Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

Blossom 17 Petal 4
December 2012

December Newsletter

Since the last issue...

The beginning of September saw Aiya and Amma in Toronto for the 2nd annual Paduka puja at the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre of Scarborough. The puja began at about 6 a.m. and culminated at noon. This year, all those present also got the chance to do milk abhishekam to a special Hanuman murthi.

It was a busy Labour Day weekend for Aiya and Amma, as they also performed a private house puja that same evening. The next morning, they conducted a wedding in Toronto, as well as other private ceremonies in and around the city that long weekend.

A couple of weeks later at the temple, Aiya presided over a private Pratyangira Devi madai on Sat. Sept. 15, and prepared for Ganapathi Chaturthi on the 19th.

Immediately after Chaturthi was complete, Aiya went to Texas to perform a wedding on the 20th and 21st. He returned to New York state to do a puja with bhajans in Corning NY on the 22nd.

A wedding was held in the temple on Sept. 28th, and the Interactive Learning Sessions (ILS) class was held on the 29th. General volunteer training took place on the 30th. That same evening, Aiya performed a private Pratyangira homam in the temple.

The Navarathri flag went up on Oct. 8th, and as Aiya is the peetadhipathi of the temple, he was grounded at the property until the Navarathri flag came down on the 25th. Each of those evening he performed bali as per the brahmotsavam customs.

The end of Navarathri always marks the beginning of Kedara Gowri vratham, and Aiya performed the first day's puja. Three weeks later at the conclusion of the vratham, he also did the final day's puja.

In typical pattern, the last day of Kedara Gowri marks the beginning of the 6-day Skanda Shashti festival, as well as Deepavali.

Another ILS class took place on Nov. 17th. The last day of Skanda Shashti on Nov. 18th also saw the official temple calendar release for 2013.

November quietly wound down with Karthikai deepam on the 27th. Aiya then prepared for his trip to the Bay area in California on Dec. 1. There, the program was to perform a vilakku puja for Sri Mathioli Saraswati's organization, the Nandalala Mission.

Past Events

A chandanam Ganapathi was fashioned for offering tarpanam

Ganapathi Chaturthi, Sept. 19

The weather was still warm enough to do much of the puja outdoors. After everyone offered tarpanam to a turmeric Ganapathi, he was dissolved in the "Kashi" creek. The homam then began, after which all the Ganesha murthis in the entire temple were gathered into the yajnashala and given abhishekam.

After a bhajan session, the evening program began, during which the utsava Ganapathi murthi was duly worshipped and carried around the temple in procession.

Sharada Navarathri, Oct. 15 to 25

The theme for this Navarathri was the Chaturayatana Devatas, who are four deities who surround the Devi in the centre of the Sri Yantra.

As such, the first two days of this Brahmotsavam festival were reserved for Ganapathi, the next two for Surya, the next two for Mahavishnu, the next two for Lord Shiva, and the last two for the Devi.

Navavarana puja was still performed every evening but this year it alternated—one night it was Navavarana puja, the next night it was Navavarana homam, then back to Navavarana puja, and so on throughout the 10 days.

The Chandi homam, chariot festival, Vidya-arambam puja, and water-cutting ceremony all took place as scheduled.

As the flag had been raised on the 8th, it went down on the 25th, well after the next festival of Kedara Gowri vratham had already begun.

The utsava murthi was carried around the temple as Goddess Saraswati on the 9th day of Navarathri.

Kedara Gowri vratham (last day), Nov. 13

The final day of this 21-day vratham saw an elaborate puja and several trays of fruits, clothing, and other treats being offered to Lord Ardhanareeshwara.

The married ladies who sponsored the puja were also given these offerings by the main sponsor, as well as a sharadu thread (pictured left).

This vratham is taken by whosoever wishes to merge with Lord Shiva as Parvati Devi once did, but is commonly known as a day when married women pray for the well-being of their husbands.

Skanda Shashti, Nov. 14-18

Devotees spent five evenings performing puja to Lord Muruga and his divine consorts, Sri Devayani and Sri Valli. The sixth and final night of this festival involved a re-enactment of the slaying of Surapadman, Muruga's wedding to Devayani, and his subsequent elopement with Valli.

The evening began at 4 p.m. and wrapped up around 9 p.m., and was attended by about 50-75 devotees.

Karthikai Vilakku, Nov. 27

As this festival took place on a Wednesday evening, a small but dedicated number of devotees showed up to witness the temple and yajnashala awash in soft candlelight.

After an initial puja to Lord Arunachalam, the tea lights, deepams and candles around the temple were lit and the electric lights switched off. The entire ceremony took about two hours from start to finish.

