Since the last issue...

After returning from the Toronto workshop Aiya conducted on June 2, he and Amma remained in Toronto that following week to perform various private pujas. On the 9th and 10th of June, they went to Washington DC to perform a wedding and then came back to Canada to do another wedding in Ottawa on June 16th and 17th.

Aiya was back in Rochester the weekend of the 23rd and 24th because he was teaching one of the ILS (Interactive Learning Sessions) classes. That week was also quite busy since everyone was preparing for the annual Alankara (Pratishta) festival from July 1 to 3.

In the latter part of July, Aiya and Amma left for Europe again, but this time met up with Sri Mathioli Saraswati (Sri Akka) for about 10 days.

Aiya had to miss the first two days of the Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion camp, but was there most of the week. Even before camp ended, he had to honour a prior commitment he made to the students in Australia and Singapore, and was on a plane to visit them for about three weeks.

While he was abroad, Aiya performed several workshops, house pujas, public pujas and conducted university lectures.

Thanks to Mayuran Saththianathan for sending in photos of Aiya’s homam/puja at the site of the upcoming Shree Shirdi Sai Sansthan in Sydney, Australia.
Past Events

Pratishta Festival, July 1-3, and Guru Poornima, July 3

Pratishta had a slightly lower turnout than in past years because of the adjustment in scheduling to coincide with Guru Poornima. The first day was Sunday instead of the usual Friday, and the Ganesha festival went on as usual with a grand Ganapathi homam in the morning, followed by the utsava Ganapathi's procession around the temple at night.

Early Monday morning saw a Chandi homam, followed by kalasa sthapnam and annapavadai being offered to the Devi at midday. That night, the Devi's chariot lit up the parking lot.

The temple's children ran the show on Tuesday for the Dattatreya puja, and puja was also done to Aiy and Amma, as well as the whole guru lineage, for Guru Poornima that day.

Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion (camp), July 28 to Aug. 4

The eighth year of camp was the largest but many agree perhaps the best. The temple took on 110 children from the ages of 8 to 19, who experienced a variety of activities throughout the week.

They learned about two saints, Sri Yogaswami of Jaffna, and Sri Ramsuratkumar of Annamalai, as well as various aspects of the culture within Sanatana Dharma. Arts classes showed them how to string kalasams, tie malas, and draw kolams.

They learned the important aspects of seva and how to operate a temple, and also spent a lot of time outdoors during sports and games and during the full-day outing to a local Rochester park. The kids were fed a pure vegetarian diet, even during the outing and barbecue at the end of the week. Special thanks to all the camp admin, the temple admin, the counselors who gave their all to the kids during the day despite many sleepless nights, the medical team, the parents who stayed on site and ran the temple for the week, and Aiy and Amma. See page 5 for camp pictures.

Aadi Amavasya, July 18

Good weather allowed all sponsors to perform their own tarpanams.

Vana Durga during the final aarthi of the Aadi Puram festival.

Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion (camp), July 28 to Aug. 4

Aadi Puram, July 22

Falling on a Sunday this year, many people were able to attend the festival that celebrates the Devi's entrance into womanhood. Shankar aiy presided over the Chandi homam on this day, which took four or five hours to complete. The Vana Durga murthi was bathed in milk by everyone present, then dressed, carried in procession, and finally given a short puja featuring a variety of snacks and sweets.

The festival wrapped up at about lunchtime and everyone present was then given mahaprasadam.

Varalakshmi Vratam, July 27

At least 75 sumangalis (married women) sponsored this puja, and the subsequent number of spots were set up, row by row, surrounding the Devi standing atop the homakundam.

A large lamp was dressed as a woman with the customary silver Varalakshmi face fastened at the top. All the puja sponsors performed their own Sri Suktam pujas to the small lamps before them, guided by Shankar aiy to do the puja step-by-step, in unison.
Upcoming Events

Ganapathi Chaturthi, Sept. 19

Falling on a Wednesday this year, Ganapathi Chaturthi is usually the last exclusively outdoor event of the year, subject to good weather.

If sunny and clear, the festival will be held outside on the deck and a grand Vancha-kalpa Ganapathi homam will be conducted in the morning. At night, the utsava Ganesha murthi will receive puja and be taken around the temple in procession on a palanquin.

Karthikai Vilaku, Nov. 27

The temple is lit up like a Christmas tree this evening, and even though Karthikai Vilaku (or deepam) is only a one-night festival, it is certainly one of the most beautiful of the year. After the main puja is complete, scores of tea candles and deepams will be set aflame and the lights will be turned off.

This is the night that hundreds of people perform girivalam in Thiruvannamalai (pradakshanam of the Annamalai mountain, which is a 14-kilometre trek), in an act of worship to Lord Shiva.

