her head
Sarva Mukha Ranjani—her beautiful face, including her half-opened eyes
Kleem Hreem Sreem—the two hands playing the veena

Sarva Raja Vashamkari—her two earrings made of shanka
Sarva Stri Purusha Vashamkari—her heavy breasts
Sarva Dushta Mrga Vashamkari—the parrot on her shoulder
Sarva Satya Vashamkari, Sarva Loka Vashamkari, Sri Rajarajeshwari [Trailokyam] me vashamaanaya svaha—the lotus on which she is seated

Souh Kleem Aim, Sreem Hreem Aim—the merging of Devi with the self.

A Fruitful Trip

by Megha Chatterjee

My husband and I first saw Aiya and got to know about the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam in April 2007, through a workshop he conducted in Toronto. Back then, Sri Vidya Upasana was a very new concept to me, and I barely knew anything much about the living tradition (I still don't, in truth, but I am learning). So the prospect of attending an eight-hour workshop on "The How and Why of Puja" seemed daunting—but we decided to give it a try anyway, figuring that if it was too boring we could always leave.

Once the workshop had begun, however, eight hours seemed all too short. Aiya's magnetism was off the charts! We couldn't take our eyes off him. When Aiya spoke, it was evident that he was speaking from experience, not just an intellectual understanding; and that put life into everything he said. Rather than feeling exhausted and bored, we were sorry when the workshop was over, and we came home feeling energized!

For a long time after that, we kept planning to visit the temple, but our trip never materialized until January 2009, when we took our then six-month-old son for his *annapraasana* (first partaking of solid food). Entering the main sanctum was little overwhelming. I am not talking about the energy one feels, etc.—I am a little too dense for those things. I am talking about the sheer regality of it. The grandeur is like that of a palace, as it should be for the Mother Empress sitting there in all Her majesty.

We were told that it was a full moon night and hence Aiya would be doing a Sri Chakra puja. Only later did we realize what a nice coincidence that was. A lady at the temple told me to stand in front of the Devi and look into Her eyes. "Soon you'll be able to see Her eyes for real," she said. I tried. Nothing happened. It didn't surprise me, really. I had never considered myself "worthy" of such "miracles," so there was no real disappointment.

The Sri Chakra puja began and I saw everyone making these intricate mudras and chanting mantras and stotras at a speed I can barely muster in my own mother tongue! As beautiful as it was to witness, it was also intimidating.

Still, my attraction to both the temple and to Aiya grew. I began reading various issues of *The Sri Chakra* time and again to keep in touch with the feeling I got during my visits there. The section called "Temple Lore," with all of its miracle stories, always amazed me, but it also disturbed me on some level. I felt the same when I read Corinne Dempsey's book, *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York*, which is also full of intriguing miracle stories from many of Aiya's longtime disciples.

Obviously, these special stories make it into the written word only when people choose to share them—but somehow it begins to seem as though everyone other than you is in some way "special." They are special to Devi; they are

special to Aiya; and they are only so because they are "worthy" of having such experiences.

No matter how much you try and reason with yourself that this "special-ness" is due to past-life karmas and so on, it never quite subdues that underlying feeling of not being good enough. We all have our own inner demons to fight, and I guess this is one of mine: never feeling that I am "good enough."

Despite such self-doubts, I finally found the courage this August to approach Aiya and ask him if he would initiate me. I was nervous, of course. I thought he might turn me down, due to my various shortcomings. But without a moment's hesitation he said, "Of course, I will." Then he asked me if my "mate" was there, and he initiated my husband as well. It was, of course, a most significant day for both of us.

A few weeks later, we visited the temple for Ganesha Chaturthi. After homam and a late-afternoon lunch, Aiya was presiding over a marriage ceremony and everyone was inside the temple. My husband and I had left the temple building so that our two-year-old son could run around without disturbing anyone. The property of the temple was almost deserted.

