



Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY



Blossom 9
Petal 1
October 2005



OUR THOUGHTS

By Kamy Ramaswamy

Dear Devotees,

I've always thought the best things arose out of curiosity, although the more negative among us seem to believe it's what killed the cat. Curiosity, mixed with a little intelligence and bravery, is what gets our questions answered and it's what makes us smarter and bolder in the end. It fuels our need for learning.

A hunger for answers about a host of topics was also what fueled the revival of *The Sri Chakra* magazine. It started with Vijitha and I sitting around in the temple *yajnasala* on a Saturday night, throwing questions back and forth at each other that we were too embarrassed to bother Aiya with. These were not only questions about spirituality, but also how to reconcile our spirituality with the pressures and culture of living in the West.

Just how damaging (if at all) are egg-mixed foods to one's body? If gold is so important for Hindus, why is a state of detachment from material objects so valued? If social drinking is a no-no, what is the deal with the *viseshargyam* in Sri Chakra puja? (I hear Bagalamukhi puja requires a straight shot of brandy!)

Maybe it was the late hour that contributed to the philosophical turn of the conversation, but we knew others in the temple would be just as curious as we were about the answers to these questions. If you know the answers to these things, don't tell us—write an article about it instead.

It's the one thing I appreciate about Catholicism, although most of my Catholic friends are struggling Catholics, at best—even if they're not fans of the religion, at least they have been taught standard answers to the questions that outsiders are bound to ask. Meanwhile, how many of us Hindus know the scientific answer to why women shouldn't enter a temple while menstruating? What about the importance of kum-kum, or what it's made of? Any guesses as to why we wear it on the forehead?

We're not only curious about answers, folks—we need them.

Abhi, Vijitha and I were honored when Aiya told us to revive his magazine, *The Sri Chakra*. We'll do our best to let the ideas keep this thing afloat, but we need contributors to write some articles and put those ideas into fruition!! And if any of you kids are interested, we're hoping to print a section called the Kids Corner with things written by you, and for you.

This issue is all about firsts. Here, you'll find stories from a plethora of devotees on their personal 'firsts' with the Rajarajeswari temple.

Look for us on the temple website every other month and keep sending your articles and story ideas to sri_chakra_mag@shinyfeet.com. I know, Aiya's blessed feet are more dusty than shiny, but I thought I'd try to appease him with that e-mail address.

We would like to thank the following people for their endless support and help in reviving this magazine: Aiya, Dharshan Logendran, Dinesh Kumar, Karunanathan Jeyakumar, Kathy Allen, Muralee Mahathevan, Soumitra Sengupta, and all the contributing writers!



SEPTEMBER

NEWSLETTER

Past Month Events

Aadi Pooram, Sept. 7

By Kamyā Ramaswamy

Aadi pooram is one of the special events at the temple that finds its charm in the female-centred tone of the celebrations. Every year in August we celebrate the day that Devi became a woman—the day is full of snacks, and gifts for the females in attendance.

The celebrations began simultaneously with the morning puja on August 7, and concluded by lunch. This year's programme was slightly different due to the presence of Mookambika Devi (in the South-East Agni corner beside utsa Ganapathi) and Vana Durga in front of the flagpole.

In front of Mookambika was a huge spread of snacks. Vana Durga was sitting on a rolling table in the centre of the temple during the puja. In front of the table was her bathing tub, and everyone was able to pour a cup of milk on her and a thumb-sized Ganapathi statue.

What was interesting was that there was kusha grass in the milk. The temple was aptly packed—by the time everyone there had finished pouring a cup of milk on her, the morning puja was nearly over. The abhishekam easily lasted one hour.

After the abhishekam, they dressed Devi up, picked her up and started the procession around the temple. Aiya explained why she was going around the temple—in the old days, a girl who had just become a woman was taken through the village by her family because it was a good way to show that she was of marriageable age.