Upcoming Events

Event	Date/time	Location
Bhajan/CD release of "Sri Prabhavam"	Dec. 8, 6:30 p.m.-9 p.m.	Sree Sathya Sai Centre of Scarborough, 5321 Finch Ave. (at Finch Ave. & Markham Rd.)
Interactive Learning Session	Dec. 15, 4 p.m.-5:30 p.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Thiruvempavai	Dec. 19-28, 5 a.m. daily	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, inner sanctum
Sanskrit Learning Session	Dec. 22, 4 p.m.-5 p.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Ardhra Dharshanam	Dec. 28, 4 a.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, inner sanctum
Kids' Matangi homam	Dec. 30, 9 a.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Thai Pongal/Sankaranti	Jan. 14, 9 a.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, inner sanctum

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 2013.

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 10, 2013. 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!

Our sincere thanks and gratitude to this issue's volunteers: Aiya, Vilas Ankolekar, Venkateshwar Babu, Gratus Devanesan, B. Jayaraman, Anand Panikkar, Kumaran Perinpanatan, our anonymous author, and Vimalan Sothinathan.

Aruṇa

by Gratus Devanesan

The first time I heard about Aruṇa was 10 years ago. My friend had just gotten *purna diksha* (full initiation into Sri Vidya) and Aiya gave him the name "Aruṇānanda." We asked Aiya what the name Aruṇa meant and Aiya said simply "it's a shade of red." We all burst out laughing—considering that Śāntāmba, the one that brings peace, and Svaprakāśānanda, the one that is self-illumined, were other names given by Aiya that day, "a shade of red" seemed more like a practical joke than a name. More than anything, we remember this fondly.

It took many years for me to appreciate the significance behind this shade of red.

At some point I started looking for health mantras in the Vedas and found that Sūrya worship is generally associated with health improvements. That led to Ādityā Hṛdayam, Sūrya Upaniṣad, Mahasauram and finally Aruṇa Prashnam.

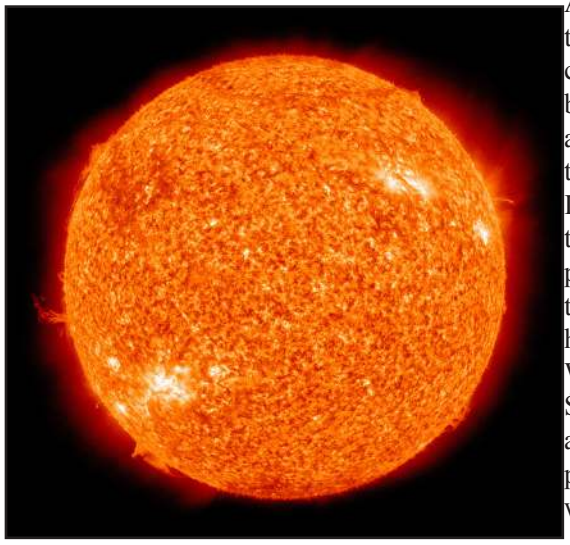
Aruṇa Prashnam occurs in the Taittirīya Āranyakam of the Kṛṣna Yajur Veda and consists of 132 mantras divided into 32 anuvakams. There is a tradition that suggests that one Sūrya Namaskaram (the hatha yoga kind) be performed for every anuvakam (some traditions suggest after every mantra). This apparently will bring health and drive away any type of diseases.

While I strongly believe that this is true, I have to admit, that if you are able to sit and chant for 1.5 hours, and do 32 (or 132) Sūrya Namaskarams, each day, you probably don't have a health issue—even most healthy people would be challenged to do this.

Mention of Aruṇa can be found in the Rudram (1.7) where it states that Aruṇa is Rudra and that he is the sun when rising. Particularly, Aruna is the sun approximately two sun diameters above the horizon until 4 diameters above the horizon. I believe that while this Aruṇa is fleeting, Aruṇachalam is a reference back to this same concept—Aruṇa fixed to a place for the benefit of all.

Aruṇa provides health. But health in the Vedas does not mean the same thing as how the current medical community defines it. It means social satisfaction, physical health, mental balance, and spiritual growth. Aruṇa provides all of these. And it is not done through painful medication, or obscene treatments—it is done through humour.

When Aruṇa is working to create social health or mend the community there will be that giddy feeling that happens just before you burst into laughter. It is an unreasonable joy for doing something that had no purpose for being done. That is Aruṇa.



And with that burst of laughter the karma that was preventing the community (or a group of people) from working together is consumed. Similarly, your cells will engage with whatever bacteria or virus in a "jovial" manner to overcome the obstacle, as opposed to the method used by anti-biotics or radiation therapy.

In short, Aruṇa burns karma without burning you. While the brightness of the sun at noon will burn your eyes and the peacefulness of the night sky is easily forgotten, the sunset and the sunrise are always pleasant sights to behold. And no matter how many sunsets we have seen we never grow tired of them. While 10 years ago only my friend received the name Aruṇa, as Śri Vidya Upāsakas we are all empowered, and I think encouraged, to do this in varying degrees, each to his or her own capacity and interest—to heal what we see without burning what we see; and to always be a pleasant sight to behold.

