

# CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM  | 2   |
| EDITORIAL Warriors  | 3   |
| THE PRACTICE OF SELF-ENQUIRY N.A.Mohan Rao                    | 9   |
| THE FAQ'S OF LIFE I.S.Madugula                                | 21  |
| VIDEO INTERVIEWS: MY CHILDHOOD WITH BHAGAVAN Rajalakshmi      | 29  |
| KEYWORD Samadhi   | 41  |
| ULLADU NARPADU: VERSE EIGHTEEN S.Ram Mohan                    | 45  |
| A TRIBUTE TO SWAMI RAMANANANDA                                | 50  |
| ON NOT LIVING THROUGH CONCEPTS Mukesh Eswaran                 | 55  |
| SRI GURU RAMANA PRASADAM Sri Muruganar                        | 65  |
| ON USING SRI RAMANA'S TEACHINGS FOR YOGA PRACTICES Gary Weber | 73  |
| REMEMBERING NARAYANA IYER T.R.Kanakammal                      | 79  |
| PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION: PART ONE Swami Sadasivananda           | 87  |
| ENLIGHTENMENT: THE PATH THROUGH THE JUNGLE Dennis Waite       | 93  |
| JOURNEY INTO ONESELF T.C.Gopalakrishnan                       | 99  |
| BHAGAVAN IN SUSSEX Alasdair Black                             | 104 |
| BOOK EXCERPT: WAYS TO TRUTH Ananda Wood                       | 105 |
| SRI ARUNACHALA VENBA Sadhu Om Swami                           | 111 |
| RAMANA KIDS' CORNER   | 117 |
| BOOK REVIEWS  | 119 |
| ASHRAM BULLETIN   | 125 |

## Ramana Ashtottaram

### 52. ओं महर्षये नमः

Om maharṣaye namaḥ

Prostration to the great seer who has realized the supreme Truth and reveals it to others.

The name ‘Maharshi’ was given to Bhagavan (who being a youth, was till then known as *Brahmana Swami*) by the eminent scholar, Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni.

The title Maharshi is a significant indication of Sri Ramana’s role and why he was born into this world. The word *rishi* comes from the root *drs* ‘to see’. *Rishi* means ‘seer’. The ancient rishis saw the truth, *rta*. They ‘saw’ with their inner eye and composed verses to celebrate the revealed truth. In the same way Sri Ramana directly ‘saw’ the Truth of Brahman without any mental constructions.

### 53. ओं भगवते नमः

Om bhagavate namaḥ

Prostration to the master of *bhaga*.

*Bhaga* indicates a god or godly person. It stands for the plenitude of *aisvarya* (lordship or opulence), *parakrama* (heroic courage), *kirti* (renown), *tejas* (splendour), *jnana* (wisdom) and *vairagya* (dispassion).

The word ‘Bhagavan’ can also mean one who watches as a mere witness the world process.

Another list gives the six qualities of *bhaga* as: *jnana* (wisdom), *sakti* (potency), *bala* (strength), *aisvarya* (lordship), *virya* (valour), *tejas* (splendour). ▲

## Warriors

Being a warrior is not a choice we have; it is a condition of our existence. A child fights to make her wishes known; an adult struggles to lead the life that seems desirable; a practitioner in search of spiritual enlightenment struggles with wayward vasanas. The world is a battleground in which, like Arjuna we contend for what we believe is right and just. After he became despondent on seeing his relatives and gurus opposed to him on the field of Kurukshetra, Krishna advised Arjuna to act according to his warrior (*kshatriya*) dharma. Try as we might we cannot but act either vigorously or passively according to our natures.

We are composed of conflicting elements: these are our ‘relatives’ and ‘gurus’. The battle within us that we as warriors have to fight is to resolve these differences and submit to a higher power, the harmonious sense of ‘I am’ which is free of all false identifications and distinction.

Aside from Arjuna who else is there who can embody for us the temperament of the warrior? Amongst those who fought in the interminable wars which racked Japan in the fifteenth century Miyamoto Musashi, the renowned samurai warrior’s name endures to this day because of his exemplary life and literary testimony. He has

become an icon in the martial arts, not just as an invincible swordfighter, but also as a master of battlefield strategy. He farmed and practised carpentry and applied its principles to war. He wrote a classic, *The Book of Five Rings*, which offers insights into the subject of conflict. He believed that a true strategist was adept not just in war but also in peace and he cultivated the tranquil art of *sumi-e* (monochrome ink painting). It is said that he killed some twenty-five opponents in duels.

This cold-blooded warrior is a stark contrast to Sri Ramana Maharshi and although there can be no comparison between them in terms of spiritual accomplishment, there is much to be learned in comparing their lives. Bhagavan was a gentle, considerate and compassionate person as we know, but there is much more to him than that, as we also know. He was fearless and uncompromising when it came to adherence to the truth and efficacy of Advaita Vedanta. He could be a lion, and it was said by one devotee that a glance from him could have stopped an elephant at fifty paces. Yet he never harmed any person or animal. He could be quite caustic when someone took the trouble to strip a flower bush of its leaves for the sake of a puja to him.

Bhagavan was naturally gracious and accommodating to all who came for darshan. He felt it to be his destiny to be always available and not inconvenience those who might have come a long way to receive his blessing. People left his presence uplifted. His smile and deep penetrating eyes did not threaten but were a comfort. However, once a person surrendered and requested guidance, Bhagavan was firm and exacting. The attendants, in particular, who were blessed by being allowed to physically serve Bhagavan, were under close scrutiny for each action they performed. Bhagavan did not hesitate to censure them for sloppy behaviour. His tongue could be sharp and his purpose insistent until the lesson was learnt. Chinna Swami often advised visitors to be careful for Bhagavan was Arunachala Siva — he was fire and should be approached with caution.

He showed by example that however many people surrounded him or whether the situation was joyous or tense with drama, he was equally unmoved. His stillness was not dependent upon anything external; he was free of all conditions. There was no struggle.

Musashi on the other hand, was a man of action like many of us. He never really settled down until later in life. There was a wild, ruthless element to his character. He stood alone and was an eternal seeker who sought to test himself through opposition to both man and nature, perhaps not fully comprehending that the true battle was within. And yet, it is worth noticing the revolutionary nature of Bhagavan's departure from Madurai, his abandonment of its sophisticated family support system. He boldly stepped out alone impelled by the revelation which had destroyed the sense of individuality. But in major contrast to Musashi, he never moved again after that one giant leap. His purpose had been accomplished.

What we know of Musashi the teacher is from his book, *The Book of Five Rings*. He taught many different methods but there are several themes which recur. He highlighted timing, perception, control of mind and practice. Above all, practice. Timing is important not just in judging the speed of an opponent but also for how we conduct our daily lives.<sup>1</sup> We cannot force nor rush what is to happen. When we are ready Life will unfold whatever is necessary for us to learn. We do not live life in a straight line but circle or weave according to certain rhythms which depend on our age, mind, society, culture and religion. Like flower bushes in a garden, our right thoughts and actions do not find fruition when we want them to but arise and blossom when the time is appropriate. We should know when to act and be courageous as we take a step into the unknown future. We should know when to be still and patient. Bhagavan emphasised the need to commit ourselves totally to the Truth and observe with detachment, the fundamental conditions which surround us. He did not advise casting the religious and social framework overboard but to respect it. It reminds one of the words 'to be in the world but not of it'. We cannot free ourselves from the constraints of family or society until we have paid our dues for all that has been done for us. Those who mindlessly cut the bonds before their time will later find that they have to repay with interest.