Sharada Navarathri, Oct. 15 to 25

The Brahmotsavam of this temple, Navarathri lasts a full three weeks from beginning to end. The flag-raising, or dvajarohanam, will take place the evening of Oct. 8.

About a week later, the start of Navarathri proper will see three full days of worship to the Devi as Goddess Durga. Devi will take the form of Mahalakshmi over the next three days, and the last three days will see her become Goddess Saraswati.

Every third night, the Devi will go around the temple in procession, and a different upasaka will perform Navavarana Puja every evening.

Important days include Chandi homam and Vijayadasami on Oct. 24, water-cutting ceremony on Oct. 25, and kulurthi on Oct. 26.

Skanda Shashti, Nov. 14 to 18

Starting with nightly pujas to Lord Murugan and his two lovely wives, and culminating in Sura Samharam and Devayani and Valli kalyanam, this festival runs for six nights. Those present are often given the chance to perform part of the puja themselves.

In Three Months

Kedaragowri Vratham (last day), Nov. 13

Beginning on Vijayadasami day (even before Navarathri is over), this festival commemorates the Devi merging with Shiva and occupying half his body. Married women typically perform this vratham to pray for the well-being of their husbands. Please call the temple early to register as a sponsor.

Our sincere thanks and gratitude to this issue’s volunteers: Aiya, Vilas Ankolekar, Sarmel Arudsothiy, Venkateshwar Babu, B. Jayaraman, Ramesh Kutticad, Anand Panikkar, Kumaran Perinpanatan, Mayuran Saththianathan, Vimalan Sothinathan, Sreekant Subramanian, and Dhanuja Uthayakumar.

The many forms of the Mother
Clockwise from top left: Amma trusts Pravin intensely during her first time in a canoe; Sahana akka instructs a class; Aiya and the admin team run the food table during the outing; the kids sit in complete silence during Vedic lunch; and Lord Nataraja decorated with the malas campers made during art class.

Madhu and Nikhil take part in Raksha Bandhan, where sisters pray for the well-being of their brothers.

The kids learn teamwork activities on the outing.

Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion, 2012
I’ve been coming to the temple for the past 12 years. I’ve had diksha for the past 10. In the beginning I used to do my japam, do puja, chant Shivapuranam, and listen to Lalita Sahasranamam every day. Why? Because that’s what seemed like the right thing. Everyone around me was doing it and to me, at the time, they seemed to have everything.

Once I got into high school, the way I saw things changed. I started asking more questions about life and what we do at the temple. What was the purpose of doing all this? I never got any answers from anyone. Not even the Devi herself. I still went to the temple for the sake of it, but what was I really doing there?

Everything that I did completely stopped. I would still do puja, but it was just me showing the dhupam or deepam just so my mom knew I was still a “believer.” People would tell me their experiences and explain their concept of Sri Vidya while I was there just nodding my head, listening to all that garbage.

We heard that the temple was having an India Yatra trip in December 2011. I didn’t want to go for many reasons. To name a few:

1) I’ve been to India way too many times
2) I didn’t believe in any of this, and
3) it would have been a waste of money.

But my mother of course, knowing her, forced me into going. I was really bummed out. My friends and I planned to do so many things during our Christmas break but I was stuck going to India. But during the trip, on the second day, I had my first experience.

It was during our time in Devipuram, where Guruji’s temple is. I was telling a couple of the temple boys, Ruban and Jeilan, right before it happened about how I didn’t believe in God and the whole japam/puja thing. Later that day, the kids were doing an abhishekam at the Kamakhya peetam. I just stood outside. What was I going to do there? But a few minutes went by and I had a feeling that I would go inside, sit, and “try” and do japam—see if I could bring myself back. And I did!

I completely zoned out. I didn’t know what was going on around me. I woke up and had the feeling of going somewhere. Seeing something. But it wasn’t me wanting to see this thing. It was like something was controlling me.

I got up and started running. I had no idea where this “controlling power” was taking me. I started walking up some stairs and there I was. Staring right at Her. I felt like everything was answered, that she was right by my side, that I could do anything I wanted and that everything was going to be okay.

I started crying so much because I was the happiest person in the whole world. Ever since that day, I knew why I was here, what I’m doing.

It took me 10 years to realize why and what I’m doing in life. Look around you and appreciate the things that are right in front of you. People always say that there’s a reason for everything. And sometimes you won’t understand what that reason is but there’s still tomorrow. Be happy for everything you have and live in the moment!
The many forms of the Mother

During the Vibuthi Saivaite Immersion (camp) of 2011, the kids and counsellors were treated with a class by Aiya’s childhood friend, Anand uncle, who was a direct student of Sri Satya Sai Baba and spent years with Him at his ashramam. Among other topics, Anand uncle answered a camper’s question about how he developed an intense spiritual bond with the divine source of the universe.

