Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

Blossom 20 Petal 4
December 2015

Our Thoughts

Dearest Guruji,

You never promised anything to anybody but only the promise that you made to yourself—love all unconditionally and teach the Mother's message to all.

You came as the ocean of infinite compassion to embrace all beings.

You came as a friend, brother, mother, father and Guru to all of us.

You taught us the true meaning of unconditional love and not the traditional illusion of love.

You always welcomed us with that sweet smile and loving soft words that would heal any sorrows and hurts instantly.

You never expressed anger, anxiety or irritation and taught us the same.

You understood us and taught us the esoteric arts of Mother worship.

You came to us as the MOTHER of all MOTHERS.

You have now left this mortal body to merge with the Universal Mother where your true place resides.

You have left us in tears—not tears of sorrow but tears of joy at having been able to know you and be with you.

This is not to say goodbye as the little human being who will miss seeing you and being in your physical presence. But to say that you reside in our hearts forever as the fully blossomed lotus and continuous ecstasy in our lives.

Sundhara

December Newsletter

Since the last issue...

At the beginning of September, Aiya was in Rochester but soon had to leave town for a house puja and workshop in Chicago from the 10th to the 13th.

From Sept. 14 to the 18th, Aiya was in London, England for a wedding and a series of different events.

Ganesha Chaturthi fell during that time in the middle of the week. Although it took place on a Wednesday, it was well-attended, even first thing in the morning.

Shankar aiya was presiding over the festivities, which included kalasa stapanam, homam, alankaram and tarpanam. The morning program went from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The evening alankaram puja began at around 6 p.m. and featured the Utsava Ganesha going around the temple. The puja concluded at around 9:30 p.m. Altogether, about 125 people attended, with bigger crowds showing up in the evening.

The murthi on the Ganapathi deck received abhiishekam as part of the morning puja.

The next festival coming up was **Sharada Navarathri**, which was sombre for some as of October 10th. That was when the announcement came from Devipuram that our beloved Guruji (Sri la Sri Amritanandanatha Saraswathi) had transitioned into the beautiful ever after.

In Rochester, Aiya's students ran Navarathri from beginning to end, from Oct. 13-24. The theme was simple, with Goddesses Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswathi receiving tailored pujas and homams for the first 3 days, second 3 days, and third 3 days, respectively.

Each weekday saw about 40-50 people attending during the day and many more at night. The "extras" particular to SVTS were also observed at the end of Navarathri, including a Chandi homam on Vijayadasami day; the chariot festival; Vidyarambham ritual for kids; the water-cutting festival and kulurthi.

Gajan photo-bombs the Devi during Mahalakshmi puja

Another thing observed at the end of Navarathri was the beginning of **Kedara Gowri vratham**. The low-key festival celebrating the merger of Shiva and Parvati began on Vijayadasami on Oct. 21 and ran the typical 21 days until its culmination on the evening of November 10th.

On the final day, there were easily 130-150 people in attendance. Sri Ardhanareeshwara received abhishekam and alankaram, and then the festival kalasam was taken around the yajnashala and inner temple. All the ladies who sponsored this puja received prasadam and the *sharadu* thread tied around their hands. A further 21 sumangalis received a larger prasadam package from the festival sponsor.

Where one festival ends, another begins—so it was the case with **Skanda Shashti**, which ran from Nov. 12-16. This year, Lord Muruga's special time was only five days instead of the usual six.

Shanmukha, Valli, and Devayani were brought into the yajnashala, where they remained for the entire festival. For the first two days, volunteers chanted Murugan's ashtottaram as puja to him, but the festival also included milk abhishekams and daily archanas.

On the last day, volunteers performed abhishekam and alankaram to Muruga, after which he went off to "war" with the demon Surapadman. Muruga received a second abhishekam before his wedding to Devayani, and then they became a trio after Murugan married Valli. The night concluded with their procession around the temple.

Volunteers had a few days of rest before the next festival in the schedule, which was the short and always sweet **Karthikai Deepam** on Nov. 25.

Shankar aiya conducted the puja on this full moon night but Aiya was present and participated in the chanting.

Since this is exclusively an evening festival, many people were able to attend even after work and school. The turnout was an estimated 100 people, and the whole puja lasted a couple of hours. Afterwards, the lights were turned off in the temple and all present were able to bask in Lord Shiva's beautiful glow.