<sup>1</sup> "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven; A time to be born, and a time to die;... A time to rend, a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." *Ecclesiastes* 3:1.

Musashi used his observations and knowledge of various crafts to hone his swordsmanship. He explained, for example, that a carpenter would find a use for every kind of wood, even the apparently useless pieces. Similarly we can find a use for every observation and apply it to our lives. He famously compared the building of a house to a battle with its unique terrain and limitations on the resources available. You work with what you have and if applied intelligently, these would be sufficient to the task at hand.<sup>2</sup> There is no point in self-pity or in repeating uselessly, ‘what if’. There is no what if, there is only what is.

People often asked Bhagavan questions which had no relevance to the task of self-enquiry and self understanding. They would ask about reincarnation and the validity of the *Puranas*. Bhagavan would firmly bring them back to the question of their own identity. He advised seekers to look to themselves first before asking about other matters which had no direct relevance to their lives. This advice included gossip and altruistic plans to save the world, yet again.

The warrior when confronted by an enemy does not indulge in reverie. The situation is real and pressing. The power of observation is an essential skill for survival. This means noticing everything in the moment, but also observing in an objective manner because our desires and fears can blind perception. Musashi was interested in Zen Buddhism because it helped him to concentrate on seeing things as they are. This is what Self-enquiry can do. Faced with the naked reality of our own motives we cannot but recognise our delusions and act to rectify them. No one wishes to be a fool and if we are truthful and fearlessly face the truth about our own thoughts like a warrior, we would accept responsibility, be free of gnawing doubt and walk on.

The principles of swordsmanship can be applied to our everyday lives. Musashi explains how one controls the enemy’s mind. Some samurai schools taught methods of jumping and twisting to gain an edge. Musashi instead advised that the body and mind should be kept straight and still. One waits for the opportune moment to strike. He

said the moment an adversary takes an in-breath, is the right moment, for in that instant the opponent is frozen.

Let us consider for a moment that advice in the light of atma-vichara. Breath and thought-creation are connected. When breath or thought expands we are identified with it. Our one chance to be free of this identification is to catch the thought before it becomes full-blown. Atma-vichara is the tool that enables us to catch that moment. Like a sword it cuts the rising thought off from its source and we observe that by itself, it has no life of its own. It is but part of a chain of presumptions. It is dependent on something else for its existence. When we observe this, the perception frees us for an instant; we are still....until the next thought automatically arises. “As thoughts arise they should be destroyed then and there in the very place of their origin, through enquiry...As long as there are enemies within the fortress, they will continue to sally forth; if they are destroyed as they emerge, the fortress will fall into our hands.”<sup>3</sup>

The one constant advice Musashi gave was *practise*. When giving instructions he would say you must practise this, or it can be only understood by practice. We can’t learn self-enquiry by reading alone. For us too, we can only practise self-enquiry until we are released from erroneous ideas about ourselves.

We see the differences and commonality between Bhagavan and Musashi in the ways they faced death. On that fateful day at Madurai, Bhagavan calmly faced death and understood the transcendental ‘I’. All else was ephemeral.

Musashi’s end exemplified his intrepid life. “At the moment of his death, he had himself raised up. He had his belt tightened and his short sword put in it. He seated himself with one knee vertically raised, holding the sword with his left hand and a cane in his right hand. He died in this posture, at the age of sixty-two.”<sup>4</sup>

Like warriors we should be brave and alert with our sword of discrimination. It is a matter of life and death. ▲

<sup>2</sup> “If you know the Way (*Tao*) broadly you will see it in everything. Men must polish their particular Way.” *The Book of Five Rings*, The Earth Scroll.

<sup>1</sup> *Who Am I?* Section 15. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

<sup>2</sup> *Hyoho senshi denki* (Anecdotes about the Deceased Master).



John Maynard

# The Practice of Self-enquiry

In the Light of *Upadesa Saram*

N. A. MOHAN RAO

As scripture is considered most valuable to us if it serves two purposes: one, it enlightens us on the nature of ultimate Reality, and two, it indicates some plausible way of verifying that Reality in our own experience. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Upadesa Saram* (*The Essence of Instruction*) fulfils these criteria to obvious perfection. Free of any hyperbole unlike some of our ancient texts, it speaks in a strictly contemporary tone, appealing to our modern psyche with its consistency of focus and logical rigour.

*Upadesa Saram* presents the Ultimate Reality as non-dual in line with the highest traditions of *advaita*. The trinity of God, the world and the individual are held to possess no separate identities, and are at

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best seen as passing projections of a single, transcendent Reality. The individual can realise this by systematically following a set of disciplines, called *sadhana*. He or she then finds himself to be non-different from that Reality, and so is said to have ‘realised’ his true Self. Since he finds this Self to be non-dual, he is no more bound by the former compulsions of dualistic life, inclusive of death. He is therefore said to be ‘Liberated’.

### Two Methods of *Sadhana*

A cursory study of *Upadesa Saram* reveals two alternative methods for *sadhana*. We may refer to them as ‘conventional *yoga*’ and ‘Self-enquiry’. They are dealt with in verses 1-15 and 16-22 respectively. The last eight verses (23-30) present an insight into the nature of Reality (or the ‘realised state’).

‘Conventional *yoga*’ comprises three stages, namely *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga* and *jnana yoga* in that order. The *pranayama* component of *raja yoga* can be taken as an additional option within the ambit of *jnana yoga*. The three regular *yogas* are dealt with in verses 1-3, 4-7, and 8-15 respectively. The overlapping role of *pranayama* in *jnana yoga* is covered in verses 11-14.<sup>1</sup>

The method of ‘Self-enquiry’ is summed up in its essence in verses 16-20. Some further elaboration is provided in verses 21-22. The present essay is an expansion on the ideas presented in these verses, with due attention paid to Bhagavan’s teachings on numerous other occasions. Supplementary information from other sources is appended wherever appropriate.

### Opting for Self-enquiry for one’s *Sadhana*

If a seeker is to choose Self-enquiry as his settled method of *sadhana*, he has to examine his suitability in the light of two questions: one,

<sup>1</sup> Only those who are unable to obtain one-pointedness of mind during meditation, and who have no opportunity to meditate in the immediate presence of a realised Master, need go in for *pranayama*. Even they are advised to give it up once skill is gained in arresting the breath. (cf. *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Devaraja Mudaliar, Entries of 24.12.1945 and 10.5.1946; *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, N.R. Narayana Aiyer, 1996, p.30; *Self-Enquiry*, Translation of *Vichara Sangraham*, §35, T.M.P. Mahadevan).

whether he is seriously motivated to pursue Self-enquiry, and two, having chosen it tentatively, whether he is able to adhere to its practice and gain confidence over a reasonable period of time.<sup>2</sup>

If the seeker finds a natural aptitude for Self-enquiry and finds no great problem in its practice, it is inferred that he had fulfilled the necessary prerequisites in his past lives and/or in the present one.<sup>3</sup> It is in respect of such a seeker that it is said that Self-enquiry needs no prerequisites. The seeker can then bank on Bhagavan’s assurance that Self-enquiry involves no secret technique (*upadesh*),<sup>4</sup> and go ahead with his practice with the help of information from published literature<sup>5</sup> and through personal exchange.