The simple answer is this—if you learn to be quiet, meaning your thoughts, you have instant access to God all the time. Maybe not all the time because the thoughts still interfere. No matter how much we say we want to lessen the ego, it’s still there. It’s like if you have a dirty rag and no matter how much you wash it, it’ll still be dirty. But each time you wash it, it gets a little bit cleaner.

That’s what happens when you meditate, when you do bhajans, when you do puja—you’re getting a little closer each time. So you don’t always have instant access—at least I don’t. It’s easier when I’m meditating because I’m reflecting inside.

The biggest thing for me [when learning with Baba] was that he could help me realize true consciousness. It wasn’t about the tricks, the rings, the viboothi—because these things that were created don’t last. What lasts is the experiences and the faith that takes you through life.

Usually the way this starts is when you’re desperate. I’m sure you have all experienced this; when something bad is happening to you, you are able to ask, and you’re able to ask without the ego. You can say, “Please help me,” and there’s no ego because if there was, you wouldn’t be able to ask for that help—you would think there’s still something you can physically do to help yourself.

So when you’re desperate, you drop the ego. For me, I have seen so many desperate situations as a physician where we doctors have no answer. If you are functioning as yourself, as a body and soul together, it’s going to be limited because the very essence of what we can do in these forms is limited. But if you’re functioning with a greater source coming through you, the result is much better.

If I have a patient, while I’m walking to that patient, I ask, “What’s wrong with this person?” And by the time I’m there, I have the answer because I’m asking for help. I’m not trying to use the knowledge I acquired in medical school because I know that’s limited knowledge.

When you’re desperate, it’s a sickness. It’s a sickness because you know you can’t control it. But if you can let go and ask for that help, you’ll be amazed. Help is coming from within you and it’s easy for us to link it to the Devi or Swami because that’s our mindset. It’s really difficult to consider something that you can’t see or touch because it’s unmanifested.

But you have to go beyond the form [of Devi, Swami, etc.]. If you stay with the form continuously, it impedes your purpose. It’s almost like putting the brakes on. That happens to a lot of people, I find, because it’s hard to let go of those ideas you’ve always held close to you.

At the same time you feel the desperation, you’ll feel the fear—there’s no question about that. But that’s where faith comes in. When you can absolutely have total faith, the fear goes away because you know the right thing will come through. It may not be the result you want or expect, but faith will pull you away from being miserable from whatever the result is, and take you to being at peace with it.

It’ll start initially with you injecting yourself into a situation to affect the outcome. But then you’ll realize that if you inject, the outcome is never what it’s supposed to be because it’s never perfect. And then you can let go, but you have to accept what the result is as being His will or Her will. If you can live like that, life becomes very easy.

In my life, I’ve made bad choices. But if you surrender, you’ll soon realize it’s impossible to make a bad choice.

But this doesn’t mean it’s okay to never try and not do your duty to the best of your ability—you must still do that, but the trick is to do it without going after the result. I tell the kids you have to still study, but don’t worry about the A. Your job is to study. So you have to make the effort. The result will happen and whatever the result, it’s what was supposed to be. And the result will usually be good if you do what you’re supposed to do.
Wash it Away

Methods of Karma-Burning, part 1

Recently, an upasaka asked Aiya about why we do abhishekam and how it is tied into the overall practice in Sanatana Dharma. In this series, Aiya gives a detailed answer to that question, and addresses the background as to how karma is created, preserved by us throughout lifetimes, and eventually destroyed. Thanks to Kumaran Perinpanatan for sharing his recording of Aiya’s answer.

Now, one of the principles upon which this faith is built is that we don’t just have three score [one score is equal to 20 years—ed] and 10. What the Bible says is that you have three score and 10 years, and after that, you’re gone. I think the supreme intelligence is not going to just give you 70 years to clean up your act. If He or She or It, whatever, is described all all-compassionate, omnipresent, and all-knowing, it has to have much more intelligence than to give each person three score and 10.

Imagine there’s a string hanging directly toward the ground and at the end of it, there’s a steel bar. Someone is giving that steel bar a push so that it swings like a pendulum. It will go far one way and then the other, and so on.

Eventually, it will come to a standstill. I think the human experience, the birth experience is like that. You’ll find each successive swing is marginally small than the previous one. So ultimately, what is the aim? It has to come to rest. That is what that which is inside of each of us is yearning for.

It wants to be completely at rest without running after this thing, running after that, analyzing this, analyzing that. That’s what we’re doing. Twenty-four hours of the day, anything that comes into our heads, we analyze. “Oh, I have seen this person somewhere…” Now you’re accessing your memory. And in the time between when you start accessing your memory and when you realize that’s what you have been doing, you’ve lost track of time.