Hundreds of tealights sat on tens of plates surrounding the homakundam on Karthikai Deepam

The Sri Vidya Temple Society 2016 pocket calendar has been released! You can pick them up for free at the temple (they're only as big as a business card) or refer to this handy-dandy virtual copy on the right.

Wall calendars will be released in English and Tamil closer to the new year.

Alankara Utsavam - Anniversary Festival 2016

Sri Maha Ganapati Utsavam	July 1
Sri Rajarajeswari Utsavam, Chaparam‡	July 2
Sri Dattatreya Utsavam	July 3
Sri Bhairavar Madai	July 4

Brahmotsavam

Dwajarohanam	September 24
Navaratri - Starts	October 1
Navaratri - Ends	October 9
Vijayadasami, Rathotsavam	October 10
Tirthabhishekam, Dwajavarohanam	October 11
Kulirtti	October 12

Thai Pongal	Jan 15
Maha Sivaratri	Mar 7
Tamil New Year (Thurmuki)	Apr 13
Chithra Paurnami	Apr 21
Guru Purnima	Jul 19
Adi Amavasya	Aug 2
Adi Puram	Aug 5
Varalakshmi Vratam	Aug 12
Vinayaka Chaturthi	Sep 4
Kedara Gauri Vratam - Starts	Oct 10
Diwali	Oct 29
Kedara Gauri Vratam - Ends	Oct 29
Skanda Shashti Vratam - Starts	Oct 31
Skanda Shashti Vratam - Ends	Nov 5
Tiru Kartikai Vratam	Dec 11
Kartikai Vilakku†	Dec 13

‡ Chandi Homam † Deepam at House * Sani Pradosham

2016	Purnima	Pradosham
Jan	23	7, 21
Feb	22	5, 19
Mar	22	6, 20
Apr	21	4, 19
May	21	4, 18
June	19	2, 17
July	19	1, 16*, 31
Aug	17	15, 29
Sep	16	13, 27
Oct	15	13, 27
Nov	13	11, 26*
Dec	13	11, 26

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Upcoming Events

Event	Date/time	Location
Thiruvempavai	December 16-25	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, indoors
Kids' Raja Mathangi homam	December 27	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Thai Pongal	January 15	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, indoors

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 2016.

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 9, 2016. 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, Sundhara and Ahalya Arasaratnam, Jeilan Devanesan, Aparna Hasling, Vimalan Sothinathan and Sreekant Venkata Subramanian.

Golden Clips from Guruji

An explanation by Sri la Sri Amritanandanatha Saraswati

Revelation of a new Breathing Technique

[Revealed by Guruji, year 2001, at the Guru Purnima celebration at Sri Rajarajeswari Temple, Rush, New York. Guruji mentioned this unique breathing process was given to him by Devi herself to be passed on to her devotees and will enhance the process to realizing the Devi in oneself.

This breathing technique is significantly different from all other techniques that have been published, until now, given that there is no pause or holding the breath in between the inhaling and exhaling rhythms.

This is to be practiced at least once a day either in the morning or evening. If time permits it can be done twice a day—morning and evening].

Thanks to Sundhara and Ahalya Arasaratnam for transcribing and submitting this piece to the Sri Chakra.

PROCESS
Position yourself into a very relaxed and comfortable position; you could be seated or lying down.
Keep both your hands loosely to your side; legs and/or feet not crossed.
Inhaling will be only via the nose; mouth closed.
Exhaling only via mouth.
While inhaling or exhaling focus on the tip of your nose -this would help focusing on your breathing.

Iteration 1
Step1
Inhale slowly, as slow as you can, in a very relaxed manner until your lungs are at least 80 % full. You may go the full 100% if you wish to. You should now feel your whole thorax section inflated. Immediately, without pause (no kumba), start exhaling, again as slowly as long you can, visualizing that you getting rid of all tensions and pain (you may think or even make the sound "Ah.....ah"), until you have emptied your lungs. Feel that you are rid of all tensions and totally relaxed.

Step 2
DO NOT PAUSE OR CATCH YOUR BREATH (no kumba)
Repeat step 1.

Step3
DO NOT PAUSE OR CATCH YOUR BREATH (no kumba)
Repeat step 1.