If, on the other hand, one or both of the aforesaid conditions are not met, the seeker will have to start at an appropriate stage in ‘conventional *yoga*’ (consisting of the three classical *yogas*). Obviously, after having progressed with it for some time, he can still exercise his option to get into Self-enquiry if he so wishes, but subject to the selfsame conditions. Otherwise, he can stick to the conventional *yoga* to the end without any sense of loss or regret.

It is noteworthy here that as Bhagavan points out, Self-enquiry is the final gateway everyone has to pass through before Realisation, irrespective of his earlier practices. A seeker who follows conventional *yoga* will also therefore pass through a phase of Self-enquiry just prior to Realisation. It is as though the *yoga* practices preceding Self-enquiry build up an avalanche of force behind the query ‘Who am I?’ that renders the fructification of Self-enquiry to be very quick. Since the seeker may not have deliberately planned for this phase, it will seem to him as if conventional *yoga* is altogether separate from Self-enquiry.

<sup>2</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 18.7.1946.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Entry of 18.11.1946.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Entry of 8.10.1946.

<sup>5</sup> For a preliminary insight into the method, vide *Who am I?*, recorded by M. Sivaprakasam Pillai. A summary view of the underlying philosophy may be gleaned from *Gems from Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar. For a comprehensive treatment of the subject, see *Be as You Are*, (ed.) David Godman, Penguin Books, New Delhi.

*Upadesa Saram* presents a single sequential *sadhana*, of which ‘conventional *yoga*’ and Self-enquiry are successive stages. A seeker can start at one or other of the stages depending on his aptitude and preparedness. If he chooses conventional *sadhana*, he has the further option of either switching to Self-enquiry after a time, or else continuing with the conventional method with the prospect of entering Self-enquiry almost involuntarily towards the end.

### Requirement of a Guru

Having a Self-realised Master for one’s Guru is a rare good fortune available to only a few. This is because a Guru does not appear to one till one is mature enough to follow the Guru’s instructions in letter and spirit. The absence of a Guru is however no disqualification for starting one’s *sadhana*, and a seeker can always trust his inner Guru, namely his Self, for counsel and guidance till he finds his destined Guru. It is true that such a counsel can sometimes be ‘misread’, but in the end it all works out to the seeker’s advantage, since faith placed in the Self can never be in vain.

An added help at this stage is to accept Bhagavan or some other realised Master (bodily alive or departed) inwardly as one’s notional Guru. For one thing, it is easier to repose faith in a ‘tangible’ Guru than in an intangible Self, even though both are identical. When unique experiences start descending on the seeker in course of *sadhana*, this prior acceptance of a human Guru as an overarching authority over his *sadhana* helps keep his ego from becoming puffed up with misplaced self-importance. One’s whole *sadhana* must be built up on the foundation of a constant inward submission to the Sadguru and unflinching faith in his guidance from within and without at all times.<sup>6</sup>

### Getting into the Groove of Self-enquiry

Self-enquiry consists in withdrawing the mind from its preoccupation with the world, and turning it inwards to delve into its own nature

<sup>6</sup> From the seeker’s point of view, faith begets Grace. Sai Baba, the famous saint of Shirdi, has likened Guru’s Grace to copious rainfall, and a seeker without faith to a pot turned upside down (in the rain). The pot collects no water, even though it ‘receives’ bountiful quantities of water all over.

(verse16). These two steps generally go by the names of *vairagya* (dispassion) and *abhyasa* (practice) respectively. Of these, the withdrawal of the mind from its outward focus is by far the most challenging, and more or less determines the success of enquiry.<sup>7</sup>

In this electronic age, the average person’s life has become so complex that his mind finds not a moment’s respite from its engagement with the world. If the mind, so intensely drugged into worldliness, is to be reined in for the purpose of enquiry, mere will-power alone cannot suffice. At the very least, the person has to circumscribe his goals in the material world, and commit himself to progressive non-attachment in his day-to-day life.<sup>8</sup> Thereby, his mundane life becomes synchronised with his *sadhana*, and ceases to create insurmountable obstacles to Self-enquiry.

### Core Principles of Self-enquiry

When the mind, divested of all thoughts about the objective world, enquires into its own nature steadily over a period of time, it will be found that there is no mind at all (verse17). In its place arises Pure Consciousness that is non-dual (verse20).

The mind is nothing but thoughts. But all thoughts spring from the ‘I-thought’ and are therefore identical with it. The mind is therefore nothing but the ‘I-thought’ (verse18). So, if one investigates what is mind, he must ask himself “Who am I?”, or “Where does the I-thought arise from?” (verse19). The mind then begins to identify itself with the ‘I-consciousness’ or ‘I-feeling’ within.

In practice, the inwardness of the mind so obtained is easily disturbed by worldly thoughts. However, as and when a thought arises, one should immediately pose the question “To whom is this thought?” The answer comes, “To me”. This should prompt the question “Who am I?”, which brings the mind back to the ‘I-consciousness’. This is the real nature of Self-enquiry or ‘Self-attention’. When this is practised

<sup>7</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 18.7.1946.

<sup>8</sup> Desire for something that is absent and fear of losing something that is present are the principal signs of our attachment to the world.

steadily, one will find oneself going deeper and deeper into one's own self,<sup>9</sup> till ultimately the real Self stands revealed.

The question "Who am I?" is thus not meant to be recited as a *japa*; nor is it meant to obtain a verbal answer. Consider, for instance, a father searching for his missing son in a carnival crowd. He would not keep repeating within himself "Where is my son?" Instead, his eyes would keep darting from place to place and person to person, eager to find the form of his son. In a somewhat similar fashion, the enquiry "Who am I?" consists in an active search within oneself (i.e., within the ego or the 'false-I') for finding the true 'I', that never fades back into the oblivion of thoughts.

### Steps in the Practice of Self-enquiry

Practice of Self-enquiry initially starts sitting in an *asana* (*yoga* posture) behind closed doors, or in some other agreeable location like a temple or an *ashram*. We may term this '*meditational enquiry*', as it closely resembles conventional meditation in its exterior aspects. In course of time, the enquiry extends to other periods of the waking state, wherein one is engaged in physical or mental activity. For our purpose here, we shall designate this '*concurrent enquiry*'. The two steps together should, ideally speaking, occupy the entire waking life of the seeker.<sup>10</sup>

### Meditational Enquiry

*Meditational enquiry* is practised sitting in an *asana*, holding the head, neck and spine erect in a straight line. The *sadhaka* (practitioner) may wash his face and limbs before the start, so as to freshen himself up a bit. Once seated, he must remember his Guru and offer prostration inwardly.

The purpose of *asana* is many-fold: firstly, it helps keep the body in perfect *poise* with minimum expenditure of energy and attention. The body-consciousness is thus almost instantly overcome, leaving

the mind free to attend to the inward quest. Secondly, by minimising the contact of the body with the surroundings, the *asana* facilitates easy dissipation of body heat. And thirdly, it allows for free expansion of the spine and lungs during *pranayama* (if used). All these factors together help the *sadhaka* to maintain the posture for prolonged periods without strain.