Every time one passes on into the beyond, there’s no beyond—this is what it is. You have to come back again. If you have not reached that stage of complete oneness and equanimity, you are going to come back. Throughout your life, you are going to carry impressions. The human mind is structured in such a way that it will quietly push back any unpleasant experience to the back. Any pleasant experience, it will bring to the foreground so that you relive it again and again. But with the unpleasant experiences, you have to confront them and relive them and deal with them if you want to move forward. And there are some mantras that will do just that—they will drudge back all the rot that’s been kept underneath. And as it comes up, you’ll be forced to deal with it.

Now, what does have to do with abhishekam? I’ll get to that. When you die, what is it that leaves the body? It doesn’t have a shape or a form, nothing, but something is leaving the body. Today they call me Haran. But the minute I die, this form will just be known as “the body.” They won’t say, “Have they brought Haran to the funeral parlour?” They’ll say, “Have they brought the body to the funeral parlour.” Something is missing from that body. What is it?

It can’t be the intelligence. Because if I clunk you on the head with a baseball bat, you’re still living and breathing even though
you might be unconscious. The mind is still going, and the intelligence has to do with the mind. When you die, the mind also dies. So something that's beyond the mind must be there. Finding out what that is, is what this journey is all about.

On the way, you will come across impressions that you have carried with you maybe even hundreds of years ago. God knows how many lives we have had. You have to take care of all those impressions and mute them and neutralize them if you want to go forward. When a person passes on, according to what our scriptures say, the causal body moves on. This is how you carry those impressions with you, in the causal body. Where you end up in the next life is entirely up to Her.

It has to do with committing negative acts. Let's say you wake up in the morning, put your feet down and hear a crunch... you look down and you have just killed a big ant. You go on, shower, get dressed, leave the house, get in the car and back out of the driveway, and accidentally hit the neighbour's cat on the way out. You tell the neighbour, keep going around the corner and then a German Shepherd jumps in front of your car and you run over it as well. But then, you're driving along and you hit and kill a small child—of these four things, which is the one that will remain most strongly in your mind? The child. But why? The ant, cat, dog, and child all had life. It's because you identify the child's body with your own existence, and you subconsciously think it is more important than the other three. And the creature you will think about the least out of the four is the ant.

But remember, in the eyes of the Absolute, in the eyes of the Mother, all those lives are equal. Many people may not accept it, but that is their problem. But for each of these living beings, you will carry some guilt, maybe a little with the cat and the dog, but a massive amount of guilt for killing the child. All that guilt will be quietly programmed into your psyche while you are still alive. And after the causal body leaves when you die, it will take the psyche along with it—all these subconscious memories and feelings that have been recorded in you.

And when you are reborn, these things will enter the gene pool with you. And now you have to work this karma away... but how?

Find out how to work the karma out in part two of this series, in the next Sri Chakra.
The many forms of the Mother

Pathishad Rudra Mantra
by Ramesh Kutticad

One of the main morning bedside rituals of a Sri Vidya upasaka is chanting the Rasmimala of 37 mantras. One of the mantras is the Pathishadrudraa mantra. The fruit of recitation is Marga Sankata Hari, which is the removal of dangers/discomforts in one’s way or journey. The root word is ‘path,’ the way or route taken for travel. The suffix ‘shad’ will mean protection. The deity indicated is ‘Rudra’—a fierce, terrible form.

The dhyana sloka is:
‘Aatta sajja dhanurbaaNa TankaiNaM vRUshabhasthitam 
AnnapoorNaa samaaslishtam pathishadrudramaasraye’

The mantra as per Nityotsava/Parashurama Kalpasutra is:
‘om namo bhagavate rudraaya pathishade svasti maam sampaaraya’

The free translation of the meditative verse is, ‘Having a strung bow and arrow, also holding a chisel and deer, seated on the bull, and hugged by Devi Annapoorna, I seek refuge in the Pathishadrudraa.’

The translation of the mantra would be, ‘I bow to the lord Pathishadrudraa, let him protect me on the way and lead me to my destination successfully and peacefully.’

The idea of travel was difficult in the earlier days; the dangers in travel were innumerable, like thick forests without any defined way, wild animals, dacoits, and foreign people. To cross oceans, the only mode was a ship which had even more factors of danger in it and finally unknown diseases. Hence, few people traveled by foot, cart or in a ship. They also prayed for a happy and successful travel to the Lord.

The bow and arrows are said to represent the senses and the mind, thus the image of a strung bow and arrow reminds us to keep alertness in any situation. The chisel represents the finer shaping of ideas like the creation of a beautifully shaped idol. Holding the deer represents restraint of the ever restless mind.