Now you would have completed the three steps per cycle.
You may now pause and catch your breath.
Repeat cycles with step 1, 2 and 3 two more times and thus completing three cycles and the three steps thrice. You may pause and catch your breath after each cycle.
Start Iteration 2.

Iteration 2
Step1
Inhale slowly mentally intoning "Sooo...." as slow as you can in a very relaxed manner until your lungs are at least

80% full. You may go the full 100% if you wish to. You should now feel your whole thorax section inflated. Immediately, without pause (no kumba), start to exhale, mentally intoning “Hamm.....” again as slowly as long you can, until you have emptied your lungs.

Step 2
DO NOT PAUSE OR CATCH YOUR BREATH (no kumba).
Repeat step 1.

Step3
DO NOT PAUSE OR CATCH YOUR BREATH (no kumba).
Repeat step 1.

Now you would have completed the three steps per cycle.
You may now pause and catch your breath.
Repeat cycles with step 1, 2 and 3 two more times and thus completing three cycles and the three steps thrice. You may pause and catch your breath after each cycle.
Total of 18 cycles from Iteration 1 and Iteration 2.
Start Iteration 3.

Iteration 3
Step1
Inhale slowly as slow as you can in a very relaxed manner until your lungs are at least 80 % full. You may go the full 100% if you wish to. You should now feel your whole thorax section inflated. Immediately, without pause (no kumba), start to exhale, mentally intoning “Aum-mm.....”. Again as slowly as long you can, until you have emptied your lungs.

Step 2
DO NOT PAUSE OR CATCH YOUR BREATH (no kumba).
Repeat step 1.

Step3
DO NOT PAUSE OR CATCH YOUR BREATH (no kumba).
Repeat step 1.

Now you would have completed the three steps per cycle.
You may now pause and catch your breath.
Repeat cycles with step 1, 2 and 3 two more times and thus completing three cycles and the three steps thrice. You may pause and catch your breath after each cycle, thus completing another nine cycles making a total of 27 cycles from the three Iterations.

You may feel lightheaded or dizzy the first few days immediately after exercising this breathing technique, due to a blast of oxygen into your system. Do not fear to continue. One will find it rewarding—benefits include stress relief, increase of oxygen dispersion into your body, blood pressure regulated to acceptable readings, and reduction of pulse rate.

Girivalam on Purnami

by Aparna Hasling

It was my first visit to Shiva's sacred mountain. I was travelling alone, and arrived the morning of Phalguni Purnima. The moon would be full at night, so I had time to explore Ramana Maharshi's ashram. Although I have always respected Sri Ramana Maharshi, he never engaged my heart; so it was a surprise to find myself cry at his shrine and softly whisper that I missed him!

Wandering around the compound in a cosmic daze, I stumbled upon the trailhead to Virupaksha cave where Ramana Maharshi lived for years. At first I was nervous to step foot on the mountain, but my environmental mind prevailed as I started to read signage about land restoration projects, native flora and fauna and see all the newly planted bilvam trees. As I imagined the hill as unspoiled wilderness, I felt deeply connected to the land, and the saints who found God in Nature.

Devotees of Lord Shiva are encouraged to walk barefoot around the mountain while doing tapasya. Chanting Rudram is beneficial. And since it is auspicious to offer gifts to sadhus and shrines, a friend advised me to carry lots of 10 rupee notes. In addition, I carried a bag of bananas to feed cows. However, my plans changed after a beggar saw me feeding cows. There was a line of seated beggars, waiting for charity; they smiled and each clamored for a share. One by one, I gave a fruit until the bag emptied. *There but for the grace of God go I.*

Just outside the temple complex, I saw a cow staring longingly at a vegetable stand. I asked the vendor what that cow wanted, and he pointed to a bundle of curry leaves. So I bought 3 bundles, and was happy to find something to feed the cows which were not in demand from beggars. It was fun to buy naivedyam offerings along the way – and each transaction resupplied my stash of 10 rupee notes.

The inner fire ignited once I received darshan of the Agni Lingam. From there I crossed the street with the masses, and noticed a vibrant Ganesh murti in a tiny house with cement steps. There were only a few people there, and I cautiously showed a coconut from my bag, as if to ask if I could offer.

In a single gesture, I cracked it, poured juice clockwise around the Bali peetham, and when I hit the coconut a second time, it broke in perfect symmetry. I placed it front of Ganapati with two bananas and a 10 rupee note. One lady smiled and said to her husband "she is correct." The affirmation was comforting, and it was then I decided to ditch the whistle dangling from my wrist—my fear of walking alone at night was unfounded after all.