On this day, the morning and afternoon pujas were almost congealed into one—during the procession outside, the volunteers inside replaced the sannidhi fruits and lauched into the Lalita Sahasranamam.

The sannidhis gods were given naivedyam and Aiya performed the bali puja, after which the official puja was

over. However, gifts for all the women in attendance had yet to be given out.

The gifts were sponsored by Anita's family (from Montreal), partly in celebration of her 16th birthday. Anita distributed all the presents in front of Vana Durga. They consisted of a blouse piece, a turmeric root, kum-kum, and a lime. First they called all the little girls, who hadn't reached maturity yet. Then they called all the kanya girls who were still unmarried. Next, they called the "recently marrieds," who had been wed for 5 years or less. Three sumangalis received the remaining bundles, after which the function was complete and lunch was served.

Varalakshmi Vratam, Sept. 19

By Dinesh Kumar

Varalakshmi Vratam or Sumangali Pooja is performed in the Southern Part of India. This pooja is performed by married women for the health and long life of their husbands.

This year, on the 19th of August, this pooja was performed in our temple. This year 54 women performed the pooja themselves. A big lamp was decorated like Devi, and Amma performed the pooja to that lamp. Each of the Suvasini's who had already registered for the pooja were seated around the lamp, which was placed over the homa kunda on a platform. Each of the suvasini's were provided with a complete Pooja Set and a lamp with Devi's face in silver. All 54 Sumangalis did Shodasa upachara pooja to their individual lamps after Aiya chanted their Gotrams, names, and Nakshatrams.

After the pooja the women tied the sacred thread around their right wrist. Aiya and Amma then blessed the Suvasinis. The suvasinis were given the Pooja set that they used to perform the pooja to encourage them to continue the blessed ritual in their own homes.

Ganapathi Chaturthi, Sept. 7

By Abhi Somaskanda

This year's Chaturthi marked the beginning of many beautiful ceremonies at the newly built deck for the Ganapathi behind the temple. Performing the first yagna in that homa kunda since the Chandi homa before the temple was fully built, Aiya spared no offering (2780 aahuthis to be exact!)

The festival's sponsors, Pravin and Gratus, sat around the homa kunda with Aiya, along with their family and friends. The puja commenced with kalasa sthabana and a Ganapathi Tarpanam prescribed by Guruji that allowed all the devotees present to sprinkle tirtham on a small, hand-shaped, tumeric Ganapathi.

Aiya continued with an elaborate homa, while everyone present circled around the deck offering a few of the 1008 modakas at a time. This was followed by a grand cirumambulation of the temple for the final aahuthi, carried by Prasanna.

Afterwards, the abhisheka poured on for more than a half an hour, with milk, pancha amrta, and turmeric water being offered to both the outside Ganapathi, the utsava Ganapathi, who joined in the festivities at the deck, and the Astra Devata. The installed kalasa was taken around the temple in typical Saturday pooja style - umbrella, torches, and all - by Gratus, and then finally showered on the Ganapathis.

After lunch, the devotees worked hard to create a colorful background decoration for the procession, and the evening commenced at seven with shodasa upachara puja intertwined with Ganapathi bhajans. The procession was blessed with a warm night and plenty of devotees. The utsava Ganapathi enjoyed a whirl of laughter and dancing around the temple.

After giving Bali and offering naivedyam down at the deck once more, the evening came to an end.

Upcoming Events

Sharadha Navaratri, Oct 3

By Kamy Ramaswamy

Navarathri 2005 will pick up where the 2004 left off. Last year, the celebrations invoked and installed the 10 Dasamahavidyas into the homa kundam, where they have been residing for the past year. The Mahavidyas are 10 tantric aspects of Devi, among which our Devi Rajarajeshwari is one. As part of this group, she is known as Lalita, or Sodasi. The nine other devis around her range from the most 'ugram' renditions of the female form to the more 'sattvik' ones. Worshipping any of these devis as one's 'ishta-devata' will bring one to moksha, although the manner and the length of time involved in doing this will vary.

