Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

Blossom 18 Petal 1
March 2013

March Newsletter

Since the last issue...

Aiya was in the Bay Area in California at the beginning of December, partnering with the Sri Nandalala Mission to perform a deepam puja.

Upon his return to the east coast, he went up to Toronto. There, the annual CD release and bhajan program took place Dec. 8 at the Sai Centre at Finch and Middlefield.

Just days later on Dec. 12, Aiya and Amma left the continent to embark on the 2nd annual India Yatra. They were joined by scores of temple youngsters just days later.

The official yatra began on Dec. 21 in Chennai, with the theme being the Aaru-padai veedu, or the six sacred kshetrams of Lord Muruga.

Over the next 4 days, the group visited Thiruvannamalai, as well as various local temples in and around Chennai. Check out Sahana Sivakumaran's experience performing girivalam in Thiruvannamalai on page 13!

Some temple boys in front of the Sri Seshadri Swamigal samadhi in Thiruvannamalai.

The group departed for Madurai on the night of Dec. 25, and saw the Madurai Meenakshi temple as well as Thiruchendur and other temples in the Madurai area.

On Dec. 28, the yatra went to Pazhani, Swamimalai, and the general Kumbakonam area.

On the 30th, the group returned to the Chennai area, visiting the divine mother-daughter duo of Sri Kamakshi and Nemili Bala. They performed a bhajan-puja in Chennai and remained there to be present for Sri Akka's new year's message.

Top: Bhajans in Kanchipuram
Bottom: CD release in Nemili

The yatra devotees were split into groups, and Sri Akka generously set aside time to spend with each group.

Everyone boarded a plane on Jan. 2 but weren't headed home—it was to visit our beloved paramaguru, dearly known as Guruji, in Devipuram, AP.

There, Aiya performed a full "security package" homam for the well-being of Guruji, Guru Ammah, and the Devipuram property.

The official yatra wrapped up on Jan. 5, but those who wished to stay longer on their own did so. In fact, many devotees returned to North America Jan. 11 and Aiya himself returned well after Thai Pongal on Jan. 14.

The temple returned to its regular schedule of Interactive Learning Session classes, Bhajan Learning Sessions and Sanskrit Learning Sessions on alternating Saturday afternoons.

Feb. 1 was a grand occasion, as Singapore devotees Gayathri and Havesh came all the way to the States to have their wedding performed by Aiya at the temple!

The remainder of February came and went fairly quietly, and Aiya finally had some rest between his travels. He remained in Rochester until Mahashivarathri was celebrated at the temple on March 9.

Past Events

Thiruvempavai & Ardhra Dharshanam, Dec. 19-28

The miniature murthi of Lord Nataraja after receiving alankaram

Aiya and many of the temple volunteers were away in India during this festival, but the show still went on every morning at 5 a.m. sharp. Volunteers took turns performing pancha-upachara puja (offerings of five aspects) before sunrise to Lord Nataraja and his consort, Sri Sivakami.

On the final day of Ardhra Dharshanam, Kumaran aiya led the puja. The divine couple were given abhishekam in the yajnashala, after which they were given alankaram and placed in the silver festival mantapam together.

Singing and traditional dance were also given as offerings to the Lord. In the Chidambaram tradition, the utsava Nataraja murthi, the Nayanmar saint Manikkavasagar, and a small child holding the *Thiruvasagam* scriptures were then taken around the inner temple in procession. The entire festival concluded just after noon.

Kids' Matangi homam, Dec. 30

This edible train set was designed, constructed, and offered to the Matangi Devi at the end of the homam.

The children at the temple seem to outdo themselves every year in preparation for this festival, and they raised the bar again this year.

This homam is organized by children for children just after Christmas to collectively aid them in their studies, since Goddess Matangi is the tantric form of Saraswati Devi. The young volunteers got together and put together the offerings for homam, naivedyam, and small gifts for all the sponsors present.

As in past years, batches of young people of assorted ages sat directly around the homakundam and put offerings in with their own hands.

Finally, the kids who had more experience performing homam put in the final offering (purnahuti). This process repeated itself until all the children had a chance to sit at the homam.

Thai Pongal, Jan. 14

This simple puja was carried out with minimal fanfare since it did occur on a weekday morning where a modest number of visitors and volunteers were present.