I had recently read Kathy Allen's article, "Bathing Dvara Ganapathi" in *The Sri Chakra's* November 2007 edition. In the article, Kathy mentions the "secret" that anyone who looks at Dvara Ganapathi's manjal spot on the trunk is sure to receive a blessing.

So I walked up to Ganapathi and stared at the manjal spot for a while, praying to Him with all my heart to overlook my shortcomings and accept my limited notions of love and devotion. As I stood there sharing my thoughts with Him, I heard a rustling sound and saw a mango tumble down from somewhere behind Ganapathi's garland, and settle among the other fruits lying at His feet.

I got a little excited. I wondered if the mango was meant for me. But being quite skeptical about the nature of such things, and not wanting to assume I was being graced by a "miracle," I thought, "Well, if this is meant for me, then someone will tell me so."

Still, even as I resolved to not jump to any conclusions and claim that mango, I have to admit I felt a little deflated. What were the chances that somebody would appear out of thin air and tell me to take the mango? I thought that even if Ganapathi had kindly given me a mango as His blessing, the condition I laid down for accepting it had severely reduced my chances of receiving it; and that I would, in all probability, walk away empty-handed.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a long-time lady devotee walked past me and said, "Take a fruit." I was stunned. I was so overcome with emotion. Not only had Ganapathi graced me with a tangible blessing; He had also taken the pains to reassure me that it was really meant for me. The skeptic in me disappeared. I was sure now it was no coincidence.

I write this article not to join the ranks of those "special people of the written word," but rather to thank everyone who has contributed to this magazine for the inspiration they have given me in my low moments—and that they continue to give me over repeated readings. I also write it for those who may be assailed by self-doubt, as I am.

If this article serves to inspire even one person then I would have honoured the true meaning of Ganapathi's blessing. For only now, as I write this, do I realize that His blessing wasn't meant just for me; it is meant for all those who may think of themselves as undeserving.

In His blessing, He taught me that one doesn't *have* to know all the mudras and stotras and mantras to receive God's love. That one doesn't *have* to be "good enough;" that one doesn't have to be *anything*. We are all loved just the same. God and Guru are forever there with Their unconditional love.

May we learn to love everyone in the same way that we are loved by Them. With that hope and prayer, *Sri Gurubhyo Namaha*.

The Guru, Sishya, and Tripura Rahasya

by Sri S. Shangaranarayanan

There is one thing people do not realize when they are worshipping God in the form of a Statue. God has no mind and God has no will, either. These things are bestowed by nature on the guru, and the guru, who has an iron will and pure mind, transmits his total divine energy to the sishya or seeker who comes to him for salvation. This can happen only when you consider your guru as an adept with capabilities to transmit by his "will" the total divine energy of the God, Gurus and the Guru Mandalam to you.

A capable guru will be able to connect his soul with the sishya's soul, and bridge the gap between them, so they become two bodies but only one soul—this is the Advaita Vedanta Haranji (Aiya) is always talking about—non-duality between the worshipper, the worshipped, and the act of worshipping, which becomes so easy for the sishya to emulate when he is within the Divine vision of the capable Master. In Sri Vidya, this is called Tripura Rahasya.

When the guru connects his soul with the soul of the sishya they become one, even though the body and mind are different. The common dictum is applicable here, that "I and You become we and we become I (the guru himself)." That means the sishya always merges with the guru and NOT the guru merging with the sishya, similar to all rivers merging with the ocean.

Another important thing to remember is a capable guru is self-realized, having undergone and experienced the divine through the blessings of his guru parampara and finally merging Himself with the *Ogatrayam* or Guru Mandalam. Therefore, he possesses the cosmic mind, enabling him to transgress time and distance, and be available to the absolute needy disciple at times of distress.

The difference between the cosmic mind and other minds is that the cosmic mind has no complexities, grossness, illnesses, or barriers of any kind. It can transform at will from anything to anything, whereas ordinary human minds have barriers and can do nothing impressive.