The bull is said to be the personification of Dharma Devata; hence this indicates adherence to one’s dharma. The Devi who hugs the Lord is Annapoorneshvari. She represents the annamaya kosha, the gross body. Thus the deity to protect on the way is held closely by the gross body.

Summarizing, we find the alter mind, with emphasis on fine details, restraining the flickering mind. The safety of the gross body is granted by the Lord Pathishadrudraa for a safe travel to successfully reach the destination.

‘aatta sajja dhaNurbaaNa TankaiNam’ = Having a strung bow and arrow, with a chisel and deer. Referring to the above idea, this will point to the ‘svasti’ and ‘sampaaraya’ in the mantra

‘vRUshhabha sthitam’ = the Bull is the Lord of dharma and hence the Pranava mantra is elucidated in ‘Om’

‘AnnapoorNaa samaslishtam’ = Hugged by Devi Annapoorna, will point to ‘maam’

‘pathishadrudram’ = Lord Pathishadrudraa, the mantra says’ rudraaya pathishade’

‘aashraye’ = I take refuge in him. The mantra will say’ nama bhagavate’—I bow the supreme Lord.

Thinking on a higher plane of consciousness, in the journey of an aspirant to the final destination of the realization of the Divine, the protection of the body—‘sareeram aadyam khalu dharma saadanam’ verily refers to the gross body as the base of all sadhana.

This includes the alertness of the mind in all situations, the fine points to be enjoyed like the chiseling of an idol, and restraining the mind to not wander in unknown areas as the pointers revealed. This will ensure a safe and successful journey to reach the divine.

Thus, this mantra is to be chanted daily for the Sri Vidya upasaka to attain a state of being ever immersed in Shiva—‘satatam shivatamaavesha.’
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.

Zambia
It was in 1977 Guruji had gone
to Zambia on deputation, to work
as a professor of nuclear physics
at Lusaka University. Guruji’s
family accompanied him, and
they stayed in Zambia for 2 years.
Though far away from his
motherland, Guruji continued his
spiritual journey even in Lusaka
with chanting Lalita Sahasranamam, Navavarana
pujas, etc. on a regular basis. If
Guruji came to know that there
was a Lalita Sahasranamam
parayanam going on, he would
join along with his wife and kids.
It was here in Lusaka that he
met Professor Ramanathan, Sri
Balasubramanyam, and Sri
Wijayaharan. There were many
South Asian families residing in
Zambia those days, and these
families wanted to ensure their
kith and kin did not lose touch
with their culture and traditions.
These Indian families had the
utmost devotion and had
celebrated every Hindu festival
religiously, but some were limited
by their knowledge of rituals.
To ensure continuity, they
would meet either weekly or
monthly and chant Lalita
Sahasranamam and Vishnu Sahasranamam
without fail.
Sai Baba bhajans were a
common event during such
regular gatherings. In addition,
those with some knowledgeable
background in scriptures and
Vedas conducted religious
discourses. In this fashion, those
Indians living in Zambia
continued to keep in touch with
their religious roots and Hindu
culture.
Sri Balasubramanyam took an
active part in all religious
activities. He had Guruji by his
side whenever he attended such
festival functions. Since all these
functions were in the evenings
Guruji’s family accompanied him.
Though Indians in Zambia
chanted Sahasranamam on a
regular basis, they were unaware
of its diction and pronunciation.
Guruji explained in detail the
finer aspects of chanting
Sahasranamam to others.
Gradually, they started liking
Guruji and were eager to learn
about religion, customs,
traditions, and about Hindu
culture from him. Over a period
of time, the South Asians in
Lusaka started looking up to
Guruji for counsel and guidance.
The daughter of one Gujarati
family residing in Lusaka was
ready to get married.
Unfortunately, there was no
Hindu priest to conduct the
wedding, so the Gujarati family
approached Guruji to do it.
Guruji said, “I do not know how
to conduct a Hindu marriage. All
I know is Lalita Sahasranamam.
The many forms of the Mother

How do you expect me to perform the marriage?"

The girl’s father responded, “Please chant Lalita Sahasranamam and conduct the wedding. All that we want is you to perform the wedding. What mantras you chant is immaterial.”

So, Guruji went ahead and performed the wedding by chanting Lalita Sahasranamam. This blessed Gujarati couple has remained “happily ever after” to this day!

Gujaratis are generally very devout. The Gujaratis in Zambia had converted one house into a temple. Daily rituals were sincerely performed to a few photos of gods and goddesses in that shrine. Sri Gananathan thought it would be more appropriate to have an idol in place of the photographs to worship and perform daily rituals, so he successfully managed to get the idol of Lalita Devi from India.

The next important question came up—who will consecrate the Lalita Devi idol now? Naturally, they looked to Guruji for answers.

Guruji said, “I have never consecrated any idol to this day. I do not know how to!”