Disclaimer

The above are just my opinions and I welcome any more opinions and ideas on the Aruna Praṣna as well as the concept of Aruṇa from the Vedas. (Please contact the Sri Chakra magazine to get in touch with the author—ed)

Knowing about Sri Vidya

vs.

Knowing Sri Vidya

part 2

by Sri B. Jayaraman and Smt. Vijayalakshmi

In the last issue, Sri B. Jayaraman summarized the concepts of Anushtanam, Anusandhanam and Anuboothi, which are the three phases an upasaka must evolve through in his/her spiritual development. This is the second half of this article.

Let us summarize some basic principles of Sri Vidya. The first principle in Sri Vidya is Going Beyond. Do not just listen physically—go into the deeper significance. Transcend from physical to subtle to subtler levels.

The second principle is that of Relaxation. When you enjoy doing something, you do not feel the strain and that is relaxing. Hence when we enjoy doing our sadhana we will not be stressed but relaxed. Next is a very important lesson—Not to React Emotionally, but to respond intellectually after a pause. It is a very useful behavioural principle.

Fourth, it is possible to hold on to something firmly and yet be gentle, like the dancing Apsara who won the contest by holding the flower bouquet firmly yet gently enough that the bees inside did not get crushed. It is a very great principle of Maintaining the Balance.

Fifth, A gentle smile not only indicates that you are at peace with yourself but radiates happiness contagiously and you win over the world.

Next, Be a Friend to enjoy the friendly courtesies of others. Sri Lalita guides and helps you through your best friends. Hence develop a

friendly disposition towards all.

Seventh is the very important trait of Courage. Dhairya Lakshmi is defined as "intellectually directed self confidence" that will win back all that was lost. We are not aware of the great Sri Vidya that is very much within our reach and can bring unbounded happiness. Let us pray for the arrival of Guru in our life to reveal this greatest treasure

Sri Vidya is not just mantra upadesam, Navavarana puja, kundalini yoga and so on. Sri Vidya is in fact an intellectual blend of all these and much more. It is the way of living most purposefully to one's own self and most usefully to society.

The Sri Vidya upasaka clearly understands the ultimate purpose of his own life as self-realization and all his activities in life are directed towards fulfilling that purpose.

The basic tenets of Sri Vidya are:

1) Leading a happy, contended, Dharmic life, fulfilling duties and responsibilities towards family, society and environment and contributing to their growth and development
2) Seeking a knowledgeable guru from a great parampara and leading a spiritual life without any conflict to a happy personal life

The above tenets of Sri Vidya as realized by the upasaka and reflected in his daily activities of life are summarized below as the ABCDs of

a Sri Vidya way of life.

A – Attitude/Acceptance/Altruism

A Sri Vidya upasaka accepts whatever good or bad that happens in his life as Devi's decision. Thus he is not bothered about destiny, as he firmly believes that his destiny is decided by Sri Lalita. He is always in a friendly disposition with a smiling face. Most importantly he is altruistic i.e. unselfishly ready to sacrifice for the benefit of others. The upasaka wakes up with the thoughts of Devi. At the start of every activity significant or not, he thinks of Devi maybe for a few seconds. He accepts failure as a challenge and makes improved efforts in the future. Thus, he is connected with Devi continuously both in success and in failures.

B – Behaviour/Principle of Balance.

In view of his friendly disposition, the Sri Vidya upasaka is liked by all sections of society. However, he is very tactful and maintains a good balance such that his involvement does not affect his family responsibilities, official duties and sadhana practices.

C – Commitment/Collaboration/ Continuous improvement

The upasaka is committed to continuously improving his sadhana of Sri Vidya. He collaborates with family members, office colleagues and other Sri Vidya upasakas for mutual benefit.

D – Discipline (Self)/Duties & Responsibilities

The Sri Vidya upasaka is highly disciplined in his sadhana practices and discharges his duties and responsibilities towards his own family and society.

ABCD — further summarized as Altruistic, Balanced, and Connected with Devi

Readers will observe that in the Sri Vidya way of life, we have not specified any Japa Parayana, pujas etc. to be performed as a requirement. It is for two reasons. First, it is a subject matter between only the guru and disciple.

Second, in discussions of the Sri Vidya way of life in totality, staying continuously connected with Sri Lalita is more important than doing a few hours of japa at a stretch. After taking into account travel time for work etc., a significantly large portion of available free time should be devoted for japa sadhana, puja etc.

Most of our minds have the ability to intellectually concentrate on one aspect and wander simultaneously on some other topic. The clever and tactful Sri Vidya upasaka focuses his active intellectual mind on the main job and allows the wandering mind to stay connected with Devi even when engaged in activities like work, household, entertainment, play, etc.

Hence My Dear Upasaka Bandhus,

Always Be Connected with Devi through a no-conflict and disciplined Altruistic, Balanced Commitment to Dharmic behaviour.

