

Vedic Wisdom
By
Sri. P.V.R. Narasimha Rao



यज्ञभोक्त्रे च यज्ञाय यज्ञरूपधराय च ।
यज्ञप्रियाय सिध्दाय दत्तात्रेय नमोऽस्तुते ॥

Compiled by
The Students of
Sri Parasara Jyotish Center-Boston

VEDIC WISDOM

By

Sri. P.V.R.Narasimha Rao

On vedic-wisdom@yahoo.com

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Preface

We, the students of Sri Parasara Jyotish Center (formerly known as Sri Jagannath Center), Boston are happy to present the work of our Jyotish Guru Sri. P.V.R.Narasimha Rao on the answers he posts to inquiring spiritual minds on the vedic-wisdom yahoo group.

In the past we have compiled couple of books on similar occasion to share and provide an easy access to the Jyotish knowledge that Sri. P.V.R.Narasimha Rao imparts to us. Sri. Narasimha Rao started the yahoo group under the name “vedic-wisdom” and posts answers to various spiritual questions of the inquisitive minds. The posts vary in length and breadth across the spiritual plane. These posts are available under the archives of the yahoo group. One can always reach to them and search for the topic of interest. This would take some good time to search and explore the archives. Also, as new members join the group, there are always the same questions that keep getting posted which would expense the valuable resources of others in answering the same question again. So, we felt the need to provide an easy access again to the archive material that is available under this yahoo group, where by, members before posting the questions can refer to this compilation and post accordingly. Hence, this is once again a sincere attempt to capture the posts on vedic-wisdom yahoo group.

These captured snapshot information as of this date is organized by the topic title. Some of the questions, which had unrelated information, were trimmed. No part of the answer is edited and is verbatim.

We hope this effort will be useful to all those who are members of this yahoo group and will provide an easier access to the information in order to not repeat the already answered question consuming the valuable resources.

We are thankful to Master Manasvi Putcha who has originally provided the cover design. Any mistakes in the compilation are totally on the part of the students and we will make every effort to correct them in future.

~Students of SPJC-Boston

Vyasa Purnima, 25 July 2010

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How to Find a Guru

Q. Is there any simple thing like a mantra or some other thing which if done regularly will help one take him to his guru and find one guru in a physical body? After all we are not Lord Dattatreya who can take teachings from nature. For someone like you, your guru is there. He can tell you in simple terms what to do for spiritual growth because daily obstacles sometimes take away you from your ultimate goal.

A. Whether you want a guru to come to you or a deity to come to you, feeling a strong desire emotionally is important. Use the mental energy.

As Ramakrishna waited for Kali to give him darshan, he used to cry for Her. He also used to cry as he waited for the arrival of his disciples such as Naren, Rakhai, Jogin, Tarak etc. The people around him then were unable to understand his teachings and he knew that his eternal companions who would spend a few years with him and then spread true spirituality in the world were yet to come. He waited for several years and used to cry.

A child who is lost by parents at a fair and is alone may cry in pain and confusion, for parents. If one can become like that child and cry from the heart for deity or guru, one can get them. If you ask me, that is the best way.

Some also recommend chanting mantras of Dattatreya or Shiva or Krishna to get one's guru. One can do that, but feeling from the depths of one's heart the pain from the pangs of separation is vital.

Q. What one should do if he doesn't have a Guru?

A. Just wait. Changdev maharaj waited for more than 1,000 years for his guru. Then he got what needed from his guru in just a few days. Getting the right guru can change one's spiritual trajectory forever.

Some people say, "Whoever is your guru, just follow that guru blindly and you will achieve". That is partly true. But, a moth that clings on to a rock and does not leave it can be crushed when the rock falls from the mountain. However, one who has blind faith in guru and follows guru completely is at least pushing the ownership of several karmas to guru and keeping own account clean. That surrender is a smart (but difficult) thing and actually the first step towards an unconditional surrender to god.

It is good to surrender to a guru and follow with blind faith. But the reward for that attitude is maximized if guru is a capable one instead of a fake one.

Good gurus first test the sishyas and push them to the breakage point and test the limits. Good gurus are rare these days.

Just as a guru tests sishya, a sishya can also test guru until one is fully satisfied. But, once one accepts a person as one's guru, one should be faithful and obedient. People like Vivekananda and some fellow disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahansa tested their guru for an extended period of time. Vivekananda

tested his guru almost till the end. But then, those are special plays of special souls. But, a good guru should not be angry or upset if an intelligent sishya questions or tests.

Though many people go searching for a guru, it is not necessary. A good guru will find the sishyas he/she is supposed to guide and approach them. Or at least a good guru should know how to make the sishya come to him/her.

For some people, a guru may have already entered their life and started influencing them and yet they may not know it! Guru does not necessarily mean one who sits on a high pedestal with you sitting at his feet and teaching you things. Guru does not mean one with certain robes or certain hair etc. Guru does not mean one with a "Swami" prefix in the name. Guru does not mean one who has a certain age or a certain look. Guru is one who removes darkness within you. A person you have never met consciously may have decided to influence your thinking and slowly remove your darkness from a distance. You may never meet and the person may have transformed.

A guru who is unable to transform you is worthless. A guru's job is to transform a person. Similarly, a sadhana you are doing that is unable to transform you in some way or the other is useless. The goal of all sadhana is to transform yourself.

On a *personal note*, I did not realize it when I was approached by my spiritual guru. I was actually quite put off by him. I thought he was a wacko - a crazy man - talking about useless and impure things. He would talk about tantra, aghora, Kaali, Taaraa, shakti chalana, kundalini, darshana of devatas and stuff like that. He sent me a rudraksha mala he specially made for me and asked me to use it to meditate on Gayatri mantra 216 times a day. The only rules were to stay as still as I could, with an erect back and closed eyes and not let any strange experiences or visions distract me and keep the focus on the mantra. The other rule was brahmacharya. I did nothing about it for a long time. He would patiently call me now and then and chat about various things related to spirituality. Though I did not like him at first, I slowly started realizing his purity and simplicity. He never put any pressure and let things take their course.

About one year from the time he contacted me first, on a Vaisakha Pournima day, after my monthly Full Moon Satya Narayana vratam, I suddenly got the inspiration that I should follow his advice. He may be a tantrika, a Kaali worshipper, a corrupt soul and what not (yes, that is how I thought then!), but all he asked me to do was Gayatri mantra, a veda mantra, with a Rudraksha maala and keep brahmacharya. What he asked me seemed "saattwik enough". So I decided in an impulse and started. Some things happened. After 18 days, something dramatic happened that changed my thinking and life completely. Abstract concepts and bookish knowledge are one thing and direct experience is another. It is ok to harp on the transientness of the so-called "concrete" reality that our senses keep perceiving and hypothesize that there is a far higher reality that one can merge one's consciousness in, but one's conviction - especially that of a highly logical person like me - will not be complete until one actually sees it. In fact, one's conviction will be quite shaky until then.

Even after this, my ego was still there. I was a young achiever. I had BA degrees in Sanskrit at the age of 10 and wrote metered poetry in Sanskrit like ancients, at 11. I was a highly intelligent young achiever with a lot of pride over my intelligence and scholarship. Thus, accepting one who was 6 months younger and one whose Sanskrit knowledge and Sanskrit pronunciation seemed quite inferior to mine as my guru was too much. As if sensing it, the first thing he told me when we met face to face a few months later

was: "I am not your guru. Never be under the illusion that I am your guru. We are sishyas of the same guru and our guru is not here now. I started first in this life and hence I am guiding you. I will do whatever I can for you, but I am not your guru". I was "relieved".

Slowly, the change triggered earlier started accelerating. My mind became clearer about what is what. When I saw myself as a completely transformed person with much clearer vision and realized that the change was brought by Manish, I told him that I now thought of him as my guru. He said fine. Basically, he had accepted me as a sishya long back and waited till I accepted him as my guru (though he kept playing that role even without my acceptance). Basically, the names used for the relationship did not matter to him and he did what thought he needed to do. Simple!!

Later, the homam movement started. I started doing homam everyday. I experimented with many and settled down on daily Chandi homam. Once I looked at Manish with suspicion because he was a Kaali worshipper. Now, I was doing Chandi homam myself! I saw my prejudices for what they were. I became very clear in my mind about so many things. Many things that seemed conflicting and contradictory fell in place smoothly now. Some of that clarity of knowledge translates into my writings, but some of it is difficult to translate into the physical plane.

What a good guru does is precisely this - to transform you from something to something else, preferably something better!

If you want to find the right guru who can make this human life worthwhile, you should not be in a hurry at all. Be patient and keep praying. While you wait, you can use whatever knowledge, teachings and tools are available to purify and transform yourself and remove some of the darkness yourself. In the process, you may end up finding your guru!

More on Guru

Quite seriously, please do not address me as a guru. Guru is a very heavy word. It means the remover of the darkness of ignorance. I am NOT a guru.

If She wants to answer something, She can pick someone and answer through them. The person in question is just a nimitta.

Actually, Vasishtha teaches that even a guru is a nimitta! Then what about someone like me? Everything here is just a coincidence. She is the master planner. If She wants something to be given to someone, she will select somebody else as a nimitta for it and make the second person give that thing to the first person. She is the energy that moves the entire universe. She is the ichcha sakti (desire), kriya sakti (action) and jnaana sakti (knowledge) of each being in this creation. It is amazing how She plans the whole thing.

She is like a master film director who is making a secretive magnum opus. Imagine a director who has a really complicated script and shoots one scene with one set of actors and another scene with another set of actors etc. Each actor only knows the scenes (s)he is in. No actor can figure out the complete story from the few scenes that (s)he knows. The Mother is like that. She has a beautiful screenplay and we are all actors playing out roles. We only know a little bit of the story.

Some people become too attached to the play and start wondering what the complete story is. They waste their time and energy wondering what the complete story is or what the next scene is. This does not improve their performance in their own scenes even one bit. On the contrary, this guesswork sometimes biases them and they end up messing up their own scenes due to the mistaken biases.

Now take an actor who leaves it completely to the director, resigns to the mastery of the director and just does what (s)he is told to do. Such an actor gives a perfect performance and does not waste any time or energy in unnecessary activities. Similarly, one who realizes Her mastery and realizes that She is the doer of everything and considers oneself a pawn in the hand of a master chess player does not over-analyze everything and leads a blissful and fruitful life and serves Her agenda perfectly.

Testing Guru

Q. I had read some books on Thakur in Bengali and in one there was the description of an incident. Once Swamiji wanted to test Thakur. Since Thakur used to say that he could not handle money (as it represented something grossly material), Swamiji deliberately put a note under Taker's pillow when Thakur was not in the room. Later when Thakur come to sleep in the bed, he instantly got up as if in pain and said something is very wrong in here, Hriday, who was used to be there, searched the bed and found that money under his pillow. But Thakur never got offended with these things. In fact, in one instance, when one of his disciples had come to him for the first time, Thakur asked him to stay over at Dakshineswar. At night the disciple woke up and saw that Thakur was leaving the room. A doubt entered the disciples mind, he thought maybe Thakur is going towards the Nahabat house where Sri Sarada Ma used to stay. So he quietly decided to follow Thakur and see where he is going, after all it maybe that Thakur used to visit the Nahabat secretly etc etc.. he was genuinely suspicious. Then as he left the room following Thakur at a distance, he saw Thakur going to the Panchvati and sitting down for meditation and there he sat for two hours. Later when Thakur came back, he told that person, who later became his disciple, that he had done very good to test Thakur. Further Thakur said, no one should accept a Guru without testing. And to see and judge a person's spirituality he has to be observed when he is public and when he is alone. There should be no difference in his words and actions. Etc etc. Every incident in Thakur's life is like an illustration of a deeper point for ordinary people like us.

A. For those who do not realize it, the word "Swamiji" in the first episode with a rupee note under the pillow refers to Swami Vivekananda (Narendranath Datta then).

The person in the second episode below is Swami Yogananda (Jogindra Nath Roy Chaudhury). However, this incident did not happen the first time Jogin met Ramakrishna. The first time Jogin met Ramakrishna, he left quickly but decided to meet again. After meeting Ramakrishna several times, Jogin decided to spend a night with him and serve if needed. So he stayed over one night. That is when the incident happened.

Jogin was a light sleeper and woke up in the middle of the night. He found Ramakrishna missing in his bed. He went and checked at the water pot and looked outside to see if Ramakrishna was walking outside. When he did not find, then he suspected "maybe he teaches us about brahmacharya (celibacy), but goes to his wife secretly in the night". He positioned himself outside the nahabat (where Sarada Mata lived) and watched the door carefully. Later he heard the chattering of slippers from Panchavati on the other side and found Ramakrishna approaching him. Ramakrishna first asked "what are you doing here". When Jogin was silent and had an expression of shame on his face, Ramakrishna calmly said "well, you are right to test me. You should test a saint by the day and night before believing in him." Of course, Jogin was ashamed and did not sleep the whole night.

I too suspected my guru a few times like Jogin and questioned him. He too never took offense. I will describe one such incident.

Once he told me that he "saw" me earlier in the day when he was driving on a highway in UK. He apparently "saw" me doing homam at my house in US. He said he lifted his hand while driving, as if blessing me. His wife sitting next to him asked what he was doing in the middle of driving at a high speed on a highway. When he told her "Narasimha is doing a homam right now and I am blessing him", she thought he was being crazy.

When he described this incident, I immediately knew of a way to find out if he was being truthful. When I do homam, I normally wear a veshti of white or red or yellow color. On that day, I was wearing something I very rarely wear and it would be nearly impossible to get it right with a random guess. I asked him "can I test you and verify if you really saw me". He said "ok, let us see". Then I asked him "what was I wearing when doing homam this morning". He said, "It seemed like you were wearing some strange kind of blue color veshti and a shirt of a different shade of blue color."

He was absolutely correct. I used my blue veshti only twice so far and that day was one of the two days. What I was wearing on that day for homam was something I rarely wear and difficult to just guess. So it is very very likely that he indeed saw me doing homam on that day.

Of course, siddhis like divya drishti (seeing things far away mentally) are irrelevant. I am not interested in them at all. My guru teaches "whatever abilities we need for our work will be given by the Mother. We should not desire anything and at the same time not reject anything given by Her. Our only desire should be to remain at Her feet always and to remember to desire that always. Rest of the things will come and go as She wants us to do various things. Leave it to Her and go with the flow without resisting and feeling emotions like pride or shame, happiness or sadness etc."

I believe that my impulse to test my guru at that instant came only because my guru (and the Mother) wanted me to do so, because there is some reason for that. Though it seems like I suspected my guru, I have a lot of faith in him and in the Mother and think that I am used as an instrument by them to do the work they want done, including testing guru with temporary suspicion. I am an unsuspecting playmate in their Play. I will not be surprised if Jogin also felt the same way later, after testing Ramakrishna. But his action taught something to others (even today!). That is perhaps why Ramakrishna and Kali used Jogin as an instrument in their Play.

In the example of money under Ramakrishna's pillow, how did he know it? Did he have all kinds of super-natural abilities? May be. But there is another way to look at it. He was a pure soul and the Mother devised a divine play to demonstrate his purity. It was the Mother's divine play that Naren should get an impulse to test Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna should get an impulse to run away from the bed and pass the test and it should inspire some people in future.

It is foolish to go after anything other than getting a perfect sense of surrender and devotion to the chosen deity. If that comes, everything needed for what one is supposed to do in the world is provided by the chosen deity. No pride and no shame, no happiness and no sadness, no excitement and no depression, no attraction and no repulsion - one becomes a child and a playmate in the Divine play of the chosen deity. ALL that is needed is a perfect sense of surrender. Ramakrishna had it. Nature composed several beautiful plays involving him and attracted the other actors of that play towards him.

Gurus with Ego

Q. How astrology can "reveal" the real saint, the real sadhus..etc?

A. This is Kali yuga. While a really spiritual person must continuously try to destroy ego, so many spiritual gurus are there around us with bloated egos which are easily offended at a hint of criticism or overly excited at sycophancy. Such gurus are not of much use.

But how do separate the grains from the chaff? It is not easy, especially when there are just a few grains in the middle of a big pile of chaff. Astrology is useful but not that much. Astrologer's mind, which makes the final judgments, works based on his/her prejudices and secret beliefs.

In the past, many great souls used intellectual discrimination and intuition to judge one's guru for a long time before whole-heartedly embracing one's guru. In many traditions within Hinduism, this is encouraged. You do not accept a guru in an impulse. You "test" your guru and take your time to accept him. But, once you accept a person as your guru, you follow him faithfully.

If you take Narendra (Swami Vivekananda), the celebrated disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he was a highly rational and skeptical young man. Though Ramakrishna had induced a samadhi in Narendra by mere touch in their second meeting itself, it was not enough to convince Narendra of Ramakrishna's ability and purity. He thought the whole experience could just have been a hallucination/hypnotism and did not jump to any conclusion. As he visited Ramakrishna continuously, received love and knowledge from him and saw that Ramakrishna indeed walked the walk (as opposed to just talking the talk), he was slowly convinced of the purity of Ramakrishna. He then became a tireless soldier who dedicated his life to carrying out the mission of his guru!

During the early stages, he even told Ramakrishna bluntly about the latter's visions of Kali, Krishna, Rama etc, "Sir, they could all just be your imaginations or hallucinations". Narendra did not even believe in god with a form and believed only in the formless. Ramakrishna was never offended at these comments.

Other sishyas like Joginder (Swami Yogananda) also approached Ramakrishna skeptically and tested him for a duration. These young men who surrounded Ramakrishna weren't blind men led by a blind man. They were all rishis or associates of rishis, who were reborn together for a purpose.

They observed Ramakrishna for a while, confirmed that he practiced what he preached and realized that there was a valuable lesson in each action and word of his. They took a while to realize his purity and divinity, but once they realized they became faithful sishyas. He accepted them, loved them and taught them even before they realized his true nature and accepted him fully as their guru. He knew they were skeptical and testing him, but he was never offended (what good is a guru who cannot recognize a worthy student and what good is a guru whose ego is insulted at someone's skepticism). Once they accepted him and became faithful sishyas, each one of them was also transformed into a really pure person who takes the entire life as a sadhana and maintains purity in every thought and action. Each sishya of a Ramakrishna was a role model in spiritual purity.

One whose rinas draw one towards a fake guru gets such a guru because that is what his karmas entitle him to. The circumstances we have to face are based on the previous actions. But the current action (freewill) is in our hands. If one can truly believe from the deepest cores of heart that one's guru is pure and like Shiva himself, follows guru blindly and entertains no doubt whatsoever, that WILL pay off one day. Nature WILL bring light into that person's spiritual life. It is just a matter of time.

Thus, I will not be judgmental about other gurus and their sishyas. If a sishya believes in his/her guru fully, so be it. It is not our business.

But, if one were to find a guru like Ramakrishna Paramahansa or Ramana Maharshi or Sri Aurobindo or Srila Prabhupada, it is one's immense luck. However, the point I want to make is that having a great guru is not a guarantee of success and also having a fake guru is not a guarantee of failure!

At the end of the day, the measure of success in any sadhana is the purity generated by that sadhana. The measure of the purity is the effacement of ego. If ego is reduced completely or eliminated, one is making progress. This can happen in spite of who is the guru, what one is doing etc.

When the full grace of the Supreme Being falls on a person, any medium is sufficient to reflect that grace.

Purpose of Life

Q. Is there a purpose for life? In your initial post wrote "highest purpose (of Vedas) is self-knowledge and that is why Vedas are it's swaroopam". If I derive the point that Vedas have a purpose so should living beings. If living beings have a purpose, what is it? To maintain jeeva rasi (ecosystem)? There should be more than that. To understand Vedas and attain self-realization? Then why did the Supreme Cosmic being not create just one human being and impart all the knowledge in one shot.

A. Yours is a loaded question. Let me try to give a simple (and simplistic) answer.

Supreme cosmic being (Brahman) does not create or destroy anything. Supreme cosmic being has no gunas (attributes/qualities/properties) whatsoever. Though all possible objects, qualities and attributes lie within Brahman as a potentiality, Brahman himself/herself/itself does not have any attributes. At time minus infinity, there was just Brahman and no objects within. The whole universe was filled with Brahman and nothing else.

Then a minute part of Brahman developed an ego (I-ness or sense of "I"). Sense of "I" requires some attributes. So, this part of Brahman formed an identity based on certain attributes. As a minute part of the ocean may form itself as a wave and think of itself as a small wave instead of thinking of itself as ocean (which it really is), this being thinks of himself as a different being from Brahman.

Thus, several gods with various attributes come into being. Please note that they are all different from Brahman and limited in their scope, bound by the attributes that they have given to themselves.

The creator Brahma (different from attribute-less Brahman) comes into being like that from the Supreme Cosmic Being. The attributes he thinks of when coming into being and forming an ego make him create various other beings in this world. He sees it as his purpose.

When we have a dream in our sleep, we fashion a small part of Brahman as various dream objects with certain attributes. Similarly, Brahma fashions a minute part of Brahman as various world objects - such as you and I - with certain attributes.

These objects (you and I) have a sense of "I" based on the attributes imagined by Brahma and they go on interacting with other objects (just as objects we see in our dreams interact with each other).

As we experience and interact with more and more objects, the sense of "I" becomes very very dense. After a while, we totally forget that we are actually attribute-less Brahman. We think that we have certain attributes and our attributes determine our purpose in life.

One of the purposes dictated by the attributes taken by Brahma when he came into being was to create some other deities. Those deities are also made from minute portions of Brahman with several attributes. Those attributes decide some purposes for them. These purposes have been designed so that there is some order in this world.

The world is hence full of beings that are limited by various attributes. The attributes decide the purpose of the being. If everybody fulfils their purpose, there is some order in the system. Thus, your first answer is valid.

However, all these beings are nothing but parts of Brahman, who have forgotten that they are attribute-less Brahman and fancy themselves as objects with various attributes.

Based on the rules made by gods when Brahma was creating all these objects, we keep on accumulating karmas (actions, carried out due to the attributes) and keep on reaping the fruits of those karmas.

Thus, we keep on moving from one set of attributes to another set, change from one body to another, serve one purpose after the other. This is a potentially endless cycle.

The conditioning of the mind is weak in gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva etc, who too are serving various purposes dictated by their attributes, and they can meditate on their true nature for a small time and fully realize that they are just Brahman. We, on the other hand, change so many bodies and go through so many experiences that the conditioning of the mind becomes so dense that it is difficult to realize the nature of true self. The sense that "I am this body and I am different from others" is so strong. Still, it is possible to overcome the conditioning and realize the true self.

When a yogi reaches samadhi, it is possible to perceive that the entire world, including oneself, is just the attribute-less Brahman and that there are really no objects. In other words, it is possible for us to escape from the dreams/imaginings of Brahma. As a part of Brahman is stuck in our dreams as an object with specific attributes, we too are stuck in the thoughts of Brahma (creator) as objects with certain attributes. We can escape from that and realize our true nature.

To answer your question on why Supreme Cosmic Being creates all this confusion, the supreme cosmic being does not do or want or think anything. It is the limited manifestation called Brahma (creator) that does this. He knows no better, because the attributes he originally thought of for himself compel him to do so. However, he left the scope for all the objects fashioned by him to realize their true nature.

To answer your question at a more practical level, this is what each person can do: (1) Keep doing the duties that come to you naturally. (2) At a subtler level, question yourself who you actually are. Think "am I this body? Did I exist before this body existed? Will I exist when this body is given up?" Cultivate detachment to the body and tell yourself that you are the attribute-less Brahman.

If you do not understand all that I wrote, do not worry. This is actually high level philosophy explained in simple terms. It may be difficult for some to understand or appreciate.

Spirituality vs. Living in Material World

Q. I will say if the person is spiritual ...go and do tapasya in Himalay..why sitting in pleasure world and earning money and enjoying all world pleasures?

A. Sitting in pleasure world and earning money is NOT synonymous to "enjoying all world pleasures". One may be sitting in pleasure world, earning money and engaging externally in various activities, but the mind may be established in peace and bliss.

A realized person is NOT identified by the actions he/she engages in. Just as an electric fan continues to turn for a few minutes even after the electricity is turned off, a realized person who is still in a body continues to engage in actions based on the previous flow. After King Janaka realized Self, he continued as the king of Mithila and did all royal duties. After Krishna made Arjuna realize Self, Arjuna fought a war and killed his gurus, brothers, grandfather etc.

One who has not yet realized Self will distinguish between various objects of this dual world and view some as good and some as bad. He/she will try to stay away from so-called bad actions. On the other hand, a realized person sees all people, objects and actions of this universe as the same Self and sees no reason to either be attracted to or repelled from anything. His/her actions and inactions are thus not based on the principles of attraction and repulsion. They are based on the previous flow.

Renouncing wife, children, job, money etc is an attempt to find true mental renunciation. Renouncing external objects can promote mental renunciation, but not guarantee it. On the other hand, one can remain in the midst of the material world and all the external objects and yet have a perfectly stable, peaceful and blissful mind that is not attracted to or repelled from any of the objects one is surrounded by. For all you know, a big film star like Rajinikanth, who makes millions of dollars per movie, surrounded by glamour, money and adulation, may be more detached at the mental level than many yogis in Himalayas. It is probably true in the case of Rajinikanth.

When one stays away from objects that may attract one, it is relatively easy to overcome attraction temporarily. Whether one can retain that renunciation when one comes in contact with the objects again or not is a question mark. On the other hand, to be in contact with the objects that may attract one and yet maintain mental detachment and mental renunciation is tougher. It is the true test.

It is not out of place to mention a small story.

Trilinga Swami lived for about 300 years and did unbelievable austerities in Kashi. When Ramakrishna Paramahansa met him in Kashi, he remarked to his sishyas that Trilinga Swami was Shiva Himself and a fully realized being. Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) was not with him on that pilgrimage and he made a point to force Narendranath to go to Kashi later to have a darshan of Trilinga Swami!

Lahiri Mahashaya was the guru of Yuktेश्वर Maharaj, who was the guru of Paramahansa Yogananda. Lahiri Mahashaya was a householder and had a high-paying job. Yet he realized Self. Trilinga Swami spoke little, but he once spoke a few words in Lahiri Mahashaya's praise. He said, "The state of mind I achieved by renouncing everything, Lahiri achieved it while being a householder, being in the middle of everything. I bow to him."

Q. In my view, being a senior astrologer doesn't make one to certify any person's doings as good and spiritual.

A. Nobody can "certify" anybody. However, those who know some astrology can give their views on charts that are shared and discussed publicly. If some people see those views as a "certificates", it is their perception.

Self-realization can be consistently defined. However, spirituality is tough to define. It will mean different things to different people.

The goal of all spiritual journeys is to realize Self, at some time or the other. However, most spiritual journeys of this age do NOT end in Self-realization.

It is limited ego that binds one to a limited existence like a body and stops one from realizing the all-pervading true Self. While a self-realized person's ego is completely killed, it is possible to make partial progress. There are many people, who overcome ego to various extents and realize to various degrees that body is temporary and it is not the true self. One can do so by following many spiritual paths, like the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, the path of pranayama, the path of hatha yoga, the path of work and service etc. One who overcomes ego to some extent, using any path, is making some spiritual progress. When the ego is completely subdued, one realizes the true Self. This realization is the same irrespective of the path followed. However, intermediate steps look and feel different based on the path.

More on Spirituality

Q. But, what "real spiritualism" is still yet to defined.

A. I will try more. But first I want to recommend a couple of books:

(1) "Yoga Vaasishtham" is undoubtedly one of the best works available to a spiritually inclined person with interest in vedanta. It is a practical book with many stories (unlike most dry vedanta books) and teaches profound lessons through stories.

Interestingly, I am typing this on the eve of Sree Rama Navami (by the way, happy Sree Rama Navami to all of you!). When Maharshi Vishwamitra came to request Dasaratha to send Lord Rama with him to protect his yajna from demons, Dasaratha was hesitant and Lord Ramachandra was confused. At the request of Maharshi Vishwamitra and others, Maharshi Vasishtha taught Lord Ramachandra the essence of the knowledge of Self, in front of other maharshis, kings and gods. These teachings were captured by Maharshi Valmiki as the book "Yoga Vaasishtham".

This work helped even maharshis like Bharadwaja to obtain Brahma jnana. When Valmiki explained Vasishtha's teachings to Bharadwaja, he became realized.

There is a truly inspired English translation by Swami Venkatesananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda of Hrishikesh (Divine Life Society). Swami Sivananda is considered by some to be a re-incarnation of Maharshi Vasishtha.

<http://www.amazon.com/Vasisthas-Yoga-Venkatesananda/dp/0791413640>

This is the best book I have read in my life and I can say this is the book that influenced me the most and changed my thinking.

(2) Bhagavad Gita is a marvelous compendium on practical spirituality. It covers various paths like jnana yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, sannyasa yoga etc. While there are many commentaries and translations, I prefer the treatment of Sant Jnaneshwar. He is a rare Krishna bhakta who is also associated with the path of aghora and nathas! While most Krishna bhaktas follow dwaita and vivishtaadwaita, Jnaneshwar's treatment is purely adwaitic.

In Yoga Vasishtham, Vasishtha tells Rama that Vishnu would appear as Krishna in a later yuga and teach the essence of Veda to Arjuna. Vasishtha goes to great lengths on what Krishna teaches. Some modern commentaries on Bhagavad Gita deviate from the adwaitic principles of vedanta and interpret some teachings of Krishna in a way that contradicts Vasishtha's take. Sant Jnaneshwar's interpretation is consistent with Vasishtha's and also consistent with upanishads and vedanta.

<http://www.amazon.com/Jnaneshwars-Gita-Jnaneshwari-Swami-Kripananda/dp/0911307648>

Self-realized person is one who has realized that all is Brahman and not bound by any limited ego, even though actions continue to spring from a previously existing ego (that continues to wind down like a fan after electricity is turned off).

Spiritual person is one who is making *some progress* towards becoming a self-realized person at a point in future.

Unfortunately, scriptures can describe a self-realized person and how he thinks, but they cannot give any fool-proof steps which, when followed by one, can ensure self-realization.

Just thinking "all is Brahman" and understanding it *intellectually* is not sufficient. Let me drive my point home using an analogy.

Suppose someone goes to a movie and becomes so involved in the movie that he behaves as though something is really happening on the screen. For example, suppose there is a scene where the heroine is in a dark room and villain is about to stab her in the back from behind her. Suppose there is tense music. One may be shuddering with expectation. One may jump with shock and tension.

There may be one person who completely realizes that this is just an illusion and nothing is actually happening and watches it without any emotional involvement whatsoever. He is analogous to a realized person. Suppose someone is so involved and shouts with happiness when something good happens in the movie and shudders when something terrible happens in the movie. He is analogous to a person deeply stuck in maya. Really speaking, this life we live is quite similar to a big movie, except that it is interactive. Thus, my analogy is quite appropriate.

Now, one smart person may very well know that this movie thing is not really happening and hence controlling emotions mostly. But an odd scene may make him shudder too! Such a person is analogous to one who intellectually understands and appreciates the essence of Veda (that all is Brahman and the objects we see are all an illusion) and yet does not fully comprehend it.

If one fully realizes, then nothing should make one happy or sad internally. One may act externally as though one is happy or sad, but the heart should be stable always and not excited or depressed by *anything*. If all is Brahman, why should anything excite you depress you? In our analogy, such a person is like one watching the movie with zero involvement, realizing at all times that it is only imaginary and not happening for real and not being shaken even once. One who has only an intellectual understanding and not a complete understanding may sometimes be affected by the illusion.

If someone praises you, does it excite you? If someone humiliates, does it upset you? If something seems nice, do you want to have it? If something seems disgusting, do you want to go away?

As long as there is attachment and self-identification with a body or a name or some other limited object, some ego remains and causes all of the above. It results in happiness on some events and sadness on some events. Self-realization cannot come without overcoming ego *fully*. It never comes from an intellectual understanding of the dictum "all is Brahman". It comes from experiencing it.

How can one go from a limited ego to zero ego? There is no single path. As I said already, scriptures only describe how a realized person thinks, but they cannot give a fool-proof path to realization.

However, some scriptures do outline some paths for reference. While they are not fool-proof and do not guarantee realization, they can be helpful.

One person may sit down in seclusion in a forest or in Himalayas or a remote cave and keep eating enough to just survive and actively contemplate all the time "Who am I? Am I this body? Who am I? What are all these objects I perceive? What is all this?" and eventually realize Self. This is jnana yoga.

One person may pray to a specific deity and slowly force oneself to see the entire universe as another form of that deity and see that deity in everything. One may eventually realize Self through that deity. This is bhakti yoga.

One person may consider work and service as god and spend all of one's time serving people without prejudices, without any self-pride and without any selfish motives. One may try to see god in all people and all service and may eventually realize Self. This is karma yoga.

One person may use forceful methods of raja yoga, control the body, senses and mind through yogic practices, forcefully raise self-awareness (Kundalini shakti) to higher realms of consciousness. They too may eventually realize Self.

In each of these four broad paths, there are many sub-paths. But please realize that no path guarantees self-realization. They help, but do not guarantee anything. And the only method of spiritual progress, IMHO, is how much ego has been overcome.

Most people stick to one method. There are exceptions like Ramakrishna Paramahansa who tried each path and succeeded. In fact, I believe the logo of Ramakrishna mutt employs symbols of each of these paths in it! While each saint is great and one cannot compare them, Ramakrishna was somebody else. His lila (play) cannot fully be understood by most people even today, after such a long time. His lila may in fact continue to play out long after he left the body.

I just want to share my personal view on the link between the above paths and Jyotish. This is not from any classic and based on my own intuition.

The path of karma yoga is seen from the element of earth. The path of bhakti yoga is seen from the element of water. The path of jnaana yoga is seen from the element of fire. The path of raja yoga is seen from the element of air. Of course, ether is in all. Ether or space is the basis of all yoga.

Gayatri Mantra

Gayatri mantra is essentially a mantra for self-realization. It can awaken Kundalini and make Kundalini reach higher chakras. It can even put one in samadhi. It is too powerful a mantra. Veda mantras in general are powerful and Savitri Gayatri mantra is one of the most potent ones.

However, pronunciation and intonation have to be perfect when meditating with a veda mantra. Very very few people today are capable of pronouncing Veda mantras perfectly while maintaining a calm and detached mind at the same time. Thus, very few people actually *experience* Veda mantras.

One may definitely get things like what you described. One may get income growth, intelligence, good predictions, good health etc. But those are not the real purpose of this mantra.

I will mention an allegory.

If one has a small aeroplane, one can use it to drive around on a hillside country road and enjoy beautiful scenery of hills, valleys, villages, trees, green pastures, fields and lakes. But then, the true purpose of the aeroplane is to get away from all those things, soar high and fly in the sky. One not knowing it may only drive around on roads, enjoy the scenery and may even feel proud of what he is able to do with his

aeroplane. One knowing what the aeroplane is really for may still be unable to fly because he does not know how to fly.

I will speak in terms of a metaphor.

This life is a drama. We are actors in the drama. I am not suggesting that you should mess up your role in the drama. Do continue to play your role in the drama. But do so with a full understanding that this is just a drama, that it will end one day and that you may get a new role in a new drama. An actor who is supposed to do great deeds in a drama can do them without thinking foolishly that he is great because he is doing those great deeds. An actor who is praised by all in a drama can be praised by everybody without taking it personally and feeling great about it. An actor who is supposed to be faulted and hated by everybody in the drama can get faulted and hated by everyone without taking it personally and feeling bad about it. Whether something good or bad happens, it is just happening to a character in the drama. One should be able to detach oneself from the character one is playing and go through with the role without attaching oneself to the experiences - good or bad - of that character.

A full understanding of this fact of life and imbibing that understanding fully in one's attitude, thoughts and actions is what one needs to progress spiritually. The rest - like being able to make your role in the drama do what you like and being able to make your role in the drama avoid things you do not like - are irrelevant. Any things that are only making you get caught further in the drama without realizing its fakeness are not helping you, but getting you entangled further. The true purpose of spiritual sadhana is to make you realize the fakeness of the drama and make you play your role in the drama without getting affected by it or getting carried away.

The true purpose of Gayatri mantra is to unentangle one and make one fully realize this fact of life. As I said, it is the mantra of realizing the Self.

Its true purpose is not to make this thing or that thing happen in the *drama* of life, but to make one *realize* that life is a drama and to give one the ability to *play* one's role in the drama without being *affected* by it.

Personally, Gayatri mantra is what brought most of the experiences, understanding and clarity that I could get in my spiritual life. It has been the vehicle of my spiritual evolution. I am grateful to that mantra, to Mother Savitri, Mother Gayatri and Maharshi Viswamitra.

I am never a believer in counts. I have seen a lot of evidence of how count requirements spoil the way people do mantras and render them totally ineffective. Doing a mantra for 5 malas with better pronunciation, focus and peace/calmness of mind is far better than doing a mantra for 11 malas with faster and inaccurate pronunciation, less focus and an agitated mind.

We see so many people doing powerful mantras for lakhs of times without experiencing much. I have also seen people experiencing great things very quickly with some mantras, without meeting any significant count requirements.

Surrender to your ishta devata, think of the mantra (Gayatri or whatever you do) as just a small tool to purify yourself and to remove traces of ego from your thoughts and actions and offer the mantra to your ishta devata.

More on Gayatri Mantra

Veda mantras are in a different league compared to other mantras. As I said earlier, it is possible to achieve the one-pointed focus of mind on any combination of sounds. When one's mind repeats the same combination of sounds over and over again, eventually one's mind may lose all other thoughts and become absorbed in that combination of sounds. THEN one's mind experiences the energy represented by that combination of sounds.

Different combinations of sounds have different energies. But experiencing the energy of any combination of sounds is a better experience for the mind than the regular chaotic experiences mind has in a cacophony of thoughts.

The energy represented by properly chanted Veda mantras is in a different league. However, it is almost impossible to chant Veda mantras perfectly in today's times. The knowledge is lost. The way people chant them, veda mantras get corrupted and they end up working like other mantras and do not really act as veda mantras. Even if one experiences a veda mantra, one experiences the energy of a corrupted version and not of the original veda mantra.

The expression "Om bhur bhuvah svah/svah" is not part of the actual savitru gayatri mantra. The actual veda mantra starts with "tat savitur" and ends with "prachodayaat".

I never recorded an audio clip of my Gayatri chanting. I only hummed the ups and downs to show the intonation. I was instructed to never chant Savitru Gayatri mantra loud. Spiritually speaking, that mantra is my food and I get whatever little energy I have from it. In order to continue doing my dharma in the world, I will need to be selfish with my food. I can share everything else with the world.

Astrology knowledge that we have on earth today is insufficient to give perfect guidance. A good guru may be able to do a better job than astrology as we understand it.

I have seen my guru make some interesting mantra suggestions. For example, I once mentioned to Manish a friend who visits me often and meditates when I do homam. Manish said, "he will not be interested in doing homam by himself. If at all he does, it will not be Mahaganapathi homam or Chandi homam. Teach him Vishnu sahasra naama homam. He MAY be interested in that. He will like Vishnu sahasra naama stotram." I had not mentioned much about that person to Manish and only said the name. Interestingly, Vishnu sahasra naama stotra is indeed a favorite prayer of that person.

Another time, I met a person who loves Ganapathi atharva seersham and chants it every day and interested in doing Mahaganapathi homam. Manish told me, "if he wants, he can do Mahaganapathi homam. But eventually there is another sadhana he needs to do. He needs to chant Hanuman Chalisa everyday 108 or 54 times for one whole year. It will transform his life." I had not mentioned anything about that person to Manish. Interestingly, when this person was young, he was a sishya of a great spiritual master in the lineage of Sadguru Samartha Ramadas (considered to be born with Lord Hanuman's amsa). He said to me later that his guru had also advised him in the past to just stick to Hanuman chalisa! Interestingly, the same suggestion came to Manish's mind.

Of course, Manish tells me at other times that he knows nothing and says whatever comes to his mind. If he ends up giving correct guidance to someone, he says it is because the Mother wanted someone to get correct guidance and he is just a nimitta.

I believe that a sadguru with very limited individual ego and in tune with Nature will be able to give far better guidance in spiritual sadhana than astrology as we know it today.

Manishji' s Savitur Gayatri Sadhana Procedure

(This was originally a mail to Narasimhaji from his spiritual guru Manish Pandit ji which he forwarded to vedic-wisdom yahoo group forum)

Dear Narasimha,

When the sadhaka effaces his own personality such that the deity of the mantra comes and occupies him, then at that stage there is no real difference between the sadhaka and the Deity (even if the deity is with the sadhaka all day I would say that there is no real difference). The difference that one feels is as follows: One feels a strange coolness on the skin and on the eyes. A few repetitions of the mantra bring about a situation where the deity possesses the sadhaka and the sadhaka's prana goes upward very quickly (Urdhwa Retas), During all meditation the sadhaka sees the feet or clothes or hands or face, etc of the deity sitting beside him along with minute details of the room (even though the sadhak's eyes are closed). The sadhak typically becomes dreamless except for suchaka dreams. The whole day the sadhaka behaves like a love lorn person. How can I again experience the Beloved. That then is the experience of mantra when it is done correctly. When the sadhak's personality is effaced such that the deity's personality sits there then the sadhak experiences himself as that Deity (Devata). There then arises no difference in the sadhak or the deity commanding a certain thing to happen (be it what appears to be good or be it that which appears to be bad). The deity's personality is crucial. Ugra devatas make the person care almost for nothing himself, so self identification is minimized and the person's spiritual evolution continues.

Remember, there is, very little, according to me which is black magic. It is all a use of Shakti. If your Shakti and deity is a higher shakti such as Prachand Chandika, MahaKali, Tara, Chinnamasta, then your power will be that of God himself (Provided you have Vijnana). After the death of the body, such a sadhaka joins the realm of the deity or if he was originally a Nath or a Muni goes to a separate realm reserved for these beings. Attacking such a sadhak brings the full bearing of karma onto the heads of the attackers and some people may realize this to their detriment (Patan comes from Jalandhar Nath burying the city of Patan with his Shakti causing an earthquake). Some people may even equate this with black magic. Here there is only action and reaction. (Bit like you attack a normal person, and you will get a result of this from that same Atma whom you harmed maybe 5 to 10 lifetimes later. But if you attack somebody who is identifying with the universe and has very few karmas left, then the Universe itself attacks you, because your attack is not on the sadhaka, but on his identification, ie God or the universe).

If people persist in using the Shakti possessed by a small Pisacha, Bhuta, then there is only a little Shakti which can be used, moreover, then their minds and intellects will not be free of identification with the body and so their actions are those which are generally termed as black magic. These people usually join the same spirits which they have been using after death, this is not an enjoyable experience. Imagine if

somebody is worshipping Chandika for a few lifetimes, then even in this birth he or she is drawn to that deity and such a sadhak may achieve after a few repetitions of a mantra (because of his previous effort). On the other hand somebody doing this mantra only in this lifetime may feel that the 64 things which bind every mantra are crucial and may not achieve in this lifetime. According to me the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so let me suggest an easy sadhana. If one is so inclined, then starting on some good day, do 1000 repetitions of the Savitri (some, call this the, Gayatri, but the real Gayatri is hidden) every day, main constraints Same time every day. Same place. Same materials. Same direction. As little movement as one can. Count on rudraksha or Tulsi as is your inclination. Complete restraint on sex (from the mind and the body, not just the body), reduce food intake, grow a beard. Do not eat 2 hrs before you start, make sure your bowels are empty before you start. Continue this for 100 days and do this whole procedure 3 times. See the difference in your personality before and after. Long and short, what is important is that life may be short, so do some sadhana, and persist with that sadhana for as long as is physically possible. I hope this clarifies some of the concepts which were being discussed.

Kind Love and Regards

Manish

Q. Narasimhaji, what exactly is urdhwa retas and the experiences of prana going up? How does it really feel? What is suchaka dreams?

A. Praana is the movement in consciousness that sustains the lifeforce. Apaana is the downward force. When one attains a perfect focus on a mantra and distracting thoughts cease, praana moves downward from lungs/stomach and apaana moves upward. After praana and apaana combine, they can move upward at a rapid speed.

When praana and apaana combine for the first time, it may feel like an explosion within one. As praana moves up, it will feel like one is freed from the body and one does not exist. This is similar to death, except that there is fear and confusion at death and one may feel a kind of bliss when this happens during meditation. However, if one's focus on mantra relaxes and one become "aware of" the experience and starts analyzing it with the rational mind, there is a chance of one becoming worried and confused. So one should sustain the state where there is full focus on mantra and no other distractions, for as long as possible.

These things happen automatically without thinking about them and engaging in any specific practices. In fact, thinking about them, desiring them and doing specific practices may become an obstacle and delay things. If you surrender to a deity and do a mantra with a high level of focus, that is enough. Do NOT run after any experience and think of an experience as an end result. The focus should be mantra and mantra alone.

Even when an experience occurs, I tell people to not be tied to it and not think too much about it. Suchaka dream is a vision of something that is going to happen.

Q. Thank you for such a nice explanation. Even with not maintaining Brahmacharya, I could see significant progress in terms of my control of temper etc. when I did Gayatri Japam in the past. Did not know the significance of Brahmacharya then (in future I will practice with Brahmacharya) . But the way I did was it was one a lakh purascharana (daily 1000-3000 times) for a period of two months and then I did a homam to complete the dasamsa in homam. For the homam, however, I have called about 10 people (Grihastas / Brahmacharis altogether) and we all did chant the mantra while I performed the homam. This is how our Sharmaji instructed us to do. So, is a Dasamsa homam, satamsa for tarpanam, sahasramsas for marjanam and finally dasamsa of shasramsas for feeding the number of brahmins (so basically, for a laksha Gayatri, 10 brahmins must be fed, to finish the ritual of purascharana) . This is how I thought the big japams must be done. Can you shed more light on this? b)Also, Gayatri mantra is a 24 syllable mantra starting with tatsavitur.. .., but if the vyahritis are added it becomes a 30 letter mantra (om bhur bhuvah ssvah). How should this be practiced? 30, I suppose strengthens the 6th house, whereas the 24 strengthens the 12th house, according to your explanation? Sorry for digressing into astrology ! (but they are tightly integrated here and could not avoid this question). Please tell me if my interpretation is right and also please tell me which approach is better.

A. We tell a young student to study well and get good scores in examinations. We tell him that he should go to so and so institution (e.g. IIT, IISc, , REC, IIM etc). But we know that going to IIT or getting 90% score in exams is NOT the goal of education. The goal of education is to understand the subject well and have a good career. It is possible to get 90% score without understanding well and it is possible to go to IIT and not understand the subject well.

Similarly, the goal of spiritual sadhana is to get better control over mind, overcome the internal enemies as much as possible and become liberated. But, we tell people to do so and so rituals, follow so and so procedures/formulas , go to so and so temple etc.

Some formulas were created so that there is some structure to sadhana. But there is nothing absolute about those formulas.

Yes, if your gurus told you the formula of n times japam, n/10 times homam, n/100 times tarpana etc and you want to follow it, please do so. No harm in it. Some people believe that such a procedure gives "siddhi" in a mantra.

However, please note that there are many people who did purascharanas using such formulas and did not really get any "siddhi" in the mantra. On the other hand, there are people who did not stick to those formulas and yet found god through the mantra.

In my opinion, you can do just japam with a mantra without worrying about 1/10th count homam, 1/100th count tarpana etc. Or you can also do a mantra entirely in homam without any japam or tarpana. Choose one practice and do it until your mind is so absorbed in it that your mind is chanting that mantra sub-consciously when it is free (like some people hum catchy songs when they are free).

Regarding the astrological formulas for evaluating the impact of a mantra, I would like disown those concepts originally taught by Pt Sanjay Rath and shared by me in my astrology classes. There are many technicalities, but many many corruptions in the way knowledge is preserved. Most rules and technicalities of mantra shashtra apply to people who do prayogas to get specific material results (and naturally those rules have been intentionally corrupted by Nature in preparation of deepening Kali).

Bottom line is that a mantra done for spiritual progress works based on your mental visualization of the mantra and its deity and the latent forces of conditioning in your mind. All the house calculations based on the numbers of letters and number of words are irrelevant. Moreover, a veda mantra like Gayatri mantra can be done by anyone without worrying about technicalities.

Regarding adding "Om" or "Om Bhur bhuvah suvah" or "Om bhuh om bhuvah om suvah om mahah.." etc, there are many standard approaches. I suggest using what you were taught by your gurus and not worrying too much about it.

Utpal asked about count vs time. Counts sometimes force people to speed things up. In my humble opinion, it is fine or even better to set a time limit (e.g. one hour, two hours etc) and do japam for that time irrespective of the count.

Q. What is the visualization that accompanies the chanting of this mantra?

A. The visualization may vary based on one's conditioning and attitude.

One may visualize Mother Gayatri with certain number of faces. Or one may visualize Savitaa or Surya Narayana (Sun god as supreme cosmic being) running the whole universe through his shakti Saavitri. Or one may visualize a bright light that fills the entire universe. And so on.

One can use whichever visualization comes naturally to one. Irrespective of how one visualizes, one can experience something sublime with Gayatri mantra. But the key is to suppress all other mundane thoughts and visualizations happening in the mind side by side with the mantra! THAT is a long process, but one can keep trying.

One important point is that feeling guilty or frustrated at the mundane thoughts and laboring consciously to "suppress" them can actually increase distracting thoughts instead of suppressing them. The best way to suppress other thoughts is to move the mind back to mantra whenever one observes another stream of thought, without any guilt or frustration. Suppression of other thoughts when chanting a mantra is a long process. Success may suddenly come one day unannounced. You just keep doing it and wait patiently.

Q. 100 days -3 times means---10 malas thrice a day right? ie.3240 mantras a day?

A. He meant - 100 days at a stretch with these rules, with 10 malas a day. After 100 days, take a small break if needed and start another 100 days with the same rules. Do 3 times like this and see the difference internally.

Q. In between there will be break for menses--is it 5/6 or 7 days

A. Yes, then continue counting afterwards.

Q. If one has to go out during this 100 days period, what then? The rules mentioned about same place, same materials get broken.

A. In unavoidable situations, stick to as many rules as possible and break only what is unavoidable.

Q. The men are to grow beard. I am a lady, still I have some hair on my chin, for which I get threading done. Is this to be suspended too? But then it really looks weird.

A. If beard cannot be grown, hair can be grown. Do not cut the hair during the time.

Q. My husband would also like to join in this anushthan, but his job will not allow him to do japa thrice a day, so could he do 10 malas once a day?

A. That is what he was saying. Even 10 malas a day take a long time. Actually, if someone who has free time does the same procedure with something like 30 malas a day, really tremendous things are almost guaranteed to happen to that person within a year. But Manish's advice was 10 malaas a day.

Q. What about dhyān viniyog nayas etc? I do not know much about these. Are these to be done before the japa? Also if you could please choose an auspicious day, for us to begin this anushthan, i'll be grateful.

A. Forget about all of that. Just think of Vishwamitra maharshi, Gayatri devi, Savitri devi and Savitaa for a second and start with the mantra.

Brahmacharya

Q. It is important to maintain brahamcharya but I wanted to ask that even Vimalananda had to work for 6 years for overcoming lust though he had his deity with him from the very early in life. How can normal college going people like me who don't even have a deity obtain this goal. Though I try to maintain physical brahamcharya for few months but after that I am not able to hold it , and even if I maintain some physical chastity it refuses to go out of mind. So, how can I finish it completely from my mind. Though I have read Swami Sivananda's book on Practice of Brahamcharya but I don't think I have made any spiritual progress in maintain Brahamcharya and sometimes it makes me guilt ridden.

A. Vimalananda may have overcome lust after having his deity with him. Someone else may have to first overcome his lust even to have a vision of the deity. What is good for goose is not good for gander. In general, it is good to try to overcome lust if it is possible.

Several "normal college going people" were taken under his wings by Ramakrishna Paramahansa and transformed into spiritual giants. Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Yogananda etc were college students when they met Ramakrishna.

But it is not easy to overcome lust at all. Several of Ramakrishna's disciples also struggled with it initially and overcame lust with his blessings. Lust is a very basic human instinct and not at all easy to kill completely.

In the beginning, it is ok if the thought does not go out of the mind. Set a rule for 20 days or 40 days or 108 days or some period like that and maintain physical brahmacharya. Don't worry if thoughts come. Feeling of guilt is a weight and it does not help in overcoming the basic problem. Don't be over-burdened by it.

Q. Moreover, what I read in AGHORA was the important thing is not suppress desires but remove them from the root.

A. True, suppressing desire will make the desire come back later. But, if one keeps fulfilling desires, they never end!! This is the nature of desire. Whether one desires money or knowledge (of anything other than Self) or physical pleasures, the desire will never end no matter how much one gets.

Removing desire from the root often requires suppressing the desire temporarily. But the thing to remember from the Aghora book is that just suppressing desire is not sufficient. Practice suppressing desires, but do remember that the final goal is to uproot it fully and keep working on it.

Q. The only reason for which I keep trying for brahmacharya is if Vimalananda took such a long time probably I can also do it , if not in 6 years at least in 10-12 years

A. That is the right spirit! Spiritual progress involves a lot of things and brahmacharya is one thing. The most fundamental thing is to overcome ego and not become attached to things. Developing detachment to one's actions and possessions and developing a sense of surrender is the most fundamental thing.

There are several things in spiritual progress. They all come together! One person may develop detachment to actions and possessions and brahmacharya may become easy as a result. One person may achieve brahmacharya first and detachment may become easy as a result and come later. Various signs of spiritual progress come almost together, but the exact order can change from person to person. Thus, do not be disappointed by your inability to get something. It may be possible to work it out from another angle.

Q. One day an individual came to Rakhal Maharaj (spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa) asking for his blessings and said "Maharaj, please give me brahmacharya as a blessing". Hearing this suddenly Rakhal Maharaj said, "Why do you people always come asking for Brahmacharya? Was does not any one come to me asking me to give him/her God? Isn't God the final aim of everything. "

Is it possible for someone who cannot maintain brahmacharya to reach God? I am puzzled.

A. Swami Brahmananda was not a normal soul. Thakur said he was one of Lord Krishna's eternal playmates.

Words and actions of great masters like Swami Brahmananda are not always easy to understand. He may have had some subtle motivations when he said that.

There are many people who are prone to pride and do not realize god despite abstinence and other wonderful ascetic practices. They let those ascetic practices fill them with pride and never reach the final goal. If he wanted to subtly remind such people the final goal and remove the mental focus on intermediate steps, he may say something like that.

If he wanted someone to ponder over whether someone else can give one god or one has to do sadhana and individual effort, then also he may say something like that.

If he wanted to dismiss the notion that his blessings would remove lust from people, with hidden and subtle sarcasm that he was quite capable of, then also he may have said that. It is subtler than sarcastically saying "while we are at it, why not ask for god? I may as well grant you god". He may have wanted to make the person understand the need of individual effort as opposed to getting something (say, brahmacharya) with his blessings.

Brahmacharya and other practices give higher and higher control over self. When the control over self is *perfect*, one may find god.

Another person may find god due to the grace of a guru and brahmacharya and other practices may come to one in a perfect form *along with* that. That is also possible. It is not necessary to engage in a certain practice for a long duration to realize god. If one is already very pure from all previous life efforts and the impurities of this life exist only on the surface, it may be possible for a sadguru to free such a person in a moment and make him realize god.

However, one should start climbing the mountain when there is no certainty that one will suddenly disappear at the base and find oneself on the peak in a blessed moment, though that is possible!

When Swami Brahmananda was doing several penances in Vrindavan, Vijaykrishna Goswami, who had known him for a long time in Calcutta, asked "The Master gave you all that is covetable in spiritual life: visions and samadhi. Why then do you still practise so much austerity?" Brahmananda humbly answered: "The experiences and visions I got by his grace, I am now trying to attain as my permanent possession."

Despite visions of gods and samadhi, he knows that his realization was not perfect and there was more to be perfected!

Observing his hardship, rigorous disciplines, and long meditation and prayer, Swami Subodhananda once told him "The Master looked upon you as his son. You are the veritable son of the Lord. It does not befit you to sit like a beggar seeking his grace." Brahmananda replied: "What you say, brother, is true. The Master loved us so dearly that he gave us everything he had to give. Still we have not attained peace. This shows that it now lies with us to do the rest for the fulfillment of life's objective. Uddhava was Krishna's dear friend, you Krishna said to him: 'If you want to properly realize any spiritual truth, you must go to some solitary place and practice austerity. I can grant you some miraculous visions, if you like. But that won't be enough. It is much greater to concentrate and meditate on Him.' Indeed, without meditation and contemplation none can know anything about God."

Some may climb a small hill, think it is Mt Everest and start calling themselves realized. But the disciples of Ramakrishna like Swami Brahmananda were different. In order to understand the motivation behind specific words, you have to understand him better.

Most sishyas of Ramakrishna did not marry. Some married, but never had sexual relations with wives (e.g. Swami Yogananda, who married forcefully, and Swami Shivananda). Swami Brahmananda was one who not only married but had a child too! He was at one stage troubled by lust and found it very difficult to conquer it. Thakur placed his hand on his heart and chanted a mantra. Swami Brahmananda revealed that he never felt lust after that.

More on Brahmacharya

Abstinence is not brahmacharya, but it is a good start towards it. To have the mind established in god and not have any desires spring in it is brahmacharya.

But, as long as we keep fulfilling desires, more and more of them keep springing up. The process of overcoming the springing up of new desires often starts with suppressing (and not fulfilling) old desires and take the mind away from it. But, that is the beginning and not the end.

Regarding being married and not fulfilling the desire of spouse:

One's karmik debts may require one to fulfill the sexual desire of another person. But, the problem is that we incur new debts while paying off old debts in this matter, like in many other matters. In general, if one engages in an action with a detached mind that finds the action neither attractive nor repulsive, one is not committing a new karma and creating new debts to be settled later. One is merely settling old debts with such detached actions. But, if one engages in an action with an attached mind that finds the action either attractive or repulsive, one IS committing a new karma and creating new debts to be settled later. This becomes an endless cycle!

Sex is a highly physical action. While engaging in it, it is nearly impossible to detach the mind from body and focus on god. Mind invariably gets attached to the body and its experience. Thus, one is not only settling old debts by giving pleasure, but one also creates a new debt by deriving pleasure again. This is an endless cycle.

Scriptures cover a lot of ground and they say a lot of things that may contradict one another. Yes, one who marries and begets children is needed for the continuation of human race and smooth running of society. But, dharma and moksha are different. Performing your duties sincerely is good and takes you to heaven for a while and then brings you back here. For liberation from the cycle, one has to overcome the weaknesses and desires.

Do not compare with gods like Rama and Krishna. Our minds are totally different from those of gods and rishis. Krishna was the Ishwara of Yogis, whose mind was eternally in yoga with the Absolute. Actually, his mind may be taken as the definition of Absolute. His mind is not anything like ours.

For People Who Are Struggling with Internal Conflicts

In general, to those who are struggling with internal conflicts related to spiritual progress and getting frustrated, I have a few words. Rome is not built in a day. Forget Rome, even a small protocol of Rome is not built in a day! Be patient.

I have seen people change from inside out in a short span of time. There is no need to panic or give up hope.

Be patient. Read scriptures. Read the words of saints and yogis such as Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharshi, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Sai Baba, Kabir, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mahavira, Jnaneshwar etc. Try to understand what they are saying.

Try to integrate some of it into your common sense, your way of thinking and your life style. Realize that the goal of spiritual practices is inner transformation. The archives of this yahoo group also have some inspired writings.

Nobody can change you. You yourself can do it. You CAN do it, if you really want to. Introspect and go to the root of your problems. If you introspect and analyze each big problem, you will realize that ego is the root of it all. Whenever something in life seems fundamentally important, question why? I am not saying to leave it. Do what you normally do. But, at least analyze why it is important and try to understand your inner motives. Such introspection will eventually lighten the clouds of fear, expectation, attachment and pride that often color one's attitude.

Introspect on your attitude and motives and contemplate on the nature of god. Meditate.

In this age, there is nothing like a total surrender to the Lord. Of course, saying "I surrender to you. So give me x or y" is NOT total surrender. Total surrender means you take whatever the Lord gives without questions and expectations. If you can manage it, you are all set!

Homam or worship of deities in fire is a powerful practice taught by rishis. I know from experience that it burns blocking karmas and enables the inner transformation. It is a very useful spiritual practice. I know people who made (and are making) considerable spiritual progress through regular practice of homam. It is the most powerful method I know of and teaching it is one of my tasks for this life.

Try to make some time in your daily schedule and start doing Mahaganapathi homam everyday. After a few months, you should switch to Vishnu sahasra naama homam (I will put it up on my website by then). THAT should help you find your way in your spiritual life and strike the right balance between spiritual life and material life.

The purpose of material life on this earth is to perform actions to pay back debts without incurring new debts, so that spiritual progress becomes smoother. Without paying certain debts, spiritual life cannot become smooth. However, without some spiritual progress, actions in material life create new debts. In the beginning, one needs to create a synergy between the two and use the actions in material life to promote spiritual life. For true spiritual progress, most people cannot and should not run away from material life.

Vasishtha said in the very beginning of Yoga Vaasishtham that action and knowledge are two wings with which the bird of manifested Self flies and becomes liberated. Action without correct knowledge creates pride, promote ego and binds one further instead of liberating. Knowledge without action does not become complete because of the remaining debts and one is stuck. One needs to have true knowledge and perform actions, to become free.

Durga Saptashati

Durga Saptashati (aka Devi Mahatmyam or Chandi saptashati or Chandipath) is a collection of 700 verses about Divine Mother. It is from Maarkandeya Puraanam.

The 700 verses are arranged in 13 chapters. Also, they are arranged in 3 parts (charitas). Some parts have more chapters and some parts have less. The three parts have MahaaKaali, MahaaLakshmi and MahaaSaraswati as the deities. They have Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda as the swarupas, i.e. each Veda is a different representation/form/essence of each part. The purposes of the three parts are dharma, artha and kaama respectively. They have aim, hreem and kleem as the beejas.

Some people mistakenly think that it is merely an account of the exploits of Durgaa and her slaying of demons Mahisha, Chanda, Munda, Raktabeeja, Shumbha, Nishumbha etc. They view it as a collection of stories. But, IMHO, that is a very limited view. Devi mahatmyam is much more than a collection of stories. Vedas are its swarupam!

Devi mahatmyam is the very definition of the nature of Divine Mother. When I say Divine Mother, I am not talking about limited forms. I am talking about unlimited Shakti (energy) behind all limited Shaktis. Some people call her Durgaa, some call her Chandi and some call her Mahaalakshmi. The name does not matter that much. Bottom line is that She is the Moola Prakriti, the root nature, of all that manifests. She is the force that drives everything in the universe.

Towards the end, the 11th chapter (titled "Naaraayani Stuti") describes gods praying to the Divine Mother after slaying all the demons. They address Her as "Naaraayani". This is consistent with the difference between Narayana and Vishnu that we maintain at SJC. Vishnu is one of the Trimurthis. He is of Sattva guna and sustains the creation. Narayana is gunaateeta (above gunas/attributes). He is the Sahasraseersha and Parama Purusha. Some people may describe the same as Samba Sada Shiva, but let us not get caught in names. When we are essentially speaking about an entity that is beyond attributes, it is foolish to argue about the name. After all, name too is an attribute. Though great people gave different names to the Parama Purusha, the names essentially capture the nature of the path those people took to experience the Parama Purusha rather than the nature of Parama Purusha, which is beyond names and attributes.

The bottom line is that there is a Parama Purusha above the Trimurthis (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). If we call him Narayana, then Narayani is his Shakti and She is the root cause of all creation. She is inseparable from Him. Don't imagine Narayani as a separate form. That is a mistake. She is simply the power of Narayana. Neither Narayana nor Narayani have a form. After all, Narayana is gunaateeta and formless. Though He CAN take forms, forms only "limit" Him. His highest nature is that He has no form or attributes. Similarly, Amba is not a separate person, but simply the power of Samba Shiva. They are inseparable (just as Sourav said in a separate discussion on "Samba Shiva and Adwaita").

