



Dear Yagya Friends,

It is amazing to find ourselves at the end of another year of fantastic yagya performances. All of the priests are very thankful for your participation during and we're anticipating new, larger and more powerful yagyas over the next 12 months.

We begin our December yagyas on the 10th with a very significant total lunar eclipse. This is a powerful time for mantras and we have an intensive program planned for that day in both north and south India.

A year ago we performed our first 10 day Rig Veda Pavamana Soma yagya and since then we have continued performing it every month. Now, we conclude the year with a 10 day long Pavamana Soma yagya. We are fortunate to have access to the specially trained Rig Veda pundits through the support of the Shankaracharya Mutt in Kanchipuram.

In this issue you will find great photographs from our recent series of yagyas for Navaratri and Divali, as well as November's Saturn Yagyas. I've added a few words of commentary and explanation so you'll understand a bit about each yagya.

Lastly, I've written something of an overview of Saturn's movement into Libra where this powerful planet will be exalted for the next two and a half years. Hopefully you will find the article both interesting and useful.

As always, thank you for your on-going participation and support. You make so many good things possible.

Enjoy the yagya programs!

Ben Collins



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Lunar Eclipse Yagya

Saturday, December 10 (\$21)

Eclipses are a special time for spiritual practices, because it is said that the effects of mantras are multiplied many times over. Some texts say each repetition during an eclipse is equal to one thousand at any other time, and other texts say ten thousand. Regardless of which it is, this is a very valuable time to enhance our spiritual development and to remove obstacles to our continued progress.

During the day of the eclipse, our Chief Priest, Seetharama Sastry, will lead a group of priests through long series of mantra japa repetitions (Navagraha, Rahu and Ketu, and Nakshatra mantras) for many hours on the banks of a river, the traditional place for these rituals.



At the same time another group of pundits will perform similar rituals on the banks of the Ganges River near Varanasi in northern India.

Eclipse days are a rare opportunity and the end result is always a sense of peacefulness and purity. I hope you'll join us!



Pavamana Soma Yagya

Thursday, December 15 - Saturday, December 24 (\$51)

As is our annual tradition, this month we will be performing a special yagya called the Pancha Suktam Pavamana Soma Yagya from the Rig Veda. The yagya will be performed for 10 days and will conclude with a special Shiva Temple yagya in Kanchipuram.

During our lifetime we do our best to act correctly and in a life supporting manner, but perfect action is almost impossible. So we gradually accumulate papas (bad karma). The first purpose of this yagya is to remove these bad karmas. Secondly, the yagya supports and enlivens the ability of our nervous system to create Soma, the divine substance of enlightenment and divine awareness.

The yagya ritual comes from the Rig Veda, the longest and oldest of the Vedas. We have assembled a uniquely qualified team of Rig Veda pundits specially for this event. During each of the 10 days of the yagya the pundits will begin with two hours of Rig Veda recitations. Then they will perform our usual routine of pujas and yagyas; Ganesha, Navagraha, Lakshmi/Durga/Parvati, Mrytunjaya and Rudra Abishekam. Then the traditional Rig Veda Pancha Sukta Pavamana ritual will be performed.

Traditionally, this yagya series is performed in order to remove any bad karmas created during this lifetime, and to support the development of our nervous system so that it supports enlightened consciousness and divine awareness.

*Pavamanir dishanthu nah,
Imam lokamadho aamum,
Kaamaan samradhayanthu nah,
Devir devai samaabhruthaa.*

Those who are purified by Pavamana Suktham,
Enjoy fully this world as well as the next,
Their wishes will be fulfilled,
And they will be united with gods and goddesses

The Diwali Festival

Diwali is a happy festival of light most associated with Lakshmi and the abundance of the fall harvest season with decorations and little deepa oil lamps glowing on every available surface of homes and temples.

The festival is supposed to have originated when Rama, Sita, and Lakshman returned to their home in Ayodhya after defeating Ravana in the battle of Lanka. The residents of the kingdom decorated their homes with oil lamps to welcome their return, and so this time celebrates the victory of good over evil.