After invoking each of the Dasamahavidyas last year, the temple will focus each day of Navarathri 2005 on chanting the sahasranamams of each devi. Each of the 10 devis will be worshipped on each of the 10 days. The chanting of the namams will be accompanied by the corresponding homam for each Devi. The Dvaja Arohanam commences on Monday, Sept. 26. Navarathri starts this year on Monday, Oct. 3, and concludes on Wednesday, Oct. 12. Please encourage your family and friends to attend the festivities!

Chaturthi Pictures



The sponsors all pray as Aiya shows the pancha aarathi to the yagna.



Gratus carrying the Kalasam around the deck.

In Two Months

The next issue of the Sri Chakra Magazine

Devi willing, the next issue of the Sri Chakra Magazine will be up on the temple's website (www.srividy.org) by December 1st. The next issue will focus on the topic of "Food and Drink." Such topics as "To egg or not to egg," "Ideal foods to offer for naivedya," and the level of sadhana at which none of these matter, will be discussed.

If you are interested in writing on any of these topics, please email us at the address given in the front of the magazine (sri_chakra_mag@shinyfeet.com). We are also looking for anyone who would like to submit or take photographs to go along with the topics.

If you would like to contribute, the deadline for submissions (photographs and/or articles) is Monday, November 21. Please be a part of this effort and we look forward to seeing your contributions and suggestions to help make this magazine the best it can be!

Sri Gurubhyo Namah!

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TEMPLE FIRSTS

They say that a first impression is a lasting impression. Based on what these devotees share about their first experiences with Sri Chaitanyananda (Aiya), Sri Gnanamba (Amma), and the temple, it's not just one of those things people say. From Gratus's honest disclosures, to Aparna's dream-like recount, each devotee has experienced the infinite grace of Devi. For a few of them it was all about letting go of fears, shame, and bad experiences, and for others it was finding generosity, humility, and finally coming back home. Please enjoy their stories and remember your own first memories of Devi.



Aparna's Story



I often recall my first meeting with Aiya like a dream. Everything was perfect, and seemingly predestined. My seven years as a monastic in the Sarada Convent in India had provided me with a foundation in puja, bhakti, and kundalini yoga, as well as the confidence to pursue any avenue towards the goal of God Realization. But it was truly fortuitous that I was brought to Aiya for the first time in the company of four dear friends on the occasion of Navaratri 1996.

The pilgrimage from Philadelphia to Rochester was originally planned as a soul-saving trip for our friend Bruce, a man who had the insight to know that he needed a mantra to pursue spiritual life more seriously. Another friend, Eric (known more popularly as Kalidas) and I had done an inventory of available gurus on the planet and decided to introduce him to Aiya. I had not yet met Aiya myself, but the stories that Kalidas shared about this householder guru impressed me. I expect a guru to walk that line between humility and spiritual power, and Aiya seemed to be the "genuine article".

Yet the anticipation of meeting a holy man for the first time was immense, and so it was an added blessing that destiny brought together my friends Steve, Kathy, Kalidas and Bruce - the innermost link of my spiritual family whom I now refer to as "The Philly Sangha". We each approached the

journey with reverence, and we were each rewarded by Devi's infinite grace.

When we arrived at 33 Park Circle, Aiya was immediately and incredibly attentive. Amma fed us, and I was sooo struck by their Indian hospitality. I responded with unabashed enthusiasm and excitement. The questions and answers flowed, the conversation was lively, and even though it was the third day of Navaratri, there were few visitors around. I was never made to feel that we were anything less than welcomed guests.

Since there was time before evening puja, Aiya asked if he could show us the newly acquired temple property in Rush. I didn't know why we had to get back in the van to see an empty lot - I had been through the California-New-Age-Circuit and I was a bit cynical about anyone wanting to build another temple. But I did enjoy the vast landscape and the apple trees and I thought that even if he never built anything there, it was a beautiful place to worship God.