Coming back to the point, the nine Shaktis who fought demons, i.e. Brahmaani, Maaheswari, Kaumaari, Vaishnavi/Lakshmi, Vaaraahi, Naarasimhi, Sivadooti and Chaamundaa/Kaali, are all described as different forms of Naaraayani. I am quoting the slokas below in ITrans format. If you have ITranslator, copy the text into it and see it in Sanskrit.

haMsayuktavimAnasthe brahmaNIrUpadhAriNi |
kaushAmbhaHkSarike devi nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-13
trishUlachandrAhidhare mahAvR^iShabhavAhini |
mAheshvarIswarUpeNa nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-14
mayUrakukkuTavR^ite mahAshaktidhare.anaghe |
kaumArIrUpasaMsthAne nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-15
shaMkhachakragadAshAr~NgagR^ihItaparamAyudhe |
prasIda vaiShNavIrUpe nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-16
gR^ihItogramahAchakre daMShTroddhR^itavasundhare |
varAharUpiNIshive nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-17
nR^isiMharUpeNogreNa hantuM daityAn kR^itodyame |
trailokyatrANasahite nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-18
kirITini mahAvajre sahasranayanोज्जvale |
vR^itraprANahare devi nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-19
shivadUtIswarUpeNa hatadaityamahAbale |
ghorarUpe mahArAve nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-20
daMShTrAkarAlavadane shiromALAvibhUShaNe |
chAmuNDe muNDamathane nArAyaNi namo.astu te || 11-21

The nine Shaktis that fought the demons are described as various forms/manifestations of Naaraayani here. Thus, Devi Mahatmyam is essentially about the Shakti of Gunaateeta Parama Purusha (Narayana). All devatas come from Him and hence the shaktis (energies) of all devatas come from His shakti (Narayani). Thus, Devi Mahatmyam is about the nature of the most supreme energy of this universe!

Though Devi Mahatmyam looks like stories, there are very valuable lessons on Her nature in it. The deeper you go, the more you can understand and appreciate the lessons in the stories. Let me give a couple of examples.

(1) When various Mothers are going to war with demons, this is how it is described (8-14): "Whatever form, decoration, weapons and vehicle each god has, his shakti (energy) came in the same form, decoration, weapons and vehicle." The next 9 verses describe how Brahmaani etc came. For example, Brahmaani came on a swan with aksha sutra and kamandalu (worn by Brahma), Maaheswari came on a great bull with a Trishoola and She wore a big snake and Moon. And so on.

What is the message hidden in the above description? The fact that these female deities are identical to the male counterparts in form, decoration, weapons and vehicles suggests, to me, that they are not really separate from the male counterparts. Brahma and Brahmaani are not separate. Maheswara and Maaheswari are not separate. Vishnu and Vaishnavi are not separate. And so on. Brahmaani is simply the shakti (vitality/energy) of Brahma. Maaheswari is simply the shakti (vitality/energy) of Maheswara. And so on.

Of course, if you imagine Vaishnavi (Lakshmi) as a separate person with certain attributes, She may manifest limited by your imagination and even give you a darshan in that form. However, that is a limited form and Her true nature is beyond that. Her true and highest nature is that She is an inseparable part of Vishnu and represents the energy of Vishnu. She is the part of Vishnu that makes Vishnu think, desire, act etc. Any other external form is a lower nature of Her.

Thus, contemplation on these verses will make you understand the true nature of male devatas and female devatas and their relationship better. It will enable you to appreciate the highest nature of Shakti.

(2) Take Raktabeeja's slaying. Raktabeeja is a demon with a special ability. If a drop of blood falls from his body on the ground, another demon will be born from it and will be of the same size, age and strength as the original Raktabeeja even at birth. As Vaishnavi, Maaheswari, Aindri etc were hurting Raktabeeja in the fight, more and more demons were being born and all the gods were scared. Then Chandikaa told Kaali to expand her face and eat all the demons as they are born. Chandika goes around the war ground eating all the demons as they are born and eventually Raktabeeja runs out of blood.

This looks like a nice story. But, is there is a deeper meaning in it? Why was Kaali the chosen one and not Vaishnavi or Naarasimhi or Aindri?

The word rakta means blood. Another meaning is "desire/passion". Actually, both the meanings are linked and the word comes from the root ranj/rang, which means "to color". Of course, in our astrology also, Moon shows rakta dhatu (blood) and he is also the karaka for desires.

Raktabeeja means "the seed of desire". Raktabeeja fighting with gods symbolizes desires taking the better of our good judgment and good qualities. Each human being is a microcosm of the macrocosm that the universe is. All devatas reside in us as various good qualities and all demons reside in us as various undesirable qualities. When we are overcome by desires and do bad deeds, the Raktabeeja within us is defeating the gods within us.

The thing is that desires are difficult to get rid of. You get rid of one desire and another desire is born. That is what Raktabeeja's special ability means. The "seed of desires" within us will keep producing more and more desires. It is very resourceful.

Then, why Kaali to destroy Him?

In astrology, we associate Mahaakaala and Mahaakaali with Saturn. Kaali shows detachment and vairagyam. She wears a garland of skulls, symbolizing that there is an endless cycle (garland) of births a material form (skull) goes thru. The way Kaali shows to overcome the cycle is vairagyam and detachment. She shows meaningful and highest level of vairagyam that comes with a deep understanding of the cycle of material forms.

To fully cut off the "seed of desires" so that one does not get any more desires, one needs to develop vairagyam and detachment and keep on destroying desires as they are born and persist like that. After persisting for a long time, the "seed of desires" will run out of desires and one will overcome desires.

Thus, simple stories have deep meanings. This particular story celebrates the value of detachment, vairagyam and persistence - Saturnine qualities.

Durga Saptashati is what is used in Chandi homam. It is very auspicious to read every day or on Ashtami/Navami/Chaturdasi days. It takes 1-2.5 hours. When I read it for the first time on March, it took me 2 hours. Now it takes me 50 min. If you don't have much time, you may want to read one chapter per day.

Merely chanting it without understanding the meaning is also excellent and produces results. Understanding the meaning and marveling at the power of the Mother makes one fearless and energetic and also give material benefits. Understanding the deeper meanings and appreciating the True Nature of the Mother makes one realize one's own true nature. It has various benefits at various levels of sadhana. It is tough to exactly say what benefit it gives, as that depends on the evolution level of sadhaka and his attitude. But, there is something in Chandipath for everyone!

It is more effective if you read the moola mantra (the Navakshari mantra or, preferably, Dasakshari mantra with Om added) 108 times before AND after chanting 700 verses.

I will give one interesting personal anecdote. I started reading Durga Sapta Shati during Shata Chandi Homam at Chennai in March. I took a vow to read it for 108 consecutive days. After I finished exactly 40 days of reading it, a priest who came to our house gifted me a one foot tall panchaloha idol of Ashtadasa Bhuja Maha Lakshmi (Narayani with $9 \times 2 = 18$ hands).

There are no classical references, to my knowledge, on the mapping between the nine planets and the nine forms of Narayani described in Saptashati, who fought with demons. But obviously there must be a link. Here is my first shot at it:

Brahmaani: Jupiter

Maaheswari: Moon

Kaumaari: Mars

Vaishnavi: Mercury

Vaaraahi: Rahu

Naarasimhi: Ketu

Aindri: Sun

Sivadooti: Venus

Chaamundaa/Kaali: Saturn

Thinking of the stories of the Mother and contemplating on them can help one. However, there are a few other factors to consider:

(1) Mantras in Sanskrit have been meditated upon by many saints and yogis in the past and their effect on the mind is well-understood. A sequence of sounds, when repeated with full mental focus, creates a certain energy. Just thinking of the meaning may not create the same energy. For example, sounds without any meaning also produce specific energies in the mind when we focus on those sounds single-mindedly.

(2) The sadhana of so many saints and yogis who used the mantras before adds to the power of those Sanskrit mantras.

This is my opinion: Reading meanings of Chandipath is also good and creates positive thoughts. But repeating the Sanskrit mantras (even without understanding the meaning) is superior to that! It creates well-understood energy in the consciousness.

If one carrying a seed does not understand what it is for and makes a replica in gold, which in his opinion is better, one is losing the basic functionality of the seed. The golden seed may appeal to one as it does not get spoiled and looks better to one's senses, but it can never give rise to a plant. The original seed, on the other hand, can give rise to a plant when one figures out how to germinate it.

One or two years back, I wanted to translate Chandipath into Hindi or Telugu (my mother tongue) in poetic form or even prose form so that people speaking those languages can read it instead of Sanskrit verses and understand better what they are reading. But my guru (Manish) discouraged me. He said something written by a person like me with a dense ego would not have the same power as a Puranic verse. The Sanskrit verses of Chandipath were composed by someone with a highly effaced ego and in communion with divinity. The same could be said about several sacred writings in many religions in many languages. There is something special about words composed by saints, yogis and messiahs who were in a very elevated state of being, where the individual ego is effaced largely and the mind is filled with some divine energy (which is not possible when individual ego occupies the space of mind).

So Manish told me to wait till I was ready (if ever) for such a project. I realized the wisdom in his advice and removed the thought of this project from my mind.

When Jnaneshwar Maharaj composed Jnaneshwari (Marathi translation of Bhagavad Gita in poetic form), he was in a very purified state of consciousness. Hence there is divine power in his Marathi words and many saints experienced divinity by chanting his Marathi verses. Same with Ram Charit Manas by Sant Tulasidas. Those are inspired translations.

If one has access only to words spoken by a normal person in a language that one can understand, it is better to repeat words spoken by an elevated being instead, even if one does not understand the meaning.

Q. You have mentioned somewhere that Manishji was inspired from Mother to start Homam daily. I would like to know whether it was for Maha Ganapati Homam too or only Chandi Homam?

A. The instruction was to spread homam and create a community of sadhakas across the world who worship various deities in fire. It can be any deities.

Q. Please also guide me whether really we should read Chandi Path or Sapta Sati Stotra with Devi Kavacha, Argala, Kilak and Ratri Suktam before 13 Adhyayas and Devi Sukta, etc in the end ? Suppose we recite only 13 Adhyayas only after Sankalpam-will it not be sufficient in daily routine worship? Or it is compulsory?

A. The beauty of Chandi Path is that it instills a great sense of discipline in one. Even 13 chapters take a long time, without anything before or after.

Kavacha, argala, keelaka, raatri sooktam, nyasas and moola mantra are recommended before, while nyasas, moola mantra and devi sooktam are recommended after.

However, in my humble opinion, nothing is really compulsory. Doing just the 13 chapters everyday can be very powerful after a while. I see nothing wrong in it.

Q. Can you guide me the proper uttering of Beej Mantras in Navarna Mantra? Some say it is Aing, Hring, Kling.... and some say it is Aim, Hrim, Klim.....

A. Both are correct and work differently. However, those who try who pronounce the beeja mantras as "aing hreeng" invariably mispronounce them. The "g" becomes explicit. Ideally, you should start pronouncing as though you are going to say "aing" and abruptly stop just when you are about to say "g", without saying it. It is not easy to pronounce this correctly.

Instead of trying "aing hreeng" and messing it up, it is better to just say "aim hreem".

Internal purity and lack (or minimization) of individualized ego is the key in any sadhana. Thousands of hours of sadhana without them is fruitless. One who is pure and has a very limited ego achieves results quickly.

There is a lot of misinformation and unfounded fears that are spread regarding Chandi path. Do not worry about them.

Eating an elaborate set of appetizers and desserts before and after a meal may be recommended. But one can get indigestion from it too. If the meal itself is correct for you, go ahead and enjoy it without appetizers or dessert! Whatever you eat, eat it happily and positively to get the most energy from it. Similarly, read whatever you read with a sense of surrender and limited ego.

Instead of doing everything with a lower focus, it is better to just do 13 chapters with a higher focus.

Q. It is said that Chandi Path can be done only after bathing. In this regard I have some questions Sir. Can I recite Chandi path at evening or at night after just washing my hands and feet? Or Bath is necessary?

A. The vibrations produced by the subtle body are far more important than the vibrations produced by the gross body. Thus, mantra is more of a subtle body activity than a gross body activity. Thus, purity and cleanliness of the subtle body is more important than that of gross body. However, people cannot perceive the subtle body and its purity. Maintaining the purity of subtle body and mind is far more difficult than taking bath, wearing clean clothes and being in pleasant surroundings. Thus, people shoot for the easier external thing (which is a symbol), in the hope that it eventually brings the desired internal end result. If one takes bath, wears clean clothes, keeps one's surroundings clean and pleasant, it will make the mind feel clean. It eventually can bring purity to the mind. Thus, even while maintaining external purity, remember that what matters is the internal purity and that external purity is being maintained only to promote internal purity in the long run.

Let me now answer your specific question. Please remember that the goal of the external practices is to bring forth the desired internal transformation. If there is any amount of guilt or fear or feeling of impurity in the mind when chanting something without taking bath, it is disruptive. These feelings slow down internal transformation. Then it is a good idea to take bath or do whatever is needed to remove those disruptive feelings. On the other hand, if one feels peaceful, clean and calm internally even in unclean external circumstances, the external conditions do not matter. One can then read without taking bath also.

So it all depends on your state of mind, for which you are the best judge. If you are unsure and have any concern at all, then be conservative, i.e. take bath and wear clean clothes.

Q. If somebody is coming at home and I have to attend him for half an hour, can I continue the Chandi path from that completed chapter Or should I start from the first chapter again?

A. I personally give priority to my ritual and not receive anyone in the middle of my rituals, i.e. I make them wait. If you must interrupt your pooja, then I see nothing wrong in continuing where you left off.

Q. I am doing Chandi Homam with Kshir (Boiled milk with Rice) in Navratri but sometimes after offering Kshir, the fire is going off. After reading your articles, now I will not offer kshir as this is not good if fire goes off due to milk. Sir, Kshir offering is necessary for mother? I had read somewhere so I was doing this.

A. That is a good offering, but the fire has to be sufficient. Laddus may be a fine sweet, but we cannot feed them to a two month old baby. Similarly, you cannot offer much kshir to a small fire.

I do my daily Chandi homam with a log of wood and there is a big fire. I can pretty much burn anything. I can offer kshir, I can offer laddus or any other sweets. If you also have a big enough fire, you can offer anything without troubling fire. When your fire is small, you have to exert discretion.

BTW, ancient greco-Roman civilizations had a fire ritual where entire bodies of killed animals were offered to gods in firepit and reduced to ashes by next morning.

If the fire is big, any amount of materials can be offered.

Q. Generally now a days the Deepak is enlightened in Stainless Steel. Is it Ok or we should use copper or Brass for Deepak? Once we read something, our mind is questioning for what we are doing. This is why I have written this mail.

A. I am surprised that stainless steel lamps are used. In Andhra Pradesh (where I am from), we mostly use silver or copper lamps. Even in US (where I live), we use silver lamps mostly. I have actually never seen steel lamps. For my daily homam, I prefer a clay lamp to a silver lamp and use it.

If you are at a stage where external things are just used as symbols based on the momentum of previous karmas and do not mean much to you, then all this is irrelevant. Otherwise, I suggest using silver, brass, bronze, copper, clay etc instead of steel.

Chandi Saptashati

Some people mistakenly think that Chandi Saptashati is merely an account of the exploits of Durgaa and her slaying of demons Mahisha, Chanda, Munda, Raktabeeja, Shumbha, Nishumbha etc. They view it as a collection of stories. But, IMHO, that is a very limited view. Devi mahatmyam is much more than a collection of stories. After all, Vedas are its swaroopam! Rigveda, Yajurveda and Saamaveda are the swaroopam (form/essence/a different manifestation) of the three parts of Chandi Saptashati. The purpose of Vedas is self-knowledge. How can something with Vedas as its swaroopam be about something other than self-knowledge?

Though Devi Mahatmyam looks like stories, there are very valuable lessons on Her nature in it. The deeper you go, the more you can understand and appreciate the lessons in the stories. Let me give a couple of examples.

(1) When various Mothers are going to war with demons, this is how it is described (8-14): "Whatever form, decoration, weapons and vehicle each god has, his shakti (energy) came in the same form, decoration, weapons and vehicle." The next 9 verses describe how Brahmaani etc came. For example, Brahmaani came on a swan with aksha sutra and kamandalu (worn by Brahma), Maaheswari came on a great bull with a Trishoola and She wore a big snake and Moon. And so on.

What is the message hidden in the above description? The normal imagery painted elsewhere is of female deities with a separate form. Here, they are depicted differently.

The fact that these female deities are identical to the male counterparts in form, decoration, weapons and vehicles suggests, to me, that they are not really separate from the male counterparts. Brahma and Brahmaani are not separate. Maheswara and Maaheswari are not separate. Vishnu and Vaishnavi are not separate. And so on. Brahmaani is simply the shakti (vitality/energy) of Brahma. Maaheswari is simply the shakti (vitality/energy) of Maheswara. And so on.

If Vaishnavi went on Garuda vehicle and killed a demon, it actually means that Vishnu went on a Garuda vehicle and killed the demon. Vaishnavi is the personification of Vishnu's energy, which makes Vishnu be, think, desire, move and act. Vaishnavi is not separate from Vishnu.

Of course, if you imagine Vaishnavi (Lakshmi) as a separate person with certain attributes, She may manifest limited by your imagination and even give you a darshan in that form. However, that is a limited form and Her true nature is beyond that. Her true and highest nature is that She is an inseparable part of Vishnu and represents the energy of Vishnu. She is the part of Vishnu that makes Vishnu think, desire, act etc. Vaishnavi is basically Chetana (animated consciousness) of Vishnu.

Thus, contemplation on these verses will make you understand the true nature of male devatas and female devatas and their relationship better. It will enable you to appreciate the highest nature of Shakti.

Puranas personify everything to make things interesting and understandable by laymen. However, it is more fun to explore the deeper meanings.

(2) Take Raktabeeja's slaying. Raktabeeja is a demon with a special ability. If a drop of blood falls from his body on the ground, another demon will be born from it and will be of the same size, age and strength as the original Raktabeeja even at birth. As Vaishnavi, Maaheswari, Aindri etc were hurting Raktabeeja in the fight, more and more demons were being born and all the gods were scared. Then Chandikaa told Kaali to expand her face and eat all the demons as they are born. Chandika goes around the war ground eating all the demons as they are born and eventually Raktabeeja runs out of blood.

This looks like a nice story. But, is there is a deeper meaning in it that helps you in self-realization? Why was Kaali the chosen one and not Vaishnavi or Naarasimhi or Aindri?

The word rakta means blood. Another meaning is "desire/passion". The word comes from the root ranj/rang, which means "to color". Desire/passion/attachment colors and conditions the mind. Beeja means seed.

Raktabeeja means "the seed of desire". Raktabeeja fighting with gods symbolizes desires taking the better of our good judgment and good qualities. Each human being is a microcosm of the macrocosm that the universe is. All devatas reside in us as various good qualities and all demons reside in us as various undesirable qualities. When we are overcome by desires and do bad deeds, the Raktabeeja within us is defeating the gods within us.

The thing is that desires are difficult to get rid of. You get rid of one desire and another desire is born. That is what Raktabeeja's special ability means. The "seed of desires" (i.e. basic attachment that is the nature of mind) within us will keep producing more and more desires. It is very resourceful.

Then, why Kaali to destroy Him?

In astrology, we associate Mahaakaala and Mahaakaali with Saturn. Kaali shows detachment and vairagyam. She wears a garland of skulls, symbolizing that there is an endless cycle (garland) of births a material form (skull) goes thru. The way Kaali shows to overcome the cycle is vairagyam and detachment. She shows meaningful and highest level of vairagyam that comes with a deep understanding of the cycle of material forms.

To fully cut off the "seed of desires" so that one does not get any more desires, one needs to develop vairagyam and detachment and keep on destroying desires as they are born and persist like that. After persisting for a long time, the "seed of desires" will run out of desires and the basic attachment of mind will vanish.

Thus, simple stories have deep meanings. This particular story celebrates the value of detachment, vairagyam and persistence - Saturnine qualities.

Merely chanting Chandi saptashati without understanding the meaning is also excellent and produces results. Understanding the meaning and marveling at the power of the Mother makes one fearless and energetic and also give material benefits. Understanding the deeper meanings and appreciating the True Nature of the Mother makes one realize one's own true nature. It has various benefits at various levels of sadhana. It is tough to exactly say what benefit it gives, as that depends on the evolution level of sadhaka and his attitude. But, there is something in Chandipath for everyone!

However, the highest purpose is self-knowledge and that is why Vedas are its swaroopam.

Towards the end, the 11th chapter (titled "Naaraayani Stuti") describes gods praying to the Divine Mother after slaying all the demons. They address Her as "Naaraayani". Trimurthis symbolize the purest aspects of the three gunas. Vishnu is one of them. He is of Sattva guna and sustains the creation. However, Narayana is different. He is not Vishnu (contrast Narayana sooktam with Vishnu sooktam!). He is gunaateeta (above gunas/attributes). He is the Sahasraseersha and Parama Purusha (Supreme Cosmic Being). Some people may validly describe the same as Samba Sada Shiva also, but let us not argue about names. When we are essentially speaking about an entity that is beyond attributes, it is foolish to argue about the name. After all, name too is an attribute that intends to describe other attributes! Though great people gave different names to Parama Purusha, the names essentially capture the nature of the *path* those people took to experience the Parama Purusha rather than the nature of Parama Purusha, which is beyond names and attributes.

The bottom line is that there is a Parama Purusha above the Trimurthis (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). IF we call him Narayana, then Narayani is His energy and She is the root cause of all manifested creation.

Saptashati is about Narayani. It is about the inseparable root energy of the Supreme Cosmic Being who is the source of this entire universe. A small part of that root energy lies within us too. Because I said "small part", don't think it is small. Even a small percentage of infinity is still infinity. Though each of us is a microcosm of the macrocosm that the entire universe is, each of us is a complete and accurate replica of the entire universe. Think "poornamadah poornamidam" in Vedic spirit! The purpose of all spiritual sadhana is realizing the true nature of self. Chandipath can also be viewed from that perspective.

Someone queried a while back on the meaning behind the story of Madhu Kaitabha. Here is a quick reply based on my limited understanding.

Madhu means honey. "Madhu keeta" means an insect of honey, i.e. honey bee. Madhu kaita means belonging to honey bees. It can be the qualities or nature of honey bees. One of the meanings of "bha" is "having a similarity to". Thus, in my judgment, "Madhu Kaitabha" means "having a semblance to the nature of honey bees".

Like I keep saying, Sanskrit is a fantastic language. Sanskrit names selected by Rishis for expressing various concepts and stories are very thoughtful. Depending on how deep one goes, there are many meanings of the same word. Thus, Rishis expressed concepts that may have one meaning to a layman and a different meaning to one who is ready to understand the deeper meaning! I salute to the wisdom of our Rishis!

I was saying the same thing at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam last weekend. When somebody said at an open discussion that the idea is important and not the name, as there are many names of the same thing in many languages, I made a quick point about the value of Sanskrit names. I said that Sanskrit names have not one meaning, but layers of meanings that can be understood based on the capability of the reader. Rishis used this to hide some special meanings and to keep some higher knowledge as secret, even though it is very much out there! The example I gave was of bhava and pada. Parasara described bhavas (houses) and how to find their respective padas (arudha padas of houses) and said that a bhava and its pada should be judged to see the matters of a house. Though he did not explain the difference between a bhava and its pada further and did not elucidate when to use which one, I said that the very choice of names is a huge clue! Bhava, which is usually translated as a house, also means "a thought/concept/feeling" and pada means "a symbol/word" used to express a thought/concept. Thus, houses are to their arudha padas what thoughts (bhavas) are to the words (padas) that attempt to express them. For example, if the 4th house shows one's happiness from vehicles, the pada of 4th house shows the tangible articles that attempt to throw light on one's happiness from vehicles (e.g. the physical vehicle owned by one). Houses (bhavas) show intangible/internal aspects of a matter (just like thoughts inside one's head), while their arudha padas show tangible/external aspects of a matter (just like the external words spoken that attempt to express the thoughts in the head). If you use the English words to translate Parasara, this hidden meaning may be lost! So, I argued that Sanskrit names used by Rishis are not like words in any language.

Anyway, let us come back to the Madhu Kaitabha story. As I said, Madhu Kaitabha means "having a semblance to the quality of honeybees". What is the quality of honey bees? Well, they keep working hard to accumulate the sweet honey! They are not intelligent enough to think about any higher things in life. Thus, Madhu Kaitabha are an allegory to the quality within us which makes us work hard, like honeybees, with a single-minded focus on accumulating material comforts. Like honeybees accumulate honey, we accumulate material objects and spend whole life working hard doing just that.

Vishnu is a personification of the sattwa guna of the Parama Purusha (Universal/Absolute Being). Within us, Vishnu is an allegory to the sattwa guna within us. Madhu Kaitabha were born from Vishnu's earwax when He was asleep. The ability to work hard like a bee is not really a terrible thing. This ability is essentially born from the sattwa guna within us, when it is in deep slumber (i.e. sattwa guna covered by taamasi shakti, i.e. sattwa guna that "manifests" in a taamasik way).

There are so many good people in this world, who just spend their entire lives in honest labor like the honeybees and accumulate things for themselves and others around them. Their sattwa is in deep sleep and Madhu Kaitabha born from that asleep sattwa are very much active.

The problem with this focus on hard work and accumulation of material objects is that it keeps us away from supreme bliss. Madhu Kaitabha's attack on Brahma and Vedas is symbolic of that. Vedas symbolize the supreme and liberating knowledge of self and Brahma, the carrier of Vedas, symbolizes the sadhana to

achieve the supreme knowledge. The focus on working like honeybees and accumulating material objects tries to kill one's ability to do sadhana and obtain supreme knowledge of self.

Vishnu battles Madhu Kaitabha for 5,000 years. Devi Bhagavatam even describes that Vishnu wondered in the middle how to defeat Madhu Kaitabha, as He finds them quite formidable! Even when the sattva in us awakens, it is difficult for it to overcome the formidable instinct to lead the life of a honeybee and to accumulate the material objects for oneself and others.

According to Parasara, thighs are seen from the 9th house of dharma. The earthy element symbolizes the commitment and stability. The fact that earthy element came from the thighs of Vishnu shows that it is the dharma of sattwa guna sustaining this universe that ensures that there is commitment and stability in this creation.

Moreover, it is apt that someone born in the ears (3rd house) of Vishnu found end in the thighs (9th house, i.e. 7th house of death from the 3rd house) of Vishnu! Similarly, Brahma, who is born from the navel (6th house) of Vishnu should naturally find His end in the 12th house of Vishnu (feet/sleep), which is the 7th house of death from the 6th house! That may be why Vishnu goes to sleep, when there is a change of Brahma.

Anyway, the instinct within us to keep accumulating material objects like honey bees accumulate honey finds its end in the dharma of the sattwa guna, i.e. when the sattwa guna within us follows its dharma. Then we are fully awake spiritually. Naturally, the path to self-knowledge becomes open then and Brahma becomes elated.

Thus, the story of Madhu-Kaitabha refers, allegorically, to the instinct most of us have towards leading a "regular" life, working hard like honeybees and accumulating objects for self and others and how that instinct needs to be defeated by waking up the sattwa guna and allowing it to perform its dharma.

Lest I am misunderstood, I need to clarify one thing. I am not saying that these stories are not real. These stories ARE very much real. In fact, when a Yogi is able to transport consciousness (Kundalini) to a particular plane (chakra), He/She can vividly see these stories actually happening. The stories are as real as our own existence as beings made of flesh and blood is, in the normal plane of consciousness.

What I am saying is that there is an allegorical link between various planes of consciousness. What is real in one plane of consciousness is an allegory in another plane of consciousness. If one is at least capable of understanding a story as an allegory, that will serve a valuable purpose!

Q. How do you do certain number of chandi paths? Does one person reads the book continuously until the number of pathas is completed? I was wondering if it is OK to do simultaneous paths by say 7 people to complete sapta chandi path? If that is possible then sata chandi path can be completed even in one day. But I remember you did that in Chennai over a period of 10 days or so. In this case did the person (I think you) who took the sankalp to complete the sata chandi path stayed in the temple from start to end? I understand from my experience that without Mother's wish such a thing is not possible but do people invoke mother's protection in some way besides choosing an auspicious time (as you did)

A. The normal interpretation is to add the counts of all participants. If ten people read nine times each, the count is $10 \times 9 = 90$.

When we did Sata Chandi homam, we did it that way. Actually, we did not do over ten days. It was 7 days. We cumulatively chanted 90 times in 4 days and then chanted 10 times *in the fire* over the final 3 days.

The priest arranged for some other priests to read Chandipath during those 4 days and clear the count of 90 with a safe margin. But not all of them were reading it at the temple. They were reading it at their homes with the mental sankalpam to contribute to the homam at the temple.

The homam was due to the sankalpam of my spiritual master Dr Manish Pandit from Manchester, UK. He suggested that we should actually get to the count of 90 *at* the temple if possible. So some of us chanted several times a day and actually covered the count of 90 at the temple itself with a margin. In addition, some more people read it at homes, based on the previous plan of the priest. So we made the count in different ways.

I was not there all the 7 days. During the first 4 days, I was away for 2 days, visiting Tirupati, Tirunannamalai, Kanchi etc. But my guru was there chanting all the seven days. On 5 out of 7 days, I too was there at the temple. However, we left the temple and went to the house of the head priest to sleep in the nights. It may have been a good idea to sleep at the temple itself. Again, it is a very alive temple with so many kinds of energies...

Yes, we think we are the doers, but we are just pawns. Just read the kavacha, argala and keela in the beginning of chandipath on each day for protection.

I took a vow at the Sata Chandi homam to read Chandipath for 108 consecutive days and completed it in June 2006. A couple of months after that, the head priest of that Kalikambal temple visited Boston. He was at our house and we did 10 Chandi homas at my house. We did 8 on a Saturday (starting in the morning and going on till 2 am!), the 9th on Sunday morning and did an elaborate final one on Sunday afternoon. It was six months after the Sata Chandi homam in Chennai and it can also be considered a different kind of Sata Chandi homam.

Reciting Mantra without Receiving Initiation

Q. Can anyone do the Navarna mantra, or does this require initiation?

A. If one's parents did not do a proper "anna praasana" ritual (the ritual of first feeding of solid food to a baby) to one, should one consider oneself not entitled to eat any solid food? Not doing a mantra because of no initiation is basically like that.

Getting initiation is good, especially if the one initiating has some level of sadhana in that mantra. But it is neither necessary nor sufficient for making progress in your own sadhana.

If you see my homam document, I gave an analogy for this. A millionaire may open a bank account in his son's name with a starting balance of a million dollars. This is akin to a good guru initiating a sishya in a mantra. Sishya starts off by getting some of guru's attainment. But the son may waste those million

dollars and end up with nothing. Similarly the sishya may fall and not achieve anything. Another person may not have anyone to give money and may start off with a zero bank balance but accumulate millions of dollars with own effort. This is akin to a person doing sadhana with a mantra without guru and attaining some level in the mantra.

Some people hold the view that mantras cannot be chanted without a proper "initiation". This view is especially prevalent in some sections of society w.r.t. navarna mantra. However, I disagree with that view.

If you know the mantra (!), just chant it. What would an initiating guru have done for you? Perhaps he would've given some of his attainment in the mantra to you. Well, you can do it yourself if you work hard. Or a guru would've taught you the right nyasas to be done before the mantra. Well, you can get the nyasas from books too. Moreover, what most people do today for nyasas is anyway just a ritual with no meaning. Nyasa literally means placement. You place various sounds in various body parts (like the tips of various fingers, heart, top of head, eyes etc). People merely act out some signals while saying the sounds. This "placement" is actually supposed to be an internal act and it creates an ideal environment for the repetition of mantra. Due to the external actions, what is supposed to occur internally does not occur in most. So the sounds end up not getting properly placed in the body. In other words, what I am trying to say is that most people do not know how to "place" various "sounds" in various body parts. They merely perform meaningless ritualistic actions. So, if you do not know nyasas, you are not really missing much compared to others who were initiated.

In my humble opinion, the most important qualification is to have devotion and sense of surrender to Her. If you have them, you can consider yourself "highly initiated".

Right Way of Chanting Mantra

Q. What is the right way of chanting mantra ? Loudly or just whispering or Manan?

A. Both are ok. But, in my view, the best way to chant is to chant mentally. When some people chant mentally, there is subtle movement of muscles in the throat. If you can chant in the mind with complete silence, i.e. with NO movement of any internal [physical] body part, it is the best.

In fact, if you attempt that, you will realize that your focus on the mantra has to be very high to achieve the above. When you say a mantra loud, mind can be thinking of something else while the throat and lips say something. In order to say something mentally without any movement, however, your focus has to be much higher. It just forces a higher level of focus.

If you attempt the above, it is difficult in the beginning to avoid occasional movement of muscles in the throat. If you practice more, you will be able to say without any movement. Secondly, if you can also avoid the movement of other physical body parts (not involved with sound production) such as hands, legs, head etc, it can result in a more productive meditation session.

Krishito naasti durbhiksham. When it comes to spiritual sadhana, there is nothing like effort. One just needs to put more and more effort and keep trying without giving up.

Negative Thoughts During Japa

Q. I really have a nagging problem which others may be experiencing at various intensities. Without fail, my mind thinks of a very particular highly negative thought whenever I am doing Japa. Often I try to negate it in my mind with the obvious result that my Japa gets destroyed. I am paranoid about these bad thought coming true, especially as I am thinking them while doing Japa. In my heart I definitely do not want them to materialize. How should I proceed?

A. The nature of mind is to wander and think various things. Mind will stop thinking only when it is in samadhi. Until then, it will continue to get some good thoughts and some bad thoughts. That is its nature.

The goal of sadhana is to train the mind to focus on one thing. Some may train the mind to focus on a mantra. Some may train the mind to focus on musical notes. Some may train the mind to focus on the breathing. In various types of spiritual sadhana, you have one object for the mind to focus on. Still, mind tries to wander off all the time.

If a computer is running a program and a virus or spyware or adware starts running, an anti-virus program's watchdog task that is running in the same computer detects it and deletes it (before it does much harm). Similarly, install a watchdog task in your mind. Suppose you are meditating or doing some sadhana and trying to focus the mind on something. Suppose some other (good or bad!) thoughts come to the mind. As soon as you are aware of it (i.e. the watchdog task detects them), simply delete the thoughts.

I recommend not getting aggravated or frustrated at the bad thoughts. Just become aware of them and tell yourself to focus on the mantra. It is *natural* for the mind to be thinking of those bad thoughts. By being aggravated or frustrated, you are only increasing the distraction. It is like picking fight with a heckler who interrupts a speech you are giving or a song you are singing. Become aware and move on. If you pick a fight with the heckler it does more harm than the original heckling!

By being aware of the distraction, acknowledging it and then consciously trying to ignore it, you are maximizing your chances of successfully returning the full attention of the mind to the mantra. Of course, the distraction will keep coming again and again. But the best option is to tell your mind to focus on the mantra each time you are aware of the distraction. Do NOT get frustrated. As you keep doing this over and over and over, the heckler may decide to shut up. Similarly, as you ignore distractions of the mind, eventually one day a pleasant accident will happen and mind will achieve absolute focus on the mantra, with no other thoughts! THAT is when you experience the mantra and deity. Until then, it is a rehearsal.

All thoughts - good or bad - are distractions. When you are meditating with a mantra, the mind should be focused on ONE thing. That one thing can be the sound of the mantra or an image of the deity you have in your mind or a thought that "so and so deity is supreme. I am an insignificant servant" etc. Try to focus your mind on that one focus point. As other thoughts come, become aware and move on without any frustration or sadness or anger or disappointment.

Original mail said: "In my heart I definitely do not want them to materialize.". Please realize that one's thinking or not thinking of something has nothing to do with something happening or not happening. Thinking that you make several things happen, that there is a cause-effect relationship between various

things in the universe and you have a role in it is an unnecessary burden. Tell yourself that She (or He) does it all and you are just an insignificant servant who happens to be there observing it all. It is a simpler world view and one that does not burden you. Moreover, it is a more accurate view.

Maalaa for Japa

Q. Personally, I do not like to do japa with a Mala, as I feel this makes the whole process very mechanical and preoccupies my mind with issues such as not crossing the Meru, handling the Mala properly etc..I find my mind dwelling on these issues rather than the mantra itself.

A. Mind anyway preoccupies itself with many things! :-) By giving it an anchor to focus on (like handling of the maalaa), you are actually stabilizing it somewhat. If this specific pre-occupation minimized many other (and worse) pre-occupations, it is not a bad thing at all.

It is like a monkey that keeps jumping from one place to another place being tied to a pole with a chain to limit its jumping. The monkey may still be jumping up and down, but the chain atleast **limits** its movement around one pole.

Of course, if the monkey learns to stay in one place without jumping, it needs no chain or pole anymore. Chain was there in the first place to limit its jumping.

Each person is the best judge of where one is and what is appropriate for oneself. We make progress by recognizing our weaknesses and addressing them. In addition, there are certain chakras in the tips of fingers that are directly connected to the brain. Objects like rudraksha and tulasi beads can stimulate those minor energy centers. Thus, there is **some** use in the beginning.

Q. Does japa have to be done with a Maalaa?

A. Upto you. For most people, I recommend using a maalaa.

Q. What are the ramifications of crossing the Meru bead?

A. What use is it to know? Avoid it as much as you can. If you cross it, so be it. Don't worry and move on. But, avoid crossing it again.

Q. I know some scriptures say Japa done with Mala (in my case Vishnu mantra done with Tulsi Mala) is more effective than japa done without Mala. Is this meant to be taken seriously?

A. It is also given in a scripture that Rudraksha and Tulasi maalaaas can be used for chanting any mantra and they are many more times powerful than other maalaaas. My suggestion is to pick up either a Rudraksha maalaa or a Tulasi maalaa based on your taste and use it for **all** mantras.

I want to categorically state that using a Tulasi maalaa for Shiva or a Rudraksha maalaa for Vishnu will NOT do you any harm.

Q. What should one concentrate when reciting Japa for purpose of remedial measures? The mantra, the devata, one's goals?

A. Anything that works as an anchor to limit the mind from straying away too much is useful. An image or visualization of deity may work for some. Focusing on each sound and ups and downs in intonation may work for some. The goal is to minimize other thoughts. Thinking of one's goals will usually make the mind stray away into unnecessary pre-occupations. It is better to focus on deity or mantra.

Q. Sorry to get so technical but the Tulsi mala I have seems to be cracked in many places, is this is ok?

A. Compared to the cracks in our determination, sincerity and surrender, cracks in a maala are far less problematic. Do not worry. It is not uncommon in Tulasi maalas to have cracks.

Q. I have heard best place to keep mala while doing Japa is near the heart, at least always above navel, is that correct?

A. Yes. Keeping the current meditating bead of the maala close to the anahata chakra is a good idea. Mooladhara, svadhishthana and manipura chakras are the bhur, bhuvar and suvar lokas, which exist physically. Above navel are the lokas that do not exist physically and exist only spiritually. The goal of sadhana is, if not to get moksha, to go to a higher spiritual loka. Keeping the bead above navel is a good idea.

Q. I distinctly notice feelings of anger after doing Japa? I have just started doing Japa as a remedy, is this anger residue some kind of byproduct of the purification process? The mantra is a very common, Prasiddha Vishnu Mantra.

A. Possible. Certain prior vasanas and karmas need to be washed away or burned in sadhana in order to progress. When a room is being swept by a broom, some dirt may spill over at its door. Have patience and surrender to the Lord.

Q. What is "Crossing the Meru". Reading more about this, got me concerned - Just would like to get full practical understanding. Please explain this in detail.

A. The pendant is the meru. You start from a bead next to it and keep going to the next bead. When you finish all the beads and come to the last one (on the other side of the pendant), you start the next cycle right there and go in reverse direction. Suppose beads are B1, B2, B3, ..., B53, B54. You go as B1, B2, B3, ..., B53, B54 and then go B54, B53, B52, ..., B3, B2, B1.

Instead, if one goes as B1, B2, B3, ..., B52, B53, B54, and then again B1, B2, B3, ... etc, that is called crossing the meru. When going from B54 to B1, one crosses over the meru. It is better to avoid that and do as mentioned above.

Q. Does the japa mala go clockwise or counter clockwise.?

A. Either is fine.

Q. Usually we are supposed to do 108 (or multiples) japa - So in my case after 54 should I turn back (reverse) the direction or reverse the mala?

A. Yes.

Q. Is it okay to wear the japa mala on a regular basis. I would rather wear it than keep it down or away or get mishandled. This japa mala spent some time at Mantralaya Moola Brindavanam and is given to me by the Pontiff.

A. There are two views. Some people keep the maala in pooja room and treat it auspiciously. Some people keep the maala on their body to protect them and be available at all times for do japam. If you keep it on the body always, the question is what do you do at the time of activities like emptying the bowels. Some people consider those activities as impure and remove the maala at those times. Some people keep it all the time no matter what they are doing.

If there is any feeling of impurity in one's mind when doing certain things, it is a good idea to remove the maala. If one is fully comfortable and has no such feelings of impurity or guilt, then one can keep it on at all times.

Q. Which mala is best for Ganesha Japa? I know you say to stick with one mala for all Japa however my mind cannot fully accept this. Which mala is best for Ganesha? Sandalwood, Turmeric or Sphatik? Or something else entirely?

A. In my judgment, a rudraksha mala is more than enough for Ganesha sadhana.

For Lakshmi, kamalagutta mala (a garland of lotus seeds) is considered the best. I did use one that was gifted by the same priest who gifted me so many other religious articles. However, in my judgment, I had more fruitful sessions of Mahalakshmi meditation with Rudraksha mala than with it. Rudraksha and Tulasi are very special compared to all other malas. Instead of using a different mala for each deity, it is a good idea to use a single mala for all meditation and let it be a repository of all the generated energy.

This reminds me of an unrelated incident. When Shata Chandi homam conducted in Chennai in March 2006 was finished, priests bathed the idols in the garbhaalaya with the water from the kalashas (pots) used in the homas and brought malas from the idol and gave them to us. The priest put a Rudraksha mala from the Mother around my neck. A passing thought came to me and got stuck in my mind for a couple of seconds, "I already have so many rudraksha malas, but I have no sphatika mala, which is considered ideal for the Mother. I just took a vow of doing Chandipath for 108 days. I wish he had given me a sphatika mala instead of this rudraksha mala." Then I forgot about that stupid thought.

This was in the afternoon. Next morning, we were in a flight from Chennai to Hyderabad. In another day, I was to leave for Boston. In the flight to Hyderabad, my son was kicking the seat in front of him and the gentleman turned back to complain. I apologized and told my son to behave. The gentleman turned forward and again turned back in a few seconds and asked "you are PVR Narasimha Rao, right?" I said

yes. He apparently uses my free Jyotish software and likes me. Though I had offered all my hair to Balaji at Thirumala a few days back and was without any hair, he still identified me based on a photo published 6 years back in an interview in a Jyotish magazine! He talked to me for a while.

When we reached Hyderabad, he ran to the baggage claim, collected his suitcase, took out a sphatika mala from it and gifted it to me. He said he met a saint on the previous afternoon at Chennai and the saint gave him three sphatika malas - one for him, one for a family member and the third one meant for someone else. The saint told him that he would meet somebody he respected on the next day and he was supposed to hand over the mala to that person. When he saw me, he decided that the mala was meant for me. Interestingly, his meeting with the saint happened around the same time I had that stupid thought about sphatika mala in the garbhalaya of the temple.

During shata Chandi homam, I took a vow to read Chandipath for 108 consecutive days. I did it and used that mala to count the moola mantra. At the end, that priest came to Boston and conducted 10 Chandi homas at our house to complete the sadhana. During the last homam, a strong thought came to my mind, "the purpose for which that sphatika mala was sent is over. Now offer it back to the Mother in fire." I suppressed my instincts and did not do it. I wanted to hang on to it. See, I formed an attachment with it! Interestingly, that mala broke on the same evening, a little after that homam was finished! Of course, I made a mala again with the sphatikas and kept it for offering it in fire next time. Now I realized that my attachment was foolish.

Of course, I did Chandipath and Chandi homam many more times after that, but that was the first 108 and I was destined to use the mala given by that saint for that round. Now, of course, I use the same rudraksha mala for everything and did not look for another sphatika mala.

It is the nature of mind to see variety. There are different types of malas and different kinds of rituals and mind is fascinated by the variety. At the end, mind needs to be trained to see the same in the variety. But, in the beginning, mind does see variety and it needs to wade through variety...

Pronunciation of Mantras

Sabda (loosely translated as sound or vibration) has 4 levels - vaikhari, madhyama, pastanti and para. When moving parts of our gross body (e.g. lips) move the gross bodies of objects around us (particles in air) and this vibration is perceived by the senses attached to the gross bodies of people around us (e.g. ears), that vibration is at the level of vaikhari. When we are talking about pronunciation of mantras, we are essentially talking about vaikhari.

But we are not just our sthoola sareera (gross body). There is also a sookshma sareera (subtle body), kaarana sareera (causal body) and finally MahaKaarana sareera (cosmic body). Just as vibration in sthoola sareera creates vaikhari, vibrations in other levels also create vibrations at other levels.

The image you have in mind when you chant a mantra and the thoughts you are thinking when you chant a mantra go towards shaping the subtle vibrations behind a mantra. They vibrate the space around you at the subtle level.

Once you cause of vibration of space around you (at gross or subtle level), it is there. One with an ability to perceive it can perceive it. Of course, the deity of your mantra does not receive just the gross vibration produced by you, but receives and responds to the entirety of the vibrations produced by you at all levels.

Vaikhari is the least powerful level and para is the most powerful level.

All the scholarly preoccupation with the correct pronunciation etc is a little trite. The devotion, sense of surrender and the ability to create the correct mental images and correct thoughts to accompany the chanting of the mantra are far more important.

Of course, it is helpful to pronounce the mantra correctly too. I am not saying ignore the correct pronunciation. Do your BEST to get it correct. But all I am saying is that that plays a small part and a bigger part is played by other factors which are often ignored. Do NOT ignore those.

Secondly, being a child as opposed to an arrogant scholar helps with gods. If you can be like a child who is lost by parents at a fair and crying for them, it is easier to find god. As a matter of fact, we ARE almost like a clueless little children left by parents at the fair (of samsara)!

I want to clarify one thing lest I be misunderstood. I am not at all saying that people should not chant veda mantras. They can. But I am pointing out that Veda mantras do not work to their potential these days.

I can clarify using an analogy. Imagine that mantras are the weapons used to protect the mind from enemies (weaknesses). After all, mantra comes from mana and tra and does mean "that which protects the mind".

If regular mantras are like sticks with which you can beat up enemies, veda mantras are like powerful guns with which you can shoot with precision. However, the correct knowledge related to chanting and experiencing veda mantras is pretty much lost today. Though there are people who possess a lot of guns, pretty much nobody knows how to shoot a gun. Thus, one who wants to use a gun will have to use it like a stick and beat the enemy with the gun.

Q. Personally, I am in favor of living thru my karmas with consciousness rather than appeasing anything/anyone. The grace of consciousness of savitur is perhaps what all of us are seeking, isn't it?

A. I do not want to make a personal comment on you, but want to say something in general.

People talk about living thru karmas with consciousness, about surrendering and going through the fruits of karmas with a stable mind etc. But these things are easier to talk about than to actually do. When the fruit of a really bad karma strikes, then it will be difficult to maintain the same attitude and mental stability. One can be shaken. Being able to live through the fruits of *any* karma with a stable and unperturbed mind is indeed the goal of all. One can get there only after burning/exhausting several blocking karmas.

With some sadhana, some tranquility and stability of mind comes. That enables one to do better and more focused sadhana. That increases the tranquility and stability of mind. That enables one to do even better sadhana. This slowly picks up and eventually one reaches the state where one can simply live through the

fruits of *any* karma without any impact on the equanimity and stability of mind. Before that, serious sadhana is needed.

Common Sanskrit Pronunciation Errors

Ramakrishna Paramahansa once said that even Vedas are corrupted these days. It is the nature of Kali yuga to corrupt everything.

It is my feeling that many people, including highly learned Vedic scholars, pronounce some sounds in Sanskrit mantras (including Veda mantras) incorrectly.

Of course, pronunciation is not everything. Having devotion and the spirit of surrender to god is even more important. However, pronunciation is a factor too. Especially, correct pronunciation is very important in Veda mantras. Wrong pronunciation of a Veda mantra can stop one from the most complete experience of the mantra. In fact, we have a lot of people who can memorize and repeat Veda mantras, but very few who can actually "experience" a mantra.

Over the next few months, I will write my views on correct pronunciation and point out some common errors. If you do not think that correct pronunciation is important or if you disagree with my assessment of the errors or if you do not want to change your pronunciation, please ignore my writings on this subject. On the other hand, if you are open to changing your pronunciation, please give a consideration to my views and adopt my suggestions if you find them appropriate.

Take the "t" sound at the end of the words like "prachodayaat", "ava purastaat", "sahasrapaat" etc. Most priests and scholars pronounce this sound incorrectly. They change "t" to something like "tu" or "ttu" or "ti" or "tti". There is a reason why this corruption came into practice, but it is a corruption nevertheless.

In "prachodayaat", the sound "yaat" as one letter/syllable/akshara. If you change it into "yaattu" or "yaatu" by adding a vowel sound at the end, it becomes two aksharas. This increases the number of aksharas, changes the chhandas and changes the meaning also. You may still experience something when meditating on the mantra, but you will never experience the mantra to the fullest with that pronunciation.

Akshara means "unperished". Vowels (swaras) are the praana (life force) of an akshara. If you have just a consonant without a vowel after it, then it has no praana. It is kshara and NOT an akshara. It perishes. For example, if you pronounce "t" as is (without adding any sounds to it), you cannot sustain the sound and the listener cannot decipher what exactly you pronounced. It has no life force.

In "prachodayaat", the whole sound "yaat" is one akshara. Because "t" has no praana by itself, it simply joins to the akshara "yaa" (which has the vowel "aa" as its praana) and becomes part of that akshara. In chhandas, "yaat" is considered one letter (one guru). When you pronounce "yaat" correctly, it is difficult for the listener to know for sure whether you said "yaat" or "yaak" or "yaan". It is possible if one listens carefully, but otherwise difficult. The "t" at the end is a very quick and abrupt transient sound without praana. So it tough to hear clearly.

This makes people add some vowel to it (like "u" or "a" or "o" or "i" or some other vowel sound in between them) so that the "t" sound gets a praana and becomes clearly audible. It suddenly becomes an akshara and the chhandas changes.

Probably, some big teacher started pronouncing "yaat" as "yaatu" so that "t" gets a praana of itself and becomes very clear to hear, so that his students would not get confused when learning. Probably the students thought the mantra was "yaatu" (instead of "yaat") and got used to that mis-pronunciation. Probably, that became a standard practice after a couple of centuries.

If you pronounce the English word "path", you do not change it to "paaththu". You say "th" at the end of "path" as a consonant and leave it there. You don't force an vowel sound to be added at the end. The same thing holds for "t" in "prachodayaat".

What I said about words ending in consonants applies to all consonants and not just "t", though "t" is more commonly encountered. There can be words that end in "n" or "k" etc also. There also, people normally add an artificial vowel sound at the end and end up changing the chhandas and altering the flow of energy in the mantra. That is also wrong.

One more common mistake is the sound "tha" (as in "kathaa" = story). Most south Indians pronounce this as "dha" (as in "dhana" = money). In Telugu and Kannada scripts, the symbols of tha and dha looks very similar and just one dot in the middle is different. It is possible that some people started mispronouncing this sound because of their inability to see the dot and others started following. Now pronouncing tha as dha became mainstream and one pronouncing correctly will be the odd person out.

Sanskrit is not English. We never have two different symbols for the same sound or two different sounds for the same symbol. The letters "tha" and "dha" are different and their sounds are different too. Pronounce "t" (as in "tanu" = body or "taamra" = copper) with a stress/aspiration to get "th" (as in "kathaa" = story).

In the sankalpa before many poojas, people say "dharmaartha kaama moksha chaturvidha purushaartha siddhyartham". This means "for attaining the purusharthas (purposes of human existence) - dharma (fulfilling duties), artha (work and money), kaama (fulfilling desires) and moksha (developing detachment)". Most people end up pronouncing "dharmaartha kaama moksha" as "dharmaardha kaama moksha". It means "half of dharma, kaama and moksha". Even "siddhardham" means "half attainment" and "purushaardha" means "half a human". Mis-pronunciation in this sankalpa is a bad mistake and I have seen it committed by many many trained priests!

When you read Vaidika/Taantrika/Pouranika mantras, pay attention to the difference between "tha" and "dha" and learn to pronounce them differently. When you see "tha" or "dha" in the mantra, pay extra attention to ensure that you are not confusing tha for dha.

There are several other mistakes (in my view) commonly made by most people in the pronunciation of Sanskrit mantras. I will be pointing them out slowly in the next few months, whenever the Mother allows me to.

Please give me your consideration and take my input into consideration in altering your pronunciation (if you are open to that). If you don't find any sense in what I am saying or want to continue as taught by your gurus, I can understand that. I am not here to change everybody's pronunciation. But, because She inspired me to share my thoughts with the world, I am guessing that there are SOME who are destined to change their pronunciation based on my views. That is why I am writing these mails.

Q. What is the right version of the Ganapathi mantra: "Om Gung Ganpataye Namah". or "Om Gam Ganapathaye Namah" ?

A. Both the versions are correct and work differently. Beejaksharas are pronounced ending with "m" as well as "ng".

However, please note that the "g" should not be explicitly pronounced. The pronunciation of "ng" in beejas "gang" or "aing" or "hreng" etc is actually like that of the letter "n" in the English word "king" or "monkey". Though it is written as "ng", the sound "g" is not actually pronounced. To pronounce "gang" correctly, start to pronounce "gang" and stop *just before* you pronounce the last letter "g". Unless you are about to pronounce "g", the correct pronunciation of "n" is not possible. So think that you will pronounce "gang", but suppress "g" at the last second.

Many Tantrikas use "ng" as the nasal at the end of most beejas, while others use "m" as the nasal at the end of most beejas. Nasals are of aakaasa tattwa (ether/space) and owned by Jupiter. The nasal "ng" is a combination of agni and aakaasa tattwas ruled by Mars and Jupiter and is akin to Guru-Mangala yoga given by them. The nasal "m" is a combination of vaayu and aakaasa tattwas ruled by Saturn and Jupiter and is akin to Brahma yoga given by them. Both are correct, but work differently. Do whatever comes naturally to you or whatever your guru taught you!

Hurrying Vedic Chants

Namaste revered friends and elders,

I was at a Srisukta homam at a local temple a few weeks back. The priests recited Sri Suktam 16 times. But, unfortunately, they read it too fast. After finishing 15 times very fast, they read the last time slowly. It is as if they are thinking "thank God it is over, now I don't need to hurry anymore. Let me do it slowly, now that only one count is left". This is unfortunate.

If you have decided to express your love to your parents, will you say it with a hurried tone and a business attitude? Or, will you say it slowly and clearly with love, care and expression? Worshipping a deity is also like expressing your love to your father/mother!

Especially, Vedic chants have a special power. When chanted with the correct pronunciation and intonation, they have the power to transform. But one cannot hurry them. If one hurries a Vedic chant, certain sounds will not be clearly audible. The intonation - ups and downs - on various aksharas get mixed up. It is not possible to put the correct intonation on each akshara (and for the entire duration of the akshara) if one hurries. Some intonation levels sometimes get carried over wrongly from one akshara to another. That is not good. There is no comparison between the energy and bliss produced by a perfect Vedic chanting and an erroneous one under haste. Vedic chants are not meant to be read too fast. Those who cling on to fixed counts and sacrifice the quality of chanting are missing the main point and losing the actual benefit.

If one has limited time to perform a ritual, it is better to reduce the counts instead of keeping long counts and hurrying the chanting. It is better to read 11 times slowly and clearly, rather than reading 16 times hastily. I wonder if it is better to just decide a time period and chant for the duration with a normal speed

(without bothering about counts), rather than having a target count. The latter has the potential to create hurry.

I am not finding fault with any specific person or group here, but just airing a general complaint I have with a small section of the priest community. If a single person's thinking is affected by this mail, my purpose is served! I am sorry if I offended anybody.

Q. You have noted well. Such problem does not exist with a small group of brahmins but actually with a majority of them these days. I live in Canada and at times, I have inquired with priest for different pujas that I want to do at home....each time the pundit says it is going to take 1 1/2 hours....no matter what type of puja it is , it is going to take 1 1/2 hours. Hence I have decided, I am not going to call any brahmin at home to do puja.....just do whatever I can to the best of my ability. Unfortunately, we are not living in the best of times and possibility times are going to get even worse.

A. There is another angle. A priest may have gotten used to the fast style because of others and not due to lack of devotion. Fast reading of mantras does not prove a lack of devotion (though it sometimes indicates that). A priest may pronounce mantras incorrectly or very fast, but may have the highest level of devotion in his heart. If such a priest calls gods, they WILL come. Gods do not do nitpicking about your pronunciation or procedure or speed, when your devotion and effort makes them happy. Shiva was pleased with the meat offering Kannappa who did not know how to worship!

When scriptures refer to Sabda Brahman, the "sabda" (vibration) referred to there is not just the physical audible sound. When we say a mantra, the thoughts, the images and the movement of prana in the mind also accompany the sound as subtler levels of sabda. Out of the 4 levels of sabda (vaikhari, madhyama, pasyanti and para), the audible sound that results in vibration of the gross matter around us is only the grossest level (vaikhari). The other levels cause vibration in the subtle matter around us. An advanced yogi may be able to hear (not with ears) those vibrations too. Those vibrations are a more important part of the sabda.

Even a person who reads a mantra perfectly may produce wrong sabda if his thoughts are wandering. One who pronounces incorrectly but has his mind firmly focussed on the Lord produces an almost perfect sabda and reaches Him.

Though I urge people to make an effort - as stated in the previous mail - to pronounce mantras slower and better, I urge them NOT to judge others around them. It is dangerous. Judge yourself and not others.

If you can do a pooja yourself, it is always a good idea to do that.

But, when you call a priest to your house to perform a pooja, don't judge him and just think of him as Shiva. Think that Shiva Himself came to your house and doing that pooja. Believe that in all sincerity and surrender. Then, you will get the perfect fruits of the pooja, no matter how the priest reads the mantras, no matter how much he hurries and no matter how much his devotion is! All that is HIS karma. If you truly accept him as Shiva and take his deeds as Shiva's deeds, your karma is pure.

Unfortunately, we are not living in the best of times and possibility times are going to get even worse. There is a silver lining to every cloud. Compared to Krita/Sathya yuga, the overall dharma in this Kali yuga is 1/4th. However, the dharma followed by an average person today is probably 1/100th or 1/1000th of the dharma followed by an average person in Krita yuga. How is it then that the average dharma is 1/4th?

Obviously, there are some souls somewhere, who are engaged in great tapascharya and pulling up the average dharma for the benefit of the world. Thus, even though we "are not living in the best of times", there are places and people where "the best of times" is maintained. If it gets "even worse", the sections that are maintaining dharma will get even better. SHE ensures that. One can volunteer for that work and seek Her blessings.

Each fall is a new opportunity to rise. Each falling soul is a new opportunity for you to serve.

Can Mantra Cassettes or CDs Create Positive Vibrations?

Q. I had visited one Gentleman in 1980 who was curing the patients by simply their photographs. He was demanding photo of the patient. He had pasted Gayatri Mantra sticker on all the three wings of a table fan and he was keeping the photograph of the patient just opposite the fan. He was switching his fan on for 1 or 2 hours daily for couple of days and as per his say, he was throwing the vibrations of Gayatri Mantra directly to the photograph. He was claiming that he has cured so many patients by Gayatri Mantra vibrations. Can anybody be cured by Gayatri Mantra-written Fan?

A. In general, if anybody pastes Gayatri mantra stickers on a fan and runs the fan in front of a photo or even the person directly, you can be sure that it does nothing whatsoever. This is too literal a way to create "vibrations" of the mantra. Vibrations of a mantra are subtle and created by the subtle body as one repeats a mantra.

However, the person in question may indeed have cured some people like this! As somebody does spiritual sadhana, Nature may give one some abilities. Curing people with a specific procedure - however illogical - CAN be one such ability conferred by Nature after one does sadhana. The shakti generated by his previous sadhana may be slowly being put to use with each patient. Fan with Gayatri mantra stickers is only an instrument and the result comes because of the person's previous sadhana and not the procedure.

There may be people with very minor siddhis and abilities like this, who use weird and illogical procedures to achieve tangible results. There is nothing wrong with it. However, most of them fall into the trap of thinking "I did it", "that procedure did it" etc and feel a sense of ownership, entitlement or superiority. They may take pride in what they do. This whole thing promotes ego. In the process, they get stuck. They accumulate some people who admire them, but they do not free themselves. This may happen to people with more advanced siddhis also.

However, all kinds of people are needed by Nature. People like this are also needed. Not everyone is going to be liberated in the current life. Every soul passes through various stages.

Q. Some people are arranging some Mantra cassette or CD in their worship room and playing them for couple of hours daily and believing that the room is charged due to Mantra vibrations. Some are playing these types of CDs in their Car to get protection from accidents and like. All are doing these as per their believes. What I want to know from you Sir is whether this is really working? Can a CD or Cassette create vibrations? If someone is sleeping in the room where whole night one CD of a certain Mantra is played. The person is unaware of it. Whether Mantra will create any positive effect on him?

A. Vibrations are not generated by the *vaikhari* sound of a mantra repeated by a machine or even a person. They are generated by the subtle body of a person whose consciousness is focused on a mantra. If one plays a mantra in a CD, listens to it actively and focuses the mind on what one is listening, then the person's thoughts while listening can produce good vibrations and generate purity. But, in general, playing CDs and tapes in a room with nobody listening to them does not do much.

However, suppose a person of sufficiently high level of purity recorded it and he intended some good results for these people. His strong intention may be sufficient to transfer some of his energy to them and help them. Then playing of the CD can work as a nimitta or an instrument (like the fan in case 1 above) and slowly release the shakti of the person.

We can appreciate the work of all people. If one listens to us, we can try to impress upon one some spiritual teachings of rishis and great saints and try to help one see things in proper light and not get stuck. If other people foolishly try to imitate someone's illogical procedure, because it seems to work, we can try to educate them and remove their misconceptions.

We can advise others and try to help others, but we cannot really change anybody. But each of us can definitely change ONE person and correct the attitude of that person. And, that person is oneself.

Questions on Homam

Q. What do the seven "tongues" of Agni mean?

A. You ask a very good question. Agni is the element of transformation. It symbolizes absorbing and digesting experiences. As you make offerings in fire and they burn in fire, various spiritual experiences are processed and digested by your internal fire.

Tongue is that which allows one to taste things that one is going to accept inside and digest. Each tongue of fire stands for a spirit that controls how you absorb spiritual experiences.

The seven tongues of Agni are: Kaali, Karaali, Manojava, Sulohita, Sudhoomra-Varna, Sphulingini, and Vishwaruchi.

Kaali is the dark and black/blue fire. It symbolizes the spirit of detachment. Spirit of detachment controls how you absorb your experiences, when you are offering in that tongue of fire.

Karaali is the monstrous, dreadful fire that looks like a wide open mouth. Spirit of attachment and desire controls how you absorb your experiences, when you are offering in that tongue of fire.

Manojava is the swiftly moving, flickering and unstable flame. Spirit of wavering (could also be flexibility) controls how you absorb your experiences, when you are offering in that tongue of fire.