Lord Surya received worship on this morning, as Thai Pongal traditionally celebrates the end of the winter and the beginning of the harvest season.

Everyone present was given the opportunity to put grains into the brass Pongal pot, and all were given the sakkarai pongal prasadam at the end of the puja.

Mahashivarathri, March 9-10

This year brought an amazingly auspicious Shivarathri—not only did it fall on a weekend night, it fell on a Sani Pradosham. For those living in the Eastern time zone, daylight savings time also occurred during the night!

About 200 people were there for pradosham puja, which began at 6 p.m., and 75-100 people remained for the whole night. In addition to the 11 shivalingam "stations" that were worshipped throughout the night, seven kalasams were set up by sponsors. In the style of Saturday puja, there was full kalasa-sthapana, Rudra homam, abhishekam and alankaram.

The theme of the night was Lord Ardhanareeshwara, and corresponding stotrams were chanted while devotees performed bilva-archanam. Final aarathi was offered at about 6:30 a.m., and all received mahaprasadam shortly thereafter.

Upcoming Events

Event	Date/time	Location
Bhajan Learning Session	Mar. 16, 4 p.m.-5 p.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Sanskrit class	Mar. 23, 4 p.m.-5 p.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Bhajan class	Mar. 30, 4 p.m.-5 p.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Tamil New Year	April 13, 9 a.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, whole temple
Maha Pratyangira homam	April 14, 2 p.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Saint Catharines workshop	April 21	
Chitra Poornima	April 25, 9 a.m.	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala

In Three Months

Devi willing, the next issue of the Sri Chakra will be up on the temple's website at the beginning of June 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 May 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, B. Jayaraman, Kumaran Perinpanatan, S. Shangaranarayanan, Sahana Sivakumaran, Vimalan Sothinathan, and Sri Yegnaratnam.

***Guruji's story*, Chidagni, *will return*

Wash it Away

Methods of Karma-Burning, part 3

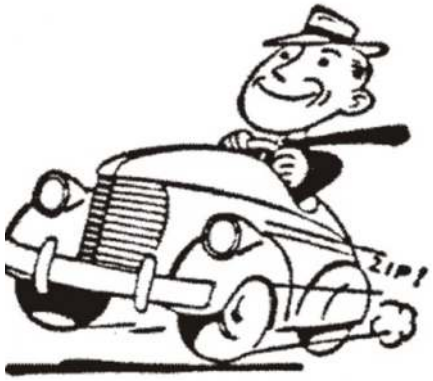
by Aiya

In the previous issue of the Sri Chakra, Aiya talked about how the scientific way that karma is drawn out of a person, and why abhishekam is pivotal in neutralizing its effects on the surrounding environment. In this third and final installment, he addresses the three types of karma, and how they are carried on throughout several lifetimes.

When you die, you'll go straight up, past the Earth's atmosphere, the inner and outer Van Allen Belt and magnetosphere and out into space. And you'll stay there in a temporary residence until your accounts are tallied. What kind of accounts? There's something called nitya karma—in your daily struggle to exist, there are so many things you kill.

When you get up in the morning and brush your teeth, you kill millions of bacteria there; same when you take a shower. That nitya karma also has a value, and that is the first type of karma that must be considered.

Say your neighbor gets a brand-new BMW, blazing red, with leather interior. You might think, "The fellow has just been working a short time and he already has a BMW, meanwhile I've been struggling for years…" For that little twinge of jealousy, there's also a karmic mark. So that's what is considered when your accounts are tallied.



With each lifetime, you want to get a little bit more into the black, because then you will be put into a life where you will be a little closer to getting to that state of absolute stillness; we call it reaching the Devi. If you are in the red, depending on how much in the red, you will be placed in a situation that is a little less comfortable than what you had in this life.

Usually it will take three years for this process to be completed, where you will stay in that temporary residence called *pitru loka*. It is an area reserved only for

the souls of our departed ancestors. One year for you is one day for them. And after they leave that holding pattern and are reincarnated on earth, they come down by way of the elements; by the rain, or rays of the sun, or some type of gradual absorption into the atmosphere.

And when they come down, the impressions they carry with them will imbibe themselves into the earth. So either you eat the plant or you eat the animal that ate the plant. And those impressions will take root in you to some extent, in an unconscious way—the beliefs you hold that you're not sure why you hold, the peculiarities of why you do things a certain way.