The unanimous response was, “Please don’t say so! We look to you for guidance. Only you can perform this holy task. Kindly accept our humble request.”

Guruji was speechless. He did not know what to do.

He meditated that night. By the time he got up, he was fully aware of all the consecration rituals and all associated holy chants by heart. It was Devi herself who taught Guruji everything to do with idol consecration. Devi’s wonders were countless!

Guruji picked an auspicious day and time for Lalita Devi idol consecration. He performed this event on a very grand scale following all necessary rituals, and Vedic chantings. Lalita Devi’s idol was consecrated in a small suburb of Lusaka called Kavyoowe. This Lalita Devi Temple has become the main center of worship for all Hindus in Lusaka even to this day!

Sri Wijayaharan

Sri Wijayaharan was a close friend of Sri Balasubramanyam and they had been living close to each other in Zambia for a very long time. Sri Wijayaharan was a Sri Lankan Tamil and an architect by profession. He was extremely devout and highly spiritual in his endeavors, and he was initiated at a very young age by a disciple of Swami Sivananda.

Sri Wijayaharan had taken on these initiated mantras very seriously, and these became his way of life. Whether it was the power of these mantras, devotional bhajans.

It was his long unfulfilled wish that someone would teach and guide him through the principles of Vedic worship. He was always on the lookout for such a noble soul. Since his initiation by Mataji, he was on the lookout for a guru that could lead him to higher levels in spirituality.

Instead, people discouraged him saying, “Why learn these mantras? Why do these pujas? Being non-Brahmins, in case we make any mistake knowingly or unknowingly, these can destroy a person completely. Better stay away from it.” Sri Wijayaharan felt that he could never realize his unfulfilled dream to attain high levels of spirituality in this lifetime.

During one of his conversations with Sri Balasubramanyam, Sri Wijayaharan wondered whether Guruji initiated people into Devi worship.

Sri Balasubramanyam responded, “He has initiated many. As long as one’s intention is sincere, he does initiate.”

In addition, he said, “My wife went to India to get initiated. She met Kanchi Kamakoti Peetadhipathi Sri Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, and expressed her desire to get initiated. He said I am not your guru. Your guru is in Africa. His name is
The many forms of the Mother

Amritananda Saraswathi. Go and request him to give you manthropadesam.”

Hearing this Sri Wijayaharan got a glimmer of hope. This conversation continued.

“Will he initiate me?” Sri Wijayaharan asked.

“I see no reason why he will not initiate you,” Sri Balasubramanyam replied.

“As you know, I am not a Brahmin,” Sri Wijayaharan said.

“He does not differentiate,” Sri Balasubramanyam assured him.

“He will surely give you manthropadesam.”

“So, can we go and ask him tomorrow?” Sri Wijayaharan suggested. “If he agrees, well and good! If he doesn’t, I will consider him one of the many who declined.”

It was one of the days during Navarathri. Sri Wijayaharan and Sri Balasubramanyam went together to meet Guruji and make their humble request.

“Why won’t I?” Guruji said. “I will give it to you! These are the days of Navarathri. These are really auspicious days. Panchami is even better. I will initiate you on that day!”

As promised, Guruji went to Sri Wijayaharan’s house on the auspicious day of Panchami and performed Sri Chakra Puja and gave him and his wife the manthropadesam.

Sri Wijayaharan’s joy knew no bounds. Whether it was the effect of Guruji’s manthropadesam or Sri Wijayaharan’s dedication or both coming together, Sri Wijayaharan reached greater spiritual heights. Since then, he had established himself very well in the USA and consecrated his own temple, the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam in Rush, New York.

Within four or five months since being initiated by Guruji, Sri Wijayaharan migrated to the USA. It just seems like he may have spent such a long time in Zambia only to meet Guruji and get initiated.

“Detachment from common life
While in Zambia itself, Sri Balatripurasundari appeared in many forms to impart spiritual knowledge to Guruji. Along with this, his inbuilt urge to share the knowledge of Sri Vidya, and thereby help others on the righteous path was a huge motivation.

During almost every one of Guruji’s interactions with the Divine Mother, she said, “Why do you need this job? Just stay with me. I will give you everything.”

“That sounds too good!” Guruji replied to Her. “You have imbibed spirituality in me. You taught me all sacred scriptures. You have shown me the world. I am giving manthropadesam to all those who seek it from me. Performing pujas and bhajans has become my way of life.

“At this stage, in this state of ecstasy, fulfilling my professional obligations has become a big test on its own. Under such circumstances, if I quit my only livelihood, what will I do? How can I feed my wife and children? I am not rich either!”

“This job is no big deal!” the Divine Mother responded. “You have attained high levels of spirituality, which cannot be confined by your professional status. Please quit your job.”