Sulohita is the (copper like) dark red color flame. Spirit of determination and strength controls how you absorb your experiences, when you are offering in that tongue of fire.

Sudhoomra-Varna is the greyish/purple/smoke-colored fire. Spirit of confusion (could also be resolution of confusion) controls how you absorb your experiences, when you are offering in that tongue of fire.

Sphulingini is the fire with sparks. Spirit of aggression and haste (could also be a great intuition/insight) controls how you absorb your experiences, when you are offering in that tongue of fire.

Vishwaruchi is the bright fire. Spirit of focus, knowing, being and bliss controls how you absorb your experiences, when you are offering in that tongue of fire.

As you keep performing homam and a relationship is formed between you and fire, the external fire in the homa kundam will reflect your internal fire. When your mind is well-focused and blissful, the fire will automatically burn bright.

The state of your mind will decide how you will taste the spiritual experiences you are going to absorb from around you. That in turn decides which tongues (tasting agents) of your internal fire are receiving food right now. That in turn decides which tongues of the external fire are receiving offerings right now.

The external fire is a mirror to your internal state. An adept may be able to detect, looking at the fire, which tongues of fire are active right now and hence guess the state your mind is in.

Of course, trying to pay too much attention to this technicality and becoming over-conscious of the nature of fire is unneeded. Though external can be used to manipulate the internal (within some limits), it can become a distraction.

Whether internal follows external or external follows internal a invalid question. The reality is that the two change together. Neither is the cause and neither is the effect. They just happen together.

Without thinking much, just make offerings in the fire with the *firm belief* that god is in fire. The rest will happen automatically. It may take time, but it will happen by itself.

Importance of Anga Nyasa, Kara Nyasa, and Digbandha

Q. What is digbandha and how is it related to homa or any puja?

A. Before any pooja or homam, we do anga nyasa and kara nyasa and then digbandha. Nyasas are supposed to *place* the energy of certain sounds in specific chakras (energy centers) of the body. Then digbandha is supposed to lock all directions so that no energy except that of the deity being worshipped can enter the area. You are placing an energy fence around you that can be crossed only by a specific energy.

However, these procedures are a mere formality now-a-days and very few can actually do them as they are supposed to be done. Any person or energy can *penetrate* the area that has been locked out in the digbandha done by most people. It is ineffectual. However, the good thing with keeping the tradition alive

is that knowledge is passed on and a capable person coming in a future generation can benefit from the knowledge passed on blindly and without experiential verification.

I stress surrender, devotion and sincerity and downplay various technical aspects to which most people - including many professional priests – cannot do justice anyway.

Can Women Perform Homam?

Q. You say that male and female are different on gross body level only. But that sounds like an act of ‘political correctness’ when you say that, with no true awareness behind, I mean. /” it makes no sense to have a total ban on women performing homam.”???”/ With the serious warnings: risk of increased sexuality /particularly difficult for woman/, danger of spiritual practices during pregnancy /even killing fetus “if the soul in it is not spiritually elevated”! I would always exclude guess-work in this SO important matter! Do you really think that these are not qualifying enough for ‘a total ban’? I don’t say that female-ban is/would be ‘unfair’. In fact, I don’t see any room here for any /rational/ judgment. This is not about feminism, either. I have honestly accepted the ‘ban’ of F-attending church during their menstrual period. Period. I’d just want to hear an honest opinion on this important issue- too important to be ignored and/or polluted by any political stand ‘in vogue’.

A. I am glad you asked this. I was not being politically correct in saying that a total ban makes no sense. On the contrary, I almost decided to unequivocally assert that everybody interested in spiritual progress can do homam. Period. But I wanted to be cautious and not take on traditional orthodoxy head-on. Instead of dismissing fully, I was trying to put the fundamental reasons in perspective and say that a total ban makes no sense and push back the responsibility of decision to individuals. I am sure I will gain confidence with time and be more assertive. I just need to become ready to take on some karmas in corner cases. Then I can make that assertion.

In the old days, men did so much spiritual sadhana, so many rituals and so much tapascharya that women did not need to do anything. Just run the house, get groceries, cook, serve food and your husband builds enough spiritual bank balance for both of you. But things are not the same anymore! Most men today are worldly people and don't do enough spiritual sadhana for themselves, let alone for their wives!

Given this situation, women cannot rely on husbands for spiritual progress. I believe that women should be allowed to perform rituals like homam, tarpanam etc for their own spiritual evolution. I know some ladies who are performing Mahaganapathi homam using the manual on my website now and enjoying it.

The risks I mentioned are only for rare cases and most people need not worry. The issue about Kundalini rising, getting stuck in Swadhishtana and tough testing in that area applies to both men and women. In any case, fire worship with complete surrender to a deity is quite likely to help one skip over this. The risk about pregnancy also affects very rare cases. In general, one need not worry. To be extra-cautious, one can skip serious sadhanas like homam during pregnancy. Also, women doing homam should stop during the monthly periods time.

After doing homam a few times, most people will only experience an indescribable calmness and pleasure coming from the cleansing of various nadis and chakras and resultant extra flow of praana vaayu in the sookshma sareera. Things like Kundalini awakening and rise do not happen in most people. Actually, most people talking about Kundalini flow actually mistake smoother praana vaayu flow for Kundalini flow. Most yogis do not ever experience the latter. So most of what I wrote is inapplicable to most people anyway. Let me not trivialize it though - little bit of praana flowing better itself is a great experience and one should try for it.

When several women contacted me for further clarifications and asked whether they could do Mahaganapathi homam, I always encouraged them. The feedback from all of them was very positive.

The assertion that men and women are different only at the sthoola sareera level and the sooksha sareera and kaarana sareera have no sex is absolutely correct. By the way, men may be reborn as women and vice versa.

Thanks for the kind words. The "resourcefulness" and time are not really mine. When a king and his minister decide to distribute some of king's money to people, the minister will summon a servant to do the work and the servant will take the money to people and distribute it. But it does not make him the owner of anything. He is merely fortunate to be picked for that good karma. Of course, even the minister will actually say that he too is a servant only and will say that king is responsible for this action and the money is really king's.

That analogy is perfect here. Of course, if it is not clear, the Divine Mother is the king, my guru is the minister, I am the servant and the manuals, writings and private talks I share are the king's money being distributed. I am not being humble or politically correct. This is absolutely the only truth. Anything else would merely be an ignorant fool's delusion.

Regarding the practical usefulness of homam, there is no doubt. I have seen its transformational power with real people in front of my own eyes.

Q. I am planning to start doing Mahaganapathi homam based on your manual. I just finished reading the manual and I have a question. My wife also wants to participate in the homam, How can she do this ? Does she need to be a passive observer or does she need to setup her own set of materials and do the same action I do ? If yes, Where does she sit?

A. People whose karmas are very intricately intertwined together can perform homam together in the same homa kundam. You and your wife can sit next to each other, both facing homa kundam on your east. Both can make offerings in the fire.

All procedures can be done by one of you or both of you. Sankalpam can be taken by both of you simultaneously but separately. Or you could take sankalpam with your wife touching your left shoulder with her right hand while you take sankalpam. When mantras are offered in fire later, make sure that atleast one of you (or both) make offerings with each mantra.

Your wife can sit on your left, next to you. If you consider you and your wife together as one person, she is the left, i.e. lunar nadi (Ida), and you are the right, i.e. solar nadi (Pingala).

It is possible to do separately in two different homa kundams. It is also possible to time share the same homa kundam, i.e. do at different times in the same homa kundam. But it is perfectly acceptable for husband and wife to do together at the same time in the same homa kundam.

Yes, as long as you do this desiring only spiritual progress, you can consider me as guru. Though I am not really capable of dispelling anyone's darkness, I am willing to take responsibility for teaching people how to walk in darkness. It is my belief that one walking in the specific direction pointed by me (performing homam for spiritual progress) will eventually reach a room with some light.

Q. Should this be the case for all rituals, or only for Homam? I always sit on the right hand side of my husband during the Poojas. But now that I read your directions, I realize that in the pictures of the devatas, the devi always stands/sits on the left hand side of the deva (ref. Sri Rama Darbara, or Sri Siva and Mother Parvati). So perhaps, then, the wife should stand/sit on the left of the husband for all religious worships/practices (including lighting of deepam and aarti)?

A. Yes, as you noted in the pictures of Siva-Parvati and Sita-Rama, wife should be on the left of husband. As I said, when you consider them together as one unit, wife is the lunar nadi and husband is the solar nadi of that unit.

However, there are other traditions in India. Some people do the opposite. They say that the main wife should be on the right hand side of the husband and the other wife (if any) on the left. Because the right hand is considered auspicious, the main wife is on that side. This is the other view.

People may feel free to do as *their* tradition teaches. If one wants my recommendation, it is that wife should sit on the left of husband.

But, as I keep saying, these technicalities are secondary and tertiary. Primary thing is having sincerity, devotion and surrender.

Q. At my home we are not maintaining the 3 days M.C time period. All my daughters in law when in Time are making tea, cooking the food and I am eating. They are also coming to Puja Room and may touch me while my Puja. Sir, is it OK? The "Belief" that they should not be allowed in Puja Room or cook food is correct? Is there any harm in doing Chandi Path during these days ?

A. Orthodox tradition is rooted in meaningful principles that got overstretched in time.

Several ethereal beings are sensitive to smell and many of them do not like the smell of menstrual blood and also the aura of normal women in periods (if it is a spiritually elevated woman, it is different).

Though most higher deities do not care about this, their attendants may be sensitive. When you do a sadhana, an attendant of a deity may visit at first. One can try to make the visitors comfortable.

However, there may be so many other offensive things where we do sadhana these days and putting too much stress on one little thing is somewhat unbalanced. You can try to follow tradition if that is possible. Otherwise, don't worry.

Regarding cooking food, the food we eat now-a-days is so badly corrupted in various ways that being cooked by a lady with periods is a very small thing in comparison. Coming into the pooja room is also not a big deal in my view.

However, when you do homam, I suggest not using food cooked by such a lady if possible. Also I suggest that ladies with periods should not come too close to the fire. These are precautionary suggestions only.

Chandipath is fine. The Mother does not care much about external things.

Q. I am totally convinced with your lucid explanation. You have mentioned about attendants. Can you please explain this in details? What we mean by attendants of higher Deities? This is very interesting so I am asking this. Thanks.

A. Deities are accompanied by various celestial beings. For example, the divine Mother has several attendants (e.g. Jaya, Vijaya, Jayanti, Aparajita etc).

According to Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Sarada Mata was born with an amsa of Bagalamukhi and some of his sishyas like Yogin Ma, Golap Ma etc were born with an amsa of Jaya, Vijaya etc. They took care of Sarada Mata. These celestial attendants are born as human beings when god is born as a human being.

As one's sadhana for a deity progresses, that deity's attendants may visit one in celestial form (one may or may not realize it).

However, one should not think of all these things. It is ok to be aware of the possibilities and, if a result occurs, it is ok to take cognisance of it. But, expecting and looking forward to a result corrupts the sadhana. The sadhana one engages in should be an offering to god without anything *expected* in return. Such sadhana begets the highest fruits.

Moreover, whether one was visited by a deity's attendants or not is not really a measure of one's progress. One's progress is judged from the internal transformation. When someone praises you (correctly or incorrectly, does not matter), does it make you proud? Of course, one may act humble externally and yet feel proud internally. I am talking about the internal feelings here. Similarly, when someone criticizes you (correctly or incorrectly, does not matter), does it make you unhappy or angry? One may not show it externally and yet feel those emotions internally. I am talking about the internal feelings here. Spiritual sadhana is about overcoming internal enemies and weaknesses and reaching the state of sthita prajna. Anything else that happens externally is secondary and a coincidence.

Q. But above does not discount the importance of formal knowledge of sadhana and puja. That helps a lot. But it sometimes happen that people get bogged down by externalities.

A. You are absolutely right. Suppose one needs to travel in hot Sun and the rules say that one should use an umbrella. Yes, shade of an umbrella is helpful in hot sun, but one can do without it too. If one has an umbrella, it is a good idea to use it and start walking. If one has no umbrella, it is a bad idea to not cancel the travel because of it. Technicalities are there to help, but, they need to be compromised when they start to block one. One needs to know what is primary and what is secondary.

Women Reading or Learning Vedas

We are living in Kali yuga and Kali is becoming deeper. We cannot trust that every standard convention is based on sound knowledge.

One of my favorite sooktas is "Devi Sooktam" from Rigveda. It is attributed to Vagambhrani, a female rishi. She felt oneness with the Divine Mother in Her undivided supreme form (nearly nirguna form) and the riks of Devi sooktam were revealed to her then. Those eight riks are really fantastic.

There are other riks in Rigveda that were revealed to the world by female rishis. We use those riks in our worship, meditation, homas and other sadhanas. Yet, should we insist that women cannot recite Veda? If Vagambhrani is amid us again as a woman, should we stop her from reciting Devi sooktam?

Jnaneshwar (or Jnanadev) was a great saint from Maharashtra from about 800 years back. He was a great devotee of Krishna and was a fully self-realized master at a young age. He reformed religion and corrected some corrupt traditions. He once made a buffalo chant Veda.

He started to recite Veda and the head of the Brahmin council forbade him because he was not "qualified" to recite Veda. Jnaneshwar insisted that everyone had a right to recite Veda and the head of the council disagreed. As he started reciting Veda, the Brahmins tried to stop him by closing his mouth. Then a buffalo standing next to him took over and chanted Veda. Astounded by the miracle, the Brahmins fell at his feet. The head apologized and said, "we are masquerading as the keepers of Veda, but you have the real understanding and mastery of Veda".

Jnaneshwar taught the equality of all and did not distinguish between people based on caste, creed or gender. He considered BhagavadGita as the essence of Veda and wrote a fantastic commentary on it. His commentary departs from the standard Dwaitic (dualistic) point of view adopted by most Vaishnava gurus and uses a purely Adwaitic (non-dualistic) point of view. It is a priceless and timeless masterpiece.

One Swamiji who was at my house last month had an interesting take. He said that the belief that women cannot recite Vedas is based on a misinterpretation. He said that the physical body we have is called the "stree sareera" and the inner body we have is called the "purusha sareera". He said that the physical body comes from mother and the soul comes from father and that is why they are called so. The soul or inner self is the thousand-headed purusha within us (described in purusha sooktam).

He said that Veda is supposed to be recited with the purusha sareera. According to him, it does not mean that women cannot read it. Whether men or women, they have to read it with the purusha sareera, i.e. inner body, and not just with the physical body. So, according to him, the standard convention is based on

a flawed understanding. According to him, one simply reciting Veda with the mouth without the correct internal understanding is only reading with the "stree sareera" and hence not doing the right thing.

In fact, reciting Veda and chanting the verses is one thing and understanding them is quite another. When we make sound, there are four levels of it - vaikhari, madhyama, pasyanti and para. Vibration of material belonging to the gross body (sthoola sareera) produces vaikhari level of sound and it is heard through the senses belonging to the gross body (ears). But vibrations at the level of subtle body (sookshma sareera) and vibrations at the level of astral body (kaarana sareera) are also there and can be perceived through subtle perception.

If one is chanting "Om Namo Narayanaya" and thinking of some mundane matters, the vibrations produced at levels above vaikhari will not be auspicious. There is so much stress on what we do physically and people forget that what happens at the other layers of existence is equally, if not more, important!

If you produce the correct vibrations at all levels (not just physical) while "reciting" any Vedic mantra, you can truly "experience" the mantra. A full experience of a single Vedic mantra may be sufficient to alter one's life! The mantras of Veda are most powerful. Unfortunately, so much of Vedic scholarship these days is only superficial (but it has to be encouraged, because it will keep at least one level of knowledge alive).

Forget the man vs woman controversy. The difference between genders is only in the gross body. When you go to the subtle body and astral body, there is no difference at all. One should realize that the role of gross body is too limited in the correct recitation/experience of a Vedic mantra. It is the purity of the subtle body and the lightness of the astral body that are far more important.

To be fair and balanced, I need to throw light on the other angle. Like I said, Vedic mantras are too powerful. They are capable of producing a full self-realization (actually the sole purpose of Veda is "to know self"). However, given the depth of Kali Yuga, it is difficult for it to come in one shot. It comes in steps. When one is half way down the path, one has to be careful and under the vigilant guidance of a sadguru.

When one is not fully realized and the gross body has a role to play, there are some differences based on the gender that come into play.

If a lady carrying a baby in her womb has certain spiritual experiences (which a good Vedic chanting is capable of bringing), there can even be an abortion (or a great siddha being born, on the other extreme).

There is another subtle factor. Good Vedic chanting can bring an awakening of Kundalini (i.e. an awakening of self-awareness) and an ascent of Kundalini (i.e. an ascent of self-awareness). Though some people may have a wrong impression about Kundalini because of the corrupt practices of a section of so-called "Kundalini sadhakas", the fact is that Kundalini merely represents one's ego-consciousness. When one casually associates the body one sees with "self", Kundalini is asleep in the Mooladhara chakra. As one's self-awareness becomes more and more refined, Kundalini ascends in the sookshma sareera. As one has a perfect self-realization, Kundalini reaches Sahasrara. Whether one thinks in these terms or not, Kundalini moves based on how evolved one is. Whether one is into Bhakti yoga or Raja yoga or Karma

yoga or Jnana yoga does not matter. All paths lead to an awareness of a more and more correct concept of self as time progresses and a full self-realization finally. Accordingly, Kundalini rises more and more and reaches Sahasrara at the end.

During the period when Kundalini is stuck in Swadhishtana chakra, sexual drive can multiply. Several yogis get stuck in this stage and fail the tests to progress further. In general, women have a higher drive than men. If that drive multiplies, there can be a difficult situation. However, it really depends on the individual and we cannot generalize.

Thus, there are some practical difficulties on the way, which may have made some people come up with some rules. However, are those issues sufficient to ban women from reciting Veda? I don't think so. In fact, the factors I wrote above are probably irrelevant given the superficial understanding of Veda present at this time and the superficial recitation of Veda that we find these days.

But, if you want to be sure and do not want to misguide anyone, it is better to not give any advice. Leave it to one's sadguru. If you have a sadguru who is guiding your spiritual sadhana, surrender and do as your guru says! What is good for goose may not be good for gander. What goose's guru taught to goose may be good only for goose and not for gander. Gander will do well to follow gander's guru.

Doing Homa for Different Deities Gives Different Results?

Q. I was wondering, does doing homa for different deities have different kind of effects. Like if someone does a Mahaganapati Homa vs someone doing a Homa of Krishna for a considerable period of time, is there any set principle that defines what kind of progress or experiences each may undergo? I know that it may all depend on the specific person's karmas and mental makeup acquired over many lifetimes, but can there be a broad generalization done on this?

A. It really depends on the person and his/her karmas. In general, after a few months of daily homam, some inner transformation should occur in the way the person views self, others and life. Some clarity should come. Mind should be more peaceful and calm (even when engaging in actions that usually spoil mental calmness). Even when mental calmness is disturbed temporarily, it should be restored fast. The impermanence of most things we cling on to should be more obvious than before. Devotion should increase.

Specific experiences can vary. If one is ready, meditation at the end of homam can even make Kundalini rise, but that may need more preparation in most. Some level of prior inner transformation is needed before that.

The goal of homam or any other sadhana is inner transformation. In addition, some specific results are possible with different kind of homas. One doing Savitri Gayatri homam regularly may experience a sharper intellect and the ability to see things related to knowledge more clearly. One doing Chandi homam regularly may experience fearlessness, boldness, frankness, detachment and the ability to wage a big battle without much attachment. One doing Sri Krishna homam regularly may melt with devotion

and start to internally cry for Krishna. Different homas may work in different ways. But they all cause internal transformation, simplify the ego of the person, purify the system and clarify thinking.

Homam of Two Deities Together

Q. Is there any way I can do a homam for Ucchishtha Ganesha and goddess Lakshmi together?

A. Yes, you can. Take a sankalpa for Ucchishta Ganapathi homam and Sri Lakshmi homam. Invoke Ucchishta Ganapathi in fire, do panchopachara pooja, offer the chosen mantra of his as many times as you want and then offer him some naivedyam/food (fruit piece or something). Then invoke Lakshmi in the same fire, do a panchopachara pooja, offer her chosen mantra as many times as you want and offer her some naivedyam/food. Then do uttarangam and poornahuti. At the time of poornahuti, you can say the main mantras of both devatas and offer poornaahuti.

I have seen some priests actually take sankalpam for only one homam and make offerings to other deities also, without a formal invocation. In other words, you take sankalpam for Ganapathi only and, after finishing his mantra, you simply pour ahutis in fire for Lakshmi (or other deities). That is also fine.

When you receive a VIP at your house, you may follow a protocol (e.g. greet him at the door, walk him inside, make him sit down in a sofa, offer some refreshments, chat for a while, serve some food, send off formally etc). When you receive two VIPs together, you can treat them together or separately and use different level of formality with them. The level of formality and protocol to be followed really depends on how comfortable you are with them and how well you know them. Thus, some shortcuts resorted to be some priests may be somewhat inappropriate for normal people in the beginning. Thus, it is a good idea to formally invoke each deity. If you want to offer a specific mantra for a very small count, it is perhaps ok to offer without an invocation.

Some priests give multiple poornaahutis. After finishing Ganapathi mantra, they give one poornaahuti and they give one more after finishing Lakshmi mantra and give one final "Maha Poornahuti" at the very end. As poornaahuti means "complete surrender" and it is like a river going and merging in an ocean, I think multiple poornaahutis are not really needed. When you give one poornaahuti at the end, gods are not going to be confused who it is meant for and fight over it. They know that it is for the underlying one god within them. What is important is to instill a true sense of complete surrender at poornaahuti time and meditate deeply.

Q. I am bit confused about 2nd mantra offered in homam. After offering the pradhan mantra in homam. If we offer mantra of some other deity, does the offering reach that deity or the deity invoked in the fire? I have one more question after going through Sri-Krishna homam manual. In that you have mentioned that all offerings are reaching via Lord Vishnu i.e. Vishnu actually runs the universe. I was thinking Advait vedanta is most widely acceptable, but reading your guide, I think dwiata vedanta is also worthwhile to study (which mentions Vishnu as the highest form of god and of course many other things). How would you comment on this?

A. Suppose you are doing Mahaganapathi homam and viewing Mahaganapathi as the supreme cosmic being as described in Atharva Seersham. It says "tvam brahmaa tvam vishnustvam rudrastvam" etc, which means that Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Surya, Chandra etc are all various forms/parts of Mahaganapathi. If you have called THAT Mahaganapathi in fire and made offerings to him, you can also make offerings to the other deities who are his own forms/parts.

If you invoke Vishnu, Mahalakshmi, Krishna, Shiva, Chandi or Mahaganapathi in fire, you can view them as supreme cosmic being (or the energy of supreme cosmic being) and make offerings to all deities through them.

Regarding the second question, I am not really dogmatic about how people view the relationship between themselves and the supreme cosmic being. Irrespective of one's views in that matter, one can do sadhana and make progress. Let me use a simple analogy to clarify my stand.

Whether the final goal of one's travel is accepted as Haridwar or Amarnath or Mount Kailas, one living in Kanya Kumari has to start traveling north. I am showing them paths that go north and to Himalayas and creating manuals for those travels. They can decide for themselves whether they go to Haridwar or Amarnath or Mount Kailas. I do not want to impose on them. My manual only covers the initial travel in the northern direction.

However, when I put together a travel manual for one attached to Haridwar, I do not want to cause confusion by talking about Mount Kailas. So I talk about how traveling north to Himalayas can make one reach Haridwar and focus on Haridwar alone in that manual.

Bottom-line is that I will be equally happy whether one reaches Haridwar or Amarnath or Mount Kailas using the travel manual I made. And all are great places and difficult to reach.

Homa & Meditation

Q. I read somewhere that you are of the opinion that 20-30 minutes of Homa is equivalent to 4/5 hours of Meditation. I didn't understand it.

A. Maharshi Parasara, father of Maharshi Vyasa, wrote a treatise on Jyotisha shastra just before Kali yuga started. He referred in it a few times to the "intellectual pygmies of Kali yuga" and gave techniques suitable for astrologers of Kali yuga. Thus, he was conscious of impending Kali yuga and that was on his mind as he taught. In the chapters on remedial measures to overcome karmic problems (as represented by planets and horoscope), he basically referred to various kinds of homas. Though some people may insist on japam (meditation) today, Parasara only referred to offering mantras in homam fire. He was not specific on poorvaangam (initial offerings) and uttaraangam (final offerings) to be used and asked to use whatever agnimukham (fire ritual procedure) is practiced in the family or by one's gurus. But he was specific on the mantras to be offered in fire for various deities.

Obviously, Parasara did not advise japam (meditation) of various mantras and instead advised homam (fire ritual) with various mantras, for a reason. He knew that the latter is *far more effective* in Kali yuga.

The goal of sadhana is to burn impurities in the subtle body (synonymous to overcoming various internal enemies and weaknesses) so that energy can flow freely within one's subtle body. The internal fire (bhootaagni) burning within us does this burning. When you focus your mind on a mantra, bhootaagni burns and starts acting.

However, the ability of *most* people to focus the mind is highly limited. The bhootaagni is extremely low in most people. Thus, meditation of mantras even in counts of millions does not make much difference really. There is an impact only if one spends 4-5 hours meditating on the mantra every day. The first hour or so is warm up, mind slowly achieves a decent focus after that and the fire starts to burn slowly.

If you do the same meditation in front of an external fire, it makes a big difference. You tend to absorb some qualities from the people you spend time with. When you spend a lot of time with a cinema fan, the cinema fan inside you becomes strong. When you spend a lot of time with a politics observer, the politics observer inside you becomes strong. Similarly, when you spend a lot of time with fire, the fire inside you becomes strong.

If you do a 30-min homam and spend just 10 minutes meditating by the fire after homam, the energy surrounding you, the level of focus you can get and the amount of impurities you can burn are much more than a regular meditation for a couple of hours! One need not believe me. The proof of the pudding is in eating it. If anybody tries to do a 30-minute homam everyday (or atleast every weekend) for a few months, one should find some difference internally.

Mahaganapathi homam is very apt for many people. Lord Ganapathi takes care of one's material needs and gives spiritual progress at the same time. A detailed manual, an audio MP3 file and a complete youtube video of a simple 20-min Mahaganapathi homam are available for free, so that people can learn and get started.

It is not without a reason that many sadhus (saints) maintain a dhuni (constant fire) near them. When at Dakshineswar, Swami Vivekananda used to light a big fire in open space that would burn throughout the night and he used to meditate by it whole night. If one can actually spend a couple of hours meditating by the side of a bright fire every day, I am sure they can make a lot of quick progress.

Q. That was a very good description but at present I have not been in a position to do homam. I have been doing meditation for a very small 15- 20 minutes twice a day but of late I have started falling asleep during that period how can I avoid it because somewhere I read that at time it increases tamas. How can I avoid it?

A. Goal of all sadhana is internal purification. Homam is far more efficient than other sadhanas and actually increases the effectiveness of other sadhanas when used in conjunction with them. However, time has to come for anything. Don't worry about the inability to do homam.

Meditation of 15-20 min is only better than no meditation. It is not really that effective. For most people, it is hardly sufficient for cleaning up the impurities that accumulated in the subtle body within the last 24 hours. One needs to take care of accumulated karmas of several lives and that needs much heavier sadhana.

However, if this is all you can manage now, that is fine. As I keep saying, rituals like japam and homam are only one part of the sadhana one does. One can engage in constant contemplation of one's thoughts and motives to weed out the internal weaknesses and overcome ego. Every moment and every activity can and should be sadhana. Watch your thoughts and reactions to what others do and say and see if any shadripus (internal enemies) or other internal weaknesses have a role in those thoughts and how ego is causing all this. When one starts to put in conscious effort into such contemplation, that is also sadhana. Whether one does japam or homam or something else, this contemplation is also needed. If you cannot do those, you can still engage in contemplation. Depending on your readiness, it can work fast or slowly. But remember that no effort is ever wasted.

Q. Can you please help me reconcile the superiority of homam with the place that japa finds in the nityahnika procedure? As part of nityahnika, the prescribed method for dvijas is to perform japa followed by the nitya homam (in the form of aupasana). This ordering is followed in ahnika texts followed by various communities. If homa is much more effective, I would expect there to be *some* dharma shastra prescription which prefers performing this required daily japa as homa. The rishis / grihya-sutra-kartas would never have left such an opportunity alone. At the very least, I would expect these texts to prescribe the performance of japa after the aupasana, in front of the kindled fire. Do you know of any smriti texts / shishtachara which follows such a procedure? If not, can you please help me understand such an absence?

A. If the room where you meditate is very cold, it is a good idea to turn the heater on a little before you meditate there. That will ensure that the room warms up before you start and is more conducive to your meditation. Otherwise your meditation may be distracted and less effective.

On the other hand, if a room is always maintained warm, there is no need to switch the heater on before meditation.

It is fantastic if one is sincerely doing 1000 times Gayatri mantra and a nitya homam in the form of aupasanam everyday (and any other nityahnika rituals followed in one's tradition). One will be reasonably pure then. Meditation by such a person is like meditation in a warm room in the above analogy.

But we are living in changed times, when dvijas are cutting down on everything or doing a little bit without sincerity. If one is doing agni karma everyday and also considerable amount of japam, the order is secondary. Instead, if one has limited time for sadhana, then optimization is needed.

I am not aware of any smritis, but I do know of traditions where fire is worshipped and then one meditates sitting next to fire. Moreover, many sadhus do light a dhuni (constant fire) and meditate sitting in front of it.

Q. Is there any benefit in performing japa in front of a lit fireplace, where no agnimukham has been performed?

A. In my view, it is still beneficial. Just as sitting and meditating next to a big body of water calms and relaxes one's mind, sitting and meditating next to fire purifies one and enhances subtle vision.

When at Dakshineswar, Swami Vivekananda used to collect a lot of wood in one place, light it up into a big fire, sit facing it and meditate the whole night. Though he did not do any formal ritual, I still believe that fire helped his focus in meditation.

Homa Kunda Effects

Q. Since the time I had been doing homa on a regular basis I had first started off with an iron kunda, then an aluminum and finally shifted to a copper homa kunda. And in each case, I could feel some very palpable effects.

A. Thanks for sharing your experience. Yes, agni in homa amplifies the effects. But others may also note that these things depend on the individual and there are two main factors at play here.

We perform karmas and we receive the fruits of those karmas. The order in which the fruits are received is in the hands of nature (god). Depending on the karma-fruit pipeline of a person, one may or may not see the fruit of certain action immediately. One with a deep pipeline may not see the result of performing homam in an iron homa kundam immediately. By the time the result comes, it may not be obvious why. On the other hand, one with a shallow pipeline may see the results relatively sooner and realize the correlation between action and result!

Secondly, the deity being worshipped also matters. Suppose you offer spoiled milk to a friend. If he is a soft-natured person, he will drink a little, leave the rest and go away calmly. If he is blunt on the other hand, he will drink a little, tell you that the milk is spoiled and perhaps yell a little at you, give you a piece of his/her mind and then leave. Which kind of friends are better for you depends on your nature!

Similarly, if you worship soumya devatas (Sadashiva, Lakshmi, Vishnu etc) and your worship has flaws, the deity ignores it and waits till you correct the flaws. If you worship ugra devatas (e.g. Bhairava, Rudra, Kaali, Narasimha etc) and your worship has flaws, the deity will ensure that you get the message sooner.

When you buy wood logs from some stores, they stick a big iron staple in a log or two so that the logs and the plastic wrapper stay together. We normally use the unstapled logs first and use the stapled logs after removing the iron staple.

Oneday I ran out of logs and the only log I had had an iron staple. I decided to use it without removing the iron staple in it. I thought, "well, this is a Saturday and Saturn likes iron. Let me just offer it like this." I did it and forgot about it later.

That day, I had a really bad sprain in a muscle at the back of my lungs and suffered for two days. When doing the daily Chandi homam on Sunday, a thought suddenly came to me. I suddenly remembered that I put a log with a fat iron staple in it in fire the previous day. The thought that came to me was that I did a mistake and nature pointed it out to me in this way.

When we make mistakes and nature shows our mistakes to us, we need not worry or panick. We should just learn the lesson and move on.

I still say that a homam in an iron or aluminum tray is still better than nothing. The gain is higher than loss due to mistake. But, one can try to avoid the mistake when it is possible.

How to Increase Bhootagni

Q. I have read that bhutaagni is very important for spiritual growth and for bhutaagni to grow jatharagni should be weak and for mortals it is quite difficult to weaken jatharagni as we need food for survival. Other than homam, can we do something more to strengthen Bhutaagni?

A. Eating less (just enough to live healthily) and focusing mind on god at all times will help. But any changes have to be gradual and not drastic.

When you do homam or meditation, do it on an empty stomach. Try to have a gap of at least 2 hours from the time you eat and you do homam/meditation. If you are doing it in the morning, do not eat anything before. That should help.

To limit the jatharaagni and increase bhootagni, one should also eat food that is very simple to digest.

Eating spicy food with a lot of chilies, cinnamon, cloves, pepper etc increases the fire. Avoiding such spices, complicated vegetables, meat and complex proteins such as red kidney beans etc and sticking to steamed rice, bread, simple proteins like moong dal and thoroughly cooked simple vegetables such as squash, carrots etc and using simple spices such as coriander powder and cumin powder will help in easy digestion and keeping jatharaagni low but sufficient for healthy living. If there is some food being actively digested, it limits the bhutagni in the system and hence the spiritual experience will be minimized.

In fact, most sadhus eat "sattwik food" that is nutritious, simple and easy to digest. This is a smart thing to do if one wants to increase bhootagni and increase the "digestion" of subtle spiritual experience (as opposed to wasting so much energy on digestion of physical food).

Do more sadhana. Spend a lot of time in homam/meditation. Even at other times, think of god. That will enhance bhutagni.

Misconceptions on Pratyangira Homam

I recently saw the chart of a person who is in some troubles. He is troubled by some professional rivals. A priest recommended Pratyangira homam and performed it for him. Some people mistakenly believe that Pratyangira homam gives relief from this kind of petty troubles.

Inspite of the risk of offending some elders, I want to put my foot down and assert one thing strongly and bluntly, for whatever it is worth. More learned ones who disagree with me may kindly forgive me and ignore me.

Pratyangira is a very very powerful deity and very very few people know today how to worship her properly. I am talking about all kinds of worship here - worshipping Her in an external fire and worshipping Her in one's own internal fire and Kundalini shakti.

I do not want to emphasize the necessity to learn to worship Her properly, because very very few people are actually *ready* for worshipping this form today. Many other forms are far more suitable for most people.

Pratyangira is an astra devata (astra=weapon). A powerful automatic gun may be used to shoot a specific object at a large distance when an expert uses it. If one is not an expert, the gun may not fire at all or may hit some other object. One is better off staying away from the gun in that case.

I can give an allegory for today's situation w.r.t. Pratyangira.

One's Mother had a very powerful automatic gun. She was a high official in military and used the gun in some important wars she participated in. Once upon a time, one of her sons learnt how to use the gun and knew how to knock down powerful enemies in a combat using that gun.

Many years later, a small young boy of the lady was being troubled by a bully at school. He wanted to solve the problem. A friend at school, who was known in his circle as a smart person, suggested using his mother's gun. They messed around with mother's gun, but nothing happened because they did not know how to use it. But that was good, because there could have been an accident and one of them could have been hurt in the exercise! Luckily, his mother put a locking mechanism on the gun because she had young children at home. Another time, a smart friend who knew how to unlock it but not knowing fully how to use the gun, unlocked it and shot it. He ended up unintentionally hurting the young boy.

In today's deepening age of Kali, "locking mechanism" is put on astra vidyas such as Pratyangira, Bala, Atibala, Mahabala, Paashupata etc. Going back to my allegory, because the home (world of sadhana) now includes a lot of young boys (most of us with half-knowledge and incomplete spiritual maturity), mother has placed locking mechanism on dangerous weapons that are risky in the hands of young children. She did not want automatic guns, assault rifles, missile launchers etc to be used for getting back at a school bully. When one is brave enough, decides that one does not fear the possibility of death and wants to go and fight the enemies of the nation in a war, then those big weapons are useful. They are not meant for standing up to a school bully.

If someone helps us unlock the weapons, it is still a bad idea to try using them. It is very risky. The best thing a child can do when a school bully is troubling is to tell his mother about it and let her handle it. Taking mother's weapons and trying to handle it oneself is a very bad idea.

Similarly, performing Pratyangira homam to overcome the obstacles caused by an enemy or a rival or take care of some such material troubles is unwise and risky. When one is very pure and saattwik and battle with a tamasik force has agitated a highly pure one, she is to be used as a weapon to bring down that agitation and restore sattwa. Her purpose is a really high one and inapplicable to most people.

Some temples perform Pratyangira homam regularly. I see it as an obedient son taking the automatic gun of his mother, dusting it off, cleaning it, lubricating it and putting back where it belongs. The son may do this service on a regular basis, without expecting any result and out of love for mother. That is fine.

The problem comes only when a son tries to use the weapon against his enemies or rivals.

If you look at Pratyangira's story, she came into being to pacify Lord Narasimha, who drank the blood of the demon he killed. The guna caused in him by the demon's blood created big problems for the universe and Pratyangira pacified Lord Narasimha and filled him with pure sattwa again.

If a goddess could pacify a deeply agitated and angry incarnation of Narayana himself and restore sattwa in him, you can imagine what that goddess must be like. She is the ultimate power to restore saattwa and remove all kind of disturbance from one's consciousness. Such a high deity of purity, equanimity and sattwa restoration has been converted to one who ruins one's enemies and rivals and gives material success and several people perform Pratyangira homam with dried red chillies etc for petty purposes.

Just as a young boy is better off approaching one's mother when harassed by a school bully instead of trying to use his mother's machine gun, we are better off approaching the Mother and asking for help rather than trying to use Pratyangira shakti. Chandi homam, saptashati chanting, lalita sahasra nama chanting etc can be used instead of Pratyangira vidya. Surrender to the Mother and chant her prayers, instead of trying to use her sophisticated astra shakti directly.

Next time somebody suggests a Pratyangira homam for material problems, please think of what I wrote.

As I have already said, more learned ones who disagree with me may kindly forgive me and ignore me.

More on Pratyangira Sadhana

I just came back from my daily Chandi homam. Probably because this is a Chaturdasi, that too a Saturday night, the homam was more pleasant than usual. I cannot sleep after this one right away and so let me type one more mail.

If one is an aghori who does not care about anything and is willing to go through any terrible experience and still take it as Her blessing, then several things can go into fire. But others should never put red chillies in homam fire. Those who throw red chillies in fire and think that their petty problems will go away are fooling themselves. Whatever you put in external fire is actually going into your internal fire also. People having awakened shakti and subtle perception may realize it and others may not realize it. But it is a fact. Now the impact of red chillies on your internal fire is not at all a desirable one. One may not be realizing it because the karma may be going at the end of a long pipeline of karmas and give its result in far future, possibly even in a future life.

My sincere advice to all: Never ever put spicy substances like red chillies and black pepper in a homam fire, even if you are worshipping a fierce deity. Respectfully ignore advice from anyone to use black pepper and red chillies to solve your problems. That practice does NOT solve any problems and in fact creates further problems in future.

By the way, Pratyangira is not a ""bali kavar Deivam" (deity wanting animal sacrifice). It is what people of this age made her to be. Pratyangira, as I described earlier, is a powerful deity who can fill one with pure sattwa. Unfortunately, she is misunderstood and her mantras and vidya are so abused and misused these days. That is why I felt compelled to write the last mail. The allegory is actually quite appropriate.

I did not write the mail to criticize Pratyangira sadhana. I wrote the mail and the allegory to criticize Pratyangira sadhana *as done* by many people today and to put things in perspective. People don't even understand what Pratyangira is for and what she can do.

Regarding balis (animal sacrifices), I want to say one thing. In the old days, yogis who sacrificed animals were capable of taking some karmas of the animal being sacrificed and give it moksha or atleast a much higher birth after the sacrifice. In other words, there was a give and take of karmas. Now-a-days, those who sacrifice animals have no such spiritual caliber. They are only taking the life of the animal (bodily life which is something very dear to every being that self-identifies with a body very strongly, i.e. animals and human beings) and not giving anything in return. This causes a big karmik debt that needs to be paid back later. Thus, one should think seriously before sacrificing an animal in this age.

Some places have sthala maahaatmya. The power of the place, the power of the sadhana performed by elevated beings there and the power of an alive deity there ensure that karmas are balanced even when animals are sacrificed. Such places are few. An example may be Kamakhya.

At other places, a yogi with no caliber to take on the animal's karmas and give it a higher birth should stay away from animal sacrifice.

If you read Saptashati, the last chapter describes how the king and the vaisya kept chanting devi sooktam for 3 years on a river bank. It talks about the "bali" (sacrifice) they gave:

"dadatustau balim chaiva nijagaatraasrugukshitam"

It means "and they gave a sacrifice (bali) that was soaked with blood from *their own* bodies".See, *that* would be something.

More on Pratyangira homam

Path of sattwa does not need a weapon in general. Its tools (as opposed to weapons) are surrender and devotion.

When a person of sattwa reaches great spiritual heights and is beyond even surrender and devotion, then a question of a weapon to defeat taamasic influence may arise. Please remember that Pratyangira was used to remove the agitation in a person no less than Lord Narasimha.

The weapon is made difficult to use because more and more people unaware of what the weapon is for would start using it in this age for all kind of silly purposes.

If a black magician troubles one, it is like the school bully troubling one in my allegory. As I said, locking mechanism on your mother's automatic gun that prevents you from using the weapon does not prevent you from fighting the bully by reporting to your mother. You can fight black magic through surrender and devotion to god. In fact, that is the best way to fight. In any case, Pratyangira homam as practiced by most people today does NOT help you fight black magicians.

BTW, you are incorrectly equating vamaachara with kshudra activities like black magic to trouble people. Not all who use vamaachara are alike. Aghoris uses tamasik practices, but to test how saattwik one internally is and whether external tamasik influences can disturb the internal sattwa inside one. An aghori

wants to be in such a perfect state of sattwik equilibrium of consciousness that he hones his equilibrium by using depriving external factors to try destabilizing the internal sattwa and eventually reaching a state that they have no effect on him.

Thus, the use of tamasik practices by an aghori is different from the use of tamasik practices by some black magicians to trouble people. You can't place all vamamargis in one group.

Nava Graha Homam and Puja

Graha means grasp/grip or one who grasps/grips. The nine grahas are the nine celestial bodies that take our consciousness into their grip when the right times comes (based on certain celestial formulas). They create environments and situations in our life to create certain states of mind.

For removing obstructions in material and spiritual aspects of life, we propitiate grahas. If a graha is pleased with our propitiation, it will not create situations that create a certain state of mind that may be ahindrance to our material and spiritual progress. To propitiate grahas, one can read their Veda mantras or kavachas or stotras.

Veda mantras are very powerful. But they work slowly (mainly because most people do not know these days how to chant/experience them perfectly). Big counts are needed. When you persist with a Veda mantra, it first removes the obstacles caused by an aspect of Brahman represented by the deity of the mantra and eventually creates a perfect understanding of that aspect of Brahman. All Veda mantras are eventually for a perfect understanding of various aspects of self only.

Sun is the soul. Moon is the mind. Mars is the energy/initiative/drive within. Mercury is the flexibility, ability to learn and adapt. Jupiter is the wisdom, discretion and judgment within a person. Venus is the spirit of being happy. Saturn is the spirit of working hard and going through austerities. Rahu is the spirit of breaking the barriers, innovating and reaching for the unknown. Ketu is the spirit of perfect detachment with everything. Veda mantra of a graha, when chanted for a long time, removes the obstacles thrown by that planet based on dasa and gochara and eventually gives a perfect understanding of the aspect of self represented by the planet (as mentioned above).

Kavachas of grahas, when chanted many times, create an unseen protective shield around the person. Kavachas can be used for overcoming physical ailments, health troubles, prayogas etc. Stotras are meant for pure bhakti maarga. They praise various qualities of a graha. In addition, there are various beeja mantras also.

According to Parasara Maharshi who taught "Brihat Paaraasara Horaa Saastram", the greatest classic on Jyotisha, grahas are Vishnu's avataras. They comprise of the energies of various incarnations of Vishnu. Ramachandra's energy is Sun. Krishna's energy is Moon. Nrisimha's energy is Mars. Buddha's energy is Mercury. Vaamana's energy is Jupiter. Parasu Raama's energy is Venus. Koorma's energy is Saturn. Varaha's energy is Rahu. Matsya's energy is Ketu.

Apart of doing japam with these graha mantras/kavachas/stotras, one can also do a homam. Homam is always a better avenue than japam and others. In navagraha homam, you invoke the nine grahas in fire and offer oblations with their Veda mantras several times. It is also possible to do a homam for just one graha.

One Word about the Efficacy of Homam...

Seeing divinity in a solid form such as an idol is shown by earth (bhoo) element. It is a sureshot way to achieve, but it is extremely slow and one needs to be very patient. It is difficult to maintain focus for so many lives in Kali yuga. One can lose one's way in the middle. Seeing divinity in the water is shown by the water (jala) element. The water element is anyway predominant in the human body and it is imperfect in Kali yuga. It is quite tricky to achieve through sadhana shown by the water path in this age. Seeing divinity in the air we breathe is the sadhana form shown by air (vaayu) element. It is fast, but the air we breathe in so corrupt in this age that this is a very risky path. Though many teach praanaayaama, hatha yoga, raja yoga etc these days, this path is extremely risky. It is very difficult to reach the end goal in this path in this age. The path of pure Vedanta, shown by the aakaasa (ether/space) element may also not be appropriate for most in this age.

Irrespective of the impurities in the food one eats, the water one drinks and the air one breathes and irrespective of the impurities in various nadis in one's system, the fire is always pure and it purifies everything that it comes in touch with. That is why another name of fire is "paavaka" (purifier). You just have to expose various parts of your system to fire. Thus, the sadhana form shown by fire (agni) element is the safest and quickest in this age for most people. It is quick and safe and purifies one despite other distractions of Kali and helps one achieve the Ultimate eventually.

It is possible to get *some result* in every sadhana. But, if one wants to make significant progress, homam is the best sadhana. No wonder rishis put a lot of stress on agni kaaryam (fire ritual). These days, people - even those who are born in Brahmin families - are afraid to do homam because they think it is complicated and one may make mistakes. However, a homam done as a personal sadhana for one's own progress is different from a yaagam that is done for universal benefits. While the latter is far more elaborate and strict, the former is much simpler. When performed on a regular basis, it really purifies one's koshas and nadis.

Regularity is the key. If you eat a big bowl of almonds once every six months, you will not get enough proteins for the six months from them. On the other hand, if eat a few almonds *everyday*, that may be a good source of proteins.

We eat a few times every day, we drink water a few times every day; and we breath many times every day (and all these activities are constantly pumping in impurities into our system!). We should also do sadhana also on a regular basis.

Whichever deity one wants to worship, one can worship the deity in fire for faster results. This applies to Mahaganapathi, Chandi, Shiva, Lakshmi, Narayana or Grahas.

Q. On the other hand, as has been well established, all forms are nothing but the same paramathman. Then what is one supposed to do? Can we with the understanding that each deity is essentially the same paramathman continue to worship the different deities. Should there be any difference in worshipping different forms or one form given that all are the same paramathman's form? It is here that the approach of astrology seems to be

different where depending on dasa bukthi/ gochara an appropriate mantra/sadhana is suggested. Is it fine if the sadhana keeps changing over time?

A. Fantastic question. It is indeed the same Paramatman that expresses as various objects of this universe, including various deities and various other beings. Blessed is the one who can see one's Ishta Devata in all objects of this universe and not let any so-called "unpleasant" object take one's mind away from Paramatman.

But that is not easy. It is easy to look at various idols and various names and say "all these different forms are the same Paramatman only". But, when one confronts objects and situations that are quite "unpleasant", it is difficult to keep that state of mind and say "this too is Paramatman only". If one wants to see Paramatman in all objects, one should not distinguish between pleasure and pain, success and failure, praise and criticism etc. If one gets cancer or a terrible disease, for example, and the body starts to pain badly, one should be able to see Paramatman in that disease, pain and suffering too. Of course, a great saint like Ramakrishna Paramahansa was capable of seeing Kaali in everything and even a terrible throat cancer did not deter him or disturb his equanimity.

But, how many can be like that? If health, wealth, family happiness, well-being of family members etc are very important to someone and one cannot withstand certain "unpleasant" situations with respect to those aspects, then one is not really ready to see the same Paramatman in all. One is mired in duality/multiplicity then. The approach needed by such a person is different from that needed by a great saint who can see the same Paramatman in all people, places, times, objects and situations. Health or disease, wealth or poverty, pleasure or pain, fame or censure, marital bliss or marital discord, praise or criticism - such a Yogi sees no difference in all and sees the same Paramatman in all. Such a Yogi looks at even the greatest suffering as a gift of Krishna/Shiva and does not let it take one's mind off Paramatman. If such focus, one-pointedness and equanimity of mind is present, then there is no need to worship various forms. One can just focus on Paramatman. Such a soul is close to moksha. Various shastras like Jyotisha that deal with how the maayaa of this world works are irrelevant to such a soul, as one is mostly beyond the grip of maayaa.

But, one who sees pleasure and pain, wealth and poverty, health and disease, fame and censure etc differently is in the tight grip of maayaa and hence shastras that shed light on how the maayaa works are useful. Such a person may want to worship various forms (like grahas) for specific purposes. This can remove from one's path obstacles like diseases, suffering, pain etc and create a situation that is conducive to doing sadhana to get a higher level of equanimity eventually and loosen the grip of maayaa after a lot of effort.

Hinduism is full of teachings for people of various spiritual levels and one should take what is applicable to oneself. A sadguru can be helpful there.

Q. Your words always give so much of clarity and reflect very good knowledge and understanding of subtleties.

A. I am not saying this to sound humble, but I truly am merely a nimitta. If a crow sits on a coconut tree and a coconut falls from the tree just when the crow lands on the tree, one may think that the crow actually broke the coconut. But it is a coincidence. This whole universe is so full of coincidences and the

Mother is the manager of this whole show. When I write something, She is the cause and manifestation of the desire inside me to write, the knowledge inside me that drives the writing and my action of writing. She is also the cause and manifestation of the desire inside the reader to understand something from the written words, the action of reading and understanding the written words and the knowledge that comes out in the reader after reading. She does everything, through Her various forms and manifestations. If somebody egoistically feels proud thinking that *he* did something, even that veil of ego is Her manifestation only. As one understands and unravels one level of Her manifestation, She shows the next level.

Offering Tamasik Foods in Homa

Q. I was seeing a homa being done by a person where alcohol was being offered in the fire. What is the significance of using alcohol in a homa?

A. Taamasik stuff like alcohol, meat, chillies etc should never be put in homam fire. The type of fire used in homam is jaatavedas (omniscient) or havyavaaha (one who carries offerings to various gods). That fire can carry various auspicious substances to various deities, but does NOT like to carry stuff like alcohol and meat, even if a deity is willing to receive the offering. If you want to offer alcohol to a deity such as Bhairava, call the deity in an idol or a kalasha (pot) or in an animal and then make the offering of alcohol. But do not use homam fire to make the offering. Another type of fire called kravyaada (funeral pyre) or ripravaaha (carrier of impurities) can be used to carry anything, without restrictions. However, this fire is not used in homam.

A few deities such as Smashaana Taaraa and Smashaana Kaali may be worshipped on a funeral pyre with any materials. However, such rituals are not appropriate for 99.99999999% people. Those are only for people who already have a very high level of detachment and a very low level of distinction between the polarities of duality, i.e. people who have a very low level of mental distinction between things normally considered highly pure and things normally considered highly impure and see all as One.

As a result of their worship on funeral pyre, they may get results that are normally considered good or results that are normally considered terrible, but again their mental distinction between good and bad results is very low and they accept all results with an equal vision. Rituals practiced by such aghoris are aimed at honing their detachment and non-distinction to further perfection. Such aghora practices are not to be done out of "fascination" or because they seem or sound "cool". That is a formula for failure and disaster.

For the majority of us who are still deeply affected by the polarities of duality and cannot see all things equally, worship of any deity in funeral pyre is a strict no-no. Stick to regular homam and maintain basic purity, no matter which deity you worship in the fire. In that case, throwing chillies, meat and alcohol in fire is a strict no-no. Unfortunately, some people do not realize it and throw these things in their homam fire. This is a terrible thing to do.

People in this age foolishly mix up principles of duality and non-duality. Principles of non-duality like "all is god" are applicable only if you can see god in pleasure and pain and accept both the same way. If pleasure and pain are two distinct feelings for you and you prefer one to the other, then you are immersed

in duality and follow the principles of duality without mixing up non-dual principles and pretending "all is god". All is NOT god for you then.

Offering alcohol, meat, chillies etc in homam can bring terrible results to one. One whose karmic pipeline is very short may experience the results immediately, but most people do not experience right away. As a result, they do not realize what a terrible thing they are doing. My humble request to everybody who performs homam is to stay away from using such taamasik materials.

Ganapati Homam

Q. I performed Ganapathi homa for a 2nd time 2 days back, this time with less mistakes, feel more comfortable, was able to handle the fire without any problems, I had bought fire wood from the local store. This time I also used very little Ghee, less than 100 gms for 1hr of homa. I found that the audio (Mp3) does not cover a few sections like Bali. Naivedya. Talking to a local expert he advised that normally they would assign one individual to add ghee, one to add samith, one to add modaks etc. In the write up the impression is that it is all done by the same person, is this correct? Does it matter if the homa is preformed outside the house in open air, is it done inside to keep the positive vibrations internal to the house? Please advise.

A. I am glad to know that. With practice, it will become smooth and you can start to focus better of mantra.

When priests perform homam on a grand scale, they distribute the tasks among them. If you do on a smaller scale by yourself, you can do everything by yourself. In fact, the latter is better.

In fact, even when many priests do it together with one fire, it is good to have one person managing the fire and offerings. If one chants, one prepares and chooses offerings and one finally makes the offerings in the fire, that is better than everybody making different offerings in fire. Ideally, the contact with fire should be from one person. Of course, if each has a separate homa kundam, all can make offerings in fire.

Never think in terms of keeping the positive vibrations to yourself or within your house. Fire is the basis of creation. Fire rituals are important to maintain dharma in this universe and promote creation and sustenance. Do homam thinking that you are doing your dharma and have no other thoughts of motives. Of course, if you do your dharma by helping nature, nature WILL reward you for it. But leave it to nature and do your part selflessly. Self-centeredness is an acid of which a single drop is sufficient to break the milk of your ritual.

Actually, a homam done under the sky (i.e. in open air) is better than one done under a roof (i.e. inside a house). However, when one cannot do in open air, one can do inside a house also.

Q. If I do not find time in the morning, can I do Homam at night after washing hands and feet?

A. Yes, Mahaganapathi homam can be performed in the night too. In fact, the most pleasant Mahaganapathi homam I have ever attended was performed in the back yard of a priest's house, right next to a river, on a night. I practically know that it is perfectly fine to do Maha Ganapathi homam in the night and the energy generated is still pleasant and saattwik.

However, if you do Chandi homam, my advice is to do it in daytime, at least in the beginning. The energy that manifests is different at night than at daytime, especially with Chandi homam. If you are unable to perceive that energy, then there is no problem and no difference between day and night. But, if you are able to perceive that fierce energy and if it scares you, that may be bad. Thus, it is better in the beginning to do Chandi homam during the daytime.

For Lakshmi homam also, daytime is preferred. But night is also acceptable. Other homas are ok anytime.

Maha Ganapathi Homam Video (based on the manual)

Q. Are you living in a foreign country? Normally homams are performed without shirts on and wearing Panchakacham. In fact, in Kerala temples, nobody is allowed to worship with shirts. What is the correct position? Out of curiosity I am asking this question.

A. While I respect the orthodoxy of Kerala temples, it will not work in cold countries and even in north India during winter. Many priests do wear shirts when performing homas in winter here, in Boston, USA.

Honestly, the clothes that we wrap around the body to hide the true body are not a major issue and have very little bearing on our sadhana. The layers of conditioning by various gunas that we wrap around our ego-consciousness to hide the true Self IS the major issue that blocks our spiritual progress. The former is a symbol and the latter is the real thing that matters. Shedding those layers surrounding the ego is far more important than removing shirt.

Actually, though I live in cold climate, the room in which I recorded the video was comfortable enough and I could have done without the shirt. But I consciously chose to record it with a shirt on, in order to not send a wrong message to those living in cold climates and having to do homam in cold garages. Instead of sticking to unnecessarily strict rules and ending up not doing homam as often, I want people to relax rules that do not matter and do it as often as they can. I want to de-emphasize things that do not matter that much.

World is going to go through interesting times and we need many serious sadhakas - those who may be wearing many clothes on the body but shed off as many layers as possible on their ego - doing homam on a regular basis.

I use more materials in my daily Chandi homam (because I use a bigger homa kundam for it) than I used in the video, but again that was a conscious choice. I did not want something elaborate. I wanted to demonstrate how a very simple homam can be performed quite easily with very few materials and a simple setup. Even a very simple procedure like this will make a big difference in the world, if a lot of people are doing this sincerely every day.

Q. Thank you for the video, it clarifies a lot of questions (mudras etc), wonderful idea!! I was also under the impression that you were referring to coconut shell, which by and large is a no-no for homam's. It looks like you performed the entire homa with one copra only, and ghee, and the 2nd addition of 1/2 coconut for poornahuti. Does cow dung produce smoke?

A. Yes, dried cow dung does produce more smoke. From the point of view of smoke control, copra (dried coconut) is the best substance. It has a good balance of oil, fiber and carbohydrates to catch fire, sustain fire and burn for a long time without as much smoke as wood.

Q. I saw the video of Narasimhaji as well. One thing I realized that my pronunciations, unlike the way Narasimhaji says swahaa etc etc, are horribly wrong. I just can't get the chandas and intonations correct. It's just a flat tone in my voice.

How wrong is wrong pronunciation? I am trying hard to change but sadly I guess I have no sense of rhythm or intonations etc at all.

A. Do your best and do not worry about the rest. When everything - pronunciation, intonation, thoughts, mental images, surrender, dedication, procedure, external factors (place, surroundings and time) etc - lines up nicely, one's sadhana becomes fruitful very fast. We all struggle for a long time because something or the other is lacking. But it is better than nothing.

Do not worry about what is not in your hands and keep doing everything that is in your hands.

Kaalidas was a totally ignorant person. Kaali blessed him and he became the greatest scholar of his time in a split second. If one can try to cultivate perfect surrender to a deity while one does a sadhana, that is all one can do. When, why and how the blessings come is beyond our grasp. But note one fundamental fact - no effort goes waste and each action will result in a reaction sooner or later. So keep doing the best you can in your spiritual sadhana.

Imagine that there is a hill that is steep on one side with a comfortable slope on the other side. If one has the right mountain climbing gear, one can climb on the steep side and reach the top quickly. If one doesn't, one can still walk on the slope and eventually get to the top. If your pronunciation, procedure etc are perfect, good for you. If not, don't be disheartened. Just keep walking on the slope side.

Q. In addition to Sharad's question (I think dried cow-dung cake is acceptable), I would like to ask that by dried coconut, do you mean the coconut shell or the coconut (copra)? I inaugurated my attempt to do Ganesha homam on the day of the solar eclipse (Monday 26 January around 12.15 pm) but it didn't turn out very well.

A. Dried cow-dung cakes are a very auspicious substance to use in homam. They are readily available in India, but very difficult to find in the west.

By dry coconut, I mean copra and not the coconut shell. The shell can be used, but it generates a lot of smoke like firewood. Copra (dry coconut) has a good amount of oil in it and hence burns nicely without much smoke. Fresh wet coconut has a little water also in it and hence generates some smoke and does not burn well. Dry coconut catches fire easily, burns well and generates less smoke.

I am sorry your first homam did not go well. But keep trying. I am sure you will make very good spiritual progress through homam and through Chandipath. In the short run, April 9-June 10 is a good period for you for spiritual sadhana. In the long run, Sept 2010-Sept 2017 is the period to watch out. I am quite confident that you are on the verge of a transformation. Keep doing whatever is in your hands, keep faith and leave the rest to Her.

Q. I could not understand exactly what is your meaning in this advice.. " But if you are able to perceive the fierce energy and if it scares you....."

A. When you do a ritual like homam or just meditate with a mantra, it generates a spiritual energy around your being. Different mantras and different homas generate different kinds of energy. I was pointing out that Chandi homam tends to generate different kinds of energy at daytime and night time. Energy tapped by Chandi homam at night is likely to be more fierce and raw.

If one has a subtle perception, one may be able to perceive this energy. If one is ready to be absorbed in that energy and let it purify one, one will benefit from it. But, some may be scared or otherwise put off by it. So I recommend doing Chandi homam in the daytime only.

But, I see no issues with doing Mahaganapathi homam in the night.

Q. If I may interject- Dr.Ashwin Rawalji is (like me) wanting to know that is it acceptable to do MahaGanapathi Homam at night after washing hands and feet-that is without taking a regular bath and just washing face, hand and feet as a quick measure. I, too, am interested in having clarity on the evening Bath and change of fresh set of cloths. Though I do prefer to take bath and change into fresh cloths-this takes easily 10-15 minutes and after a working day-sometimes the Tamo guna takes over the mind ...As you have been repeatedly stressing-the real purpose is to have deflated ego and pavitra bhava in surrendering to the Deity, I request clarity on the criticality of bathing for evening Homam.

A. If you can have a stable, balanced and saattwik mental state without taking bath, then a bath is not necessary. But, as you said, tamoguna takes over the mind after a day's work. Most people will benefit from taking a bath in that situation and reach a better state of mind. While I am not for making strict rules, I believe that a bath will be advisable for most people when doing homam in the evening after work.

Small Fire Vs Big Fire in Homam

One gentleman asked me a question privately. He does homam everyday. Originally, he was doing inside the house with a small fire (a few dry coconut pieces). In the summer and autumn, he was doing in his garage with a big fire (wood logs). At that time, he observed that a particular thing was happening within himself during homam. In the winter, he moved back inside the house and switched to small fire. The homam was still nice, but that particular thing stopped happening. Recently, he did with a big fire again and the same thing occurred again.

So he concluded that homam with a big fire is more effective than homam with a small fire. If doing homam with a big fire increases your fire, he wondered if doing homam with a small fire lowers your fire. He asked me to shed some light.

Look at it like this. If you spend time in the company of a saint who is more advanced than you, some of the saintly qualities in him may rub on you. Similarly, spending some time with a big fire increases the bhootagni inside you and burn blockages. If one is pure enough already, it can even give some experiences.

If you spend time in the company of a spiritual person who is not of the same stature, it is still a good thing. It is better than wasting time in the company of worldly people. You may not get the same benefit as you do when you meet a great saint, but at least your mind is thinking about spiritual things.

Thus, homam with a big fire is similar to spending time in the company of a great saint and homam with a small fire is similar to spending time in the company of a normal spiritual person. Both are good, but the former is better.

However, those who cannot do homam with a big fire because of the conditions they live in can still do homam with a small fire and benefit from it.

Homam Procedure

Q. Thank you for your Ganapati homam procedure but I am very curious to know about the brihat (long) procedure to do homa.

A. Take a sankalpa to do Vighneshwara pooja. Invoke Vighneshwara in an idol made with turmeric paste. Do a shodasopachaara pooja to Vighneshwara. Then take a sankalpa to do the main homam (e.g. Mahaganapathi homam). Call back Vighneshwara. Invoke Varuna in kalasha with "imam me" and "tattvaayaami" mantras (veda mantras). Do shodasopachaara pooja to Varuna. Then read Punyaahavaachanam (Pavamaana sooktam). Call back Varuna and sprinkle a bit of kalasha water all around.