This is also considered to be the day when Lakshmi emerged from the Ocean of Milk after it had been churned by the devas and demons in order to obtain amrita, the nectar of immortality. In another story, on this day, Lakshmi's husband Vishnu, returned after completing his Vamana Avatara. Since Lakshmi was so delighted to see him, on this day she is in a good mood and receptive to the offerings of the yagya, and ready to bless her devotees.

From a spiritual perspective, the light that we celebrate is the inner light, the light of consciousness that dispels ignorance and fear. The yagya mantras enliven our inner awareness and attract the fullness that Lakshmi symbolizes.



Kanchipuram



After the basic layout is complete, the oil lamps are arranged on the pattern and decorated with flowers.

The first pujas are performed to Ganesha who takes the form of a lump of haldi (turmeric) as seen in the middle of the flower tray below. He is invoked to remove all obstacles to the performance of the pujas, and to allow the blessings from the pujas to flow freely.

Then the priests light the lamps and begin the recitation of slokas and hymns for Lakshmi including the Sahasranam (1008 names) along with offerings of flowers and fresh coconut.





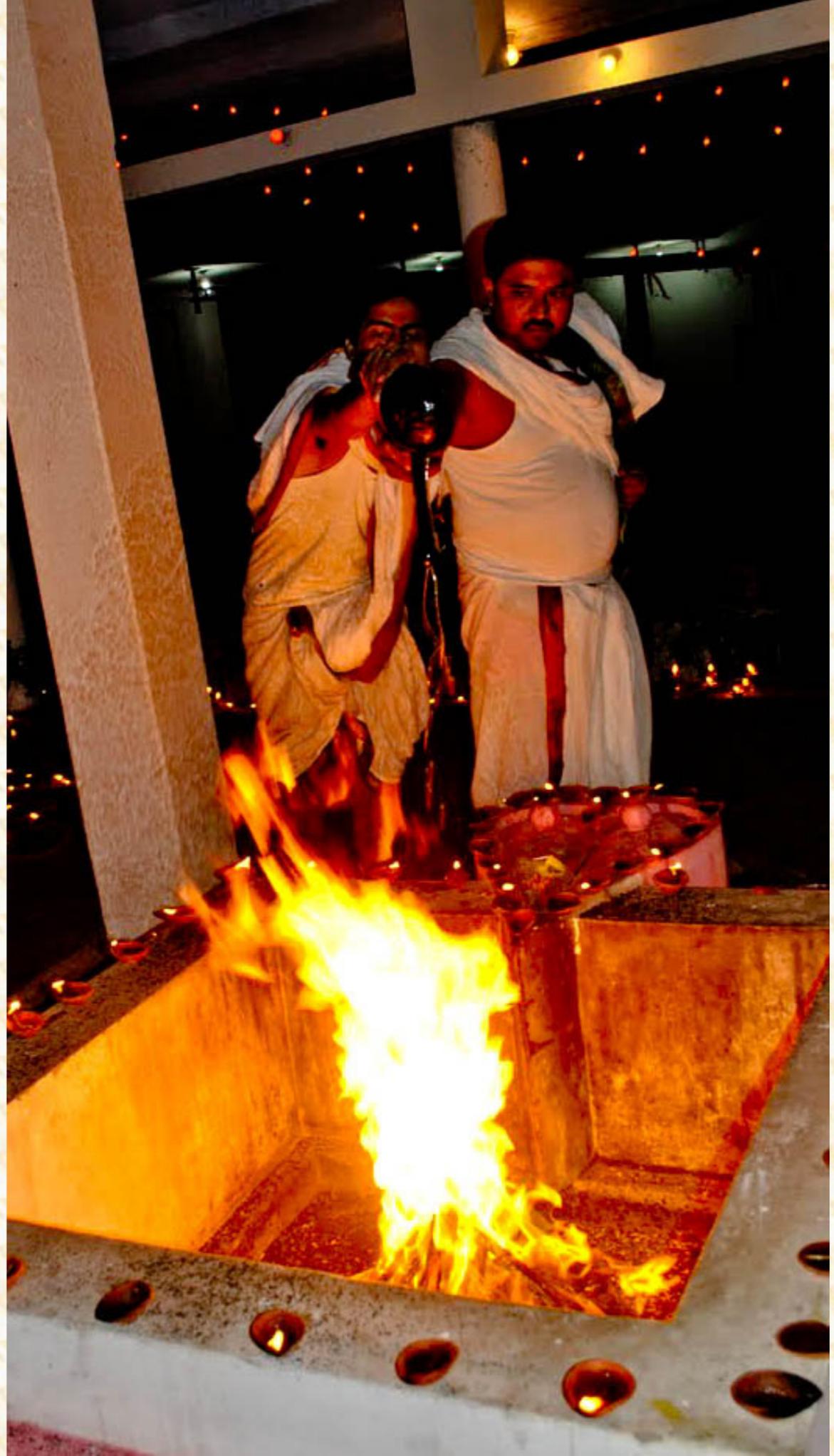
Varanasi

On the night of Diwali, we had a simultaneous event taking place in Varanasi. This facility is located in the countryside in a beautiful agricultural area far from the city. It is wonderfully peaceful and overlooks the Ganges.