“I am not alone,” Guruji said. “I have a wife and three kids to take care of.”

“Is it just your wife and kids?” the Mother asked. “Is you who is bearing them? Is it you who is bearing the responsibility on your shoulders?”

“Then who is it?” Guruji asked.

“It is me who brought everyone into existence,” the Mother explained. “It is me who is bearing everyone’s responsibility. It is me who is taking care of everyone.”

“So what is happening to me?” Guruji asked.

Understanding Guruji’s predicament, the Divine Mother smiled and said, “Nothing is happening to you. You are safe and sound in my arms.”

During the early days, Guruji was always worried that these divine interventions and divine experiences were taking away his time and energy, and was not sure if he was allocating the necessary attention to his family and job. But, at the same time, he was enjoying his spiritual journey and all the exhilarating experiences along the way!

Guruji’s life continued peacefully and happily in Zambia. The Divine Mother showered Her grace on him in the form of a home, car, prestige, wealth, and a professorship at a university. It was in 1980 that Guruji’s deputation came to an end, and he returned to Mumbai to take up his old job.
The many forms of the Mother

Our Home

by Sreekant Venkata Subramanian

It seems as if it was just a few days ago that I entered this little temple (yes, a very little temple at the time) in 2001. We stayed for an hour or so and watched the end of the evening puja which was done by Mohan uncle.

To me, there was one thing that stuck in my head. It was the sight of watching a man blow into a conch shell. I had never seen anything like that before.

Fortunately, we kept coming back to this little temple situated in what I felt like was in the middle of nowhere since we initially missed it the first couple of times trying to find it.

In those days, our temple was a whole lot different. Most of the inside wasn’t gold plated and the yajnashala extension, which we have now had yet to be constructed. Every Saturday we would come to this temple, a rather long drive from Southfield, Michigan where we used to live in those days. I can still remember every Saturday we would have to go and get milk from the fridge for the regular abishekam.

Every Saturday, Tharuman and I would have to run by the office, which happened to be the room across from the old kitchen (which was the only kitchen) and get car keys from Raji aunty to her little car’s trunk, which held a fair amount of milk. We then took that milk to the fridge of the house and replaced it with the milk that was put in last week.

It was a constant cycle. When we took the milk, we needed to always make sure we checked the date on the milk or we would get a sufficient yelling. Mind you, this routine did not stop even in the coldest of winters but it didn’t matter.

To some, this would seem as if it was a chore but to me there was a hidden joy in helping out. It cannot be described—the feeling you get when you feel like you’re a part of something bigger than yourself. This temple had become a family to me.

I have moved a lot for various reasons and those who know me generally ask, “Where do you live now?” I ended up in this little town called St. Catharines, situated in the Niagara region, which also happened to be about an hour or so from the temple.

I can remember one such week, there was a Kanda Shashti festival going on. I would go to school in the morning, come back quickly and be ready in 20 minutes to head down to the temple to help set up. It was such an awesome time.

As time went by, our temple had its extension and eventually the annual camp started to run. That was when Aiya started getting all the kids to learn the Shivapuranam. I went through the words day in and day out but for some reason it never stuck. Then one day, I thought why not just play it in my sleep? Three to four days later it had just stuck in my head.

The one year we didn’t have camp was in 2010 when we had the Ati Rudram kumbhabhishekam instead. I had reached my final...
year of high school by then. I can remember at dinner one fine day, Aiya came up to me while I was with my mom and said, “Okay, so you will be doing the archana for 11 days to the main kalasam while Tharuman does sankalpam,” and then with a smile graciously walked on.

I was in shock now because I needed to learn the Shiva and Lalita namavalis and I needed to make sure my pujas weren't rusty for this festival. I practiced day by day with my mom (who has generally been my teacher for most things).

Ati Rudram finally arrived and I was ready to my best ability. At the end of the second or third day I remember Priya akka came up to me and told me to chant the Khadgamala Stotram, which I didn’t happen to know too well at the time. So I quickly ran around and found Abhi akka, who helped me pick it up in one night. I have learned most things last-minute like this. I can thank nobody but the Devi herself for this.

This Ati Rudram was a big deal for me because I was heading to India for two years, so for me this was almost the last time I could have been at the temple like old times.

Ati Rudram came and went like a flash of light. It had taught us more than just the Rudram or for me, the namavalis and the Khadgamala Stotram. It taught me that as a group we can accomplish anything.

In the September 2011 issue of the Sri Chakra magazine, Tharuman wrote about the events of the tent flood during Ati Rudram. If you ask anyone who happened to be present for that event you will hear them talk about how everyone was running around and trying to help out, even old aunties who could barely walk.

It was a tale that was similar to when Rama was building a bridge and even the squirrels and ants were moving things. Regardless of how big a job they did, nobody was any more important than anyone else.