Then start the fire. There are few additional procedures including the invocation of Brahma and Varuna in small water bowls with darbhas on them and quick pooja to them with akshatas. After the poorvaangam, call Mahaganapathi into fire and do shodasopachaara pooja. Then do the mantras you want. Do a shodasopachaara pooja again at the end. Do uttaraangam with avijnaataadi praayaschitta mantras etc just as in the short procedure. But one can optionally do Jayaadi homam also in the uttaraangam. It is a bunch of aahutis for various celestial beings with veda mantras. The rest is similar to the short procedure.

I have done big ones as well, including 7-hour Mahaganapathi homam and 9-hour Chandi homam. But I have no doubt that a short homam repeated everyday is more effective than a long homam done once in a while.

I once saw some priests performing a Mahaganapathi homam and Navagraha homam. The priest declared, "all the bad karmas of whoever is present here are burned today and all of you will start on a clean slate now." Though they did a detailed ritual, the actual mantras of Ganesha and planets were done to the minimum. For example, they offered the mantra of each planet just 4 times! For such a small count of mantras to actually burn all the karmas of 100 people, the performer has to be a rishi or something! I was amused by the declaration.

Obviously, they were under time pressure and made a wrong tradeoff. The point I wanted to make is this. If you are able to do the main thing in a ritual for 2 hours, then it is reasonable to have 30 minutes of overhead. If you have only 40 minutes, it is a bad idea to spend 30 minutes on the overhead and wrap up the main thing in 10 minutes. It is better to do the overhead in 10 min and do the main part for 30 min. It is better that way.

Sometimes, I see learned priests making the wrong tradeoffs when pressed for time. In this age, most people are pressed for time. They need help to make the correct tradeoffs so that they maximize the impact of the little they get to do.

Offerings that Don't Burn

Q. I had read on this before through your correspondences and have been advised as well on this. This happened to me today...I had some offerings...especially a large chunk of wood that did not burn in the last homa that I did. Further to which I had some troubles which were emotionally disturbing. Considering your reflections on the same, I was sanguine that may be those emotional disturbances were a result of certain karmas accelerating and arriving before time. Hence I was a little scared and tensed...and what was on priority today while doing the homa was to burn those unburnt portions. Interestingly...I sat to do the homa...did my sankalpa...ahutis started and all that...when I heard this distinct voice (admonishingly)from within me (I guess) which said "your priority is not me...but burning off that piece of wood?". Now this was something that embarrassed me to the core... I said sorry...and went on to concentrate on the task at hand...though could not fully concentrate partly because I was still apprehensive of the offerings were properly burning or not and partly because I was still reeling from embarrassment. This is what I wanted to share with you and also the members of the forum.

A. Thank you for sharing. You are lucky to have a conscience that guides you correctly. Listen to it and overcome fear, shame, embarrassment etc.

Emotions like fear, embarrassment, pride, sadness, anger, desire etc are all natural to us. Cutting them off completely will take a long time. But one can at least try to learn to not dwell on them for too long. Normally, when a thought like embarrassment or fear or anger or pride disturbs the mental equilibrium, it

will linger in the mind for a while. It will not go away quickly. Try to learn to move on, without protesting or fighting with such thoughts. Take notice of the thought and move on without over-analyzing it. Don't feel great or bad about any thought. Let the thought come and get its two seconds of space in your mind and then move on. Remember the analogy of a heckler I gave in a mail before. The distracting thoughts are like hecklers. Do not fight with them or reason with them. Notice them, ignore them and move on.

When you do a sadhana, do not worry too much about the results. Having the results or some expectations on the mind is an unnecessary distraction. If you consciously (but not violently or with a sense of shame or anger or disappointment) steer your mind away from such negative thoughts during your sadhana, your sadhana will become fruitful sooner or later.

Q. Also you mentioned that Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to say that Raja Yoga is not for this age. Did he advice people to worship through fire ? I'm a bit curious because my knowledge of him is that he was a priest and was worshipping the idol which means he chose 'earth' element.

A. I am not aware of Ramakrishna advising fire worship in that birth.

Shree Maa (see the recent mails on her) had visions and encounters with Ramakrishna (after he physically left the world), who she considers her guru. She claimed that Ramakrishna told her to do fire ceremonies and help establish truth and world peace.

My guru was told by the Mother to spread homam and create a community of people performing regular homam around the world. To me, Ramakrishna's words and the Mother's words are not that different. When he lived, Ramakrishna essentially carried out the Mother's will.

Ramakrishna's disciples were spiritual giants with impeccable backgrounds and pedigree. Still each of them needed really serious sadhana to find Self again. That is the nature of rebirth and Kali yuga. They all were lucky to have Ramakrishna's company. Ramakrishna taught the highest spiritual truths in simple words to them, made their thinking clear and inspired them so much. They had clarity from Ramakrishna's influence and meditated for 4-5 hours everyday and sometimes more. STILL, they needed one or two decades of such serious sadhana to become liberated again.

When one is able to meditate for 5 hours everyday, that may be sufficient and there may not be a need for homam. But lifestyles have changed in the last 100 years. If one is unable to meditate for 4-5 hours everyday, fire ritual is a great option. In other words, there may not have been a compelling need for a homam movement 100 years back, but it may be there now.

When Ramakrishna lived, intelligent young Indians were being indoctrinated with western thinking and started to look at Hinduism as primitive. Some of them were also attracted by the impersonal philosophy of Brahmo samaj and detested idol worship. Ramakrishna did two things: (1) To those attracted by the impersonal philosophy, he showed the magic of surrendering to a deity such as Kali or Krishna and demonstrated true bhakti, (2) He had his sishyas such as Vivekananda propagate the non-dualistic Advaita philosophy in the west and in India. This two-pronged approach countered the intellectual onslaught on Hinduism and kept many intelligent young minds from running away from Hinduism.

Times are different now and needs are different. IF Ramakrishna is reborn now, his specific teachings and approach may be different.

Multiple Homas in the Same Fire

Q. Today with your inspiration and help, we did the short version of the Maha Ganapathi Homam. After completion of the Homam, my mother felt like doing Sri Ganapathi Artharvashirsa so she sat down and continued in the same Agni. Is it advisable to do multiple pujas in the same Agni or should we start over again (rekindling)? She did do the sankalpa again.

A. It is fine to do multiple homas in the same fire, if the persons doing it have intertwined karmas.

If one starts a fire and makes offerings, an association is made between one's internal fire and that fire. It will continue to some extent even after homam finishes, as long as the fire keeps going. If another person makes an association between the same fire and internal fire, then there is some karmik interchange between the persons. If the other person is someone that you do not mind sharing some of your karmas and karmaphalas with, then it should be fine.

Usually, karmas of parents and children, wife and husband etc are anyway strongly intertwined in many ways. It should be ok for them to do homam in the same fire, either together or one after the other.

Q. In our local temple here in upstate NY, several people sponsor a homa. All the sponsors (say, 4 or 5 persons - most unrelated to one another) gather around the homa kundam and offer ahutis. How does the concept of intertwining of individual karmas and karmaphalas among affect this?

A. I have seen this done by many priests, though some priests do the right thing and make it a point to have a separate homa kundam for each person. When you give things and take things and when you do things together, there is already an intertwining of karmas. However, fire worship amplifies things.

If five people together are cooking some food for their dinner, it takes one person putting a bad ingredient in it to spoil it. It leaves a bad taste in all their mouths. It is a good idea for them to cook separately.

Similarly, one person having bad thoughts while making offerings in fire can spoil things for everyone. Of course, whatever happens for cleansing only. But, why share somebody else's dirt and then get it cleaned?

When some groups of people who are very similar in attitude and thinking do a homam together, it may be fine. But, it is better to be conservative with this.

Of course, if you are a realized person with no distinction of opposites, all this is irrelevant. But remember one thing: A tree can share its flowers and fruits with all. But, when young as a plant, it should be protected. Then it can give more to the world later.

Namah, Swaha, Vashat etc.

Q. Certain Mantras are ending with Namah. Certain ending with Swaha. Certain with Vashat, some with Vaushat, some with Hum and some with Fatt. Sir, I would like to know in details as to what is the real meaning of each word. What they indicate? When they should be uttered? It is general belief that Swaha is used only for Homam. But it is not so as certain Mantras are ending with Swaha. e.g. --Aum Hram Hrim Hraum Sah Suryaya Swaha.-- Even in Tarpanam we are using Swaha. - Aum Tarpayami Swaha, Gam Tarpayami Swaha, Glaum Tarpayami Swaha and like. Your valuable comments will enrich our knowledge.

A. Namah simply refers to bowing to a deity.

Swaahaa is from the word su. It refers to hailing a deity and surrendering to the deity. It is used when making offerings to various deities.

Swadhaa is from the root swad, which means to taste and fulfill a desire. It is used when making offerings to pitris (ancestors), who have strong unfulfilled desires.

Vashat is from the root vash, which means to control and command. It is used when one wants to control the energy and channelize it.

Hum refers to creating a cover. It is used when seeking a protective cover of some nature.

Vaushat is also like vashat. It is used when one wants control over one's vision and observation.

Phat is the sound of leaving an arrow. It is used when seeking something specific and leaving a mantra towards the target like an arrow.

Some mantras ending in phat also have a hum and end with "hum phat". It is used when one seeks to strike a target while protecting self.

Mantras ending in Vashat and Phat should be used carefully. They are inappropriate for most people in this age.

BTW, do not write phat as fatt. The sound "f" (as in "fan") does NOT exist in Sanskrit. It came to Indian languages through the Arabic influence on Hindi and now many Indians get confused between ph and f. The sound ph in Sanskrit words such as phat and phala is pronounced as a strongly aspirated p. It is not pronounced as f in fan.

Q. Can an Iron Kundam be used in Homam?

A. It is a bad idea to use an iron homa kundam. If there is any chance to avoid iron and use a better metal such as copper, that should be done. Iron homa kundam may be used only in circumstances where there is no choice and the only alternative is to not do a homam at all.

Those who live in India and have a big yard can actually dig a homa kundam (2 ft length x 2 ft width x 1ft deep or 1 ft x 1 ft x 0.5 ft deep) and do in it also.

Iron represented by Saturn is not an auspicious metal. But, do not worry about mistakes committed due to lack of knowledge. Once you get knowledge, try to put it to use and correct previous mistakes if that is possible. A detached yogi engages in a lot of actions, but does not waste even a second feeling good/proud/happy about a good thing from the past or feeling bad/ashamed/sad about a bad thing from the past. Doing homam in an iron homa kunda is better than not doing homa at all.

In general, please remember that iron is not good for homa kunda, kalasha (vessel/pot) used to invoke deities in a regular pooja or idol used in regular pooja.

Q. Any conclusive guidance about wrapping haven kunda with aluminum foil and usage of quick burning log in the homa is appreciated.

A. Aluminum is a modern metal and my hunch is that it does not have the right gunas. I suggest sticking to gold, silver, copper, bronze, brass, clay etc. But if one has access only to an aluminum or iron havan kunda (or tray), one may do in it.

Wrapping the copper havan kund with aluminum foil so that the havan kund remains "clean" is also not a great idea. A bit of aluminum mixes with the fire slowly and that is not a great idea. Fire should come in contact with auspicious materials only.

Quick burning logs containing artificial materials are also not a good idea. Plain firewood is better. Many people are doing homam with mainly dry coconut.

Q. Further I read somewhere that one needs to also invoke brahma for the entire time from start till poornahuti is done and is to be seated on the south side, I am not sure how to do it.

A. Brahma is invoked in a small silver bowl with water with darbhas placed on it and a small pooja is done to him and the bowl is placed on the south. Varuna is also invoked in another bowl. The procedure I give in the manuals gets rid of some steps to simplify. Things like Brahma pooja, Varuna pooja, Aajya suddhi, punyaaha vaachana etc are all skipped. There are many steps given in tradition and different priests pick different sets of those steps. There are different procedures in vogue, having some common features and some differences. Doing all the steps makes it long. Not every step is equally important. If the main homam is 3 hours, having an overhead of 45 min may be ok. But, if the main homam is 20 min, overhead has to be 5 min. And, a 20-30 min homam done every day or every week is far more effective than a 3-4 hour homam done rarely.

Q. Tarpana in the Ganapati homam, there is tarpana details but others like Lakshmi or Krishna or Sani homam manuals do not seem to have or I missed it. Do we need to do tarpana always with milk for all humans? I suppose so. Again some clarification would go long way.

A. Tarpana is not necessary for all deities. You can skip it for Mahaganapathi homam also. When you do tarpana, you can do it with milk or just water (in which a few akshatas were added).

Q. Can Homam be performed on the roof top of a house(3-floors)? Can a homam kundam made by arranging red bricks, with sand base be used instead of a copper one?

A. Yes, you can do it on a rooftop. Doing it in the open is actually better than doing it in closed space. But realize that a rain can cause problems. Keep an umbrella around to protect the fire if it rains while you are doing homam. It is not good if fire is extinguished by rain in the middle of a homam. Yes, you can construct a homa kundam with bricks and sand at the bottom. Use a square shaped huma kunda.

Q. While performing the Homam using the mp3 audio file, should one repeat the mantras mentally along with the audio?

A. One can repeat mentally while listening attentively (not casually). Actually, even listening to mantras with all the attention focused is as powerful as saying mantras.

Suppose person X is chanting a mantra and thinking of some mundane matter in the mind. Suppose person Y is listening to it with focus and thinking of the mantra and its deity. Then the mantra may do nothing for person X and yet person Y may benefit from the mantra. The word mantra means "one that protects the mind". One can say a mantra or listen to a mantra, to be protected. The key is control over the mind and keeping the mind focused on the mantra.

However, there is a difference between meditation and homam. Mantra is submitted in the internal fire in meditation and it is submitted in the external fire as well in a homam. So making some external sound (even if feeble) is a good idea as opposed to silent chanting or just listening. Try to repeat slowly.

Q. Can bachelors do Maha Ganapati Homam? Any Other conditions/niyamas that should be followed apart from having vegeterain food?

A. Yes. Anybody whose upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony) has been performed can do it. Bachelor or married is irrelevant.

One should follow the yamas and niyamas set by one's guru. Whatever rules one's guru sets, one should follow them strictly. At the minimum, one should eat only vegetarian food on the day of homam and take a bath before homam. Another rule I will recommend is to avoid eating any solid food 2 hours before homam.

By the way, if one without a sacred thread wants to do homam for spiritual progress, I am willing to take responsibility and allow them to do it. Such a person can think of me or my guru as guru and perform homam. I am willing to take on any karma incurred in the process until the person crosses some minimum threshold of purity through homam and other spiritual practices. Sacred thread or no sacred thread, mantropadesa or no mantropadesa, it does not matter after a while, when the person crosses a threshold of purity. The goal of upanayanam and other mantropadesa by guru is to speed this up and make the person cross the threshold of purity.

As long as one desires no specific material benefits (and ready to receive whatever god gives) and does homam for spiritual progress, I am willing to help, even if it means some suffering for me.

Q. Any good day to start the Homam? Or any day would be fine?

A. For Mahaganapathi homam, the best is a Chaturthi morning. But any day is fine really. Mentioning rain and rooftop homam reminded me of my India trip.

When I went to India in May 2008, I and my guru Manish traveled together to several places (on a specific project). We ended up doing homam in the morning in several places (wherever we were). Before the trip, my guru told me to carry an umbrella with me. As monsoons come only in June/July in India, I did not take it seriously. We were in New Delhi in mid-May. We proceeded to the rooftop of the apartment complex we were in, to do a homam. Manish told me, "Narasimha, it is going to rain heavily in this city after our homam finishes". I just smiled.

To my surprise, it did rain as soon as our homas finished. After we offered poornaahuti, it suddenly started raining with really big drops. Luckily, there was a small towel/blanket on the rooftop close to us. Together, we held it on top of the two small homa kundas, closed our eyes and meditated. We held the cloth cover on the homa kundas until fire in the two homa kundas went off and then packed everything and went down. We left for Kurukshetra later that day, but we were told that a heavy rain continued for a few days in New Delhi. In fact, rain followed us on that trip as we covered the north, east and west of India. It rained in every place we went to, as we finished our task in that place and prepared to move on.

Q. You have mentioned somewhere that Manishji was inspired from Mother to start Homam daily. I would like to know whether it was for Maha Ganapati Homam too or only Chandi Homam?

A. The instruction was to spread homam and create a community of sadhakas across the world who worship various deities in fire. It can be any deities.

Q. Please also guide me whether really we should read Chandi Path or Sapta Sati Stotra with Devi Kavacha, Argala, Kilak and Ratri Suktam before 13 Adhyayas and Devi Sukta, etc in the end ? Suppose we recite only 13 Adhyayas only after Sankalpam-will it not be sufficient in daily routine worship? Or it is compulsory?

A. The beauty of Chandi Path is that it instills a great sense of discipline in one. Even 13 chapters take a long time, without anything before or after.

Kavacha, argala, keelaka, raatri sooktam, nyasas and moola mantra are recommended before, while nyasas, moola mantra and devi sooktam are recommended after.

However, in my humble opinion, nothing is really compulsory. Doing just the 13 chapters everyday can be very powerful after a while. I see nothing wrong in it.

Q. Can you guide me the proper uttering of Beej Mantras in Navarna Mantra? Some say it is Aing, Hring, Kling.... and some say it is Aim, Hrim, Klim.....

A. Both are correct and work differently. However, those who try who pronounce the beeja mantras as "aing hreng" invariably mispronounce them. The "g" becomes explicit. Ideally, you should start

pronouncing as though you are going to say "aing" and abruptly stop just when you are about to say "g", without saying it. It is not easy to pronounce this correctly.

Instead of trying "aing hreeng" and messing it up, it is better to just say "aim hreem".

Internal purity and lack (or minimization) of individualized ego is the key in any sadhana. Thousands of hours of sadhana without them is fruitless. One who is pure and has a very limited ego achieves results quickly.

There is a lot of misinformation and unfounded fears that are spread regarding Chandi path. Do not worry about them.

Eating an elaborate set of appetizers and desserts before and after a meal may be recommended. But one can get indigestion from it too. If the meal itself is correct for you, go ahead and enjoy it without appetizers or dessert! Whatever you eat, eat it happily and positively to get the most energy from it. Similarly, read whatever you read with a sense of surrender and limited ego.

Instead of doing everything with a lower focus, it is better to just do 13 chapters with a higher focus.

Using Wood for Homa

Q. I had a few questions to people who use wood for homa. Sometimes the wood bursts in the fire with a loud crack. Is it because of trapped air in the wood? If so, is there anything that can be done to reduce this cracking. Sometimes I have seen people offering pieces of cloth in fire during poornahuti. What does cloth indicate? One more question I had, the homa Agni burns away the karmas which are represented by the wood and the offerings we give. Now is this only the negative karmas it burns or also the once we call good karmas?

A. Cracking can be because of air or moisture trapped in wood. Don't worry about it.

Offering clothes to gods is like offering clothes to your mother and father. But remember one thing. If you give expensive clothes as opposed to simple clothes, human beings may be happier. But gods do not care much about the value placed on clothes by human beings. A simple 1 ft x 1ft cotton cloth offered with devotion, sincerity and surrender may please Her much more than a 9 ft x 4 ft silk saree with elaborate silver embroidery work offered with pomp and pride. Gods do not think like normal human beings. One should offer what is reasonable based on one's finances and time and maintain a humble attitude of surrender.

A child who is proud and pompous does not impress his mother as much as an innocent child does. When you do a homam, think and behave like a small child who plays a game with his mother in which he feeds small bites of food to mother. One's mother may be big and be able to take care of herself. But she may like to play a game with the child and say "I am hungry my son. Can you please give me some food?" Even if the child gives very small bites, she may say "oh thank you. I am full now." Just as in the allegory, we are children and gods we worship in fire (or elsewhere) are parents who have everything and do not really need anything from us. Yet, for their pastime, they engage in a play with us. Be an innocent

child in that play rather than being a pompous and proud kid. We are feeding little bites to playful parents who do not really need anything from us and who actually own everything that we consider ours.

Esoterically, clothes represent the gunas that condition us.

Regarding burning good and bad karmas: Suppose a great saint visits you and you serve him and offer him something nice. Suppose he blesses you. His blessings may either enhance good results or decrease bad results. Both are possible. With fire and homam also, both are possible. Fire may burn a bad karma and relieve you from having to experience its fruit. Fire may also receive a good karma and give its fruit immediately. Fire is intelligent and you do not have to worry.

Question on Mantra Recitation and Performing Homam

Q. Will there be any effect of playing Audio Mantras read/rendered by experts? (as layman like me, who do not know how to pronounce the Sanskrit mantras correctly, is it OK to take help of the CD's or Audio MP3 mantras available?).

A. It is perfectly ok. In fact, even if the original expert recorded it mechanically and without much devotion, you will still get good punya from it if you listen to it with focus and devotion. The purpose of mantra is to control the mind and its thoughts and tap some spiritual energy that the mind has access to but does not get because of its various pre-occupations. If you hear something with focus, it still helps in controlling the mind, tapping some spiritual energy. It is still beneficial.

However, as you become comfortable with it, try to chant it yourself at some stage. That is a little better.

Q. You have provided Audio and Video of Ganapathi Homam, will there be the same effect if one plays and mimic (imitating the actions without any self voice and your original voice in place)?

A. Yes. As you hear, a part of your mind is repeating that sound while you do the actions. It will still be beneficial. In fact, I know that some people who are now doing homam quite well started out in that manner!

Q. If the answers to the above is `Yes', who will get benefitted (I mean will I get benefitted or the originators who rendered the mantras or performed Homam?)

A. You will benefit mainly. But various people who enabled you will also get some small portions of it. But most of the benefit for this specific action is yours.

Homam During Eclipse

Q. Should we do havan during eclipse?

A. Rituals fall in two groups - those done for dharma and those done for moksha.

Sun and Moon were doing their dharma when they pointed out to Vishnu that Rahu was drinking amrita (nectar) and Vishnu did his dharma when he cut off the head of Rahu. The event of eclipse, in which

Rahu and Ketu trouble Sun and Moon, is not conducive to dharma, i.e. adherence to the rules of engagement in the field of duality.

But it is conducive to spiritual experience of the underlying single reality where there is no duality (no god, no demon, no good, no bad). Torturing of Sun and Moon by Ketu is conducive to moksha. The eyes of the cosmic being, through which the variety of beings in this creation is observed, need to be closed in order to get out of the field of duality and become absorbed in Brahman.

At the time of eclipses, temples close and priests do not do temple rituals. However, for individual sadhana for spiritual progress, it is a great time. Some say that japam and homam done at the time of a homam gives 1000 times more result.

If you are doing a homam for spiritual progress, eclipse time is a great time to do homam.

Q. Suppose I am giving 12 Ahutis daily to Maha Ganapati with (Aum, Shrim, Hrim Klim.....Vashamanaya Swaha) Maha Ganapati Mantra, is it necessary that I have to speak - Idam Maha Ganapataye, Idam Na Mama - after each Ahuti? Or It is OK if I give 12 Ahutis first with the Mantras only and I will speak -Idam Maha Ganpataye,Idam Na Mama - only once at the last after 12th Ahuti is completed?

A. There is no need to say that. Just add swaahaa first 11 times and vaushat in the 12th time.

Saying "this is for XYZ god and not mine" after the mantra is needed if we are using fire to send generic aahutis to various deities like Prajapati, Agni, Vayu etc. If we invoke a specific deity in fire and worship him and then offer aahutis for him, you can merely read the mantra and add swaahaa. No need to specifically say "this is for XYZ god and not mine" after each mantra.

Burning Poornaahuti in Homam

I happened to be at a Sudarsana homam performed by a local priest at the house of some friends in North Carolina. The priest made a mistake which made me realize that others may be making that mistake too!

That priest performed the homam with a small fire in a big rectangular aluminum tray. Of course, I had my copper homa kundam with me and had just performed a homam before going there and my host too had a copper homa kundam with him and either of us would've been happy to bring the homa kundam and lend it to the priest for the ritual. But the priest just performed in an aluminum tray, which is not ideal. But that is not the mistake I am referring to.

He offered a full dry coconut and some grains as poornaahuti. Though dry coconut burns well if it catches fire, this gentleman dropped it away from the fire and it did not catch fire. The grains also did not burn. The food he offered before poornaahuti was also too much for the fire and did not burn. Had the full coconut caught fire, there would have been a big fire and everything would have probably burnt. But it didn't and a lot was left unburnt.

It is in general not good if something offered in homa kundam does not burn, especially poornaahuti. Make sure that your poornaahuti burns. If you offer a dry coconut or a dry coconut half or a dry coconut piece in poornaahuti, make sure that it is in contact with fire (so that it catches fire). If you offer a regular

coconut (advisable only if you have a big homa kundam and a big fire), make sure you pour enough ghee on it so that it catches fire completely. In any case, the poornaahuti needs to be burn fully.

If poornaahuti or some other offerings don't burn fully, it is fine to burn it on the next day by performing homam in the same homa kundam. You can continue doing homam daily without emptying the homa kundam of the ashes from the previous day.

But, if you do a one-off homam like that priest, make sure that your poornaahuti burns fully.

When you are in front of a fire and making an offering, some of your karmas are brought to the top of the "pile of karmas" for burning. If you make the offering in fire properly with a decent mental focus, most of that karma burns and what is left for experiencing is minimal. On the other hand, if you make an offering and it does not burn, you brought out a karma to the top of the pile and it did not burn. You now have to face it!

If you are one with a *perfect* sense of surrender who can take *anything* with an equal vision, all this is inapplicable. But, if you are still trying to get there and doing homam to help you get there, this is quite applicable.

Chandi Homam

Q. Just I read Chandi Homam manual yesterday. You have written that Devi kavacha, Ratri Sukta and Devi Sukta (Namo Devyai....) is to be omitted before and after 13 chapters for Ahutis.

But sir in my routine daily homam for different deities, if I find some time I am doing homam on Ratri Sukta and Devi Sukta mantras also and giving Ahutis. Sometimes I include 4th Chapter (Shakradayah....) and sometimes 11th Chapter also. Is it a mistake? or it is O.K ?

I mean, can I give Ahutis for Ratri Sukta and Devi Sukta independently when I am not doing whole Chandi path Homam ? Can I also give Ahutis for 4th chapter only?

A. Ratri sooktam is for Kaalaraatri, personification of the state of the universe between creation cycles. Devi sooktam is for the root energy that is behind the creation, susetenance and destruction of the universe and that which drives the desires, thoughts, actions and knowledge of all beings in the universe. Those sooktas can be chanted in any homam and not just in Chandi homam.

If you offer aahutis with them, that is ok. The only point is that the intonation of the last syllable (before swaahaa) is most likely mis-intonated. Don't worry too much about it.

The "shakraadi stuti" and "Naaraayani stuti" chapters are like the crux. It is ok to do a homam only with 4th or 11th chapters.

Some Thoughts from Narayan Iyer ji

Regarding fire getting extinguished (or anything similar to it), it happens with all beginners and its only practice which makes one perfect. Most of us assume that this is only applicable in mundane matters. This is applicable in the path of spirituality too. I know there are people who think that any affair/process related to God must be done perfectly. Honestly ... unless one is an adept, this is impossible and only repeated and sincere attempts makes one an adept.

Reminds me of the great Kalidasa who worshipped Goddess Mahakali for nine lives and he was born a dunce in his tenth and she appeared to him in his 10th lifetime, when his sadhana was complete and he banged his head out of sheer frustration. Imagine!!! In Kaliyuga, along with Homa, surrendering to ones chosen deity is the best path for most.

Let me share one incident, when Narasimha's spiritual Guru whom I also consider my Guru, asked me (when we were in Chennai for Shata Chandi Homa) to learn Mahaganapthi homam, I thought he was really joking! When I got back to the US, he called me again and reminded me. It then occurred to me he was really being serious. So, I started searching on the net and I found a really flimsy document, but nevertheless I took it up and performed it. But, I was not satisfied. Manishji then reminded me of the book he gifted me, but even in that it was entirely in Samskrit and illiterate that I am, I couldn't distinguish between an instruction and sloka :). Around this time, Narasimha occasionally performed a longer version of the homam and I participated in it, but never could grasp it. I then asked Narasimha to guide me, which he did, but still it did not get through my really dense brains :). I felt really helpless, but the stars were such that I never gave up, instead I made a sincere prayer to Lord Ganesha, that If he really intends that I perform the homa, then he should kindly show me the way. In around two weeks time, Narasimha told me that he has decided to document the Laghu (Short) paddhati of the homa. I just couldn't believe my luck and thanked the Elephant-headed omnipotent for his grace. Well ... its been exactly 2yrs and I am still at it taking baby-steps and making progress everyday.

I thank Manishji, Narasimha and the all the divine forces for helping me progress. My request, pls dont give it up, persist with it no matter what. We are humans and prone to mistakes. But then nobody got perfect the very first time, unless he has worked on it a lot in his previous lives. Its all a continuum. Dont worry about time, we have future lives ... plenty of time. These things take their own sweet time, doesnt happen overnight. No matter what, complete your homa everyday, that should be the primary goal ... nothing else. Pls dont waver from it, whether you get or dont get anything. Slowly we'll progress in our Sadhana and move on to higher things. I wish all the best. We should really thank our stars that people like Manishji and Narasimhaji are here guiding us ... what would be life without them!

Narasimhaji's Response

Excellent and inspirational writeup Narayan!

Earlier, I mentioned the Mother's instruction to Manish when She appeared in front of him at the temple in Chennai during Shata Chandi homam, to spread the practice of regular homam around the world. However, Manish did not reveal that incident to me until much later. All he told me at that time was that Narayan really needed to do homam everyday and that I should teach a simple procedure to him.

I experimented with homam, started doing occasionally and liked it. I started doing a quick procedure everyday. After doing it daily for a few months, I finally got down to the original task - teaching Narayan. I chose to write a detailed manual for that purpose. In hindsight, I made the correct choice, as many people in addition to Narayan are able to do homam using the manual now! I and many other people have benefited (and will benefit). However, as far as my mind concerned, all this started for Narayan! When it was time for Narayan to start doing homam, many people across the world started with him. What a fortunate soul.

It was probably for a reason that Manish did not tell me at the onset itself what the Mother asked him to do. My attitude and mental state would've been different while working on the manual. I would've been more egoistic and also hurried more. Because the only thing I was told was to teach Narayan, I took mysweet time, arrived at the correct balance and also wrote it down without many pretensions. The whole effort ended up being more saattwik and I really benefited from the exercise. If I had known the full story, it would have had more rajas given my mental state then and I would not have had made the same progress I made, while preparing myself to teach homam to Narayan.

Manish told me the full story only when I was better prepared to handle the information and, of course, I added it to the preface of the manual as asked by him then.

A good guru protects a sishya from unnecessary information that can wreak havoc with the ego. I remember another incident.

One day in the spring of the same year, I decided to spend a whole day meditating with Gayatri mantra during the coming weekend. The inspiration came out of nowhere and I immediately latched on to it. When I told Manish, he only said "good, go ahead and do it". I started before sunrise and went on till 9:30pm. Except for 3-4 breaks of 2 min, a 20 min break at noon for bath and a small lunch and another 10 min break for another bath at dusk, I was basically sitting in the same place and meditating with Gayatri mantra. It was a very good experience. I was in a very nice state at the end of the day.

I noticed on the next day that the previous day was Akshaya Triteeya (Vaisakha Sukla Triteeya). It is considered a very auspicious day and it is believed that spiritual sadhana on that day is 1000 times more powerful than on other days. Though I had not noticed it before, I picked a perfect day for the sadhana. I was excited. When I mentioned this to Manish with excitement a few days later, he said calmly "I knew it earlier itself. But I did not tell you because knowing it would've distracted you. You would have been excited at doing the sadhana on Akshaya Triteeya and that excitement would've changed the mental focus and brought more rajas into the sadhana."

He was absolutely right. As such, I was "proud" of doing such a sadhana. The ego and pride brought rajas and limited the mental focus on the mantra. If I was aware that I was doing this sadhana on a powerful day, it would've increased the pride and excitement, brought in rajas and reduced the saattwik focus on mantra further. Ego is a very dangerous entity. Even after one makes excellent progress, it can suddenly return and pull one down! After hearing Manish's words, I introspected and found that my ego was still alive and kicking and that he was wise not to feed it with more delicious food!

Lucky are those who have a guru who can succinctly tell them what is useful rather than what sounds good. Lucky are those who have a guru (or someone else) who can go to the heart of their problem and

point it out, so that they can weed it out through further introspection and weaken it through conscious effort.

I remember one more similar incident. Before the shata chandi homam in early 2006, a priest we respect a lot took me to a Siddha (a perfected/advanced soul). When he looked at me, he mentioned the name of one of the saptarshis and said that I very close to him and that I would do some important work in this birth.

When I saw Manish later that day, I mentioned this to him. He immediately became serious and said "Narasimha, do you need one more identity? Your ego is already strong with the identity of 'Narasimha, the Sanskrit scholar', 'Narasimha, the astrologer', 'Narasimha, the engineer', 'Narasimha, the spiritual seeker' etc. It will take great effort to overcome those identities and find True Self. As if that challenge is not sufficient, do you really need yet another new identity to feed your ego further? See, what he said may very well be correct. But it is not useful for your progress. You have to rise above all identities."

How true and wise!

Just as a fat and mighty dog may win over a lean and weak dog and get all the food given by the master, ahankara (ego or the sense of "I") within us wins over the spirit of detachment and gets all the energy possible. Just as a good master may chain the fat dog and feed the lean dog specially, we too must consciously try to restrain ego and increase detachment.

Manish has a unique way of looking at things and some simple points he made brought so much clarity to my thinking and sped up my spiritual evolution in this life. Even without giving any specific mantra to me, like many spiritual gurus do, he lit the lamp of knowledge in my heart. He would say the lamp and light were already there and he simply wiped the dust on the lamp that was blocking the light. That is what a good guru does. He/She wipes off the thick layer of dirt (conditioning by gunas) on the glass (ego) that encloses the lamp (Self) that is lit in the heart. Sometimes, we may be too caught up to notice that dirt ourselves..

Homam and other spiritual sadhana tools are very helpful. But one should also try to introspect and change one's thinking, on an ongoing basis. There is no magic pill. For most people, this does not take just a single moment or day or month or year. It CAN take a long time. As Narayan indicated, one should start walking on the path and not worry about the progress and the distance left. One who keeps walking without distractions will reach the goal.

The point I want to emphasize is that the external rituals (like homam) and the internal introspection (to change attitude) should go hand in hand. After a while, there will be synergy between them and they will start to work together very effectively.

Technicalities that Block One

The astrological angle I criticized in another mail today is only one aspect of the unnecessary technicalities that sometimes block people from progressing. There are other technicalities that can be done away with, when they start to block one.

I recently saw the chart of a person, who I am sure, will make much progress and be in a position to guide thousands of people spiritually. His chart strongly suggested that he should chant Chandipath or do Chandi homam and then progress will come. I told him that. He said he learnt Chandipath sometime ago but he does not read it regularly because he does not have the anga nyasam and kara nyasam text. He cannot read Indian scripts and can only read English. Chandipath is available in Roman script from Ramakrishna math, but that only has the thirteen chapters, kavacham, argala and keelakam. It does not give the nyasas, which are given in the Gita press version (available only in Indian languages).

The poor guy assumed he could not do it without proper nyasas and did not attempt to do it. I told him that 13 chapters are the main thing and all else is secondary. I told him to just start with 13 chapters.

Like this, many people have various ideas about "the right way" to do it and do not even try things lest they should do it "a wrong way"!

Of course, there *are* right ways to do poojas, japas and homas. However, there are also right ways to do so many things. Let me give an analogy using eating.

There are right ways to eat too. There are certain mantras you should say before eating, while eating and after eating. There are rules for what items should be eaten. There are rules for what order they should be served in, on the plate. There are rules for how the served items are arranged on the plate. There are rules for what order you eat them in. There are rules for what kind of plate can be used (silver, golden, copper, banana leaf etc). There are rules for what kind of clothes the person serving food can wear. There are rules for what kind of clothes eater can wear. There are many many rules.

Suppose you don't know some rules. Or suppose you are unable to follow some rules and have to compromise. Or suppose you don't know the mantras to be recited before and after eating. Will you then stop eating? Won't it be foolish to not eat because you cannot follow all the rules and technicalities of eating? Won't you compromise wherever you have to and just eat *some* food, so that you get some strength and sustain yourself?

Friends, the *same* thing applies to spiritual sadhana. Whether you spend 5 hours or 1 hour or half hour or ten minutes everyday on spiritual sadhana, it should be an integral part of your life. It should be as important as eating food, drinking water and breathing air. In fact, it really is. Just as not eating makes you weak, not doing any sadhana also makes you weak. Just as eating makes you stronger, doing some sadhana also makes you stronger.

People are unnecessarily afraid of spiritual sadhana. They take all the rules and technicalities too seriously (unlike with other things in life, such as eating, drinking, bathing etc) and block themselves from progressing.

This needs to change. People need to know that it is ok to compromise on most things, but important to do *some* sadhana. Just as you would eat simple dal chawal (lentil soup with rice) or a bread and cheese sandwich when there is no multi-course meal that satisfies the rules, you can just sit down for 15 minutes without moving and repeat any mantra. Or just light a fire in a silver or copper or clay bowl with sticks, say "Om bhuh swaha, Om bhuvah swaha, Om suvah swaha, Om bhurbhuvassuvah swaha" and then repeat some mantra with swaha added and some ghee drops poured into fire. Such a simple sadhana also, when

repeated daily, can be powerful. It is definitely better than avoiding sadhana at all, just as eating just a bread sandwich is better than not eating at all.

Rules and technicalities are there to maximize the experience one gets from sadhana. They are NOT there to block or stop one from doing sadhana altogether. That would be counterproductive.

Each rule, each technicality and each step in the standard procedures has some deeper meaning and motive (which is lost on people these days!), but it is ok to compromise. If you can, follow *all* the rules. If you cannot, at least do *something* with several rules compromised, rather than not doing anything at all.

Too many people are suffering from inertia when it comes to progressing spiritually. I see some great souls meant for big things also suffering from inertia at various levels. Unnecessary fear of rules and technicalities is part of the reason for this inertia.

This needs to be changed. Spiritually inclined people have to be empowered and boldened. The fear and inertia in them need to be destroyed. This is very much needed for not just for the individual good of those people, but the collective good of world in these interesting times.

Regarding One Supreme God

The potential to manifest (Brahman) is ONE and it fills the entire universe, known as Brahmanda (anda=egg, i.e. potential to manifest). Brahman alone exists, Brahman alone is supreme and Brahman alone is unlimited and beyond attributes. Each manifestation of Brahman is limited and has attributes (gunas etc). Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra, Agni, Vaayu etc are all different limited manifestations of Brahman with various attributes. Though they are all limited, a rishi can see the unlimited Brahman in all of them.

A rishi is capable of seeing that everything that exists is actually Brahman only. When he worships Vishnu, he actually sees Vishnu not as a limited manifestation with certain attributes but as Brahman and hence lauds that Vishnu is supreme and beyond attributes and that everything and every deity is a different manifestation of Vishnu only. For example, Narayana Sooktam says "sa brahma sa shivah sa harih". Similarly, when a rishi worships Ganapathi, he actually sees Ganapathi not as a limited manifestation with certain attributes but as Brahman and hence lauds that Ganapathi is supreme and beyond attributes and that everything and every deity is a different manifestation of Ganapathi only. For example, Ganapathi Atharva Seersham says "tvam brahma tvam vishnus-tvam rudras-tvam...".

You see similar assertions in Vedic literature with respect to various deities. It is not that rishis are lying. It is that they are in such exalted state that they see Brahman in whichever deity they are contemplating. In fact, a rishi in sahaja samadhi state can see Brahman in everything.

That one God who manifested differently is the unmanifested supreme potentiality. He/She/It has no attributes (which come with only a specific manifestation) and normally known as Brahman. When the final goal of a journey has no description, one may describe it based on the path taken in the journey.

Similarly, those who worshipped Vishnu and finally reached Brahman through Vishnu describe Brahman as Narayana and attribute some of Vishnu's gunas to Brahman, though Brahman has no gunas. Those who worshipped Shiva and finally reached Brahman through Shiva describe Brahman as Sadashiva and attribute some of Shiva's gunas to Brahman though Brahman has no gunas.

All the fights about the superiority of deities that occurred in the past are meaningless. Brahman is ONE and Brahman alone is. Whether you reach Brahman through Vishnu or Shiva or whoever, Brahman you reach is identical. So worship whichever deity you are attracted to. Try to reach Him/Her. If you are so inclined and believe in the One source of all divinity (Brahman), try to reach Brahman through whichever deity you worship. The paths are many, but the final goal is the same. Ekam sat vipraa bahudhaa vadanti.

All religions and spiritual paths offer valid paths to Brahman. Allah is not different from Brahman, but the path taught by some Islamic teachers to Allah may be different from some paths Hindus know to Brahman.

The advantage of aarsha dharma is that rishis have experimented and given some easy paths. If you don't want it easy and want to take a difficult path also, that is fine and good in a way. But, if you want an easy path, try to follow rishis and use some Vedic mantras.

I have recently uploaded Mahaganapathi Homam audio and a 25-page manual on my webpage. This is a simple procedure that takes less than an hour and do-able on a daily or weekly basis. I do a one-hour homam everyday and can tell you based on my own experience that a daily homam is great for spiritual sadhana. When bhootagni burning in sookshma sareera is weak, nadis have impurities and energy flow has obstructions, then most other sadhanas you may be doing will not yield much result. Homam as a sadhana is a very effective in increasing bhootagni, purifying nadis and removing obstructions to energy flow. If one is already a realized soul like Buddha, homam may be unnecessary. But, for the confused souls of Kali Yuga, it is a very effective method. Just like with any sadhana, regularity increases effect in homam too. I encourage people interested in the Vedic path to make a small homam (one hour or half hour or atleast 15 min) a part of their daily spiritual sadhana. After doing it for a few months, you will realize that it will make all your other sadhanas (such as japam) much more effective.

Those of you who are more learned must forgive me if you find mistakes in what I am teaching. Instead of teaching a complicated procedure that turns people off, I believe in simplifying it so that people benefit from it. Moreover, I have retained most important steps and this is an almost authentic Vedic agnimukham.

Some people believe that Vedic agnimukham based homas cannot be performed by everybody and hence recommend Tantrik homas. I am inspired by Saint Gnyaanadeva, who asserted that each being has the right to recite Veda and made a buffalo recite Veda in front of arrogant scholars who forbade him from reciting Veda. I like the Vedic method and hence teach it to every interested person. May those who disagree with me ignore me.

A Discussion on Oneness and Manyness of Forms

Q. Is Vishnu there in the flower? The answer is yes. Is Vishnu there in the tree? The answer is yes.

A. That's all fine. But a devotee of Kaali like Ramakrishna will eventually reach the stage where he sees Kaali in flowers, trees etc (just as you may aspire to see Vishnu in everything). A great devotee of Shiva will eventually see Shiva in everything.

It is possible to devote to several deities and eventually start seeing the deity in everything that exists. It is not correct that only Vishnu's form has the characteristic you explained above.

In order to explain this more clearly, let me go back to the analogy I gave earlier. This fantastic analogy is from my spiritual guru.

----- *Quote Begin* -----

Imagine God to be a bright star in the sky. When you see from a distance, star seems tiny and you conclude that there is only one God. If you start moving towards God, you realize as you get closer that the star is in reality a huge diamond with 330 million faces. Each face is several miles long and wide and has various attributes (gunas). One face may be red and hot and another may be blue and cold etc. So, as you get closer to the diamond, you have to pick one face to get close to.

Now, when you get too close to a face, the whole world will seem to have the attributes of that face. For example, if you get too close to a face that is cold and blue, then the whole world will feel cold and blue to you. In other words, the God you are getting close to is the Supreme god of the world and fills the entire world as you experience it.

This is the ultimate goal in sadhana for one adhering to Dwaita siddhanta (duality). For them, getting close to ishta devata and securing a place near the feet is the highest goal. Everything else is immaterial to them.

For some, there is a next stage: As you get closer and closer to the face you picked, you finally merge with it! This is the ultimate goal in sadhana for one adhering to Visishtadwaita.

To Advaitis, this communion with a Saguna ("with attributes") form of God is not the final goal. The final goal is to break through the face and jump into the inside of the diamond. As you break through the face of the diamond into which you merge and jump into the interior of the diamond, you no longer perceive the faces of the diamond or the world outside. There are no longer any objects or attributes. The experiencer, experienced and experience all merge into one.

This state can be achieved by first merging into any face (Vishnu, Shiva, Mahalakshmi, Mahakali etc).

----- *Quote End* -----

Read the above analogy carefully. Imagine Vishnu, Shiva etc to be faces of the diamond in the above analogy. If you get too close to Vishnu, you will indeed see Vishnu in everything and you 'realize' that

Vishnu is the supreme god of this universe and fills everything that exists. You see Vishnu in even Shiva. Similarly, if you get too close to Shiva, you will indeed see Shiva in everything and you 'realize' that Shiva is the supreme god of this universe and fills everything that exists. You see Shiva in even Vishnu. The same applies to Sun, Ganesha and so many other deities.

It is as simple as that.

But then, one may ask what is the importance of picking ishta devata based on astrology chart. If it is possible to see Vishnu in Shiva or Shiva in Vishnu, what is the big deal in choosing a deity? Why can't one pray to a random deity?

The answer is that the stage of perceiving the ishta devata in all gods and everything that exists has not been reached by most people. Our ishta devata prescriptions are for people who are yet to reach that stage. In terms of my analogy, the journey to different faces of the diamond takes different times based on where you stand right now. If you pick a face that is closest to you based on where you are, you reach the diamond faster. For example, if you choose a face on the other side, it will take considerably longer to reach it. On the contrary, if you select a face that is closest to you, you reach it faster.

Similarly, if you choose a form (face of the diamond of divinity) that is closest to you based on where you stand in karmic evolution (i.e. based on all previous karmas and samskaras), you reach god faster. Once you reach the chosen face and get too close to it, you will see that deity in the entire universe. Someone with different samskaras may choose a different deity and reach a different face and that person will see that deity in the entire universe. There is no contradiction here!

Thus, while trying to surrender to a random deity may eventually work, surrendering to some specific deities may work faster based on your previous karmas. That is what astrologers should try to figure out. Instead of setting one on a different course, if we help one continue the course one was on already (from various lives), we would have done a good thing!

Thus, my humble appeal is this: Let us not restrict to one deity (e.g. Vishnu and His avatars) based on OUR OWN samskaras. Let us recommend all deities based on the native's inclination, samskaras and karmas.

I hope my view on not prescribing only Vishnu's avatars as ishta devatas is better understood after this detailed mail!

Dwaita vs Adwaita

Q. I think you hold the view that the un-manifest Supreme Brahman is the origin of all other forms.

A. Maharshi Vasishtha held that view and taught it to Lord Rama. Vasishtha's teachings to Rama were later repeated by Maharshi Valmiki to Maharshi Bharadwaja. They are captured in a classic called "Yoga Vaasishtham". For any sincere seeker of the Highest Truth who is attracted to Adwaita, "Yoga Vaasishtham" is a must-read book.

Q. Something can be spiritual and still have form. But spiritual form is not perceivable to our material eyes. I wonder what you think of this.

A. Whether you are talking about a form made of gross matter (e.g. a human being) or a form made only of subtle ethereal matter (e.g. a god), it has some "attributes" (gunas). Attributes are attributes, whether gross or subtle. They are limiting.

A form with attributes can be perceived by the mind (through the senses of the gross body in the former case and through the subtle perception in the latter) while mind is still mind. It is only the formless reality that cannot be perceived by the mind while it is a mind. Only when mind ceases does the duality of the world cease and the reality that is not limited by any attributes is revealed.

So, my definition of a form is not what is "perceivable to our material eyes". It is what can be perceived by the mind through senses or subtle perception, in its various levels of existence. My definition of formless reality is that which is revealed when mind ceases to exist.

Q. It may be useful for you to read more deeply into the ISKCON philosophy. I can provide links to the Caitanya Caritamrta, Srimad Bhagvatam, Bhagvad Gita if you are interested.

A. Hindu philosophy as outlined by Upanishads is a very vast and complex one. When Kali Yuga started, it seems to me like some great souls were born on this earth to simplify and slightly re-adjust the teachings of Upanishads to make them more palatable and understandable to the masses. A simplified and systematic religion that people can appreciate is perhaps better in Kali Yuga than a complicated philosophy that seems self-contradictory and alienates people.

Thus, I respect the works of several great souls and consider each work to be an important one, but I am clear about my own path.

As far as Bhagavad Gita is concerned, it is the highest teaching of the Absolute Reality. The commentary on Bhagavad Gita by Jnaneshwar (a great saint from Maharashtra) is the one that I like the most. It is unabashedly Advaitic (non-dualistic). I cannot reconcile most other commentaries with the teachings of Upanishads and the teachings of Maharshi Vasishtha to Lord Rama. However, Jnaneshwar's interpretation fits perfectly with the rest.

A literal English translation of the Marathi commentary (containing the original Sanskrit verses also) is available at

http://www.amazon.com/Jnaneshwars-Gita-Jnaneshwari-Swami-Kripananda/dp/0911307648/sr=8-1/qid=1171905959/ref=sr_1_1/105-8466969-7236409?ie=UTF8&s=books

* * *

I humbly suggest that you should follow the path that you feel comfortable with. We need not convince each other. Whether you follow Dwaita or Advaita, the first steps are the same. If you follow the teachings of your gurus sincerely, you will get there. The final goal is almost the same. For one who lives in USA, Delhi and Agra are almost the same distance. First get to India and then you can figure out

whether to go to Delhi or Agra. The journey to India is a long one. Similarly, whether you want the highest dwaitic experience or the adwaitic (non-)experience, the distance between them is quite small compared to the distance a normal person has to either!

Self Identification

Q. What does self identification with a deity means?

A. Who are *you*? Are you really this body? One normally identifies with a body, a name and a limited identity that goes with that body. This identification is very very strong.

You are actually Brahman, the all-pervading, all-knowing and all-being essence of the universe. The same essence manifests as various beings, including various deities and various people, including your own body. And *you* really are that essence and not the body. Still you identify only with the body.

It is possible to destroy this self identification with the body and identify with another object such as a deity. When you identify with a deity, your consciousness is in communion with that of the deity. Your will, thoughts and actions are those of the deity.

Q. When somebody says to me to self identify with Shiva what exactly I have to do ?

A. First I can tell you what exactly you have to avoid: Do NOT tell yourself that you will now identify with Shiva, because Shiva is great and you want to be great. In other words, this is not for ego satisfaction. In fact, until ego completely goes, it is not even possible.

Before you can self-identify with any deity, first your false self-identification with body has to cease. You should absolutely not think of your body as "I".. Your will, thoughts and actions should be those of Shiva.

Will Shiva think of a specific physical body as "I"? No. If a specific physical body has good or bad things happening to it, will Shiva feel pleasure or pain? No. If people are praising a specific person, will Shiva feel proud? No. If people are attacking and criticizing a specific person, will Shiva feel angry? No.

The first step is to overcome attachment to the body, name etc. Reach a state where you are not very sensitive to pleasure and pain to the body and praise and criticism of your thoughts and actions by other people. Reach a state where equanimity of mind can be maintained in all circumstances.

WHEN you reach that state, meditate with a mantra of Shiva while thinking of Shiva.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa could self-identify with not only deities, but pretty much any object of the universe. Once he went into deep meditation while admiring the beauty of grass in the lawn with dew on it. As he was absorbed in deep meditation, a bird came and walked on the grass. His sishyas observed that some bruises appeared on his body suddenly then!

Q. I "think" I can intellectually understand what you have written but somehow I do not get that feeling or in other words I cannot experience that state. I can although feel some of the symptoms that you have mentioned. And as per your writings I understand that this has to be permanent state. Can we have self identification with a deity for some time say some minutes or fraction of seconds since Vimalananda in his book Aghora mentions that when you do this(some action) then self identify with Shiva?

Also I can understand that everything is Brahman but still "I" like to think of various deities like Shiva, Ganesha , Devi ma , Vishu ji etc while eating or before sleeping. Is this ok ? If not Ok then how can I get rid of such thinking?

A. If that can be experienced very easily, everyone in the world would be liberated. Yes, it is made a little difficult by design. Yes, it has to be a permanent state.

However, if you can feel that way sometimes, it is a good start. Suddenly, you may fail in one situation and your equanimity may be broken. As you practice and improve self-control, the failure becomes less frequent. Eventually, you may reach a stage where you can maintain such a state of equanimity for very long periods of times. Finally, it can be permanent.

Self-identification with a deity for even a second is not possible without the self-control over long periods of time. Only after one has been in a state of equanimity for a long time does one become worthy of being possessed by divine energy. As Vimalananda says, you can try to identify with Shiva. But, successful identification occurs only after ego has been demolished fully.

Of course, it is ok. Thinking of divine manifestations of Brahman such as Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha, Devi Ma etc is much much better than thinking of yourself or about your pleasures and your needs. Don't worry about it. For most people in this age, path to realizing Self as Brahman is thorough a deity such as Vishnu and Shiva.

Difference between Self Respect & Ego

Q. "What is a difference between Self respect & Egoistic attitude in day to day life?"

A. In vedantic terms, ego stands for "I-ness" (sense of "I"). If you self-identify with anything, you have an ego. Ego is not there when and only when there is no self-identification of any kind, i.e. when one is immersed in Brahman without any distinction like "this is I, this is other".

But, in order to exist in a body and function in this world, one needs to keep alive at least a very limited amount of self-identification.

However, in most people, this self-identification is not "a very limited" amount, but really huge. We self-identify with a body, name and identity quite heavily. The goal is to reduce it and keep it under check, so that it is ready to completely melt away one day.

The only useful purpose of allowing ego (self-identification) to exist is to allow one to identify with a body, name etc and use them to do god's work. How does one know what god's work one is supposed to

do? One knows it through one's intuition, one's logical thinking and external input like the words of a guru or other learned men.

How you decide your dharma - what you are supposed to do in this world – is personal and up to you. But, once you decide that, all your actions should be centered around that. The level of self-identification should be barely sufficient for discharging one's dharma. Any self-identification above that level is unneeded and counter-productive. It gets one entangled in unnecessary web of karmas.

Suppose I decide that my dharma is to spread homam in the world. Then I should use my body, my name, my image, my thoughts and my actions to do what is needed for spreading homam in the world. Suppose somebody dismisses homam and speaks very deridingly about homam and me. I may argue or ignore. If my judgment is that arguing with him and removing the doubts of people is better to advance my dharma and spread homam, I should argue. If my judgment is that ignoring is better to advance my dharma, I should ignore him. If my self-identification with the name and its fame is too strong and it was offended by his deriding comments on me and I get back to him just for that reason, I am doing something silly and unneeded. Instead, I should look at what actions will help me advance my dharma better.

When Swami Vivekananda lived in US for sometime after his celebrated speech at the parliament of religions in Chicago, he received some good coverage in US newspapers. Some jealous Indian neo-religious leaders conducted a campaign of writing letters to the parliament of religions declaring that Swami Vivekananda was a fake and that he did not represent Hinduism.

Swamiji was a detached soul who did not care what people thought of him. His self-identification with the body, name and image in the world were there only to finish his mission of spreading sanatana dharma and vedanta in the world. After all, once he finished *his* dharma, he did not look back and gave up body.

Still, he did not ignore the taunts and negative letter campaign. He took it seriously. If his detractors were taken seriously, it could have derailed his mission. He needed thousands of important people from across the world to be influenced by him and start vedanta societies in various cities (and co-operation from parliament of religions and positive media coverage contributed to it). That was *his* dharma as judged by him. So he used his body, name and image to engage in actions that fought with his detractors, shut them down and advanced his dharma. He requested Ramakrishna's other disciples in Calcutta to hold a public meeting and send news clips. Swami Abhedananda went from Dakshineswar to Calcutta, stayed there for a few days, invited all spiritual leaders, royals and famous personalities to a public meeting, held a public meeting. He ensured that the grand public meeting was attended by many famous people and passed a formal resolution acknowledging Swami Vivekananda's contributions to Hinduism. News clips from Indian news papers were promptly mailed to the parliament of religions leaders. All doubts about Vivekananda's authenticity were laid to rest.

If Vivekananda did this out of personal egotism and to feel good about himself, he would be binding himself in more entanglements. But, he was doing it to advance his chosen dharma, which was far bigger than feeling good about himself. So it did not really bind him.

As you said, suppose your superior insults you or is unfair to you. The first instinct of a person would be to be hurt or sad or angry or mad. But, that is the sign of a overly strong self-identification with a body,

name and image. What's the big deal if someone calls me names? You, the imperishable one, are trapped in this perishable identity (body, name, image) *temporarily* just to fulfill some dharma. Identifying with this identity just enough to fulfill your dharma is required. But why identify more than needed and become angry or sad or mad that someone thinks badly about this temporary identity? It is actually quite foolish.

You should think only in terms of your dharma. What is the dharma you are working for? What things help it and what things pull it back?

Suppose you decide that one of your dharmas is to take care of your family (because there are still unpaid karmik debts). Suppose an unfair comment of a superior has a chance of impacting your next performance review, your salary or even your job itself, and, as a result, a chance of blocking your dharma. Then, the question is what action will advance your dharma better. Will you serve your dharma better by ignoring and remaining calm or by arguing back? Do whatever helps your chosen dharma more.

But, thinking "he is wrong. He is unfair to *me*" and reacting based on it useless, though that is what most people do. As I said above, do not pay too much attention to a temporary entity called your identity (body, name and image). You are not that. You are something else using 'that' to fulfill some dharma. Decide what your dharma is and base your actions in tricky situations on their impact on your dharma. Hope that clarifies a little bit.

Will of God

Q. For the past few days, few questions as listed below are confusing me. Hoping to get this blockages cleared from learned gurus. "Nothing in this world moves without the will of God"

1. I can understand this with regard to action/reaction philosophy but with regard to free will, how do we interpret the above statement? e.g., murdering innocent people is an action done by one's free will (agami karma) How to understand this "murder" incident with the "Will of God".

2. How to understand/interpret the "Will of God" in a natural catastrophe kind of situation ? (E.g.,Tsumani disaster or Earth Quake disaster, leading to mass deaths of hundreds of lives?)

A. At the level of supreme cosmic being, please realize that supreme cosmic being (Parama Purusha) contains all beings of this universe. His desires are the sum total of the desires of all beings. His actions are the sum total of the actions of all beings. His knowledge are the sum total of the knowledge of all beings. Thus, anything that is happening through the individual will of a single being is also happening with the will of supreme cosmic being. The statement "nothing in this world moves without the will of God" is take the supreme cosmic being as God.

A demon like Raavana conquering the world happens through his individual will and actions, which is part of the will and actions of supreme cosmic being. But this makes gods and rishis unhappy and Lord Vishnu decides to kill him. This decision of Vishnu's avatara as Rama and its execution happens through the will and actions of Lord Vishnu, which is part of the will and actions of supreme cosmic being. This is the karmaphala of Raavana's actions, given by Nature through gods, rishis and Vishnu. A demon becoming strong and abusing gods and Vishnu killing him are both due to the will of supreme cosmic being.

Though every action is indeed due to the will of god, that is a generic and 1000 ft high view. A better view would be to look at it as the will of a specific being, who will get a corresponding karma phala (reaction) in future from another being. The action and reaction are all happening due to the will of god (supreme cosmic being).

If X murders Y, it is the will of X that is responsible for it. Though it is also due to the will of supreme cosmic being, a more useful way to look at it is as the will of X.

Of course, will of Y may be responsible for some adharmik actions in the past and the reaction given by nature may be his murder (with X being the instrument of this reaction). When Y committed those actions in the past, it was due to his will and hence also due to the will of supreme cosmic being (as Y is part of supreme cosmic being). Then X is used by nature as an instrument to murder Y, so that he gets the reaction of his action. This happens due to the will of X and also due to the will of god as X is a part of supreme cosmic being.

However, if X does this action with self-identification, this becomes a new karma for him. He will get its reaction later and nature will use someone else (or Y himself) as an instrument. This is an endless cycle until one realizes that what is happening to one is a reaction to one's own previous actions and does not harbor emotions like hatred, anger, jealousy etc towards people and objects used as instruments by nature to bring reactions to one's previous actions.

Similarly, when many people who engaged in some bad actions using their free will (and hence also god's will) are together, nature may decide to give them the reaction to their actions together. A natural or man-made disaster (like a tsunami or earthquake or a terrorist attack) may come to all of them and give the reaction to their bad actions from the past. This is happening as a result of their own actions.

All actions of all beings and the reactions given to them by the nature are due to the will of supreme cosmic being. It is very difficult to understand supreme cosmic being.

God's Will, Individual Will, and Jyotisha

Q. I have few questions in mind which I am not able to find a satisfactory answers from anyone. There is saying in Sanskrit "Tena vina truanam api na chalati" means " A blade of grass doesn't move without his will". In purusha suktam also it mentions God alone is Prabhu(lord) of bhoot(past) and bhavya(future).. So with these statements in mind can't we conclude that everybody's destiny is fixed by God according to his karmas? Now if my destiny is fixed why should I bother if a particular day is auspicious or not, or the girl will be my perfect match or no. Can't I just concentrate on my Karmas and leave the rest to

God? What is the relevance of Jyotish Shastra in this point view? Why should I bother about Jyotish at all?

A. This is a good question. It is a loaded philosophical question and one that many may have. Though I addressed such questions in the past, I sense that I may be able to give an inspired answer on this auspicious day. I will hence spend a little time trying to put my thoughts into elaborate words and cover various aspects related to this question. At the end, I may not answer your question fully or satisfactorily, but I will hopefully have penned some useful thoughts. Hoping you won't mind, I am cc'ing this mail to a few yahoogroups related to Jyotisha and spirituality.

This mail is a little long, as I will cover a few different things and try to put them in perspective.

Brief Answer:

First let me give the brief answer. If you can indeed concentrate on your Karmas (actions) and leave the rest to God and if you can accept with an equal vision any results (fruits) that your karmas may bring, then you are a liberated soul. Jyotisha shastra is indeed irrelevant to you. But there are very few people who are like that. For others, it is still relevant.

Now let me give the long-winded answer.

Nature of Self:

When someone has a dream, one may experience many objects of various attributes and qualities in the dream. Do those objects exist in reality? No. All those objects and various interactions between those objects are unreal - they exist fictionally within the mind. Only the mind exists in reality and no other objects. Still, during the course of a dream, the mind is under the illusion that all these objects exist outside of it. All those objects obey the rules conjured by the mind that is dreaming.

This whole creation is basically like that. All beings are but Brahman. Upanishads and vedanta teach that there is Brahman and nothing or nobody else in this universe. There is no "self" and "other". All is self. However, a part of Brahman becomes deluded and forms a self-identity and entertains an illusion that there is an "I" and the "other". This first being is the supreme being (known by various names such as Sadashiva, Narayana, Krishna, Mahaganapathi, Savita etc).

When the supreme being imagines the existence of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva etc to play various roles in this universe and imagines various beings that make this universe up, all those beings come into being (just like the objects in someone's dream). Just as the objects in a dream obey the rules conjured up by the dreamer in his dream, the beings of this universe obey the rules of the game imagined by the supreme being. Each being experiences various other beings and other objects in this universe because of the spell of delusion that he/she is under. When one realizes the delusionary nature of this spell, one can break free from it.

But a normal person is not aware of all this. One's senses simply perceive so many different objects and one entertains various notions with respect to those objects. All these notions become very firmly established in one's consciousness after many births and it is difficult to overcome those notions. Some objects give pleasure and some give pain, some are found attractive and some are repulsive, some are

considered good and some bad. And so on. The field that is experienced by one, i.e. the field in which all these objects of opposite qualities exist, is known as the "field of duality" or "maayaa" (delusion).