The *sadhaka* may initially start with one meditation session a day, unless he happens to be more determined. Early morning is considered the best period since the mind is very fresh then. Some find the time of dusk better suited to their temperament and situation in life. Another alternative is late evenings, an hour or so after a light dinner. When, through practice, some proficiency is gained in enquiry, one may extend the number of sessions to two or three a day, so that enquiry has its impact on the rest of the day's proceedings. The total duration of all the sessions put together could be about one to two hours.<sup>11</sup>

*Meditational enquiry* counts as the cutting-edge of *sadhana*, as the first rendezvous with the Self is expected to occur in it. This occurs in the form of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, during which the *sadhaka* loses outward consciousness. In such a situation, there could be a risk of the body falling and incurring injury. The use of a regular *asana* precludes this by holding the body steady even in the unconscious state. The *asanas* recommended are *padmasana*, *sukhasana*, *siddhasana* and *swastikasana*.<sup>12</sup> Seekers who find it difficult to sit cross-legged may sit erect on a straight-backed chair taking due precautions.

The core of the practice has already been dealt with. The idea of the Self as given in verse 21 must form the backdrop to enquiry. The effort should be to keep the mind steady in its source in the manner of a flicker-free lamp in the interior of a god's shrine. Initially, this can be very frustrating, as the mind is not used to staying within. The best

<sup>9</sup> *Sat-Darshana Bhashya*, K. Sastri, p.ii-iv; as quoted in *Be As You Are*, (ed.) D. Godman, Ch.5, Question 5.

<sup>10</sup> Inferred from *Who am I?*, §15, and *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entries of 2.1.1946 and 21.7.1946.

<sup>11</sup> *A Search in Secret India*, Paul Brunton, B.I. Publications, New Delhi (1998 Reprint), p.156.

<sup>12</sup> *Concentration and Meditation*, Swami Sivananda, Divine Life Society, Sivanandanagar, (1964, 3/ed), pp.138-9.



remedy is perseverance.<sup>13</sup> The distractions become less and less of a bother over a period of some months or a few years.<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, one may resort to *pranayama* as outlined in verses 11 to 14.

### Practice of *Concurrent Enquiry*

During the day, we go through many activities which require little or no attention from us — e.g., walking, bathing, eating food, waiting for someone or something, going to sleep, etc. Such occasions may be conveniently utilised for enquiry, thereby raising the number of hours of daily practice substantially. This *concurrent enquiry* can be fruitfully attempted only after making some headway with *meditational enquiry*.<sup>15</sup>

When a foothold has been gained in *concurrent enquiry* in the above manner, the practice can be extended to other periods wherein the mind is actively engaged — e.g., reading, writing, talking, shopping, cooking etc. It may at first seem impossible to combine enquiry with such activities, but Bhagavan assures us to the contrary<sup>16</sup>. Village women, when they fetch water from outside, walk home carrying the water pots on their heads even without holding them, even while conversing among themselves. Though their minds are engaged elsewhere, their subconscious attention never wavers from the water pots. In the same way, it is possible to carry on with Self-attention while attending to worldly chores.

*Concurrent enquiry* ensures the commitment of the total personality of the seeker to his goal of Self-realisation. It thereby greatly enhances the efficacy of *meditational enquiry*, which forms the inner core of practice.

<sup>13</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*, 6.34-35; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 18.7.1946.

<sup>14</sup> It is the common experience of *sadhakas* that their faith in *sadhana* is sustained by the inflow of Grace in unexpected ways from time to time. This is particularly helpful in the initial period, when progress is slow.

<sup>15</sup> A practical way to reduce the difficulty of this transition is to try to fill the time slots meant for concurrent enquiry first with mental *japa* of a chosen *mantra*. When the *japa* is well established, the fickleness of the mind is arrested, and then it will be relatively easy to substitute the *japa* with Self-attention.

<sup>16</sup> *A Search in Secret India*, op. cit., pp. 157, 160.

### Obstacles to *Sadhana*

Obstacles of various types may be faced. Distracting thoughts of the world are naturally the foremost 'obstacle', and the essence of *sadhana* consists in overcoming them. In this, the attitude of the seeker should be not one of struggle or coercion, but one of preferentially shifting his attention to the source of 'I'. His effort should be as delicate as that of the proverbial princess in freeing her wafer-thin upper garment (*dupata*) caught by thorny bushes while strolling in her garden.

*Sadhana* should not be expected to proceed evenly at all times. There are bound to be ups and downs due to the constant flux of the *gunas* — *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The seeker is advised to make the best use of his time when *sattva-guna* is in the ascendant. At other times, he should be content with moderate or little progress. As time passes, the *sattva guna* will begin to preponderate, and this will be reflected in a noticeable decline in distracting thoughts.<sup>17</sup> When distractions seem particularly powerful, it might help to rehearse the principles of 'Reality-unreality-discrimination' (*nitya-anitya-viveka*) inwardly in the mind. The distracting thoughts would then seem not worthy of attention, and are easily shed.

During *meditational enquiry*, the seeker may have a variety of experiences like shedding tears, horripilation, photisms, twitching, numbness, heating of the body, pain in body parts, titillation, rapture, visions (of strange scenes, persons and gods), weakness, drowsiness, sounds, a void, fear etc.<sup>18</sup> These experiences are indicative of the reaction of the *prana* and the mind against the efforts at controlling them. They differ from *sadhaka* to *sadhaka*, and none of them last in the long run. The seeker should pay no heed to them, and instead overcome them by steadfast enquiry,

<sup>17</sup> Inferred from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, M.S. Venkataramiah, §91 of 6.11.1935 and §618 of 1.2.1939.

<sup>18</sup> An interesting account of the various types of visions and experiences met with in meditation, and of other obstacles faced, can be found in *Concentration and Meditation*, Swami Sivananda, op. cit. It can also be referred to many useful suggestions on the practice of meditation.

i.e., by asking “To whom has this experience come”, and following up the answer “To me”, with “Who am I?”<sup>19</sup>

Physical obstacles like external sounds, hostile insects, irksome health, lack of privacy, opposition from family members, inadequate free time, inability to adhere to meditation schedules, irregularity in *sadhana*, etc., have to be tackled by the seeker in the manner best suited to his capacity. If his aspiration is genuine and his faith strong, solutions are bound to appear due to the Guru’s Grace.<sup>20</sup>

### Progress in Self-enquiry

When the seeker senses that he is making some progress, he must be extremely vigilant against becoming overconfident. Else, his ego can revert to its old ways, causing great setbacks to his *sadhana*. Reflection on the principles of discrimination (*viveka*), the reading of spiritual books, the company of saints and sages, and surrender to the Guru (within) can be relied on for support when enquiry is seriously threatened or hampered by *maya* (delusion).

When, eventually, the *sadhaka* finds himself able to contact the ‘I-consciousness’ with some ease, he sees new possibilities for mind-control. Normally, the most persistent form of distraction concerns some ‘fruit of action’. The seeker realises that the purpose of all action is only to return the mind, at the end of action, to its state of repose in itself, and that he could as well accomplish this by not allowing the mind to go after action in the first place. The fruit of action, as well as action itself, then ceases to be of consequence, and the distraction ceases. *Karma yoga* thus gets sublimated in Self-enquiry.