It was nice to be on my own and stop whenever I was inspired without explanation to others. I offered deepams, showed mudras, lingered at amazing shrines, chanted alone and with devotees, tied haldi roots to a tree, listened to distant thunder and eventually reached the Rajarajeshwari Temple. The priest remembered me from the afternoon—he had graciously unlocked

the gates and was pleased when I commented upon his beautiful, granite Dasamahavidya murtis. I had asked about the timing of Sri Chakra puja, but he told me it occurs on new moon (amavasyai) and not purnami. Nonetheless, he was happy when I returned during girivalam with a HUGE garland.

He graciously accepted and took his time to carefully untie the knot and poke it between the existing flower malas on the murthi. I watched and smiled, and he gave me prasad... and then we both laughed as we turned around to see that Devi dropped all three of her garlands to the ground! It was another perfect moment and I carried onward in joy!

The energy was particularly intense as individuals and groups celebrated the divine manifestation of life. I was inspired how lakhs of people together could create a spiritual symphony, each contributing a single note—and awed to think that the ebb and flow of this festival is maintained as a nitya (daily) puja! I noticed how the entrance to each temple/shrine had a caldron for burning camphor, and realized that since Arunachala is Shiva in the form of fire, devotees offering a piece of camphor were worshipping fire with fire!

Already I appreciated how the bonfire blazes helped guide me to the ashtalingams and prominent temples, yet on this dark night, keeping the fire lit with camphor bits was also a way for pilgrims to cast their vote and invite other to share their faith.

Joining the practice of offering camphor added depth to my experience. It was especially fun to offer it at less popular shrines, sometimes just in time to keep a small fire alive. Late in the night, I noticed an old man near a neglected Nandi murti. At first I walked past, but turned back when I still felt his humble presence. I gave him some bananas, a 10 rupee note, and poured a bag of camphor pieces on a cement block—the shrine didn't even have a caldron, but when he lit the camphor we smiled as if the whole world were shining.

By 11 p.m. my bare feet were hurting. It was time for bed, and I saw hundreds of beggars/sadhus/mothers with children already asleep on the side of the road. Poverty was rampant, and in a few cases, I put 10 rupee notes or a laddu for them to find in the morning.

The elderly women were still working, probably desperate to make a final sale, and hoping for Lakshmi to descend upon them during this sacred night. I still remember one woman in particular: She was selling camphor packets and I gave her a 100 rupee note and asked for change. When she touched the new bill, she was ecstatic! But fear rose in her eyes as she managed to find only a few tattered rupee notes, and could not complete the exchange. To bolster her innate dignity, I sat down with her and counted the notes and tiny bags of camphor in such a way that it worked in her favor. We smiled at each other with love, and I could see my own mother in her face.

It was well past midnight when I returned to the main temple. I was hoping to enter and see a massive abhishekam, but the doors had long since closed. Yet, a quiet calm overtook the dwindling crowd as devotees turned their gaze to the sky. The full moon was blazing just above the raja gopuram of the Arunachalam temple. As a soft wind blew, we merged into the stillness of the night.

Dasamahavidyas

by Aiya

part 2

During one of the past Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion camps, Aiya told the parents about some of the Dasamahavidyas, all of whom are equally powerful to Sri Rajarajeshwari but have different approaches to liberation. Thanks very much to Mohan Murali for sending the Sri Chakra *the audio of Aiya's talks. In the first part, Aiya explained about Tara, the first Mahavidya, and partially about Kali, the second Mahavidya. This is the second part of a two-part series.*

Kali is the same deity that Ramakrishna Paramahamsa worshipped—what he worshipped is called Dakshinakalika. There are other Kalis called Samhara Kali, Bhadra Kali, Atharvana Bhadra Kali, and Smashana Kali. Atharvana Bhadra Kali you already know—she is Maha Pratyangira. Bhadra Kali is an aspect of Mahalakshmi who has now become the anger incarnate.

Dakshinakalika is a deity that you would not want to miss seeing. She is a most beautiful form of the Mother. The mantra is *Kreem Kreem Kreem, Hum Hum, Hreem Hreem, Dakshinakalikai, Kreem Kreem Kreem, Hum Hum, Hreem Hreem svaha.* We don't need to tell the mantra for Samhara Kali here—it will create complete detachment in your system, and after that you won't want to stay with your family or friends or anything. You will become a recluse.