From Premaspada Bhoomika,
B. Jayaraman & Vijayalakshmi

Wash it Away

Methods of Karma-Burning, part 2

In the previous issue of the Sri Chakra*, Aiya talked about how karma is created and carried on from lifetime to lifetime. In this second of three installments, he addresses the different ways that a person can deal with that karma.*

So how do you work that karma away? You have to wash it out, and the mantras that we chant are one method of doing just that. In our culture, there are five main ways of washing away the karma. If I say, "Tripurasundaryai namaha," and throw a flower at the Devi, that's called namo mantra. If I say the same thing, "Tripurasundaryai swaha-ah," and offer a flower into the fire, that is the act of havan. If I say, "Tripurasundari sri padukam pujayami, tarpayami namaha," and pour water over the Sri Chakra, that's tarpanam.

You can also do it in a procession, like when we carry the Devi around the temple during festivals and say, "Jai, jai, Tripurasundari!" When 50 people are doing it with you, you forget yourself in that ecstasy and the effect is much more. And the most powerful way is with internal reflection, in japam. But this is also the most difficult because you have to have the concentration to keep your mind focused. Remember what I said about the mind always analyzing everything that goes in and out of it? That cannot happen with true japam… you have to practice the stillness.

Now, I said before that the impressions and influences you experience in any lifetime are carried on with you in your causal body. At any given moment, even in the cold winter, there is heat and sweat coming off your human body and it is diffusing into the ether. All the invisible gases around us, nitrogen, oxygen, water particles, argon, krypton—imagine these gases to be small balls, like the ones in the pit at Chuck E. Cheese that children jump into. Even though the pit is full of these balls, there is still space between the balls. That space between is the ether.

So whenever sweat comes out of your body, that sweat brings out all the products of the endocrine system. They're dumping their hormones into the bloodstream—that is why some people's sweat will be very strong. If you ate about two pounds of garlic and came, if you come to the edge of the property, I can smell you.

Along with that, what comes out? Nitrogenous-based products come out; ammonium hydroxide, ammonium oxide, NH-3, NH-4-OH. Those things will come out. Along with that, the impressions that I told you are recorded—those will come out in little quantities at a time. That is why I tell you to stay in the same pitch when you're chanting, it's because the effect is maximized in burning those products when they come out. When we're chanting here, we're doing it at D-sharp, at 16,800 kilocycles per second. When someone chants strongly, the vibrations in the room are affected because the air inside the room is pulsing. What it will do is bind those impressions that are coming out of you and take it to the central deity that is there. And they are subtly carried and go to rest on the deity.

Now, imagine one person who is sitting here and chanting and sweating has killed another person in his last lifetime. That karma will come out at any particular time and rest on the deity. And a lady comes along and in reverence will go and touch that deity. What happens?

She will take part of that karma. So what do you do to neutralize that effect and protect her and the deity? You pour cow's milk. What does cow's milk contain? Lactate. What it will do is bind that karma and wash it away.

Now, you notice that on Saturdays we give everyone who wants to do abhishekam a pot of milk to pour. Do you think we charge for that milk? No, because we know everyone is benefitting and that the neutralizing effect of

abhishekam is well worth the price of milk.

There are lots of people who come to me and ask, "Why are you wasting so much milk? There are so many orphans in this world who don't have milk." I'd like to know how much money those same people waste eating out each month or how often they go shopping and buy $100 jeans or shirts. Couldn't they eat at home and buy a $20 shirt and give the rest of the money to those orphans?

What we try to do is be as economically and environmentally friendly as possible. When we first came to this property, we didn't think of the consequences—we gave everyone full cream milk to pour on top of Her and in three days it became cheese in the septic tank. And it stunk to high heaven! It was really bad.

Now, if you go to the north of India, you will see all the murthis and statues are made of marble. This is because way back during the Persian invasions, this geographical area was where these fellows would go and smash the murthis and loot and pillage. They didn't go too far into the south, where they still have granite murthis today. The people in the north rebuilt over and over again, but with marble, which is much easier to shape than granite.

But see, if you did this abhishekam there, in five years all the marble would disappear because it's calcium carbonate. It will dissolve. Granite won't. Even after a thousand years, it will be exactly the same way. And that is why it is important to have a murthi that not just looks good, but is also sturdy and functional.

So the milk has a purpose—the worst things that you have done, the impressions that you carry with you will be carried out by milk. But do you know why we do abhishekam with panchamrutam as well? In the proper abhishekam, there is pure water, milk, yogurt, ghee, honey, fruit juice, unrefined sugar. Each of those items takes care of what each sense organ has done in previous lifetimes.

Look for the third and final installment of this series in the next issue of the Sri Chakra.

Chidagni

The story of Sri Amritananda Saraswati

part 9

The biography of Sri Amritananda Saraswati—who is affectionately known as Guruji to most of Aiya's students—was penned in Telugu by Smt. Nethi Seeta Devi. These chapters were translated into English and graciously submitted to the* Sri Chakra *by Venkateshwar Babu from Philadelphia in an ongoing series.