The classic architecture of the yagya shala looks particularly beautiful in the light of the ghee lamps as the pundits perform Lakshmi puja and havan, the vedic fire yagya.

Note the beautiful rice flower decorations for the pujas, as is the tradition in north India.







Navaratri - Ganesha Yagya

Every puja and yagya begins with Ganesha, but for our larger events, we dedicate an entire day to him with special offerings of sweet modaka balls, fruit sugar cane, puffed rice, and other traditional ingredients.





Navaratri - Goddess Yagyas

The series of yagyas performed during the nine days and nights of Navaratri begin with three days for fiery Durga, then three days for sweet Lakshmi, and conclude with three days of quiet Saraswati. Each day begins with pujas and Rudra Abishekam, followed by recitation of Chandi Path - a 700 verse mantra/story of the Goddess and her victory over various demons. In the evenings, Lalitha Sahasranam (1008 names of Lalitha, the most beautiful form of the goddess) is recited along with another recitation of Chandi Path.

The daily Chandi Havan (fire yagya) requires over 100 different ingredients and is performed in its entirety every day by our Brahmin Priests.



Each day begins with the performance of the daily yagyas which include; Ganesha, Navagraha, Durga/Lakshmi/Saraswati, Mrytunjaya, Subramanya, Purusha Suktam (Vishnu), followed by abishekam, the cooling puja ritual during which soothing milk and sandalwood are offered by pouring them over the deities while mantras are recited (lower left).

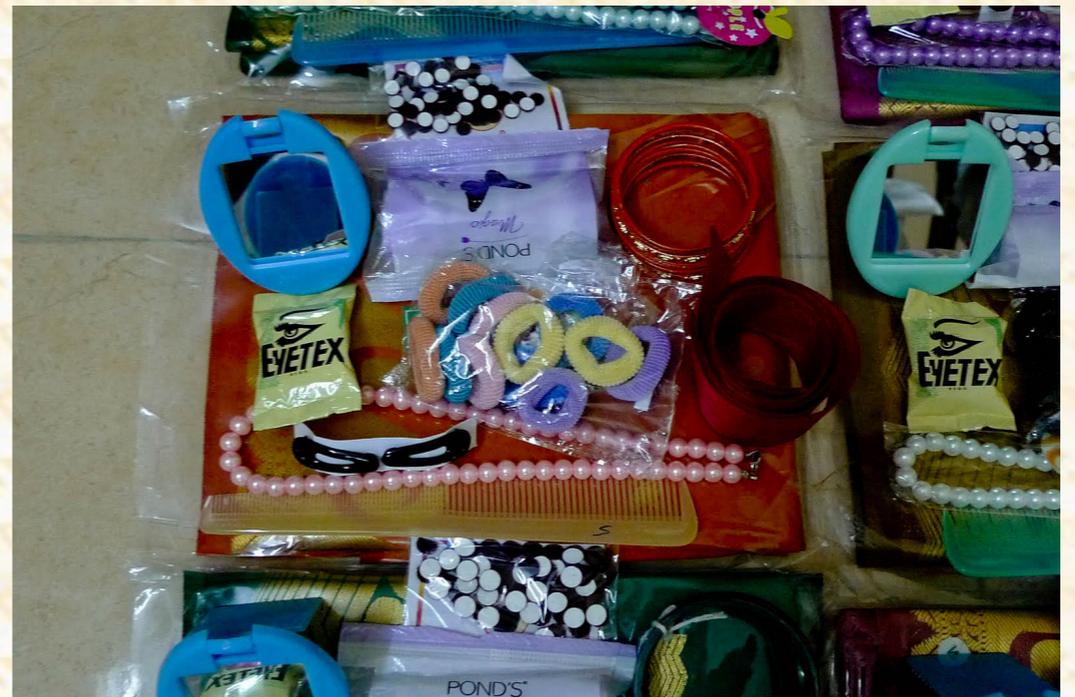
Then the recitation of Chandi Path begins and is followed by the fire ritual which begins with the above list of deities and concludes with Shiva and Durga/Chandi.







As a part of the Navaratri rituals, each day women of different ages are invited to attend the yagyas and are given gifts. A puja is performed to them, as a living embodiment of the power and grace of the goddess.



On the first day of the Lakshmi series a young cow wandered down the street and came up to the house. Since the cow is considered to be a form of Lakshmi, she was welcomed and given treats of bananas. She had a good look around.

As a part of every yagya, one always offers a great meal in thanks for the hard work of the Brahmin priests and pundits. We are fortunate to have someone, who I think must be one of the best cooks in India... but stay out of her kitchen!





Chandi Path is recited many times each day; morning and evening as a simple recitation (above left) and always during the homam (left).

The offerings that accompany the fire ritual are always extensive and colorful.

The Final Day

The preparations for the final day are extensive and everyone stays up late the night before to prepare. Squares of cloth are laid out (upper right) and various offerings are placed on each one (middle right). Ingredients include bitter melon, coconuts, bananas, sugar cane, betel leaf, betel nuts, camphor, flowers, kumkum, haldi, and various sticks, roots, leaves, nuts, and seeds (below left). It all looks very exotic, smells good, and when offered into the yagya fire, generates great amounts of smoke!





At the conclusion of the nine days and nights of Navaratri, a beautiful silk sari is offered to the goddess by way of the yagya fire. The entire garment is fed into the fire (left) and the fire blazes up as if to consume it thoroughly (lower left).

With all the extra ingredients offered on the last day, the fire will typically burn steadily until the next morning.

Even after spending the past 10 days working hard, sitting on the stone floor and either chanting or listening to chanting for hours and hours each day, the end of the yagya time is always disappointing. You want it to go on, you miss the subtle sense of the goddess' presence, their power, and purity.

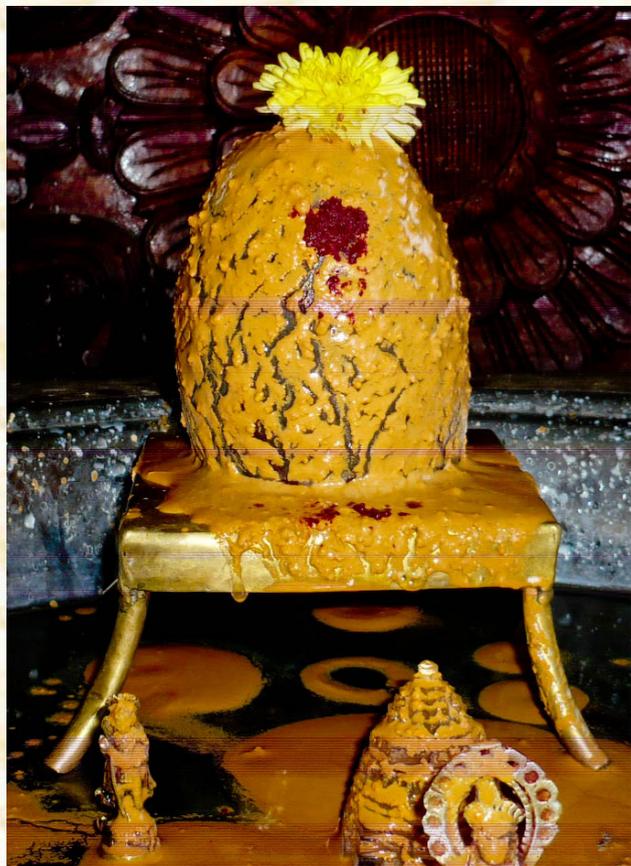
The next thought is, only four months until Shivaratri!



Sani Peyarchi (sign changing) Yagya

The November Yagya program focused on the movement of Saturn from Virgo (Kanya) to Libra (Tula). This time is uniquely powerful for improving the way in which this planet's energies will manifest in our lives over the next two and one half years. Each day after the Rudra Abishekam, our priests performed a complete Sani Yagya which included over 30,000 repetitions of the vedic Saturn mantra! The result will be increased smoothness and fewer obstacles.









Saturn, the force of change

Every two and one half years, Saturn moves into a new sign of the zodiac. Just a few weeks ago, Saturn moved from the very precise and somewhat fussy sign of Virgo (ruled by Mercury) into more easy going Libra (ruled by Venus). Libra is the sign where Saturn expresses the better side of his nature and causes the least amount of trouble. Saturn is exalted in Libra.

In our modern technological era, we have a scientific outlook on life, seeing most things in terms of cause and effect. Older cultures can be more mythologically oriented where symbols play a larger role and the events of life are seen in a slightly different context.

All astrology, but especially Jyotish (Vedic Astrology), is concerned with the interplay of the forces of the universe as represented by planets and constellations. The planets are not seen as causing events, but rather they act like markers, and the relationship between them gives clues as to the direction that events will take. Essentially the analysis of a jyotish chart is the analysis of a series of symbols; planets, signs, and houses.

In the sky now, the royal planet Jupiter is in Aries, a sign ruled by powerful Mars. Opposite that point we now find Saturn, the planet of the people, now gaining strength as he moves further into friendly Libra. This new position of Saturn will bring change on the macro level as well as on a personal level for each of us.

Leaving the complications of politics aside, it is particularly fascinating to see the evolution of the Occupy Wall Street movement. It sprang to prominence just as Saturn was about to leave Virgo a couple months ago.

Saturn is a planet that is not terribly sophisticated. It is the planet of things that are common and usually a little rough around the edges. Saturn represents the people in a democracy...perhaps slow to react, but always a steady and ultimately irresistible force of change, usually for the better.

Looking at photos of the occupiers in public parks, living in tents, and one is certainly seeing an expression of this aspect of Saturn. Their idealism and belief that they can change the way the world works comes from the current exalted status of Saturn and in some ways from the softening position of Jupiter, opposite Saturn in the sign of Aries.

We all have Jupiter in our charts. To varying degrees we all enjoy the luck, knowledge, wealth, and spirituality that Jupiter gives. Jupiter is the planet of dharma, good karma, and luck, but even Jupiter has his limitations. There is no such thing as enough for Jupiter. Jupiter loves to spend money and acquire possessions. Jupiter is learned and sophisticated, but often times a little out of touch with the suffering of others. What Jupiter gives can be taken away, but what Saturn gives generally can not.

Again, leaving politics aside, it is interesting to use jyotish to speculate about what will happen with Occupy Wall Street over the coming weeks and months.

The forces of what are being termed the 1% are quite strong because Jupiter is strong and they will work hard to protect their interests. Jupiter is in Aries through mid May 2012, and Aries is owned by combative Mars who in turn will be in the sign of Leo, (owned by the royal Sun) through June, 2012.

With Saturn exalted in the diplomatic sign of Libra, there will be an effort to resolve things gracefully and without violence. But with the involvement of Mars (representing the police) coming into conflict with stubborn Saturn, some disruptions seem to be inevitable.

Astrologically speaking, I think that it is unlikely that the protesters will give up and go home. They are not going to lose interest because they are represented by Saturn who is known to be slow moving, slow to change, and very tenacious.

Later this spring, Jupiter and Mars will change signs and the times will shift and

Saturn will assume a position of power as the pendulum of public opinion will in some form, swing in the other direction.

The recent years with the excesses of the wealthy, the powerful, and the banking and investment communities will come under increasing scrutiny. It is reasonable to expect that there will be added restrictions and much more accountability. But this need not be traumatic. Indeed the exalted status of Saturn could well mean that the next 2 1/2 years will see the world ease away from the financial troubles that have been so dominant. Saturn is structure, and an exalted Saturn will restore the healthy structure that protects order and balance in life.

Remember that this is an astrological analysis and we're not taking sides here. Jyotish is neutral - it just shows what is and it is always interesting to speculate about the ways in which these symbols might represent the course of events in the near future.

If we look a little further at where the planets will be moving, from mid August through late September of 2012 Mars and Saturn will be together in Libra. Even though Libra is the sign of the diplomat, these two planets are always explosive together. Perhaps this is sign that the 2012 election will be dramatic and exceptionally hard fought.

More fireworks can be expected when Rahu joins Saturn from January 2013 through December 2014. Rahu always acts as a magnifier accentuating, in

this case, the influence of both Saturn and Venus (the ruler of Libra). That's not bad, but Rahu is always a little rough, manipulative, and always unpredictable. Given the timing, might this portend dramatic events arising from the election? It will certainly be interesting to see.

So much for Saturn on the macro scale...what will this time mean for us as individuals?

On a personal level, an exalted Saturn is a wonderful thing. Saturn periods bring discipline, patience, focus, persistence, humility and contentment with what you have. Saturn turns your weaknesses into strengths by challenging



you to overcome obstacles and sometimes big ones.

For the most part, this 2 1/2 year transit of Saturn will be beneficial to everyone in one form or another. While, it is difficult to make broad generalizations, the impact will be greatest on those who have planets in Libra, Sagittarius, Aries, or Cancer.

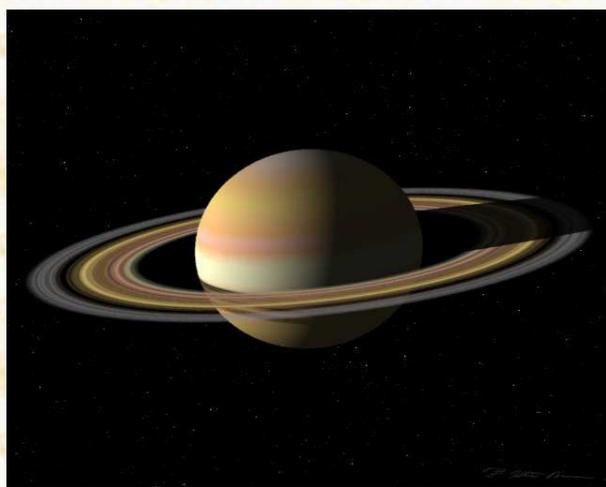
Sade Sati is a 7 1/2 year time when Saturn passes through the signs before, of, and after the position of the Moon. So if your Moon is in Virgo, you're in the last and usually easiest phase. For those with the Moon in Libra you are in the middle part, although with Saturn this will not be so bad. For those who have a debilitated Moon in Scorpio, your fun has just begun.

If you know where your Moon or Lagna is in your vedic chart (not western!!) then the following list will offer some insights into what this transit of Saturn through Libra will mean for you.

But first, let's emphasise that there is no reason to fear Saturn, especially now when he is exalted. From a spiritual perspective, Saturn is the energy that forces us to change and grow even when we don't want to. This energy of the universe pushes us ahead, making certain that we don't stop our quest for liberation too soon, short of the goal.

During a puja, the pundit typically recites the either 108 or 1008 names (mantras) for a deity. In the case of Saturn, one of them is "Vishnu Bhakta", meaning that he is a devotee to the divine and ultimately his purpose is to help us transcend the material world and embrace spiritual values.

Little bit by little bit, Saturn's influence guides us to develop *vairagya* - a state of balance where our involvement in worldly affairs doesn't over shadow our inner spirituality. Saturn also pushes us to develop *viveka*, usually translated as discrimination; meaning that we live in a state of balance in which we give equal weight to that which is transcendent and lasting, and the fun of the material world with all its variety of pleasures, but which are ultimately fleeting.





Of course, Saturn will always act like Saturn; he gives his blessings gradually and makes you work for them, but once given they aren't taken away. If you take a long term view and do what needs to be done, you'll find it easy to work with Saturn's energies with attention, patience and flexibility.

Yagyas for Shiva, Ganesha, and Hanuman are always useful when working with Saturn.

Aries - Saturn will be in your 7th house of partnerships and committed relationships. If supported by other planets in your chart, your most important relationships will flourish.

Relationships that you have outgrown may end, but it will be a step of progress. Be honest and straightforward with others. Saturn doesn't tolerate deception, self or otherwise. Sowbagya yagyas will help to maintain harmony in your relationships. Saturn is also connected to your 4th house, so you pay attention to your home and living environment. His aspect onto your 9th house will bring deeper spiritual focus as well.

Taurus - Because Taurus is ruled by Venus you can slide into comfortable modes of living that may not be healthy but which you find difficult to change. With Saturn in your 6th house, you will find new depths of determination and discipline. If you play sports, you'll be feeling positive and powerful. The 6th house is related to arguments and disputes, so be patient with yourself and others. The 6th house is also related to service and much spiritual progress can be made through service to others. Saturn aspect onto your 8th house will bring growth and transformation during this time. Hanuman yagyas will be very useful for both discipline and patience.

Gemini - If your Moon/Lagna is Gemini then you have much to look forward to over the next couple of years. Saturn is moving through your 5th house which is related to past life good karmas, children, general creativity and higher education. You'll find that these areas feel invigorated and events flow in a way

that will support your activities. Saturn likes discipline and consistency, so if you approach your activities in this way, you'll receive his full support. Saturn's aspect onto your 2nd house will bring good income. Because Saturn rules your 9th house, be sure to spend some time every day on spirituality. You'll be glad you did. Shiva yagyas are very helpful for maximizing the spiritual potential of this time period.

Cancer - Saturn rules your 7th and 8th houses and so some of the focus will be on developing and maintaining a deeper emotional balance in your relationships or marriage. You will not feel satisfied with the status quo and this can be a great catalyst for growth. Saturn will be in your 4th house, so you may take on projects related to your residence. Because the 4th house is also a moksha house, a renewed emphasis on your spiritual life will bring positive rewards. Saturn's aspect onto your 6th house can bring obstacles and obstructions, but you will learn from overcoming them. Ganesha, Shiva and Lakshmi yagyas will help to balance and lighten this period of time for you.

Leo - Saturn will bring change, but because Saturn will be exalted in your 3rd house, you'll find it to be a great adventure of new horizons, new interests, and new satisfactions. Saturn will bring some humility, something that is a bit foreign to the sunny Leo personality, but it is healthy and you'll adapt. Be flexible and open and this time will be a pleasure. Saturn's aspect onto your 12th house is good for travel and spending time alone. Go on a retreat - you'll like it. Hanuman yagyas will provide balance and inner harmony.

Virgo - The movement of Saturn into Libra will be quite a relief. Normally a Virgo person can be detail oriented but, in combination with Saturn, for the past two years you'd be obsessed and just a bit frustrated. The pressure is off and you'll start to feel much more relaxed. Saturn will be in your 2nd house and this will be good for finances and possessions. Be sure



to maintain your discipline and feel free to discard anything that you don't really need. Friends will be a great source of enjoyment and guidance. Take care with what you eat because Saturn just loves leftovers and junk food. Goddess yagyas will be great for maximizing income and Hanuman can help with discipline.

Libra - Saturn is a special planet for you. He (in his own way) brings good things into your life and guides you in the right direction. It may not feel like it now, but these couple of years will be enjoyable and successful. You'll make much progress and it will feel like a whole new chapter of your life has begun. Set new goals and work towards them. You will be lucky and for once, the breaks will come your way. Your relationships will be enhanced and feel more satisfying than they have been in recent years. Work will be a greater source of pleasure and your hard work will be recognized and rewarded. Yagyas for the goddesses will enhance your enjoyment of this time.

Scorpio - It may feel like Saturn is holding you back, and you're feeling cranky and dissatisfied. For now, Saturn is asking you to take a break and consider where you are and where you are headed. This is a time for examining and planing in preparation for the time when Saturn will be moving through Scorpio in a couple years. You'll be feeling unstoppable then! This time is when you take aim and stockpile your resources. This may be a time of lessened income, so try to save when you are able to. You'll have lots of energy for work, and it is a great time to perform service to others less fortunate. Saturn's aspect on your 9th house can bring deep contentment. Subramanya yagyas will help with calmness and balance.

Sagittarius - You are one of the fortunate ones who will find this time enjoyable. Saturn will be in your 11th house of rewards from work, recognition and



friends. Saturn being a modest planets, may not give you lots of recognition, but you will get a good raise, or new opportunity. Spend time enjoying your friends, spend some money on the things that you have delayed buying, and find ways to enjoy your life. You've earned it! Lakshmi yagyas will enhance your sense of abundance.

Capricorn - As a Capricorn you are already familiar with the energies of Saturn and how to use them well. Libra is your 10th house and to have an exalted Saturn here will bring you success, career advancement, and income. You will be feeling strong and balanced, but remember not everyone will be having the same experience. Be generous and patient with others. This will be a great time to pay off debts and invest in your home. Saturn's aspect on your 7th house will bring some focus to your relationships. Work on them with flexibility and kindness. Vishnu yagyas will be helpful in maintaining balance and softness.

Aquarius - Breathe a sigh of relief. Saturn has moved from your unlucky 8th house of loss and transformation and into the lucky and happy 9th house. No doubt, you have been through a difficult time for the past couple of years. Enjoy your new found freedom and spread your wings a bit. You've grown a lot and you'll find that as the next years unfold, you have started a new and refreshing phase of your life. Saturn peeled away everything that was holding you back and now you can roar ahead and find new horizons to conquer. Saturn's aspect onto your 11th house will bring new friends and professional recognition. The 9th house is spirituality in all its forms. Exalted Saturn in Libra will bring spiritual satisfaction and a renewed commitment to your journey. Subramanya yagyas will be useful.

Pisces - Saturn will be moving through your 8th house of transformation. Because Saturn rules the 12th house, you may find a desire to spend more time alone, working on your interests, researching, or just meditating. As ruler of your 11th house, Saturn's presence in the hidden 8th house means that you may spend less time with friends, and may not gain the recognition you are used to at work. This is a time when you take a lower profile, making plans, and deciding where your life will take you next. It can be a very valuable time. Because the 8th house represents the resources of your partner, they may pass through a time of greater earnings, or you may inherit money during this period. Dakshinamurti yagyas will be useful and will especially deepen your spiritual experiences.





The Rig Veda begins with verses in praise of Agni - the yagya fire, which provides a link between our world and the divine.

“Be unto us, easy of access, as a father is to his son. May you be ever-present with us, for our sake” -Rig Veda 1-9

“Our songs and invocations are for you and your eternal order. May you come to us and nourish us with your blessings.” -Rig Veda 2-4