For instance, if Haranji wants to help someone say, in Ethiopia, he

Sri Shangaranarayanan and Aiya holding the Navarathri festival kalasam this year before abhishekam. Sri Shangaranarayanan has attended several festivals at the temple.

can do it from Rochester by transmitting the divine energy in him, and he can materialize and de-materialize himself even in physical form and help the devotee crying for help. There have been many instances where Haranji had helped devotees in far off places—mentally, morally, physically, financially and spiritually. There are no barriers for his extending his help in any manner whatsoever to any real seeker.

With respect to the realized, this grace has transcended time and distance. To attain such a level of elevation, one should go beyond idol worship to ideal worship and see his/her guru as the Divine Mother herself. The sishya should always remain connected soul-to-soul with the guru—interaction for integration with the soul of the guru. Without the use of body and mind, it is totally impossible to attain such a state of "being to becoming," no matter what *tapas* or worship you do.

Most of you must know about meditation—*dhyana* is the end of Sri Vidya. Prayer is always begging and meditation is always getting the essence of what you meditate. If you meditate on the living form of your guru then you get reality, which is his essence.

So when you're doing dhyana, better to have the living form of your guru before you, develop soul-to-soul interaction, and always observe what is happening inside your heart. You will then know that Haranji is always transmitting his soul's divine energy to you and He is no different from the Divine Mother.

This connection cannot happen without the guru's presence and total participation in your meditation. When you are focused internally and the guru is also there, then you develop "silence in silence" and duality no longer exists, as the sishya has merged with the guru and transcended time and distance. Your identity as well as the identity of the guru is lost, and as both have merged themselves in each other, duality is lost. All that remains is your body and mind and the difference between you and the guru is lost forever.

When we're doing homams here, we're doing *ajya-ahuti* (offering of ghee)—into the sacred fire. When you are offering your soul to the guru in meditation, the guru has no choice except to accept your soul as your offering and merge the same with His soul. This is called *prana-ahuti*.

This is what we also do when we install the soul of the Divine Mother in the fire, kumbham, kalasam, Sri Yantra etc., through *trikanda mudra*, which indicates the Tripura Rahasya. Knowing for certain that there is absolutely no difference between the guru and the Devi, one should always be in constant remembrance of the guru in his heart.

See, people want the benefits but they can't take the simple step of offering their souls to the guru. By this process nobody is going to die! You will only become more alive, brimming with more divine energy than ever before and your improvement in terms of material, physical and spiritual benefits increase considerably. One is able to have a divine, energized environment all around him, develop compassion, never possess the guru and provide ample opportunities for others to interact with the guru.

It is very important to understand that too much popularity with the guru brings contempt. One should at no time thrust their opinions onto the guru, disturb him in any manner whatsoever, show oneself as if he is a favoured person of the guru in public, interfere in his activities and trying to influence him in carrying out the temple protocol and connected spiritual activities.

A realized person who has totally merged with the guru to become the guru shall be silently interacting with the guru and helping him in all his activities silently. Let each one of you try to become Haranji and

every assigned job will be carried out meticulously as if Haranji is doing it himself. Then you will gather no *samskaaras* and your life will really be worth living.

See, this is why I like Haranji so much. It is not typical for a guru to become so close with so many of His sishyas, but he has given so much of himself and all the liberties to all of you. Also why I love him, simply for that matter, is he is beyond caste and creed. That's something I have never seen in Sri Vidya. I'm drawn towards him only for that reason.

Going back to what I was saying before about the seeker going through the guru because God has no will—there is a lot of difference between faith and good faith. When you have faith, you go to Haranji and ask him to bless you with something once, twice, three, four, five times and even harass him, unmindful of his conveniences.

But only the real sishya who has good faith in his guru will ask him only once and then forget about it. That complete belief in the guru, coupled with detachment is the mark of a truly evolved sishya.

My prayers to the Divine Mother are that every one of you should become "Haranji" and not his *amsam* but the whole aspect of him. To achieve this, you have to emulate his qualities, actions, reactions, power and at least try to imitate him in gestures, behaviours etc., so that one day you will really become Haranji. Don't you think that once you become at least 50 percent of your guru, then the temple will grow by leaps and bounds and there will be no negativity anywhere?