So what you have inherited

is the second type of karma you must deal with. And the third type is deliberate acts that you commit in each life.

These three are collectively called *Praaradhva karmam*. When you made your way into this world, you brought some baggage with you. Whatever you brought, you have to process and finish it off. And there are many ways to do this; doing the fire ceremony or homam is one way, doing annadhanam and feeding hundreds of people is another way, serving people in need is another way. Abhishekam is one more way of coming to that neutral point.

Abhishekam is a true and tried practice. It's not just yesterday or today that somebody thought this up. This has been practiced for thousands of years and for good reason. The best part of it is, in all our temples it is done by proxy—since they don't let you touch the murthi anywhere, the priest does the abhishekam for you and so you've already given a portion of your karma to him!

And if that priest doesn't do regular homams or japam to burn off the karma of all the hundreds of people he daily does abhishekam or archanas for, he'll live a very difficult life—he'll end up having to burn that collected karma (plus his own) through suffering.

But this method of abhishekam is the way that many people can wash away the things that bog us down for many lifetimes. That is why it is done.

Ayatana Puja

Its origin and relevance in Sri Chakra puja

by Sri B. Jayaraman and Smt. Vijayalakshmi

About 2,000 years ago, Sri Adi Shankaracharya as an avatar of Lord Dakshinamurthi took birth in Kerala, revitalized each and every aspect our Sanatana Dharma and established certain practices for the good of all of us. Adi Shankara propagated Advaita philosophy for those seeking enlightenment and liberation.

For most of us engaged in bhakthi marga he composed a number of sthuthis in praise of every form of God namely Shiva, Vishnu, Devi etc. For some of us who are engaged in ritualistic form of worship, he established for the first time the concept of Panchayatana Puja (a form of Para/Apara form of worship) and made it a mandatory daily ritual for all the pontiffs of mattams although they were Sannyasins and not supposed to do any form of ritualistic worship.

Thus through the pontiffs of mattams established by him in four corners and at center of India, Adi Shankara introduced the Panchayatana puja concept to be followed by all grahasthas (householders) also.

In Panchayatana puja we worship Ganapathi, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva and Devi (Shakthi). Here actual murthis with faces, hands and legs are not employed. We use certain naturally occurring stones to represent the devatas.

For example, a naturally occurring reddish tinged stone called shonabhadram is used to represent Ganapathi. Spatika, a glass-like, round stone is used as Sun God. The naturally formed saligramam found in river Gandaki in Nepal, is used as Vishnu. The naturally formed banalingams from the river Narmada is employed to represent Shiva. Devi is represented by Ambikam, a shining stone with a metallic tinge.

A Gandaki river saligramam

Depending upon the mental frame of the upasaka and his preference, one of them is chosen as the main deity and kept in the center. The other four are kept surrounding the main deity in four cross directions.

For Devi Panchayatana, the Ambikam stone (Devi) is kept in the center and the other four deities are kept around in four cross directions clockwise starting from the stretch of right hand in front, i.e. in the Southwest, Ganapathi; in the Northwest, Surya; in the Northeast , Vishnu; and in the Southeast, Shiva. The main deity at center is formless and hence is assumed as facing all four directions.

In terms of Advaita philosophy, the atma of every living entity is not different from the Paramatma. However it is experienced as different only because of awareness of self as different from Universal Self.

The object of worship of any form of God is to start with Apara form (i.e realizing God in a particular form and shape as infinitely powerful and abundantly kind and merciful towards upasaka), and move towards Para/Apara form of worship (realizing God as present everywhere both inside and outside), and finally attain the enlightenment of experiencing the Self as God.

Thus the object of worshipping Ganapathi or Surya or Vishnu or Shiva is the same as worshipping Sri Lalita Devi. It is with this enlightened Advaita philosophical objective and with due respect to Sri Adi Shankaracharya that Chathurayatana Puja has been introduced in Sri Chakra Navavarana puja although none of the texts like Kalpa Sutra or Nithyotsava specify Chathurayatana puja.

We worship a number of Gods with different forms and shapes with a clear logic that although God has no particular form or shape, with the power of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience, God can assume any form and with abundant Grace and compassion God takes the specific form and shape as desired by the devotee. However, only five forms of God are worshipped as a "Sum total Universal principle" and they are included as the Panchayatana deities.

Sri Lalita as "Chidagni Kunda Sambootha" represents the sum total of Chid shakthi of all living entities. Sri Lalita Sahasranamam also declares that Sri Lalita is "Jada Shakthi and Jadathmika." Thus Sri Lalita represents the sum total of all operating Shaktis of the universe.

Let us analyze the principle based on which the other four deities are included as Ayatana Devathas. Lord Ganesha represents the Muladhara chakra in the body as well as the Prithvi Principle." Thus, Lord Ganesha is the basic adharam for everything as well as Prithvi.

Thus, Ganesha represents the sum total of everything in Universe and the principle by which everything is physically supported in universe.

Surya represents Prakasa—the visible light and intelligence of all living entities. That is why we pray to Gayatri Devi during the Surya Mandala to give intelligence to all. Surya also represents the heat which helps the growth of plants that provide food to all. Surya thus supports in total, the existence of life on earth.

Vishnu means Viswam—present everywhere. God created the universe and entered into it (Anu praves-am). It is because of the presence of Vishnu in each and every part of the universe that it is sustained for survival and growth.

Shiva is the ever-existing principle of the Nirguna Brahman that ultimately has taken the form of each and every atom of this magnificent universe. Shiva represents the highest form of enlightenment, Truth and Bliss where everything finally merges.

Thus each of these five deities represents an area of a "Sum total Principle" of the universe and hence they are called Ayatana deities. Hence in the highly intellectually evolved Sri Chakra puja it is natural that our ancestors have included Chathurayatana Puja to make it complete in all aspects.

Udayosthu! Udayosthu! Let the Jnana Surya arise in all our minds.

Understanding Panchayatana puja

by Sri S. Shangaranarayanan

Akasha: Space: Vishnu
Agni: Fire: Ambika
Vayu: Air: Aditya
Bhoomi: Earth: Shiva
Jala: Water: Ganapathi

Adhithyam, Ambikam, Vishnum, Gananatham, and Maheswaram are the Panchayatana Devatas, the five elements of nature. They are worshipped as such because these elements are present in one's body as divine energy and also in the Universal energy.

Worshipping the relevant deities leads one to merge with the Universal energy.

The Pancha Makaras which also indicated the withdrawal of the divine energy from our feet to the ajna chakra, are relevant to the worship of the five energies, represented by Surya, Shakti, Vishnu, Ganapathi and Maheswara. These 5 elements are assigned their place as follows:

Ganesha—Nirruthi—South West: Represented by the stone called sonabhadra available in the river "Sone" in Bihar where it merges with the river Ganga—Water or Jala tatvam

Surya—Vayu—North West: Represented by a round sun-shaped crystal which is available in vallam, near Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, India—Air or Vayu tatvam

Vishnu—Isanya—North East: Represented by Shalagramam which is available in Nepal in Kantagi river—Space or Akasha tatvam

Maheswara—Agni—South East: Represented by banalingam which is available in the river Narmada in Omkhara kundam, Madhya Pradesh in India—Earth or Bhoomi tatvam

Shakti—Centre: Worshipped with Swarnamukhi stone (which has gold lines in it) available in the river Swarnamukhi in Andhra Pradesh, India—Fire or Agni Tatvam

It is interesting to note for instance, if the sadhaka worships Ganesha as the main deity, it is worshipped in the center, and the Sri Yantra or swarnamukhi representing Shakti would move to the South West. Similarly when the Sun, Vishnu, or Maheswara is worshipped their place becomes the center and the Shakti stone takes it place. This would indicate that the divine energies of nature and/or the deities merge with each other to become the Universal Energy and are complimentary to each other.

Panchayatana worship becomes important, simply because one has to be in tune with these five elements so that when he starts doing the Navavarana Puja, these five elements will help the sadhaka. These five elements (or their devatas) installed form a barrier protecting the sadhaka that nothing untoward happens during the puja.

The Divine Mother Lalita Mahatripurasundari is mentioned as "Panchakritya Parayana," doing the work of the five elements. Not only

Panchayatana puja is always performed during Navavarana puja at the temple. Here, the Devi is always in the centre, for obvious reasons.

this, She is the energy personified by Ganesha, Grahas, Nakshatras, Rasi, and Yoginis, which again are represented by these five elements.

The worship of Panchayatana Puja was there even before the advent of Sri Adi Shankara, but he fine-tuned it for the benefit of the common man. It is very important that everyone should do at least the Panchayatana Puja. For the puja they can use dried tulsi/vilva leaves and mangala akshatha, and for naivedyam they can use drakshi (raisins).

This shows that God is simple and the way to reach Him is also simple. In worshipping these sentiments are considered secondary and one can worship them in all circumstances, attaching no importance to his physical neatness.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Sri Vidya upasakas are considered as Masters of total Divine Energy which they are able to draw from the atmosphere *(paramakasa bhasure agascha agascha)*, worship it and then merge it with the soul again. They are often trained by their gurus in panchayatana puja as an entry point.

There is no bedha between these deities worshipped, as they represent absolute divine energy of the five natural elements, without which the universe cannot exist. By doing the panchayatana puja one is worshipping the whole of the five elements, and the entire punya teerthams in India and Nepal. Nowhere else has such a worship been prescribed.

Along with this people worshipping Subramanya will include Him in the form of a (silver) Snake or Vel (spear).

I can surely say that while panchayatana puja was strictly followed in our country we were really flourishing. Though the technical advancements were not present people were peaceful, satisfied and happy. Only when this Panchayatana stopped during the English invasion, we began to lose our glory, happiness, mental peace and everything.

Panchayatana Puja is a systematic procedure which involves physical and mental discipline, and requires inner and outer cleanliness. When done systematically it will surely bring the progress in the material world and the final truth—awareness of the true Self. By following it, one obtains the Lord's Anugraha, without which liberation is not possible.

Loka samastha sukino bhavanthu.

Devi Panchayatana Puja

Vishnu Surya

Devi

Shiva Ganesha

Ganesha Panchayatana Puja

Vishnu Devi

Ganesha

Shiva Surya

Shiva Panchayatana Puja

Vishnu Devi

Shiva

Surya Ganesha

Surya Panchayatana Puja

Shiva Devi

Surya

Ganesha Vishnu

Vishnu Panchayatana Puja

Shiva Devi

Vishnu

Ganesha Surya

Agni Mukham explained

by Sri Yegnaratnam

During the temple's Punarutharuna Kumbhabhishekam in July 2010, celebrated havan master Sri Yegnaratnam was one of the VIPs at the 11-day ceremony. During breaks between doing 11 Rudra homams per day, he would impart his knowledge behind the ancient art of the fire sacrifice. This is an excerpt of one such talk.

There is always some kind of preparation ritual that is done before a person offers proper puja to the gods. When you are chanting Rudram or Lalita Sahasranamam, you would do a *nyasam* (protective ritual) for yourself. In the same way, this Agni Mukham is the way that we do initial puja for Agni. After doing the *Agni peeta puja*, we have to give three *ahutis* (offerings of ghee) for Agni—in this way, we have to do it like we are engaging the initial services of a servant.

We want to get the maximum output from this fellow, so what we will do first is feed him. When you do that, he will have the energy and bhakti to do your job. Remember, Agni is the messenger of the gods. What you put in the fire will only reach the destination if he does his job properly. Otherwise, it will be like getting someone to work for you who has not been taken care of first.

The Vedas are very, very practical. The moment you do the Agni peeta, it will immediately engage Agni.

Next, you will notice in the Agni Mukham that it refers to Agni's seven tongues—*sapta-jihva*. Each must get his own ahuti so that none feels that he has been overlooked in this pro cess. It is about equal respect for all the workers.

In the mantra that comes later, *Om Vaishvanara Jataveda ihavaha, lohitaksha, sarva-karmani sadhaya svaha*, you are invoking the names of Agni but also setting down a purpose for him. By saying *sarva-karmani sadhaya*, you are saying, "It should be beneficial to me." That is first.

Secondly, *Utthishta purusha harita pingala lohitaksha sarva karmani sadhaya me dehi dapaya svaha*. You are referring to the black fellow, because Agni is always dark because he is burnt and on fire all the time. And you are telling him that he should help you achieve the goal that you are setting out to achieve with this homam. And you are telling him that this is his job! He might be enjoying the ahutis you gave him just now and thinking what you want to do can be done later on—no! You are the boss here and you are reminding him that it is his job to help you.

Sri Yegnaratnam presided over the main homam at the temple's Ati Rudram kumbhabhishekam in July 2010. He is a master of havan, especially Chandi homam.

Thirdly, *Chit pingala hana hana, daha daha, pacha pacha, sarv_ajnapaya svaha*. Agni might be thinking he will get the finest things because you have just offered him ghee (where you said *Prajapataye idam namama*). But here, you are laying down the working conditions. It will not just be ghee! He has to

accept and deliver everything you put into the homam without exception.

See, the words themselves will convey the meaning: *Chit pingala hana hana, daha daha, pacha pacha, sarv_ajnapaya svaha*. He must take everything without picking and choosing which things he likes and which things he does not like. If he does that, you may end up with ahutis at the end of the homam that are not completely

burnt, and it will affect the success of the overall homam. Everything must be burnt and so he must take everything in without discrimination.

It is like you are giving someone $100 to go to the store and buy something for you and bring it back. If on the journey itself this fellow loses $15, you will automatically not get the full amount of what you are seeking. You are instructing Agni that this is what you are giving him, and he should do his job properly and deliver the right thing to the right god.

Now, [at this temple] we are all in the practice of performing the Tantric Agni Mukham. Why do we even do the Tantric Agni Mukham? In Vedic times, there was only one way to send offerings to the gods—it was like just one post office. There was no courier service, no e-mail, just the one way. Now, we found that post office was often jammed because everyone would be sending everything through that way. Agni was brought forth and given instructions through the Agni Mukham every time there was a havan conducted.

But there are three avenues that one can use to reach god. The first is water, the second is fire, and the third is through Brahman.

Say if you are doing Maha Ganapathi puja and you have offered him different items, you may come across something that says *Maha Ganapathi svaroopaya, Brahmanaya tubhyam namaha*. That is, you can give to god in the form of Brahmanas—that is, a person who embodies god by following the shastras of a proper Brahman's knowledge and conduct.

So if you want to feed Lord Ganapathi, you can ask a Brahman to come as a substitute and eat, thinking that the person is not eating for himself but he is eating as Ganapathi. This is why *annadhanam* is the best offering—if you give someone $1 million, people will ask for more. If you give 10 saris, they will say they have more than 10 people in their house. But if you give an extra idly, they will not be able to eat more than their stomach allows.

Brahman can be satisfied, but the appetites of water and fire cannot be satisfied. This is why the Vedas prescribe certain amounts of ahutis to give into the fire for different homams, or you will be sitting at the fire forever.

Now, it is not possible for someone to do puja or homam continuously—it will take too much time and too much money and more resources. And you cannot take care of your family that way. People will easily say, "Oh, the Goddess will take care of me," but in reality, someone has to cook, someone has to take care of the children in the home, someone must work outside.

This is also why giving food is the best puja. The *jatar-agni* (belly fire) in the stomach will replace the physical Agni with which you do homam. The offerings will still be given into the fire but this is the only Agni whose appetite is limited. Even when you are eating, if you internally chant *svaha-a* when swallowing each bite, the fire inside you will process the food. This is how you do homam in the body temple.

Arunachalam, my mountain

by Sahana Sivakumaran

The experience of a *yatra* (pilgrimage) can never fully be explained or understood by others. Only the person venturing through this journey can understand their multiple lessons and experiences, and take out a greater and deeper understanding of themselves and the truths that lie within them.

During the temple's India yatra at the end of 2012, I found myself taking part in a journey where I learnt many things as an individual as well as in a group of friends. The beginning of our trip to Thiruvannamalai grounded me throughout the rest of the yatra, giving me a glimpse of what I felt I was meant to take out of this trip.

This red mountain, Arunachalam, is one that I developed a personal liking towards (aruna = red). Before this trip I only saw and heard stories relating to it, but this time around I had an urge to find greater meaning to this mountain and questioned what was so important about it.

As we began our long walk around the mountain I found myself only rarely glancing at it, noticing how beautiful it looked so early in the morning. Quickly, I would return my focus back to singing bhajans and figuring out the directions to the long path we were walking. As our journey progressed and the sun headed upward, the mountain became more evident and I found myself noticing it more and more, from different perspectives.

At times all that was visible of this mountain was the sides and random portions of it, and at other times it was as clear as the sky. I began to enjoy this game of hide and seek that I was playing with the mountain. I would look over much more and then began to notice that the very top was hiding behind a group of clouds. Throughout this little game we played, I noticed my friends and guru walking with me along the path around the mountain.

My mind and feelings also jumped around through different situations that I came across, along this short period of time. However, the more we walked, the faster my relationship with this mountain grew. Slowly and steadily, my group, thoughts, surroundings and feelings all begun to fade and all I cared for was playing this game with my mountain.

I saw my guru in this mountain. He showed me that he is that which is separate from the world. He is so precious and vast that I can only take in the essence of him and even that is beyond imaginable. No matter where I went he was always there watching over me. I realized how, like my guru, this mountain was immovable even though I, like a monkey, kept jumping from here to there.

My problems and fears, thoughts and doubts no longer mattered because regardless of what was inside of me, whether I depicted it as good or bad, my mountain just calmly sat in its place where I could admire and love it and it could watch over me. Whether I saw only a glimpse of it or what seemed to be its entirety, my mountain was always there, rooted where I could always find it.

I knew then and there the fear of being alone, without my guru was false—that regardless of what my mind and the world tell me I can always close my eyes and know he will be rooted right where I can find him, within me.

By the end of the trip the clouds that hid the tip of my mountain slipped away and Arunachalam showed himself to me as completely as I could only imagine. Every mountain after that, whether big or small, green or red, movable or immovable, made of my own thoughts or dirt from the ground reminded me of my mountain. It brought me back to this experience that he shared with me, and that taught me that he can never be measured or touched.

The very essence of him is a great enough glimpse of his entirety and that is enough to show me that he is beyond what I can comprehend or ever understand. He is beyond me, this universe, and everything it holds. Nothing can touch the purity and greatness of my mountain and he will always love and watch over this little nothingness, as though she were the universe.

The efficacy of mantras and the Vedas

by Aiya

part 1

During a recent workshop, Aiya gave a prepared speech about how the Vedas apply to the mantras commonly chanted today. In this first of two halves of his talk, he describes the basics of the Vedas, as well as the proper method of chanting.

There is tremendous controversy even today among scholars, both Western and Eastern, as to the age of the Vedas. Studies arising out of Oxford University in England, and studies inspired by Max Mueller, the renowned Indologist, have said that the Vedas are about 3,500 years old—that's what the Western world thinks. But in my opinion and from what I have learned and studied, the Vedas are much, much, much, older than that.

Long before the medium of a language was structured and invented to record various sounds produced the human voice, the Vedas were an oral tradition. That is why it is called *karna parampara*. Karna refers to the ears. When the guru chanted, the disciples heard it and chanted back.

Also, the Vedas are described as *apourashaya*. Purusha is a human being. Apourashaya means something is not of human origin. I won't repeat details that are easily accessible and that you can get from a Google search, as to what the Vedas contain.

In the Vedas, there are a wide variety of mantras. Rg Veda is the oldest, and I think it is at least 11,000 years old, with 10,500 stanzas in exquisite Sanskrit. The second one is Yajur Veda, which contains something like 23,500 stanzas. Depending on which scholars you subscribe to, Sama Veda is supposed to have between 26 and 37,500 stanzas. And the Atharvana Veda has well over 32,000.

Now please remember that when there was no language with which to read and learn, the guru would sit and all the disciples in the gurukulam would sit opposite to each other. They would start chanting. The guru would chant a line and touch the student at a particular point on the body. The student would chant it back two times and touch the guru at the same point. And like this, the interaction would go on.

Now remember the number of stanzas I mentioned. It would take a minimum of 18 years to learn all this, with no Canada Day, no Christmas holiday, nothing. Every day this teaching would go on. When the teacher was not busy, the students would be washing the teacher's clothes, or milking the cows, or cleaning the house, something like that. The rest of the time, they would sit opposite to each other and practice.

And after 18 years, the guru might feel a student is ready to graduate and leave the gurukulam. He would tell a student to sit down and he might indicate a particular line of a particular section of a particular stanza of one of the Vedas, and tell you to chant it. The disciple must know it by memory. The memories of these students were sharpened to such a point that they knew exactly where these lines were, and they would chant it back.

They could not make a single mistake. If they made a mistake, the guru would tell them to go back and practice some more.

There have been cases where men have grown old in the guru's home and died there without ever having graduated.

But if you did pass, then the teacher would tell you that you were ready to go out into the community, start your own school and teach others. This is how the tradition was passed on.

And you know, there were various divisions within Sanatana Dharma. Vaishnavites worshipped Vishnu, Shaivites worshipped Shiva, etc. This got so muddled that Adi Shankaracharya came along and divided the practice into *shan-mattam*, which are six particular schools of worship. I do not claim to know all of the details and nuances and variations that are employed by everybody else, but I

was born into a Shaivite family so I subscribe to and have learned what was taught to us by *Shaiva Siddhantham*.

The mantras are supposed to have been chanted by Shiva's five faces. The details of this, you will find in the Mahanyasam chanted by Bodharaka or Ravana. In the Yajur Veda, fifth patalam, this is extracted as Panchanga Raudrikaranam. It is the section of five slokams starting with, *"Satyojatam prapatyami, satyojatayave namo namaha…"* and ending with, *"Ishana sarva vidyanam, ishvara sarva bhutanam…"*

These are the five faces of Shiva. He performs a five-fold function. Shrishti is creation so

the first face is called Satyojata mukham. The second face performs the function of protecting the universe, which is fulfilled by the Vamadeva mukham. The third face, the Aghora mukham, dissolves the universe after it has fulfilled its function.

The fourth face has to do with *thirodhaanam*, the way the Lord veils His grace before He gives it to you. The veiling of that grace is done by the Tat-purusha mukham. Finally, the fifth face, Ishana, bestows anugraham or grace and blessings upon the devotee.

From these five faces, which is the one that issued first? Let's go to the Bible. Our job is not to exclude any scripture. Sanathana dharmis do not have a monopoly on the knowledge of God—if we thought that we did, it would be extremely arrogant. We have experienced a tiny portion of that huge grace.

In one of the four gospels of the Bible, it says, "In the beginning was the word, the word was God, and God was the word." What was this word? It's the first one we chanted today—Om. That primordial sound was the beginning of movement from the unmanifested universe to the manifested universe. What is the unmanifested universe? In your mind's eye, clear everything that you see in space. Completely clean out everything.

What remains is pure space, and in this space, there is no limit. And in this space, you can travel for millions of light years and not come to an end. It has no beginning, no middle, and no end; it is neither male nor female; it has no attributes. There are no molecules of air or gases or anything like that in space because you have eliminated everything.

Vyakta, avyakta svarupini, as it says about halfway through the Lalita Sahasranamam. So many of our scriptures of extolled the virtues of the Devi and of Shiva in that formless, infinite state. Call this force Him, Her, It—whatever you like. In this vast emptiness, 14.5 billion years ago, as some scientists will tell you, a movement occurred. That movement was in the form of sound, and that sound is our Omkaram.

When you chant the Omkaram, learn to chant it properly. Fill your lungs to the bursting point and then slowly, measuredly release the air for as long as you can go. That alone is a maha mantra. People these days, especially the young people, ask me, "How do I know I am getting somewhere [spiritually]?"

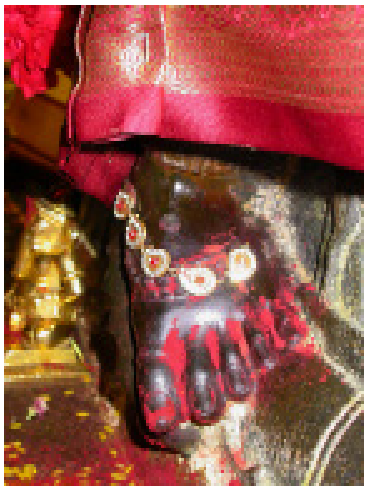
Chant the Omkaram as much as you can and whenever you can. If you are doing it with the method I just described, you will

see the changes on your face when you look in the mirror. The person looking back at you will seem brighter and brighter each time you look.

You must be able to last 36 maatras (beats, or measures of time) on a single Om before you will get there. If you break down the Omkara, it is divided into three sub-sounds, the A-kara, U-kara, and Ma-kara. A-kara should last for 9 maatras, U-kara must be chanted for 9 maatras, and Ma-kara must be chanted for 18 maatras.

Why is it that, when a group of 15 people sit down and chant the Rudram, for example, you feel as though you are on another plane? When that collective sound comes together, your consciousness is elevated to another level. Why is that? It is because the Vedas have the perfect mapping of the Omkaram contained inside them, and in the perfect order.

Look for the second half of this article in the next issue of the Sri Chakra.



Sri Gurubhyo Namaha