When we arrived back to his house, Aiya talked to us for a bit longer in the basement before we all prepared for puja. The five of us sat together against the back wall, facing the Devi. Others arrived and sat in front of us, but I barely noticed. I wasn't there to "witness" the puja, or even participate, but rather to ride the waves of the energy which the pujari generated by sacred ritual. I wrapped myself in a white prayer shawl and chanted my

Ramakrishna mantra through much of the evening. It was a relief to feel the waves of blissful energy rejuvenate my soul. Months later, Aiya told us that he saw the Devi dancing on our laps that night - and perhaps that is why he gave us mantra diksha that evening, graciously planting the seeds for Devi consciousness within us. For that, I will always be grateful and in his debt. And so I offer this testimonial at the guru's feet.

By Aparna Hasling

Chitra Mahendran's Story



We came to Zambia in February 1972, and we were put up in a hotel, and the first person we ran into was Aiya. As usual, he was doing his type of charity work—collecting money for somebody's funeral. That day, itself, we spoke to him. It wasn't just that he was from Sri Lanka, like us... there was something about him that drew us both to him. Once we found out he was having bhajans and pujas, I was very interested. At about October 1972, it was a much closer relationship. When Saru was born, I literally looked after her because Amma used to go to work and she left her with me. I had the privilege of being able to clean up and cook for the puja when Amma couldn't do it. We became more like a family than just friends

In Zambia, there was a group of flats there, and we were living in opposite flats. Fridays, we never missed one event. Bhajans, we never missed on Thursday. Each day we went, the crowds got bigger and the pujas got more intense with Lalita Sahasranamam. Friday pujas were always at Aiya's place, and bhajans were at different places, but Aiya always conducted them. The Lalita Sahasranamam was very intense there, especially when Amma was ill. I think it was the power of the chanting—because it was done with so much faith, that she got better soon.

Once Guruji came to Zambia in 1979, we both went to Guruji's place and Aiya was able to take me around the area—Aiya received diksha in October 1979 and I received it on Baba's birthday,

November 23. At the time that Guruji gave me diksha, he also gave me a Balatripurasundari vigraham.

Even after Aiya came to America and we were still in Africa, every time our contract was over and we had some vacation, we always came to visit Aiya. We would stay with him for at least one month. One time in 1988, I came when I was so ill—I didn't think I would recover. But just sitting with Aiya and Amma in the shrine room, I got better right away.

Aiya left Zambia for the States in 1980. We left for Botswana a month later, but we kept in touch over the phone. In 1991, we came here. I think it was 1991 or 1992 that Aiya gave us a peetam. He called it Krauncheshwari Peetam, or the "North American" peetam.

Even when I have become ill over the last few years, when I was really bad, Aiya put a little Devi pendant on me to protect me. At this point, I feel I may be able to go a little more often to the temple. Of course, winter is out, but when the weather is good, I'm hoping to come much more often!

I think Aiya's kindness makes a difference and his generous spirit is an inspiration. I'm so thankful to him for not only imparting information, but also a passion for learning and growing.

By Mrs. Chitra Mahendran



Gratus (What's his last name?)

I love Aiya and Amma very much. Other than that there is very little that matters and even less that needs to be said.

But for those who care to read on, here it goes.

I met Aiya first in 1999. He came to attend some conference on Hinduism in Toronto. The first thing, and maybe the only thing, I noticed was that Aiya was the only one without a beard.

I saw Aiya again two years later. I was in Jeya anna's car, in the back seat. Aiya turned around and said to me, "we all have to die sometime." That was the first thing that Aiya ever told me—if that seems a little odd to you, then it is because you don't know that we were going to a funeral at the time. Later that day, going the other way on the same highway, Aiya initiated me. I still recall the difficulties of putting together pancadasi in my head. I retained it for about two seconds. Luckily, Kumaran wrote it down and gave it to me. I still remember how I kept that piece of paper for about a month. For about two weeks, I was actually chanting it wrong. I am probably still chanting it wrong, but no paper can help me now.