It is the responsibility of every one of you to be of service to the Guru Haranji whose dream is to expand the temple in a big way in the years to come, and fill it up with total spirituality. Remember in your efforts the guru, parama-guru and parameshti-guru are all there to help you. Achieve the goal and be one with Haranji.

May God bless you all.

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Story Time with Aiya

While volunteers dress the Devi each week during the Saturday puja, Aiya usually tells the crowd a short story about some aspect of the divine. Just before the final day of Kedara Gowri vratam, he told a tale of how important this puja is for the prosperity of a community.

Close to Pazhani in Tamil Nadu, there is a village called Kodha Mangalam. In the early part of this century in this village, a sannyasi used to roam. His name was known variously as Kodha Mangalam Swamiyar and he was also known as Maanoor Swamiyar, because apparently he lived in a small village called Maanoor (also close to Pazhani) for a long time.

How old was he? Sightings have been reported of him by the very old people in the village when they were small children, and back then he looked exactly the same.

A family had lived in Kodha Mangalam for several centuries and their last known descendant was called Venchina Goundar.

It so happened that for anybody approaching Maanoor Swamiyar, if he knew you were going to ask him for something material—money, a house, etc.—if you had that in mind and approached him, he would throw stones at you and then run away. However, for any spiritual question, he would sit there and calmly and very patiently answer all your questions. The only thing that he was able to give in the form of material things was food.

One time, for seven years in Kodha Mangalam, there was no rain. The fields dried up, there was no chance for irrigation, and the village faced starvation. And it so happened that Maanoor Swamiyar was walking on the side of the now dried-up tank and

Venchina Goundar went up to him and said, "Swami, it hasn't rained for seven years, we don't have any food… how are we going to survive?"

So Maanoor Swamiyar looked at him and in typical village style said, "It hasn't rained. If you go onto the paddy fields that you're so crazy about and make pongal, it will rain." Venchina Goundar asked when they should do that, and Swami said to do it that day.

So they gathered everyone at the temple where Venchina Goundar announced what Swami had told him—as many families as possible should gather and make their pongal in the paddy fields. So half the village said, "Look at the sky. You can't see a cloud visible anywhere… how can we think it's going to rain?" Venchina Goundar said he didn't know, but this is what Swami instructed them to do.

So skeptical families didn't show up that night, but some families that had even a semblance of faith brought out their materials, and in about 25 minutes started making pongal (that's sweet rice) in the paddy fields. This was in the middle of the night. At about 4 a.m., the winds started picking up. And then in 15 minutes, nobody knew from where it came, but it clouded over and it rained cats and dogs!

And in every house where they were skeptical and refused to make the pongal, rain broke through their ceilings and flooded only these houses. For all the others who had gone out that night, nothing happened to their homes.

The next morning, Venchina Goundar went to the temple where Maanoor Swamiyar was seated quietly. Swami told him that years ago in this village, in that very temple, they used to observe Kedara Gowri vratam. About 20 years previous, one of the ladies doing the puja was not given a blouse piece or sari and so the Devi went away from that village.

He told Venchina Goundar that once again, all the villagers—including the males—must start observing Kedara Gowri vratam. It is not actually Kedara Gowri vratam; it is Kedareshwara vratam. That means worship to Shiva to become one with him, or to achieve undifferentiated bliss with Shiva.

So Maanoor Swamiyar was instrumental in re-starting the vratam in that Kodha Mangalam village. About 10 years later, he appeared in 12 different villages at the same time and told the people, "I am going to take Samadhi." And in every village he instructed the villagers to build a small Samadhi for him and at each site, he walked in, sat down, and left the world.

So Maanoor Swamiyar's Samadhi exists in 12 different villages in and around Kodha Mangalam. Each village claims his Samadhi as the original one. Even now when people go to any of these Samadhis at night and offer pongal, he appears to them, and will come and eat the food.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha