Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

Blossom 18 Petal 2
June 2013

Our Thoughts

During a February ILS (Interactive Learning Session) class at the temple, Aiya briefly spoke about the two main reasons why people come to a temple—for spiritual enhancement and for material enhancement. It struck me for the first time just then that not everyone takes away the same idea when we tell and re-tell stories of miraculous events.

We tell these stories to reiterate the point that that omniscient, omnipotent presence within each of us and in the atmosphere is not an outdated concept. That force we call God or Devi, or Jesus, or Allah, or Deus, or Yah-weh, or simply The Universe, is in an ongoing process of creating amazing occurrences every day. Miracles happen all the time; they didn't only happen in the days of Rama and Krishna.

This is what I get out of miraculous stories. I couldn't believe that many, many others just saw it as a way to get an iPod.

People have historically turned to God when they felt they had no other alternative. There are countless tales of destitute fathers going to Kanchipuram temples to beg the Devi for money for their daughters' weddings, or an unknown power turning paupers into merchants. It doesn't mean going to that temple will let anyone hit the jackpot. Bestowing fortune upon a person is merely one in hundreds of ways for the Almighty to show its grace.

When I heard Aiya's lecture that day in February, it dawned on me that more and more people are confusing God with Santa Claus. And when they don't get what they ask for (in their timeline, mind you; not God's timeline), they're convinced that God, like Santa, doesn't exist. *(The Sri Chakra takes no position on the existence of Santa Claus—ed)*

This strange realization made a lot of other things clear as well, like why I've often seen people whispering in Nandi's ear, strangely enough, in broad daylight and on non-Pradosham days. Or the immense popularity of doing archanas—fast, easy ways to put in a wish-list with God.

I suppose it's too much to ask that people believe in something greater than themselves while expecting little in return. But every religion in the world has suggested in one way or another that those expecting nothing are the not only the happiest people around, but they're also the most grateful, and they feel the richest.

Jesus famously told his followers in the Bible to leave everything behind and simply follow him. The Buddha said desire breeds expectations, and expectations result in disappointment when they are not met. Eliminating desire will in turn eliminate one's sorrow with life.

This isn't to suggest that everyone should be poor and miserable to be close to God; it's to say that people

should start seeing the value in the life they already have. We compare ourselves to those that have more and feel horrible about our already-charmed lives, when we should be looking at those who have less. And if you live in any G20 nation, 80 percent of the world's population has less than you have. Aiya summed it up best when he was once talking about how he has never understood jealousy: "What reason do I have to be jealous of anyone? Can I not see all the wonderful things the Devi has showered upon me?"

Lately, I haven't been able to ask the Devi for anything. While my mother was dying in 2010, I couldn't even bring myself to ask the Devi to let her live and restore her health, even though it was the one thing I most wanted. Why? Because what if my wishes weren't the best thing for her? What if being liberated from this life was the best thing and the Devi was the only one who knew what was best?

It's my firm belief that when we ask for things in our lives, we risk limiting ourselves from getting something better that the universe has in store for us. When we ask for things, we assume that we, as insignificant specks in a corner of this boundless universe, know better than that vast universe itself. And how arrogant and delusional is that?

That's why when I perform archanas, I always throw in, "Devi vara prasadam siddhyartham," meaning that I only ask for whatever prasadam the Mother wants to give me, regardless of whether I may deem it "good" or "bad" in the short term. Aiya has said many a time that if you have to ask for something, simply put in the request and then forget about it. You'll receive what you want without being encumbered by the attachment to that desire.

When you do it that way, with your eye on the Devi instead of on all the material, impermanent stuff around you, She will give you things as gifts; things you didn't even ask for. When you let go, the way a baby does with its Mother, the Mother will always provide the best care for her baby.

This worked out for a friend of mine at work. She and her husband, who doesn't practice her religion, were trying to save up for a down-payment for a house, and he told her that if her God was so powerful, He would give them $50,000. Then he said he'd be reasonable and he'd wait 18 months for that $50,000.

Sixteen months later, she was calculating their savings for tax purposes and suddenly remembered her husband's challenge. He makes an average salary, she works part-time, and last year they loaned money to family, flew their parents in from India, and even took a vacation. But even with all their expenses, she looked at the bits of money that had trickled in over the past year-and-a-half and found that it had totaled $52,300.

Maybe not an outright "miracle" with bells and whistles and a marching band, but I've found that when God does things right, you don't even know that anything is being done at all.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

The *Sri Chakra* staff

June Newsletter

Since the last issue...

Right after Mahashivarathri was celebrated at the temple on March 9, Aiya left for London, England on a private trip. He was abroad for about two weeks before returning to Rochester. On March 26th at the temple, he performed the wedding of Anita and Kumaran (Baba), two long-time and hardworking temple volunteers.

At the end of that week on March 29th, Aiya went to Toronto to perform another wedding and then returned to Rochester. That week, on April 2, about 25 students from a local Rochester university visited the temple with many questions about Hindu culture and rituals. Aiya was on hand to spend time with them and answer their queries.

On April 5, the temple co-sponsored an evening event with the Ayyappa Samajam of Toronto. Mr. Dato' J. Jagadeesan spoke that night in Scarborough on "The Challenge of Hinduism in a Modern Dynamic Society." Mr. Jagadeesan is a world renowned speaker and author, and has received national awards from his native country of Malaysia.

A week later, Aiya was at the temple for Tamil New Year's puja, as well as the annual tradition of the Maha Pratyangira homam on April 13 and 14, respectively. A week from that point, Aiya visited Niagara Falls to conduct a workshop there on the topic of Shiva, on the 21st.

He was back in Rochester the next day on the 22nd to perform an upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony) for a young girl. Chitra Poornima fell later that week and Aiya presided over the puja then as well.

For the next three weekends, activity at the temple carried on around the visit of Pujyasri Mathioli Saraswathy, also lovingly called Sri Amma or Sri Akka. The living incarnate of Sri Akilandeshwari Devi graced us with her presence in Rochester from April 26 to April 28.

Aiya was also present for Sri Akka's visits on May 4 in Etobicoke, May 11 in Scarborough, and May 12 in Pickering. He spoke extensively at each occasion and gave the crowds extra insight on who Sri Akka really is.

After Sri Akka left the Southern Ontario and Western New York area, Aiya also left the area to attend his granddaughters' arangetrams in California. He was there for most of the rest of May.

During the time Sri Akka was in the area, regular weekend classes at the temple were suspended. Most of the temple volunteers attended in Toronto, not only to see Sri Akka, but to help organize the elaborate pujas and events surrounding her visits.

Please check with the temple by phone, or on the website for updates regarding the class schedule. Bhajan classes, Sanskrit classes, and Interactive Learning Sessions (ILS) occur on rotating Saturdays from about 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the temple. These classes are on track to resume in June.

Temple Photo Archives Project

Attention volunteer photographers! If you have any photographs of the temple which are not in a digital format, Kathy has volunteered to help scan the images into a high-res digital file. All of your photographs will be put on a DVD for the temple archives and the originals will be returned to you. There is a deadline for this project so please contact Kathy at katallen@hotmail.com by July 1st for more details.

Past Events

Tamil New Year, April 13

There were a lot of people who turned out for this puja, as it fell on a Saturday this year. Aiya presided over the actual New Year's puja, while Shankar aiya took care of the regular Saturday puja.

In the area between the garbha-graham and the yajnashala, an elaborate puja tray and pongal patram were set up. It included all the special litems that one should gaze upon at the dawn of a new year—grains, cash, gold, and other auspicious items.

All were welcome to contribute grains into the pongal pot, and all were given the cooked sakkarai pongal later as prasadam. Aiya handed out special dollar bills later that afternoon.

Maha Pratyangira homam, April 14

The day after Tamil New Year's day was the Maha Pratyangira homam. Maha Pratyangira is the fierce but loving goddess that only a few people are familiar with. She is also known as Thillai Kali and is revered in parts of South India.

The festival sponsors sat for the homam, but in the temple's inclusive tradition, everyone present got the chance to offer cooked items into the fire. Aiya presided over the 2-hour event, which hosted about 200 people.

After an elaborate bali ceremony following the homam to compensate for mistakes made knowingly or unknowingly, devotees got to take home some of the cooked items that didn't make it into the fire.

Chitra Poornima, April 25

Although this solemn day fell on a Thursday morning, it was very well attended. At least 75 people sponsored this puja to offer oblations to the departed souls of their mothers, and also performed the puja themselves under Aiya's guidance.

Each person offered tarpanam, as well as pindams (made from 5 items to mirror the composition of the human body) on this most auspicious day. Due to great weather, much of the puja was performed in the temple's back field with the use of the water running through the "Kashi" creek.

Sri Akka's visits

Sri Mathioli Saraswati, whom we affectionately call Sri Akka or Sri Amma, is the head of the Nandalala Mission. The temple has been blessed to enjoy a deep relationship with her, as she has guided us throughout many years.

This year, we were all surprised to hear she would be in this part of the world, as she regularly lives in Chennai and travels through India as part of her charitable work with the Nandalala Mission.

Her first visit was from April 26 to the 28th, at the Rochester temple. The following Saturday May 4, she appeared at the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre in Etobicoke, Ontario. The next Saturday, May 11, she presided over a deepam puja at the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre in Scarborough.

On Sunday May 12 (Akshaya Tritiya day) at the Pickering Devi temple, she presided over a Swarna Gowri puja. Read more on page 7 about these events.

Upcoming Events

Event	Date/time	Location
Alankara Utsavam (anniversary)	June 28 - July 1	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, full property
Guru Poornima	July 22	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Vibhuti Saivite Immersion camp	July 27 - August 3	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, full property
Aadi Amavasya (father's tarpanam)	August 6	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, back fields
Aadi Puram	August 9	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Varalakshmi Vratam	August 16	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 September 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 August 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 special thanks and gratitude to this issue's volunteers: Aiya, Vilas Ankolekar, Jeilan Devanesan, The Nandalala Mission, Mickell Smith, Vimalan Sothinathan, Bhuvana Subramanian and Sreekant Venkata Subramanian.

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

A Mother's Grace

by Kamya Ramaswamy

It is extremely rare to receive the dharshanam of a purna avatar, but to do so several times within a period of 3 weeks is indeed the rarest of blessings.

But that was the surprise bestowed upon the devotees who live in the Western New York and Southern Ontario regions at the end of April and the beginning of May this year, when Pujyasri Mathioli Saraswathy visited the area. Her visit wasn't made public until just a couple of weeks beforehand, but the crowds that came to see her seemed to have been waiting for her for a long time.

To preface, she is most commonly called Sri Amma or Sri Akka by many of her devotees. From a young age, she exhibited tendencies that were beyond human and could only be described as divine. When she was a teenager, her family went to Kanchipuram to see the great 20th century seer, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (also known as Paramacharya and Maha Periava), who was the head of Sri Mattam at that time. During the visit, Sri Akka asked him, "Don't you recognize me?"

The great seer, Maha Periava

The great sage did, and he announced that this young girl was the full avatar of Sri Akilandeshwari whose temple is in Thiruvanaikavil. To paraphrase Haran Aiya, who spoke several times during Sri Akka's recent appearances, if it was anyone else, you could take that statement with a grain of salt. But to come from Paramacharya's mouth, it was the unexaggerated truth.

For decades, Sri Akka lived with her mother in Chennai after the passing of her father. Seeing the suffering and poverty that so many had to endure in India, she started a small organization for children in 1988. This group, the Nandalala Seva Samithi Trust, ballooned into a multi-national organization that helps the needy on many levels.

Today, Nandalala operates a state-of-the-art kidney dialysis facility, ENT program, and physiotherapy centre in Chennai. It feeds the poor through Matru Seva, gives schoolchildren milk and food as part of the Balakrishna Project, and has built educational facilities in Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad. It has also extended to California and North America, where its volunteers operate soup kitchens and food and clothing drives.

These things are just a drop in the bucket of Nandalala's charitable endeavors. Moreover, it is guaranteed that 100% of the money donated to Nandalala Mission goes to the causes. It has no overhead, no employees, and its volunteers do what they do out of love and devotion to Sri Akka.

The Nandalala Mission's 2010 backpack drive in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As Sri Akka has guided the Rochester temple through its kumbhabhishekam in 2010 and throughout many other times since the temple's inception, we were excited to see her again. She arrived at the temple on Friday April 26 at about 9 a.m. Upon her arrival devotees performed a paduka puja to her, which was led by Aiya.

Akka has a special fondness for

children, and later in the day met with all the children who were present. She gave a short discourse to everyone present (about 100 people) on Friday evening. Saturday, busloads of devotees from Toronto arrived at the temple for Sri Akka's dharshanam and not everyone could meet with her personally.

Aiya assured everyone that simply being in the same zip code as her was enough, and simply seeing her was enough to receive her grace. It is the same principle as being near a light bulb or a fire—it is not necessary or even advisable to touch it when simply being near it can give a person the benefits of its light and heat.

Sri Akka spoke to everyone as temple volunteers completed the Saturday puja. Later in the afternoon/evening, everyone present was treated to a classical music performance by the famed Karnatic singer, Sudha Raghunathan.

Akka spoke to the crowd the evening of April 27th.

The following Saturday, May 4, Sri Akka appeared at the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre Toronto-York, located in Etobicoke. It was an intimate gathering of about 100 people or so, and Akka spoke at length. In all of her talks, she elicits responses from those present and there is a lot of audience interaction. One thing that many people don't expect from her is how funny she is, and how she frankly calls out people on why they behave the way they do.

The deepam puja on the evening of May 11th.

Akka was especially pleased with the musicians who performed that morning, and gave them all special prasadam for their devotion to their art.

On Saturday May 11, a deepam puja took place at the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre of Scarborough. The function began at 5 p.m. and was attended by about 300 people in total, although only half that amount actually sat to perform the puja. Guided by Aiya, the people performing the puja did so to a standing deepam sitting on a banana leaf and copper plate. All the sponsors took home those puja items that evening.

Akka spoke again to the crowd on what their train of thought should be when performing such a puja, and the reason why people attend temples. Aiya announced that the following day was Akshaya Tritiya, and it would be a very auspicious day to see Akka again, this time at the Pickering Devi temple.

On Sunday the 12th (fittingly Mother's Day), a large amount of people again turned out for the Swarna Gowri puja that evening. Married ladies performed the puja for the well-being of their husbands, and unmarried people did so to quickly get married and have a prosperous life with their spouse.

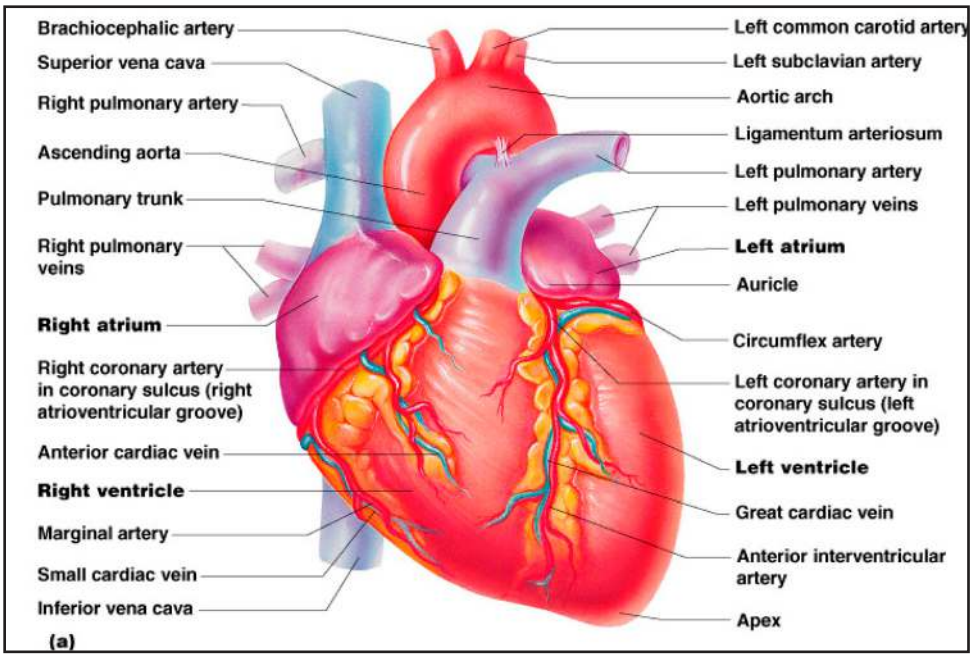
Just like a mother bestows nice surprises on her children every now and then, Sri Akka's string of visits provided her children in this region with a lovely gift—her.

A Medical Approach—Clockwise Circulation

by Sreekant Venkata Subramanian

As a medical student, I often find myself reading very in-depth about various pathways, conditions, and intricacies of our human body. As a Sri Vidya upasaka early on and growing up, Aiya and devotees around me have always taken an effort to combine science and Sri Vidya. Vidya in itself means knowledge, so this integration was very needed for the understanding of a student. As upasakas, we learn that this body is our temple. It is the sanctum and we are the god. It houses a number of major vital organs that without which we would certainly not be able to live.

Lets take a look at our circulatory system. The blood is our largest connective tissue. The heart takes the blood and allows for its movement by pumping it around the body.



It should be noted that the heart has 4 chambers, 4 valves, and it most importantly circulates the blood in a clockwise manner (with exception to Situs Inversus or Heterotaxy). The exceptions are rare congenital conditions that do not occur regularly.

The blood enters the chambers on the right, and exits from the chambers on the left. It is important to note that this movement is clockwise and is very similar to our movement in a temple. When we enter a temple, we always move in a clockwise manner (with exceptions of course) but on the regular its typically clockwise.

As an upasaka, "Aham Brahmasmi" means a lot more than just "I am the creator" or "I am God." We need to learn to integrate this concept so that we can correlate every little practice we follow.

Tough Mudder 2013

by Jeilan Devanesan

A year ago my friend showed me a clip of an event that happens every year worldwide, Tough Mudder. It was an eleven to twelve mile obstacle course that pushed people to their limits. What I saw were people climbing over walls, crawling through mud pits, climbing over hills, jumping over fire, and even getting electrocuted! Women and men, short and tall, lean and round, it didn't matter—they were all putting themselves through this annual challenge.

I have always thought of myself as a relatively active guy, but what I lacked was a reason to push myself, to demand the most of myself each and every day so that I could be at my best. I never had that reason until I saw this, a gruelling physical and mental challenge that ordinary people did each year, by the thousands. That same night I helped myself to piles of lasagna, ice cream and chocolate cake, and only four hours later, I woke up at five in the morning and went for a seven-kilometre run—that was day one of my Tough Mudder training.

What I needed was to be consistent in my training, and avoid junk food at all costs. Where would this discipline come from, if I've never had it before? What I envisioned in my mind then was game-day, an entire year away, requiring the greatest deal of physical effort and mental determination I would ever muster just to make it to the finish line. Eleven miles with twenty-two obstacles along the way (which I'll describe in a moment, if only to depict how ridiculous this event is) is not something you just wake up and do. I needed discipline, I needed will-power.

My mornings: Wake up, brush teeth, eat light breakfast, train, shower, meditate—before I do anything else. I actually meditated during my training too, it helped me push myself beyond what I normally would do. And eventually, training became meditation. I would spend nearly an hour each day, the energy of my mind and all of my thoughts directed towards one single goal. I ran, I did squats, push-ups, crunches, chin-ups, rows, curls, lunges, and more, with my mind empty and focused only on the task at hand. I began to cultivate a sense of discipline and willpower (at least when it came to being active). Problems (jogging eleven miles, for example) became mere challenges, and challenges were opportunities to grow further.

My japam dragged me along this path, almost against my will. There was a great deal of resistance each and every day, I wanted to do all sorts of others things, namely sleep in, eat veggie rolls and samosas, drink pop, and eat cake! But each morning these wants that threatened to throw me off course, all disappeared as I spent yet another hour tending to my single, overarching desire to cross the finish line, building it up, and letting

it overwhelm every other want in my mind. My mantra became a driving force, it kept me going—to the surprise of all the people around me. I shed the pounds, my body became more defined, and I was more athletic than I'd ever been in my life.

Game Day

Designed by the British Special Forces, Tough Mudder challenges our individual strength, stamina, and courage, while developing a sense of camaraderie amongst strangers, and a sense of accomplishment within ourselves. The proceeds go to the Wounded Warrior project (a charity for soldiers who have permanent injuries/ disabilities due to their service in the military), and to this day over 700,000 people have participated world-wide, and raised over $5 million in the process.

Before the event began, we crowded together at the starting line with music blasting from the speakers. The nervous excitement was in the air, and we hugged ourselves to ward of the biting cold snapping at our arms and legs. The coordinator told us what dangers lay ahead, what fears we must overcome, and that we were great individuals who possessed the strength and determination needed to finish this course.

We sang the Canadian national anthem solemnly as one, we shook hands with our fellow participants, and were told that these were the faces of those who we will help and be helped by today. Then we took a knee and bowed our heads to chant the Tough Mudder Mantra, which ran thusly, "I understand that Tough Mudder is not a race but a challenge. I put teamwork and camaraderie before my course time. I do not whine—kids whine. I help my fellow mudders complete the course. I overcome all fears." We rose, hearts pounding, blood pumping, our bodies shaking from the cold as well as the thrill. And we started moving, a slow trot at first, but then as the crowd spread apart, we hit a strong pace as we approached our first mud covered hill (hills were not obstacles by the way, they were just there to mess with you).

Like the name entails, there is a lot of mud in this obstacle course, waist-deep mud to trudge through, mud-filled trenches to climb in and out of, muddy pools to swim through, and slippery, muddy hills (used as ski slopes in the winter!) to march up and over. But then there's live electrical wires that electrocute you, fire that can burn you, ice-water to plunge into, 12-foot walls to climb over, a 20-foot drop into cold, muddy water that you have to swim through, snow and ice to crawl through, and hills – hills, upon hills, upon hills to journey over before you ever see a finish line.

The hills were easy, by then I knew what it felt like to be discouraged, exhausted, and still finding the resolve within yourself to keep moving. My training had served me well. But there were some things no one can train for—like shock. And I mean shock in the sense of complete surprise, accelerated breathing, heart racing…

And then getting electrocuted.

Arctic Enema—a large vat of ice-filled water that you must plunge into, with a wooden wall you have to descend below and emerge on the other side of, before climbing out and proceeding to run the 11-mile challenge you have just embarked upon. It was our first

obstacle, yay.

I stood at the ledge, took a breath, and my friends and I jumped in. The shock was unreal. I could not experience my body for several moments. What I mean by that is, I could not hear anything; I could not feel, or even see anything.

My body was simply moving, my hands searched for the panel under the water, my body pulled itself under and passed through the slot, it emerged on the other side, climbed over the railing and back down onto the cold clammy ground before I could even realize my breaths were sharp, my heart was pounding, and my entire body was shaking.

And I felt alive! I jumped in the air and screamed from the excitement, the thrill, it was like being baptised, or initiated—and only now were we truly ready for the rest of the course.

At one of the obstacles I was also electrocuted and knocked unconscious for a moment as I crawled on my stomach through mud water. It felt like getting punched in the back of the head.

Another time I was running through the field of electric wires and a few cables swung over and hit my leg—and that felt like getting punched twice.

The only real challenge however, was falling 20 feet into water that was 12 feet deep.

I can't swim. Not properly anyway, I splash a lot, gasp for air, and eventually I get from point A to B but whether that's swimming or something else is debatable. At this obstacle I was hesitant, I didn't know whether I would drown, if someone would help me out, or if I should just forego looking stupid. My friend reassured me, he can swim so if anything just do it, and he'd help me. I was definitely afraid of catching pneumonia, but I went through Arctic Enema. I was afraid of getting electrocuted but I crawled through Electric Eel. So I was afraid of drowning! I Walked the Plank all the same, falling twenty feet into twelve-foot deep water, and 'swimming' my way out. I love overcoming all my fears, and the trick is to just do it – don't think about it, don't talk about it, don't contemplate the outcome, don't entertain the what-ifs, just leap.

People afterwards told me they could never do something like this, they said, "I don't know how you did it, that's crazy!" but really, you just need to tune out every thought that tells you that you can't, stop listening to them, ignore them. And learn to hold onto the one voice that tells you that you can.

I am grateful for friends that joined me in this adventure, and helped me along the way. I am grateful for all the volunteers and individuals that help organize Tough Mudder and other events like it, so that we can all (and in relative safety) test our limits, overcome our fears, and have fun.

The efficacy of mantras and the Vedas

part 2

by Aiya

In the last issue, Aiya gave a brief description of each of the four Vedas, and discussed how they are linked to the primordial sound that resonates within each and every one of us. In this second half of his excerpted speech, he elaborates on how sound changes organisms on the cellular level.

Now, the effect of the sound and our chanting that sound, and its positive effect on us brings about the next question—how is this change taking place? Up to very recent times, there has been this mistaken notion that only certain people in an elite minority can chant Vedic mantras and others are not allowed to do so. Of course, the eternal curse that is there in India, the caste system, says that only Brahmins can chant the mantras—and only Brahmin men at that—and others cannot.

Sri Satya Sai Baba has been one of the most prominent voices in recent times to try and turn this around. He has said that the Vedas must be taught to children as they grow, and it is never too late for anyone to learn, regardless of caste, race, culture, gender, educational level or age. About 10 years ago was when Baba started to tell people to learn the Purusha Suktam, the Narayana Suktam, the Sri Suktam, and they are regularly chanted en masse at Sai Centres today.

It has made me so happy to see this. What is this change that has taken place? The 5th-century Tamil saint Thirumular has said in his works that the body is the original Shiva temple, the soul is the Shivalingam within, and the entrance to that temple is the mouth. And inside this Shiva temple, how many shrines are there? There are sometimes hundreds in those big Shiva temples in India, like in Chidambaram or Arunachalam. At those

The Chidambaram Nataraja temple

places you have to do full puja six times a day to each sannidhi (shrine) and it would require an army of priests. There are very few temples today that adhere to that principle. For convenience and logistics, things have been eroded.

But remember, if you go away from what has been written in the scriptures, whatever the reason, you are diluting the effect. When a child is invested with the Gayathri mantra and given the sacred thread, it is a necessity to do the ritual of sandhya vandanam three times a day. Show me someone who does that today. At the minimum, you must at least do Gayathri japam every day but even that is not there.

People today scoff at these practices and say there is no point to them, but is there anyone who has committedly followed through on the practice every day before dismissing it? If people do it the way it is prescribed for even three months, they will see the changes within themselves, and then they won't be able to stop—you can't go back to the way you were before, once you've experienced the power of the mantras within the Shiva temple that is yourself. It is simply an enhanced state of being.

Sandhya vandanam is a complete package—physical exercise, breathing exercise, spiritual exercise, concentration and chanting exercise—everything is there. But when you're working in a tall building in downtown Toronto, how

can you do sandhya vandanam in the middle of the day? You can't, so you have to adjust your schedule. You can get up in the morning and do it once, and then again when you come home in the evening—even twice a day is quite good.

Now, what will happen to you when you do that, with sandhya vandanam or chanting mantras or any type of focused puja? In this Shiva temple that is the body, there are 6.4 billion cells and each cell is its own shrine. And when puja is done, it will be done in all 6.4 billion shrines.

So what will happen then? Every cell without exception, every cell is quietly being reprogrammed from the inside to resonate with the universal flow. And how that change occurs, you will experience when you chant whether externally or internally.

Set aside a half-hour each morning and each evening to chant Om, or Om Nama Shivaya, or Om Namo Narayanaya, or Aim Hreem Sreem, or Amen—whatever form of the omniscient power you can relate to. It must be enough time for you to chant slowly and properly, not just rush through it. Immerse yourself in it and enjoy it, and do it this way for three months. Your life before this commitment will pale in comparison to how you will feel afterwards.

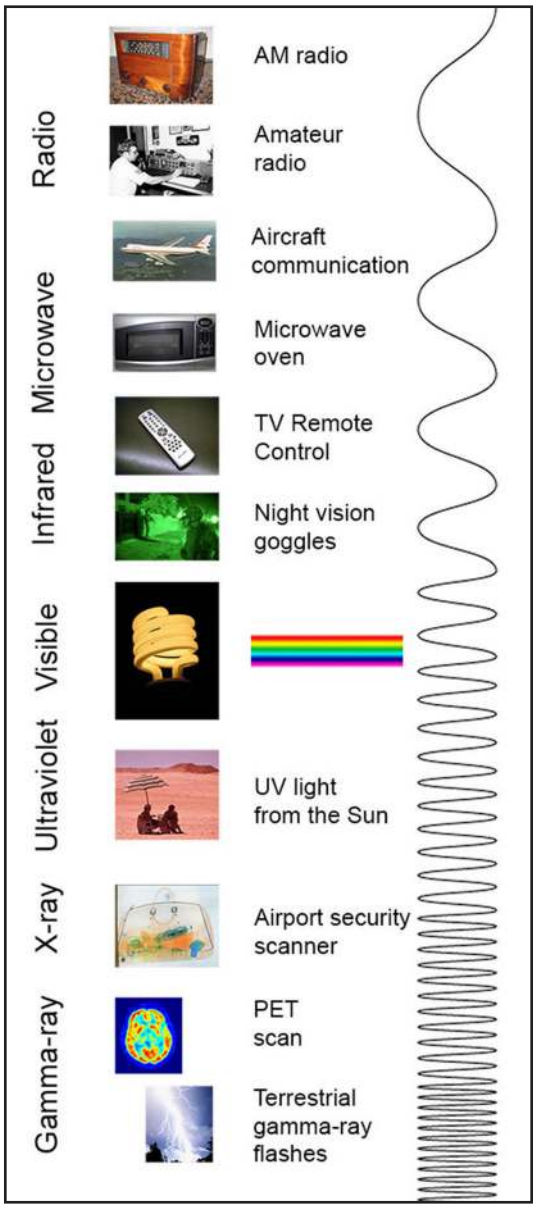
And at that point, you won't just want to do a half-hour anymore, and you don't have to do it that way—sitting down and formally chanting or doing puja in the morning and then again in the evening. There are some people who chant 24 hours of the day and still lead normal lives. They drive to work, talk with their colleagues, play with their children, go to the movies, cook and clean—and all the while, they propel the mantra within them on a loop.

Like I said before, you don't reap the full power of anything if you dilute the effort you put in. So eventually, one or two hours a day of chanting or japam (mantra repetition) won't be enough for you. Whether you perform external puja or not, at the depths of your heart and mind japam must go on. If you want fast results, make the effort. If you do it that way, many things you find important will fall by the wayside and that omnipotent presence will turn your attention to other deeper, more meaningful things.

Now, what is a mantra? It is constant thinking or recollection of which one is protected, or released from the rounds of births and deaths. It is divinity encased within a sound structure. Make no mistake, all the mantras that the rishis (sages) had developed from their spiritual omniscience have a solid scientific basis. My own guru was a scientist; he was a nuclear physicist before he retired. When he explains spiritual concepts, he always explains in terms of physics, in a way that people can understand.

So, he would say to understand this, you have to have a basic understanding of a solar spectrum. The electromagnetic spectrum of energy is huge; the bandwidth is very big. Out of that, the human perception is a tiny sliver; that is the extent to which we can see and experience it. On one side is 3,500 angstrom units, on the other side is 6,000 angstrom units.

This is what Guruji explains to people who ask him why he can see deities and they can't. Through constant practice and focus and meditation, you can increase the bandwidth of your perception of that field. The deities vibrate in a different frequency; not in ours.



It is the same reason why we can't perceive ultra-violet rays or infra-red rays with the naked eye.

This is why we have to learn to chant Rudram, Purusha Suktam, Sri Suktam and the rest—to start the process of gradually expanding our consciousness. And it must be on pitch and in a strong, clear voice. It must perfectly jive with your sensibilities—only then can you internalize the sound. Why? Because after some years of this type of chanting, the mantras will internalize within you and continue to go on automatically. Once that happens, you will be able to see the different spectrums.

A Japanese scientist named Dr. Masaru Emoto placed glasses of water and played different types of music to them and spoke different phrases to them, and then analyzed the water crystals afterward. The ones exposed to positive sounds were beautiful, and the negative ones had ugly water crystals. Then what do you think positive sounds (i.e. mantras) will have on your body when you are made of 70 percent water?

Dr. Masaru Emoto with a water crystal in the background

People ask me what the meanings of the mantras are and how they change you. To describe that would be like describing the taste of sugar with words. Even thousands of words can't describe the experience of the sweetness, but just a few grains on your tongue will make you understand better than any theoretical learning. Try it and see.

Sri Akka's speech on Tamil New Year's day

This is an excerpted version of Sri Akka's speech in San Jose, California, on April 14, 2013. Special thanks to the Nandalala Mission for its transliteration into English.

After the Nandana Tamil year, we are stepping in to a new year, "Vijaya." Let us whole-heartedly welcome the Tamil New Year, Vijaya! Vijaya is the 27th year in the 60-year cycle of the Tamil calendar. Two and seven make nine, which signifies victory. It is called "Vijaya" which means success. So this will be a successful year.

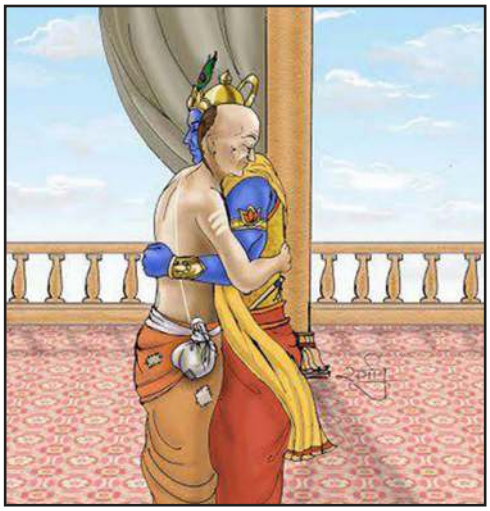
In front of you today, you see "Vishu Kani"—a display of sweets, fruits, flowers, colorful clothes, jewelry, and decorations in front of the mirror, which reflects them and each of us as well. These are all the signs of abundance one would see in a typical South Indian home, as part of the decorations for the New Year. Always remember to see all the abundance and good deeds around you wherever you go in the days to come.

Every day, when you look into the mirror, what do you see? Normally, you see your physical form. This year look within you, at your own atma and see all the good and bad within you and about you and realize it. When you realize what is bad within you, try to change. You have to search within the whole year looking to differentiate between good and bad.

Today I have two coconuts filled with honey as prasadam for you, as well as specially prepared milk (boiled with ground cashews, cardamom, saffron, and edible camphor). When you have prasadam, your brain calms down and you are able to think properly.

When you think about aval (poha, or parched rice) everyone is reminded of Sri Krishna and his childhood friend, Kuchelan "Sudhama." As an adult, Sri Krishna was rich as the king of Dwaraka, while Kuchelan was poor. Kuchelan visited Sri Krishna to seek assistance, carrying some aval remembering his friend's fondness for it as a child.

Sri Krishna was delighted to see his friend and appreciated the aval immensely, savoring Kuchelan's devotion and friendship. But Kuchelan could not talk to Sri Krishna and ask him for help, even while Sri Krishna treated him like royalty in the palace. However, on his return home, Kuchelan found his humble abode transformed into a mansion. Sri. Krishna had bestowed all worldly goods and happiness to him! Thus is the importance of aval conveyed in our ancient stories.



Krishna and Sudhama, with a pouch of aval tied to his waist

It is easy to digest, simple to cook and hardy. Aval may be made into Pongola, puma, pajamas, or added to yogurt and eaten. If you have a persistent cough that has not left you in spite of medications, you can chew on aval slowly and it will rid you of the cough. This will also help for asthma, and if you are not well.

When you go to a hotel or restaurant they give you a menu card and you can order food that you would like to eat. Just as aval is simple yet solid and powerful, we also need a menu for our heart (soul). What is it? It is bhakti.

What is the menu for bhakti? How does one get it?

- By good thinking—through reading epics such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Sthalapuranam (history about sacred places), Bhagavad Gita etc.
- By chanting slokas, performing puja
- By doing meditation/ dhyanam/ japam
- By doing yoga
- By hosting, participating in satsang (being amidst good people)
- Watching visual media or listening to audio media, you need to hear, see and feel the good deeds; language should not be any barrier at any point.

You can choose different focus points for bhakti—Shiva, Parvati, Devi, Narayana, Anjaneya, Allah, Jesus—you can have bhakti for any of these entities. The benefit of the bhakti menu is peace for mind and rejuvenation for the body. Only in Hindu dharma, we have the concept of "one-to-many," "many-to-one" and "all is one."

Hence we have many gods and many rules and regulations in our dharma, but they all lead us to one, through bhakti. Hindu dharma is very flexible. This year try to read good things, speak good things, and go to events where you listen to good things, see good things and realize good things. This is very important to follow this year.

This is Chithrai Masam (Tamil month of Chithra). What is special about Chithra Masam? We have Vasantha Navarathri. In the south we have a lot of temples celebrating "Thiruvizha" (festivals), kalyanam (divine weddings), and kumbhabishekams. Chithra month is also the beginning of summer. It is very hot. The events are held for people to go and immerse themselves in God and forget the heat." A few examples:

- Tiruchendur Annabhishekam
- Golden Chariot procession at Kanchi (Goddess Kamakshi) and Samayapuram (Goddess Mariamman)
- Ramana Maharishi's Aaradhana at Tiruvannamalai

- Also marks the auspicious occasion where Divine mother fed sacred milk (of knowledge) to Thiru Gnana Sambandar in Seerkazhi
- In Madurai, the marriage of Goddess Meenakshi and Sokkanadhar is performed, and Goddess Meenakshi's brother Lord Kallazhagar visits the Vaigai river banks en route to Madurai to attend the marriage ceremony

People always wish to visit sacred places such as temples, but sometimes, their situation becomes difficult that they are unable to do so, due to unavoidable circumstances. In those instances, just thinking of the picture of gods/goddesses who resides in the temples that you were supposed to visit and/or making a collage of the pictures of such gods/goddesses might help get peace of mind and happiness. You can always pay a visit to such temples when it is feasible to do so.

This year Shani Bhagawan is in four positions. He is either alone or is joining other planets e.g. Shukran. So praying to Shani Bhagwan will bring you benefits.

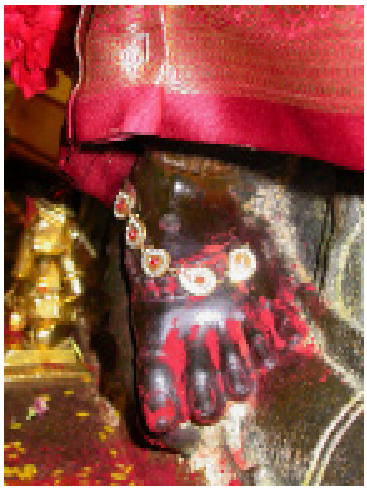
This year will also mark four eclipses that will be visible, from the south west to the south east. The star "Swathi" will be affected most during lunar eclipses. Those born under the star Swathi, may feed someone that day. Even if you cannot cook a meal for them yourself, take your friends out to eat that day.

If your star is part of the transition, during solar eclipses offer wheat to temples; this will bestow good health. During lunar eclipses, offer rice, which will bestow good knowledge.

Every one of us feels happy to light a lamp. Hence I urge you all to light a lamp. When you light a lamp, you suddenly feel peace within and a great sense of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. As you know lighting a lamp removes darkness; particularly when the same is done at temples, while watching/witnessing the alankaram/decorations of the god, only in the light of the lamp lit within the sanctum sanctorium, the entire darshan process gives a great feeling of ananda/happiness.

It is indeed true that lighting a lamp imparts such confidence for oneself and gives the feeling that whatever happens will be good and will happen well.

Light a lamp every day and let worries be gone. My blessings to all of you.



Sri Gurubhyo Namaha