I made my first trip to the temple in 2002. It was the first day of Navaratri. I walked in and looked in a little confused as to why all these people were in that room. Then I realized, that room IS the temple. And what a temple it is. My visit to this temple was my second visit ever to any temple. I have since been to many temples, and all of them pale in comparison. Small but powerful, to quote our campers from last year. Of course this temple has since grown, but it has grown with style.

Devi, as I doubt any of the regular visitors would disagree, is very much alive here. However, what I have learned is that whatever is in that statue is more like an answering machine, where those who come can leave a message and Devi will get back to them. She is out and about, and you could never tell where, and/or in whom. Sure, she may assume an individual body, but more importantly she jumps from person to person. As if she is experiencing them, thereby granting them an experience of her.

During my first visits I often took offence at certain things that I saw people do. It had nothing to do with the way they did puja, cause I still don't really know how to do puja. It didn't have anything to do with the way they talked to me—since everybody here has

put up with me quite happily. It was more little things that I noticed. It would be just one person that day, and I would notice that person do something odd—something that I would expect elsewhere, but something that I would not expect from someone at a temple. I would leave with that impression: why did that person not see the lack of, let's say decency, in doing what they had done?

On my next visit, I would have a startling experience of the same person doing something only a saint would do. That person would do something with such compassion and with such love and kindness, that it would genuinely surprise me and I would simply have to scratch the previous image from my mind. However, without fail, I would find someone else doing something

impressed by the fact that I did more than one Lalita Sahasranamam a day, even before I was initiated. Furthermore, they started commenting on the fact that I was so lucky to obtain pancadasi and other mantras even before coming to the temple. By the time I came here I was convinced that I was special. To add fuel to the fire, I found some quite odd and entirely untrue stories had been circulating regarding the strength of my tapas. So it was, in retrospect, no surprise that I was full of it. I know now that my great friends, Pravin and Kumaran, who can tell no story without adding their own little embellishments, had in my absence laid it on real thick. I feel sorry for the people who actually believed them.

Naturally, Devi would not allow pride of that level to stay for too long. As time went on and I continued to come to the temple, I realized I had no clue, just like most others. The pride that had been there turned into a secret shame. Secret, because no one really knew how proud I had been, and now no one knew how ashamed I was of having been that proud—well, I guess it's not a secret anymore.

Shame comes in many ways. I don't know which one's worse—fear or shame. I guess it would be really bad if one was afraid to be ashamed, or ashamed to be afraid. Or maybe that's the solution? I don't know.

Things have changed since I have come here. I have certainly lost interest in the ritual portion of the temple. It seems more like an obstacle that must be overcome so that breakfast time can turn into lunch time. My attention span is so short, I could fall asleep doing pancha-upacara puja. Give me a seat, and I will turn it into a bed. So it is no wonder that I do not attend Vish uncle's "way too long for me" Chandi Homams, and even during Saturday puja I spend most of the time just drinking tea in the hallway.

I love the food. Even Amma's sambar (that has come under heavy criticism in recent times) is a great meal after those long "will it ever end" pujas. I love coming to the temple, in all honesty, just to drink tea and eat food.

I hope Devi will continue to overlook my shortcomings, misgivings and ill-conceived intentions, so that I may continue to come here to drink tea and eat food, and maybe play a little volleyball...

So that this looks like it was written by a disciple, let me add: "Sri Gurubhyo Namah."

Gratus's



Story

quite peculiar; and without doubt, the next time I came, the very person who somehow managed to offend me would again seem like the most magnificent person here. It took me a while, but I chose to no longer judge these people or anyone else.