Atharvana Bhadra Kali and Bhadra Kali are closely related to each other—it's just Mahalakshmi in an angry form. So if you worship Maha Pratyangira, you are worshipping Mahalakshmi at the same time. One year when we were doing the Maha Pratyangira homam, I think that year we put something like 75 kilos of chillies into the fire, she said to me for every chilli that we put in, she would give it back to us as $100,000. *[laughs]* She has still not kept her promise!

The third Mahavidya is Sundari. Sundari of course

you know. Her mantras are Bala Triyakshari (3 syllables), Bala Sadakshari (6 syllables), Bala Navakshari (9 syllables), and then Panchadasakshari (15 syllables), then Soubhagya Panchadasakshari (3 syllables of Bala attached to the 3 parts of Panchadasakshari). After that is Laghu Shodasi, which is 16 syllables, then *Purna Bijarupa Ramaadhi Shodasi*—all the letters are in the form of bijas (seeds). This is utterly powerful and the pinnacle of her worship. It will give you everything that you want and more, and is also known as Maha Shodasi.

After Maha Shodasi, you will be given what is known as Atma Kumbhabhishekam. You will be given Purna Diksha with the *shanka-theertham* on your head and a namam will be given to you. After that, you'll have to live up to the namam. If you get a peetam, it's given separately from all this. Sometimes people have Purna Diksha and don't have a peetam (that's when the Sri Chakra comes into your home).

If you get a peetam, by necessity, you'll have to maintain certain degrees of purity. You cannot have contamination of the house and of the puja room—it has to be absolutely *soumyam* because it can otherwise cause problems. If one person eats meat in the house,

it's enough to contaminate the whole thing. But make no mistake, in Devi worship there is a method by which meat and fish and alcohol are offered to her. This is called *vamacharam*, the left-handed path.

This is a very risky path and if you're not careful, you'll get thrown for a loop. Because with vamacharam, you're travelling through space at 21,000 miles per second. What will happen to you if you trip and fall at that speed, as opposed to taking a slower path? Not even your bones will be left. It's not for this day and age, unless the person doing it is absolutely knowledgeable about what this is and has the control required.

There are five methods—*vamacharam* (the left-handed path), *dakshinacharam* (the right-handed path), *kaulacharam, samayacharam,* and *misracharam*. Kaulacharam is mistaken all the time for left-handed worship—that is wrong. It comes from *kula* + *acharam*, referring to the petals in your body. If you know how to traverse all the petals in your body and go up and down, and perform *shat chakra japam* with the bijaksharas, it's kaulacharam. It's the discipline of the petals.

In dakshinacharam, you can only perform the pujas exclusively chanting from the Vedas and nothing else. So even Lalita Sahasranamam is out—it's not from the Vedas but from *Brahmanda Purana*. Such people are non-existent these days.

The other one is samayacharam. For that, no external paraphernalia like the bell, puja items, etc. are needed. Everything is in the mind. You perform the puja inside your mind, you offer the naivedyam inside the mind, and you show the final aarthi in the mind. Everything is internalized.

Misracharam is where a little bit from here, there, and everywhere has been taken. This is what 100 per cent of the upasakas in India are doing. Even if they claim to be doing Vedic puja, nonsense. They can claim that to someone who doesn't know what it is. Everybody is misracharam. The moment you so much as offer a flower or perform a mudra, it has become tantric.

All the paths are equally valid and equally powerful.

Anyway, back to Sundari. For her, there is also *pashubhavam, veerabhavam*, and *divyabhavam*. Example—it's a fact that most people do not know, but Ramana Maharshi was a Sri Vidya upasaka of the divyabhavam. Near Ambathoor outside of Chennai, there is a Sri Vaishnavi temple. That murthi was at somebody's private residence until one day they decided to build a temple for her. So they went to Ramana Maharshi and said they wanted to build the Devi a temple, and they needed a Sri Chakra.

Swami promptly put his hand inside the *kowpeenam* and took out a Sri Chakra and gave it to them. It is a silver Sri Chakra that is 3.5 square inches. I've actually looked at it and touched it and worshipped it. Only then did they know he was doing Sri Vidya upasana. If you read *Aksharamani Malai*, which Ramana Maharshi wrote, in two places he has hinted that he is Subramanyam, and Skanda is a Sri Vidya upasaka.