Job resignation

As time progressed, Guruji slowly started losing interest in his job, family, kids, society, colleagues, friends, and friendships. Not that Guruji was disillusioned; it was just that these things did not interest him anymore. More and more, his affinity to the Divine Mother led his heart to feel happiness in divine aspects. Eventually, this led to his disinterest in the physical aspects of everyday living. Topping this off was the persistence of the Divine Mother asking Guruji to quit his job.

The search for answers to his questions was always in the back of Guruji's mind: "What am I going to do? What will happen to my wife and kids?"

The Divine Mother always kept reminding Guruji, "Don't worry! I am there for you. I will take care of them."

"How can one let go of a decent job?" Guruji asked Her. "Is there anything more stupid than that?" But in reality, there was nothing more precious than meditating on the Divine Mother! For Guruji, there was nothing more interesting or fulfilling than reflecting upon Her. So what to do?

After returning from Zambia, Guruji was assigned to research in the Air Defense division. Guruji was not that interested to conduct research in Air Defense, and his superiors were not willing to transfer him to a different division either. Yet, following the process, Guruji requested a transfer to a different division. There was no response from Guruji's management.

ONE FINE DAY GURUJI TOLD HIS WIFE, "I DON'T WANT TO CONTINUE IN THIS JOB. I WILL QUIT."

The lack of Guruji's interest in his work, the Divine Mother's persistence in asking him to quit his job, and the lack of response from Guruji's management all contributed to Guruji losing patience.

One fine day Guruji told his wife, "I don't want to continue in this job. I will quit."

Married life motherhood enlighten women to better understand responsibilities, and to develop foresight in such situations. When a husband mentions about quitting the family's only livelihood, most women would be extremely worried. But to Mrs. Annapoornamma these things did not bother her!

Instead she told Guruji, "Don't try to do something that you don't like to do! Whether you have a job or not, you know your responsibilities. You will anyhow share what you have. So, it is up to you!"

Guruji thought about it and came to a conclusion. He resigned from his job and split his accumulated earnings into five equal parts; one for each of his children, one for the Divine Mother, and the last one to both of them.

After an exemplary 25 years of professional service, Guruji returned to Visakhapatnam in 1981.

Many questions remained unanswered from his young age. Even the answered ones were incomplete. When he was growing up, Guruji had decided not to think of these until he was at least 40 years old. Now the time had come when he involuntarily engaged himself in this spiritual journey, seeking answers at 47 years of age after he retired from his job at Bombay.

Upon his return to Visakhapatnam in 1981, Guruji started living in his own home along with his younger brother. Answers to questions that bothered him from his young age gradually bore fruits in the form of divine experiences. Guruji's sincere efforts in the form of Lalita Sahasranamam parayanam and Navaavarana pujas started bringing people closer to Guruji.

Until then, the common man was scared to chant Lalita Sahasranamam. It was deeply embedded in their minds that strict traditions and customs had to be followed, but that such elaborate rituals were not needed for the common man. In addition, people feared that they might face the wrath of the Divine Mother if they made a mistake knowingly or unknowingly.

But over a period of time, people overcame their inhibitions to join Guruji in chanting the Lalita Sahasranamam. There were no bounds to Guruji's devotion and dedication so he was always surprised to find that people had fears, doubts and inhibitions. He always imbibed confidence that the Divine Mother would never seek to destroy, but instead love and protect her children, even if they committed a mistake unknowingly.

Gradually, devotees realized that the Divine Mother had no reservations or qualms about caste, creed, religion, hard customs, or traditions. Will any kid choose a day or time to sleep in his mother's lap? Will a mother ever insist on a kid to sleep at a specific day or time in her lap? The answer is NO!

So, Guruji was able to convince and instill confidence that any person can pray to the Divine Mother whenever and wherever they wish. Slowly, women started actively participating in a Lalita Sahasranamam parayanam group.

Sri Chakra temple model

One day, the Divine Mother in the form of Balatripurasundari appeared to Guruji and said, "Please construct me a home."

Guruji got the shock of his life and said, "What? Home? I don't have one for myself. From where can I get one constructed for you?"

Bala said, "Who said you don't have one? Is not mine yours?"

Guruji replied, "I agree! Yours may be mine, and mine may be yours. But where do I have any money to build one? Sorry! I cannot build one for you, Mother."

But Bala said, "You will build me one. You will be able to build one soon."

After this divine intervention, one day during Guruji's meditation, a multi-layered, multi-dimensional, multi-deity formation appeared before him, in the form of the Sri Chakra with the Divine Mother at the pinnacle.

That visualization was extraordinary and the temple very beautiful. Guruji was extremely enamored over and over again by the Manidweepa temple that he visualized in his meditation. He immediately summoned a carpenter to build a model of his visualization. With the Divine Mother's blessing, this Manidweepa temple model turned out to be exquisite.

Sagara Giri Durga Pilgrimage

The Divine Mother said to Guruji, "I would like you to take 108 bare-footed Lalita Sahasranamam chanting Suvasinis to the Sagara Giri Temple to perform puja."

Guruji immediately informed all those near and dear about this mammoth undertaking, and the word spread around like wildfire. In addition, leaflets were also distributed to spread the word around every nook and corner.

It was in October 1982 this grand event occurred. Abhijit Lagnam (Early morning 6 a.m.) was chosen as the start time on an auspicious day for this great undertaking, and all arrangements were made. Many suvasinis enthusiastically came forward to take part.

The previous night, all of a sudden, there was a heavy downpour accompanied by squalls. It poured cats and dogs to no avail.

Upon seeing this, Guruji's younger brother said,"In this heavy rain, do you think anyone will show up tomorrow morning? Should we cancel the event?"

Guruji replied, "No way! We are not canceling the event. Whether anyone comes or not, the Divine Mother and I are going. There is no way that program will be cancelled or postponed."

What else can be done when such a decision is made? The downpour continued and the house was packed with friends and relatives and their kids. At this critical juncture, Guruji realized that they lost power and

no one knew when power would be restored. It was dark everywhere. It was wet, damp and crazy all around.

On one side, when things were in such a bad and confusing state, Gurupatni Smt. Annapoornamma did realize that she had all the raw material ready to make laddus for the grand event, and laddus were not ready yet.

Guruji's sister Smt. Suryalakshmi realized that there was no point in patiently waiting for the power to be restored. So, she took the initiative in lighting a candle and assisted her sister-in-law to prepare laddus in the darkness.

The heavy downpour continued and it seemed it would not end in the near future. The next day's grand event was a concern on everyone's mind.

Guruji was watching how the events were unfolding. He thought for a moment, and went inside to the shrine room and brought the miniature model of the Sri Chakra that he had designed, and left it in the heavy downpour.

Either it was a sheer miracle or blessings of divine beings, that in a span of 15 minutes after that simple action that the rain completely stopped! Guruji brought back the Sri Chakra inside after that.

As planned, at 6 a.m. sharp Guruji with the miniature Sri Chakra model safely placed on his head, left bare-footed for the journey. Until then, all the neighbors had assumed that Guruji might have cancelled the program. Once they came to know that the grand event was on schedule, they hurried up and joined the procession.

Ultimately all 108 Suvasinis were part of the procession chanting Lalita Sahasranamam and were right behind Guruji who had Sri Chakra temple miniature on the top of his head. The traditional shahanai music that accompanied this procession enhanced the spiritual atmosphere. It was a sight to watch all participants walking bare-footed towards the seashore.

Upon reaching the seashore, all the ladies boarded the boat that was awaiting their presence. Guruji also boarded another boat, still with the Sri Chakra temple miniature firmly on the top of his head.

The boats started their journey towards Dolphin Nose. Sagara Giri Durga Temple is nested on top of Dolphin's Nose hillock. Upon reaching the base of the hill, all alit from the boats and continued their journey to the top of the hill by foot. Guruji continued his journey to the temple by foot still with Sri Chakra temple miniature firmly placed atop his head.

Upon reaching the temple, Guruji directly approached the Simha Vahanam (lion vehicle statue) and firmly sat on its back with his legs on either side, still with the Sri Chakra temple model firmly on his head.

Upon seeing this, Guruji's sister Mrs. Suryalakshmi immediately approached Guruji, broke a coconut, lit camphor, and offered arathi. After this, Guruji became his normal self, got off from the Simha Vahanam, and put the Sri Chakra temple miniature down.

All the pujas were performed by the 108 suvasinis on a very elaborate scale, and thus concluded this grant event, which was a success beyond everyone's imagination. This was followed by distribution of prasadam to all those present.

A few days passed after this grand event. It so happened that a temple trustee had visited the Sagara Giri Durga Temple. The Sri Chakra temple model grabbed his attention and he asked the chief priest what it was, and who left it there. The chief priest narrated to the temple trustee what occurred few days ago.

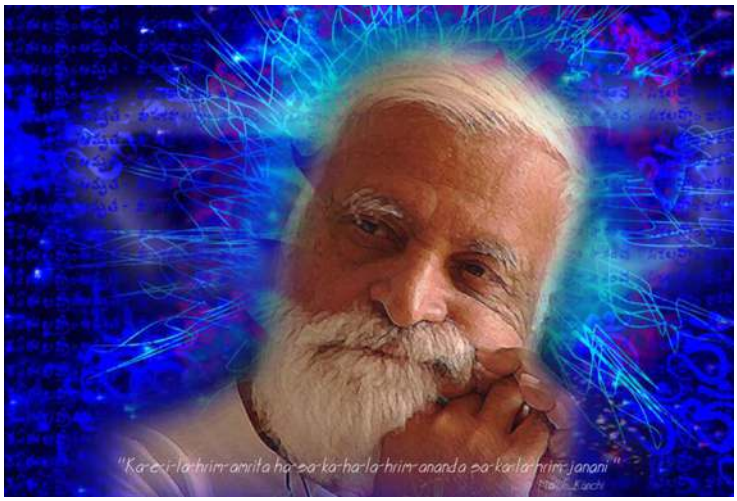
Temple trustee: "It is okay for them to come and perform pujas. But they need to take their things back with them. They can't leave these in our temple."

The chief priest was left with no alternative but to inform Guruji the next day what transpired between him and the temple trustee.

Guruji went to Sagara Giri Durga Temple the next day and brought the Sri Chakra temple model back home.

Smt.Annapurnamma asked, "What happened? Why did you bring this home? Is it not something related to the Divine Mother? Had it remained in the temple what would have happened?"

Guruji replied, "Don't worry! They were not fortunate enough to retain this replica of divinity!"



The sword and the shield

One man's struggle against his ego

Sri Guru sri sahasradala padma-padam pujayami tarpayami namah
Sri Vag vaadhini divya guruve saranam
Sri Sudha Varsini amritam samar-payami namah

Over the past few years I have been struggling with unemployment. Each year I would apply for jobs and I would find that I either wouldn't be called for an interview or while having the interview I would not perform and thereby maintain the status quo of unemployment.

I felt throughout this whole time that the Devi was trying to

teach me a lesson—one that I couldn't quite comprehend—and I often interpreted signs here and there as lessons while still not seeing the whole picture. This in its entirety frustrated me.

This year I decided to find the source of my unhappiness. Why was I unhappy? Why could I not simply accept the status quo? The answers to these questions were like stripping an onion, layer by layer. I found some answers but was never satisfied, always trying to get to the truth. I found that there were varying degrees of ego at play.

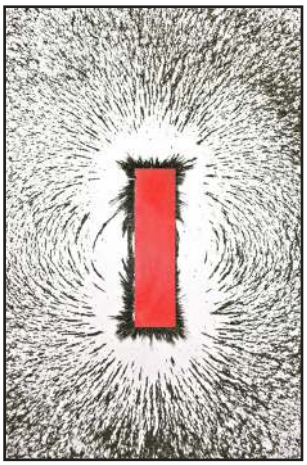
Firstly, the ego from education—how could I, an individual over-qualified for this job, not even get an interview for this job? Secondly was the ego of ambition—the expectation to succeed, the need to keep progressing in my career, and the inability to accept the status quo of unemployment, i.e. the need to explain my unemployment, to explain that I'm doing something productive.

I had wanted to please the mother and so I asked my guru regarding every step of my career, thinking that this would be my sadhana and so I was justified in asking. Of course, my guru perpetuated this, knowing that I was not ready to accept the truth. Every little innocuous thing he said perpetuated this maya such that it would eventually bring me to confront it.

The root of the problem I initially felt was expectations, the expectation of success, the expectation that if I felt the Devi wanted me to do something, that I would succeed. And that it would be easier somehow because it would make Her happy and that in turn would make me happy.

It took me some time to realize that this in itself was a form of spiritual ego. The thought never came to me that the Devi could simply be burning my karma through this process. I eventually realized that by burning my karma I was getting closer to the Devi and this alone was what would please the mother.

Like a sliver of metal caught in a magnetic field, the closer that sliver came to the magnet the greater the force pulling it to the magnet. So I found that by burning my karma I was inexorably becoming closer to the mother, like the sliver of metal hurtling to the magnet, so was I burning more and more of my karma whether or not I was successful at my job. The only solace I had from this was that a force required to push me off the path to the Devi would be significantly greater with the more karma that I burn. In the same way that a greater force would be needed to pull the sliver of metal out of the magnet's field the closer it is to the magnet.



On my way to one job interview I considered that friend of mine—the ego. The ego had its place in ensuring my survival thus far, enabling me to compete and driving me to succeed in life thus far. However, the ego prevents our ability to unite with the Devi. It prevents total surrender, by always trying to temper the fall of failure. It thrives by being fed by success.

How is it fed by success? Because the individual considers that it is through his own action and ability that he obtained what he possesses.

So I thought that I needed to be able to go to my interview

without any expectation for success or otherwise, simply being there as it fulfills my dharma. I then asked why is it that in all my interviews I feel that my answers were imperfect and I always felt that I had not performed as I would have liked?

Upon ruminating on this, I realized that in that state of stress and anxiety associated with my interviews, I would revert to my ego to come up with an answer to a particular question. Of course, my ego being imperfect and unable to provide an adequate answer, would simply string along a couple of concepts and hope for it to suffice.

The ego in itself is a crutch that we use in our times of need. I saw myself as a dog being called by two masters, one being the mother and the other being my ego. As a dog would, I would go to the master that had provided for me time and time again, i.e. the ego, whereas I now knew that the Devi had been keeping me in this situation like some interminable déjà vu so that I may eventually make the decision to go to Her i.e. total surrender.

I then asked her how can I totally surrender? To this she answered in a moment of clarity, "In the same way that the struggling man drowns, he only does so because he fights the water. He must realize that once he surrenders to the water he will float and live."