Overcoming the Delusion:

Overcoming this delusion and rising above the limited perception of the senses and realizing that all the beings that seem to exist are like dream objects imagined by the supreme being, i.e. that there is nothing but the supreme being in this universe, is not easy.

Saying "all is Brahman and the objects we perceive are all Brahman only" is easy. Even understanding it at an intellectual level may be easy. But a perfect and unshakable understanding of it is not difficult.

Let us see an analogy. Suppose one goes to a movie. Some events unfold on the movie screen and they seem to really happen. However, they are not real events. It is just fake and manipulated. The characters in the movie are not real. However, some people take the events on the screen seriously and react strongly. Good happenings on the screen make them elated and scary moments on the screen shake them up. There may be someone with an intellectual understanding that the movie is not real and yet one specific scene that may get him/her. For example, one may shiver with shock in a scene despite the intellectual understanding that it is not real. Intellectual understanding does not give full control over instincts.

Similarly, one with only an intellectual understanding that all is Brahman does not have full control over the mind. The instincts, sense organs and various aspects of mind sometimes run like a mad monkey, away from the understanding that "all is Brahman". One may feel happy about some things, feel sad about some things, become attracted to some things and become repelled by some things. A perfect, permanent and unshakable understanding that all is Brahman is much more difficult to obtain than a mere intellectual understanding.

It requires dismantling the formidable fort of delusion made of the walls of mental conditioning formed by the bricks of sense experiences that are joined by the cement of logic and analysis. These walls are fortified over many many lives and make the fort quite formidable.

This is a long process involving many steps. There are different practices designed to facilitate this in different religious/spiritual paths. There is no foolproof algorithm to ensure this process. There are only guidelines.

All is Brahman and all the duality is arising from the Supreme Being. All of one's actions are actually occurring due to the will of Supreme Being only. The results/fruits (good or bad) of one's actions may be viewed as the reactions by Nature to one's actions and they too are due to the will of Supreme Being. Thus, everything that happens is due to the will of Supreme Being. If one person remains in ignorance, keeps on taking a rebirth and keeps going through good and terrible experiences, it is all the will of Supreme Being. If one says "it is all the will of Supreme Being. I am doing nothing" just for the heck of it and yet continues to have an egotism (self-identification with a body or name or personality or some object), continues various actions through that ego and continues to receive their fruits and becomes elated by some and depressed by some, it is all through the will of Supreme Being. Though the person is saying "Supreme Being does all", he continues to think of an "I" and thinks deeply that "I am doing". That is why Supreme Being wills the persons to receive the appropriate fruits of that action. If another person

truly understands that Supreme Being knows, wills and does all things, kills "I" completely at the mental level, then that person may seem to engage in various actions, but he does not really perform any actions. When there is no "I", there is action and no reaction. Despite moving in the material world and doing various actions, that person's mind is always established in bliss. Again, this person has no "I-ness" and hence Supreme Being wills the person to be in supreme bliss always.

The subtle lesson I am trying to drive at is: As long as there is an "I-ness" to a person, actions take place and their reactions happen. "All is Brahman. I do not do anything" is for one who has killed "I-ness" completely. It is not an excuse to do anything and get away. Until one completely kills "I-ness", one has to watch one's actions to produce good reactions that are conducive to making more progress.

Two Types of Knowledge

The teachings of maharshis in Veda and allied subjects like Vedangas and Vedanta cover essentially two types of knowledge:

- (1) Understanding the rules of engagement of the field of duality (maayaa)
- (2) Understanding how the field of duality is delusionary and how all is Brahman only

Knowledge of type (2) is essential because eventually the goal of each being is to overcome the delusionary nature of the field of duality and see Brahman in all. However, the problem with 2 is that this knowledge is only realized and not imparted in a step-by-step process. One may read reams about how all is Brahman and seemingly different objects of this universe are a delusion and one may even understand and appreciate it to some extent intellectually. But it is of not much use! Until the realization comes from within and experienced, one continues to be deluded by duality. One may know all the theory, but the mind continues to be deluded and swayed by duality. When somebody praises one, one may feel elated. When somebody attacks one, one may feel unhappy. When one finds something nice, one may be attracted. When one finds something disgusting, one may be repelled. And so on. Please see my previous analogy of a movie.

While knowledge of type (2) elaborates why the above behavior is silly and describes the thinking and approach of a liberated soul, it is very very difficult to imbibe such thinking and attitude and become liberated. Even reading works imparting knowledge of type 2 for a long time does not guarantee liberation.

Vedangas such as Jyotisha belong to type (1). When one does not realize that the field of duality is a delusion and is swayed by the opposites, then one needs tools to navigate the ocean of opposites. Jyotish is one such tool. When one's mind is deeply stuck in duality and has unsurmountable "I-ness" and "other-ness" deeply imprinted on it, "all is Brahman. Parama Purusha knows, wills and does all" is a useless concept. From the perspective of that person, one's "I-ness" does all actions and begets the fruits of those actions based on order set by Parama Purusha. This gives happiness and sadness of great proportions. This cycle of actions and fruits may go on forever, until one's "I-ness" is killed completely.

Some spiritual sadhana is necessary to kill the "I-ness". This spiritual sadhana is happening within the field of duality where the mind has a clear "I-ness" and "other-ness". Thus, the rules of engagement in the field duality apply. Subjects like Jyotisha throw light on these rules and they can be helpful. For example,

one may start sadhana at a particular time and make swift progress. One may start sadhana at a particular time and encounter many obstacles and stop the sadhana without much progress. One may find the right sadhana based on previous samskaras and vasanas from the horoscope. One may find out that impending material problem (e.g. job loss or loss of a close relative or a divorce etc) may derail one's sadhana and take some measures to stop it and reduce its magnitude. Thus, Jyotisha can be used to manipulate the field of duality to one's advantage, as one wades it trying to kill one's "I-ness" and individual will.

One's Will vs Other's Will

When a scripture says that everything that happens is God's will, it is essentially referring to the supreme being (Parama Purusha) mentioned earlier as the God. This Being is the first Being arising from non-dual Brahman and the one who conjures up the entire duality. Thus, we are at the border of non-duality and duality.

Deities who operate completely within duality have their own wills which may clash with each other and clash with our will. For example, the will of Yamadharmaraja (yama=discipline, dharma = righteousness, raja = ruler) compelled him to kill Markandeya and collided with the will of Markandeya who wanted to remain alive and the will of Lord Shiva who wanted to save Markandeya. There are many stories where the will of one deity/being clashed with another's.

Of course, all these deities are different forms of the same Brahman (or, loosely speaking, of Parama purusha). The will of Parama Purusha is that one deity's will should compel the deity to do X and another deity's will should compel that deity to do Y and something should happen as a result. Everything is indeed the leela (play) of the will of Parama Purusha. But we are not at the stage of fathoming the play of Parama Purusha (and his Shakti). All we can say is that Parama Purusha's will is a complex thing. It is in fact the sum total of the individual wills of all beings of this universe!

As long as there is "I-ness" and individual self-identity left in the mind, there is an individual will. As long as that is the case, one is not liberated. One's individual will facilitates various actions that clash with the wills of various other beings. It causes various problems. Basically one acting based on "individual will" is in tune with only a small subset of "God's will". That person is not in tune with the *entire* God's will.

Thus saying "all is God's will. I need to do nothing" is not conducive to liberation. It continues bondage. Directed effort to kill "I-ness" makes one truly understand that "all is God's will" and drop off one's individual will.

Only when "I-ness" is killed and "individual will" is completely evaporated can one be in tune with the entire "God's will" (as opposed to a small subset). Then alone can one remain in constant bliss, as an unbound observer of the play of this universe without any individual agenda or will. THAT is liberation. Such a liberated soul may seem to engage in various actions, but the mind is stable, has no "I-ness" or individual will and is established in constant bliss. Like a fan may continue to turn for a while after the electricity supply is stopped, such a liberated soul may continue to engage in actions based on the previous flow, but without any egotism (supply of electricity in the analogy).

Power of Duality

Q. Does it matter at all who is whose reincarnation? And anyway, how will you distinguish when *those* very folks have gone beyond the meaning of "I"? What you can only do (well, at least, IMHO) is consider yourself blessed to read about or be part of their lives...One part of me is skeptical whenever someone claims to be a reincarnation of someone else, on the other hand we are all a part of Divinity, so why bother arguing over trivial things. What the Learned say is to pick one, and surrender one totally.

A. Your skepticism is justified. The duality is infinite and impossible to master. Even great jnanis are occasionally deluded by Her power. One can understand un manifested non-dual Brahman, but one cannot hope to understand the dual world fully ever. She is capable of deluding even the greatest sadhaka with a wrong idea as soon as one ventures into duality. She can mislead *anyone* on *anything*. What She does and why She does that is so difficult to fathom. The only way to deal with Her is to surrender to Her power *fully*.

BTW, though we are all part of the same Divinity, we are all not the same. In the non-dual field, we are all the same. But, in the field of duality, we have differences due to previous vasanas (conditioning), which decide what and how much we can do within the dual world. When a being like Krishna is born with 16 kalas, He can do *anything* with the objects of the dual world. When a being like Sai Baba is born with 2 or 3 kalas, He can do a lot of things in the dual world that are impossible for others.

Realizing the non-dual Self is something that is possible for anyone, but there are limits imposed on what things one can do in the dual world, based on the force of previous conditioning. Thus, all are the same at one (non-dual) level and all are different at another (dual) level.

But it is tough to know for sure what one's caliber is. Thus, your basic point holds. But I just wanted to point that all are not indeed the same. We should be disinterested in knowing who is what, not because all are the same, but because we have no surefire way to know who is what.

Achintya Bheda Abheda

Q. In your spiritual studies have you ever come across the concept of Achintya Bheda Abheda? Here are some quick links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achintya_Bheda_Abheda

<http://www.harekrsna.com/philosophy/bmgs/caitanya/tattva.htm>

A. Yes, I have read Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's achintya-bheda-abheda teachings, just as I have read the dwaita teachings of Madhvacharya, visishtadwaita teachings of Ramanujacharya and adwaita teachings of Shankaracharya. *My* view on those teachings is captured well by Swami Turiyananda, an enlightened sishya of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, in a letter he wrote to Swami Sharvananda on 1919 April 18 at Varanasi:

"The ultimate Truth is one and no dual. It is called by various names: Brahman, Paramatman, Bhagavan [Lord], God, and so on. Whoever has realized that Truth has tried to express it according to his own temperament and understanding by giving it a particular name. But nobody has been able to express the whole truth. "What he is, he is" - that is the final conclusion of those who have realized him.

"From different standpoints, Gaudapada's doctrine of no creation, Shakara's doctrine of superimposition, Ramanuja's doctrine of transformation, and [Sri Kantha's] doctrine of Shivadvaita - each one of these is true. Again, apart from all these doctrines, he is beyond all human expression and beyond cognition of mind. The founders of all these philosophical systems practiced austerities, and having received God's grace, they preached the various doctrines at his command. God is the subject from which these doctrines evolved, but he himself is beyond them."

The nature of god and this creation are inexpressible in words and can only be experienced directly. Even one who experienced cannot express accurately, for it is inexpressible by definition. I see no point in engaging in arguments on various doctrines. I firmly believe that Chaitanya, Shankara, Madhva and Ramanuja were all perfected beings who experienced the highest Truth that is there to experience. Yet, they ended up expressing what they experienced in different words. Personally, I think that a discussion on who is more correct is useless, as nobody can accurately capture the nature and relationship between god and his creation in *words*. One should instead undertake individual spiritual sadhana to realize him by direct experience.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to refer to a statement of Lord Hanuman. Hanuman said to Rama, "O Lord, while I identify myself with the body I am your servant. When I consider myself as an individual soul, I am a part of you. And when I look upon myself as the Atman, I am one with you - this is my firm conviction."

It is not useful to debate exactly which statement above is more correct. Most of us cannot relate to anything above. Most of us cannot drop individual self-identification to "look upon self as the Atman". Most of us cannot even identify with individual *soul*. Most of us cannot rise above the body and mind. Most of us are only able to identify ourselves with a mass of flesh and blood that perishes sooner or later. Most of us are only able to identify ourselves with a restless monkey called mind that tortures itself in the jaws of six relentless enemies called desire, anger, greed, delusion, wantonness and jealousy, which are all children of a monster called ego. Most of us are only able to identify ourselves with a name and an image that give pride one day and shame another and happiness one day and sadness another.

For such people, a comparison of the states experienced when one self-identifies with different entities is useless. It is like a poor person in India without a passport or a ration card wondering whether to go to US for vacation or to UK or to Italy. It is a theoretical discussion. One should first accumulate some money and get a passport. Similarly, one should do spiritual sadhana and reduce ego and refine one's self-identification.

I humbly suggest that one should follow the teachings of the Teacher one likes. More than what you believe is the final destination of your travel, the immediate steps you take are important in deciding the success of your spiritual journey.

If praise makes you happy and criticism makes you sad, if pleasures excite you and pains depress you, if beautiful things attract you and ugly things repel you, you have some progress to make in terms of control over mind, irrespective of the final destination of your spiritual journey. Whether the final destination is Delhi or Agra or Benares, one at Kanya Kumari will have to first start walking towards north. Follow your chosen path and purify your consciousness and self-identification. Reduce ego and increase surrender. THAT will keep you in good stead.

Jyotisha and Vedantic Antahkarana (Internal Components)

Q. Scriptures says we have four inners (Antahkarana's). Can you please help me to understand this?

A. I will share my 2 cents of thoughts on Vedantic antahkarana (internalization or internal components). When we discussed antahkarana on vedic-wisdom yahooogroup earlier (dedicated to spirituality, vedanta, tantra, homam etc), I gave an analogy. Before going into Jyotish mapping, let me first share the analogy. This analogy can help understand different components of antahkarana better.

If the antahkarana of a nativity is like a computer, ahamkaara is like the CPU (central processing unit) that co-ordinates all activities in the computer. Chitta is like the memory. This includes static memory that just stays fresh, dynamic memory that needs to be refreshed frequently and even cache. In other words, conscious and sub-conscious memory, i.e. impressions of various experiences in this and previous lives, are covered by chitta. Buddhi is like the ALU (arithmetic and logical unit), which does all the mathematical and logical operations and makes all decisions. Manas is like the I/O controller. It is the interface of the computer to the rest of the world. Network port, printer, USB port, mouse, keyboard etc devices are connected to the computer through this.

The five jnanendriyas (channels of perception) of the manas are like the input channels on the I/O controller. Of course, one may replace one physical input device with another (e.g. replace one mouse by another), but those devices are not really parts of the computer. The input channel used by all those devices is the same and it is a part of the computer. Similarly, jnaanendriya is a *channel* in the manas and the physical device connected to it may be replaced. For example, when we are awake, the input channel corresponding to the jnaanendriya of vision is attached to the physical device called "eyes". We "see" objects based on the light that falls on the eyes. When we sleep and get a dream, the same input channel is attached to some other virtual device that just exists in the chitta (computer memory) as a model and we may see something else. Jnaanendriyas of manas are internal *channels* and they may be connected to external or internal *devices* of perception.

The five karmendriyas (channels of action) of the manas are like the output channels on the I/O controller. Again, the actual devices connected to them are not parts of the computer (antahkarana) and they can be replaced (one throws a ball with physical hand while awake, but with a virtual hand existing in chitta in a dream).

The five praanas are like the power supply circuitry in the computer supplying electric power to various parts of the computer. These 19 components (4+5+5+5) define an individualized consciousness.

A jeevanmukta (liberated while living) is like a network computer where the logic and information

storage happens on a super-computer on the network and the local CPU merely executes the commands of the remote super-computer by controlling the local I/O. One's I-ness has almost been erased and the bare minimum I-ness needed for interfacing with the world around one is left. Just as network computers with different I/O connections may be used for different purposes, similarly different jeevanmuktas may perform different roles in the world. One jeevanmukta may roam the world and teach spiritual knowledge. One jeevanmukta may act like a mad man. One jeevanmukta may rule a kingdom (e.g. Janaka). One jeevanmukta may sit in contentment at his ashram. One jeevanmukta may roam the whole country, defeat scholars in debate and write books (e.g. Adi Shankara). And so on.

Now let me share my 2 cents on the Jyotish mapping. If this makes no sense to you, please leave it. If it makes sense, please feel free to use it, refine it and share with others.

Ahamkara (I-ness):

It is one's I-ness. Though one is non-different from Brahman, one is aware of a separate (and limited!) identity as "self" (e.g. a body, an engineer, a good person etc). Ahamkaara (literally, I-ness) defines that identity of an individualized consciousness and permeates all layers of it.

The main Jyotisha indicator of ahamkaara is chara aatma kaaraka (AK). No wonder Parasara said AK is like the king if a nativity is like a kingdom!

Ahamkaara permeates and operates in all the three bodies - sthoola sareera (gross body), sookshma sareera (subtle body) and kaarana sareera (causal/astral body). Ahamkaara operates through lagna (body) in the sthoola sareera, through Moon (mind) in sookshma sareera and through Sun (soul) in kaarana sareera. Thus, ahamkaara is mainly shown by AK overall, but also supported/represented in different sareeras by the tripod of lagna, Moon and Sun (refer to Sudarsana chakra!).

Buddhi (intellect):

The word buddhi means that which gives perception, understanding and discrimination. Buddhi is the faculty of individualized consciousness that is responsible for processing various pieces of available information, making various decisions regarding the interactions between various components of antahkarana. Buddhi operates within the limits of current destiny and its decisions shape future destiny!

There are different functions of buddhi and they are all shown by different Jyotisha indicators. A high level block within buddhi influences the decision-making faculty of buddhi based on information from chitta (conditioning). That block is shown by AmK (chara amatya karaka). The decision-making faculty within buddhi itself is controlled by Jupiter. Transmitting the decisions to chitta and manas is done by Mercury. Thus, AmK, Jupiter and Mercury are the key Jyotish factors.

Understanding (feeling) information from input channels of manas (sensory/motor mind): Mercury (aided by Moon)

Deciding what information to retrieve from chitta (memory/conditioning): Jupiter, AmK

Retrieving information from chitta (memory/conditioning): Mercury

Deciding what information to store to chitta (memory/conditioning): Jupiter, AmK

Storing information to chitta (memory/conditioning): Mercury

Deciding what commands to send to output channels of manas (sensory/motor mind): Jupiter

Sending commands to output channels of manas (sensory/motor mind): Mercury (aided by Moon)

Chitta (conditioning):

Chitta is the collection of conscious, sub-conscious and super-conscious memories (impressions of past experiences), that condition the way one responds to different situations.

Chitta is not shown by a single factor. It is a large factor and comprises of various aspects of the horoscope! Chitta extends between kaarana sareera (causal body) and sookshma sareera (subtle body). However, chitta vritti (operation of chitta) manifests as various electrical signals and chemicals flowing in sthoola sareera too.

Karakas show how conditioning from prior experiences is embedded in the causal body as various causative factors and in the subtle body as conditioning.

Super-conscious impressions of past desires, actions and experiences as shown by houses in various charts (especially D-40, D-45 and D-60) are all embedded in chitta operating in kaarana sareera.

Sub-conscious impressions as shown by houses in various divisional charts (especially D-27 and D-30) and conscious impressions as shown by houses in various divisional charts (especially D-16, D-20 and D-24) are all embedded in chitta operating in sookshma sareera.

The interface between chitta and manas is done by Mercury (storing the observations of jnanendriyas into chitta). The interface between chitta and buddhi is done by Mercury and AmK. Retrieving memories from chitta for use in decision-making of buddhi and storing decisions made by buddhi for future reference in chitta is controlled by Mercury, while the choice of memories/decisions being stored/retrieved is partly controlled by prior conditioning as denoted by AmK.

Manas (sensory/motor mind):

Manas is the faculty of individualized consciousness that interfaces with the rest of the world. An individualized consciousness has a notion that "this is I and this is the rest of the universe". Manas is the agent through which interactions between the two take place. Through 5 jnanendriyas (input channels), manas perceives various things related to the rest of the universe. Through 5 karmendriyas (output channels), manas tries to affect various changes in the rest of the universe.

Though manas operates mainly in the sookshma sareera (subtle body), it also operates in the sthoola sareera (gross body) through various physical stimuli and chemicals in the brain.

Moon shows manas and houses from Moon show jnaandriyas and karmendriyas of mind. Houses from lagna show the physical devices attached to those.

Praana (life force):

Praana is the life force that sustains the individualized consciousness. Manas is (and the rest of the components of individualized consciousness are) supported by the 5 praanas (praana, apaana, vyaana, udaana and samaana). They are shown by houses from praanapada

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As this is just philosophy, it cannot be directly used in predictions. However, it is my observation that a lot of our astrological understanding of today is based on weak philosophical foundation. Understanding the philosophy of individual consciousness as explained in scriptures and mapping it to Jyotish factors can enhance our understanding of Jyotish in the long run.

As I said, if my 2 cents of thinking makes no sense to you, please leave it. If it makes sense, please feel free to use it, refine it and share with others.

Giving Importance to Experiences

Q. "One person may be seeing visions of deities, experiencing mystical things and another person may not be experiencing any such "extraordinary" things. Yet, the latter may realize Self first. It IS possible." Is it seriously possible? Or is it only a theoretical concept?

A. Absolutely. Once, Ramakrishna Paramahansa wanted to give some siddhis (mystical abilities) to Vivekananda. Vivekananda asked "will they help me realize Self". Ramakrishna said "no". Vivekananda said "then I do not want them. Let me first realize Self. Then we will see."

Things obtained before one is ready are detrimental to progress. Things like mystical experiences, mystical abilities etc are actually like a detour on the path of self-realization. When they happen to one still with an ego, they may fan the flame of ego rather than extinguish it. When a realized soul gets them, they do no harm. But when an unprepared person gets them, they can spoil one.

Accepting what nature gives us without our asking for is fine, but craving for things is not good, mystical experiences included.

Self-realization comes when ego is completely effaced. Mystical experiences are neither necessary nor sufficient for that. As I said before:

"If you normally feel sad or angry or upset when someone criticizes you badly and you are now able to feel normal in that situation, isn't that a "tangible" sign of progress? If you normally feel elated when someone praises you to the sky and you are now able to feel normal in that situation, isn't that a "tangible" sign of progress?"

Instead of focusing your senses outward and looking for some miracle or an "extraordinary experience", focus your senses inward, watch your thoughts and instincts closely and refine them. Try to reach a state where criticism and praise are the same for you."

Control over the mind and senses and control over the six internal enemies (lust, anger, greed, delusion, wantonness and jealousy) are a far more accurate metric to judge the spiritual progress. If one watches one's own thoughts and instincts honestly, one should be able to know what is happening inside the mind.

I know someone who did not even have an awakened Kundalini and had no mystical experiences of any kind but had Kundalini reach sahasrara directly oneday, went into nirvikalpa samadhi, stayed in it for 7 days and returned after 7 days as a brahma jnaani to lead a different life. Of course, it was possible due to the purity generated for several years before that.

Instead of focusing on the *symptoms* and recreating the symptoms observed by some people when they made spiritual progress, it will be productive if one focuses on the root. Mind and its ego are the root of all bondage we experience. Reduction of the ego is the solution that frees one. Other things like mystical experiences, mystical abilities, visions, Kundalini rise etc are symptoms and not the root. If one is successful in recreating the symptoms without making much progress on the root, it is futile really.

Whatever path one follows, one will do well to cut down on all cravings - including those for mystical experiences - and be vigilant in observing one's thoughts and instincts. There is no substitute to cutting the ego, if one is genuinely interested in self-realization.

Q. I recited Sree Hanumathbadabanala stotram some time back. I had an unusual experience of 'being on fire', during the initial stages. It was as if I was engulfed in a ball of fire, which slowly receded over time. I had a similar experience during the Navaratri puja when reciting Devi kavacham. I still have that feeling of an aura of fire around me and feel extremely hot and sweat even in the cold weather. This stays on for a time. I also had to face extreme circumstances in 'relationships' that matter to me and there is a steady deterioration, almost as if a heavy veil has been torn asunder.

A. Most people do not experience a mantra. They just mechanically chant it and nothing happens. What you described tells me that you were able to experience the manta to some extent. That is a good sign.

Though I have never done the mantra you mentioned, from the name, I would imagine that this mantra makes energy flow in pingala nadi.

Different mantras, when they work, force energy to flow in different subtle channel of energy flow in our subtle body, resulting in the perception of a different "experience" to "self". Some mantras (e.g. tryambakam yajamahe) are extremely cooling and made energy flow in Ida (Chandra) nadi. Some mantras (e.g. Savitri Gayatri) make it flow in Pingala (Surya) nadi.

When merely some vaayu (movement of air) enters a nadi also, there is some experience. When the entire energy of self-awareness (aka Kundalini) enters a nadi, it is a very powerful experience and one's perception of self alters drastically.

There are thousands of nadis in the body and thousands of possible experiences. The key is to NOT be distracted by the experience. Mystical experiences are signs of spiritual progress, but they are also traps where we can get stuck (i.e. not progress further). Do not think much about the experience. In a normal wakeful experience, our senses perceive various objects of the external world. We know that all that is just superficial and the reality within all of them (i.e. Brahman) is imperceptible to senses. Similarly, whatever our inward-directed senses perceive (e.g. vision of a being, sound of a mantra, feeling of heat from fire engulfing one etc) in an intense meditation session is ALSO superficial (though perhaps less

superficial than the objects we see in the external world usually) and the reality within those experiences (i.e. Brahman) is experienced only when you transcend the superficial sense experiences.

While it is difficult, the right thing to do when you feel like you described is to ignore it and keep the intense mental focus on the mantra or on the deity. The good thing is that your experience is a sign of spiritual progress and the bad thing is that it can distract you from the final goal.

Feeling hot while and *after* meditation and fighting are signs of some disturbance in the pingala nadi. When the corresponding karmas are flushed out of the system, things may be fine.

I am not really knowledgeable. With my guru's blessings, I have experienced some things and realized some things. Then he told me to not hold back and boldly declare answers to questions on spirituality and religion as if I just know. I just follow his word and do as he said. It is up to my guru and the Mother to impregnate my words with meaning as they are received by people. From my end, I just type out whatever comes to my mind...

Q. I am happy that something *positive* emerged!!! Thank you for your guidance. One other thing I wished to ask you and would you please answer if time permits? One of my friends accidentally touched the chair I was sitting in and felt a jolt of charge a few days back but I did not attribute it to myself. A couple of days back she casually touched me on the shoulder and immediately retracted it saying it was like touching a live wire. Is it also due to the experiencing of the mantra?

A. Yes, when shakti is flowing in one, such things *are* possible. If one is able to contain the shakti, it will not happen. If shakti is flowing and one is unable to contain it, such things can happen. It does seem like you have an awakened and active shakti.

However, you are wise to not attribute it to yourself and try to not even think about it!

Having done so much sadhana in this and prior lives to get a little bit of experience, people often let the experience bind them and block them from going further! That is sad.

If one becomes possessive about an experience or thinks of it as an achievement or thinks of it as a vindication of one's superiority/progress or otherwise develops *any* kind of attachment to the experience, then one gets stuck. This is a common pitfall with various experiences. A true sadhaka should have complete surrender to the cosmic being and not allow the mind to think of *anything* as "mine" or "I did it". Any attachment or possessiveness about something - whether it is regarding a material object such as a car or a wife or a child or body or whether it is regarding some knowledge such as physics or astrology or mantra shastra or whether it is regarding an experience such as seeing a deity or talking to a deity or hearing a mantra internally or something like you described - only promotes personal ego and binds one. The only way to progress further is to reduce personal ego further and not let the mind think of anything as "mine".

Mind's nature is to look at the objects of the world and accumulate objects into a big pile labeled as "mine". This is very difficult to fight.

When I went to India this summer, I and my guru visited several places together. When I was at a specific place, there were some nice experiences - probably my best experiences in this life so far. I realized some things. I had a strong sense of belonging and felt that that place was mine and I used that place to do much work in my past life. After feeling those emotions for a few seconds, I immediately realized my folly. Forget the past life, even my body, my belongings, my achievements and my actions in *this* life are all not really mine. They belong to Her and I am just a temporary caretaker, like a servant takes care of the properties of a rich landlord. The goal of sadhana is to cut off the remaining ego and attachment so that that realization becomes complete. Given that, what is the point is bloating that ego by digging previous attachments that were long forgotten? Whatever I was in the last life, whatever I built and whatever I did is not mine. It was not mine then and it is not mine now. She did it using me then and it was surrendered to Her. It is Hers even now. Once this confusion cleared, I could focus and have a nice meditation session.

One should be very vigilant about the kind of thoughts that enter mind. A feeble thought today, when not checked carefully, may become a strong thought later and cause problems.

In your case, please do not think about your experience and keep focusing on the sound of the mantra or on a vision of deity.

Q. What I am still not convinced about is that the possibility of not experiencing any *tangible* extraordinary experiences but still one is really making good progress?

A. One person may be seeing visions of deities, experiencing mystical things and another person may not be experiencing any such "extraordinary" things. Yet, the latter may realize Self first. It IS possible.

Believe me, all it takes for Her is a split second to turn a fool into a self-realized person.

You will do yourself a big favor if you take the thoughts of "extraordinary experiences" off your mind. These expectations are a big obstacle.

If you normally feel sad or angry or upset when someone criticizes you badly and you are now able to feel normal in that situation, isn't that a "tangible" sign of progress? If you normally feel elated when someone praises you to the sky and you are now able to feel normal in that situation, isn't that a "tangible" sign of progress?

Instead of focusing your senses outward and looking for some miracle or an "extraordinary experience", focus your senses inward, watch your thoughts and instincts closely and refine them. Try to reach a state where criticism and praise are the same for you.

That will put you in a good stead. THAT is real progress. If you make real progress and do not bother about any "extraordinary experiences", you may indeed have an extraordinary experience one day! Not the one that gets you stuck with a sense of possessiveness or entitlement, but the one that frees you.

One can get stuck in some expectations that are unknowingly formed in the mind based on what one read or heard. One can get stuck in possessiveness or a sense of entitlement over an "extraordinary experience" that actually happened to him. One can get stuck in many ways.

If you do not want to get stuck, have no expectations. Have no sense of ownership over anything. Surrender to Her fully, not because it will give X or Y or Z, but because everything is really Hers. Keep looking at yourself and your own actions/thoughts and refine them to make the sense of surrender fuller and fuller. And expect to get nothing from Her in return for that surrender. That is a surefire way to succeed in one's spiritual pursuit.

Q. You said “One person may be seeing visions of deities, experiencing mystical things and another person may not be experiencing any such "extraordinary" things. Yet, the latter may realize Self first. Is it possible?” Is it seriously possible? Or is it only a theoretical concept?

A. Absolutely. Once, Ramakrishna Paramahansa wanted to give some siddhis (mystical abilities) to Vivekananda. Vivekananda asked "will they help me realize Self". Ramakrishna said "no". Vivekananda said "then I do not want them. Let me first realize Self. Then we will see."

Things obtained before one is ready are detrimental to progress. Things like mystical experiences, mystical abilities etc are actually like a detour on the path of self-realization. When they happen to one still with an ego, they may fan the flame of ego rather than extinguish it. When a realized soul gets them, they do no harm. But when an unprepared person gets them, they can spoil one.

Accepting what nature gives us without our asking for is fine, but craving for things is not good, mystical experiences included.

Self-realization comes when ego is completely effaced. Mystical experiences are neither necessary nor sufficient for that. As I said before:

"If you normally feel sad or angry or upset when someone criticizes you badly and you are now able to feel normal in that situation, isn't that a "tangible" sign of progress? If you normally feel elated when someone praises you to the sky and you are now able to feel normal in that situation, isn't that a "tangible" sign of progress?"

Instead of focusing your senses outward and looking for some miracle or an "extraordinary experience", focus your senses inward, watch your thoughts and instincts closely and refine them. Try to reach a state where criticism and praise are the same for you."

Control over the mind and senses and control over the six internal enemies (lust, anger, greed, delusion, wantonness and jealousy) are a far more accurate metric to judge the spiritual progress. If one watches one's own thoughts and instincts honestly, one should be able to know what is happening inside the mind.

I know someone who did not even have an awakened Kundalini and had no mystical experiences of any kind but had Kundalini reach sahasrara directly one day, went into nirvikalpa samadhi, stayed in it for 7 days and returned after 7 days as a brahma jnaani to lead a different life. Of course, it was possible due to the purity generated for several years before that.

Instead of focusing on the *symptoms* and recreating the symptoms observed by some people when they made spiritual progress, it will be productive if one focuses on the root. Mind and its ego are the root of all bondage we experience. Reduction of the ego is the solution that frees one. Other things like mystical

experiences, mystical abilities, visions, Kundalini rise etc are symptoms and not the root. If one is successful in recreating the symptoms without making much progress on the root, it is futile really.

Whatever path one follows, one will do well to cut down on all cravings - including those for mystical experiences - and be vigilant in observing one's thoughts and instincts. There is no substitute to cutting the ego, if one is genuinely interested in self-realization.

Q. Recently I attended a spiritual workshop that ran over say 10 hours. But the next day I felt like I was completely drained of my energies, I felt very tired and also felt that I lost lot of good energies, in fact the person conducting the workshop did also indicate that one can experience similar things when one goes to a group meeting and one needs to be careful about it. I did not pay much attention then but really I felt bad the next few days to the point that I regret going there. At a minimum I did not go there to get robbed. Anyways my question is how does one make sure that he/she does not experience this again in future. I believe it is very important for all of us to not go through similar experience. Are there any precautions, one can take? Any special mantras to protect one self?

A. If one is ready, the best is to not think of the energy as "mine". Who is robbing, what is he robbing, and from whom is he robbing? All is God's anyway. What is not really yours, despite being perceived by you to be yours, may be taken away from you. But what is really yours cannot be taken away.

However, one may not be ready to think that way, perhaps because one still has many karmik debts to pay back and need to *hold on* to things that help one with that. In that case, some precautions may be taken. I recommend Devi Kavacham (also known as Chandi Kavacham). Chanting it once or several times every morning for a duration will form a subtle shield around one that will protect one from this kind of people.

Narayana kavacham is another powerful shield mantra. Depending on one's taste, one may try Narayana kavacham or Devi kavacham. But the key is to do it regularly.

How True are the Mind Powers

All that exists is Brahman. Different beings, different points in time/space are like different ripples in the ocean of Brahman.

One who identifies oneself with a ripple on the surface of the ocean only sees things from that perspective. One who realizes, not superficially but fully, that one is actually not the ripple but the ocean itself and identifies with the entire ocean sees everything. A ripple may not see another ripple at a distance, but the ocean itself can see all ripples as its own parts.

Nothing is impossible for a man who realizes his true nature.

However, one who has realized the true self may not be interested in making a show of such abilities or in exercising such abilities or even in looking at them as "abilities". Such a person's attitude may be totally different from that of an un-realized person who just fancies all those as "abilities" and is curious about them.

It is also possible to have some such abilities without being self-realized, but that is an unwise pursuit.

A true jnaani pursues nothing but knowledge of self. When the knowledge of self comes, knowledge about everything comes as a result. After all, everything we perceive is a limited manifestation of Self, while Self itself unlimited.

On the other hand, one pursuing some specific thing may succeed in getting it. But it will only bind one further. Only knowledge of Self liberates one.

Mystical Experiences of Mind and Mantras

Mantras work beyond the physical sound energy level and work at the mind level. Mind connects the material and non-material realms of experience. So all experiences of mind cannot be studied by physics or modern science in general.

I want to narrate a small incident. At this time, the person in question prefers not to be explicitly identified.

One man was sleeping one day. In the middle of the night, he woke up. When he was still on the bed and partially awake, his shakti rose. In other words, his self-awareness got refined. He first perceived a tremendous bolt of electricity going up in his back. Then, in a split second, his perception of that electricity changed from "shakti inside me" to "I inside shakti". His changed perception was that there was a tremendous amount of shakti that was surging up like an ocean wave and encompassing everything that was there and that he was a very tiny particle in that tremendous wave. Moreover, he also "heard" a specific beejaakshara being chanted together by millions of people, who were all tiny particles in that wave. That wave reverberated with the sound of that beejaakshara and he perceived that he too was chanting that beejaakshara along with all. His mind was filled with that sound and a kind of bliss. His self-awareness was that of a tiny particle filled with that sound and joy. He was in that state for a while. Suddenly a thought that can be loosely expressed as "I am on the bed in a room. How am I hearing all this? Are there people in the room" came to his mind. That thought disturbed the state of his mind and his shakti came down. In other words, he returned to the regular level of self-awareness and again perceived that he was a body lying on a bed in a room. The bliss was gone and mind was again filled with hundreds of thoughts as usual.

He mentioned this incident a few days later to his spiritual guru, who lived thousands of miles away and a few hours ahead of him. When this happened, it was the middle of the night for him and morning for his guru. When he mentioned the incident and said that he heard the sound of a beejaakshara reverberating in the wave in which he was a small particle, his guru said he knew it and also mentioned the specific beejaakshara and asked "that is what you heard, right?" That was indeed correct. When he confirmed, his guru shed some light: "I was at that time meditating with that beejaakshara. So and so deity came and filled my consciousness. I then went into samadhi. Some people close to me may also have experienced that deity at that time. But we should realize that this is all Her play and we are just nimittas. What she does and why she does, she knows and we do not. We are just dummies observing what comes our way. We neither make anything happen nor should we desire anything to happen. Just be and observe. Do not be attracted or repelled by anything."

If you are talking about the mystical experiences perceived by a single mind, the possibility of hallucination cannot be discounted. However, when two people independently experienced something

similar and one of them knew that the other one experienced it, it shows that there is something here. It shows that the ultimate Reality is *beyond* the reality that can be perceived by senses and studied by modern science.

Mind is the connection between the material and non-material worlds.

Ego, the sense of "I", is what blocks one from higher things. Notions like "I am the body", "I should be safe", "I should be happy" etc block one and limit one's self-awareness to a gross body and its gross external senses. When the self-awareness changes to that of a tiny particle at His/Her feet, it is a lot more blissful state to be in. But, we are kept away from that because our self-awareness is different and more gross and we cannot let it go! We just hang on to an undesirable self-awareness.

I want to make one thing clear. When I write about any mystical experiences, there is a chance of influencing someone wrongly. Luckily for me, the first thing my guru did with me was to de-emphasize the value of mystical experiences. I was prepared by him to look at them as just any other experiences in the material world. They really are. When one goes on a road, one sees nice scenery on the side. Some scenery on a normal road may be accessible to everyone and some scenery at a high altitude hill road may be seen by very few. But the bottomline is that both are sceneries and one should learn to just see it, appreciate it and move on. If attachment is built with a scenery or one becomes proud of oneself for having seen a scenery, it is foolish. Such feelings can distract one from the final goal and slow down one's journey. Nothing in the 14 worlds needs to be desired or feared. Just observe what comes your way and continue your journey.

A mystical experience can promote pride in one ("I am good and I got this", "I did good sadhana and so I got this", "I deserve this" etc) or attachment or possessiveness or a sense of entitlement. That can trap one and slow down spiritual progress. The ultimate goal of spiritual sadhana is to kill pride and overcome ego completely. That should be remembered at all times.

I know that I mention this again and again. But internet and e-archives are a nonlinear medium. I want to make this key point in every relevant mail.

Aagamas vs Gita, Vedas etc

Q. Have you ever given a thought why the religious landscape of Bharat remained almost intact even after a thousand years of suppression by Muslim and Christian invaders ? Do you think it was the power of Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita and our people's knowledge in our fundamentals? NOPE. It was by the singular attachment of the lay Hindu towards HIS God, that we are still alive as heirs to Hinduism. How did the common man develop so much attachment to his God, silently suffering under the brutal suppression of the worst enemies of Humanity then and now? It was by the Agamas.

A. Namaste Sir. Nice writeup and thanks for forwarding! However, I have an issue with the opening paragraph and the overall tone that follows later. I will take a slightly different stand. To show the value of aagamas, one need not put down Gita, Vedas etc. Though Vedas and Upanishats are not comprehensible to many Hindus in this age, Gita has been a fountain light of wisdom and conviction for

many Hindus in this age. After all, Krishna taught the essence of Veda and Upanishats in a simple form to understand just before Kali Yuga started, for a reason.

Putting down Gita and Vedas to show the value of aagamas is IMHO a wrong attitude. To praise the value of the "physics lab" class, you do not have to put down the "physics theory" class. After all, they are related and they are not opposites. If the knowledge of physics becomes weak among people (including teachers) and the teachings in the "physics theory" and "physics lab" classes start to deviate due to corruption in the understanding of teachers, then people may start taking the two sides and start fighting about the superiority of the one class over the other. But that is a wrong attitude and one who thinks that "physics theory" and "physics lab" are independent and/or opposites understands neither subject correctly!

The same holds in the case of Gita/Vedas/Upanishats vs Aagamas/tantras issue. The above is a perfect analogy for what happened. There is no point in putting down either one of them by the other camp. The time has come for people to realize that they are two sides of the coin and one helps in a better understanding/appreciation of the other.

If you ask me, the reason for India's sanatana dharma being preserved is a few liberated sages who are engaged in tapascharya in remote corners of the land. Men of absolutely unbelievable spiritual caliber are constantly meditating in several places and they are playing their role in the divine play of the Mother.

Reciting Veda or Gita and performing Aagamas are excellent things to do, but those can only accomplish limited things. There are several who recite Veda or Gita, but do not understand the true meaning. There are several who perform aagamas, but without the purity of consciousness that comes with a true understanding. Such people cannot accomplish much.

On the other hand, when a yogi who understands the essence of Veda and Aagama reaches one of the higher realms of consciousness, remains in it for a long time and accumulates enough shakti, a mere wish is sufficient to change the course of world history. There are many great yogis who are immersed in the nectar of the bliss of divine communion, who are fulfilling the Divine Will through their wishes and maintaining sanatana dharma. In fact, India is set to become a major force in the material plane too (in addition to the spiritual) in the coming 100 years. All this is simply divine will, executed by the thought power of the Yogis who are in tune with the divine will as their own individual ego-consciousness and the resultant individual will have fallen off. Some of them are popular and people know them, such as Sant Jnaneshwar Maharaj, who is still immersed in constant meditation at Alandi and Lord Hanuman, who too is present on earth in his physical body and meditating on Lord Rama. But there are also many that we do not know of.

As a matter of fact, I will say that the study of Vedas, Upanishats, Gita as well as performing of aagamas is still going on in India due to the meditation and thought power of such Yogis.

Q. Are Vedic (Pure Vaidika rituals) different from Mantra Shaastras (people explain that mantra shaastra does not originate from the vedas, but classified under tantra). Did Mantra shaastras not originate from vedas?

A. When people say what is in Veda and what is not, honestly I can only laugh. They are only fooling themselves. Reciting Veda with perfect swara or mastering a celebrated commentary does not help one understand Veda. In fact, understanding each single verse in Veda requires great tapascharya. Understanding a verse in Veda is neither possible with energy flowing in Ida nadi (intuition) nor in Pingala nadi (logic and analysis). It is possible only with energy flowing in Sushumna nadi. It is possible with neither intuition nor logic, but only with *revelation* and simply, for the lack of a better expression, direct knowledge.

When one meditates long enough on a verse, the verse may simply be revealed to the yogi. THAT is the only way to understand a Vedic verse. For most people, it is not possible to decipher even a single verse in an entire life, let alone a passage.

Bottom line is: Almost nobody understands Veda today. What are considered "pure vaidika rituals" are merely another variety of rituals created by someone at some point of time. From the point of view of authenticity as granted by Veda, there is no difference between them and other aagamic rituals, though people ignorantly believe otherwise.

A simple analogy may help clarify a lot of things related to this complicated issue a little. What the thing in the analogy represents is shown here and there in square brackets [].

Once there were many people who lived near the sea [Brahman/Aatman]. They regularly sat by the sea and enjoyed the sight and sound of the sea [experienced Brahman]. They described the sea in some nice cryptic poems [Veda].

As people started living a little away from the sea [less spiritually evolved], someone had to put together some instructions on how to reach the sea. He said, "keep walking towards east" and the instructions grew with time. People faithfully followed the instructions [rituals].

People started moving further and further inland and started living in a landlocked desert far away from the sea. This generation had never seen a pool of water like a lake, let alone a sea. They faithfully performed the ritual of walking towards east, but did not find sea. They debated endlessly whether one had to walk one mile or two miles or three miles and formed different schools of thought. Some walked their chosen distance, found a tree or a building or some interesting object and even became satisfied that that was sea!

Then came some great person, whose instincts led him to take a horse instead of walking and ride it for a long distance [use of other tools]. He did find the sea after a few months. He put together newer instructions to reach the sea, which included riding a horse [new aagamas].

People performing the old rituals objected to this and said "but then this horse thing is not granted by the book of sea. This is a new path and different from the "pure" sea ritual" ["pure" Vedic ritual]. By now, people did not even understand what the cryptic poems of the original "book of sea" mean, but they simply believed that those poems taught the old "pure" sea rituals that they were used to. They were blissfully unaware that the original instructions were meant for someone already close to sea and the newer instructions came from someone who actually saw the sea and knew where they currently lived and how to get to the sea from there!

Slowly many new sets of instructions involving horses, chariots etc were taught and many new paths to the sea were outlined instead of just instructing people to walk towards east [evolution of mantra/tantra/yantras].

One particular path through jungles was dangerous [aghora and other dark tantric paths involving practice of sex, meat, wine etc]. Though the distance to sea was much shorter through that jungle, it was just too dangerous and only the bravest and strongest could make it. There were cruel dacoits and wild animals [chance of a fall in a risky ritual] and many weak people travelling to sea via that path were killed. A wise man who knew the entire territory well came forward, condemned that path and discouraged people from trying that path. Since then, even people who were strong enough to successfully make it in that path desisted from it.

As time progressed, people started fighting too much about whose path was superior. They were foolish, not smart enough to adopt the original instructions, of either the so-called "pure" sea path or the so-called "new" path or other variations, for the changed geography and changed times. Many followed the instructions blindly, hit roadblocks and did not reach sea. Many did not even know that "reaching the sea" was the actual goal of all their journeys. They only thought they were supposed to follow the instructions faithfully and there was no need to adopt to the changed geographical territory and time. They even condemned those who actually went to sea, came back and gave updated directions for their place and time, for violating tradition.

In case the analogy is not clear, here is a brief summary of its points. Veda is about realizing self. Veda describes various aspects of the state of self-realization. That is why it is considered the highest knowledge. Other allied subjects throw some light on possible ways to reach that state. While definitive statements can be made on the actual state of self-realization itself, no definitive statements can be made on how to reach it. The path depends on one's current position!

Great men in many spiritual paths, within Hinduism as well as outside of it, came, experienced that state, understood the current state of people around them and gave specific instructions on how to reach that state from the current state. Some followed the instructions and experienced the state. Some instead kept arguing about the contradictions between paths.

Please re-read the story and try to understand what each part of the story represents. If you understand this analogy well, this can really clarify the meaningless nature of so many debates that people waste time with!

Q. I read from somewhere that Sri Sri Adi Sankara has condemned Tantrik practices. But I also hear and read that he is a great Sri Vidya Upasaka himself. If Sri Vidya has its roots from Tantra, what did Sri Adi Sankara condemn?

A. He did condemn some vaamaachaara (left-hand) practices of tantra like the use of sex, alcohol, meat etc.

However, please go back to my analogy. A great man may condemn the use of a short path to reach the sea if it has a lot of wild animals and dacoits and many travelers through that path recently lost their lives.

It does not mean that path is totally unusable. It only means that too many people incapable of travelling on that path are using it of late and so the great man was compelled to stop the practice.

If the same great man is reincarnated at a different time when several adept souls he has a rina with are about to be reincarnated, he may not condemn the path and instead write on travelling that jungle path carefully!

The words of great masters need to be interpreted within the context of their desa, kaala and paatra and within the context of the purpose of that particular birth.

Q. What is vamachara? If it is the left hand method - sex, drinks etc, why must it be practiced at all?

A. Suppose one's house is close to the market and the market noise reaches one's house. Suppose that noise is disturbing one's meditation, i.e. one is unable to focus on god amid all the noise. There are two approaches one can take - (1) run away from the noise, find a place of solitude and meditate there. (2) rise to the challenge, meditate right there and develop the ability to turn off the sensory input to the mind, i.e. get mastery and control over the part of the mind that is making one vulnerable to this disturbance. After all, the noise from outside is NOT the problem - the problem is the *inability* of one's mind to turn off that sensory input. By controlling one's mind, one can focus attention on god irrespective of what is happening outside.

Approach (1) is not bad. If one is weak-minded and has a decent chance of failure with approach (2), then approach (1) is definitely prudent and worthwhile. But, if one has a strong mind and can succeed with approach (2), it is great. It hastens one's progress. Vaamaachaara is also like that, but a more extreme form of testing one's self-control by rising to the challenge.

Please realize that vaamaachaara/aghora is not about the use of sex, wine etc for the kick of it. It is about their use to test oneself with the toughest challenges and hone one's self-control. Self-realization comes when self-control is perfect and one's mind can always be focussed on god no matter what is going on around one. If one is either attracted or averse to any one thing, that is enough to block self-realization.

However, if one is weak, it is better to stay away from vaamaachaara. One needs to do other practices and strengthen oneself. If a really pure yogi with perfect self-control is able to focus on god with all his mind even when he is drunk and sitting naked with a beautiful naked woman tightly embracing him, then he can try that to test his self-control and hone it. But, if that is going to tempt one, get the mind away from god and onto a physical enjoyment, then one better not try that path! Just as one who does not have a strong mind to meditate amid noise should meditate in solitude and hone one's self-control, one who does not have a strong mind to keep the focus on god in the middle of normally depriving practices such as wine, meat and sex should stay away from those.

In my analogy before, the short jungle path to the sea having the danger of wild animals and dacoits represents the vaamaachaara path of aghora. If one not having the wherewithal to battle and kill the wild animals and dacoits tries that path, one may be killed. Similarly, one who wants self-realization using this path will fall if one does not have perfect self-control. If one takes this path because it sounds cool or exciting, one is likely to fall. It is only for the fittest and bravest.

If there is ANY weakness in one's self-control, one can NOT follow this path. Just as there are many paths from the desert to the sea in my analogy, there are many paths to self-realization. One should follow the path that is appropriate for one based on previous samskaras, strengths and weaknesses.

Q. Is it not a fact that Sri Ambal lies above all these?

A. Sri Ambal (the Divine Mother) does not lie above or below anything. She lies everywhere! All knowledge, all desires and all actions of all beings are Her own different manifestations.

If a yogi with perfect self-control drinks wine and sits naked with a beautiful naked woman tightly embracing him and yet keeps his mind fully focussed on god, his self-control, his focus on god are all different manifestations of the Divine Mother only.

As a matter of fact, even if one gives in to base instincts and pursues carnal pleasures, his desires and actions are also different manifestations of Divine Mother only. The Mother gives rise to so many lower level forms with specific domains of responsibility. The Mother takes the form of Lakshmi and Alakshmi as well. She takes the form of Vidya and Avidya as well. All opposites and polarities are actually Her manifestations only.

However, those who are more comfortable with Lakshmi and Vidya and uncomfortable with Alakshmi and Avidya will look at only the former pair as manifestation of Divine Mother and remain in duality. That is a valid point of view. However, the *ultimate* reality is that She is All.

There is one more thing I wanted to include in the analogy/parable. Though this is not related to the original questions, this will complete the story.

There was a way to the sea through a country called "Vishnu raajyam" [Vaishnavism]. Some people travelled the path, found a beautiful city called Vishnupuri on the coast and the sea was close to the city. The journey through Vishnu raajya was documented in a book [Vishnu Purana] and the book claimed that this was a beautiful journey and enables one to reach the sea. It also claimed that other coastal cities were by the very same sea and reaching the sea here amounts to reaching the sea at all other places.

There was another way to the sea through a country called "Shiva desam" [Shaivism]. Some people travelled the path, found a wonderful city called Shivanagari on the coast and the sea was right next to it. The journey though Shiva desam was documented in a book [Shiva Purana] and the book claimed that this was an amazing journey and enables one to reach the sea. It also claimed that other coastal cities were by the very same sea and reaching the sea here amounts to reaching the sea at all other places.

There were some people who had never actually been to either city nor seen the sea. Some were impressed by the description of one city and some by the other. They were so impressed that they started arguing which was the best city. Some even went to the extent of condemning and putting down the other city. Some people who had seen both the cities came forward and said, "the main thing is not the city, but the sea itself. The sea is the same in both places. Though different, both cities are nice and both give one the same sea." That did not convince the fighting factions and they continued to fight. Later, some of them even forgot about the sea and started thinking that the city was the main thing and not the sea. Of course, both the cities are really beautiful. Stuck in their animosity and fights, they could never visit either city nor enjoy the sea.

Question on Isha Devata

Q. I was reading up on the old mail about how you started doing Chandi Homa. You mentioned that you always considered Ma Lakshmi as your Isha Devata. Now what I was wondering about it that, is it possible that for a person to get closer to his/her Isha, he/she may have to undergo serious sadhana of some other deity? Like in your case you have done so many homas for Ma Chandi, so does it mean Ma Chandi is your Isha devata? Or does it mean Ma Lakshmi wanted you to do these sadhanas so that you can progress faster, maybe you had done a lot of sadhana for Ma Chandi in previous lives?

A. First of all, our current understanding of arriving at ishta devata from horoscope is not perfect.

Secondly, the way ishta devata may work is complex. The role of ishta devata is to give moksha. Moksha is the state of non-distinction between objects of universe. "Supreme cosmic being" (known by various names) is the observer of all with non-distinction and the gate to moksha. Several deities play specific roles in the universe at the lower level and become one with supreme cosmic being at a higher level. Accordingly, one may start praying to a specific form of a deity with a specific role in the universe, later realize a higher form of the deity and then become liberated through that higher form.

For this reason, some (especially some gurus at Sri Jagannath Centre) even say that only Vishnu's incarnations can be ishta devatas giving moksha and other deities cannot be. This is partly logical, but based on a misconception. Vishnu here refers to sarva vyaapakeswara (all-pervading lord). If one realizes an all-pervading form of Ganesha or Surya or Lakshmi or Kaali or Shiva or Subrahmanya, then too that form qualifies as ishta devata who enables moksha (liberation). For example, Ganapathi Atharva Seersham describes a supreme cosmic being form of Ganapathi, from whom Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva come. Suryopanishat describes a supreme cosmic being form of Surya, from whom Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva come. And so on.

One may start with the worship of Ganesha who removes obstacles and finally realize a form of Ganesha that is beyond gunas and from whom Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, Agni, Vaayu etc are born. One may start with the worship of Lakshmi who gives prosperity and money and finally realize a form of Lakshmi who drives the thoughts and actions of all beings. One may start with the worship of Saraswati who gives knowledge and finally realize a form of Saraswati who is the root of all creation.

Thus, one starts worshipping one's ishta devata and slowly evolves to worshipping a higher all-pervading form of that deity, who may sometimes seem like a different deity to a casual observer. This is the natural process of evolution.

Saptashati rahasya associated with saptashati (Chandipath) describes the process of creation. It says that first there was Mahalakshmi with three gunas. She divided herself into 3 parts - Mahakali with tamas (ichchhaa sakti - the force behind desire), Mahalakshmi with sattwa (jnaana sakti - the force behind knowledge) and Mahasaraswati (kriyaa sakti - the force behind action) with rajas. The 3 parts of Chandipath are devoted to the three.

Thus, trigunatmika Mahalakshmi is the root energy driving the desires/thoughts, knowledge/perception and actions of all beings in this universe.

In fact, chapter 11 towards the end of Chandipath prays to Devi (divine Mother) after all her exploits and addresses Her in the prayer as "Naaraayani" (energy of Narayana). If one views Naaraayana as supreme cosmic being from whom Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva came, trigunatmika Mahalakshmi (or Narayani) is his energy.

Thus, the Divine Mother of Chandipath is not really different from Mahalakshmi I have been worshipping for many years. I originally started out worshipping Lakshmi with 4 hands who sita on a lotus and gives money. I later realized that a higher form of the same deity is the energy of Narayana (supreme cosmic being) and She is responsible for the birth, sustenance and destruction of all beings including Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Whichever deity you are attached to and worship as your ishta devata, please try to imagine that deity as the all-pervading supreme cosmic being from whom the entire creation evolves.

Where One Should Imagine the Ista Devata During Meditation

Q. Can you also please clarify on where one should imagine the Ista devata during meditation? Some people say that it is at the heart but some others say it should be in between the eye brows.

A. Both are fine. Anahata chakra in the heart area is the centre of vaayu tattva in one's body. Vaayu (wind) is expansive in nature and fills anything it has access to. It can be restricted to a balloon or fill even a room. Once there is an opening, it gets into the area and fills it. The process of creation is also like that. It is expansive by nature and fills every part of Brahman it has access to.

On the other hand, ajna chakra is beyond the five elements (mooladhara-visuddhi show five elements). It is the source of all elements.

Thus, both chakras are suitable for imagining ishta devata. If you are primarily a dwaita siddhanta follower (clear duality), one may suggest imagining the ishta devata at anahata chakra. All the elements and duality continue to exist and the ishta devata is seen as the master of all creation. If you are primarily a visishtadwaita (special non-duality) or awaita (non-duality) follower, one may suggest imagining ishta devata at ajna chakra. All the elements and duality are withdrawn and ishta devata is the only thing that exists in the universe. There is nothing else.

Bottomline is that both are acceptable, but one is conducive to a dwaitic experience and one is conducive to a visishtadwaitic experience. You pick one based on your samskaras and vasanas.

Right Deity and Sadhana

Q. Leaving astrology aside and those who do not have a guru, how can they choose a particular form of GOD? Because in second part of AGHORA, Vimalanda said choosing right deity is very important, as the analogy he gave of a person who is greedy and worships Lakshmi, may increase his greed.

We have so many deities that on Diwali would like to worship Lakshmi and Kali, in navaratri we would worship Durga, on Janmashtami we would fast for Krishna, an on Mahashivaratri for Shiva like this with the change in festival the deity changes.

Suppose if I choose a deity and something wrong happens (materialistically) what should I consider that my deity was helping me to clear my debts/wrong deeds or the nature was telling me to change the deity as I am not fit for that deity and sometimes you feel that “what am I doing? Does this really work?”

A. Choosing the right deity for sadhana is important. If you do not know the right deity, just doing some sadhana is definitely better than waiting. Pick whatever deity seems natural to you and do sadhana.

Please remember that sadhana for spiritual progress is different from sadhana for specific material benefits. No matter which deity you worship, sadhana performed for spiritual progress never goes waste. However, sometimes it may be necessary to experience the results of some bad karmas before some good things happen. Imagine all your karmas lying in a pile in a basket. Suppose some of the really good karmas that will enable you to do serious sadhana and experience great things lie at the bottom or middle of the pile. When you start sadhana, suppose god decides to give you the fruits of those auspicious karmas. Imagine him reaching into the pile and retrieving those karmas. In the process, some other karmas may spill over and give their fruits. Some of those may be undesirable. So what? They had to be experienced sometime or the other, anyway!

A serious sadhaka should never be disheartened by a few seemingly undesirable results after starting a spiritual sadhana. Just keep going. One gentleman I know received mantra for Kaali from a very good priest-cum-yogi in late 2005. After he did the mantra for a few days, he was laid off and lost his job. He was not perturbed. He continued his sadhana and used the break to go on an extended trip to India and make a pilgrimage to some nice places. He participated in the Shata Chandi homam we conducted at the Kaalikambal temple in Chennai in March 2006. He met my guru and got the opportunity to be his room mate for a week when we stayed at the house of a priest during the homam. He could observe and interact with my guru very closely. Most importantly, when my guru had a vision of the Mother on 2006 March 3 afternoon, in which She told him to start the work on spreading homam in the world, this gentleman was present there. Though he could not see the Mother, he actually smelled something out of the world and was baffled. He knew something was going on, but did not know what. The temple was closed at the time and my guru and this gentlemen were the only people on the premises when the Mother appeared. Even though he could not see the Mother, it was most fortunate of him to be present there at *that* crucial moment. That is enough to mould the rest of his life.

You never know how, when and where the grace of god falls on you. Calculations and logic are useless when it comes to the grace of god. Just surrender and keep doing whatever sadhana you picked. If it needs fine-tuning, somebody will appear to tell you that. Any bad things that happen when doing a spiritual sadhana should be viewed as nature settling some debts so that you are prepared to receive the fruits of some really auspicious karmas. As Shirdi Sai Baba says, you should have "sraddha and saburi". Have devotion and patience. There is no limit to what you can get then.

Q. Dear Narsimhaji, You mentioned the appearance of mother before you. Can you kindly clarify which mother? You mean Sharda devi (Thakurain Ma) or Goddess Durga ? Kindly answer this immediately as I am excited to know this truth about homa.

A. You misunderstood me. The appearance was not "before me". It was before my guru Dr Manish Pandit. The only other person present on the temple premises at that time was the gentleman I mentioned, who lost his job after starting Kaali mantra and went to India for pilgrimage. I was not there then. Though I was chanting with Manish on other days, I was sent away on that specific day to visit Kanchi and Tirunavannamalai (Ramana Maharshi's place).

I understand it was Mahaakaali who gave a darshan and asked Manish to spread homam as a spiritual sadhana in the world. She told him that she would arrange all the resources needed and asked him to just start. She also apparently told him of a sequence of events that were to happen.

Interestingly, the head priest of that temple had some books on homam gifted to Manish and me on the very next day. Neither Manish nor I asked him for such books. We never expressed interest in doing homam or learning homam. He himself got the inspiration. There was a book on different styles of homam for Ganesha and another book (by Ramakrishna Mutt, Chennai!) on the procedures for various types of homam. Manish and I were gifted one copy each. I perused those books to devise the short method described in the manuals.

Interestingly, how we met that priest and how this shata Chandi homam was arranged is based on interesting coincidences. The son of the guru of a local priest was visiting greater Boston temporarily. He was a famous sivacharya (a special group of priests) from Chennai and the head priest of Kaalikambal temple in Chennai. We merely went to take his blessings on a Thursday night. We chatted a little with him and then my wife asked him "what are you doing on this Saturday". He immediately said with affection "we are doing on Saturday whatever Mrs Padmaja (my wife's name) tells us to do". Please note that we met for the first time in this life and did not know each other at all. My wife said "well, we perform a Satya Narayana vratam on every Pournima night. You are most welcome to attend." He said "we are coming". Then he called up a few guys in Canada and told them to cancel some events in Canada. We learnt later that he was supposed to spend that weekend in Canada. Instead, he decided to stay back and come to our house.

He came to our house on Saturday evening (Pournima) with two other senior priests. They stayed till the end of Satya Narayana vratam (almost midnight) and enjoyed it. As soon as he entered our house, he declared "I must do a Chandi homam at your house. The mother wants me to do a homam here. But I have one condition. I and other priests who come with me will not take even a cent. You buy the materials needed, but give no money." Even though we were not excited about the condition, we said ok.

During the navaratri of 2005, a few days after a solar eclipse on my lagna (when Sun, Moon, Mercury and Ketu were in Kanya - my lagna and 8th house from Moon), he came with 3 other priests and did a Chandi homam in really grand style. It was an amazing experience. It was actually the first time in my life that I heard Chandipath. I had never heard it before. Interestingly, I had my own biases. In the morning, I actually prayed to Mahalakshmi (my ishta devata), "O Mother, these priests want to do Chandi homam at

my house and I consented. I don't know who Chandi is. Whichever deity they call, I will be thinking of you only. You please come and bless us." It was partly innocent and partly foolish.

This was my first exposure to Chandipath and the first Chandi homam at my house. To think that I have now done more than 320 Chandi homas at my house.

Manish was concerned about the continued troubles faced by the Sankaracharya of Kanchi (the state government filed some cases against him) and he decided that we had to perform a Shata Chandi homam for his relief. He was not sure when and where it should happen.

After the Chandi homam at our house, we became close to that priest and kept meeting him regularly (until he left Boston). When I mentioned Manish's wish to him, he said "Sir, we will do the Shata Chandi homam he wanted at our temple. I will arrange everything. You and Manish Pandit just come and sit for the event. We will take the sankalpa you want. I will do everything."

Finally, the shata Chandi homam was conducted March 1-7, 2006. Interestingly, on the 64th day from the poornahuti of that homam, the ruling government of that state was defeated in elections and a new government came.

Manish put it this way later "Narasimha, who are we to help a great saint like Sankaracharya? We are not capable of helping him. We are really of no use. The idea was not that we would help him. The idea is that we would help *ourselves* because of the positive intention to help Sanakaracharya! It is all Her play. See, the Mother gave the thought of helping him and brought us to Chennai. Then she appeared and instructed to spread homam. Now so many people are doing homam and benefiting. In future, many many more will do. All this is happening because of a positive intention to help Sanakaracharya."

Though the dates for shata Chandi homam were picked almost arbitrarily, there was one interesting coincidence. The day on which the ritual was started (2006 March 1) was actually the lunar birthday (tithi pravesha) of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In fact, the time when we took sankalpam formally and kicked off the 7-day-long ritual (in the morning of March 1) was interestingly within a couple of minutes from the *exact* Tithi Pravesha time (time at which the same fraction of same tithi is left as at birth) of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This was not planned and was a mere coincidence. In fact, I noticed it after the fact!

Some forces beyond the scope of the thinking of my mind are behind the homam movement that is slowly picking up. I am fortunate to be picked as an instrument in this spiritual movement.

Actually, I do not honestly consider the goddess and Sarada Mata (and, for that matter, my guru) to be really different. But that is a different thing.

Difference Between Stotras and Kavachas of a Deity

The literal meaning of kavacha is a protective cover/shield. Kavachas of planets and gods are typically used for physical well-being, protection and removal of disease. If you follow the meanings of most kavachas, you are asking the planet or god in question for the protection of various body parts.

Two very powerful and comprehensive kavachas are Narayana kavacham from SrimadBhagavatam and Chandi Kavacham from Varaha Puranam. It is a useful exercise to compare Vishnu kavacham with Narayana kavacham to understand the difference between Vishnu and Narayana.

If someone picks any kavacham and spends a couple of hours every day chanting it many times over and keeps that habit for a few years, an invisible shield is formed around one's subtle body and protects one always. Kavachas are very powerful.

But some people these days have little time to devote to God and want results in 5-10 minutes. That is tough.

Meaning of Surya Mantra

AkR^iShNena rajasA vartamAno niveshayannamR^itaM martyaM ca |

hiraNyayena savitA rathenAdevo yAti bhuvanAni pashyan ||

This mantra is a very popular mantra for worshipping Surya (Sun god). It is used in Navagraha homam and navagraha pooja as a part of Satya Narayana vratam. Parasara Maharshi (father of Veda Vyasa Maharshi) specified this mantra as a remedy for any problems related to Sun in the horoscope (see "Brihat Paaraasara Horaa Saastram").

My interpretation may be different from what Sayana, Max Muller etc gave. Especially when it comes to the second line, most scholars have interpreted "ratha" as chariot and alluded to Sun going around earth on a chariot. I have a different Vedantic take on it. I know some Sanskrit, but it is the inner inspiration given by Mother Mahalakshmi that enables to interpret.

May erudite scholars ignore me if they find my interpretation faulty!

RigVeda 1.35.2

AkR^iShNena rajasA vartamAno niveshayannamR^itaM martyaM ca |

hiraNyayena savitA rathenAdevo yAti bhuvanAni pashyan ||

vartamAnaH = existing (present)

rajasA = with the light [though rajas is one of the three gunas, it also means light and energy]

AkR^iShNa = extending till (including) darkness

niveshayan = inhabiting/dwelling in/filling

amR^itaM = the imperishable [Brahman, the unmanifested potentiality]

martyaM ca = and the perishable too [all the manifestations of Brahman in

this universe perish]

savitA = the god Savita

hiraNyayena = with the pure/golden essence of Brahman

rathena = with desire/attachment [though ratha normally means a chariot/vehicle, it also means a desire. The word "manoratha" (manah+ratha) comes from it. It means the desires and wishes of the heart. I prefer this meaning here and not the normally taken "chariot".]

yAti = moves into

AdevaH = all beings including gods

pashyan = experiencing [though pashyan basically means "watching", it also means considering, perceiving and experiencing]

bhuvanAni = all the worlds and the beings dwelling in it

Meaning in Brief:

Existing with all the light and the darkness, dwelling in the imperishable Brahman as well as the perishable creation, Savita, with the pure essence of Brahman and with the desire that causes movement in it (and results in creation), moves into all beings including the gods and experiences through them all the worlds and the beings of this diverse creation.

Detailed Commentary:

If you study carefully, this verse gives the essence of Vedic philosophy. It contains the essence of great scriptures such as "Yoga Vaasishtham" and "BhagavadGita", sooktas such as Purusha Sooktam and Narayana Sooktam and hymns such as Ganapathi Atharva Seersham. It is a very important hymn.

Savita is the highest form of Surya. He is basically the supreme cosmic being. He is Atman, the pure spirit that fills the entire universe – the creation as well as the uncreated. He is the pure light behind all the light and darkness that we see. Good and bad, gods and demons, pleasure and pain, all such dualities are but different manifestations of the same Brahman. The ONE Brahman manifests as the duality and diverse beings.

The one Atman, which is but pure light, manifests as duality - as light and darkness - and fills the entire universe. Savita dwells in Brahman as well as the entire perishable creation. Everything that has manifested has to perish. Savita dwells in all - in the imperishable Brahman as well as the perishable manifestations of Brahman (various worlds, gods, demons and other beings).

The ONE pure light of Savita manifests as DIVERSE objects ranging all the way from pure light to darkness and fills all beings. With the pure and untainted essence of Brahman and the movement caused in Brahman due to desire, Savita enters all the beings including gods. In other words, all the beings are created from Brahman and the desire/movement in Brahman.

Vedanta teaches that Brahman is unmanifested pure consciousness. A part of Brahman causes movement in Brahman, which becomes a desire and gets fulfilled immediately. This results in the creation of various beings. The word "ratha" refers to this. The pure essence of Brahman (hiraNyaya) as well as the desire that caused a movement of thought in Brahman (ratha) enter all beings. Savita enters all being as Shiva as well as Shakti!

When all the desires come to a halt and the movement of mind stops, all beings can experience the pure essence of Brahman that has entered them (i.e. sat-chid-ananda). When the desire is there, there are thoughts and movement of mind and the beings do not experience the pure essence of Brahman that has entered them.

The hymn says that the pure essence of Brahman (Shiva) and the desire that causes movement of thought (Shakti) are both aspects of ONE Savita only.

Savita enters all the beings with the pure essence and the desire/thought and experiences the worlds and beings through them. If a person called "Narasimha Rao" exists, it is actually Savita who exists through him. If a person called "Narasimha Rao" experiences the entire world - various worlds and beings in those worlds - it is actually Savita who has entered him that experiences the entire world through him!! All his thoughts, experiences and actions are actually those of Savita - the in-dwelling spirit.

This is the same as what Ganapathi Atharva Seersham means by "tvameva kevalam kartAsi...". This is the same as what Krishna means when he tells Arjuna in BhagavadGita that it is Krishna who acts through various beings and that the beings should not be deluded to think that they are doing things.

Savita in this hymn is represented as the same supreme cosmic being that is referred in various other Vedic scriptures!

Most authorities have interpreted the second line to mean that Sun goes on a chariot and watches the entire world. That is a gross interpretation and misses the subtle and deeper meaning.

In fact, when Atman goes on the chariot (ratha) of desire (ratha), it moves and sees the diverse creation. When the chariot (ratha) stops, then the desire (ratha) stops and there is no movement of thought. No longer a diverse creation is perceived and there is only bliss of true being (sat-chid-ananda). Thus, even the gross chariot interpretation is a metaphor for the subtle interpretation given above!

This hymn is very important as it covers several important Vedantic concepts:

- (1) The supreme cosmic being is one, but assumes duality.
- (2) The supreme cosmic being enters all the beings with the duality.
- (3) The supreme cosmic being experiences through all the beings.
- (4) The pure essence of supreme cosmic being enters all the beings and helps them experience sat-chid-ananda.
- (5) The desire (movement of thought) in the supreme cosmic being enters all the beings and results in movement of thought within them and diverse world experiences.

Unfortunately, I am not an expert on the counts, rules etc. But I will say what I know.

You can chant this mantra as many times as you want. Parasara also mentions offering this mantra in fire (homam).

Imagine Sun god. Offer a mental obeisance to Hiranyasthoopa Angirasa Maharshi. Then, thinking of Sun god, whose effulgence fills the entire universe, read the mantra mentally with the correct intonation as many times as you can.

The goal of sadhana with any Vedic mantra is to become one with the mantra. The goal is to lose one's self-consciousness so completely that the mantra can fill one's entire existence. One can feel and "experience" the sound and meaning of the mantra then. Forget "I", "my body", "my name", "my senses", "my experience" completely and create a vacuum within, so that the mantra can fill the vacuum.

Vedic Mantras

Q. But what I really have question is, that by chanting Navagraha mantra or going up the mountain in bare foot, which actually do not remedy any beings' suffering, that somehow our past evil deeds are nullified. This common theorem, propagated by Hindu astrologers does not answer the Law of Cause and Effect. Suppose someone kills others for money. Then in next or immediate life, he must suffer poverty and violent death.

A. Let me respectfully state that you have a very limited view on what beings are out there and what they are experiencing. If I mentally chant the Vedic mantra of a planet with perfect swaram for 8 hours continuously, do you think no beings are affected by it?

First of all, even going by material subjects such as modern science, there are millions or billions of beings (microbodies) within our physical bodies.

Secondly, if you go beyond material subjects and accept spiritual experience as a pramaana, the entire universe and all gods are within. Rishis taught that all the worlds, all the deities and all the beings exist within one's sushumna nadi. Of course, our sleepy self-awareness is limited to bhooloka (moolaadhaara chakra) and hence we do not perceive all this normally. But, it is possible to actually experience that various lokas and devas are within oneself. Unfortunately, it cannot be experienced by everybody, because waking up one's sleepy self-awareness and purifying it is difficult, and hence science will not accept it.

Whether you accept that the entire universe is within or not, the bottomline is that there are so many beings within us. They are affected by our thoughts and the chemicals (at the gross level) and energies (at the subtle level) produced by those thoughts.

Each thought and action of ours changes the lives of so many beings that are within us! It may be mind-boggling to think of this, but it is so true. Vedic mantras are special and chanting them creates specific energy patterns in various energy centers and channels of the body. So, of course, they have the potential to "remedy some beings' suffering" (suffering of millions of beings that live within us).

Mantra involves sound or vibration. This vibration is not just of particles at sthoola sareera (gross) level, but at sookshma sareera and kaarana sareera level also. The vibration produced by the physical sound (vaikhari) coming out of physical mouth (sthoola sareera) is only the gross aspect of the sabda. The subtle vibrations produced by imagery in the mind and thoughts are as important (if not more important). Out of the four divisions of sabda, vaikhari is the least important. Madhyama, Pasyanti and Para are increasingly important.

When a great maharshi chants a Vedic mantra even a few times, such a harmonious blend of the vibrations is produced at various levels (sthoola/sookshma/kaarana/mahaakaarana sareeras) that paraa level of sabda is so strong that strong vibrations are created by it in the mahaakaarana sareera. Thus, the entire universe can vibrate to the mantra!

I for example chanted certain Navagraha mantra from morning to sunset without food, drink and toilet, completed the numbers required, Nothing happened.

If one sowed a seed and a plant did not come, may be one did something wrong. May be one did not put enough water. May be there wasn't enough sunlight. May be one did not wait enough time. You cannot conclude that this seed does not give a plant.

If you read a graha mantra and nothing happened, may be you were imperfect. First of all, try a Vedic mantra. Second of all, try to perfect the intonation. Third of all, try to focus all your conscious and sub-conscious energies on the mantra or deity and produce the correct vibrations at all levels.

If you succeed even 1% in that, Vedic mantras do produce tremendous results.

Even a fool like me who knows not much has seen the power of these Vedic mantras.

Another thing:

The results of properly chanted Vedic mantras may sometimes be something you have not expected! She (or He, if you prefer) knows what should be given when. We are like small children who don't know what is good for us and bad for us and She is like the mother of children. Sometimes, a child may not like what mother gives or does, but mother knows the best.

When a small baby has an upset stomach, mother may forcefully put her finger at the base of the tongue and provoke a vomiting. The child may hate this act, but this may make his suffering less after one final suffering. Similarly, some properly done Vedic remedies sometimes bring one big trouble (like the vomiting) and much relief later. Also, one bad karma may be blocking a lot of good karmas and the planet may have to force the fructification of the bad karma before many good karmas fructify.

In fact, whenever I did intense sadhana for navagrahas (especially Mars) using Vedic mantras, there was immediate suffering for a few days before really good results. In fact, I try to not even distinguish between the two and try to consider both as Her blessings. They really are. As astrologers, we keep recommending remedies to people who are materially inclined and want temporary relief (so-called) from temporary troubles (so-called). But, it is also a good idea to increase devotion and sthita-pragnyata that makes people not distinguish between pleasure and sadness.

Meaning of a Vedic Hymn

The following Vedic hymn is used at the beginning of several Vedic homas (fire rituals), when the Fire god is welcome into the fire pit. It is verse 4.58.3 from RigVeda and 12.10 from MahaNarayanopanishad. This text is in ITrans transliteration.

catvAri shR^iMgAstrayo asya pAdA dve shIrShe saptahastAso asya |

tridhA baddho vR^iShabho roravIti maho devo martyAm Avivesha ||

Literal translation: "He has 4 horns, 3 legs, 2 heads and 7 hands. This bull is tied 3-ways and roars splendidly. This supreme god possesses all beings."

Obviously, this has to be interpreted figuratively and not literally. Here is my interpretation:

This verse extols the role played by Agni, fire god. The Agni burns within us as the bhootagni in the subtle body. It burns as jatharaagni and others in the gross body. It drives all our actions.

Shringa not only means a horn, but also a summit or a pinnacle. Agni is the fire within us and is the basis for all our actions. The four purusharthas (purposes of the existence of a being - dharma, artha, kaama and moksha) that we fulfill through our actions are the four peaks of the Agni that provokes us to act. The crowns from the actions of Agni within us are these four purusharthas.

Legs are the basis on which one stands. They provide the foundation and basis. The three gunas - sattva, rajas and tamas - are the basis for the Agni within us. It stands on the basis of our gunas and provokes us to act. If the three gunas did not exist, the Agni within us could still exist as chidagni (the existential fire), but it wouldn't move (chetana). The three gunas are fundamental to the movement (chetana) of chidagni, which enables all our actions. That is why this Agni within us that provokes us to act has 3 legs.

Seersha not only means head, but also means the front portion or what is seen. It basically refers to the identity, how one comes across. The two fronts of this Agni that provokes all actions within us are Purusha and Prakriti - the male and female energies. Surya and Chandra nadis (Pingala and Ida) within the subtle body represent these two fronts of the Agni that makes us act. They represent actions in the gross body through the sympathetic nervous system and parasympathic nervous system, respectively. One is the face of objective thinking and actions of an active nature, while the other is the face of subjective thinking and actions of a passive nature. The Agni that burns within us and makes us act results in various actions that wear one of these two as the front/face.

Hands are the karmendriyas. It is with hands that we act in the world. They are the acting agents. The fire that burns within us acts through the physical body and its tissues. The dhaatavagnis (fires burning in the seven dhatus or tissues of the vital body) are the seven hands of the master fire burning within us and making us act. Through them, the fire carries out all its actions.

This fire of action is tied with 3 ropes. The tridoshas of beings - kapha, pitta and vaata - are the 3 ropes with which it is tied and its actions are restrained and also kept in balance by these 3 ropes!

This fire within us roars like a bull and is responsible for all our thoughts and actions. It is this fire that is responsible for the actions of every being in this creation - from Brahma to Vishnu to Shiva to you and I. This fire possesses all beings and make them act in this world.

Thus, this hymn eloquently describes the subtle nature of the bhootagni that burns within us and that is responsible for all our actions. Though we invoke an external fire when performing homam, it is supposed to represent (and strengthen in the course of time) the internal fire. No wonder a hymn giving this detailed and symbolic description of the internal fire is chanted when establishing the fire in the homa kundam!

Raama Taaraka Mantra

Q. Sometime ago, Sanjayji had advised me to go to any Hanuman temple and get a mantra for lifting up the Mangal in my natal chart which suffers from rajabhanga (uccha in rasi and neecha in navamsa). When I visited the Hanuman deity in Sri Veetirundha Perumal temple, Thirumazhisai near Chennai and asked the priest about a mantra, he advised me to chant the mantra inscribed on the walls of the temple | sri raama jaya raama jaya jaya raama | which comes out to be a 7 word, 10 aksharas mantra. Energy from the 7th house to the 10th house with the mantra devata sitting in lagna as per mantra shastra teachings. I've been doing this every evening since. Later I came to know this is the Raama taaraka mantra. My question is how does this mantra help to counter the rajabhanga of Mangal? Secondly what is the correct form of the Raama taaraka mantra? Is it | om sri raama jaya raama jaya jaya raama | - 8 words, 11 aksharas or | om sri raama jaya raama jaya jaya raama |? - 8 words, 14 aksharas. Some say it should be 13 aksharas.

A. Repeating any combination of syllables with a focused mind will eventually do the trick on the mind. So you may do either.

However, some combinations tried by others successfully in the past are better and faster.

Regarding the specific mantra below: The words "raam" and "jay" (or "jai") have no meaning in Sanskrit. They should be "raama" and "jaya" respectively. Arabic has words mostly ending in consonants (i.e. no vowel "a" at the end of the word). That Arabic influence made Indians change Sanskrit words to remove "a" at the end of words. "Jaya Raama" becomes "Jay Raam".

If you want your mantra to be meaningful in Sanskrit, please restore "a" at the end of words. The correct version of the mantra is "Sree Raama Jaya Raama Jaya Jaya Raama". You can add "Om" at the beginning.

On our India trip in the summer of 2008, I and my guru went to many temples. There was one remote temple in BrihadDwaraka that had a nice level of spiritual vibrations. It is a temple of Hanuman and Makaradhwaja (Hanuman's son) together. Apparently some yogi did intense sadhana there for a few decades in the past (with the mantra you mentioned). The mantra above is written all over the walls of the temple.

Though that yogi is not there now, the vibrations created by his sadhana are still there. We were quite impressed when we spent some time there. You have to take a boat to go from Dwaarakaa to BrihadDwaarakaa and then go inside the village (a few km from the main Krishna temple at BrihadDwaarakaa). It is a very small temple without any crowd, but has stronger spiritual energy than many famous temples. If any of you go to Dwaraka or Gujarat in general, I recommend visiting that temple and spending a couple of hours there.

The mantra you gave reminded me of that temple.

On Sani Mantra

I think there is a common confusion between the following two valid Sanskrit words for Saturn:

(1) Sanaischara: "sainaih charati iti sanaischarah" = one who moves slowly (while Chandra goes around the zodiac in 28 days, Surya does so in 1 year and even Brihaspati takes only 12 years, Sani takes the longest - 30 years!)

(2) Saneeswara: "sani + eeswara" = Lord Saturn

People mix up both and say "Saneeschara". That is wrong and has no meaning. They should either say Sanaischara or Saneeswara.

People are scared of Sani, but those who realize that this world and the so-called happiness and the so-called unhappiness are just illusory have nothing to fear. Sani is a great friend to them. He increases the detachment in them. It is people who are deeply sunk in the illusion and do not want to rise above it, who have to fear Sani. Because Sani does not hesitate to shock them in order to bring about some level of detachment.

Sani is nothing but the discipline, detachment and the spirit of hard work within us. All the gods, demons and celestial beings who exist in this universe exist within each person also, in a microcosmic form. After all, while the universe is the macrocosm, each person is the microcosm of the universe. Everything that exists in the macrocosm also exists in the microcosm. Brihaspati is nothing but a personification of the wisdom, judgment and discretion within each person. Just as Brihaspati guides devatas, our wisdom and discretion guide the good qualities (gods) within us. Surya is the soul. Chandra is the mind. And so on. Each graha and each devata is a personification of certain aspect. Like that, Sani is the personification of the discipline, detachment and the spirit of hard work.

Sani is the son of Surya. Surya is the soul. Soul is ever-radiant and full of bright light. When the shadow of self-doubt, confusion and identity crisis (servant maid Chhaayaa) combines with the radiant soul (Surya), Sani is born. So the discipline, spirit of hard work and detachment within us (Sani) is the combined result of our soul's radiant light and the darkness of our self-doubts and identity crisis. When there is no confusion about the true self ("I, you, he, she" etc confusion), there is no need of austerities and discipline. So, there is no Sani without Chhaayaa. Similarly, if there is only Chhaayaa (i.e. confusion and self-doubts) and no light of the soul, again there is no discipline and austerities. Disciplines and austerities are a result of self-doubts and a result of the desire to realize self fully. If you think of this

more deeply, you will realize the symbolism embedded in the story of Sani's birth from Surya and Chhaayaa!

All stories from Puranas are metaphorical representations of various realities that play out within our consciousness from time to time!

Questions on Kunjika Stotra

Q. For someone who cannot speak sanskrit or is not even very fluent with any of the Indian Inaguges, can such a person do a homa of the Kunjika Stotra instead of the actual full Durgasaptasati. Specially since in the beginning of the Kunjika, it says Kunjika path is almost equivalent to Durgasaptasti. Kunjika Shotram is a very powerful one, why do homam of it

A. That is not a valid reason. Even a very powerful mantra can be offered in homam. On the Vedic side, Rudra namakam and Gayatri mantra are very very powerful mantras and they are offered in homam. On the Tantrik side, Pratyangira mantra, Mahasudarsana mantra, Paashupata mantra etc are very very powerful astra mantras and they are offered in homam. As these examples show, even very powerful mantras can be offered in fire for amplification.

The power of powerful mantras is a mirage for most people. The experience given by a mantra and the internal/external results brought by a mantra vary from mantra to mantra. But, even with a very powerful mantra, one needs to be ready for the mantra to actually work.

When one is able to perfectly control the mind and *fill it* with a mantra (i.e. no thoughts but the mantra reverberating in the mind constantly), then one experiences the mantra. This perfect absorption of self-awareness in the mantra then causes internal changes by the flow of energy internally in specific ways (specific to the mantra) and that causes corresponding external changes in the universe and corresponding karmic interactions between various objects.

There may be thousands of paths to climb a mountain. Each path takes one to a different spot atop the mountain. The view one has from the top may be different accordingly. One view may be more breathtaking and amazing than another. However, one taking a path leading to a breathtaking view and one taking a path leading to a normal view both have to struggle on their paths and reach the top despite obstacles. Some paths may be slightly shorter, but none is too easy. All paths are difficult to walk, but some result in a more breathtaking view than the others.

Similarly, one chanting a "powerful mantra" and a "normal mantra" will both have to put in effort and overcome the weaknesses and get control over mind. The power of the powerful mantra refers to a more powerful experience after one succeeds with the mantra (more breathtaking scenery on reaching the mountain top). It is not correct to think that things will happen automatically and easily because one if chanting a powerful mantra 11 (or whatever) times.

Coming back to Rajarshi's question, I do not recommend homam with Kunjika stotra. Kunjika stotra is a coded stotra containing several mantras in coded form. It is not what it may seem to be. It is for a reason that Shiva tells Parvati that this prayer should be hidden like one's privates. It is weird that we are discussing such a secretive mantra on a public forum. It is a collection of powerful mantras for specific

prayogas that would be considered raajasik/taamasik unless a realized soul without attachment to the actions is acting them out as an instrument of the Divine.

I see no point in wanting to do homam with it. If you are meant to do a homam with Kunjika stotra to stop the army of a country in their tracks or kill someone or delude someone etc and if you are detached enough to carry it off successfully, then you will be given an opportunity by nature to learn it and do it. Otherwise, why even try?

My advice is to drop the idea of doing a homam with Kunjika stotra. Just stick to saptashati (700 verses). If that is too long for you, try saptashloki (7 verses) or just the 4th chapter or just the 11th chapter. Another option is to do a homam with just the moola mantra (navaakshari).

If one can pronounce the 8 verses of Devi sooktam well, a homam with Devi sooktam is a great idea too.

Subtle Meaning of a Rik from Vedas

Q. I was trying to read Sri Aurobindos translation of the mystic fire hymns from the Vedas. One of the riks is as follows:

divaspari prathamaM jaGYe agnirasmad dvitIyaM pari jaatavedaaH .

tR^itIyamapsu nR^maNaa ajasramindhaana enaM jarate svaadhIH .. RV 10.45.1

Translation done by Sri Aurobindo:

1. Above heaven was the first birth of the Fire, over us was his second birth as the knower of all things born, his third birth was in the waters, a god-mind; him continuously one kindles and with one's thought perfectly fixed on him adores. Sir, when you have time could you kindly deliberate of the possible meaning of the above verse/translation.

A. I think I am not able to fully connect with this rik. However, as you asked, I will share what my intuition tells me about its subtle meaning.

Rik:

divaspari prathamaM jaGYe agnirasmad dvitIyaM pari jaatavedaaH .

tR^itIyamapsu nR^maNaa ajasramindhaana enaM jarate svaadhIH .. RV 10.45.1

Critique:

The word "apsu" in the second half has been interpreted as "in waters". The word "ap" not only means water, but also means "work" or "action". The word "div" in the first half is interpreted as heaven. It also means "desire" or "wish". In fact, heaven is a place where all desires are instantly fulfilled (after all, it is a result of your own previous good karmas and hence the period for which you stay in heaven is limited by the good karmas you carry).

Simple Translation:

First, Fire is born around our wishes. Second, as the all-knowing one. Third, in the actions of people. A thoughtful one approaches this perpetually kindling one.

Commentary:

In my view, this rik is referring to three shaktis - Ichchhaa shakti (power of desire), Jnaana shakti (power of knowledge) and Kriyaa shakti (power of action). These three powers are endowed with three gunas - tamas, sattwa and rajas - and overseen by the three goddesses - Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati, respectively. In fact, durga saptashati or chandipath contains three parts for the three goddesses, in the same order. The Adi Shakti (primordial energy) that creates, sustains and destroys the universe is the sum total of these three goddesses. Some call Her Narayani or Aadyaadi Sri Mahaalakshmi; some call her Chandi; some call her Aadi Paraashakti; and, some call her by some other names. But names are secondary.

The rik is saying that the god of Fire manifests in all of us as the powers that cause desire, knowledge and actions. Fire is not just physical fire that we can see with eyes. Fire is essentially an energy that transforms one thing into another. For example, fire in our belly takes in various food items and transforms them into things our body can use. Fire in the brain takes in various sensory inputs and transforms them into various experiences in the brain. Like this, different kinds of fire transform different objects into some other objects. There are many kinds of fires mentioned in various texts.

The rik is saying that Fire manifests in 3 basic subtle forms - as the fire that transforms the quality of tamas in us into desires, as the fire that transforms the quality of sattwa in us into knowledge, and as the fire that transforms the quality of rajas in us into actions. Fire manifests as desires, knowledge and actions.

In the veda mantra of Mars also, the same word "ap" comes. It says "apaaM retaaMsi jinvati". This is translated by many as "promotes semens in waters". However, I believe this means "incites force and energy in actions". Anyway, I will write about Mars mantra later.

Real Meaning of Beejaksharas

Q. This is my first time posting on the vedic-wisdom group. Hope the topic is not inappropriate. I was wondering if someone could tell me or point me to articles which explain to some depth what a bijakshara is, what are the Bijaksharas and why they are said to be powerful. Specifically, I also want to know - why do only some sounds/syllables qualify as Bijaksharas? Also, what exactly is the difference between a mantra and bijaksharas? Are all bijaksharas automatically mantras? Do mantras consist only of bijaksharas? What effects do bijaksharas have that mantras don't have and vice versa?

A. This is quite relevant and not at all inappropriate. Let me give the crux of the philosophy.

The mind is like a monkey. It wanders from one place to another very rapidly and gives varied emotions such as pride, shame, anger, sadness etc. When the mind becomes nearly calm, steady and stable, one can experience the bliss of finding the true Self. The goal of all spiritual sadhana - japam, homam, dhyanam, contemplation and various rituals - is to enable the mind to become calm.

At first, one cannot make the mind stable and calm. All one can do is to tie the monkey (mind) to a fixed pole (mantra). The monkey still moves around, but its motion is restricted. Once it goes far, the thread tying it to the pole stops it from going further away. Similarly, when one tries to focus on a mantra and one's mind wanders to other things, one constantly brings it back to the mantra and thus one's mind tries to stay on the mantra.

Thus, mantra is an anchor for the mind to focus on when it tries to become calm and stable.

After trying enough, just as a monkey tied to a pole may stop jumping around and fall asleep holding on to the pole, the mind may stop thinking of so many things and become absolutely calm and stable while repeating a mantra. When all the thoughts cease and some level of silence comes to the mind, one experiences some level of bliss.

Thus, mantra is a combination of sounds that is repeated by the mind to aid mind to stop wandering from one thing to another thing. The goal is to give an anchor for the mind to focus on, instead of jumping everywhere.

Various sound combinations can be used for this purpose. For example, one can even repeat "I want to find true Self" constantly. Every combination of sounds is capable of making the mind calm after repeating it enough. Sound patterns making sense in various languages were used by some saints and messiahs from time to time in the past to obtain bliss and those sound patterns are revered as being sacred in various religions.

Compared to long sequence of sounds, short sound patterns are easier to focus the mind on. If you repeat a mantra with 32 or 24 letters/syllables, a part of the mind is responsible for changing from one letter to another and there is more mind activity even in a state of high mental focus on the mantra. If you repeat a single syllable constantly, the task is simpler for the mind and it is easier for the mind to shut down various tasks of the mind and become close to being still and silent.

Various syllables can be used for this purpose. These syllables are called beeja aksharas.

Beeja means a seed. Beeja akshara means a seed syllable. When mind has absolutely no activity and becomes completely still (i.e. ceases to exist!), one realizes the true Self (Aatman or Brahman). When mind has very little activity and becomes nearly still (i.e. still exists, but in a very high state of focus and calmness), one realizes different pure manifestations of cosmic being.

When one meditates on a beeja akshara and attains the above state of high mental focus and calmness, one's mind has no thoughts other than the repetition of the syllable. Each syllable acts as a seed corresponding to a deity. The energy of that deity fills one's consciousness when one's mind is filled with that syllable and has no other thoughts in it. In other words, each deity is a personification of the state of a mind that is focused on the sound of a specific beeja with no other thoughts in it.

Of course, if one's mind has many thoughts while repeating a beeja akshara (or any mantra in general), one may experience a lot of emotions and things. But, when one's mind becomes nearly still and calm with no thought in it (other than what is needed for repeating that sound), we can say that one's individual ego has been replaced with that of a deity and the deity has filled one's mind.

Thus, focused meditation on a beeja akshara can make one experience the energy of a deity.

Which syllables make one experience which energy was well-understood and catalogued by ancient Hindu sages nicely.

Many mantras other than beeja aksharas were also experimented by rishis, who understood the nature of energy experienced by one's mind when one's mind is completely filled with the sound of the mantra and all other thoughts leave the mind.

So we need not experiment newly. We can use the knowledge discovered by rishis and go further.

**Q. Dear Narasimhaji, Thank you very much for your reply. I am still not satisfied with the answer though, especially since I am sure I can get a lot more out of you :-)
See, the explanation that "repetitive chanting calms/anchors the mind" is only a "placebo" of an answer. It does not do any justice to the obviously highly nuanced mantra shastra. If all repetitive chanting were equal, mantra shastra would be 1/2 a page of text, not more. So this explanation does nothing more than appease the atheistic scientific mind, one that is unwilling to consider (let alone accept) the non-material part of the universe. I am looking for a deeper answer that addresses the above concerns. Please bear with me in reading the following paragraph in its entirety before replying - I know I am not presenting new information to you, but merely presenting things as I know them, so you may reply/correct my thinking as appropriate: More specifically, when I read Vivekacudamani, I am led to believe that the manifested universe is all and only the quintuplicated tattwas. The gross human being is no different (i.e. is also quintuplicated tattwas), but his consciousness is the link to a deeper non-material universe. In that deeper universe, which is the source of the material universe, there is the subtle body, which has, among other things, the antahakarana, which has the reflecting/considering/theorizing mind that we are all so familiar with. It experiences the quintuplicated universe, yet is directly part of the unquintuplicated universe! At an even deeper level, even this subtle body is a manifestation of the causal body - mahat, which consists of the three gunas. The manifesting/ enlivening agent, so to speak, is the non-dual Brahman, or pure undifferentiated consciousness.**

Now, in the above scheme of things, how do mantra and deity figure? Spoken/chanted/heard mantra is nothing more than an "energetic" activity of the most external part of the universe i.e. the quintuplicated tattwa universe. Clearly this energetic activity by itself, *if* limited to the quintuplicated universe, is useless. So, clearly, we must accept that if mantra is to have ANY enlightening effect, mantra must resonate in the mind itself, which is part of the antahakarana. Right? Now, since mind itself is NON-material, what does resonate mean at the mind level? We are no longer talking about physical energy (sound), we are talking of non-material mental energy - the mental equivalent of sound in the mind.

It is this non-material mental energy that I wish to understand when I ask about mantras and beejaksharas. What is this energy? Is it tattwa, prana, chitta, ahamkara, manas, karma, what? Why do specific harmonics of it correspond to specific deities? What exactly *is* a deity in terms of the above terminology? What is the cause-effect relationship between harmonics of this energy and the disintegration of the subtle and causal bodies. Hope you appreciate the direction/thrust of my querying.

A. As you eloquently say, "if mantra is to have ANY enlightening effect, mantra must resonate in the mind itself". You are correct that "we are no longer talking about physical energy (sound), we are talking of non-material mental energy - the mental equivalent of sound in the mind".

Mind is the connection between what you called external universe and what you called the deeper non-material universe. Mind has access to ALL realms of experience, but it normally focuses on the physical/material realm. Though mind can theoretically be focused on ANY realm of experience through effort, it is not easy.

Let me give a small analogy:

If Brahman is like the ocean bed, supreme cosmic being (who thinks all that all of us think, who desires all that all of us desire, who knows all that all of us know, and who does all that all of us do) is like the bottommost layer of ocean. Various deities are like intermediate layers. Various objects of the external material world that are perceived by our senses are like the ripples on the surface of the ocean. Objects on the surface perceive other objects on the surface around them. One's body and the senses attached to it are an object on the surface in the analogy. When one's mind identifies "self" with that body and its senses, it perceives objects as perceived by those senses. When one successfully detaches mind from that self-identity and identifies with another object in the ocean in a different layer, one may perceive a different reality. An example was in yesterday's mail on mystical experiences.

Just as the ocean is vast and deep and has infinite objects at infinite depths, this universe has infinite possible self-identities. As one's self-awareness is focused on a specific object, one has specific experience/perception of self and "others". When self-awareness changes to a different object, one has a different experience/perception of self and "others". However, this is theoretical discussion for most people, as they cannot imagine self-awareness changing. The self-awareness of most people is focused on their body with its senses and their experience/perception of self is the body and "others" is various objects as perceived through the senses attached to that body. But, it IS possible for one's self-awareness to go from an object on the ocean surface in the analogy to a layer in the middle of the ocean or even a bottommost layer.

Repetition of a mantra is only a tool for calming down the mental activity that keeps feeding this self-awareness. Mind is identifying with a physical object made with gross matter (body). By keeping it busy with a particular repetitive activity, you have a chance of cutting off its identification with that object. As an analogy, suppose a kid saw a rope right next to him and thought it was a snake and was scared. You

may tell him no, but still the thought "snake is next to me" will keep scaring him. If you keep him busy with an activity that he immerses in, the thought of snake next to him may vanish from his mind slowly.

Once the identification of mind with the body is cut off or weakened, mind will have to identify with something else. Imagine a frog clinging to a rock on an ocean surface. If it is afraid of slipping and holds on the rock tightly, its thoughts are on the rock always. If the frog stops thinking about rock and becomes absorbed in some other thoughts, it may slip from the rock. If it starts sinking in the ocean, it will get hold of something else on the way to the ocean bed (otherwise, it will drop all the way to the ocean bed. Though that is not a bad thing at all, the frog is afraid of it and instinctively grabs something on the way!!). Like in that analogy, mind will get a hold of another object (on the way to ocean bed, i.e. Brahman)

and develop another self-awareness, i.e. a perception of "I" and "others". In the example from last night, the perception of "I" was not the body, but a tiny particle in a tremendous wave of energy that reverberated with the sound of a beejaakshara. The perception of "others" was millions of particles of the same wave of energy engaged in making the same sound and absorbed in the same sound.

Let me come back to what you wrote: "if mantra is to have ANY enlightening effect, mantra must resonate in the mind itself. ... We are no longer talking about physical energy (sound), we are talking of non-material mental energy - the mental equivalent of sound in the mind."

Mind or individualized consciousness is just a window to the universe. If a room has window on the east, you see what is on the east. If a room has window on the west, you see what is on the west. And so on. The sound of the mantra IS resonating somewhere (actually, everywhere) in the universe. A mind with a strong self-identification with a body is bombarded by the sense inputs of that body, just as a room with an open window on the south is filled with cold wind blowing from the south and bombarded by the floodlights installed outside on the south. You have to close that window and open window elsewhere to get something else. If self-identification with body is weakened, the bombardment of sense inputs weakens and the window of mind can open to the mantra that resonates in the universe.

When I said earlier that a vacuum should be created in the mind for the mantra and the deity to fill, this is what I was referring to.

Different objects of the universe, including human beings and deities, are made up of gross/subtle matters of different gunas. Each object of the universe has different perceptions of "I" and "others". Each object of the universe has different energies, i.e. different abilities to affect interactions between "I" and "others".

The energy of an object is the energy that brought that object into being. Deities are objects with tremendous energy. But one cannot get close to a deity unless one overcomes attachment to individualized ego and its potential energy. One needs to convert that potential energy into kinetic energy that helps one break away from that ego and approach a deity.

In the long run, none of those objects is permanent. None of those energies is permanent. In terms of the previous ocean analogy, one may cling on to an object on the way to the ocean bed temporarily, but the

final goal is to not view any object as "I" and not consider any energy as "mine". The final goal is to drop down all the way to the ocean bed and stay there, without any sense of "I" and "others" or "energy".

Please realize two fundamental things:

(1) The energy of the mantra is experienced *after* the sadhana is fruitful and one overcomes ego. The mantra is an indirect tool for overcoming ego. If one thinks that he is doing a powerful mantra and its energy will free him from ego, one is mistaken. One **MUST** put in conscious effort with constant contemplation to weed out ego and pride to make one's sadhana fruitful. Mantra does not replace that need. Instead, it works hands in hand with that and depends on that.

(2) When one succeeds in overcoming ego and experiencing a mantra, one should not think that "I did it" or "I created that energy in my mind". One does not do anything (other than *undoing* what one did previously, viz putting together of a complex and weird self-identity called a body with so many things attached to it and so many pre-conceived notions about the world). The energy of the mantra IS already there and resonating everywhere. When mind experiences that energy and fills with it, it is simply *tuning* to something pre-existing and not really creating something or doing something. It is like a radio tuning to a different channel and one listening to newer and better music or a driver driving on a different scenic road and viewing beautiful and better scenery.

Q. If all repetitive chanting were equal, mantra shastra would be 1/2 a page of text, not more.

A. I never said they were equal. Perfect absorption into different mantras fills the mind with different kinds of energies (associated with different deities). So there is a lot of difference to chronicle. In terms of my ocean analogy, the possible experiences when one is absorbed into a mantra are as vast as an ocean.

But, the essence is this: Mind has to be perfectly absorbed into the mantra and a vacuum has to be created in the mind for the mantra and its deity to fill. Other factors related to the specific details in each mantra are secondary. I want to de-emphasize all other things and emphasize this essential thing, i.e. control over ego.

One wanting to drive a car on various roads needs a detailed book giving all the maps. But my point is that one should first learn driving. What makes one an expert driver going to various places is not possession of thousand maps but the basic driving skill. One not knowing driving will crash the car even if he possesses thousand maps. One good at driving may manage without maps too. People emphasize complicated, mystified and nuanced knowledge and forget the basic essence.

I want to categorically state that the nuances of mantra shastra are neither necessary nor sufficient for one to achieve spiritual progress. One may spend decades learning the nuances and yet not achieve anything.

If the basic essence is paid attention to, one can achieve despite not knowing the nuances. In fact, the nuances may come naturally to one who gets some mastery over the essential factors.

The proof of the pudding is in eating it. Choose any mantra or beejaakshara and meditate on it silently every day, for 2 hours (at least one hour). Sit comfortably with the back, neck and head erect, eyes closed

and mind as calm as possible. Avoid all physical movement and remain as still as you can. If you have an urge to move, suppress it as long as you can and keep pushing the limit every day. Try your best to focus the mind on mantra. Do this meditation sitting in the same place, facing the same direction and at around the same time every day. Do this for one year and see for yourself if it does something to you or not, despite not paying attention to the technicalities and nuances!

Some nuances are not irrelevant completely. But they are irrelevant to most people. For example, people religiously mention beeja, shakti and keelaka of the mantra and do detailed anga nyaasa and kara nyaasa. Those are all relevant only to a person of a high level of self-awareness, which is not the case with most people.

Let me give an analogy. There may be some nuances related to how to lift the foot up and land the foot while running, to maximize the speed. They are irrelevant to a small baby who cannot yet walk and only crawls. When the baby learns how to walk and later how to run, those details will most likely come to him naturally. Even without them, one will run fine, perhaps a little slower. Thus, there is no point in trying to learn the nuances of running when one is still crawling. In fact, unneeded focus on those nuances of running may even make one's learning of walking very slow - it is a distraction!

I answered whatever questions I could answer and felt like answering.

What we need today is not people who can discuss theory in detail and have an intellectual understanding of things. In fact, these things are beyond intellectual comprehension. Practical sadhana is far more important. Do not wait till you get technicalities correct. Just start sadhana as I mentioned earlier and commit 1-2 hours of your time everyday and see what happens.

What sanatana dharma and Vedic wisdom need today is a handful of sadhakas who *experience* mantras at the highest level and yet remain free from pride and ego and become purified instruments of the Mother to carry out Her will with actions of far-reaching consequences without a trace of ego in those actions. This is possible not by learning technicalities and nuances, but by developing devotion, surrender and conscious effort with constant contemplation.

Q. Above questions and answers from both of you are beyond my reach. Where I am? At a child stage yet?

A. All are children only - those who talk, those who listen and those who are confused.

The crux of my mail was that knowledge of technicalities and nuances is not that useful and one needs to develop surrender and devotion. If you understand that much, the rest in my mail does not matter much.

The great Adi Shankara said "bhaja govindam bhaja govindam bhaja govindam moodhamate, sampraapte sannihite kaale na hi na hi rakshati dunkrun karane". It approximately means "O fool, pray to the Lord, pray to the Lord, pray to the Lord. When your time is up, all these technicalities and knowledge do not save you."

Until ego melts in the heat of true and perfect knowledge (half-knowledge is useless and promotes more ego) or until ego is washed away by the cool and steady stream of unwavering devotion of a totally surrendered mind, one is stuck in maya (delusion) and suffers. One is saved only when one of the two

happens. The former is very very difficult in this age. One gets a little bit of knowledge and then pride increases. It is very difficult to maintain humility and achieve purity through knowledge alone.

The latter is an easier path in this age. Surrender to a deity and look at yourself as a servant of that deity. When the deity gives you something, do not let it increase your pride and think of everything as a property of the deity and continue to look at yourself as a servant of the deity.

Whatever path you choose, do some sadhana practically and on a regular basis. Without that, it is difficult to progress.

Also, do not look at sadhana as an half hour or one hour or two hour thing. The meditation or pooja or homam or some other ritual you do alone is not sadhana. Every thought and action is a part of your sadhana. Install a 24 hour surveillance camera to alert you when thieves called pride and ego enter the home called your heart. Constant contemplation to control the mind should be as much a part of one's sadhana as meditation or pooja or homam or a ritual.

Meaning of Slokam/Blessing - Satamanam Bhavathi.

Q. What is the full meaning of the traditional blessing/sloka - Satamanam Bhavathi, satayuh purusha, I loosely understand that it means the well wisher is blessing that the individual to invoke several (thousands, satah) powers within him/her-self.

A. The verse you are talking about is:

"shatamaanam bhavati shataayuH puruShaH shatendriyaH aayuShyevendriye pratitiShThati"

This is normally used by priests and scholars to give blessings to people. This is normally thought to mean "live for hundred years", because of the presence of the terms "shata" (hundred) and "aayu" (longevity).

As I see it, it means: "The count is by hundreds (many). Purusha (supreme cosmic being) exists as the living essence of hundreds of (many) beings. Purusha exists as the bodily prowess of hundreds (many). Purusha is established in the vital essence of beings just as in the bodily vigor."

It is saying that the subtle essence of beings as well as physical powers including senses etc are both aspects of the same supreme cosmic being!

Q. Can you please give your thoughts on the difference between Rudra and Bhairava?

A. Rudras are realized beings who act as the agents of Karmaphala. Rudra is depicted as a bowman who shoots arrows, which are metaphors of karmaphala (fruits of actions).

Yoginis and Bhairavas represent various kinds of experiences in the sookshma sareera. There are many Yoginis and Bhairavas, but 64 of them are considered primary. Yoginis are attendants of the divine Mother. These are the experiences surrounding self-consciousness. Yoginis represent Shakti and Bhairavas represent Purusha.

At the low level, Bhairavas are personifications of various subtle experiences. At the highest level, Yoginis and Bhairavas are personifications of observing various subtle experiences. Yoginis personify the observation and Bhairavas the observer.

A fully realized person is neither attracted to nor repelled by any experience. As various experiences come, one simply observes. Bhairava is an observer of various experiences within.

Pollution of Panch Bhutas

What we eat, drink and breath does have an impact on us. Just as the gross matter consumed by us impacts our gross bodies, the subtle nature of the gross matter consumed by us impacts our subtle nature.

If food is cooked by someone with negative thoughts, those thoughts do shape the subtle nature of that food and impact the subtle nature of the person eating the food!

In this age, the food we eat, the water (or other drinks) we drink and even the air we breathe are corrupted at the gross level as well the subtle level. As Kali deepens (we are only 5,000 years into 432,000 years!), this will only get worse. These heavy impurities accumulating fast in one's subtle nature need heavy sadhanas to burn them and yet people have no time for spiritual sadhana.

Even an idol will carry the subtle vibrations of the thoughts of people involved in its making - people who dug up the ore, purified it, made it, transported and sold it etc. People have a fascination for idols, yantras etc, but they are *relatively* ineffective in this age. The element of air, as you said, is badly corrupted and obtaining god through praanaayaama etc is quite difficult. If one were to follow the path of Raja yoga and obtain god through yogic practices of praanaayaama, mudras, bandhas etc, it is very very difficult in this age. When one eats pure food and breathes pure air, it is still a difficult thing. In this age, it is thousand fold difficult. Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to say that Raja yoga is not for this age.

The only elements that cannot be corrupted are space (the vacuum that is the basis for other elements and the underlying reality behind all realities) and fire. Obtaining god through the element of space is essentially the Vedantic path of contemplation. This is too abstract and difficult for most people (just as the element of space itself is!).

The element left is fire. Fire is ever pure and purifies anything it comes in contact with. The first verse of Rigveda is a praise of Fire. Fire worship is an ancient practice found in many religions.

What Happens After Getting Moksha?

Q. When one cuts the cycle of death and re-birth and gets moksha or mukti then what happens...then what happens to the atman(the soul)...if one knows that this is his last physical life in this world and he will not be born again since he has now cut/stop the cycle of death & re-birth then what happens to his/her soul after this life....in this specific case where does the soul go after leaving the body...does it get dissolved in the cosmic universe or what...what is the final resting place or final destination for the atman(the soul) in the infinite universe considering the scenario i gave now... any views?

A. All that there is is Brahman. Just as ripples arise in ocean and the ripples forget that they are just ocean and form a separate identity and look at other parts of the same ocean as different ripples/other objects, a part of Brahman forgets that it is Brahman and forms a separate identity. It starts looking at other parts of Brahman as different objects.

Moksha is when one completely loses these false self-identities and realizes one's true nature, i.e. that one is not a ripple but the ocean itself.

There are two kinds. In the first kind, one enters a Nirvikalpa samadhi. One just merges in Brahman. One no longer has any self-identification (e.g. "I am Vikrant", "I am Narasimha", "I am an astrologer", "I am a good person" etc). One neither perceives "self" or "other". One's perception is clear of any objects or duality. One just swims in the bliss that true self is (sat-chid-ananda). There is no experience. There is no self, no objects to be experienced and no experience.

If one reaches this state and does not return from the state (Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to say "salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean and melted and mixed with the ocean"), that is moksha.

The second kind is even more difficult. In that kind, one enters Sahaja samadhi. One sees different objects of this dual world and interacts with those objects as if one is a limited object too. But yet, one fully realizes that all objects are non-different from Brahman. In terms of our ocean-ripple analogy, one realizes that one is not a ripple but ocean and yet acts like a ripple with other ripples without any corruption in the understanding that all is ocean. Being rooted in non-duality perfectly while perceiving and acting in the dual world is indeed difficult. One who reaches this state is living and yet liberated (jeevanmukta). This is an extremely difficult thing.

There have been many who got moksha, but very very very very few who got moksha while living in the body and acting in the body. Yogis like Shirdi Sai Baba, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Ramana Maharshi are indeed rare.

Can Living Organisms get Moksha?

Q. Jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, or any other yoga, is the only way to attain moksha/realization, then what will other living organisms like amoeba, bacteria and all will do to attain moksha? Aren't they also living organisms?

A. Well, sadhana (effort) is what a being does. Phala (fruits) are decided by the Lord. If God wants, a bacteria can get moksha too. However, *usually* god has some rules of action and reaction to uphold and hence does not act out of order. So the chance of a bacterium to get moksha is negligible (except at the end of this creation cycle).

It is indeed true that amoeba or bacteria have very very small chance of moksha in THAT life. However, nobody stops them from doing some good karma (possibly by *chance*), get a higher birth and eventually be born as a human and do some sadhana.

When I wrote "by chance", it may make some uncomfortable. But that is the fact. Whatever action we perform with a sense of *I-ness* behind that action becomes a karma (action) and an equal and opposite phala (fruit/reaction) will come. Suppose one donates one's eyes and feels good about the noble act and the person getting the eyes uses the newly gotten vision to look at some beautiful women, be tempted and rape them, the donor will get part of that karma! The laws of karma are complex. Thinking like "this is a noble karma. So it is good only" is incorrect. Each action results in a series of developments and begets some karma for the person. Of course, if an act is with committed with ego but not an intention to affect a particular development, the part of the karma begotten from that development is smaller (than it would be if that development was intended). Thus, even bacteria and amoeba can beget karma from the results of their actions. But it is very small and accumulates slowly. Highly taamasik beings such as trees, amoeba and bacteria take a loooooong time to make progress on the ladder of kaarmik evolution.

I want to make three comments:

(1) One need not feel sorry for the amoeba and bacteria because they are mostly a long way from moksha. Not all beings need to get moksha right away. If that is needed, god did not need to create this world. If there is unmanifested Brahman and nothing else in this universe, that will solve all problems. But the fact is that manifested Brahman with infinite objects at varying levels of karmic evolution is not really a problem! That is exactly what is needed for the Lila to unfold.

(2) If you want to feel sorry, feel sorry not for amoeba and bacteria, but for those who got the valuable human birth and yet act like amoeba and bacteria spiritually. Pity those who are stuck in the cycle of happiness and sadness, elation and depression, hopes and despairs etc, without realizing that the play will end soon and what birth one will get next is uncertain!!

(3) Actually, more than others, feel sorry for yourself. Who are we to worry about others? They, their god and their gurus will feel sorry for them and do something about them. Apne ko kya lena dena? We are first responsible for ourselves. When one cannot change self and focus attention on god fully within oneself, what is the point in lamenting about the spirituality or lack of it in other people? So, we should all try to look inward and take a critical look at ourselves, given that we got a very very very valuable life as a human being.

Q. If the whole world as a maya exist only in human's mind (as per my understanding, our mind creates this world, when through yoga, mind/ego collapse happens, there is no world or anything and we submerge as oneness in the omnipotent power), if it is a creation of mind, then there should not be any world when the human species is extinct. Right?

A. A mind is a mind is a mind. Mind creates the world, not necessarily a human mind. All minds can create a world. However, a human mind is more capable than other minds to break down that created world and return to the source. THAT is the point.

Q. I would like to know if you have heard of any Vaamacharis in India who followed Vama Marga successfully and realised God. All true saints I have heard are followers of

the Satwik path/right hand tantra. So always wonder, did anybody succeed in the other way? Anybody who was well-known as a Vamamarga saint?

A. Your question is kind of an oxymoron. Can good aghoris become "well-known" and come to limelight? I know one masterly aghori reasonably well. However, he is not restricted to one path.

All paths are His own and he does not distinguish. He does aghora sadhanas in smashana and also Vedic sadhanas like Vedic homas with the same attitude. He chants Vedic mantras too. For example, when he chants Sri Rudram, it produces amazing energy all around. He is a bhakti yogi too. When he thinks of Krishna, he melts in devotion. When he discusses upanishads and other Vedanta texts such as Yoga Vaasishtham and BhagavadGita, his keen intellect shines forth like a Sun and illuminates the thinking of a ready audience. I have never seen anyone who has such a perfect understanding of the essence of Upanishads and exudes it in thoughts, words and actions. He has wife and children, has a full-time job and engages in several external activities and is never idle. But his level of detachment with the work he does so expertly is far higher than even ascetics who renounce everything and *try* to develop some detachment.

Bottomline is that he is an aghori, but he is also a jnaana yogi, bhakti yogi, karma yogi and raaja yogi. He is a vaidika and he is an aghori. All paths are his and he views all the same way. I don't know if all really good aghoris are like that or just he.

In any case, it is irrelevant to you if any aghori succeeded or not. If YOU are meant to succeed in aghota, you will. If not, you will not. To be safe, until the right time and right person comes, one should not venture into aghora. I want people to appreciate different things for what they are and not have unhealthy biases, but it does not mean everybody should try everything. Nuclear engineers hating politicians, politicians hating lawyers and lawyers hating doctors is bad. But one should become what one is supposed to!

Q. A few years back, I had read AGHORA -Kundalini by Robert Svoboda. In that book one Aghori Vimalananda is mentioned. But except in that book, I couldn't find any references to this person anywhere. Not even in net. (The only references were the ones related to Robert Svaboda's book and as his Guru).

A. Well, he guarded his privacy and made sure that the books came out only after he left the body. Moreover, his real name was not that. Also, he led his spiritual life in relative seclusion and not many knew him. No wonder you can't find info on him.

Bottom-line is: Whether he is real or not, one can benefit from teachings attributed to him. The knowledge present in the aghora series of books is nothing short of amazing. It may shock you, but it can change your thinking from inside out and give you a clearer understanding. Vimalananda not only managed to impart great understanding to Svoboda, but also ensure that Mother Taaraa Herself would speak through Svoboda and the knowledge would come out perfect. Other books authored by Svoboda may not have the same brilliance, but those books came out just as Vimalananda intended.

There are many things in the book which could not have come from a normal person. They came from someone who had a perfect, steady and unwavering understanding of the absolute truth.

BTW, you cannot meet a good and genuine aghori unless there is a rina and *he* wants you to meet him.

Which Is a Big Sin/Karma

Q. I have once heard from one of your Astrology classes (mp3 files) that when you donate money to the beggars you might get bad karma (because of the misuse of that money by them), i have stopped giving money to all those road side beggars now.

But, in my mind i'm having a bad feeling for not giving them money whenever i see them asking me for alms. Again the thought of accruing unnecessary karma is stopping me. Can you please clarify which is a big sin / karma of these two. (karma of not giving alms to those beggars vs getting karma of their misuse)?

A. If the money you gave was used for a sin , you will get a portion of the sin. But it is usually less than the punya you get. When you know ahead that the money will be misused, do not give to that person. When you do not know, take a chance and give it.

If you donate with pride and ego, the negative effect of the bad deeds done with that money are increased. If you donate without pride and thinking that god is using you to give god's money to god, then the negative effects of the bad deeds done with that money are minimized.

Astrology Questions

Q. As I was reading the homa manul for Kuja I came across a definition of one of the 21 names of Kuja as one who can grant all wishes etc. Some days back I was re reading the Aghora book where it was mentioned at place that the planets are like munis. Is this true? Then what is the difference between a planet and a deity? Also why are they called graha?

A. Graha means one that grasps. Grahas are personification of qualities that grasp one's consciousness and thinking based on previous conditioning.

Mars is personification of the spirit of initiative, enthusiasm and energy. Of course, he can grant one's desires.

Planets are self-realized and liberated from the cycle of life and death, i.e. they are jeevanmuktas. From that point of view, rishis, gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and planets are similar. They are liberated and continue to discharge their duties till the pre-ordained time period without being deluded by duality, and merge in Brahman at the end of that time period. During that period, they may exist in multiple forms, be reborn and what not.

They are doing their duty/dharma without any attachment whatsoever.

Planets are also deities and they have a specific job of grasping people's consciousness and give them different thoughts and experiences, based on their previous karmas.

Charan Sparsh Obeisance

Q. I had arranged for the first time Chandi Homam at my house on Friday. The Brahmin priest did an excellent pooja. During Durga swaroopini Kanya (small girl 7 years old) poojan I asked her to take her feet out so that I could touch the her feet with my forehead to offer my obeisance & I normally do touch the feet with my fore head during the Namaskar. The Brahmin Pujari prevented me from touching the feet of girl as well as his feet with my forehead saying that if a person touches the feet of a guru/elder with forehead all the punya of the Guru/Elder will transfer to me & incase the Guru keeps his hand on my head all his sins will be transferred to me. Please shed light on this

A. Every tradition has a valid basis, but also corrupted in time.

So many people touch the feet with hands or forehead when bowing to elders. It is incorrect to say that "all of elder's punyas" are transferred then. So many people touch the head of youngsters with hand to bless. It is incorrect to say that "all of youngster's sins" are transferred then.

However, this belief is not without a basis. When a person touches the feet of a person with awakened energy, *some* transfer of energy occurs automatically, whether or not one is aware (that is why we have the tradition of touching the feet of saints). However, how much energy gets transferred is dependent on the capabilities of the two persons, the strength of the desire in the two persons for (or against) the transfer and the previous rina between the person.

It is not necessary to touch the feet of a person with the forehead. It is possible to touch with hands and receive energy. Once one young man came to my Jyotish class in Boston and touched my feet at the end to take blessings. Normally, when people do that, I mentally say "sarvam Sri Krishnarpanamastu" and imagine that the obeisance is going to Lord Krishna. But, this time, I could clearly feel some energy leaving me. It was a very tangible feeling. This person touched specific spots in the two feet with a specific mudra of the two hands.

Of course, one can dismiss my feeling as a hallucination. But, when the same young man came to a Satya Narayana vratam at my house later in the week and touched the feet of a very good priest who came from India (the same one who I said performed the first Chandi homam at my house, arranged for the shata Chandi homam in Chennai and had books on homam gifted to us), he immediately exclaimed "sir, we have to be careful with this boy! He seems to do some sadhana. He definitely knows how to take away some energy from people." I had not told him what I had experienced a few days back and this was his independent conclusion after the same experience as mine!

I am convinced that some energy give and take happens when feet and head are touched for blessings. However, it requires a certain level of ability and purity to receive energy from someone by touching feet. So many people touched my feet. Only a handful gave me the feeling that some energy left me.

There is another way to look at this. If a person gets something from me, it is probably because there is some rina. Why should I try to resist a payback of rina? Who are we anyway to give or to take? All the energy deposited in all the beings of this universe is Hers anyway. Why should one look at the energy deposited in oneself as one's own?

My simple bottom-line advice is this:

If someone pays obeisance to you, let them do it. Do not feel proud or superior when someone touches your feet. Think that Krishna (or Shiva) in him is paying obeisance to Krishna (or Shiva) in you and offer it to Krishna (or Shiva). When you touch the feet of someone, feel humble and think that the person you are bowing to is a limited manifestation of Krishna (or Shiva). Leave the rest of the karma/energy calculations out and do not worry.

At the same time, if someone does not let you touch his/her feet, just bow to them and pay obeisance in the mind without a physical touch. You can still feel humble and think that the person you are bowing to is a limited manifestation of Krishna (or Shiva).

A lot of this is in the mind and controlling the mind is the key.

Country First or Universal Consciousness

Q. I want to narrate an incident before I pose this question. The excerpts are from "Living with Himalayan Masters" book.

Incident1: (Before the independence of India) Swami Rama is a disciple of XXX guru (Guru's name is not mentioned in the book as Guru preferred secrecy) and is practicing the rigorous of spiritual sadhana in the abode of serene Himalayan mountains, to feel the cosmic consciousness. It was during this time, the independence movement was in progress in India and Rama too got tempted to be a part of the movement. It was at this juncture, his guru advised him to continue with sadhana and not to take part in the movement as India is destined to get freedom.

Incident 2: We keep hearing/reading from noble people like Gandhi, Chanakya, Lord Krishna, Abdul Kalam etc, that country is first before you. (Can we here imply "you" as sadhana too?)

These two illustrations are quite contradictory?What should we give the first priority to? Country or understanding self? Isn't the comfort of being in a country necessary to understand the self? Please do let us know your thoughts.

A. The goal of spiritual sadhana is to make ego (sense of "I") melt completely. A normal person is so attached to the body that one believes firmly that body is I. From the limited self-identification where

there is so much attachment to a body, a name and a specific identity, one cannot evolve in a single day or in a single step to a stage where one does not identify with anything (and becomes liberated). There can be several steps depending on the force of previous mental conditioning.

One possibility is to attach oneself to a larger cause and overcome the over-attachment to the body, name and specific identity. Anything that lessens the mind's attachment to the body, name and specific identity is helpful in the short run. Suppose one is so dedicated to one's country (or to a cause such as spreading Yoga or spreading praanaayaama or spreading Jyotisha) that one ignores comfort of body and starts to live and breathe that cause. It is helpful in overcoming the attachment to the limited self-identity.

However, in the long run, even attachment to a country or attachment to a cause such as spreading Yoga or Jyotisha blocks one from liberation. However, attachment to bigger and more abstract causes like them is easier to let go than attachment to a seemingly concrete and specific identity such as a body. So, devoting oneself to country or to a cause and working hard on it is a step in the right direction.

It all depends on what debts you have and what stage of spiritual evolution you are at. For a person close to liberation, there is no need to bind further by attaching oneself to a cause, however noble it may be. For someone else, however, attachment to a cause is a step towards liberation.

Suppose you are climbing a mountain. You need mountaineering gear, supplies for many days etc. You start with a heavy load on your back. As you get higher and higher, you may consider throwing away things and reducing your load. But, if you start throwing away your supplies in the beginning itself, you will not make to the top. You will run out of supplies in the middle itself.

Similarly, forming attachment with working for a country, working for a cause, devotion to a god, devotion to a person, a ritual such as homam, a mantra etc are like loads you carry which help you climb the mountain. When you are closer to the top and the supplies become a load, you can consider throwing them away. But you need them to survive and climb in the beginning.

Dharma

As Vimalananda says, dharma is indeed personal. Krishna clearly says in Bhagavad Geeta "Follow your own dharma. It is dangerous to follow someone else's dharma".

Following the path of dharma basically means engaging in the right action/duty. Right action varies from person to person, from time to time and from place to place. It is dependent on what nature expects from you, which in turn is based on who you have been in the past, what actions you did in the past while identifying with the action, who you affected in the past (and how) with the actions that you identified with, what debts you created in the process, and what mental tendencies you accumulated until now.

If, based on one's mental tendencies and karmic debts, nature wants a person to kill evil persons, that becomes one's dharma. If, based on one's mental tendencies and karmic debts, nature wants a person to spread the message of uniformity of all religions, that becomes one's dharma. If, based on one's mental tendencies and karmic debts, nature wants a person to spread the ritual of homam in the world, that

becomes one's dharma. If, based on one's mental tendencies and karmic debts, nature wants a person to make a lot of money and construct a temple, that becomes one's dharma.

The dharma of a being may change from one life to another. At the time of Mahabharata war, it was Arjuna's dharma to kill his gurus, elders and relatives. The time then was such that there was too much weight on earth and nature wanted earth to be relieved of some weight. Tremendous destruction was to take place and civilization destroyed to a great extent, to welcome Kali yuga and set the tone for it. Arjuna being a great warrior, it was his dharma to facilitate that. Some people he deeply loved and respected were on the other side and it was his dharma to kill them.

When the same Arjuna was born again in the 19th century as one of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's sishyas (Swami Yogananda had been Arjuna in a previous life, according to Ramakrishna), his dharma was different in this new time and place. He was born to renounce material life despite his aristocratic upbringing and live the simple life of a monk and inspire generations to embrace a simple life of mental detachment and service to others. When he is born again (which he has to, as per what Ramakrishna said), his dharma based on the time and place may be something else.

The tricky question is: How does one decide what is one's dharma?

Some people have interpreted Krishna's words saying "follow your own dharma and not someone else's dharma" in the light of castism. Though the concept of caste (varna) has been there in Hinduism for a long time, the concept of caste mobility was very much there. Valmiki was a shudra who lived by killing birds. He became a brahmana and a maharshi later. Vishwamitra was a kshatriya and a powerful king. He became a brahmana and a maharshi later. Basically varna shows one's aptitude. One starts off with the varna of father, because that is what one is exposed to in childhood. As one develops in life, one gets one's own varna based on what one does.

Thus, the misinterpretation of Krishna's words which tells you to know your dharma from your caste is wrong. Moreover, there are not just 4 dharmas in the world. Each person has individual dharma.

Knowing what one's dharma is is very very very difficult. If one is pure enough, one will *know* one's dharma. In fact, all of us have a part of our mind that tells us what our dharma is, but it is surrounded by a lot of noise from other parts of our minds which tell other things. Thus, we get confused.

We should make the best judgment combining discrimination and intuition and decide what is our dharma and follow it sincerely. We may be err, but doing the best we can is all that we can do!

More than following dharma, what is of utmost importance is to engage in actions without identification. *That* alone ensures that we are not accumulating new karmas, i.e. not increasing the load. We should not build too much attachment to what we are doing. We should engage in the best possible actions (based on our best judgment on what our dharma in the given situation is), with as little attachment and self-identification with the action as possible. When the action is finished, we should leave the result to god. We should not think "I did it", "what will happen now", "will it work" etc. Such adherence of nishkama karma yoga (unification through untached action) will simplify our ego and purify our consciousness slowly. As we become purer, our mind will work sharper and tell our dharma clearer.

There is a positive feedback here. This will slowly enable us to see our dharma clearly and follow it without incurring new karmas. This is not easy, but not as difficult as people think.

The bottomline is: Even if one is not following one's dharma, one's sense of "this is my dharma" gets refined with time if one engages in action with little attachment.

In deciding one's dharma, one's intellect and intuition are the inputs. Another external input is the words of scriptures and learned men. One can derive one's dharma from them. A special place is given to one's spiritual master. If one surrenders to a spiritual master, one can take the words of the master to determine one's dharma and follow it sincerely.

When Arjuna was confused about what his dharma was and thought killing gurus and relatives was not dharma, he had a guru in Krishna who clarified his dharma. When Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) was confused about his dharma and wanted to renounce the world and go to a secluded place to do sadhana, Ramakrishna Paramahansa cried and prevailed upon him to stay in the material world and do the work of Mother for him.

One who is not in tune with nature and does not know who one is, what one's debts are and what nature expects from one can err in the judgment of what one's dharma is. If one's guru is an elevated soul with a clear insight into one's inner core, such a guru can give perfect guidance.

Bottomline is that I (or anybody) cannot outline a set of principles and declare that as the dharma. No, dharma changes from person to person, from time to time and from place to place. Also, there are no thumbrules to find out what one's dharma is. But, one can refine one's understanding of one's dharma by increasing internal purity. By doing various kinds of spiritual sadhana (like homam, japam etc) and engaging in actions without much attachment, one can slowly purify oneself and refine one's understanding of one's individual dharma.

Q. I did not understand one line of your post. You said during the time of Mahabhrata there was tremendous weight on this planet. I could not completely understand what you ment by this. Is it a literal meaning of figuratative meaning? Also, could you tell me the name of reference of the book where Sri Ramakrishna says Yogananda was Arjuna.

A. I meant it figuratively.

For the reference on Yogananda, you can read the section on Swami Yogananda in "God Lived with Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna" by Swami Chetanananda.

There have been many great yogis, babas, saints and swamis in the last few thousand years of Kali yuga. But Ramakrishna Paramahansa stands out in one way. He is one master who mastered every single path. He mastered bhakti yoga, jnaana yoga, karma yoga and even raaja yoga. He worshipped and experienced Rama, Krishna, Kaali and several forms. He even reached the state of nirvikalpa samadhi, where there is no "experience". He was in sahaja samadhi always. He was able induce tremendous experience in people by mere touch or mere look. Yet he was simple like a child and had zero ego (that is why he could do all that!!!).

Many "gurus" force their dharma on their sishyas and have no ability to recognize the true nature and dharma of each sishya. They force sishyas to chant the mantra they chant, worship the form they worship and walk the path they walk. Ramakrishna had deep insight into the true nature of each sishya and gave specific instructions. He taught totally different mantras, totally different forms and totally different paths to different sishyas. He even taught contradictory things to different sishyas. When one sishya who needed to mend his aggressive attitude roughed up somebody for insulting his guru, he scolded "shame on you. With your attitude, you did not defend your guru, but brought shame to him. You should learn to be calm and ignore such insults. THAT will place your guru in a good stead and not your aggression". When another sishya who needed to mend his soft demeanor ignored insults of Ramakrishna by some people and came away silently, he scolded him "shame on you. Shastras say that you should kill one who insults your guru. How can you ignore such wrong behavior? You should give them a piece of your mind."

Spiritual sadhana does not mean just chanting a mantra or repeating a procedure everyday for a certain period of time. Spiritual sadhana is a continuous process by which one transforms oneself from inside out and purifies oneself. That way, every action and every thought becomes a sadhana and offers an opportunity for introspection and transformation of internal attitude.

Anyway, coming back to the point, Ramakrishna is not a normal sadhaka or a normal guru. He belonged to a very special class of sadhakas and he was an exceptional guru to an exceptional group of sishyas.

Without his [indirect] blessings, I would be a nobody and would be lower than dirt. I would not be able to say anything intelligent or meaningful in spiritual matters. Those who are impressed/inspired by something I write should be thankful to my guru Dr Manish Pandit and to Sri Ramakrishna for showering their grace using me as an instrument and not to me.

BTW, you are all free to forward my posts that you like to people who may be interested in spiritual discussions. I have no problem. As I said before, I am a servant distributing the wealth of a king (Mother) as asked by the minister (my guru).

Dogma

Q. I once had a discussion with our priest. We had gone to a temple where they had the intercom connection in the restrooms, so that people could listen if there was some announcement going on (as well as any prayers/bhajans). The priest felt that this was very inappropriate and that we should not be listening to any prayers in the restroom (let alone chant anything silently or otherwise).

A. Dogma is needed in the beginning of one's sadhana, but should be rejected as one progresses. Otherwise, it becomes a blockage instead of promoting progress. But it IS needed in the beginning.

Dogma dictates maintaining several kinds of external purity when chanting mantras, slokas and prayers. The purpose of external purity is to eventually promote internal purity.

If someone already has a high level of internal purity and can focus the mind on god irrespective of external circumstances, external purity is irrelevant.

But, in the case of a less evolved person, focusing on god is difficult and depends on external factors. When one takes bath, wears clean clothes, sits in a nice room with nice idols, nice lighting and incense etc, one may be able to focus mind on god and mantra a little better. So dogma requires all those things.

If one is able to think of god's name all the time and one's mind soars high irrespective of what the body is doing, it is foolish to try to stop the mind from soaring high and tying it down to the acts of the body. Dogma should be dumped then.

One lady told me once, " when I have my monthly periods, I am not supposed to say mantras. But my mind is used to always silently repeating certain mantras and that continues during my periods also. What should I do? It is not easy for me to stop my mind. My mind is so used to saying those names. Why should I stop consciously during my periods? Is it a sin to say god's name?"

This lady is very pure and clean-hearted. I see no reason to tell her, "no lady, it is a *sin* to say the mantra during your periods." Of course, any clear-sighted person can see that it is NOT a sin to repeat god's name, irrespective of the circumstances and surroundings.

How to decide whether you should stick to dogma or dump it? If there is *any* little feeling of guilt inside you when you break a rule of dogma, it means you are not ready for breaking that rule. Then simply follow dogma.

Suppose saying Gayatri mantra when you are urinating makes you a little uncomfortable or gives a little feeling of wrong-doing. Then don't say it. Suppose someone else realizes that Gayatri mantra says that this entire universe is filled with the effulgence of Savita and thinks that the same Savita's effulgence is in a god's idol, in one's own body, in one's urine and in the food one eats etc and there is no real distinction between all of them. Then he may chant Gayatri mantra even when urinating. What's wrong with it?

If there is ANY amount of guilt in one when are breaking dogma, one probably needs to stick to dogma for more time.

On Jodha Akbar Movie

Q. The movie Jodhaa Akbar is a vile, vicious, and covert attempt by a mischievous producer/director from Bollywood (Mumbai) to make quick bucks by denigrating and vilifying the Hindu (Rajput) people. Sonia's (Antonia Maino) Congress government promptly banned 'Da Vinci Code' movie after Christians' protest, but this Secular (?) government is so insensitive about Hindus protest about 'Jodhaa-Akbar' !

A. I saw this movie and I cannot help responding. It is true that Hindus and sanatana dharma suffered badly at the hands of Muslim invaders (and other invaders), but it is wrong to take out that anger on Akbar. Some people cannot see beyond a man's name and religion and hence cannot recognize when a great celestial being is born in a different religion.

Swami Vimalananda, the Aghori yogi mentioned in the "Aghora" series books, is somebody who achieved the highest states of consciousness. He received a lot of knowledge directly from Mother Tara.

Accordinging to him, Akbar and Jodha were the re-incarnation of Samyukta and Rajput King Prithviraj Chouhan. As Prithviraj, he repelled so many Muslim invaders at the border of India. When Muslims finally conquered India, he was reborn as one of them and put breaks on their aggression and changed their ways.

In that age, Muslim invaders engaged in barbarism, destroyed temples, libraries and other relics of native religion and culture. They beheaded Hindus who refused to convert, they raped Hindu women and they beheaded defeated kings. They just tried to wipe out the native religion and culture and replace with theirs. Akbar slowed down the barbarism and aggression and promoted tolerance and integration. He stopped the forced conversions, rapes and beheadings of Hindus. He stopped the destruction of temples and libraries. He talked about respecting other religions while following one's own religion. He even took on the mighty Muslim clerics when he abolished a special tax on Hindus based on religion. He was a man of great character, conviction and principles and was utterly fearless. He had affinity for Rajputs and was even born in a Rajput family and spent early years there. He displayed the samskaras and instincts of a refined and cultured Rajput more than those of a Mughal king - he was so unlike his grandfather Babar, father Humayun and step-brother Adham.

He used to offer arghyas to Sun in the morning and then participate in a Zoroastrian fire ritual of Farsis (similar to our homam) and then do a namaz with Muslim clerics. Such tolerance was unheard of from any other Muslim ruler in those days (or perhaps even today!). Towards the end of his life, he even started his own religion, which was based on his realization and is quite noble. He was a spiritually elevated soul. Irrespective of the religion one follows, one deserves our respect and admiration if one embodies the spirit of sanatana dharma in one's thoughts and actions.

Akbar was a true hero - a being who came down from a higher loka to fulfil a certain mission with the blessings of rishis. His contribution to the safekeeping of sanatana dharma is not to be judged from what harm his fellow Muslims inflicted on sanatana dharma. His contribution is to be judged from what *more* harm to sanatana dharma he helped *avoid*. If he had not come, I have no doubt that sanatana dharma would have suffered much much more than it did. That was not the wish of rishis and that is why they sent somebody to alter the course and minimize the harm. It is unfortunate that those who see the goodness of emperor Ashoka and king Shivaji cannot see the goodness of Akbar simply because he was a Muslim.

It is unfortunate that some Hindus are equating Akbar with the other cruel and barbaric Muslim kings. Who should be (was) a friend of Hindus is being portrayed as an enemy and being shot down. Instead, we should promote his story and inspire more people to be like him. He was a great inspirational figure then and should be now too.

The epic movie "Jodha Akbar" is a very good movie about one of the greatest and most dharmik emperors of India. The director and actor did justice to a man of great character that Akbar was. I am sad about the mud-slinging that some of my fellow Hindus are engaging in. Please do not assassinate the character of Akbar.

If you want, please make movies of the same caliber and cinematic excellence on great Hindu heroes such as Chatrapati Shivaji, Prithviraj Chouhan, Sri Krishnadeva Raya, Vikramarka, Salivahana, Ashoka,

Jnaaneshwar, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Shankaracharya, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi etc. But there is no need to denigrate a fine movie made on Akbar.

These are my 2 cents on the fire over Jodha Akbar.

Ideal Pooja Room

Q. I kindly request you to please spare your precious time to let me/us know what should a pooja room contain & what should be done every day during pooja i.e., bathing of idols every day required. Photo & idol of same deity to be kept or not etc.,. Please elaborate. Your explanations are very convincing.

A. To me, the ideal pooja room is a clean and pure heart. Ideal pooja room is a heart that has no malice for anyone and no ego/pride. Ideal pooja room is a heart that does not feel proud when others praise one and does not feel bad when others abuse one. Ideal pooja room is a heart in which one's favorite deity is established firmly. Ideal pooja room is a heart that is peaceful and views everything and everyone with an equal vision, as a manifestation of one's favorite deity. Ideal pooja room is a heart that does not feel great attraction or great aversion towards anything or anyone. Ideal pooja room is a heart that can engage in various kinds of actions without emotions normally associated those actions lingering in it.

The purpose of a physical pooja room is to create an ideal pooja room as described above in one's heart. Exactly which articles and practices in the physical pooja room mould one's thinking to create the ideal pooja room described above in one's heart depends on who one is, what one's karmas and rinas are and how one's mind is conditioned currently. A particular photo of a deity and meditation in front of it may cultivate that spirit in one person after enough time. A particular idol of a deity and bathing of it every day may cultivate that spirit in one person after enough time. One should use the articles and practices that appeal to one and that are suggested by one's gurus and elders. But the bottomline is that the ideal pooja room exists only in one's heart and one should never forget it. Choicest photos, idols, pooja articles and rituals in the physical pooja room are useless when one's heart is impure. Use a physical pooja room to create the ideal pooja room in your heart.

I would like to quote some portions from the book "Vasishtha's Yoga" by Swami Venkatesananda. This is a translation of "Yoga Vaasishtham". Here Lord Siva teaches Maharshi Vasishtha how to worship the supreme lord of the universe.

"It is he indeed who is worshipped by wise men in various ways and in various forms such as Siva, Vishnu, etc. Now listen to the ways in which he is to be worshipped.

"First of all, one should abandon the body-idea (the notion that 'I am this body'). Meditation alone is true worship. Hence one should constantly worship the Lord of the three worlds by means of meditation. How should one contemplate him? He is pure intelligence, he is as radiant as a thousand suns risen together, he is the light that illumines all lights, he is the inner light, the limitless space is his throat, the firmament is his feet, the directions are his arms, the worlds are the weapons he bears in his hands, the entire universe is hidden in his heart, the gods are hairs on his body, the cosmic potencies are energies in his body, time is his gate-keeper and he has thousands of heads, eyes, ears and arms. He touches all, tastes all, he hears all, he thinks through all though he is beyond thinking. He does everything at all times, he bestows

whatever one thinks of or desires, he dwells in all, he is the all, he alone is to be sought by all. Thus should one contemplate him.

"The Lord is not to be worshipped by material substances but by one's own consciousness. Not by waving of lamps nor lighting incense, nor by offering flowers nor even by offering food or sandalpaste. He is worshipped by self-realisation alone. This is the supreme meditation, this is the supreme worship: the continuous and unbroken awareness of the indwelling presence, inner light or consciousness. While doing whatever one is doing - seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, sleeping, breathing or talking - one should realize one's essential nature as pure consciousness.

"One should contemplate that the Lord is the intelligence in the body. The various functions and faculties in the body serve that intelligence as consorts serve their lord. The mind is the messenger who brings and presents to the Lord the knowledge of the three worlds. The two fundamental energies, viz., the energy of wisdom (jnaana sakti) and the energy of action (kriyaa sakti), are the consorts of the Lord. Diverse aspects of knowledge are his ornaments. The organs of action are the gates through which the Lord enters the outside world.

"He who contemplates in this manner is equanimity itself, his behavior is equanimous, guided by equal vision. He has reached the state of natural goodness and inner purity and he is beautiful in every aspect of his being. He worships the Lord who is the intelligence that pervades his entire body.

The worship is performed day and night perpetually, with the objects that are effortlessly obtained, and are offered to the Lord with a mind firmless established in equanimity and in the right spirit. The Lord should be worshipped with everything that is obtained without effort. One should never make the least effort to obtain that which one does not possess. The Lord should be worshipped by means of all the enjoyments that the body enjoys, through eating, drinking, being with one's consort and such other pleasures. The Lord should be worshipped with the illnesses one experiences and with every sort of unhappiness or suffering one experiences. The Lord should be worshipped with all of one's activities, including life and death and all of one's dreams. The Lord should be worshipped with one's poverty and prosperity. The Lord should be worshipped even with fights and quarrels as well as with sports and other pastimes, and with manifestation of emotions of attraction and aversion. The Lord should be adored with the noble qualities of a pious heart - friendship, compassion, joy and indifference.

"The Lord should be worshipped with all kinds of pleasures that are granted to one unsought, whether those pleasures are sanctioned by the scriptures, etc., or forbidden by them. The Lord should be worshipped with those which are regarded as desirable and others which are regarded as undesirable, with those that are considered appropriate and others that are considered inappropriate. For this worship, one should abandon what is lost and one should accept and receive what has been obtained without effort."

The above is the ideal pooja recommended by Lord Siva to Maharshi Vasishtha. To reach the mental state required for this pooja, one may have to perform other poojas and rituals that require conscious effort to do some things and avoid some other things. But the end goal is to reach the state of equanimity described above by Lord Siva.

Puja Room in Basement- Vaastu Issues

Q. I have a quick question for you if you have a moment. Are there any negative implications as per Vaastu or any other scriptural source regarding having Puja room in one's basement?

A. If a basement is completely under the ground level, it is not a great idea to have a pooja room there. I am not sure of scriptural references, but I do know that basements under ground level contain a somewhat taamasic energy. It is good for sadhanas of devatas such as Chhinnamasta, but not great for most regular sadhanas.

Q. If what you suggest is true, than in India a lot of seers did sadhana for many years in caves and many of them are underground too ... I have seen some of them. I don't think underground=tamasic.

In fact many ashrams in India I have seen have basement type rooms as meditation halls. Any clean place is good, In Guru Gita Lord Shiva has described the types of asana materials and direction of seat.

A. Not all "clean places" are equal. Vibrations do vary from place to place. The vibrations of the place do not matter to some, but do matter to many. Places with taamasic vibrations are not necessarily bad for sadhana for everyone. When one is pure and succeeds in sadhana at such places, one can make faster progress. A smashaana (cemetery) has decidedly stronger tamasic vibrations than basements completely underground. But several great yogis in some traditions did sadhana in smashaana and realized self. Nevertheless it is not conducive to fruitful sadhana by most people.

An average person is better off doing sadhana in places without such vibrations, at least initially. So I do not recommend doing spiritual sadhana in underground basements. There will be exceptions, but this is a safe and prudent position to take.

Using Dairy Products in Poojas

Q. Use of dairy products (milk, curd, ghee) is extolled in our tradition and is encouraged as part of a saatwik lifestyle. However, in this Kali yuga, the reality is that the cows that provide these dairy products for our consumption and use in religious rituals, suffer terribly throughout their life and meet a painful end. This is especially true in large dairy operations in America but I suspect it would be true elsewhere too. So, how do you reconcile the religious beliefs/doctrine and the reality of today's life, with respect to using dairy products?

A. You ask a very poignant question. I will share my thoughts.

The goodness of milk is not just a religious belief. It is a fact you can verify for yourself.

Physically speaking, milk is a great source of protein that is easy to digest. A diet comprising only of fruits and milk gives all the nutrition needed by one and keeps one very calm and relaxed. Normal food

Fruits and milk are a very saattwik food. The plant giving fruits may feel some pain because of wind and other weather factors. Even when the fruit is cut off, the plant may feel pain. Still, the emotions of a plant are far more subtle than those of a human being. The gunas that get into the fruits from the plant are far subtler than the gunas that get into food cooked by a human being. The emotions of a cow are denser than a plant's, but subtler than a human being's.

Milk given by a humanely treated cow is definitely superior, but even otherwise milk is superior to a lot of substances.

Pain and suffering from inhumane treatment is one thing and what they feed is another. A being with a subtle mind can tolerate pain more than others and the mind reacts to pain differently. But the food goes to the core of one's being. We are what we eat. Wrong food affects the mind of a being and changes the nature of the mind itself. The milk given by a normal cow embodies its motherly love and compassion and fills the drinker with such qualities. But milk given by a cow treated with hormones is different. These days they feed cows with hormones, chicken and other meat also. All these slowly change the basic nature of cow's mind. If milk from cows not treated with hormones and not fed chicken is used, that will be a lot better.

If you have a chance to pay more and buy milk from a local farm where cows are not treated with hormones and chicken and treated humanely, it is a good idea to use that milk in religious activities as well as own use.

If a temple can afford it, keeping some cows and getting milk from them is a good idea. This happens at a lot of big temples in India anyway.

One bottom line is that everything is slowly more and more corrupted in Kali yuga. Even fruits are laced with artificial chemicals and pesticides. Even milk in western countries contains chicken fat and hormones. All food contains heavy and dangerous chemicals. More and more, we shun copper and other metal containers and use plastic, thermo coal and other dangerous materials to store food and heat food (and end up consuming small quantities of those materials). We use microwave radiation to heat food. The food and drinks going into us contain gradually more dangerous chemicals that slowly dull the mind. What can we do? Kali will get denser and denser. We can put brakes now and then and slow it down, but we cannot stop it.

Significance of Reading the Stories after Satyanarayana Pooja

Q. What is the significance of reading the stories glorifying the Satyanarayana Vratam at the end of the pooja? This somehow seems to be unique only for this pooja. Is it just meant for deepening the faith in the pooja?

A. Yes, the stories are for increasing the faith. They are also for some subtle messages. For example, you can see that the stories cover a Brahman, a shoodra (wood-cutter), a vaishya (businessman named Sadhu) and a kshatriya (king names Tungadhwaaja). The shoodra and vaishya learned the procedure and did it

themselves (instead of hiring a priest like people do these days). It means that anybody can do this ritual and do it by themselves, to the best of their ability.

The businessman tried to do business with god. Instead of performing the ritual with a desire in mind, he asked for his desire and took a vow that he will do the ritual IF a child is born. He asked god to first give a result. Even after he got a child, he postponed it saying he will do it at his daughter's marriage. He tried to haggle with god and extract the most. If you have a vaishya's temperament, you should guard against the tendency to do business with god.

The king was arrogant and egoistic. He ignored the ritual performed by cowboys because they were using clay idols and clay pots and he did not think much of them or their ritual. He did not bow to the god and rejected the prasada given by them. If you have a kshatriya's temperament, you should guard against the tendency towards arrogance, ego, pride and belittling of others.

Like this, there are some hidden messages that you can get by pondering on the stories.

Of course, when I mention the castes here, I do not necessarily mean the caste of birth. In the old days, people got their caste from father, but it became clear in time as their own temperament and aptitude developed. One interested in only knowledge is a braahmana. One interested in power, authority and control over others is a kshatriya. One interested in money and more money is a vaishya. One interested mainly in physical pleasures is a shoodra. One's caste is decided by one's attitude and aptitude. Valmiki was born as a shoodra, but became a braahmana later and also a maharshi. Vishwamitra was born as a kshatriya, but became a braahmana later and also a maharshi. In the old days, the concept of caste mobility was very much there and caste was not a rigid concept like today. What I said above regarding the weaknesses that people of different castes should try to overcome should be seen in that context and not from the context of a fixed caste based on birth in a family.

Kundalini

Whatever is one's path, Kundalini is not only awakened but goes to Sahasrara when one is established in undifferentiated Self. Even if one does not think in those terms, it still happens. It is incorrect to say that one can realize the highest truths without Kundalini awakened. A more accurate statement would be that one can realize the highest truths without engaging in any specific practices geared at awakening or raising Kundalini.

Some people following the so-called "Kundalini yoga" or other raja/hatha yoga paths specifically try to awaken Kundalini. However, such practices are not at all needed for awakening Kundalini. People belonging to various traditions and paths, not just limited to Hinduism, can experience Kundalini awakening, without knowing anything about the name or the symbolism. There are a lot of misconceptions about Kundalini.

Kundalini is essentially the force of one's self-awareness. Awakened and raised kundalini implies a more refined and higher self-awareness. At the lowest level, we bind ourselves to specific bodies and our self-awareness is limited to a body, a name and other things associated with the body and name. This experience of self as a body corresponds to Kundalini sleeping at Mooladhara. At the highest level, we are the undifferentiated Self, known as Brahman, that is all-pervading. This 'experience' of self

corresponds to Kundalini at Sahasrara. As self-awareness goes from the former to the latter, it may traverse through many stages in between. Correspondingly, many experiences are possible.

Kundalini rises as high as it can when it awakens for the first time, like a spring suppressed for a long time. However, it comes down again and the process of rise from then onwards will be slower, Kundalini will work its way up while the nadis are continuously cleaned (i.e. undesirable conditioning of mind is cleaned). When Kundalini rises high at the time of awakening, it may encounter impurities in nadis and yet rise high through the impurities. This may manifest physically as a powerful experience similar to heavy electricity flowing in the back.

There are thousands of nadis in the sookshma sareera. The exact path taken by Kundalini as it rises for the first time is not fixed. It may change from person to person, based on the impurities in various nadis. The exact "experience" will vary depending on the path traversed and the final point reached by self-awareness (kundalini), before withdrawal.

I actually know one person who had kundalini awakening, rise to Sahasrara and samadhi for 7 days, all happening at the same time. His nadis had already been purified. Once kundalini awakened, he directly went into samadhi, stayed there for 7 days and came back as a fully realized person. But it is a much longer journey for most.

Saying "this is what happens in a Kundalini awakening" is difficult. The exact experience changes from person to person, depending on the path traversed the final point reached by Kundalini. However, I can say one thing confidently: Once Kundalini truly awakens and rises, one will not have any confusion about what happened. But, until kundalini awakening occurs, one may confuse various other experiences (such as some movement of vayu in various nadis) for kundalini movement and wrongly think that kundalini is awakened.

Sensation like ants or worms crawling along the spine or in the head are NOT due to kundalini awakening or rise. That can be due to a little vaayu flowing in various nadis. This can be a premonitory sign (but not a guarantee) of kundalini awakening. Same thing can be said about the sensation of tilting to one side (back or left or right) or the sensation of having completely fallen back (even though one is sitting normally in reality). There are several such premonitory signs.

As a reference, I can narrate the experience of ONE person. He was meditating with a Veda mantra every day. His guru had told him a few months earlier that his time for Kundalini awakening had come. However, he had absolutely no idea what kundalini was and was totally uninformed about nadis, chakras and kundalini. He did not engage in any specific raja/hatha yoga practices. All he did was to sit with his back erect and eyes closed and meditate with a veda mantra. In the weeks before kundalini awakening, he started experiencing various premonitory signs. He guru told him not to be distracted by them and to keep the focus on the mantra and try to forget everything else. When mind starts dwelling on an experience, it gets stuck there and cannot go higher.

When he was meditating one day, his mind was perfectly and intensely focused on the mantra and other thoughts ceased momentarily. Suddenly he became aware of his body. It felt like there was a really tremendous explosion at the base of his spine. Then it felt like a huge amount of electric current was going up his spine from the base. Then it felt like he was not a body but a small point. Then it felt like he

was going up like a rocket at a tremendous speed. Then it felt like there was a tremendously bright white light and there was nothing else. It felt like he was not a small point in that light, but he was the light itself. There was an undescrivable sense of peace and happiness. Suddenly, from nowhere, a thought came "what is this? What happened to my body? I have responsibilities still." Then he became aware of himself as a body sitting in pooja room. When he left pooja room and went out, he felt great love for everyone and happiness. For example, a serial was coming on TV and characters in the serial that he normally disliked for their shallow personalities suddenly felt like real people and he had great love and compassion for those TV serial characters (and other real people too). That state of love and compassion lasted a while and then he was normal.

This short experience was only the beginning of a journey. He experienced many things later on. These experiences were different from each other. As I said earlier, the experience varies based on the path traversed and the point reached by the self-awareness (kundalini). On various occasions, kundalini rose and he saw several sights and several beings within and heard several sounds, including veda mantras and beejaaksharas, again within.

He realized the transientness of a lot that we cling on to and the existence of something far higher and more permanent.

All this slowly started to change his attitude. His senses turned inwards and he critically started to analyze his own thoughts and motives and worked on correcting his attitude. The impact of what was happening around him, what others did and said started to make lesser and lesser impact on him. Luckily, he had a guru who put things in perspective and said that kundalini awakening was just a beginning and the real work was ahead. Depending on one's readiness, that real work can take many many years or even lives.

Kundalini awakening is only a beginning. It is not an end. Even the rise of kundalini to a chakra is not an end. In fact, a big percentage of people with awakened kundalini end up getting stuck at mooladhara itself. Very few make it to the next chakra or the one after, but end up getting stuck there. Very very few make it to higher chakras. And a very small minority actually realise self.

Complete overcoming of ego and sthita prajna described by Sri Krishna in BhagavadGita is the only real end goal of sadhana, whether you are into raja yoga or karma yoga or bhakti yoga or jnaana yoga. Thinking of a mystical experience can only distract one from this goal. I urge sadhakas, especially those who respect my advice, to forget about kundalini and chakras and just keep doing homam and japam (or whatever path they have chosen), keep purifying themselves with sadhana, keep working on their attitude and thought process and keep improving self-control. When (or as) mind becomes purified and one overcomes ego, whatever needs to happen with kundalini WILL happen automatically. Thinking of things in terms of kundalini and mystical experiences is a big deterrent rather than a boost, in one's spiritual sadhana. Instead of trying to manipulate kundalini, try to manipulate the way your mind works and perfect your self-control. Kundalini will automatically follow. One will do well to remember these words.

Jnana Mudra

Q. I have confusion on the placement of index and thumb fingers regarding Jnana Mudra.

Got three different versions:

1) A google search on "Jnana Mudra" shows a lot of images where tip of index finger is touched with the tip of the thumb. However, I remember this being taught to me as "Chin Mudra" in one of Yoga classes. (And that the same mudra with the other 3 fingers closed becomes "Chinmaya Mudra".)

<http://www.yoga.net.au/uploads/images/14/Jnana.gif>

2) An instructor from a different yoga school taught us that the tip of the index finger should touch the root of the thumb and thumb should press the bent index finger with the other 3 fingers open.

http://www.centrejaya.org/IMG/jpg/jnana_mudra.jpg

(In the above image, thumb is not pressing the index finger but we were taught to press)

3) A local priest told me that the tip of the index finger should touch the line in the middle of the thumb (i.e not at the tip, not at the root but the middle line). He also said that the same mudra, when palm is raised to the shoulder level with the open palm facing away from us becomes "Upasana Mudra" and that Lord Dakshina Murthy is sitting in this position. (with one hand, but for Upasana mudra we have to do the same with both hands).

<http://www.federationyoga.qc.ca/mudra.JPG>

Also, I noticed 2 versions of doing (1) and (3). While some people are maintaining 'O' shape between the index finger and thumb (i.e. index finger is curved) , others are bending the index finger at right angles at the first and second bends / lines (when counted from the tip). So the first version is little relaxed than the second.

Could you please clarify which is correct posture for Jnana Mudra ?

A. What you mentioned in (1) is correct, with an O made with the index finger and thumb. Though (2) and (3) are also acceptable, (1) is the best.

Chinmudra is identical to jnaana mudra, except that the palms face down. In jnana mudra, palms face up.

Actually, I suggest a mixture of the two mudras. Make a circle with the index finger and thumb with the tips touching. Do it on both the hands. Make the right hand's palm face up (in jnaana mudra) and the left hand's palm face down (in chinmudra). The two circles generate flow of energy in different directions and balance nicely. With the right hand (pingala nadi - jnaana/wisdom), we are making jnaana mudra. With

the left hand (ida nadi - surrender), we are making chinmudra. This mixed mudra is powerful and is a very balanced mudra to use in meditation.

The path of knowledge and wisdom (jnaana - pingala) is good and the path of surrender and submission (bhakti - ida) is good too. But mixing both is the balanced way.

New Karma vs Resisting the Fruits of Past Karma

Q. I have had conflicts of thought on the concept of brahmacharya in house-holders. Especially, when one of the spouses is inclined to brahmacharya and the other is equally opposite.

A. This is the dilemma faced by a lot of householders. You asked specifically about one area of life. I will actually generalize the question a bit and answer it.

Suppose you want to engage in what you perceive as a good action and someone is throwing obstacles. Should you fight and try to engage in the action at any cost or accept the obstacle as a fruit of previous karma and move on? This is a very tricky question. Let me give my 2 cents on it.

It is true that one has to engage in the right actions. However, it is also true that the reactions to previous actions are received constantly and they create various easy and difficult circumstances for current actions. In other words, all our actions take place in the backdrop of encouraging or discouraging circumstances created by nature as a reaction to our previous actions.

If somebody is throwing obstacles at you, giving you trouble and stopping you from engaging in what you consider as the right action, it is obviously a payback for previous actions. Of course, if the person being used as a medium for this payback by the nature identifies with that action (of throwing an obstacle at you), it becomes new karma for that person and that person will have to pay for it later. But that is **that person's** problem and not yours. As far as you are concerned, nature is finding a medium (other person creating problems) and paying you back for your past actions via that medium. You should not waste time and emotional energy in thoughts like "why is this happening" or "I wish this did not happen".

One cannot be stuck in the past and should live in the present. The only question one should always focus on is: what is the correct action **now**? Past actions are over. Their fruits are not in our hands. There is no point in thinking about them. We should only think about what to do **now**.

Acceptance of the fruits of previous actions is a must for progress. However, accepting the fruit of a previous action does not mean not fighting it. If the correct action **now** is to fight, one should fight. But, even as one fights, one should not be thinking "why did this happen" or "I hate this" or "why is he doing this to me" or "why did I do that before" etc. Emotional investment in such thoughts is a waste of time and energy and, more importantly, an unnecessary new karma!! Accept that a karma has been committed and a fruit (tasty or rotten) has been given by the nature. Accept it. The only question is: what is the right course of action now? Focus on that consciously.

Suppose you are driving on a one lane road and someone is going very slowly in front of you. You slowed someone down in the past and caused inconvenience. For that karma, nature used a new person as the medium and paid you back. Now, a lot of people become frustrated and start cursing the person in front of them. That is useless and new karma. That amounts to not accepting the fruit of a previous karma. Instead, think of what to do. Can you take a different turn and change the route? Is it worthwhile? If not, is there an area where you can safely and legally overtake the slow car by driving on the other side of the road momentarily? Think along the lines of current action and pick the best possible action. If even the best possible action is not good enough, well, so be it. Nothing can be done about it.

Thus, I am differentiating between not accepting the fruits of previous actions and picking correct current actions to overcome the trouble caused by the fruits of previous actions. The former is bad and avoidable. The latter is fine.

If you are always focused on the "present" and "current action", without the unnecessary emotional baggage of "why" and "why not" about the past, you minimize emotional suffering and energy dispersion and maximize your efficiency. Thus, this approach makes sense not only spiritually but practically too.

While that is good, that is not all. Even one behaving like that will incur new karmas. Each current action becomes new karma and gives fruits later. In fact, each action has various repercussions and enables various other people to engage in various other actions. A part of all those actions enabled by one's action comes to the doer of the original action. Thus, each new action generates several new karmas. This will result in fruits later on, which may encourage or discourage one's future actions.

How do we get out of this cycle? Well, by performing the action without a sense of ownership. However, the fact that we are engaging in an action means there is an expected result. We are performing an action because we ideally want a particular result and our judgment says that this action will bring that result. When we want a result and do an action, how can we let go the sense of ownership over it?

It is mighty tough. That is why I suggest an intermediate step. When planning an action, think of a goal and plan the action. But, once the action is done, you can forget about the goal as well as the action. When an action finishes, surrender ownership over it to the Lord. Think that you are now not the owner of the action or its goal or its fruit. It belongs to Lord. Don't waste any further time thinking and analyzing the task. "Oops, I should have done like that", "Why couldn't I do it right", "Will it work? Will I get it?" etc are useless thoughts. Once the action is over, there is really nothing you need to do. You should surrender it to the Lord and move on (to focus on the next action).

I am not giving a specific solution to a specific problem here, but outlining the methodology.

Going back to your example, suppose your current desired good action is brahmacharya. Suppose the obstacle is that your spouse forces you to have sex. This is a fruit of your previous actions. There is no reason to hate him or dislike him or harbor ill-feelings for him. That amounts to not accepting the fruits of your actions. That does not pertain to the question "what should be the current action". That is more like "why I hate the fruit of my previous action". That is a useless activity.

Instead see if there is something that can be done. By discussing or even fighting (it is possible to fight without hatred or anger in the heart. Anger and hatred in the heart is non-acceptance of the fruit of previous actions, while the act of fighting or appearing to fight can merely be the best current action!), do

you have a decent chance of convincing? If you think you do, that may be the correct current action to undertake. If not, don't waste time. If you have to anyway go through with something, you just go through with it. When the correct action you want is impossible, you perform whatever action is the best among feasible actions.

Anyway, whichever action you perform - good or bad, you surrender it to Lord in the end! So, it matters only for a short while. After that, the action is not yours anyway. If it is an action you are performing without interest, you can try to surrender the action to the Lord even as the action is being performed and try to do it without attachment and involvement. Of course, the same can be done with actions you like also, but it is more difficult.

Whether good or bad, if an action is surrendered to the Lord, we form a distance from it. We do not think too much about it and we do not waste time speculating about what result will come etc.

Bottom-line: Two thumb rules: (1) Focus on current action and always ask "what is the *best* thing I can do in the *current* circumstances? (2) After doing what you decided do, surrender the ownership over that action, its goals and its fruits to God. Do NOT think about that action or its goals or its fruits after that. Think about something else (like "what should I do NOW").

Krishna Trayodasi

Krishna Trayodasi tithi (13th lunar day in the waning fortnight) comes on a Saturday is a combination known as "Krishna Shani Trayodasi" and is a very very powerful day to propitiate Saturn. Especially, with Saturn in a deep gandanta in an inimical sign right now, it is good to pray to Saturn.

Even if you are not being troubled by Saturn, you can still pray for the world and for many others who are being troubled.

In fact, when you pray to a deity, you can just pray for the pleasure of the deity involved rather than any other thing. Other things are secondary. Saturn is not too pleased right now with his position and we can pray to please him.

You can download a small Shani mantram as mp3 from my website (link below, go to mantras). You can also pray to Saturn as the Koorma (giant Tortoise) form of Vishnu. Both are identical, according to Parasara. The higher form of Saturn is Koorma Deva. Just as Koorma Deva supported the churning of milky ocean with mount Manthara to get amrita (nectar), the patience, discipline, spirit of hard work and austerity within us (Saturn within us) supports the churning of the milky ocean within us. Milky ocean within us is our spiritual essence, Mt Manthara is Sushumna nadi, churning is the spiritual sadhana (pursuit) and the nectar sought is nothing but Sat-chid-aananda (the true bliss of just being). Anyway, you can pray to Shani with the dwadasakshari mantra for Koorma Deva: "Om Namobhagavate Akooparaaya".

Polygamy and Spiritualism

Q. I had happened to read a very inspiring book by Swami Raama (Living with Himalayan Masters) and it's noted there that for spiritual upliftment the following has to be done:

- a) See Godliness in all**
- b) Consider objects as the means and not the end**
- c) Do not covet for wealth, fame and women.**

My understanding is that these are the concepts that are taken from Vedic Literature as these yogis are followers of jnana and raja yogas. If this hypothesis is correct, why is it that we happen to hear polygamous marriages in the olden days (King Dasaratha, King Vichitravirya etc) King Dasaratha is supposed to be a spiritually enlightened person(Ashtavakra Gita etc) but why this contradiction with regard to marriages here?

A. Yes, running after wealth, fame and women (or men if you are a woman) is not a good thing and blocks one's progress. However, one's internal spirit and attitude cannot be always judged correctly based on external indications. Having abundant wealth does not mean that one is running after wealth (though most wealthy persons are addicted to wealth). A famous man may not be addicted to fame (though many are). A man with ten wives may not be addicted to sex (though many are).

Renunciation that frees one is at the mental level and not necessarily at the physical level. Physical renunciation of things promotes mental renunciation, but does not guarantee it. On the other hand, mental renunciation is possible without physical renunciation. One may renounce the material world and live under a tree in a forest alone for the entire life and yet not overcome the instinctual attraction to money, fame and sex. Another person may live in the middle of wealth, fame and glamour, yet remain detached from all of it and surrender at the feet of god despite being very active in many ways. It is all in the mind.

One needs to interact with the world and world objects in order to pay back one's rinas. The karmas taken on by Swami Vivekananda when he voluntarily chose to come back to earth required him to become famous and spread the message of sanatana dharma to various corners of the world. He **had** to become famous for fulfilling his dharma. It does not mean he craved for fame. He did not. In fact, his guru molded him and released him into the world only after he was strong and detached enough to be unaffected by fame.

Similarly, a king like Dasaratha (or a queen like Draupadi!) may marry several people in order to pay back the rinas that had to be paid back in that life.

Remember one fundamental point: We exist on earth in order to fulfill our dharma. We must do it without incurring new karmas and becoming attached. So what we do should be based on our personal dharma (as decided by our instincts, intelligence and gurus). But what is important is **how** we do it. **That** is what

decides the new karmas incurred for future. If we can do whatever we do with a spirit of detachment and with a sense of surrender to the Lord, we minimize our chances of incurring new troublesome karmas.

On Liberated Sages

Two liberated sages do not act the same way. It depends on the actions destined for them by poorva vasanas and desa-kaala-paatra. One liberated sage may rule a big country (like king Janaka). Another liberated sage may roam forests. Another liberated sage may be involved in the politics of a country and guide a king as the royal guru (like Samartha Ramadas).

You cannot identify a liberated sage from what one does or does not. In fact, you cannot identify a liberated sage unless you too have progressed.

All people are all like pawns in a chess game. The Mother is the master chess player who is moving all these pawns from one square to another and pitting one against another. Most people are akin to pawns that are always worried about where they are going to go next. When a pawn kills the rook, it gets excited. When it is attacked by the opposite pawn, it gets depressed.

A liberated sage is like a pawn that moves as the player (Mother) decides and does not worry much - a pawn that is neither excited nor depressed. Thus, you cannot really identify a liberated sage by what one does or does not.

It is possible that the current pontiff of Kanchi is not deviating from his guru's path because he did not "understand" his guru, as you say. It is possible that his destiny and path are simply different. He is living in different times and the Mother's plans for him, his mutt and his country may be different now.

It is not good to think negatively about a liberated sage. Please note that the current pontiff belongs to a lineage starting from Adi Sankara and that he was picked and guided by Swami Chandrasekhara Saraswati. There may be events that may make you think that there were differences of opinion between the two. But it may all be Her Lila. Please do not jump to any conclusions about the current pontiff and give due respect to him!

Quality vs Quantity

Q. Assuming that one has limited time for japa (or other sadhana), which is better -- doing a smaller count slowly and deliberately, or trying to do the japa very quickly in order to have a higher "count"? Since it is navaratram, take devi-mahatmyam as an example -- is it better to read a few chapters slowly each day, or is it better to try and finish the parayana of all 700 shlokas at super speed?

A. A really learned and elevated soul like you is asking a fool like me for my view - how weird is the play of the Mother! You read shastras far more thoroughly than me. I read only a little and mostly go by my instincts, words of gurus and insights from practical experience. Anyway, as you asked, here are my 2 cents.

The purpose of sadhana is to instill discipline and control the mind. If the wandering mind slows down, one day there is a possibility of mind stopping completely for a little time. When that happens, you perceive the underlying reality that an overactive mind normally stops you from perceiving. As this happens more frequently, you are able to control your mind far better.

If you do things in a business-like attitude, in haste, IMHO, it is not really conducive to slowing the mind down and creating a useful complete/partial silence of the mind. It is very counter-productive. Before any ritual, we are expected to do praanaayaama. The idea is that you get as much control over breathing and hence on mind, and then rely on the meditation/japam/homam to take the mind further into calmness.

If you are somebody who can maintain calmness of your mind even as you rush through some hymns in haste, then I see no problem. But, normally, rushing through something under time pressure destroys the calmness of the mind.

On the other hand, if you do not have artificial pressures to meet a count and go calmly as long as you can, it is more conducive to the calming down of the mind.

Thus, I strongly recommend doing japam at the pace that is comfortable and not detrimental to the calmness and focus of mind. If necessary, I recommend dumping restrictions like meeting a count. In fact, in this age and time, it is probably better to not have a target count at all and have a target time only. In other words, don't say "I will do this mantra for 1008 times" and instead say "I will do this mantra for 40 minutes". Then, for those 40 minutes, you can focus on the mantra calmly.

Of course, quantity also matters. Doing japam for 4 hours every day is definitely better than half hour. But quantity without quality is useless. Very focused meditation for half hour is better than distracted meditation for 4 hours. If you can maintain the quality, then quantity starts to matter.

Q.After astrological consultation people are asked to recite particular mantra for overcoming a specific problem e.g., Marital problem/ Debt. Here, does it mean that by reciting the particular mantra the mind will be calm & we will take better decision or it is something else? Please elaborate.

A. If you succeed in making your mind relatively silent, the sound of the mantra and energy of the deity will fill that vacuum. When your mind reverberates with the energy of the mantra and deity, those gunas will drive your mind and create some changes internally. Internal changes facilitate some external changes.

The whole world is connected. God's divine energy is present in every atom or even sub-atomic particle. When you have a desire for a specific result and create mental energy (through repetition of a mantra) that is sufficient to break the barriers created by the previous karmas as represented by planetary combinations in your horoscope, nature will remove the karmik barrier and make your desire fructify. What kind of mantras and deities have what kind of energy, what kind of karmas represented by horoscopic combinations create what kind of barriers and what kind of energy is needed to break them was well-understood by rishis and captured in a variety of works. Unfortunately, our own understanding of their teachings is corrupted by the nature and quality of the times we live in.

Bottom-line is: Without calming the mind down and creating some positive vibration, no mantra will work. If you routinely read a mantra without any devotion and with business-like spirit, hardly anything will happen. In order to get something from a mantra, be calm, surrender, have devotion, feel the mantra, imagine the form of the deity and let the mantra and its deity fill your mind eventually.

Those who think that they can chant a mantra hastily for 10 min everyday and solve all their problems are kidding themselves.

Query From a Seeker

Q. I know accepting bribe is considered sin, and I am fully aware of the consequences, I am talking of giving bribes and your views on this and how does that come in the way of our spiritual progress. You may be surprised to know why I ask this question, but this is very commonplace in India, Middle East and most of the developing nations of the world and I have talked to many many people, either business owners or people in sales (from small fishes to big sharks) and most of them offer the same in some form or the other. Some say to grow one has to do that. Some say to survive one has to give. So I am wondering what the correct way should be.?

Please give some detailed guidelines from the spiritual perspective and if I do the same, i.e. give bribe, will it come in the way or affect the karma of my family members, specially my wife . As a sideline, could you also explain if my action can affect the karmas of my wife or whatever my wife is today (spiritually, materialistically etc) and will be, is exclusively due to her karmas.If you could kindly throw light on these doubts, that would be much appreciated.

A. As your question may be of interest to others also, I am cc'ing this to vedic-wisdom yahoogroup dedicated to spirituality, after deleting references to your name.

First of all, dharma varies from person to person. Not every person can renounce. Not every person can perform rituals. Not every person can read scriptures. Not every person can contemplate the teachings of scriptures. Not every person can visit temples.

Different people have different duties given by Nature as a result of previous samskaras of the person. One needs to find out and fulfill the duties with as little attachment and ego as possible.

Pre-existing karmik debts of some may make it their dharma to make a lot of money and use it for some good causes. That may require bribing or lying.

That itself is not a great sin. We all do many sins.

One of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's sishyas, Surendra Nath Mitra, worked at a British merchant firm and was a rich man in Calcutta. He was one of the providers of Ramakrishna and the land where Belur Math was started was bought with the money he had donated. When he was confused, Ramakrishna told him:

"The renunciation of 'lust and gold' is for sannyasins. It is not for you. Now and then you should go into solitude and call on God with a yearning heart. Your renunciation should be mental.

"For you, like Chaitanya said, the disciplines to be practised are kindness to living beings, service to the devotees, and chanting the name of God. "Why do I say all this to you? You work in a merchant's office. I say this to you because you have many duties to perform there.

"You tell lies at the office. Then why do I eat the food you offer me? Because you give money in charity; you give away more than you earn. 'The seed of the melon is bigger than the fruit,' as the saying goes. "I cannot eat anything offered by miserly people. Their wealth is squandered in these ways: first, litigation; second, thieves and robbers; third, physicians; fourth, their wicked children's extravagance. It is like that."

Ramakrishna told Surendra to remember the Mother in all his activities and offer all his activities to Her mentally. He also told him to always give in charity.

Similarly, if your job requires you to lie or give bribes, don't worry about it. If that job is needed for fulfilling your dharma towards self or family or world, do what is needed. However, minimize selfishness. Do things for others. Do it for your family and for the society in general. Instead of using all the money for yourself or your family, be generous and donate some to the needy. Also donate some to devotees and saintly people and serve them. The lying and bribes and earning good money (which your samskaras are pulling you to do) will be worthwhile then.

If you do it to survive, survive and do good deeds. If you do it to grow, grow and make sure that some unselfish dharma around you also grows along with you.

Nothing is good or bad per se. How you do it and what frame of mind you do it with is more important than what you do.

At the end of the day, there is some good and bad and they balance out. The trick is to find the right balance.

As you engage in various activities related to the job, mentally offer them to the Divine Mother. This will eventually fill the mind with devotive energy even in the middle of mundane activities. If you are ashamed to do something, you better not do it. If there is justification for something and you are clear in your mind why you are doing it, then you should not be ashamed of it and you should be able to offer it to the Mother. So offer all your activities to the Mother mentally as you do them. If you get into this practice, it will make your mind more confident and calm and increase devotion.

People depending on you for their food etc will also get a part of your karma. So your wife and children will get some part of that karma.

However, if you engage in the activities with love, devotion and a calm mind and put a part of the money to good unselfish use, you need not worry about it.

Rebirth – Will of Shiva or Karma

Q. I have read that Siva undertakes rebirth within the world as a kind of sport or game. So, by which agency is the outcome of rebirth brought to pass; the will of Siva or karma?

A. I will answer the question based on my limited understanding. May the learned forgive errors made by this fool. Your question is not simplistic. The answer is both. Rebirth in such a case happens within the limits of karma that was taken on through free will!

Let me come down a little from the level of Shiva. Let us say there is a rishi (Sage), who did enough good karma and sadhana to stay in a higher realm of consciousness (say, Tapoloka) till the end of this world cycle, without having to take birth again on earth. Let us say he comes back to earth and is born as Swami Vivekananda or someone like that. What happens to him? Is he bound by the karmas? If he faces some sufferings, where are the karmas resulting in that experience coming from?

Whenever a being is born on earth, some of the previously accumulated karmas are ear-marked as "must experience in this lifetime" karmas. Other karmas accumulated in the past may or may not be experienced in this lifetime and may be reserved for future. But those specially marked karmas MUST be experienced (or burnt through sadhana) in the current lifetime no matter what.

If a rishi or a god is born on earth, there may not be enough bad karmas to be marked as "must experience in this lifetime" karmas. Then, in order to be born on this earth, the rishi or god may "take on" new karmas through freewill.

This can be done in several ways. One can take karmas from some other beings. Moreover, the decision of rebirth itself brings new karmas. For example, one's choice of mother and father instantly creates new karmas. If a rishi decides to be born to certain parents, some of the karmas of those parents and their ancestors are automatically transferred to him. The choice of the place can also transfer some part of the karmas associated with that place (town, country etc) to the person. Thus, the moment a rishi or a god decides to be born on earth, a set of karmas is created.

But, typically, reborn gods and rishis carry very little bad karma and a lot of good karma. During the course of life, some more bad karmas may be added. But, overall, they are karmically light (as opposed to heavy). It is relatively easy to burn those karmas and become free. Still, it is possible even for a reborn rishi to struggle for several decades before becoming enlightened.

Bottomline: In the case of those who are born on earth without being forced to, it is a result of karmas that were taken on through free will.

Vimalananda and Aghora Books

Vimalananda was a yogi who lived his life freely and shunned publicity. Even people close to him did not know about his abilities and very few knew what he was capable of. He gave a lot of freewheeling talks to Robert Svoboda on many aspects of spirituality and made the latter take down notes. He asked him to publish them after he left the body. Thus, the books were published after Vimalananda left the world. He did not want any attention while living.

In my humble opinion, these books are a divinely inspired work and Vimalananda was someone who experienced the highest states of consciousness. He must be a reborn rishi. However, I must warn you that these books may shock some of you and put you off.

Most religious practices maintain some level of external purity. Even though we say that "all is Brahman", we treat different objects differently and consider some objects as "pure" and some as "impure".

In aghora, the faith in the internal purity of everything is so high that external purity is de-emphasized and seemingly gross and disgusting things are practiced, just so that one overcomes aversion and attraction for things and sees all as one (Brahman). The path of aghora is not for everyone. A very high level of internal purity is required for success in it. Without it, one should not attempt it, because one is guaranteed to fall.

There is no doubt that these are fantastic books that are directly inspired by Mother Smashaana Taaraa. I recommend them to every spiritual seeker who is curious about tantric practices, with the cautionary word that you should be prepared to be shocked.

Here are the links in Amazon:

(1) "Aghora, At the Left Hand of God" by Robert E Svoboda

<http://www.amazon.com/AGHORA-Left-Hand-God-Aghora/dp/0914732218>

(2)"Aghora II: Kundalini" by Robert E Svoboda

<http://www.amazon.com/AGHORA-II-Kundalini-Aghora/dp/0914732315>

(3)"Aghora III: The Law of Karma" by Robert E Svoboda

<http://www.amazon.com/Aghora-III-Karma-Robert-Svoboda/dp/0914732374>

The first book is awe-inspiring and tends to catch the imagination with its magical tales. It is a popular book. The second book is even more insightful and full of genuine knowledge. There is a lot of nonsense on Kundalini out there and this is the most genuine book. The third book is the least popular of the series, but perhaps the best. Overall, these books have a lot of deep knowledge in coded form, provided one overcomes the initial shock and gets a sense of what aghora is all about.

Vimalananda had a darshan of Smashaana Taaraa when he was 20 or 21 and kept seeing Her almost every night. He basically learnt about everything from Her directly.

Vishnu Sahasra Naama

Q. I am much interested to know regarding Shri Vishnu Sahasra Naama. Is it really worth reciting daily? Please do write something about this sir.

A. Honestly speaking, I am embarrassed that somebody thinks a fool like me can certify or endorse or comment on the "worth" of Vishnu sahasra naam, which was taught by Bhishma to Dharmaraja at the onset of Kali yuga to help human beings in Kali yuga in following their dharma.

Mantras like Vishnu sahasra naam (1000 names of Lord Vishnu), Hanuman chalisa, Chandipath, Mahamantra (Hare Krishna), Gayatri mantra, Rudram, Arunam, Pavamana sooktam, Mrityunjaya mantra, panchakshari, ashtakshari, dwadasakshari etc are well-established and many people achieved spiritual progress with them. One cannot question their worth.

However, that is not to say that everyone meditating with them will make fast spiritual progress. To explain this, let me return to a previous analogy, as I believe that analogies help one understand concepts better.

Mantras are for protecting mind (from its enemies, i.e. one's weaknesses like ego, pride, attachment, lust, anger etc). Imagine one's mind to be a person. Imagine one's weaknesses to be enemies charging at the person aggressively. Imagine mantra to be a weapon (stick or stone or gun) in the hands of the person.

One may have a nice stick that was used by thousand people before him to beat up strong enemies. Yet, he may not know how to use it and the weapon may become ineffective in his hands. If one taps an aggressive enemy gently with a stick, that will hardly be effective. One has to beat hard and with all the energy one can muster. Similarly, one's will power should be strongly focused on overcoming ego, pride, lust, anger, jealousy etc and one should make conscious and forceful effort.

If one with some experience in beating up enemies with sticks tries to throw stones at them, he may not know how to aim and may fail. Similarly, one with experience in chanting other mantras tries beejaksharas, one may not succeed in aiming them correctly and making them work.

If one not knowing how to shoot a gun aims a gun confidently as the enemy approaches and tries in vain to shoot, one will fail and be beaten by enemy. Similarly, one not knowing how to use powerful Veda mantras is overconfident, he may fail in sadhana and succumb to ego, pride etc. If one at least realizes that one cannot shoot, one can at least use the gun as a stick and try to beat up the enemy. Similarly, if one at least realizes that one does not know how to put veda mantra to use, one can chant the veda mantra hundreds or thousands of times every day with sincerity, surrender and humility and try consciously to control negative emotions such as ego, pride, lust, anger, jealousy etc.

Bottom-line is this: Just as how well a person puts a weapon to use and overcomes enemies depends on how strong and serious the person is, how much training and practice he has in using the weapon, similarly how well a person puts a mantra to use to overcome internal weaknesses depends on what kind of mental conditioning one has, how strong a desire one has for spiritual progress, what kind of a guru one has and how much effort one puts into spiritual sadhana. Thus, we cannot make a blanket statement that reading Vishnu sahasra naam, for example, everyday will help one become pure and get moksha.

While one engages in various external practices as a part of the spiritual sadhana, one should remember that the internal goal is to overcome ego and attain a spirit of complete surrender and detachment and try to cultivate that internal spirit. In the beginning, things are difficult and this is a mere thought. But, as one progresses and crosses a threshold, external practices promote stronger internal focus and purity and stronger internal focus and purity promote better and more effective sessions of external practice. A kind

of synergy develops between them. Eventually, one makes sufficient progress internally, which is the goal after all.

Whatever mantra or stotra or ritual was given to you by a guru that you *surrendered* to, you should follow it while engaging in internal contemplation on an ongoing basis.

Q. My question was wrong I understand now. I just wanted to know about Shri Vishnu Sahasra Naam Mahatmya in your words and I am convinced with your answer. Thanks Narsimhaji.

A. Vishnu is the maintainer of dharma and sustainer of the worlds. He maintains natural order in creation. One may start chanting his names without understanding the meanings. After chanting those names for a few months or years, one will wonder about the meanings and learn the meanings of those 1000 names. Then, as one chants, one's mind forms auspicious images based on those names. Frequent occurrence of those images and thoughts in the mind purifies the mind and strengthens certain tendencies of the mind and weakens others.

Vishnu sahasra naam is a very saattwik prayer that promotes dharma and sattwa in the person.

Vidya Maya and Avidya Maya

Pride of vidya maya (the illusion of knowledge) is far better than pride of avidya maya (the illusion of ignorance). One who learns vedas, upanishad and vedangas and is proud of one's knowledge and one who engages in rituals and is proud of one's rituals, are better than many people who are in utter ignorance and yet proud of this or that. However, my point is that both are far away from realization.

True knowledge is one that makes one lose pride. True knowledge is one that increases the surrender. True knowledge is one that does not bind further, but liberates one.

As you correctly pointed out, recognizing the problem of pride is the first step in improving. As you said, pride does not leave one even during spiritual sadhana! One may be proud of one's sadhana, even without fully realizing it consciously. One does not have to dig deep. One needs to only scratch the surface of one's mind, thoughts and instincts to see the lion of ego alive, kicking and roaring.

As long as one recognizes the problem and *consciously* tries to take the "sarvam krishaarpanamastu" statement at the end of rituals seriously and literally, one is on the right path and one will eventually overcome.

Manish keeps telling me, "Narasimha, do not underestimate anyone. Each being in this universe has a birth right to liberation. If She wishes, a split second is enough to liberate one. Do not have any bias. There is a divine spark in *everyone*. Try to light that spark in people. Leave the rest to Her." Every person has a potential. Just some conscious effort is needed to fulfill that potential.

First recognize pride and ego in your actions, thoughts and instincts. Then make a conscious effort to overcome it.

Vedic Wisdom for Learners

Q. There is a profound gravitation towards the knowledge flowing here. From the sidelines, I aspire to learn the basics to better understand your messages. In your previous mails you suggested Ganapathi Homam as a daily ritual. Your messages convey a concept that there are umpteen paths to vedic wisdom. For starters can you please give a list of readings and daily practices. It could be due to lack of initiation or laziness if we cannot do Homam. What do you think we should start with?

A. There are so many practices that are geared towards creating discipline, reducing ego, overcoming the inner enemies and purifying oneself.

Any practice will do. However, depending on who one was earlier and what one did earlier, one may experience different levels of affinity towards different practices and also get results at different speeds with different practices.

Normal people can only give you good advice from THEIR perspective. They cannot give you advice from YOUR perspective. Only a sadguru, who knows more about the real you than you yourself do, can give you advice from your perspective. Unfortunately, I am not one.

If you want my suggestion nevertheless, here are some basic suggestions.

(1) In "Yoga Vaasishtham", Maharshi Vasishtha prescribes company of saints as the first step in acquiring self-knowledge. Spend some time every week with spiritually inclined people discussing spiritual matters.

(2) Identify one personal weakness (e.g. anger, jealousy). Make a sincere effort to overcome it. Whenever the weakness strikes you (e.g. you become angry), consciously restrain yourself and divert your mind to something else (e.g. repeating a mantra).

(3) Take a mantra (e.g. Gayatri mantra). Spend atleast 30 minutes every day repeating that mantra. Sit comfortably with a reasonably straight back and closed eyes and repeat the mantra. If your mind wanders off the mantra and its deity and you get distracted by all kinds of thoughts, do not worry. Accept it as the nature of mind and make a conscious effort to pull the mind back into the mantra and its deity.

(4) Before that japa, do a simple pranayama for 5 minutes. Breath in through the right nostril for n seconds, breath out through the left nostril for n seconds, breath in through the same left nostril for another n seconds and then breath out through the right nostril for n seconds. Keep the time duration - n seconds - approximately the same in all steps. If you want, you can use a small mantra as the measure of time and say it mentally in each step. Keep repeating this sequence for 5 minutes.

(5) Cultivate the thinking that you do not own anything. Think that you are just a *temporary caretaker* of things that seem like your possessions (e.g. you relations, your house, your car and even your own body, name, fame etc). Tell yourself that all these are god's property and that you are servant and a temporary caretaker. Just as a servant working at a rich man's house takes excellent care of things entrusted to him without developing the "it is mine" attachment to the things, tell yourself that you too have to take excellent care of all the things entrusted to you (e.g. your relations, your house, your car, your body, name, fame etc) while cultivating the "it is god's and not mine" sense.

This is a very important step and just keep on trying if you keep failing.

(6) Read a little of some scripture or teachings of a holy man everyday. Examples are BhagavadGita, Jnaneshwari etc. I particularly recommend "Gospel of Ramakrishna". Ramakrishna Parahamamsa was a great master who taught the highest knowledge in simplest terms to all kinds of people. Read his teachings with an open mind, understand them and try to follow them.

If some previous karmas are blocking one's spiritual progress, one has to either burn those karmas through sadhana or experience the result of the karmas. Then only the blockage will go away. There is no other way.

Each minute spent in spiritual sadhana - including japam, homam etc - contributes to that. No effort is wasted. One should never get disheartened.

What is Tantra?

The word tantra has a negative connotation due to so many people abusing tantra. Tantra basically means a procedure. Different rituals have different procedures. Some are more elaborate and some are simple. But there is a tantra in every ritual.

Whether a ritual is saattwik or raajasik or taamasik is decided by the attitude and thinking involved and not based on the deity or the procedure alone.

Choice of deity based on horoscope is for bhakti yoga. However, our understanding of Jyotisha is imperfect. Sometimes, we give a wrong advice. But, in this case, wrong advice is not catastrophic. If a seeker is sincere, he will eventually find the right direction.

A sadguru is far more useful than astrology to show the correct direction in which one makes quick progress.

Turiya Awastha

Q. "When the consciousness is in the state of unmodified nirguna Brahman, it is no longer aware of self as an object in the field of duality". Does this equate to the fourth state known as turiya?

A. Not quite. Within the wakeful state, dreaming state and deep sleep state, there are further divisions and distinctions. The above state of nirvikalpa samadhi is a higher state within the sushupti (deep sleep) state.

Even after being immersed in nirguna Brahman without objectification for a few hours, a sankalpa can come suddenly and one can come back to the field of duality and perceive duality again. This means a return to the wakeful/dreaming state. Only when one starts perceiving all objects in the field of duality without a sense of objectification and starts to see all as nirguna Brahman, does one remain established in Brahman for ever. If one can remain in that state for ever, then one is in Turiya. Once one reaches Turiya, one does not go back to the other three states anymore.

Turiya permeates the other three states. One in Turiya may *appear* to be awake or asleep or dreaming. He may appear to be experiencing or interacting with the objects of the field of duality. But one in reality sees all as Brahman at all times. If one can reach that state and stay in that state forever, then and only then is one in Turiya.

It can be practiced in meditation. The higher states of deep sleep aren't more easily achievable from the sleep state, just because they are labeled with the word "sleep". One is better off trying to reach them in meditation.

You may be interested in the seven states described by Maharshi Vasishtha to Lord Ramachandra in "Yoga Vaasishtham". The same book contains a description of three very high states by Lord Shiva to Maharshi Vasishtha.

More on Spirituality

Q. But, what “real spiritualism” is still yet to be defined.

A. I will try more. But first I want to recommend a couple of books:

(1) "Yoga Vaasishtham" is undoubtedly one of the best works available to a spiritually inclined person with interest in vedanta. It is a practical book with many stories (unlike most dry vedanta books) and teaches profound lessons through stories.

Interestingly, I am typing this on the eve of Sree Rama Navami (by the way, happy Sree Rama Navami to all of you!). When Maharshi Vishwamitra came to request Dasaratha to send Lord Rama with him to protect his yajna from demons, Dasaratha was hesitant and Lord Ramachandra was confused. At the request of Maharshi Vishwamitra and others, Maharshi Vasishtha taught Lord Ramachandra the essence of the knowledge of Self, in front of other maharshis, kings and gods. These teachings were captured by Maharshi Valmiki as the book "Yoga Vaasishtham".

This work helped even maharshis like Bharadwaja to obtain Brahma jnana. When Valmiki explained Vasishtha's teachings to Bharadwaja, he became realized.

There is a truly inspired English translation by Swami Venkatesananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda of Hrishikesh (Divine Life Society). Swami Sivananda is considered by some to be a re-incarnation of Maharshi Vasishtha.

<http://www.amazon.com/Vasisthas-Yoga-Venkatesananda/dp/0791413640>

This is the best book I have read in my life and I can say this is the book that influenced me the most and changed my thinking.

(2) Bhagavad Gita is a marvelous compendium on practical spirituality. It covers various paths like jnana yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, sannyasa yoga etc. While there are many commentaries and translations, I prefer the treatment of Sant Jnaneshwar. He is a rare Krishna bhakta who is also associated with the path of aghora and nathas! While most Krishna bhaktas follow dwaita and vivishtaadwaita, Jnaneshwar's treatment is purely adwaitic.

In Yoga Vasishtham, Vasishtha tells Rama that Vishnu would appear as Krishna in a later yuga and teach the essence of Veda to Arjuna. Vasishtha goes to great lengths on what Krishna teaches. Some modern commentaries on Bhagavad Gita deviate from the adwaitic principles of vedanta and interpret some teachings of Krishna in a way that contradicts Vasishtha's take. Sant Jnaneshwar's interpretation is consistent with Vasishtha's and also consistent with upanishads and vedanta.

<http://www.amazon.com/Jnaneshwars-Gita-Jnaneshwari-Swami-Kripananda/dp/0911307648>

Self-realized person is one who has realized that all is Brahman and not bound by any limited ego, even though actions continue to spring from a previously existing ego (that continues to wind down like a fan after electricity is turned off).

Spiritual person is one who is making *some progress* towards becoming a self-realized person at a point in future.

Unfortunately, scriptures can describe a self-realized person and how he thinks, but they cannot give any fool-proof steps which, when followed by one, can ensure self-realization.

Just thinking "all is Brahman" and understanding it *intellectually* is not sufficient. Let me drive my point home using an analogy.

Suppose someone goes to a movie and becomes so involved in the movie that he behaves as though something is really happening on the screen. For example, suppose there is a scene where the heroine is in a dark room and villain is about to stab her in the back from behind her. Suppose there is tense music. One may be shuddering with expectation. One may jump with shock and tension.

There may be one person who completely realizes that this is just an illusion and nothing is actually happening and watches it without any emotional involvement whatsoever. He is analogous to a realized person. Suppose someone is so involved and shouts with happiness when something good happens in the movie and shudders when something terrible happens in the movie. He is analogous to a person deeply stuck in maya. Really speaking, this life we live is quite similar to a big movie, except that it is interactive. Thus, my analogy is quite appropriate.

Now, one smart person may very well know that this movie thing is not really happening and hence controlling emotions mostly. But an odd scene may make him shudder too! Such a person is analogous to one who intellectually understands and appreciates the essence of Veda (that all is Brahman and the objects we see are all an illusion) and yet does not fully comprehend it.

If one fully realizes, then nothing should make one happy or sad internally. One may act externally as though one is happy or sad, but the heart should be stable always and not excited or depressed by *anything*. If all is Brahman, why should anything excite you depress you? In our analogy, such a person is like one watching the movie with zero involvement, realizing at all times that it is only imaginary and not happening for real and not being shaken even once. One who has only an intellectual understanding and not a complete understanding may sometimes be affected by the illusion.

If someone praises you, does it excite you? If someone humiliates, does it upset you? If something seems nice, do you want to have it? If something seems disgusting, do you want to go away?

As long as there is attachment and self-identification with a body or a name or some other limited object, some ego remains and causes all of the above. It results in happiness on some events and sadness on some events. Self-realization cannot come without overcoming ego *fully*. It never comes from an intellectual understanding of the dictum "all is Brahman". It comes from experiencing it.

How can one go from a limited ego to zero ego? There is no single path. As I said already, scriptures only describe how a realized person thinks, but they cannot give a fool-proof path to realization.

However, some scriptures do outline some paths for reference. While they are not fool-proof and do not guarantee realization, they can be helpful.

One person may sit down in seclusion in a forest or in Himalayas or a remote cave and keep eating enough to just survive and actively contemplate all the time "Who am I? Am I this body? Who am I? What are all these objects I perceive? What is all this?" and eventually realize Self. This is jnana yoga.

One person may pray to a specific deity and slowly force oneself to see the entire universe as another form of that deity and see that deity in everything. One may eventually realize Self through that deity. This is bhakti yoga.

One person may consider work and service as god and spend all of one's time serving people without prejudices, without any self-pride and without any selfish motives. One may try to see god in all people and all service and may eventually realize Self. This is karma yoga.

One person may use forceful methods of raja yoga, control the body, senses and mind through yogic practices, forcefully raise self-awareness (Kundalini shakti) to higher realms of consciousness. They too may eventually realize Self.

In each of these four broad paths, there are many sub-paths. But please realize that no path guarantees self-realization. They help, but do not guarantee anything. And the only method of spiritual progress, IMHO, is how much ego has been overcome.

Most people stick to one method. There are exceptions like Ramakrishna Paramahansa who tried each path and succeeded. In fact, I believe the logo of Ramakrishna mutt employs symbols of each of these paths in it! While each saint is great and one cannot compare them, Ramakrishna was somebody else. His lila (play) cannot fully be understood by most people even today, after such a long time. His lila may in fact continue to play out long after he left the body.

I just want to share my personal view on the link between the above paths and Jyotish. This is not from any classic and based on my own intuition.

The path of karma yoga is seen from the element of earth. The path of bhakti yoga is seen from the element of water. The path of jnaana yoga is seen from the element of fire. The path of raja yoga is seen from the element of air. Of course, ether is in all. Ether or space is the basis of all yoga.

Verse about Cow Sacrifice

Q. I came across a verse in the Rig Veda 8-43-11 : "Let us serve Agni with our hymns, Disposer, fed on ox and cow," (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv08043.htm>).

Does that mean cow sacrifice was allowed in Vedic times? Kindly enlighten us on the meaning of this verse.

A. Do you really think that these internet translations are accurate? Of course not. These are unintelligent and dumb translations at best and ill-motivated translations with a hideous agenda at worst. In either case, do not rely on them. Let me reproduce the rik.

Rishi: Angirasa Virupa, Chhandas: Gayatri, Devata: Agni

ukShaannaaya vashaannaaya somapR^iShThaaya vedhase | stomairvidhemaagnaye |

RV 8-43-11 |

The translation given by Swami Satya Prakash Saraswati in the version published by Veda Pratishtana, New Delhi is: "Let us adore with hymns the fire-divine, who is fed on agricultural products, dairy products, and who bears the herbal plants on the back."

This is far more intelligent than what you quoted. However, I am still not satisfied. Let me give my take on it. I just meditated on it for a few minutes and this is what I make of it.

(uksha = supreme, large

anna = matter)

ukshaannaaya = to one who feeds the channel of domination, i.e. pingala nadi

(vasha = submissive, controlled, obedient

anna = matter)

vashaannaaya = to one who feeds the channel of submission, i.e. ida nadi

somapR^iShThaaya = to one who carries the nectar of immortality in the middle channel, i.e. sushumna nadi

vedhase = to the one who is virtuous and great

stomaih = by hymns

vidhema = may we worship/praise/honor/contemplate

agnaye = to fire.

Meaning:

"May we contemplate on the fire god, who feeds the pingala nadi of dominance and ida nadi of submission and virtuously carries the nectar of immortality in the sushumna nadi."

Purport:

"Fire is the transformative power. It is the basis of our existence. It is what fuels (feeds) every part of our being. The fire that burns in the sookshma sareera (subtle body) is called bhoota agni. This fire feeds the pingala nadi (solar channel of the subtle body) and causes analytical and logical abilities and aggressive instincts of domination and control. The same bhoota agni also feeds the ida nadi (lunar channel of the subtle body) and causes submission and calmness. In modern medical parlance, we can say the same fire feeds and runs the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and provokes the "push" and "pull" actions of the push-pull nervous system. In addition, the same bhoota agni also drives the sushumna nadi and makes the nectar of immortality (sat-chid-ananda) flow in that channel. We should contemplate the various roles played by this subtle fire in our subtle body in amazement."

If I spend more time, I may be able to do better justice. But this is what I understand of this rik as of now.

Veda is about self-knowledge and nothing less. Most people cannot understand even a single verse of Veda fully in an entire life. Ignore the people who claim to be scholars in Veda and make claims on what Veda says and what Veda does not say. Secondly, time has come to dump all the abusive and motivated translations of Veda.

The only translation/commentary on Veda that pleased me until now is the one by Sri Aurobindo. He is undoubtedly a reborn rishi. Such depth and clarity of thinking is impossible otherwise.

Why Flowers Signify Aakaasa Tatva

Q. Can you please explain how flower indicates the aakasa tatva ? It is easy to understand for the other 4 elements.

Deepa - light – Agni

Gandha - smell – Bhu

Naivedya - taste – Jala

Dhoopa - smoke – Vayu

But not able to understand how flower signifies aakasa tatva.

A. This is a good question. When offering five services to deities representing the five elements, flower is used to represent the element of ether or rather space (aakaasa tattva). The question is why, i.e. what is the link.

Aakaasa is the subtlest element. Aakaasa or space is that which is everywhere. It changes and other elements come from it. You may see a solid matter or liquid matter or air in a place *now*, but there was space there before. It is the basis of all other elements.

Similarly, a flower is the basis of many things. Flower gives rise to a fruit. Fruit contains seeds and seeds give rise to plants. Plants become trees. Trees give more flowers and fruits. All these lie within the original flower as a potentiality, just as various element lie within space (aakaasa) as a potentiality.

When you see a tree or a plant or a fruit, you do not see a flower in them and yet they came from a flower. Similarly, when you see a solid or liquid or airy matter, you do not see space in it and yet they came from space.

The purpose of mantras and rituals is to guide the mind along certain routes where it can visualize certain things well and forget other things. A lot of deep philosophy exists behind symbols used in rituals. The basic philosophy of veda and upanishad is behind a lot of symbols used in rituals and mantras. Following rituals faithfully without understanding the symbolism is also very good. It will eventually have the desired effect on the mind. But, pondering the symbolism can take one closer to the upanishadic essence represented by the symbols.

Somebody like Ramakrishna Paramahansa might offer a flower to Kaali, immediately visualize the symbolism represented by it, visualize how fruit, plant, tree, more flowers, more fruits and more trees come from a flower and, at a deeper level, how various tattvas, deities, worlds and beings evolve from the Supreme Being and just go into samadhi mesmerized by the lila of god. We should try to overcome the regular pre-occupations of the mind and focus it on god and god's lila.

Significance of Long Hair and Beard

Q. Is there any significance of having long hair and beard in the spiritual sadhana? we typically see lot of sadhus having long beard and hair, also some households who does some spiritual sadhana emulate that. I understand these as the external signs, but this has been an age old practice to have long hair for the spiritual sadhakas, please throw some light on this topic.

A. As one does spiritual sadhana, some shakti (can be translated as energy or purity) may be accumulated. However, certain egoistic actions make one lose some or all of the accumulated shakti.

Long hair and beard trap some shakti and help avoid situations where one commits an action that results in a loss of all of one's shakti. They improve the control over senses in tricky situations.

It is like a small railing atop a mountain. If one wanders off at night, those railings can stop one from falling. A small barrier can make a big difference at critical times. Beard and long hair are like that small barrier.

Of course, a small railing cannot save a car driving at 70 mph from plunging down. But it can stop a person wandering at night. Similarly, beard and long hair are not sufficient for control over senses, but one who made a lot of progress and still struggling at some critical times can benefit significantly from long hair and beard.

BTW, the tradition of growing long hair or beard is not limited to Hinduism. It is there in many religions.

Questions on Spirituality, Astrology

Q. My first question is why God created human beings?

A. Lot of philosophical questions can be answered in multiple ways. There is no single correct answer. The answer appropriate for one person is inappropriate for another. If I say "God is the doer of all things. When Arjuna killed his gurus and elders, actually God did it through him", a lesser person may imitate it and that will be unfortunate. But that will be a very appropriate point to make to a more elevated person who still has a sense of ownership over his actions and need to give it up.

Thus, one cannot answer questions such as yours without understanding the current spiritual level of the asking person. Otherwise the answer will be utterly useless. I will go by my gut and answer the way I think will be useful to you and some others on the vedic-wisdom yahoogroup.

God created human beings and other beings so that there is some commotion in the Atman (cosmic soul). If there is no different beings with different qualities, the whole universe will be filled with Atman (cosmic soul). That too happens for a while. But, at other times, various beings with various qualities are created. An ocean may be still for a while and give rise to a lot of waves for a while. If cosmic soul is like an ocean, various beings are like waves in the ocean.

Q. When God is creating all the human beings, we are all God's children. Then why he is differentiating some people are good, some are bad? On what basis he is deciding that "this person will have good habits in his life time and that person will have all bad habits? "

A. God decides based on the cumulative good/bad of all your previous actions and wishes over all your lives so far. If you have good tendencies, it is because of good actions and wishes in the past. If you have bad tendencies, it is because of bad actions and wishes in the past. All you can do is to engage in good actions and have good wishes. That will keep you in good stead in future.

Q. Some of the astrologers say to me, whatever problems/sufferings etc., we are facing in this life time is due to our previous karma, i.e., we have done some sin to others in our previous birth. Who induced us to do sin in our previous birth to others?

A. Your own free will!!!! That is why now you have to pay for it. Nature works on the principle of "equal reaction to every action". You engaged in an action using your own free will and nature has to somehow find a way to give the equal reaction to that action. God is there to implement the rules of nature.

The circumstances faced by you are decided by nature based on the previous actions exerted by your free will. Within the limitations imposed by those circumstances, your free will decides one particular action among several possible actions. That gets added to the list of your actions and nature pays back for it in future by creating different circumstances for you to operate under.

Q. Some people say, God is inside us. When God is inside us, why people are doing sin to others? If they are doing, why God is not correcting them??

A. There is a duality and singularity. In the world of singularity, there is one god - the cosmic being. Gods and demons, good and bad, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, intelligence and foolishness, happiness and sadness, knowledge and ignorance, punya and sin - all are nothing but this singular god. There is nothing but that singular god. That singular god lives in all of us, in each molecule, atom and sub-atomic particle of this universe. The entire core of our being is filled with this singular god.

When the same world is seen through the lense of duality, this singular god manifests as different entities. In the world of duality, there are various gods engaged in various good roles and various demons engaged in various bad roles. There is always a tussle between them.

Now again, all these gods and demons engaged in various good and bad roles exist within us in a microcosmic form. The Brihaspati (teacher of gods) within us (i.e. our intelligence and discretion) tells the gods within us (various good qualities) what to do and works for their victory. Various gods and demons discharge their roles. But the result varies.

If a person's spiritual evolution is like that of the world when Ravana was ruling earth, then the demons inside the person will be dominating over the gods and gods go into hiding within that person. He will engage in sins. If a person's spiritual evolution is like that of the world when Rama killed Ravana and ruled earth in peace and prosperity, then the gods inside that person will be dominating over the demons. Ge will engage in good deeds. And so on.

So, realize that there are gods and demons inside us and there is a constant tussle between them. The good thing is that gods are amara, i.e. immortal. They can be weak and defeated, but they never completely die. Demons can die, gods can never die. They may be defeated, but they live on and overcome demons oneday!

If someone tells you "there is only one god and he is in all of us", realize that this refers to the singular god I described earlier. With that god, there is no distinction between good and bad. The distinction comes with gods of duality. The moment you talk of duality, gods and demons are both there and there is a tussle.

Q. Nowadays, they are so many accidents happening in the city. Painful deaths are happening which cannot be digested / make us sleepless for nights together. Why God is giving these type of painful death to people? Why he is so cruel? People say the person who died might have made sin to others in last birth. For that, this kind of cruelty is required? Why God is not giving peaceful death??

A. God is simply doing his job. Nature is based on the rule of equal reaction to one's actions and God impassionately implements that rule. If one was really cruel to somebody else and killed cruelly, nature will have to find a way to give an equal reaction. It is sad, but that is how nature works!

Q. My another question is regarding family issues. Most of the daughters-in-law suffer because of their Mothers-in-law/Fathers-in-law/Sisters-in-law and Husbands or vice versa. I have come across so many families like this. If daughter in law is tortured from her husband's family, is it due to her horoscope or due to society. If it is due to her horoscope, it's the same answer that it's her karma. Why her karma is written like that? Why she

should suffer in her life?? Who has made her to suffer like this(even if she is of good character/good habits)??

A. The previous karmas and rinas to various people decide the give and take in this life. The relations in this life may be relations in the past life too (but the exact relationship may be different). If you harassed a particular person in the last life, nature may provide an opportunity for that person to harass you now.

Again, if nature is placing you in a difficult circumstance where someone is harassing you and making life difficult, it is not because nature hates you or god hates you. It is because you did exactly the same thing to someone else previously. Nature is paying back.

The goal of this "pay back game" of nature is that after a big cycle of actions and equal reactions, one understands how nature works and manages to leave the game! When all the players leave the game, the game will end. Until then, the game will go on...

Q. Nowadays, it is becoming very unsafe for ladies in the society. Some girls are getting exploited and some knowingly going in the wrong way making a mindset that nothing is wrong. Why society has developed like this??When God has created the world, why he is allowing it to go worse? What will be the future of the youngsters? Whether we can bring up our children with good habits? I feel it's very difficult..All these things related to astrology?

A. As more and more people engage in more and more sinful behavior, this creates of a spiral of adharma. That increases the negative quality of time in general and leads to more and more people engaging in adharma. It is a spiral.

Unfortunately, we are in Kali yuga and adharma will only increase in the long run. But, by engaging in good actions of great magnitude, we can create positive energy and slow down this spiral of adharma.

It is good that you worry about those who suffer. That compassion is great. But that compassion alone is not sufficient. Instead, if you and others engage in good actions and create a positive energy of great magnitude in the world, that can be helpful. If ten thousand people are performing a homam every morning, trying to transform their attitude to that of surrender to god and limited ego, that can really transform the world at least for a few decades and centuries.

Do homam, do meditation, read good books, have good company, discuss spiritual matters (instead of wasting time on meaningless entertainment), think of god, try to understand the ways of god, lessen pride and ego, try to do your best in each action without much attachment, analyze each of your own actions and correct the internal attitude. If you keep up like this and several others do, the problems you mentioned can see some relief.

Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's Statement about Being Reborn

Q. I vaguely recall reading somewhere that Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa once stated that he would be reborn in 100 or 150 years time; can anyone kindly verify whether that

statement is indeed true; and if so kindly provide a reference to the text that has that quote? I also recall reading that he mentioned that his disciples would again gather with him this time around as well; so any references to that would be appreciated as well.

A. Please check "Ramakrishna as we saw him" by Swami Chetanananda. Several people who knew Ramakrishna well reminisced about their encounters with him and Swami Chetanananda chronicled those in that book.

Read the chapter on Sarada Devi. In that chapter, Sarada Mata remembers Ramakrishna. One of the accounts mentions the rebirth prediction.

Ramakrishna told Sarada Mata pointing at the northwest that he would be back after 100 years. Sarada Mata told him she would not come back. His niece Lakshmi Devi also said she definitely did not want to come back. Ramakrishna then laughed and said "how can you people not come back? Our karmas are intertwined. Just as the whole kalmi plant on the water surface of a pond comes off when you pull ONE stem, all of you WILL have to come back when I come back."

Thus, not only did Ramakrishna predict that he would come back after about 100 years, but he also predicted that key people around him would be back. It is possible that Sarada Mata, his sishyas, Mathur, Ramkumar, Rani Rasmani, Girish etc all will/have come back.

But how to identify him. Well, you cannot. And you need not!

Take another example. Narasimha, Rama and Krishna are incarnations of the same being (Vishnu). But each is unique and not replicable by another. Similarly, Ramakrishna is unique. Those who like him will get knowledge and spiritual progress through him. The reborn version may again be unique and have a new lila - a new play. Those who like him may get knowledge and spiritual progress through him.

Bottomline is : Those who find Ramakrishna useful need not find his reborn version useful. Also, to those who find his reborn version to be useful, it may not matter that he is the rebirth of Ramakrishna. Those who are attached to Lord Narasimha may not be attracted to Lord Rama. And, to those who worship Lord Rama, it may not matter that he is the rebirth of Lord Narasimha.

There are different classes of beings. While some beings merge in Brahman and do not come back, some beings are ever-free and yet engage in the game from time to time. Gods like Vishnu, Shiva etc and rishis are free and yet participate in the game of duality from time to time. Though they are free, they do not merge back in Brahman for a long time. Such beings keep taking birth on earth from time to time. I believe that Ramakrishna, Sarada Mata, Vivekananda, Brahmananda etc are such beings.

On Advaitism, Shiva's Worship and Different Paths

If you are interested in Advaitism (non-duality), I recommend reading the works of Adi Shankara. He is considered a great teacher of Advaitism and an incarnation of Lord Shiva Himself. In fact, a scripture mentions Shiva telling Parvati that he will be born in Kali Yuga as Adi Shankara to revive Advaitism and to refine the teachings of Buddha.

I personally consider "Yoga Vaasishtham" to be the highest treatise on Advaitism. I have read many authors, but none matches the brilliance of Vasishtha. After all, he is a maharshi and one of the saptarshis and it does show.

Maharshi Vasishtha taught Lord Rama (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu) about self-knowledge in great detail, in the presence of many gods and rishis including Maharshi Vishwamitra. These teachings were later taught by Maharshi Vaalmiki (author of Ramayana) to Maharshi Bharadwaja. Yoga Vaasishtham is thus a detailed account of Maharshi Vasishtha's teachings captured by Maharshi Vaalmiki.

The commentary by Swami Venkatesananda is quite an inspired one and I very very strongly recommend it to everyone deeply interested in the highest Hindu Advaitic philosophy. You can find it on amazon.com.

In "Yoga Vaasishtham" mentioned above, there is a beautiful narrative where Maharshi Vasishtha describes to Lord Rama his meeting with Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva teaches Vasishtha how to worship Him. He says, "there are many ways to worship me that are used by many foolish people who desire various things. They may even get various things worshipping me in those ways prescribed in some scriptures. But those are inferior methods of worship. Let me tell you the highest worship that is most dear to me. It is how a self-realized person worships me." He then describes the method so beautifully.

It is an absolutely beautiful account. I can say that Shiva's teachings to Vasishtha on the best way to worship Him are the essence of Vedas, the essence of BhagavadGeetha and the essence of the highest Hindu philosophy. One interested in self-realization and moksha must read Shiva's teachings and keep them at the back of their mind always.

I don't mean to be disrespectful to various aagamas and rituals prescribed in various scriptures. They all serve a purpose. But, if one views moksha (complete self-realization and the liberation that comes with it) as the highest goal, one cannot ignore the worship recommended by Shiva Himself to Vasishtha.

Hinduism is indeed a "collection of philosophies". However, that may be a misleading statement. It may suggest some inherent self-contradiction. That would be unfair.

Though different ripples of an ocean look different, the underlying ocean is the same. Similarly, the teachings of rishis form a single coherent philosophy (ocean) that appears as many philosophies (ripples) on the surface.

After all, Rigveda says "ekam sat vipraa bahudhaa vadanti", which means "Truth is One, but the learned call differently". Though Hinduism had no "no single founder" or ANY founder for that matter, all rishis tapped the same "Single Source of Knowledge" (the Self, known variously as Brahman, Shiva, Narayana, Krishna, Allah, Buddha etc) and hence there is a consistency in their understanding.

Unfortunately, not everyone can dive deep into the ocean of self-knowledge. Some are more comfortable floating on the surface (which is fun too). The teachings of rishis have something for everyone. This gives the appearance that rishis taught different contradicting philosophies. In fact, they didn't.

There are three main views regarding the relationship between individual soul and the supreme soul. However, instead of viewing them as competing theories, one can also view them as steps in the same path.

I want to share with all an *analogy* given by my spiritual master Dr Manish Pandit:

“Imagine God to be a bright star in the sky. When you see from a distance, star seems tiny and you conclude that there is only one God. If you start moving towards God, you realize as you get closer that the star is in reality a huge diamond with 330 million faces. Each face is several miles long and wide and has various attributes (gunas). One face may be red and hot and another may be blue and cold etc. So, as you get closer to the diamond, you have to pick one face to get close to.

Now, when you get too close to a face, the whole world will seem to have the attributes of that face. For example, if you get too close to a face that is cold and blue, then the whole world will feel cold and blue to you. In other words, the God you are getting close to is the Supreme god of the world and fills the entire world as you experience it. You think that the whole world is filled with his energy. One who gets close to a blue face sees the whole world as blue. One who gets close to a yellow face sees the whole world as yellow. Similarly, a worshipper of Shiva may get close to Him and see Shiva in all deities and all beings. A worshipper of Narayana may get close to Him and see Narayana in all beings.

No wonder one scripture says that Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva etc all gods came from Narayana, while another scripture says the same about Mahaganapathi, while another scripture says the same thing about Shiva; and so on.

Reaching close to the deity is the ultimate goal in sadhana for one adhering to Dwaita siddhanta (duality). For them, getting close to ishta devata, securing a place near the feet and seeing the entire world as emanating from that deity is the highest goal. All gods and entire creation are extensions of that deity.

For some, there is a next stage: As you get closer and closer to the face you picked, you finally merge with it! This is the ultimate goal in sadhana for one adhering to Visishtadwaita. You create a vacuum within yourself by completing killing ego-consciousness and the deity in question fills the vacuum.

To Advaitis, this communion with a Saguna ("with attributes") form of God is not the final goal. The final goal is to break through the face and jump into the inside of the diamond. As you break through any face of the diamond and jump into the interior of the diamond, you no longer perceive the faces of the diamond or the world outside. There are no longer any objects or attributes. There is no I-ness or It-ness or experience. The experiencer, experienced and experience all merge into one. The same thing happens irrespective of from which face the person jumped into the interior of the diamond. Whether one enters a nirvikalpa samadhi through oneness with Narayana or through oneness with Sadashiva or through oneness with Mahaganapathi, the state reached is identical. The path only is different.

Some people can jump into the interior of this diamond without first experiencing oneness with a face. Ramakrishna Paramahansa's Advaitic guru Totapuri did not believe in any form and worshipped only the Formless Reality. He would directly jump into the interior of the diamond in this analogy. However, his disciple Ramakrishna Paramahansa chose to first reach oneness with Mother Kaali and then reach the interior of the diamond by jumping from the face of the diamond representing Kaali. Both are valid paths”.

Rishis were very open-minded and had a perfectly integrated knowledge of all aspects of the Unlimited (Brahman, non-dual Supreme Self) as well the Limited (Maya, i.e. manifestation of Brahman as the dual world). They understood Brahman as well as Maya and had mastery over both domains.

We are now in Kali Yuga and it is inevitable that biases, narrow-mindedness and posturing enter the mindsets of many learned.

As long as one is living the dual reality, the duality enters all things. Polarization is the very nature of duality. Good and bad, beautiful and ugly, powerful and weak, learned and ignorant - all these seemingly opposite polarities are a creation of the duality. Even when it comes to spiritual progress and reaching god, there are polarities. There are seemingly opposing paths. One scripture says one thing and another says the opposite. One may take one word of one scripture as the ultimate Truth and another may take another word of another scripture as the ultimate Truth. Unfortunately, all the knowledge we get from books, gurus etc is still in the domain of duality and not free from the phenomenon of opposites.

The only solution is to be firmly established in the non-dual Supreme Self at all times and see each thing in the dual world for what it truly is, i.e. yet another manifestation of the very same non-dual Self.

Such a state was achieved by so many rishis in the past. In this age, however, such rishis are so rare. No wonder there is too much posturing and disagreement.

Q. Your passage on Kaali bhakta was interesting as. It points to a different outcome. Divine intoxication versus no experience and no mind. Perhaps both are experienced at some point in the path?

A. Yes, there were (and are) those who experienced both. However, there are some who reject one of the two in favor of the other. Actually, one would be most fortunate to reach either state.

If you look at the "star in the sky" analogy I gave earlier, you will see different goals in Dwaita, Visishtadwaita and Adwaita paths. Some people following one approach do not entertain notions corresponding to another approach. However, some take them as different stops in the same journey.

I just want to make one more comment that is not directly relevant to the discussion, but touches it on the periphery. May those who find my views and analogies silly kindly ignore me.

Hard-core Adwaitis are essentially Vedantis and jnaana (gyaana) yogis. This path is appropriate for someone who is already quite evolved. If one is too deeply sunk in the delusion of this dual world appearance, it is a difficult path. It is like telling someone who wants to reach the sky, "you are already in the sky. Just realize it and be done". The poor guy is very much on earth and can by no means "realize" that he is "already in the sky".

One who is rooted on earth and wants to reach the sky needs to engage in some actions that elevate one and prepare one for reaching the sky. Various tantras and rituals help in that. These are more appropriate for many people than the path of Adwaita, jnaana yoga and contemplation.

However, if one gets too involved in building tall structures on earth, one may find it interesting and keep on building taller and taller structures and forget the ultimate goal of finally reaching the sky. Building tall structures will help one rise from earth, but not help one reach the sky. However tall a building one builds, it will still not take one to the sky. Reaching the sky is not about building tall buildings. Books and gurus can teach one how to build tall structures, but the final leap into the sky is untaught.

In the analogy I am talking about here, Advaitic self-realization is akin to reaching the sky. Normal state of a person is akin to being on earth. Building tall structures on earth is akin to engaging in various tantras, rituals and practices to progress spiritually.

By engaging in more and more practices, one may experience more and more things and get some siddhis etc. This is akin to building tall structures and climbing them. Even as one builds tall structures, the final goal of reaching the sky should be at the back of one's mind. Otherwise, one can get lost in the practices and not reach the final goal.

There is no fool-proof approach to have an Advaitic self-realization. Even as one engages in various practices, one should keep the final goal at the back of mind. That is why I recommend reading Vedanta works like "Yoga Vaasishtham" and various Upanishats and keeping the high philosophy at the back of mind even while engaging in various practices.

Q. We could say that there are two ways of labeling self-realization, I'll call them the 'positive' and the 'negative' for want of better words and lack of imagination.

A. Yes, the two paths you mentioned are well-known (and mentioned in Yoga Vaasishtham), but they are not known as the positive and negative paths. The path of exclusion keeps on eliminating everything in this manifested world appearance as "this is not Self", in order to realize what IS Self. After eliminating everything, what is left is the Self/Brahman. This path predominantly exercises Pingala/Surya nadi (solar channel of energy flow).

The path of inclusion considers everything as Self. Even the limited manifestations of Brahman are considered as Self only and accepted thus. One sees Self in all that is manifested. This path predominantly exercises Ida/Chandra nadi (lunar channel of energy flow).

In both the paths, one overcomes the simple and finite concept of I-ness with something more infinite.

Q. Whilst it seems that Shiva is a given constant his partner is depicted in different ways. I have found descriptions and images of Shiva in the company of Shakti, Parvati and Kali. What is the significance of the female in these various depictions?

A. The Female element represents the Energy (Shakti). The desires, actions and knowledge of each being are caused by the movement of life force within that being, which is personified as a Female deity. If there is no energy, there is no movement of life force and there is nothing to desire or despise, nothing to do or avoid and nothing to know or ignore. We just have the singular non-duality and there is no field of duality then. It is the Shakti that gives birth (Mother!) to all desires, actions and knowledge and the field of apparent duality in which all desires, actions and knowledge operate.

Shiva is essentially nirguna Brahman, while Shakti is the energy that causes a movement in Brahman and gives birth to a field of duality.

While Brahman (nondual reality) is ONE and only one, the field of duality has a lot of variety. The field of duality (also known as "maya" or "delusion") has scope for different types of desire, action and knowledge. The energies that cause different desires, different actions and different aspects of knowledge is personified as different female deities.

You can also trace all those energies to the primordial energy that is the root of all energies in Brahman. However, at that stage, we are almost beyond names, gunas and depictions.

Even within each person, there are different Energies that cause different desires, actions and knowledge. But there is one root energy that causes a distinct identity in that person. All other energies stem from that energy.

It is that root energy that creates the entire field of duality in which THAT person operates. This energy is the cause of the self-awareness or ego-consciousness in that person. This energy (that causes ego-consciousness) is also called "Kundalini shakti". Instead of having no concept of self and no objectification and being immersed in the non-dual Brahman, due to this shakti, one views a part of Brahman as "self" with certain attributes, certain vasanas (mental conditioning) etc. This energy can either "bind" one to a limited concept of self or "liberate" one with an infinite concept of self. In most people, it is the former. One can view this shakti as a microcosmic representation of the Divine Mother within oneself.

Q. Am I right in thinking that the contraction of Nirguna Brahman is, in fact, Shakti and the further contraction of Shakti is our ego-mind?

A. The modification of Nirguna Brahman (formless Self) to create a field of duality is Shakti. All further modifications in that field of duality to create various forms is also Shakti only, in Her various aspects.

Q. Would you say that the 'witness', mind, consciousness or whatever "label" we apply, is the state of Nirguna Brahman, Shakti or (at different times) both?

A. The ego-mind or consciousness that experiences various objects in the field of duality is an aspect of Shakti. However, it is Nirguna Brahman too, just as everything else in the field of duality in reality is. So it is both!

When the consciousness is in the state of Shakti (or modified Brahman), it experiences various dual objects in the field of duality and is aware of "self" also as an object in the same field.

When the consciousness is in the state of unmodified nirguna Brahman, it is no longer aware of self as an object in the field of duality. It no longer experiences any objects in the field of duality. There is no longer any objectification and it no longer experiences a field of duality at all.

After switching between the two states, the consciousness may reach a different state. In this state, consciousness is in the state of Shakti and unmodified nirguna Brahman at the same time. The consciousness experiences various objects in the field of duality and interacts with them. Yet, it is firmly

rooted in the understanding that all those objects and their field of duality are actually modifications of nirguna Brahman only.

This is a very very tough state to reach. Of course, even the state of nirguna Brahman (second state mentioned above) is tough to reach, but the third one is tougher.

Rishis do not denounce Maya ("field of duality" which is the basis of all "experience"). The very word Maya is translated as "delusion", which has a negative connotation. In fact, there is no perfect equivalent of that word in English.

While some may look down upon Maya, a rishi does not dismiss Maya and does not talk about "overcoming" Maya! A rishi talks about realizing that Maya is just a modification of nirguna Brahman. A rishi looks to reach the third state I mentioned above. Thus, one can operate in the field of duality without losing the understanding of the underlying nondual Self. Such a person does not give up action in the field of duality and acts and interacts with the objects of that field (and yet free from reactions to those actions and the bondage caused).

Just as a bird flies with two wings, such a person flies with the dual wings of knowledge and action. Neither knowledge is compromised nor action (in the field of duality) is sacrificed.

Vasishtha taught the same to Rama in "Yoga Vaasishtham". Krishna taught the same to Arjuna in "BhagavadGita".

If "action" is sacrificed or "Maya" is trivialized/denounced and the second state mentioned above is over-emphasized, the order in this dual world will be disturbed. That perhaps happened to some degree in the last couple of millennia.

I realize that this discussion may be difficult to follow for some. After all, it is not easy to express the essence of "Yoga Vaasishtham" in a few emails, though I tried like a fool. Please ignore this email then and instead read Yoga Vaasishtham and Upanishats.

Experience is more important than scholarship or theoretical discussions. Certain things are only experienced and not learnt by reading or hearing. Yoga Vaasishtham is one rare book reading which can actually take a prepared person close to experiencing, but most books are not like that. Thus, spiritual sadhana is far more important than typing and reading emails like this. Satsang (good company) and discussions with learned people may help if one is also doing some sadhana. But sadhana is the key.

Q. Many thanks for both replies which give a slightly differing perspective. It is not a slight but a huge difference whether you consider shakti as providing liberation from the fetters (as in the agamas) or as being the cause and embodiment of ahamkara, i.e. avidya and delusion (as in vedanta) To be exact it is an 100% percent opposite view.

A. The Shakti that binds one also liberates one. She is the one who puts a veil and she is the one who removes it. Thus, the vedantic view is not "100% opposite", but it actually encompasses the view you mention and captures additional aspects of Shakti ignored in the view you mention.

Though She is referred to as "vidya avidya swarupini" (embodiment of all knowledge and ignorance), one may be comfortable worshipping certain aspects of Her and ignore others. Agamas are selective and offer a limited picture for practical utility, while vedanta is comprehensive and offers the big picture.

I maintain that what you referred to as "vedanta viewpoint", i.e. the teachings of maharshis, is actually the big picture that covers the essence of everything. Because it is very complex to understand and appreciate, some great teachers have taken limited aspects of the big picture and elaborated them so that more people can understand and appreciate it and make progress.

Thus, I suggest that seemingly different viewpoints of different religious traditions originated from the same teachings of maharshis. Instead of approaching these view points with a "this OR that" attitude, I suggest approaching them with a "this AND that" attitude. The teachings of maharshis are the key in synthesizing everything.

If you are convinced that the teachings of vedanta and the teachings of aagamas are totally different and that there is no commonality, then we can respectfully agree to disagree.

Wearing Gems

Q. Your statement about "worshipping the gem instead" has really gotten me confused. My assumption until now was that gems are tantrik remedies at the level of controlling the body.

A. Gem is an external object that contains some energy related to a particular planet. If you make it a part of your body (by wearing it), you are putting yourself (body and mind) under extra influence of that planet. If that planet's influence on your mind is one that makes you elated, the gem may elate you. If that planet's influence on your mind is one that makes you sad, the gem may sadden you.

On the other hand, if you invoke a deity in a gem, gem is akin to an idol. As the gem contains the energy related to a planet, your invocation of a deity who is related to that planet will result in some of that deity's energy entering the gem for a small time. If you offer a mantra related to that deity in the presence of that energy, that will please that deity and strengthen an aspect of yourself represented by that deity. This in turn makes the planet more favorable to you. As you strengthen, with mantra, an aspect of yourself represented by a deity associated with a planet, that planet becomes more favorable. Negative results become smaller in magnitude and positive results become magnified.

Let us try an analogy to clarify further.

Wearing a gem is akin to bringing someone to your house and keeping him in your house. If he likes you, he will make your life happy. If he does not like you, he will make your life miserable.

Praying to a deity corresponding to a planet is akin to getting help from somebody who has influence on that person, so that the person behaves better with you due to that influence

Chanting the mantra of a planet or its deity in front of the gem before wearing the gem is akin to keeping a person in the company of somebody who has influence over him before bringing him to your house, so that he is influenced sufficiently.

In your case, Mercury has certain weaknesses and emerald is a dicey choice for you. However, if you offer enough mantra of Lord Ramachandra in front of that gem, it should become more favorable to you and actually eventually give you the result of the raja yoga between Sun and Mercury. Hence my advice..

One Question on Jupiter

Q. I was reading somewhere that the fire of a homa is represented by Jupiter among planets. So in case someone has a very badly placed Jupiter which is badhakesh or much afflicted, is it advisable for such a person to perform homa? Or will it lead to great dangers?

A. There is no truth in what you heard. Not only that, but you can do homam to a very very badly placed and afflicted planet in your chart also. There is no problem with it. In fact, Maharshi Parasara suggests doing homam with the mantra of the planet that is badly afflicted in a chart, for relief. See the chapter on "graha shanti" in "Brihat Paaraasara Horaa Saastram". Anybody can do homa to any planet or any deity, irrespective of the horoscope.

Jupiter is badhakesha in my chart and he is in an inimical house. I have been doing a homam daily for 2.5 years.

Rishis

Q. I had a question about Rishis. In the Aghora books, it is mentioned that the Rishis of yesteryears are still alive and roam around in this planet. There are signs on their body. And that only some who has done terrific amount of tapashya is eligible to meet a Rishi. And also that praying to Rishi of ones gotra can help to acclerate ones spiritual progress. Kindly enlighten us with your thoughts on this topic. I am really curious.

A. There are really two different things here. Some people are born with an amsa (part) of a rishi's consciousness. For example, Ramakrishna Paramahansa said that Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) was one of the seven great rishis. Many people did meet him. Thus, meeting the physical manifestation of an amsa of a rishi is not that difficult (though that also requires some punya).

The second thing is to meet the physical manifestation of the entire consciousness of a rishi. *That* is very very very difficult. As Vimalananda said, that may require a terrific amount of tapascharya (unless you are one of that rishi's people who came to do some work on earth and have already done a terrific amount of tapascharya in past lives).

One may wonder: If rishis are so great, why do they not get moksha and why do they remain in physical manifestation?

Though the following is essentially like a kindergartener explaining Einstein's theory of general relativity to fellow kindergarteners, I will nevertheless try to explain it.

All that our senses perceive is Maya (delusion) that is created by the power of duality. If the veil of delusion is removed, there is no duality and all is ONE uniform and undivided consciousness, known variously as Aatman or Brahman or Narayana or Sadashiva. This one uniform and undivided

consciousness is known as "unmanifested Brahman". The world of duality, where there are many different objects, is also actually Brahman only, but Brahman that went through some modification and manifestation. It is known as "manifested Brahman". Both are Brahman only.

Normally, living in the domain of duality without being deluded by some aspect of duality or the other is near to impossible. Remaining in duality with a perfect understanding of the underlying oneness of all objects and perceiving all those objects of duality without experiencing attraction or repulsion for any single object of duality is almost impossible. Most spiritual aspirants try to reach the state of oneness with unmanifested Brahman - a state in which there is no duality and no objectification - and become absorbed in that state forever. That is the advaitic experience of "nirvikalpa samadhi" and what happens in "moksha".

However, maharshis have described higher states. It is possible to be in oneness with manifested Brahman and unmanifested Brahman at the same time. It is possible to remain in duality, with the senses perceiving objects of duality, and yet remain in oneness with the underlying oneness (Brahman) of all objects and not be deluded, i.e. not experience either attraction or repulsion for any object of duality. Mere perception of objects by the senses is not the problem. The tendency of mind to be find some attractive and find some repulsive is the problem. It is possible to remain in a state where there is neither attraction nor repulsion for any object is possible.

Such a state is experienced by very few beings. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Shirdi Sai Baba etc were in this state always. Swami Vivekananda also experienced it.

Rishis are beings who are always in a very high state. They are always alert to the maya and yet not stuck in it. They perceive objects of duality and yet are not attracted or repelled by anything. If one overcomes attraction and repulsion and yet remains in duality, one can pretty much do anything. But because one is neither attracted or repelled by anything, it means one has no personal ego and one has no reason to do anything for personal ego. Then one becomes an instrument of nature (Prakriti) and implements the wish of nature through one's actions, which are performed without any attachment or personal identification. One who has a personal ego can do limited things. One who has a very very small ego can do great things. One who has no ego can do ANY thing. But such a being does things that are desired by Nature - the natural order of the universe. They can change the course of history of nations and planets.

A rishi in this state may engage in various actions of great consequence for the world. Yet, there is no attachment with the actions. He is just an unattached instrument of Nature.

If one gets out of the duality and becomes absorbed in unmanifested Brahman forever, one is not born again. But a rishi who has an equal vision of unmanifested and manifested Brahman is for ever mukta (liberated). Thus, he will freely interact with duality without any fear or aversion. Amsa of such a rishi may even be born again as a separate person, just as a process running in a computer may spawn off a separate thread to do some focussed task. Even if the computer process has finished all the initialization and early work, the newly spawned thread has to go through initialization etc again. Similarly, the person born with amsa has to go through the process of overcoming weaknesses and realizing self all over again. When a Vivekananda is born from the amsa of a rishi, he may have to struggle initially and overcome the weaknesses and realize self all over again. But he is the amsa of an ever free and liberated being and will find his way again.

Thus, a liberated rishi, with the force of his liberated consciousness and with the force of his reborn amsas, will act as an unattached instrument of Nature performing actions of tremendous consequences without any personal ego driving those actions.

Worshipping the rishi of one's gotra and getting his blessings is a very good idea. In general, getting the blessings of ANY rishi is a great idea. Pursuing the rishi of one's gotra is relatively easier for most people. But, if one has a connection with a specific rishi (apart from the rishi of one's gotra), one can worship that rishi. However, it is not easy to know that.

Suppose several mantras you find natural attraction for have the descendants of a specific Maharshi as the rishi. Then you may have a connection with that Maharshi. You can try praying to him.

Meaning of Trikaagni-Kaala

Trika = three types of

Agni = fire

Kaala = regulator, time-keeper, one who ends

The previous word in the verse is "tripuraantakaaya". Tripuraantaka means one who ends the three puras. Pura means a town or a castle. The three castles/towns referred to are basically the three bodies (or sheaths) that house each person. The sthoola sareera (gross body), sookshma sareera (subtle body) and kaarana sareera (causal body) are the three bodies/castles/towns hosting each being.

The gross body is what we see - made of gross matter and consisting of flesh, blood, nerves etc. The subtle body cannot be seen with eyes and it contains thousands of nadis (subtle channels of energy flow) and several chakras (various planes of existence in which one keeps going like in a wheel). The causal body is made of causal matter and is a repository of all the karmas (actions) the being is carrying, which are yet to be canceled by equal and opposite reactions. This body is the root cause of one's existence as a being separate from Supreme Soul.

Tripuraantaka means one who brings the end of these three bodies. In a lower level form, Rudra brings the end of the physical body, but in the highest form, he actually brings the end of Kaarana sareera too, i.e. grants moksha! However, it must be emphasized that most people suffer from "obesity" when it comes to causal body.

Now, there is a basic fire that burns in each of these bodies, illuminating them and sustaining them. In the gross body, we have the jatharaagni and several other agnis (physical transformative forces) as described in ayurveda. Similarly, there is a fire burning in the other bodies too. Without that fire, these bodies cannot live. Rudra is the regulator and time-keeper of those three fires. When the time's up, he extinguishes each of those three types of fire. Until then, he keeps the fires going and regulates them. That is what trikaagnikaala means.

Tarpana

Krishna paksha (waning fortnight) of lunar month Bhadrapada is called pitri paksha. This fortnight coming just before the nava ratri is considered a great time to perform pitri tarpanas. Those who are

interested in pitri tarpanas can download a manual from the website (<http://www.VedicAstrologer.org/tarpana>) and perform it. It is a very simple procedure and can be finished in 5-45 min, depending on whether one does super-short or short or regular procedure and how comfortable with Sanskrita.

Most of us know about god and about what is good to do and what is bad. Still we end up doing, thinking and wanting wrong things on a constant basis. The reason is that we cannot control our mind. The root cause of it is that mind is conditioned by various tendencies accumulated over various karmas. It is very difficult to overcome these tendencies.

Tarpana washes away tendencies that one got via karmik debt from ancestors (and others who one has a debt to) in various lives. Homam burns away tendencies that one got because of various actions committed by one in various lives. The mixture of one's own actions in the past and the debts to various beings in the past creates the set of tendencies that condition one's mind currently. These two sadhanas - homam and tarpana - are extremely effective for overcoming inherent tendencies and make spiritual progress. Those who are interested can take advantage of the easy manuals that were created for both.

More on Tarpana

One's samskaras take one in different directions. What can we do about others?

Some great yogis may be able to realize exactly what past karmas are behind a current samskara (mental conditioning), transfer the karma from the person to self and then burn it. But ordinary people like us cannot do anything, except feeling some compassion for the confused souls around us.

One should focus on one's own progress. Tarpana and more importantly homam are excellent tools of spiritual progress for anyone.

Not performing tarpana is ok. But then, one will continue to struggle with various tendencies and weaknesses inherited from other people. Exerting freewill alone is not sufficient to overcome some weaknesses which have a deep-seated root cause in a rina to a soul that is still struggling with that weakness. You help that soul, work out the rina and overcome the weakness. If you are somebody relatively pure with not many weaknesses, nothing is needed. But, most people are not spiritually that pure and suffer from so many weaknesses caused by the strong mental conditioning, which is partly due to the strong debts to souls that are still suffering from that weakness. When I say weaknesses, I also include inner weaknesses such as anger, lust and indiscipline. Pitri tarpana is a very useful tool for that.

Q. I was reading the tarpana manual. I am planning to start doing tarpan, actually initially I did not have a place to do it. I live in a one room house with no balcony or courtyard. Now I found an outside place where I can do it. Why is this place restriction given for tarpana?

A. When you invoke the presence of a deity like Ganesha or Krishna or Lakshmi or Durga or Vishnu or Shani or Shiva in a fire, it is one thing. When you invoke the presence of manes (departed souls) in a water pot, it is a different thing. The manes who are invoked in pitri tarpana have some strong desires. Their ethereal bodies have more restrictions than deities. To make it a bit easier for them to come and leave, standard rules involve some place restrictions.

Q. In the Rishi tarpana, is it always necessary to do tarpan for the nine Rishis whose name is mentioned? Or can I do it for the Rishi of my Gotra and do it more number of times at one sitting?

A. I personally do it also for the seven rishis of my gotra. You can add the 1/3/7 rishis of your gotra if you know them. There is no need to do more times in one sitting.

Q. I am planning to do only the Rishi and Dev tarpana, is that ok? Also after saying the mantras, and it is finished what to do with the water pot and durvas?

A. Yes, it is ok. Durva (sacred grass used for purification) can be reused. Water can be thrown away at the base of a tree or a plant.

Q. Sesame seeds should be used only for pitri tarpan or also for Rishi and Deva tarpan?

A. Only for pitri tarpana.

Q. In the deva tarpana can I take the name of my Devata for tarpana?

A. Yes. If a deity has a desire, you are doing your part in fulfilling it. Every embodied being (embodied in gross and ethereal matter) has desires and stuck in maya to some extent or the other. You fulfill your duty towards them and repay your debt to them by offering tarpana to satisfy their desires.

Q. Can we do Pitri tarpan on roof top of a building?

A. Yes, we can.

Q. What amount of sesame seeds and akshath to be taken ? I am willing to take a small amount. Do we let the water flow on the floor?

A. Yes, a small amount is sufficient. It is better to drop the water in a bowl or plate and throw the collected water at the base of a plant or a tree.

Q. Sir my parents are alive, but can I offer tarpan for rishis?

A. Yes, you can offer tarpana for devas and rishis. You can also offer tarpana for pitris. Even though your parents are alive, great grandparents may be deceased. Parents or other relatives of a different life may be deceased and there may be significant debt with them. Tarpanas can be offered to them. The mantras in the manual below use the term "svadhaayibhyah" and covers only those ancestors who are deceased and having strong desires. If someone is alive or deceased but in a higher loka, that person is not covered by the mantras.

Q. Can a jivat-pitruk (one whose father is alive) carry out Tarpan?

A. Some people hold the view that one with a living father cannot do it and one's father must do it instead. The other view is that anybody can do it. I subscribe to the later view.

If one's grandfather had some unfulfilled desires and one's father is alive, of course, one's father can offer tarpana. However, grandson can also do it. Depending on the karmic debts, the unfulfilled desires may have more effect on the grandson than son and hence tarpana offered by grandson may work better than tarpana offered by son. Thus, the idea that father has the exclusive "right" to tarpana and his son will get that right only after he passes away is illogical.

If a father is a rich man with a lot of money, son may not need to work. However, if father is not that rich, son should better work. Especially if father is not capable of getting a good job and son is capable of getting a good job, son should definitely find a job and work. Saying that only father should work as long as he is alive and son should stay home is wrong. Same with tarpana.

Q. If our beliefs are firmly rooted in karma and of reincarnation [which I am absolutely], why then should we pray year after year for the departed soul/s? Given that the atman is itself indestructible, what is the necessity to annually set aside a day to perform "tarpanam"? Isn't this rendered superfluous because of the soul's independent path, regardless of what other [mere] mortals think or do [whether or not related]? Unless the soul was destined to attain moksha, wouldn't the soul simply latch onto another body and be re-born?

A. Tarpana need not be performed only oneday a year. It can be a regular sadhana. It is not for giving moksha to a soul. It is for releasing a few negative attachments that are blocking a departed mind from going to higher lokas or take birth again. If one has rina (debt) with such a mind, the negative attachments and tendencies of that departed mind will influence one's mind too. Rituals like tarpana free the darded mind from the blocking predispositions and also free one's mind of that influence.

Here is an answer from the pitri tarpana manual:

"External rituals are meant to create the internal visualization needed to affect desirable internal changes in the long run. For example, one offers a full coconut into fire as poornaahuti (complete offering) at the end of a homam (fire ritual). This is symbolic of surrendering one's head or ego (sense of I-ness) to god and burning it in the fire of wisdom and becoming free from ego. As one keeps engaging in this act again and again, the visualization becomes stronger and stronger and ego is slowly reduced.

"One important ritual of Hinduism is tarpana. Tarpana means "satisfying" or "satiating". One acknowledges the debt one has to devas (gods), rishis (sages) and pitris (ancestral manes) and tries to satisfy them using this ritual. Just as gods are invoked in fire in a homam, pitris are invoked in water in this ritual, then held in the palm and released in a specific way conducive to freeing them.

"One owes a lot to one's parents and ancestors. In modern scientific terms, one owes all of one's genetic characteristics to one's parents and ancestors. Each ancestor is actually present in the person as a genetic characteristic. In karmik terms, one inherits some karmas of one's parents and ancestors and each ancestor is actually present in the person as a kaarmik predisposition. The latter approach obviously extends to multiple lives and some karmik predisposition is inherited from the ancestors from a past life too, though they may not be related to one in this life.

"By thinking of the deceased ancestors with gratitude and trying to give them an emancipation, one is actually trying to free oneself from various kaarmic predispositions that one has as a result of the rina (karmik debt) with several people. One can view this as an external event of satisfying and emancipating an external entity (a pitri). Alternately, one can view this as an internal event of satisfying and releasing an internal kaarmik predisposition. Ultimately, it is the latter. However, one needs to externalize first and perform external rituals, while thinking of what it means internally. This builds up one's visualization and slowly brings about internal changes and eventually the desired internal change itself.

Hindu Rastra

Q. I was hearing of a famous sentence attributed to Swami Ramdas who had told Shivaji "hindavi swarajya whave...hi shrrenchi ichcha".. Which means, to have a Hindu Rastra is God's desire. Is it really God's desire? Will such a thing ever happen? In spite of having so many spiritual super giants born in this land, Hinduism and Sanatana Dharma has suffered such terribly at the hands of foreigners. I wonder why.

A. Modern religions like Christianity and Islam almost completely wiped out native religions wherever they went (e.g. countries in Africa, South America, America etc). However, despite foreign invasion and complete foreign control of India for a millennium, Hinduism is still basically doing ok. True, some damage has been done, but it is still standing tall and firm enough. Isn't it amazing?

In fact, Hinduism is a word coined by outsiders. To Hindus, the correct term is "sanatana dharma", i.e. perennial spirit of righteousness. By definition, it is perennial. I am firmly convinced that it cannot be destroyed. Even if it seems close to extinction, it will come back up. That is the nature of this dharma. I am not worried about Sanatana dharma being damaged or destroyed.

I will continue to discharge what *I* believe nature expects from *me* and what I believe is *my* dharma, without any worry whatsoever that sanatana dharma is in some kind of danger of extinction. However, such a belief is vital for some people to discharge *their* dharma and hence we have some people driven by that sense of danger and the resulting fear and anger. That is ok too.

Sadguru Samartha Ramadas is not an ordinary soul. He is born with an amsa of Lord Hanuman. His words may be slightly misunderstood. To somebody like him, it would not matter whether a nation calls itself Hindu or secular or whatever. What would matter is whether dharma is followed or not.

Right now, we do not have sanatana dharma being followed in any country, in secular India or in Hindu Nepal or in many other countries following secularism or various religions. If it is indeed God's wish that sanatana dharma be established in the world, it will happen when its time comes.

India Slowly Disappearing !!

Q. Why is this happening? What can be done to protect our frontiers? Haven't we always had our hearts and doors open to all? It feels like Bharat Mata's head and hands being injured! With the oldest party being headed by a foreigner for the last ten years, India will further shrink. Let Indians (Hindus) awake, arise, and fight till the goal is achieved.

A. Nations always go through cycles of expansion and shrinking. Just like individual beings cannot escape from the cycle of life and death and the cycle of happiness and sadness, so can't nation escape from the cycle of expansion and shrinking and the cycle of prosperity and adversity. The only difference is that the periods are much longer in the case of nations.

What is more alarming than the *nation* of *India* shrinking is that Hinduism or sanatana dharma is shrinking in the world. Though probably there are more Hindus in the world today than a few hundred years back, there are fewer people who truly stick to sanatana dharma today than a few hundred years back. *That* is the real concern.

Now, how do you solve this problem? As the gentleman below says, you can "awake, arise and fight till the goal is achieved". But, I want to point out that there are different frontiers fighting at different levels in each "fight". Because the list "shivacharya" contains many priests, I want to point out the role that can be played by spiritual people and yogis in a dharmic battle (dharma yuddha).

Let me use the example of Shivaji to illustrate my point. Those who think the military victories of Shivaji were only due to his bravery and tactical brilliance are missing a very key enabling factor. The sadhana of Samarth Ramadas, the great yogi who was his guru, was not any less factor than Shivaji's bravery.

If you become like Samarth Ramadas, a Shivaji will automatically come and lead a fight. Brave soldiers will automatically come and join that Shivaji. As Krishna says in BhagavadGeetha, everybody has to follow "own dharma". A Brahmana can follow his own dharma and make a big difference in a fight in a totally invisible fashion. If one does spiritual sadhana with a specific sankalpa to increase dharma in the world, it is bound to make a difference sooner or later.

Specifically, if a handful of people start performing Chandi homam twice a day in various parts of the world, with the specific sankalpa of establishing sanatana dharma in the world (and without *diluting* it by adding any other individual sankalpas), I am confident that world will change. I have no doubt. The key would be for each person to pick a place and do homam in the morning and evening in the *same* place (as opposed to roaming around and doing in different places) and do it around the same times every morning and evening. If three homas can be performed everyday, that will be even better. On the other side, if two cannot be performed and only one can be performed everyday, that can also be useful.

The opulence of the materials burnt in the homam hardly matters. She does not distinguish between a small cotton cloth and an opulent silk saree. We, ordinary people, differentiate. For Her, everything is the same - both are clothes. Materials that one can afford can be used. If one is performing a selfish ritual for *individual* good (of a person or a family or a community or a nation etc), then materials commensurate with the goal are required. But, if one is performing a selfless ritual for increasing dharma in the world, restrictions are fewer and materials matter little.

If the shlokas are chanted with pure devotion and sincerity and with the perfect faith that She is coming in the fire and receiving them, that is enough. If She is treated with respect, love and care while She is in fire, that is enough. Material deficiencies can be ignored. Even if they do an imperfect job, the Mother makes it complete and perfect and accepts it! That faith has to be complete. In fact, She *wants* people to do this, so that She can destroy adharma in the world. But the nature of certain times is such that people do not do this. When the time to reduce adharma comes, She motivates some people to do this, they do it

and then She acts on it. Though She is the one who is inspiring some to do this, She needs them to act further. Fortunate are those who get to play a role in this fascinating game with their beloved Mother.

As the 12th adhyaya of saptashati says:

"durvruttaanaam aseshaanaam balahaanikaram param

rakshobhootapisaachaanaam pathanaadeva naasanam"

(a mere reading of this reduces the strength of the many with a mean conduct and destroys demons and evil spirits).

For establishing sanatana dharma in the world, there is nothing better than a regular practice of Chandi homam. Even Lord Rama performed it before battling Ravana.