As I had said before, Devi jumps from person to person. It was she who made those persons do what they did, both before and after. I doubt it was solely to teach me—it was simply a part of a play she puts on. It helped me grow in the way I described above, and I am sure it helped others who were involved.

Pride was a big factor. I personally consider pride and jealousy to be trivial obstacles compared to fear and shame. But at the time I had first come to the temple, more than afraid or shameful, I was proud. I would like to say it wasn't entirely my fault but it probably was. Somehow, people started being

All jokes aside, the first time I met Aiya was nightmarish. I was 11 years old when my parents and a few of our relatives carted us off for hours and hours in a car in December 1993. After almost an eternity of slipping in and out of consciousness in a rusted station-wagon, we arrived in the middle of nowhere. All I could see were metres of snow and a few sticks here and there, which lay sprawled in front of a cozy-looking house. This, as I found out years later, was 33 Park Circle.

It was a much more blistery and scary winter than I'd ever seen before, partly because I didn't know where I was. All I knew was that people were crammed into this tiny room with a bunch of gods in it. And they kept doing namaskarams to this one guy who was doing the puja. I was bored. I couldn't wait to get out of there and go home.

Much to my chagrin, we went back to the sticks the following summer. I started to like the puja guy a little more, because he seemed to be good at answering my questions about Hinduism. Somehow, getting answers made me a little more interested in my

culture. As I sat in the library by myself one evening before the Friday puja, I felt it—a sudden desire erupted in me to chant the Lalita Sahasranamam. I'd never looked at it before, but I felt I needed nothing more than to learn it, and to learn it fast.

Later that evening, my brother Kanna and I were tired even when the puja was still going strong. I was glad that my amma understood and showed us where we could go to bed, but I wasn't pleased shortly after when she woke us up again. Apparently, the puja guy wanted to give us something.

But after we dragged ourselves down there, he just told me and Kanna to repeat a few words after him! I felt ripped off. I got out of bed for this? But we kept saying those few words everyday for the next several years. Eventually, I realized we had gotten mantra diksha. It wasn't until I was 21 that I found out how powerful those few words were—chanting them was what altered Kanna's fate over the following years and prevented his pancreas from disintegrating like it was originally supposed to.

We all slept that night in the library, which, as I recall, had no windows and no lights. I woke up in the middle of the night to pitch blackness, unable to breathe, and I realized I was having an asthma attack. Luckily, I passed out again due to sheer fear, but later came to the conclusion that this puja guy couldn't be all THAT holy if I nearly died in his basement. I was pretty sure I would never go back again.

Fast-forward eight years to June 29, 2002. I was accommodating my amma's wish for an anniversary present—she wanted to make a trip to some temple in Rochester, which I could vaguely remember was run by that puja guy. She had been going for years, all the while hitching rides with other people. She wanted to go at least once with her family so I figured I could spare one Saturday for her.

As soon as we came in, we saw Aiya, who asked me to tie my hair back. I don't quite remember what else happened that day, other than a bit of dehydration and severe restlessness at having to sit through a puja that lasted half the day. But I remembered I really wanted to come back to this crazy place. And I really wanted to have Aiya be a part of the rest of my life. So we did come back the next week. And the week after that, and the one after that as well. And although I'm sure Aiya has had enough of me, I'm still coming back now.

Kamya's Story



By Kamya Ramaswamy

Om Sri Matre Namaha! Praises to She who is the Mother of the Universe. Praises to She who guides each divine soul on its journey to return to Her embrace. The first time I visited the Sri Rajarajeshwari Peetham of Rochester, NY the direct and overwhelming experience of Her Divine embrace brought tears of joy and utter solace to me. I knew in every cell in my body that this was my ultimate Home.

Aiya has taught us that each name of the Sahasranam has endless meanings and that Devi herself will reveal those layers of meaning to one who meditates upon these sounds. In hindsight, I realize that She has been leading me on a path which will ultimately bring me back to my Home, the final resting place in Her arms. Sri Matre Namaha! She who measures and gives the spiritual aspirant what they need, when they need it, patiently guiding them back to Her.

Since I was born an American to non-Hindu parents, my introduction to Hinduism was through my university studies. I traveled to Nepal for my junior year in college and lived with a Hindu family, was taught by Hindu professors and visited great Hindu and Buddhist temples. But still I did not find my Home. The year after I graduated from university, I traveled with my Hinduism professor to Calcutta for nine months to study Bengali Vaishnav padavali kirtan. I traveled all over West Bengal and across North India all the way to the Western state of Rajasthan. I felt at home in Calcutta and met my future husband during this time, but still I did not find my Home.

While in India I realized that my longing for my spiritual Home had led me on these two trips to Nepal and India, but my academic pursuits did not provide the direct experience of Devi which I was seeking. When I returned to the US, I visited my grandparents in Rochester, who introduced me to their neighbor's niece who had just returned from Devipuram. She showed me her photo album of Sahasrakshi in the Sri Meru temple and talked about Aiya/Amma and Guruji/Guruji Amma.

However, it wasn't until three years later when I moved to Philadelphia that I met another group of friends who would finally bring me to Aiya/Amma's Home.

It was the third day of Navaratri, Tuesday October 15, 1996 when five of us arrived at 33 Park Circle in a silver VW van from Philadelphia. Aiya was excited to show us the new property recently purchased in Rush, so we offered him the van keys, Aiya got behind the wheel, we all hopped back in the van and Aiya drove us to the new property. I remember the crisp fall weather, the expansive blue sky and the tart apples which Aiya plucked and offered us from the trees on the property.

That night the puja completely washed over me. Despite my experiences in North Indian temples and classroom studies of Hinduism, the abhishekham, chanting and rituals were completely new. I remember the radiant smiles of Sagar and Toshi and the palpable atmosphere of a loving family worshipping the Mother of the Universe. I remember Aiya encouraging us to bathe Devi with milk and not to be scared to touch Her with our own hands. And I remember Aiya initiating us into mantra diksha. However, it wasn't until the following morning, when I crept back into the shrine room by myself, and sat staring at the Mother in the early morning light that I fully felt Her embrace. She told me, "You don't have to keep seeking, you are Home now." With her thousand gentle arms, She pulled me into Her chest, like a small child returning to a mother's lap. The pain of separation was gone. A boundless bliss overwhelmed me and all I could do was cry like a baby in my Mother's arms.

As we loaded the car to drive back to Philadelphia, Aiya gave each of us small keepsakes and a photograph of Devi to remind us of our visit. These small items immediately became the center focus of my new shrine back in Philadelphia. Even though I did not have the chance to return to Rochester until nine months later, I was completely satisfied knowing that I had found my

Kathy's Story





It all started out when we came to Indu Chachi's house for puja. Let me take one minute to tell you who they are. She is our old family friend that came to the Sai center in Syracuse. So coming back on topic, that day I will never forget. When I first walked in I had no clue who Aiya was but I felt a connection.

Indu Aunty then introduced us to Aiya. From that day until now I feel that same connection. It's a connection that I can't explain in words to anyone. When my parents found out he had a temple in Rochester we started coming pretty much every weekend. That was something I always looked forward to doing every week.

Then, one day my mom came home from work and said we were moving. At that moment I was so sad, but later I asked her where and she said Rochester. I was so happy that I could have given \$1,000 to every person I met that day—that is if I had that much money.

When we moved to Rochester we got the great privilege of living right next to the temple at the temple house. We moved in a year after the Devi moved from Aiya's house at 33 Park Circle. It was so much fun. Most of the time I was so happy because I knew that everyday, I was going to see Aiya at least once. I was about two years old when I first met him and he has known me ever since. I hope I get this chance of being so close to an awesome yet intelligent soul every life.

Purvaja's Story

By Purvaja Kamat





Sri Gurubhyo Namah