The Devi and Aiya must have thought the lesson was better taught by involving us than by simply telling us, because that incident really made us step up to the plate.

During this alankara festival I had a chance to see kids who used to help out here and there now taking up bigger roles and becoming coordinators. I had the privilege of bringing a bunch of young kids (who were about my age when I started here) to Kashi and showing them the fun of doing puja with our own little twist.

Finally, it’s my last day of school, two years have passed and I am ready to get back to North America from India. As I was heading back, the first thought that ran through my mind was, “Sreekant! What changes have happened. How will you cope? Will you fit into the rhythm like old times or will it all be gone?”

On my first trip out to the temple I finally walked in and all my questions, my feelings went blank. I just felt at home. Of course, our temple had grown in those two years but it had maintained the charm that kept me coming back every weekend as a child.

I walked up to my old friend, Tharuman, and gave him a hug, regrouped and caught up for about a minute, then instantly as though he had forgotten I had not been at the temple for two years he told me to help Aniruth make a detailed list for tasks for the upcoming July festival (which I kept calling the May festival by habit).

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Knowing about Sri Vidya

vs.

Knowing Sri Vidya

part 1

by Sri B. Jayaraman and Smt. Vijayalakshmi

Let us first understand the difference between knowing about Sri Vidya versus knowing Sri Vidya. Knowing about Sri Vidya is a mere collection of data or at the most organizing, processing and assimilating the same into knowledge. Knowing Sri Vidya is the internalizing or imbibing of that knowledge and reflecting the same in our attitude and behaviour in society. Since Sri Vidya is Atma Vidya, the internalized knowledge of Sri Vidya is called Self Realization.

Details of the worship of a specific path is Acharam. Performing worship after understanding the details of that path is Anushtanam. Contemplating on those principles is Anusandhanam. Internalizing and reflecting those imbibed principles in behaviour is Anubhoothi.

Knowledge about Sri Vidya is obtained from one’s guru, lectures by the guru bandhus and senior upasakas, from text books and also nowadays through websites, etc. One may obtain mantra initiation also.

Mere knowledge of Sri Vidya or mantra initiation does not make the disciple a real Sri Vidya upasaka. Through the grace of Guru Roopini Lalitha, the principles of Sri Vidya will have to be internalized and imbibed, and should be reflect in the upasaka’s way of life, behaviour and interactions with society.

Anushtanam

Japa sadhana, Navavarana puja, and kundalini yoga sadhanas are certainly the next steps towards realization. But if the sadhaka intensely concentrates only on the activity, it will only cleanse his accumulated vasanas and thus prepare him with Chittha Shuddhi (purity of mind) for knowing Sri Vidya. However, realizing Sri Vidya would still be a few steps away.

Anusandhanam

Contemplation is certainly the next higher and necessary step towards realization. It is still a mental activity and hence one should not get stuck with this thinking activity but proceed further towards Anubhoothi, which is Realizing or being in the experience of knowing Sri Vidya.

Anubhoothi

It is an effortless activity—one’s own natural experience. It is not an artificial behaviour by any compulsions. The impact is felt by others in society. It is usually a Blissful state. Principles of Sri Vidya are best understood only through living by those principles.
In any spiritual path there are clearly two distinct phases—Preparatory and Implementation. The first stage is knowledge of that aacharam and sadhana (Anushtanam)—one should collect all relevant details, understand, get convinced and adjust/prepare oneself to adopt those principles. Often this would require some personal sacrifices.

The second stage is Anusandhanam—sincerely adopting/implementing those values/principles in life. Based on one’s sincerity and intensity, the Grace will dawn on the upasaka and one will get Anubhoothi. Let us look at some simple examples.

An athlete prepares himself for a 100 metre running race. In the preparatory phase, he should do physical exercises and make his body capable of withstanding the stress of high speed running. He may have to make some sacrifices in his food habits. In the second phase he learns how to maximize his energy as he nears the finish line.

A person prepares to attend a wedding reception. First, he removes the bad odour from his body by bathing. Next he applies perfumes for the occasion and dresses himself well.

A very important guest is coming to your house and you need to give a grand welcome to him. Your house is a mess. First you will remove unwanted objects and clean the house. Then you will decorate the house with some paintings/handicrafts.

Before gold polishing an old brass item, it is first cleaned with acid and then coated with gold. Similarly, in any spiritual path including Sri Vidya, the upasaka is first cleansed of his negative inflictions by hard work (Anushtanam) and then enriched with enlightening thoughts and practices of that path through Anusandhanam. Over time, and with the grace of the guru, the upasaka gets Anubhoothi.

Watch for part two of this article in the next issue of the Sri Chakra.
The many forms of the Mother

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha