Since the last issue...

There wasn’t a lot of travel in Aiya’s calendar during festival season. He was in and around Rochester starting from the end of August, and presided over Ganapathi Chaturthi on Sept. 8. The next three weeks saw him staying in town to prepare for Navarathri. After dvajarohanam on Sept. 28th, he was grounded on temple property until the flag went down at the end of Navarathri in mid-October.

Aiya also presided over the first and last days of Kedara Gowri vratham (ending on Nov. 2), and throughout all six days of Skanda Shasti (Nov. 3 to Nov. 8).

He also presided over Karthikai Deepam on Nov. 16th.

Nov 21st was the first bit of travelling Aiya did in a couple of months, as he went to San Diego for a private puja.

He headed north over the next two days, attending a function for Sri Amma’s Nandalarlam Mission in San Francisco on Nov. 23 and 24. He also released a CD locally during that trip, and spent time in the Bay Area until Nov. 26th.

A similar CD release concert usually happens in Toronto in early December, but that event will be postponed due to winter weather concerns. Notice will be sent out in the Spring.

The temple’s new calendar is now released in Tamil! The English version will be available in late December or early January. The mini-calendar cards are already available for free.

Later in December, Aiya and other devotees will be abroad for the annual India Yatra from Dec. 20th to Jan. 4th. The focus this year is on the Navagraha sthalas in South India.

There is also a special puja happening in honour of Aiya’s 70th birthday in Chidambaram on Dec. 30th. It will most likely be at the Nataraja temple from 6:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. IST.

Lastly, look out for new policies and procedures to soon be released, regarding the facilities for volunteers staying overnight on temple property.

Past Events

Ganapathi Chaturthi, Sept. 8

The annual Ganesh festival began at 9 a.m. with kalasa stapanam and tarpanam in the temple’s yajnashala. In front of the kalasams, facing the sponsors and homa kundam, a large turmeric Ganapathi was created and placed in a silver yoni peetam, surrounded by kush grass and lotus flowers. A bowl on the left side of the makeshift Ganapathi collected the consecrated water that devotees poured of over Him with each syllable of Ganapathi tarpanam, a text released by Guruji Sri Amritananda Natha a few years ago.

Once tarpanam finished, the turmeric Ganesha was dissolved in the stream behind the temple, and homam commenced. After lunch, the utsava Ganapathi was adorned with a colorful dhoti, and decked out with shimmering jewelry. He was hoisted on the shoulders of delighted devotees shouting, “Arohara!” and taken in procession around the temple, treated to several sweets on the way. The evening concluded with maha prasadam.
Sharada Navarathri, Sept. 28 - Oct. 15

This year, the brahmotsavam’s focus was on different aspects of Mahalakshmi. As per Sri Mathioli Saraswathy’s (Sri Amma) instructions, gooseberries were offered into the homam with each phrase of the Kanakadhara Stotram. In the morning, Aiya also performed the Sri Samputitaa Sri Suktaam interspersed with the Kamalambika mula mantra and the Daridrya Dhwamsini sloka from the Durga Saptapta Sloki. In the evenings, devotees conducted either the Sri Chakra Puja in the sanctum, or the Kanakadhara homam.

Every day, one of the Ashta Lakshmi ashtottras was also chanted during the kalasa puja. Devotees accordingly adorned the main Devi murthi in the garba graham to reflect that day’s Lakshmi. Some of the alankarams included small dolls hugging Devi to represent Santhana Lakshmi, 16 different grains in bowls around the garba graham for Daanya Lakshmi, and gold-colored elephant statues on either side of Devi for Gajalakshmi.

As usual, uttsava murthis were taken in procession for Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati days respectively. On Vijayadasami, the main pradana kalasam, built by smaller kalasams on top of the main clay one and adorned to look like Devi herself, was taken out in procession. About 1000 people turned up for the final day, making the parade around the temple more festive than in previous years. The last three days saw the avarohanam of the flag, theertam to cool down the uttsava murthis, and finally kulirthi, where maha abhishekam was performed to the main murthis and the Maha Meru using at least 10 different items.

Kedara Gowri, Oct. 13 - Nov. 2

As in years past, Kedara Gowri vratham began on Vijayadasami and continued for 21 days. Every day, different people performed the Kedara Gowri puja in front of Lord Ardhanareeswara. A mercury lingam, the main kalasam, and a Ganapathi sat in the mandapam, and this year, 21 different kalasams surrounded them, energetically connected by darba.

On the final day, several devotees poured these kalasams over the Ardhanareeswara murthi, and after an elaborate alankaram, sponsors sat down with puja trays and offered upacharas to Her. This year, 21 individual pieces of 21 different prasadams were offered to Sri Ardhanareeswara on copper plates surrounding the murthi. After the puja, suvasinis offered each other saris adorned with other auspicious items, each seeking the other’s blessings.

Skanda Shashti, Nov. 3 - 8

For six days, each of Subramanya’s six faces was worshipped with a separate sahasranama. Devotees sat around the uttsava murthi and offered flowers and akshadas for each name. On the final day, Muruga symbolically killed the demon, Suran, who represents one’s negative qualities. Aiya used Muruga’s vel to chop off Suran’s head, as well as the banana tree he was hiding behind. Once Muruga returned, devotees bathed him and homam commenced.

One of the highlights of the festival is the interplay between Muruga and his two consorts, Valli and Devasena. He first marries Devasena, and then courts Valli. Finding out that He has done this, Devasena is upset, and He appeases her by offering her sweets. This reflects the intertwining nature of the three main nadas in the body, the ida, pingala, and sushumna. Finally, all three sat together on the mandapam, and archana was performed. After the final arathi, everyone enjoyed maha prasadam.
Karthikai Deepam, Nov. 16

Every year, the temple is illuminated by dozens of lights for Karthika Deepam. This festival commemorates the never-ending beam of light of the Eternal, or Shiva. The story goes that Brahma and Vishnu were challenged to find the end of this light. Brahma got tired of looking and lied, saying that he had found the end. Vishnu, on the other hand, realized that there could be no end to this light.

At the temple, this light was replicated with a wooden Maha Meru placed on the top of the homakundam, adorned with mini lamps. Similar to Thiruvannamalai, eight different shivalingams were also placed around the homakundam in the eight directions. The sponsor performed puja to each one, and everyone had a chance to do namaskaram at each location. All present could light lamps around the entire yajnashala and in the main sanctum, making this one of the most fun festivals to take part in.

Upcoming Events

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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 2014.

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

The next deadline for article submission is February 10, 2014. 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!
The Saint and the Goddess

During the Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion (camp) in early August, Aiya spent time daily with the parent volunteers and discussed various spiritual topics with them. The Sri Chakra thanks Mohan Murali, one of the volunteer dads, for sharing his audio of these talks.

For those of you who don’t know, at 13 years old, Sri Paramacharya was a boy named Swaminathan when he became the 64th Peetadhipathi of the Kanchi mattam. The stories of Paramacharya are well-known—the way he talked, the way he would look at you. If someone came to see him, he would say, “You have come to me for this question, haven’t you?” He could read people’s thoughts like he was reading a book. Amazing personality.

And God knows when he had time to rest or when he had time for anything. Because the schedule of a Shankara mattam is very strict—the Acharya who is in charge has to do a full puja four times a day. Periava would get up at four o’clock in the morning, bathe, and do his daily rituals, and then he would have to do Chandramouleeshwara puja.

There was a small spati-kalingam given to each of the five Shankara mattams by Adi Shankara, who brought them down from the Himalayas. Those crystal lingams are still today, and that is what they do Chandramouleeshwara puja to. Then, morning, noon, and night, Sri Chakra puja has to be done. It’s not just something you can throw together and do in 10 minutes. At the Kanchi mattam where Paramacharya was, Sri Chakra puja was slow and elaborate.

After these pujas were finished, God knows when he had time to meet the devotees and talk to them and listen to their problems. Even people like Indira Gandhi would go and seek his blessings. After he finished the last puja of the day, an aide or assistant in the mattam would come and bring only one handful of puffed rice to his hut.

That is the other thing, Paramacharya lived in an 8-foot by 8-foot hut, with a rope cot and an aluminum plate. That plate would be outside when the aide came with the puffed rice. He would not enter the hut. The aide would throw the handful of puffed rice and whatever landed on the plate was the only thing Paramacharya would eat. That is a true sannyasi, not the brand of imitators who live luxuriously in the name of God.

So that’s all he would eat. No one knew how he had so much energy. When I spoke to the senior people who lived at the mattam, they would tell me that when he went to the river in the morning, they had to run to keep up with him! He would walk so fast—nobody knew how he had that much energy.

There was a famous author named Ra Ganapathi. If you have not read him, read it. He approached Paramacharya and asked to speak to him. Periava automatically knew this fellow was a journalist and knew he wanted to interview him. He said he will speak to him but Ganapathi was not allowed to publish anything he said until after he left the earth. Nobody knew when they had time to do these interviews.

After the first puja, the...
Tantra, Mantra, Yantra

mattam secretary would come carrying stacks of that morning’s newspapers—The Times of India, The Hindu, The New York Times, Boston Globe, Times of London, San Francisco Chronicle, everything. Swami would be seated—he never picked up the papers himself, mind you—and the other fellow would be seated and he would read everything to him, cover to cover. You can imagine how long that would take. And at any given time, Paramacharya was up-to-date about the economic or political or military situation in any country. He knew everything. A phenomenal personality.

After Periava left this world, Ra Ganapathi started writing his books about him called Devathin Kural, or “The Voice of God.” There are already something like seven or nine volumes, and these are huge books. How did he and Paramacharya have time to do any interviews with all the other things Paramacharya had to do? No one knew when he rested.

If you read this books, your mind will be blown—how Periava had so much information nobody knows. He was able to speak, read, and write 23 languages with complete fluency, including Latin, Japanese, Russian, Greek, Mandarin, anything. The Greek royal family—the queen or queen mother came to him and would speak to him with a curtain separating them. She would speak in Greek and he would answer back in Greek. He was unparalleled.

He left this world in 1994 just shy of 100 years old. In 1955, Sri Amma was about 15 years old and Periava was middle-aged. When she sat down in dhyanam, no one could move her. She would become completely rigid and have fainting spells at other time. Her parents became very nervous—they were an orthodox Brahmin family. If she kept behaving like this, who would marry her?

So they took her to see Paramacharya. He wouldn’t look at a lady—he lived as an example of how a sannyasi should live. But he agreed to see this family. Sannyasis carry a dhandam—a staff. They will never go anywhere without it and never put it down. If they put it down it means something earth-shattering is about to happen.

Sri Amma stood in front of him as a teenager, took a bunch of flowers that were nearby and placed them on her head. And she addressed him casually—“Hey, don’t you know who I am?” Her parents were horrified—how could this girl speak like this when the first thing you did in front of Paramacharya was shashta-anga namaskaram? Paramacharya looked up at her, put the dhandam down and did shashta-anga namaskarams to her. And he said, “Amma, only now you have come to see me?” Her parents’ minds were blown out of the water! They asked Periava what was going on here.

He addressed Sri Amma’s mother and said to her that after she was married, her first child passed away. Then she and Sri Amma’s father went on yatras and religious pilgrimages because they found they were not having another child quickly. When they went to Thiruvanaikavil, the mother stood in front of the Devi’s shrine and prayed to her, and then went around the shrine.

As she was going around, she felt like something hit her like an electric shock. She fell, they carried her home and brought the doctor, and the doctor told them she was pregnant. This was all correct. Now Paramacharya asked Sri Amma’s mother, “Who do you think has come? That Akilandeeshwari has come as a purna-avataram.”

So that is Amma. And remember, her 60th and 70th birthdays were celebrated here, not in India. And people have asked me, “What have you done that she wanted to be here?” This is her home because she is the one who did bhoomi puja to this temple. She said this her home; she opened the yajnashala and the kitchen, and cooked the first rice in the kitchen and gave prasadam to everyone.

If you walk with her, you will start thinking she’s an ordinary woman—you have to be observant to catch the snippets of things she will reveal about who she really is. One story—we happened to be at someone’s house one time and I got the chance to cook for her. Amma came into the kitchen after all the curries were done. I put the lids on the patrams already, so they were covered. She came in and said, “Add a teaspoon of salt to this one, some lemon in this one, a pinch of salt in this one.” She said this without even opening the vessels to see what was what!

I asked her later, “Amma, how did you know how to add salt and things to those different curries without even opening them?” She replied, “For thousands of years, I’ve been standing there while people have offered me food. Do you think I come out of the statue and taste everything? I know the food through the smell.”

That gave me goose pimples. I was silent for the rest of the day.
For many years, I avoided learning the Kanakadhara Stotram, although there were various classes and teachers willing to teach it to groups near where I lived. The purpose of chanting this is obvious if you understand basic Sanskrit—"kanaka" is gold, specifically old gold; and "dhara" refers to the act of giving or bestowing.

The origin story dates back to about 2500 years ago when Sri Adi Shankara Bhagavatpada was going around from house to house and begging for alms (bhiksha) in the sannyasi tradition. This was the only way a sannyasi could eat, based on the charity of others—a true sannyasi should not know where his/her next meal is coming from.

He came to the doorstep of a lady who was destitute, but badly wanted to give him something to eat. She searched the whole house and found that the only morsel of food available was one gooseberry (nellikai/amla). She gave this gooseberry to Shankara, he created the Kanakadhara Stotram to beseech Goddess Lakshmi to give this poor lady wealth, and Goddess Mahalakshmi consented and showered golden gooseberries upon her hut.

It was a nice little feel-good story with a happy ending that resulted in millions of people in the forthcoming centuries chanting this stotram to apparently obtain the same results—really valuable fruit.

This tale was supposed to inspire people to chant this thing, which it clearly did, but it left a sour taste in my mouth as, well, a gooseberry.

I felt the purpose of chanting this stotram was antithetical to what I believed in; that the point of worship should be for worship itself and not to get something else—especially not gold. If you’re meant to receive something great from the divine, it would be a natural by-product of prayer; not the purpose for which we pray. I mean, can’t we look around and see the everyday gifts the Mother has showered upon us, and must we keep nagging her for more?

Do we pray to simply get stuff from the grand shopping catalogue we call God, or do we do so in order to spiritually evolve and change ourselves on the molecular level? For me, it was the latter, and so I had no use for Kanakadhara Stotram.

But I, like many others, decided to learn it because it was the theme of this year’s Navarathri festival at the Rajarajeswari Peetam. I couldn’t attend but my guru wanted his students to learn it and that was the only reason I finally made the effort.

Chanting it wedged open the window through which the Devi made me realize the true purpose of this stotram. The fault lay in the glib telling and retelling of the gooseberry story—it left out a lot of details, and made it seem like the goal was greed and material enrichment. In fact, the goal is actually limitless compassion.

Let’s go back to the destitute woman living in the shack—she...
didn’t just lose big in a casino and become poor that week. It was probably a long and painful process, or she may have been poor all her life. And she most likely didn’t just run out of food that morning before Shankara came along, either. It was very likely days before she had a proper meal, and she probably didn’t even know the gooseberry was in the house.

Hunger does strange things to your mind. In university, I was so hungry by the time my morning classes ended that I dreamt about having a bratwurst every time I passed the campus hotdog vendor on the way home—and I’m a vegetarian.

It is said the reason why Goddess Kali wears a skirt made of human arms is to symbolize how, at the end of the day, the acts we commit with our hands lead back to satisfying our baser instincts. That’s why the arms cover her stomach and genitals. We’re all animals, and when it comes to taking care of ourselves and our families’ basic needs, we will ultimately sacrifice everything else depending on where we each draw that line of desperation.

Apparently, this lady was one of the rarer people on this planet who didn’t have a line. A stranger showed up at her doorstep, and despite being starving and weak (many of us would also be quite cranky), she ransacked the house for food and gave this stranger 100 percent of what she found.

How many of us would curse God and our luck for being trapped in that situation where we were forced to slowly starve to death? Many people have turned their backs on God for much, much less; often because they didn’t get the life they planned on, failing to realize that the things they fantasize about may not have been what would have made them truly happy. We often behave like overgrown children, throwing grown-up tantrums at our divine Mother or Father and venomously spitting out the adult equivalent of, “I hate you! You’re a mean mommy!”

This lady didn’t do any of those things, and it didn’t even cross her mind. Her poverty didn’t stop her from exhibiting more generosity than most millionaires. Now, it was that saintliness that touched Shankara so deeply that he felt a level of emotion that sannyasis don’t usually feel. Sannyasis are supposed to be unaffected by this world and the plights of its people. When his mother died, Shankara was famously said to have wondered how a sannyasi deals with the death of his mother. No crying or tears, just, “Hmm, what’s the protocol here?”

When someone that detached was moved by the actions of a stranger, you better believe those actions carried great weight.

The single gesture of this poor lady showed so many holy qualities that Shankara couldn’t help but see Goddess Mahalakshmi in her. After all, what other Hindu deity aside from Lakshmi is depicted as giving 100 percent of what they have without the slightest thought of holding back?

It wasn’t that Shankara thought, “Wow, giving me that gooseberry was sure nice of her… let me put in a good word upstairs.” He saw the Divine Mother in this lady, because who else but a mother would be that self-sacrificing for her child? What’s more, he wasn’t even her child. This lady didn’t know this guy from the next sannyasi but she gave everything she possibly had to a stranger and sobbed about the fact she couldn’t give more!

That nth level of generosity hit a vein in Shankara that probably wouldn’t have been hit in any less extreme of a situation, and in turn, the Kanakadhara Stotram came tumbling out. It’s only in extreme levels of emotions that most of us reach God, and it doesn’t matter what the emotion is—joy, anger, fear, sadness are all the same to Her. Here, it was humility.

The Kanakadhara Stotram came out of a one-two punch—the lady’s incredible act, and Shankara’s ability to recognize the greatness of such an act. Hand in hand, they are compassion and gratitude, two things we don’t have enough of in this world. The golden gooseberries are all the riches of heaven and beyond, which are far more valuable than all the gold on this planet.

We will only be free from this earthly bondage when we are able to give to a stranger the way we would give to ourselves, for that will show we truly see every organism as one. That is self-realization and that is the true gift of the Kanakadhara Stotram.
In the last Sri Chakra, the authors explained the relationship between mantras, scripture, numbers and sounds, which work together to unlock different layers of meaning in the ancient texts. They continue their explanation with several more examples.

Sri Bhaskararaya has used these codes in his commentary on Lalitha Sahasranamam, while explaining the name ‘an+aadi+ nidhanaa‘. He splits the name into ‘an+aadi+ nidhanaa‘. Nidhana means death. He chose to decode the word ‘aadih’ which is prefixed with the code. ‘aa’ is zero since it is a lone vowel, ‘da’ is 8—reading them together will result in 80. He then explains that there are 80 types of deaths elaborating with the help of Shiva/Linga Purana and ‘an’ is the negation of these. Since Sri Devi is eternal there is death and hence no birth.

The same is referred in another name’s commentary—mRtyu taaru kuThaarikaa.’ Here he takes the word taaru and decodes it to get ‘ta’ equal to 8 and ‘ra’ equal to 2; on reading them as per practice will get 28. These 28 types of mrthyu are explained and also he refers to the other above said name which includes these 28 also. The remaining 52 are in Shiva/Linga Purana.

Another name in Lalitha Sahasranamam—shuddha vidya-aankuraakaara dvija pankti dvayojvalaa’ can be seen through this code. The 32 teeth of Sri Devi are described here. Suddha vidyaa is the 32nd in the line of tattvas. Hence that number is inferred. This number is split into two, likened to the two cotyledons of a sprout. So, we can infer two sets of sixteen each. They are likened to the dvija. Here the word dvija can be decoded with this, ‘j’ is eight and twice of eight as said by ‘dvi’ is 16.

A variation of this code is used by Bhaskararaya while explaining about the ‘chalaakshara sutras.’ He says the vowel will point to the number of syllables in the particular name and the consonant to the number of names with this number of syllable. For example if we find ‘khi chah ghu’ in the sutra, using the said method, this will mean ‘kh’ two names with ‘I’ three syllables, next will be ‘cha’—two names ‘with ah’ the16 syllables (half of the anushtub meter), next will be ‘gh’ four names with ‘u’ six syllables.

Sri Mahesanatha in his natha navaratna malika has identified the breath with Sri Guru. He decodes the number of breaths from the last line of the stotra ‘sanmaar gam matta mayooramiide.’ When read with the katapayaadi code, this will reveal the number thus: ‘matta-mayoora’ will translate into numbers as 5, 6, 5, 1 and 2.
{quote}

When reversed, this will point to the number 21565. Again ‘maarga’ when decoded will point to numbers 5 and 3, reverse of this is 35. Adding both these numbers will give the total breath in a day 21, 600.

In another code, there are certain groups which have universal number of members in them. Paksha/stana/srungra will mean 2—there are two fortnights; one waxing and one waning. Stana means breasts of a woman, they are two in number. Srungra means horns and there are two horns in all animals.

Netra will point to both two and three, since we have two physical eyes and one is the eye of wisdom. Agni will point to the number three. Agni is tretraagni. Veda will point to number four, since there are four Vedas. Shara (arrows) will point to number five—Sri Lalithamba and Manmatha (cupid) each have five flowery arrows.

Ruthu/rasa will point to number six—since there are six ruthus in a year, tastes (rasa) are six in number. Rishi will point to the number seven; traditionally there are sapta rishis—seven sages. Gaja, Naga will point to the number eight—we find elephants or snakes in such numbers in the puranas.

Vasu will point to number eight, there are astavasu. Rudra will point to the number eleven since they are so, aadityaa will refer to twelve since their number is such. Manu will point to fourteen, since they are such in number. Raja will point to sixteen since traditionally there are sixteen kings in the bharata varsham.

Using the above data lets us examine some more codes in stotras and tantras.

In the Parasurama kalpasutra the numbers of the guru mandala devatas are numbered as ‘muni veda naaga sankhyaa.’ Thus decoding with the above guide we find the divaugha will have seven, the siddhaugaha will have four and manavaugha will have eight gurus.

The third and fourth avaranas of the Sri Chakra are numbered as ‘naagadala’ and ‘manvasram’—as per the above it will mean eight petals and fourteen triangles. Further, the seventh and eighth are numbered as ‘vasvanala kona’ is also mentioned, which is translated to eight triangles and seven triangles.

Sri Bhaskararaya Acharya was a famed and revered Sri Vidya upasaka from centuries past.

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Sri Bhaskararaya uses this type of code break in the commentary of the name srungra rasa sampoornaa. Here sruna is two and rasa is six, hence twice six, which is 12. Ara means petals. Thus twelve petals are seen in the anaahata chakra, Hence the anaahata dvani is the real meaning referred to in this name.

In the Trailokhya Mohana Kavacham we find a vidya which has ‘netra vedaatmakair varnaih yutaa’. Using the code we find numbers two and four, reversing them will derive the number 42, the number of syllables in that mantra.

In the dhyana sloka of Naabhi Vidya said above further we find a reference to ‘raaja vidyaa sthanaa.’ When decoded with the above guide, it will point to the highest mantra Sri Sodashakshari vidyaa and two will point to the two variations, namely Mahashodasi and para shodasi.

This is a small beginning from which larger perspectives can be unfolded. I happily affirm my love and pranams to the entire Gurumandala, for having graced this little child in sharing this information. The journey starts now for our experience.
We all love hanging out with Aiya, drinking tea, and sometimes getting some guidance on how to travel down our own paths to the Devi. Here’s an excerpt from a talk where he addressed questions about Navaavarana puja.

Q. What is Navaavarana puja?

Aiya: There are nine curtains, and behind those curtains, there is a light. Between you and the Devi are these nine curtains. Unless you lift each veil up, you will not be able to see the light. So while you are doing the Navaavarana puja, you are lifting each curtain until it reveals who you really are.

Q. What is the proper way to prepare for Navaavarana puja?

Aiya: Whatever patrams, fruits, and other items you need, from washing to arranging them, you should do it yourself. The more people are involved in preparation of the puja, the more difficult it will be for you to concentrate when performing it. Why? Because whatever thought processes are going through their heads when preparing will go into the puja items. This is why you do the preparations yourself and do your japam while doing it. Your mind will not go out of control.

If you’re getting others to help with the preparations, they better be chanting internally as well. That’s the only way to avoid contaminating the puja, but you can’t be sure what’s going on in others’ minds. That’s why you do it yourself.

Q. What if we can concentrate already—do we still have to stay quiet and do japam?

Aiya: The Devi gave you five things in your body—skin, musculature, liquid tissue (blood), bones, bone marrow. Take these things away and only the central nervous system is left. All the changes that occur first occur in the plasma, because it travels everywhere in the body. It enters and exits every system. While you are preparing viseshargyam for the external puja, you chant to prepare the viseshargyam for the internal puja.

Q. Why do you make viseshargyam in a certain way here, and why do other people make it differently?

Aiya: What you pour in the viseshargyam patram doesn’t really matter as much as the mantras that go in it. You can just use plain milk if that’s what you want. If someone gave you bread and cheese to eat morning, noon, and night for 90 days, how would you feel? That’s why we change up the viseshargyam for the Devi, and that’s why it’s good if different people prepare it in different ways.

Q. How did you find your formula for preparing viseshargyam?

Aiya: Back in the 1970s, there was no Internet and the only computers that existed took up three floors of a building. All I had was books. People would send me old books from back home to Zambia, and I gleaned what I could from them. When I came to this country, I adjusted for what ingredients I could find locally.
The biography of Sri Amritananda Saraswati—who is affectionately known as Guruji to most of Aiya’s students—was penned in Telugu by Smt. Nethi Seeta Devi. These chapters were translated into English and graciously submitted to the Sri Chakra by Venkateshwar Babu from Philadelphia in an ongoing series.

Devipuram

It may be mind boggling to comprehend the Divine Mother’s game plan and the players she chooses. Blessed are those souls who get the opportunity to play a vital role in her plans.

For someone like Guruji, who was never serious about God, worship, or meditation, questions arose as to what made him successfully perform Sri Yajnam in such a grand scale. What exactly happened? What was the power behind him? For someone who was determined not to think of God, religion, or creation until the age of 47 years, how did all this happen?

It was the grace of his Guru, his reverend master bestowing Poorna deeksha and reincarnating him as “Amritanandanatha Saraswathi.” That, along with his self-evolution were no mere coincidences, but the Divine Mother also showered him with her love and grace.

Fondly called “Guruji” at home and abroad, Prahlada Shastri continued with his quest in seeking the truth by sincerely following his master’s divine ordinances on a regular basis.

Accompanied by the Putrevu brothers, he visited Naarapadu village for the first time. Naarapadu village was about 20 miles away from Visakhapatnam. This entire area resembled a small forest. The donated land and all the land in its vicinity was covered with shrubs, weeds, and bushes. There was hardly any human presence in this area. Lack of water and electricity compounded the complexity of the task on hand.

Except for a few shepherds and the village head making an occasional visit, it was extremely difficult to ever find any humans in that neck of the woods. Yet this place surrounded by hillocks and dense forest provided peace and tranquility, along with a sense of mystique and aura.

Guruji pondered, “Who would come all the way to this deserted place if and when the temple is built?”

But at the same time Guruji very well knew that this place was the outcome (or gift from Divine Mother) upon the conclusion of Devi Yajnam. So there was no way he could simply rule it out.

Since then it was Guruji’s
ritual to spend every weekend at Naarapadu. Every Saturday and Sunday after finishing his morning chores and breakfast, he would venture out to Naarapadu along with his lunch in a carrier box.

Upon reaching this place, he would venture out walking all over the location, hillocks and anywhere he could find a walkway to explore this pristine virgin forest land. Guruji never gave up since he knew the Divine Mother would show him the way one day.

During one of the exploration jaunts going north, Guruji happened to stumble upon a 9 feet wide by 6 feet deep triangular shaped pit oozing water from underneath. Guruji looked inside and found a Shivalingam inside. He drank the water and it tasted divine and delicious.

Finding a pit in the shape of a female vagina with spring water, and finding a Shivalingam in it appeared amazing to Guruji. With no further thought or any hesitation, Guruji started chanting Lalitha Sahasranamam immediately. In the process, even without his knowledge, Guruji delved into a deep meditative state.

Guruji was able to visualize what happened over 250 years ago at the same location. There was the presence of a very large congregation of saints performing a grand yajna chanting Saama Veda. If performing a yajna is considered great, then performing a yajna chanting Saama Veda is considered even grander due to the epic proportion and participation by this massive ocean of pious saints!

Guruji’s inner conscience could clearly hear the Divine Mother stating, “I am the one and the only one! I am here in the shape of a yoni. I am the Kaamakhya! The Shivalingam you found here is self-evolved (swayambhu). Hence forth Lord Shiva is the protector of this sacred territory. Build a Lord Shiva temple on the hill top. Those who drink the water from this sacred pond will be rid of all diseases and ailments. Those who pray to me with utmost devotion will be blessed with everything they wish for!”

In addition, the Divine Mother instructed, “Dig three feet deep within this triangle, and you will find a Sri Chakra made of five precious metals. Consecrate this divine Sri Chakra at the nadir of the Sri Chakra Temple you are about to build. In addition, it is essential to consecrate Navaavarana Devathas and KhadgaMaala Devathas in their respective assigned positions.

“Along with them, following the prescribed texts, Ganesha, Surya, Shiva, and Vishnu Yantras and Sri Rajarajeshwari Devi must be consecrated. Please make sure that all deities bear human feminine form. In coming days, I will let you know how they should look like, and what attributes they need to possess.”

With utmost humility and reverence, and following the Divine Mother’s instructions, Guruji dug three feet deep, and within this triangle, he was able to find the Sri Chakra.

Following the Divine Mother’s instructions, Guruji constructed a Lord Shiva Temple on the top of the hill with his accumulated savings. Upon completion of the temple and subsequent consecration, Guruji’s elder sister, Mrs. Suryalakshmi, was assigned to perform religious rituals and look after the upkeep of this temple. Guruji was able to join her in these activities every weekend. Guruji’s sister never ever felt lonely, as she kept herself occupied all the time performing abhisheka to Lord Shiva, or engaged in the upkeep of the temple and its surroundings.

One fine day, a little girl in a white dress appeared from nowhere in front of Mrs. Suryalakshmi and said “Are you not afraid to stay
There are certain places, it is said, that will facilitate a soul to attain mukthi (liberation) after this one lifetime. For example, if a person happens to die within the city limits of Kashi, they will get moksha. Also, if they get final dharshanaam of the Nataraja murthi in Chidambaram on Ardhra dharshanam day, it will give them moksha after this life.

Thirdly, there is being born in Thiruvarur that will assure liberation, and simply thinking of Anna-malai at the moment of one’s death. These four places are commonly mentioned when talking about holy places that will liberate someone from the cycle of birth and death.

While volunteers dress the Devi each week during the Saturday puja, Aiya usually tells the crowd a short story about some aspect of the divine. This story is about Pundalikan of Pandharipur, who was a great devotee of Sri Krishna.

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But there are other similar places that are little known.

One such place is in the state of Maharashtra in India, in a tiny area called Pandharipur. Krishna was one day speaking to the holy sage Narada, and was talking about his devotees. He said to Narada that he has countless people visit him in Dwaraka every day, and they are no doubt devoted to him. But at the end of the visit, they always want something material.

Krishna asked Narada when he was going to find someone who would simply ask for bhakti and everlasting blessings. Narada said there is one such person like that, in the town of Pandharipur. So Krishna took his wife, Rukmini, with him and set off to visit that town. They arrived outside the home of a young man named Pundalikan some time in the afternoon, and were expecting to be invited in.

Moreover, it was pouring rain when they arrived. Krishna and Rukmini stood outside the house and Krishna shouted, “Pundalikan! This is Krishna, king of Dwaraka! I have come to visit you!” Pundalikan appeared in the doorway but to Krishna’s surprise, he told him to be quiet and stay outside. Krishna and Rukmini were puzzled.

Usually, people would usher Krishna into their home with great fanfare but he didn’t understand why someone who Narada told him was a great devotee would behave in this way. He yelled out again to Pundalikan but was again to remain outside. Then, Pundalikan ran out with a few bricks, placed them on the ground, and told Krishna and Rukmini to stand on them so they wouldn’t be standing in water from the rain.

After a few more minutes, Pundalikan ran out again and fell on Krishna’s feet, asking him to forgive him. The reason for his strange actions was because his elderly parents had just had their afternoon meal and were resting. Every day, Pundalikan would gently fan them until they fell asleep.

Krishna was touched by this young man’s devotion to his parents and said he had never met anyone who would stick so steadfastly to his dharma. He offered to give Pundalikan a boon. Pundalikan said that every morning, he carries his parents four kilometres to the Bhima river to bathe them, and it is quite tiring. He would really like if Krishna made the river flow right in front of his house.

Krishna granted him his wish, and the Bhima river instantly curved to the area where they were standing, to form a crescent moon shape. To this day, anyone who bathes in that part of the river will instantly have their sins washed away.

Then, Krishna pointed out to Pundalikan that this wish was still for his parents and not really for him. He prompted him to ask another boon. Pundalikan asked that Krishna should always remain in that spot so that all devotees could worship him.

Krishna then naturally formed a murthi of himself that is standing in Pandharipur to this day. It is a swayambu murthi, meaning it is not manmade—it is a figure that appeared naturally, or by divine intervention. Dharshanam of this murthi will grant a person liberation after this lifetime.

Also connected to that is a sixth way of getting moksha—being cremated in Dwaraka.

To today, the Bhima river curves in the shape of a crescent moon.
Sri Gurubhyo Namaha