As for Sundari, you can worship her as a girl of 3, 6, or 9 years old (Balatripurasundari); or as a teenager of 15 (Panchadasi), 16 (Soubhagya Panchadasi), or 18 (Laghu Shodasi) years old; or as a woman of 28 years old (Maha Shodasi). Dakshinakalika is a woman of 32 years of age. When Ramakrishna used to sit in the temple and cry, she would come.

When Guruji gave me mantra diksha, I couldn't do a thing except this japam. I used to curse that I had to go to work and do that work instead of japam, and my boss also knew there was something off about me then. Little by little by little, people used to drop us off their lists for birthday parties and other get-togethers. So that's what the Devi will do to you eventually.

A few years ago, we did Dasamahavidya homams during Navarathri and no one was allowed on the grounds after 11:30 p.m. Somebody defied the rules and came here in the early morning hours, and that's when he had a heart attack. Some of the young ones were working in the barn and I told them,

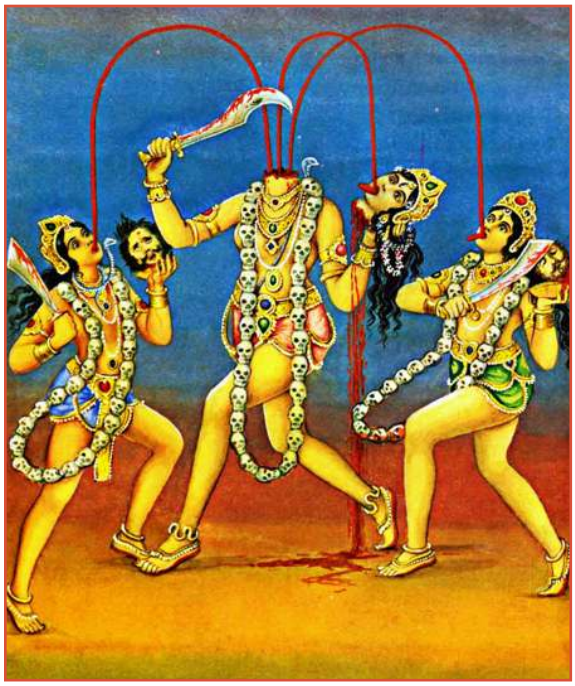
"If you don't get out by 11:30, sleep in the barn. Don't come out." One of them didn't believe me and he got in his car and drove out after midnight. One mile down the road, bang! Don't play the fool with things you don't understand.

After that, they were very careful, they ran out at 11:15 p.m.! The day we did Chinnamasta homam, 9 people cut their fingers in the kitchen one after another, all very experienced volunteers. Of course, from the age of 19 or 20 Bhadra Kali has been following me from my village. Only lately have I discovered that she is Atharvana Bhadra Kali, so she is Pratyangira. There are two songs I know; one is for Veerabhadra and the other for Bhadra Kali, and if I sing it, she'll come.

That's how I started every day of homam during Ati Rudram [kumbhabhishekam in 2010], and told her to take care of the place. At any given time, there were 121 open fires in that tent and more than 300 people were moving around giving supplies, sitting as sponsors, and doing the homams. Not one person got one little spark on their clothing. She did protect us.

The way Chinnamasta looks is she has cut off her own head, she is holding it in her hand, and there are three streams of blood shooting out of the neck. There are two friends beside her and each is drinking a stream of blood, and the third stream is being consumed by her own severed head. This represents *sattva, rajas,* and *tamo gunas*. Those accidents in the kitchen happened because she is associated with blood flow. After the puja that day, I told the kids to discard the leftover food and not to keep it for the evening. And what happened wasn't negative; she's just showing you that she's around.

Now, I'm not going to tell you about the rest; I want you to research them and find out for yourself.



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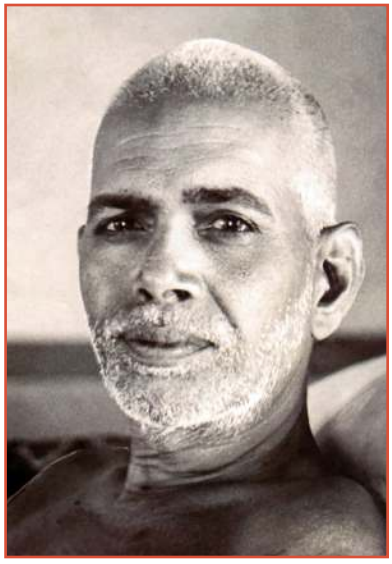
Aham Brahmasmi

by Sreekant Venkata Subramanian



Sri Ramana Maharshi was a man who achieved the greatest understanding through one question alone—*naanu yaar*, or "Who am I?" Perhaps through introspection to "aham brahmasmi" we can get a glimpse into that truth.

Aham Brahmasmi in its most primitive form means I am Brahma. I am the creator. This passage alone is an essence or rather a pillar to the mindset we are taught to follow everyday.

The primary deities to whom we pray in Sri Vidya are in essence Shiva and Shakti. The temple represents our body. The temple in itself is in essence the main vigraham (statue). Within that temple are various vigrahams all throughout. Each fragment of the temple represents a part of the body. Now if we really look at the grand scale of things, we can notice that this is the grandest introspective way to look into yourself.

This is the power of remembering that old classic mantram "aham brahmasmi." It could be the key to the answer Ramana Maharshi posed many years ago "Who am I?" So simple yet it profoundly shows us that we are not amongst a great God but rather the greatest monotheism in that we are the same as that creator.

These vigrahams and

temples help us visualize and understand the abstract of such a concept. In the most advanced stage of this worship, the ritual fades altogether and it becomes within you completely.

To quote two excerpts rather blandly in English,

"This Self is never born, nor does it die. It did not spring from anything, nor did anything spring from it. This Ancient One is unborn, eternal, and everlasting. It is not slain even though the body is slain." (The Upanishads)

"I am the beginning, middle, and end of creation. I am the ritual and the sacrifice; I am true medicine and the mantra. I am the offering and the fire which consumes it,

and the one to whom it is offered." (Bhagavad Gita)

In both of these texts, we can see an expansion of "aham brahmasmi." This is why we are taught to see God in everything and everyone. Both paragraphs show us a beautiful glimpse to the answer.

Taken from an excerpt of a speech given by Aiya on Chidambaram, we can see how much thought to represent the human body was truly taken throughout the construction of the Nataraja temple.

It is where Nataraja is. Some interesting facts you should know are that the Nataraja is the mulavar. It is the only temple in the world where the mulavar is taken out to procession. When they carry him back, he has a space exactly measured and kept and he won't move even a centimeter from there.

With his lifted foot, his left foot which many saints sang, "If you can only see that foot that has been taken." Why is it important? Two reasons. The left foot firstly belongs to the Devi. Secondly, that toe is exactly—I mean exact, exact, exact—to the center of the magnetic equator of the planet. Not even slightly left or right as marveled by NASA.

Over Nataraja, the dome contains 21,600 gold tiles held in place by 72,000 gold nails. The 21,600 represent the number of breaths taken per day. The 72,000 represent the number of nerve endings present on the surface area of a human body, also known as the nadis.

Slightly to the left is ponnambalam. There are 28 pillars there. They represent the 28 Shaiva agamas as well as the 28 styles of worship to Shiva. Twenty-eight also represents the number of syllables in Maha Shodasi mantram, which is also representative of the left foot of Shiva.

The temple has 9 entrances. The 9 entrances represent the 9 openings of the human body.

There are 365 days and 365 names will be cast to determine the priest to do puja for that day. He does everything. He can bring his extended family if need be, but all donations that come will belong to that family for that day.

At one time in the 10th century, a Chola king wondered, "They keep saying there are 3000 priests in Chidambaram." To clear his doubt, he determined he would give vastra dhaanam. To give clothing to all the priests this way he could determine the count. As they were assembled and they were called, he and his ministers took count silently. The count ran to 2999. He looked at the minister in shock and then suddenly heard from inside the sanctum, "I too am here."

Due to this incident, every day, whoever is the priest for the day is treated as Nataraja and brought as Nataraja himself. He is also the only one allowed to touch the Nataraja and the spatika lingam.

Looking at this, we can clearly see that the divisions between temple, priest and God are nonexistent. We compartmentalize these things to better understand "Who am I?" but rather the answer must be *aham brahmasmi*—I am that.

A Dream Regarding Meditation

by Jeilan Devanesan

I walked through a tiny village made up of shabby wooden houses, all of them planted far apart from one another with wide, muddy roads running between them. It was a quiet evening, the roads empty and the only sounds were the gravel crunching beneath my heavy boots and the rumble of gray clouds above me.

With my head down and hands buried in my pockets, I wandered along in this new place as a stranger looking for a place to stay. I found an inn and stepped inside to find a room filled with empty tables and a solitary barkeeper. He wasn't a large man, gray-haired and meek in appearance, devotedly wiping the bar's wooden counter.

I crossed the room and planted myself on a stool and ordered a drink. Suddenly, a man appeared next to me, brandishing a knife. He wanted to kill me and take my money, my belongings. I was surprised because I hadn't noticed anyone enter the place after me. I was shocked and couldn't respond right away. He must have thought I was resisting and leapt at me.

Without understanding what was going to happen, I just stood staring blankly and thinking I would die. In a flash, the old barkeeper reached over and grabbed the vagrant by his collar, drew him close and slit his throat with a knife, letting him slip down to the ground and die. It happened quickly; the old man did it without any expression and went back to wiping the counter as quickly as he had sprung to save my life.

I returned on another day, the bar was not as empty this time, crowds of people huddled around the tables while a few servers made their way around taking orders. I took up my seat in the same spot as the barkeeper was wiping his counter again. A group of three men approached me this time as I sat with my drink. But as soon as these thugs moved towards me, the old barkeep leapt over the counter again with a knife and cut them all somewhere vital, essentially leaving them to bleed out.

Perhaps I didn't notice before, but now he wore a traditional martial arts suit, black with a white

collar, white sleeve borders and white buttons. He was a remarkably small person, not imposing or threatening at all.

It wasn't then and there, but I asked him one day what he could teach me. He told me something and I remember he trained me for a time, but I had forgotten what he had initially said to me.

One day, my master (as I soon acknowledged him to be), myself and his other students were ready to fight a band of thugs headed to our town. Suddenly, I saw a woman pointing her gun at my master as he was standing just past me on a hill. I drew a pistol and shot at her but her shot went off first and it struck.

Then as I tried to get back to him, some big guy threw two grenades at him and he blew up into pieces. I remember that those people that killed him were his senior students, they had turned on him and hoped the attacking bandits would overwhelm the students that remained loyal to the master. A fight ensued but we won in the end.

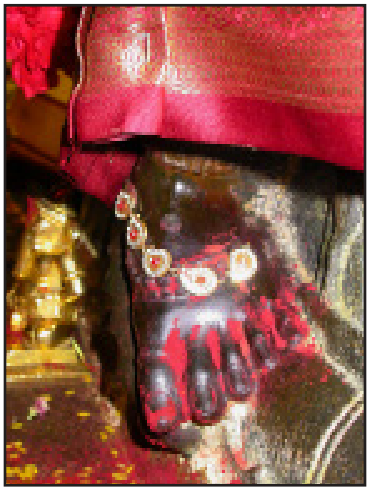
My master died. I was frustrated and angry that he was betrayed, that his death had to be seemingly arbitrary and random when he had led such a purposeful life.

A day came shortly after his passing that a senior disciple of his asked me about a final lesson that my master had provided for me. I confessed I never understood it and struggled to grasp it ever since his death, not having him around to help me anymore.

The disciple said to me, "What he meant was that true meditation doesn't stop when you open your eyes, get up, and decide to stop. Meditation is to be aware of everything, to observe everything, to have that focus all the time while you're awake and active in the world, and to see things as they are rather than how you wish them to be. Meditation is focus and the observation of your surroundings, retaining everything, being able to recall moments, instances, without any trouble. Diligent, constant, unwavering focus – that is the meditative state." Beyond that he did not elaborate and with it, my dream ended.

I had that dream back in July 2011, at a time when I was struggling with the notion of meditation and was obsessed with the question, do I meditate enough? It so happened, at that time I was convinced that meditation meant sitting down cross-legged in my room, eyes shut, mind closed to the outside world, chanting mantras and stirring Kundalini, to drive Her energy to the very top and to hold Her there for as long as I could. But was I supposed to do this for twenty minutes, thirty minutes, an hour? I did not know.

Needless to say, I've felt differently about meditation since that dream.



Sri Gurubhyo Namaha