I then asked Her, is this total surrender not difficult? This time She said, "Once the man realizes that he can float what will happen each time he enters the water? He will float. And why do you think he floats? It is because I make him float, it is nothing else but his faith in me.

"As he experiences it more frequently he will not even consider the possibility of drowning. Such is the reinforcement of that experience. So too is it with your interview."

At this point in time a verse from the *Lalita Sahasranamam* came into view, *Iccha shakti, gnana shakti, kriya shakti svaroopini.* She said, "I am the intention (iccha shakti), the ability (gnana shakti) and the deed (kriya shakti) itself. All that was, all that is and all that will be is a manifestation of me. Once you realize this, your only refuge from suffering is in me and me alone.

"In the fight against your own ego you are armed with your intellect as a sword and I as your shield. Your faith in me is that which will protect you."

I now know that wherever the Devi will test you she will also give you the answer. The seed of that answer is simply buried and needs you to dig it up from within the recesses of your mind. The only advice I have for anyone in a similar situation is to listen to your guru, for everything he does from the little innocuous words to his pronouncements will guide you to the path to the Mother. It is up to you, however, to heed his wisdom.

The myth of "good" and "bad"

by Anand Panikkar

During the Vibuthi Saivite Immersion (camp) of 2011, the kids and counsellors were treated with a class by Aiya's childhood friend, Anand uncle, who was a direct student of Sri Satya Sai Baba. Among other topics, Anand uncle answered a question about the difference between "good" and "bad" and how it affects the way we think—especially when it comes to money.

A classic example is my dad—my dad is so devoted to the point of being extremely passive. And I used to have arguments with him as a kid because we never had money, and I would tell him, "Why don't you do something?" And he would say, "No, no, She's going to give me everything."

He was a teacher and at that time, they were recruiting teachers to teach in Africa. And part of the deal was their kids could hbe educated in England for free, so I kept telling him, "Why don't you go?!" And he said, "No, I'm quite happy here." The funny part is, out of the five of us, four of us ended up going to medical school so I guess he did all right in the end, right?

He was able to see Ramana Maharshi before he died, and it was amazing because he had no money to go. There was a rich guy whose son couldn't get into medical school. See, enrolling in med school in Sri Lanka is extremely hard—when I did the exams, 40,000 people wrote the exams and they took the top 150. You're given three shots to get in.

So this guy came to my father to teach his son zoology. My father never took money for teaching, because he believed teaching is supposed to be free. And the man said, "I have to give you something," and he left some money, and that was the exact amount he needed to see Ramana Maharshi.

My dad spent three days with him and said he never spoke a word in all that time—he didn't have to. If he asked a question, the answer was there. While he was in [Maharshi's] presence, if my father looked outside at a tree, he was the tree. That feeling of oneness was there.

See, in the end, there really is no good and bad. What we think is good or bad is what we've been conditioned to believe. Like I said, when I was growing up we didn't have a lot of money but we were very happy and very spiritual. But subconsciously, I grew up with this idea that money was evil. I know people who have become doctors for the money, but I just loved taking care of people and that's why I did it.

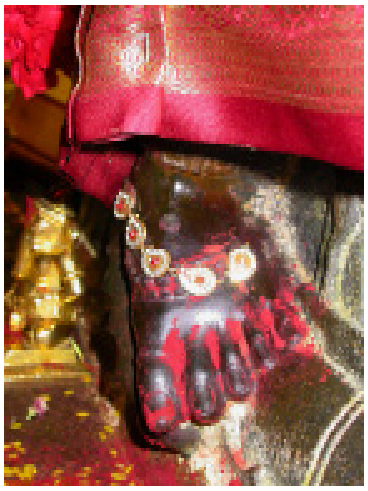
So when I came here and specialized and started making money, I could never keep it. I kept buying things, crazy things that I didn't need. What was happening was I really didn't want to keep the money because in my mind, I felt guilty that I shouldn't have it. So I was very careful about what I spoke to my kids because I didn't want them to think the same way. They grew up having no issues with money, consciously or unconsciously.

Anything can influence you into thinking one thing is "good" and another thing is "bad." In our culture, we're brought up to not eat meat—it's a "bad" thing. But in this part of the world, they celebrate Thanksgiving by eating a turkey, and then on the following Monday they go kill deer.

Where I live in Pennsylvania, the schools are closed that Monday so the teachers can go hunting. And the newspapers are filled with pictures of these people with their dead animals and they're posing away. There are young kids with their parents in the pictures too!

Now what about that culture—they're not killing because they don't have food to eat. This is a sport for them. So depending on where you're brought up, what is right and wrong? It's totally wrong for us; I mean, we can't even kill an ant, how are we going to kill a deer? And it's funny because where I live, I have 25 or 30 deer in my backyard because they know they're safe.

So what's right and wrong is all in within ourselves. We can only do what we feel at peace with—gradually, our definition of "good" and "bad" will also change and shift as we grow as people.



Sri Gurubhyo Namaha