

Friends of Nityananda Institute

2006
Year End
Report

RUDI'S PRANAPATISTHA

The highlight of the year was the summer retreat, which was a joyous occasion, marking Swami Chetanananda's return to Portland from Nepal and the consecration of the Rudi statue.

For the event, there were two days of fire pujas, culminating with the pranapatistha in the meditation hall. The pujas were dedicated to Maha Lakshmi, the goddess associated with spiritual and material wealth and prosperity. Swamiji invited Krishnamacharya Sumadrula from the Balaji Temple in Los Angeles and four other Brahmin priests (representing temples in Bakersfield, Pittsburgh, New York and New Jersey) to conduct the pujas with him. (We have in past years used the term "havan" to refer to these pujas. We've learned that havan is the Hindi word for fire ceremony, and the Sanskrit word is "homa.")

In making preparations for the event, Swamiji said he tried to have the kind of event Rudi would have wanted. We invited all of Rudi's students we could find, and were pleased to see Tom Butler, David Komito, Danny Cook and Norman Bodek. The puja preparations began on Wednesday evening. The priests started by consecrating the fire pit,



drawing the navagraha (nine planet) mandala in the south-west corner of the platform, installing a mandala drawn with various colored powders around the fire pit itself, preparing the kalashans (the copper vases to hold the blessings of the puja), and dressing the Shiva statue, wrapping saris around its body, and the aureole of fire that encloses it.

The fire ceremonies began on Thursday morning. On the first day, Howard Boster and Sharon Ward joined Swami Chetanananda and the priests on the platform as the ceremony began.

The homa is actually a series of rituals, beginning with those for the purification of the participants and the space and the dispelling of obstructing spirits, followed by worship of Ganesh. In our homa, there was also a puja with the Shri Chakra.

The invocation of the main deity followed. In a homa, the deity being invoked (in this case, Lakshmi) is worshipped in the kalashan, a copper vessel filled with water. The water in kalashan absorbs all the positive energies generated during the homa and is sprinkled on the participants at the end.



RUDI'S PRANAPATISTHA cont.

After invoking Lakshmi, the priests sanctified the fire pit and started the fire, invoking the fire god Agni. Then the main part of the homa began, with the chanting of mantras and the making of offerings into the fire. In 100+ degree heat, the homa was a total sensory assault. The color of the flowers and other offerings, the fire itself, the priests' clothing, with the cadence of the mantras that were chanted, the fragrance of the incense, camphor and sandalwood powder that were offered into the fire, the heat that was generated (internally and externally) created a powerful environment.



We were prepared to make extensive offerings, reflecting the abundance that characterized Rudi's life. Among the offerings put into the fire were forty pounds of cashews, twenty five pounds of walnuts, eighty coconuts, ten gallons of ghee, sixty pounds of

honey, fifty pounds of almonds, twenty five pounds of dried apricots, and just about every last bean on hand in the kitchen at the time. The priests were delighted, as they rarely have an opportunity to perform the homa in its most elaborated form and to make such generous offerings.

As Swami Chetanananda says in *There Is No Other*:

"The havan sets up an energy field that respects the universal, creative qualities of graciousness, generosity, courage, strength, mental acuity, and a capacity for attunement and aesthetic sensibility. These qualities exist in everyone and are nurtured in the ceremony. The sounds of chanting prayers, the food and flower offerings, the sweet smoke—every part of the ambiance—create an interaction between these qualities of generosity, courage, aesthetic sensibility, and our mind and heart. Then the qualities become ever more strongly present."



RUDI'S PRANAPATISTHA cont.

Swamiji taught an early class that evening, and the homa resumed at 6:00 pm for several more hours. A crew was appointed to watch the fire throughout the night and make sure that it did not go out.

On the second morning, Swamiji invited Buford Pippin and Danny Cook to join him at the fire pit. The homa concluded with a brief ceremony for the long life of sculptor Karla Re-fojo. The priests made sure to end on time to ensure that the pranapatistha occurred at the most auspicious moment. Swamiji had asked vedic astrologer Chakrapani Ullal to determine the time for the consecration, and it was set at shortly after noon.

At the end of the homa, the priests offered all the remaining substances into the fire. Then the priests wrapped Swamiji's head in a turban and also the heads of those designated to carry the kalashans to the shrine: Tom Fabrizio and Per Johansen. The priests wrapped the precious objects, including gold coins and gemstones, to be placed inside the statue, in red fabric, and placed it on a tray they gave to Swamiji to hold. Everyone lined up to receive the blessings from the puja by touching the packet.

Then Swami Chetanananda and the priests led a procession into the meditation hall. Once inside, they made offerings to Nityananda and then performed an abishek (ritual washing) of the Rudi statue,

followed by the actual consecration. Swamiji, Danny, Buford and Leiko Coyle participated in the pranapatistha. Rudi's navel, heart, throat and forehead chakras and four limbs were marked with kumkum powder, and kusha grass wands were used to open the chakras and the eyes.

An unexpected development was that Swamiji remembered a small bronze gajur (a stupa placed on the pinnacle of a Newari temple) he had received during a puja in Nepal. He asked the priests to place it inside Rudi's head to help focus the energy there. There were a few anxious moments as the statue was tilted back and Krishnamacharya reached deep inside it to place the little stupa securely. The package of blessed substances was also put inside.

Then energy built to a crescendo as the mantras of the homa were installed in the statue. Rudi's presence entered the room at the appointed time, and it was immediately palpable to everyone. Rudi's entrance was unmistakable. It was an overwhelmingly joyous moment. Swamiji brought Karla to stand in front of the statue, a fitting welcome for



RUDI'S PRANAPATISTHA cont.

Rudi. Afterwards, the priests remarked that they felt Rudi's power quite strongly. They reported that it was unusual in their experience even though they have conducted many pranapatishtas.

When the pranapatistha was finished, everyone went outside to the shrine for a concluding ceremony. Swamiji blessed everyone with water from the kalashans, and then poured one of them over the shrine, and, to everyone's delight, poured the other over Karla's head. Everyone made a flower offering. Swamiji spoke for a little while, saying

In his talks during the retreat, Swamiji spoke a lot about Rudi and the significance of the occasion for himself and for all of us. He reminded us of the purpose of our celebration:

"We honor the people who have established themselves in this most profound of possibilities that is available to a human being. We also honor the sacrifices that they have made to attain that state, and the great difficulty that they have endured in order to share that state with us."

It is now up to each of us to find our own way to offer tribute to our teachers, and to express our gratitude to Swamiji and Rudi for the sacrifices they made to make the unimaginable possibility available to us.



that the event was a momentous occasion for our community, and that he was certain that our lineage would continue into the future and that sweeter, finer people would appear to carry on our work.

The festivities also included a concert Saturday night by Alam Khan on sarod, accompanied by Swapan Chaudhuri on tablas and Manik Khan on tambour. Ali Akbar Khan had planned to join them, but was not well enough to travel in July. Alam, however, is beginning to make a name for himself by playing concerts in the United States, Europe and India. As Alam told us at the beginning, "My father is here. He is in every note I play." The concert was wonderful, with both Alam and Swapan receiving ovations during the performance.