Towards the latter stages of *sadhana*, distractions tend to turn *sattvic*, relating to issues such as service to humanity, spiritual theorizing, etc. Simultaneously, the awareness grows in the seeker that whatever distracting thought arises, ‘it arises out of *me*, has no purpose other

<sup>19</sup> The one experience that the *sadhaka* must avoid is falling unconscious or asleep. When he succeeds in taking his attention off the world, he must not simultaneously lose consciousness of himself.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief, classical treatment of the obstacles, see *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 25.4.1946.

than *me*, is nothing but a transformation of *me*, and has no being apart from *me*.’ The thought then becomes identified with the ‘I-consciousness’ almost instantly, and the distraction gets resolved at its root. In this process, by attracting the seeker’s constant ‘visits’, the ‘I-consciousness’ becomes the equivalent of a temple for him, and the Self in it becomes the presiding deity. *Bhakti yoga* thus stands sublimated in Self-enquiry.

As enquiry progresses further, the seeker finds himself identified with the ‘I-consciousness’ almost throughout the waking state. From this invariant centre, which is his waking ego, he witnesses the body and worldly phenomena as if they are pictures projected on the ‘screen’ of that ego. With further deepening of enquiry, the ego itself and all that it sees appear as a mere projection on the screen of the Absolute Self,<sup>21</sup> even as the ego goes through its cycle of waking, dream and deep-sleep states.

### Conclusion

*Upadesa Saram* combines the essence of discrimination, dispassion, devotion, enquiry and Self-knowledge. Its habitual recitation helps the mind to stay tuned to Self-enquiry, and provides all-round protection against the onslaughts of *maya*. With *sadhana* conducted under its aegis, the mind is enabled to rise to the threshold of cosmic-consciousness, and qualify for eventual transcendence. Beyond, there is only Light, and no seeking. ▲

<sup>21</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 17.10.1946. (See also 8.1.1946 for related observations).



# The FAQ's of Life

## What You Always Knew But Weren't Ready to Admit

I.S. MADUGULA

We all have questions. Sometimes we have the answers, at other times we don't. But the frequently asked questions about life that I list below for which we know the answers in our heart of hearts and at the back of our minds, nevertheless appear unanswered until someone—a sage, a saint, a jnani—comes to our rescue and points out the obvious solutions. Our reaction then is something like “Why didn't I think of that? It's so simple.” We don't necessarily have to feel foolish for not noticing an answer that has all the time stared us in the face, because to realize those answers is nothing less than self-realization.

The following answers to questions that bedevil our quotidian existence are based on the “Power of Now”<sup>1</sup> principle which transcends all time and space limitations. If you<sup>2</sup> are in the Now as pure existence

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<sup>1</sup> I. S. Madugula, *The Mountain Path*, June 2007, pp. 15-21.

<sup>2</sup> The informal *you* is used in place of the more pedantic *one* for the sake of convenience.



when the mind ceases to operate, events cease to exist and can be seen as the illusions that they are without any real impact. They are just fleeting images that are projected on the screen without leaving any impression on it.

Furthermore, the actions that you perform mechanically, without any expectation of results or sense of agency, will not bind you. In fact, this is a major clue to carrying out the activities of the day without being in any way affected by them.

Our daily life appears to be complex only because we think it is complex and, generally speaking, make it complex. In reality, there is nothing complex about it. There is no event or incident that is inherently complex or intractable, if you approach it objectively and, if possible, philosophically. Even if you are simply pragmatic and not necessarily philosophical, you know the old sayings, “What cannot be cured must be endured,” and “This, too, shall pass.” If you remember that nothing is permanent—pain, pleasure, love, hate, time itself—there is nothing to worry about. At the philosophical level, if you live in the moment, NOW, without anything before or after, then you are not concerned about worldly events. You are immersed in the attributeless Self which is untainted by spatial or temporal properties.

Just think how you spend your life. You keep hopping from one thought to another along with all the attendant baggage. A whole lifetime is spent like that, T. S. Eliot’s *Prufrock* measured out his life with coffee spoons<sup>3</sup>. While this indicates the utter meaninglessness of mundane existence, things get much worse when those coffee spoons measure a host of complex thoughts as well. A false sense of sequentiality ensues, which doesn’t exist in the final analysis. Real life is NOW, without any past or future, which are merely mental constructs.

The answers below are certainly not original but are a distillation of the wisdom and instruction of Bhagavan. It is amazing how he

<sup>3</sup>T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. This famous early Eliot poem may be looked upon as a rudimentary dialogue between mind/body and the Self, the former running after the attractions of the world, but the latter trying to keep them in check by reminding them of the evanescence of sense impressions.

covered every aspect of life and laid out a simple, logical, and enlightened path for us.

### **FAQ 1: How do I cope with work?**

You have no problem coping with your job, if you don’t keep thinking while you are working that you are not able to cope with your work. Bhagavan famously said that if you don’t think and feel that you are the one who is working (and therefore coping), you will be fine and the work will get done. The long and short of it is: just do whatever you have to do for your job, without any emotional or psychological involvement in it. Tasks get completed and you just move on to the next job with total indifference to the one just completed. You are neither elated that the job is finished nor depressed that it has been a lot of trouble. Here, as in all of the following answers, the point to be noted is that your composure must remain steady before and after the action or the event. Then the problem of “coping” doesn’t arise, even though the job has been completed.

### **FAQ 2: Isn’t money important?**

You need money and you either have it or don’t have it or don’t have enough of it, whatever ‘enough’ might mean. Money of course is important, being #2 on the list of the four *purushārthas*. It buys us food and clothing and a few other things that we need to live in this world. Also, we can discharge family obligations and help the needy. In all this, the most important thing to remember is that money is not evil in itself, but can be if it is used for evil purposes. Used for noble causes, it is certainly a good stepping stone to enlightenment, through the eschewing of possessiveness. The trick is to look upon your wealth as a treasurer looks upon the vast sums of money that pass through his hands daily. He makes no claim to any of it, being just its responsible custodian.

### **FAQ 3: How do I deal with emotions like anger, love, hate?**

Emotions are a concomitant of thought and the convoluted functioning of the mind. You get angry with someone for something or even for nothing; you love someone or something based on your



mental attitude; and you hate someone when your attitude towards that person is negative. You get rid of your emotions if you stop making mental associations of a positive or negative kind, both of which are fleeting and have no basis in reality. In reality, there is only balance, equanimity, and no aberrations of any kind. The essence of a person is exactly the same as that of any other person, if you stop looking on the outside. The same spark of divinity, the same spirit inhabits each and every one of us, and the only genuine feeling that we can have towards anyone is that of kinship and oneness. That's the ultimate definition of love.

#### FAQ 4: What about desire?

Desire is an attribute of the mind. It is triggered by the multiple associations we bring to each act of observation by the senses. We never look at a person or thing objectively, that is, just as a shape or image; instead, every shape or image arouses numerous thoughts and reflections, logical or metaphorical extensions of imagined actions involving it, and so on. Therein lies the rub: a thing is not just a thing, but is black or white, ugly or pretty, lovely or loathsome. We are attached to it if it is lovely, repelled if it is ugly, even though we know that none of these attributes has any inherent existence. They mean something only in a functional sense, when translated into some action or consequence.

A way to bypass unwanted mental associations is to get to the basics of the issue: is the object of desire really as good (whatever 'good' means) as it looks? What is it made of? If the object is a human being, we know that the body is made of easily destructible flesh, readily subject to decay and, in any case, disgusting when looked at closely, being a sort of waste factory. The only lovable trait about a body is the spirit that it houses. In other words, know the object for what it really is, and all desire vanishes and, with it, all related attachments. This is much easier when inanimate objects are involved, where desire is less poignant.

As Patanjali says, when sensuous thoughts begin to occur, they should be annihilated logically by thinking of the negative aspects of

the object in question as matter that is disgusting and subject to instant or eventual decay.<sup>4</sup> Then it doesn't look so attractive.

The Mahabharata says that the bliss of a person who has overcome desire is sixteen times that of the happiness of the gods or the pleasure derived from carnal enjoyment.<sup>5</sup>

#### FAQ 5: How do I interact with family, friends, and others?

It is said that family—and by extension friends—and possessions accrue as a result of obligations accumulated in past lives. So one way to deal with them is to diligently play the role of a debtor and do the best you can to discharge your obligations towards them.

The best way is to treat everyone with whom you interact as you would expect others to treat you or, better still, treat everyone like yourself. One of the spiritual *sadhana*s is to see everyone in you and yourself in everyone and everything that you see. Any interpersonal transaction is essentially a dialogue with yourself, because there is none other than your Self projected on different canvasses.

#### FAQ 6: How do I deal with personal tragedy and loss?

If all existence is an illusion, where is the reality of anything that happens within that illusory sphere? So, faced with loss and deprivation, we need to recognize the evanescence of the physical world. In the deepest sense, no one is ever born nor does any one die. As indicated above, families and friends come together in this world for a reason—their combined *prârabdha* — and start discharging their unfinished obligations towards one another and, so to say, work off their individual debts. When the obligations no longer exist, the individuals have no more reason to be around.

On another level, if each one of us exists spiritually in everyone and everything, no one has ever lost anything—or gained anything. The sum is constant, indivisible and indestructible, the parts being the only variables.

<sup>4</sup> *Yoga Sutra*, II, 33. *vitarka badhane pratipaksoa bhavanam*.

<sup>5</sup> *The Mahabharata*, *Uanti Parva* XII, Ch. 173, v.47. "The sense pleasures of the world and the great joys of heaven are not worth one-sixteenth part of the bliss that comes from the cessation of desire." (S.Radhakrishnan's translation.)

**FAQ 7: What about learning and scholarship? Do they have a place in the general scheme of things?**

Learning and scholarship have a place in life, limited though it might be. One needs to study and expand one's intellectual horizons with a view to realizing the ultimate goal, the Divine Providence. If, as in the case of Bhagavan, that realization occurs without recourse to decades of study, then all other learning is useless, strictly speaking, though it might put food on the table. We must beware, though, of the scholarly tendency to indulge in vain argumentation. *Vidya* is for *jnana*, not *vivada*.<sup>6</sup>

**FAQ 8: My past seems to haunt me and stand in the way of my spiritual progress. What can I do about it?**

The past will haunt you, just like thoughts for the future as well as current thoughts, only if you let it. You can deal with it in two ways: one is to destroy all thought while living in the Now, and the other is to understand intellectually that there is no point in worrying about the past and the karma accrued therein. It will fructify in its own time and manner, and worry won't do any good. Furthermore, such thoughts will only impede your current progress. So just admit your mistakes and move on, avoiding them now and in the future. The knowledge that you made a mistake is the first step towards redemption and no further energy needs to be expended in mulling over what happened. Instead, focusing on the Now is sufficient penance to expiate past transgressions.

**FAQ 9: What is the role of the mind in life?**

Ideally, none at all. Real living consists of living and functioning without the mind getting in the way. This is not to say that the mind

is totally superfluous in daily life. Indeed, it has a limited role to play. You use your mind when thinking, planning, etc. In fact, that is the very definition of mind—that which thinks. But you don't need it—in fact, you are better off without it—as you transcend the emotional level of functioning and start seeing things for what they are directly. You have a better understanding of everyone and everything than when your outlook is cluttered with emotions and myriad questions and doubts.

The happiest moments in one's life are those that eliminate the mental meanderings and associations. This apparent blankness contributes to one's overall sanity and takes one closer to one's spiritual inner core. All one has to do is to try it—even for one minute. Then he or she is hooked on it and will find it hard to revert to their old ways of dealing with life. Real life begins when fake mental modifications recede into the background. The mind has a place and a time when it should function—as our servant, not as our master.

Is this escapism? Says who? Every minute of our existence, without knowing it, we are lapsing into the unreal and the evanescent. Self-realization consists of escaping back into reality.

**FAQ 10: How do I deal with my own approaching death?**

Luckily, you don't have to deal with it. It will deal with you! Levity aside, since you already know that what dies is the body and never you, there is no reason to worry. It happens when it happens and is totally inconsequential. Awareness is indestructible even when the flesh is destroyed, as is its nature. Individual awareness merges into universal awareness, to accomplish which we strive for myriad lifetimes. At each death, we get one lifetime nearer to that goal.

In all these and related concerns, the one thing to keep in mind is to remain totally objective and not be involved, i.e. not to think or feel in any way that something is or is not happening to you. You are above it all, no matter what happens. Not only that, you have control over death, despite what it may look like. By this is not meant that you can control the events or the results of actions, but that you can try to not let anything affect the core of your being. In fact, that is the

<sup>6</sup> The reference is to the following popular *subhasoita* attributed to Bhartrhari:  
*Vidya vivadaya dhanam madaya uaktih paresoam paripidanaya, khalasyal Sadhor viparitam etat: jnanaya, danaya ca raksoanaya.*  
(<http://www.samskrtam.org/subhash/subhash.html>. #16)

“Good people use their learning for enlightenment, wealth for charity, and might for the protection of the weak; the evil ones use the same attributes respectively for the purposes of disputation, power, and oppression.”

'Power of Now' that we are talking about. It may sound ironic to say that everything is evanescent except Now, because every moment is fleeting including the present one. But by now we know that we do not mean the present moment—or any moment—by Now. *Now* is what may be called the forever moment without beginning or end, that is subsumed by the timeless present. If this all sounds like gibberish, think again. Have you not experienced on occasion the blissful peace of the moment when your mind is totally out of the picture and you just gaze afar without any feeling, fear, emotion, or desire and feel at one with everything and everyone around you? Did you not remain just still and aware, feeling that you are part of it all and it's all part of you? That's when you touch base with the real you and feel your original kinship with the universe. There are no questions or answers. When you stop asking, you will start knowing. When you stop doing, you are being. ▲

#### Mountain Path Readers in India

Dear Readers,

Due to increased costs in producing the magazine, please note that from the 1st April 2008:

- i) The price per copy of the magazine has been raised from Rs. 20/- to Rs. 30/-;
- ii) The annual subscription has been raised from Rs. 80/- to Rs. 120/- ;
- iii) The Indian life time subscription has been raised from Rs. 1300/- to Rs. 1500/-.

## VIDEO INTERVIEWS

# My Childhood with Bhagavan

RAJALAKSHMI

*The following Video Interview article is a composite of a video interview with Srimathi Rajalakshmi and a long report submitted by her son, Sri A. Viswanathan after he had closely questioned her about the events she witnessed round Bhagavan. There is sufficient material for a further article which will be published at a later date. We would like to thank both for their patience and co-operation.*

**M**y name is Rajalakshmi. I am the granddaughter of Venu Ammal, the younger sister of Echammal who served Bhagavan faithfully for many years, cooking and serving him food amongst other duties. Venu Ammal was also a committed devotee and did service from Bhagavan's days at Virupaksha cave. During the last days of Bhagavan's mother Alagammal, Venu Ammal was constantly at her side. Alagammal loved her so much that she used to tell people that Venu Ammal was like her own daughter to her.

Like her sister Echammal, Venu Ammal's life was also full of tragedy. Shortly after the birth of my mother Balakuchambal, my grandfather



## MOUNTAIN PATH

(Venu Ammal's husband) died. My grandmother struggled to bring up my mother alone. She eventually managed to perform my mother's marriage. I was born on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1920 and my grandmother was very happy to be blessed with a granddaughter. The joy was short lived and a second tragedy struck in my grandmother's life when my mother passed away in January 1923 of natural causes. I was hardly two and half years old. From then on, my grandmother was left with the responsibility of raising me single-handedly.

On the day of the death of my mother Balakuchambal, Venu Ammal was completely devastated, unable to bear the loss of her only daughter. She decided to meet Bhagavan at the present Ramanasramam location where he had settled down after vacating Skandasramam. While her daughter's dead body lay overnight at home, she sought the help of one Jnanambal *Patti* (grandmother) and with a kerosene-lit hurricane lamp, she walked all the way from Tiruvannamalai town to the then distant Ramanasramam at 11 pm on a dark, lonely night.

On seeing Bhagavan, she was unable to control her emotions and wept uncontrollably. She fell at Bhagavan's feet crying about the death of her beloved daughter. At that time, Bhagavan's younger brother, Chinnaswami, was by the side of Bhagavan. He was angry and objected to Venu Ammal falling at the feet of Bhagavan for a worldly reason. To this, Bhagavan countered Chinnaswami by asking him if he would have objected to his sister Alamelu doing the same thing in a similar circumstance.

Bhagavan shared the grief with Venu Ammal and consoled her by telling her that the purpose for which her daughter was born in this world was over and so she had to leave this world. Moreover, Bhagavan told her that only the body dies whereas the atman is deathless. Deeply consoled, Venu Ammal returned home.

From then on, Venu Ammal accepted the responsibility of bringing me up. At the time of the death of my mother, my father, Sri Ramashesha Iyer, also a staunch devotee of Bhagavan, was working in the Revenue Department at Tiruvannamalai.

I first saw Bhagavan in 1923 when I was three years old. From that time onwards Venu Ammal, who was serving at the ashram, took me



Seated just below Bhagavan to his left is his mother Alagammal, and seated to her left is Venu Ammal. The photograph was taken at Skandasramam circa 1920.



along with her every morning returning home only in the evening. In the early years of Ramanasramam, Bhagavan used to sit near Pali Theertham tank on a raised platform under a tree and as a young child I would play with him there. Once, I was playing a 'cooking' game by offering small stones as cooked rice to Bhagavan and I asked him to eat them. Bhagavan readily put those stones into his mouth and pretended to eat. On seeing this, Venu Ammal asked Bhagavan why he was putting stones in his mouth. Bhagavan replied that the young child was happily offering the stones to him as food and if he did not put them in his mouth it would disappoint her.

As a young child I vividly remember walking with Bhagavan while holding his stick. At times, I was not be able to walk due to pain in legs and on my mentioning this to *Thatha* (grandfather, that is, Bhagavan), either Ramaswamy Pillai or Kunju Swami who were accompanying us, would carry me.

On another occasion, in the dining hall, I was seated next to Bhagavan and Venu Ammal was serving food. She served me a portion of a vegetable preparation made of brinjal (aubergine) and I wanted more. She quoted a Sanskrit proverb, *Aasa aasa parama dukkam, Nirasa parama sukam* (Desire is the supreme suffering and contentment is the supreme happiness) and refused to give me more curry. When she was about to serve more curry to Bhagavan, he asked her to stop serving him and repeated the same proverb back to her. Venu Ammal told Bhagavan that the proverb was meant for the child, not for him. Bhagavan replied that what was applicable to a child was also applicable to him and if she did not serve more curry to this young child then he also should not be served.

As a child I very rarely worked in the kitchen. However, I have observed two incidences in the kitchen which I would like to narrate. Once, the devotees in the kitchen were cutting a large quantity of *brinjal* (aubergine) for cooking. They kept aside the thick skin covering the brinjals (known as *paavadai* in Tamil) with the intention of throwing them away as rubbish. Bhagavan noticed the heap of *paavadai* kept on one side and asked them to bring it inside for cooking. He himself cut the *paavadai* into small pieces and prepared a tasty *koottu*

(vegetable curry) out of them. The other occurrence pertained to banana flowers which are used as a vegetable. Generally, whenever banana flower is used for cooking, the outer leaves of the flower, which are thick and consisting of several layers, are never used for cooking since they are bitter and not considered a vegetable. However, out of this collection of skins as well, Bhagavan made a tasty *koottu*. He had an absolute aversion to wasteful behaviour.

Bhagavan was my guru. When, as a child, I first requested Bhagavan to teach me a few songs, he taught me two songs from *Arunachala Navamanimalai*, one starting with 'Seerana sonagiri' and the other, 'Annamalaiyai adiyenai'.

He taught me Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit starting from the alphabets. Bhagavan also taught me mathematics. By the grace of Bhagavan, I learnt all the three languages in a very short time and was able to get admission to the fourth class in the Municipal Girl's School at Tiruvannamalai straight away. The first Sanskrit sloka Bhagavan taught me was from *Upadesa Saram*. Bhagavan himself wrote all the thirty slokas of *Upadesa Saram* in Sanskrit in a note book and presented it to me so that I could memorize them. He wrote two slokas per page so that I could easily read them. I memorized all the thirty slokas of *Upadesa Saram* within a very short period and recited them before Bhagavan who was very pleased and started teaching me more slokas. My humble opinion is that I could recite *Upadesa Saram* in such a short period only by Bhagavan's grace and that it was he who recited the slokas through me. No one was too young or insignificant to merit Bhagavan's complete and total attention, and no one was ever excluded.

Daily, around 3 pm, I would start reading the works of Bhagavan in front of him and when it neared 5 pm, he would remind me that it was time to go home. I left and was often escorted by the dog Jacky (whose samadhi lies within the ashram).

Some time later, my friend at school wanted to see Bhagavan's hand-written notebook of *Upadesa Saram* and I gave it to her. However, this class mate never returned the notebook. I was very upset about the loss of this priceless treasure and wept before

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Bhagavan. Bhagavan pacified me by saying that I need not bother about the loss of the note book since I had already memorized all the slokas of *Upadesa Saram* which were now in my heart where nobody could steal them from me.

After learning Sanskrit from Bhagavan, I started attending Sanskrit classes at Arunachaleswara temple. After becoming proficient in Sanskrit, I copied in a note book, the works of Nayana such as *Sat Darshanam*, *Ramana Chatvarimsat*, *Vibaktiashatakam*, *Ramana Dasakam* etc, including the works of Bhagavan and Muruganar. I would show it to Bhagavan who would go through it meticulously, making the necessary corrections. Mostly there was little to correct, because he had taught me well.

Whenever any new book was published, Bhagavan would write my name in it and give it to me. I would read a portion from the book and Bhagavan would explain its contents to the devotees. Ramana Padananda brought out the first edition of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and Bhagavan immediately gave a copy to me. Bhagavan also gave me *Ramana Noolthirattu* which I presented to Sri.M.J. Kalyanarama Iyer (nephew of Echammal and Venu Ammal), who wanted a copy. In those days, the ashram would receive Suddhananda Bharathi's magazine, *Ramana Vijayam* and I would read out the weekly *Ramana Vijayam* edition in front of Bhagavan in the old hall. Bhagavan would explain the contents for the benefit of the devotees. One day, I saw a lot of new books near Bhagavan and asked him what they were. He told me to open them myself and find out. It was *Ramana Vijayam* which used to be serialised weekly but had now been compiled into a book. He presented a copy to me after writing my name in it.

After reading the chapter of *Ramana Vijayam* which told the story of Bhagavan's stay at Pathala lingam in the Arunachaleswara temple, I was curious to go inside this place and see it for myself. Next day while returning from Sanskrit class at the big temple, I tried to go

Opposite Page: This photograph was taken on 28th December 1928, Jayanti Day. Rajalakshmi, age 8, is indicated by the arrow.



into the Pathala lingam but could not bear to enter it due to bats flying around it and the stinking smell coming from inside. After my return to the ashram, I told Bhagavan about my experience and asked him how he had been able to stay inside such a place for such long time. Bhagavan told me that he was not aware of his stay there and that he came to know of it only from others, which shows that he was completely oblivious of time and space.

*Bhaktha Vijayam* was too big a book to handle and read for a small girl. A wooden stand in the form X known as a *saraswathi palakai* (plate) was provided for me and I read one portion per day while Bhagavan explained the meaning to everybody present. Sometimes, I asked innocent questions from the book and Bhagavan patiently replied. The devotees in the hall used to say that they got answers to their doubts from the questions raised by me and the response of Bhagavan.

Bhagavan used to tell me that I should write in the same language in which the original work was written, such as *Upadesa Saram* in Sanskrit and *Upadesa Undiyar* in Tamil. Also, he used to say that writing once is equivalent to reading ten times. While reciting *Ulladu Narpadu* or *Upadesa Undiyar* if I skipped a verse, Bhagavan would immediately come to my rescue by reciting the skipped verse.<sup>1</sup> On week-ends, the schoolchildren would go to the ashram and play in front of Bhagavan. Children usually referred to Bhagavan respectfully as *Thatha* (Grandfather). Chinnaswami, whom I called Chinna *mama* (uncle) was very nice to me and used to say that Rajalakshmi was the senior granddaughter of the ashram.

In the school where I was studying, children used to play *kolattam* (a game using two wooden sticks). I did not have kolattam sticks of

my own and so could not play. My grandmother Venu Ammal was not willing to buy me kolattam sticks which cost one and a half paise. I told Bhagavan about my problem and he immediately asked his attendant Madhava Swami to get two wooden sticks out of which Bhagavan made two beautiful kolattam sticks and presented them to me. I still have these sticks.

Having lost Bhagavan's hand written *Upadesa Saram* notebook, I told Bhagavan that I would not lend these kolattam sticks to anybody. However, Bhagavan told me that if any of my friends wanted to borrow my kolattam sticks, I should lend mine to them and later should not forget to collect them back. On Sundays I would bring some friends and play *kummi* or kolattam before Bhagavan who invariably enjoyed our performance.

Somebody told me that I should not call Bhagavan 'Thatha' but address him as 'Bhagavan'. But Bhagavan replied that since I was there from childhood, there was nothing wrong in my calling him 'Thatha'. Similarly Bhagavan's sister Alamelu was very affectionate towards me.

One day in the old hall, I was continuously coughing due to inflamed tonsils and could not read to Bhagavan the verses from a book. At once, Bhagavan directed Dr. Ramakrishnan, the son of Tiruchuli Lakshmi Ammal, to treat me for tonsillitis. Dr. Ramakrishnan took me to Ginjee Government hospital and operated on me, removing the tonsils. Only after my complete recovery, did the doctor send me back to Tiruvannamalai. I mention this to illustrate how attentive and caring Bhagavan was to those who came to him.

I was married in 1936 to Sri. C.S. Arunachalam. My first visit to Bhagavan with my husband was in 1939 and we paid our respects to him. My husband served in the Indian army and was posted to different parts of India. Wherever I was, I would write letters to Bhagavan and get prompt replies.

In the year 1948 I visited the ashram with my youngest son Sivakumar who was three months old. Since the old hall was crowded with devotees I left the young child outside in the shade near the window and went inside to prostrate before Bhagavan who did not notice me at that time as there was a large crowd around him. However,

<sup>1</sup> A few years before the demise of Annamalai Swami, Rajalakshmi's second son Viswanathan met him for the first time at Palakothu and offered his pranams. Annamalai Swami asked Rajalakshmi's son to introduce himself. Viswanathan told the Swami that he was the son of Rajalakshmi who was the grand daughter of Venu Ammal. Immediately, Annamalai Swami told him that he had seen Bhagavan teaching a lot of slokas and other works to the young Rajalakshmi and that he had asked Bhagavan why he was teaching so many works to this young child. To which Bhagavan had replied that it would be useful to her in her life.



Sri. M.J. Kalyanarama Iyer who was there in the old hall, spotted me prostrating to Bhagavan and he came out and started talking to me. On hearing this conversation, Bhagavan too came out and asked about the wellbeing of every member of my family. Then Bhagavan asked where I had left my child. I told him that the child was near the window in the shade. Bhagavan went there and pointed his stick towards the baby's stomach and the child firmly caught hold of it. Bhagavan talked to the infant, jokingly remarking that he, an old man, required a stick but what need for it was there for a young child? Then he continued to talk to me and mentioned to the others gathered around how, as a young girl, I had memorized all the thirty slokas of *Upadesa Saram* in a short period and also how I used to play with him during my childhood days.

This conversation went on affably for a while, and then some newcomer in the crowd chided me for making Bhagavan stand for such a long time. At once Bhagavan answered that gentleman, telling him that I was an ashram grandchild, brought up in the ashram and who was he to question me? Then Bhagavan asked Subbulakshmi Patti to take me to the kitchen and provide food for me.

Whenever I gave birth to a child, I used to visit the ashram to show the child to Bhagavan and get his blessing. Once, on a Jayanthi day, I took my eldest son Lakshmi Kanthan who was two years old. In the dining area, hot *sambar* (soup) was kept in vessels ready for serving. The little boy keeping his hands folded behind him, was going around the hot sambar vessels, so the people there shouted and wanted him to be taken away. But Bhagavan jocularly told them that the little boy was supervising them.

On another occasion my second son Viswanathan, who was a young child was running around a peacock trying to pull out a feather from it; on seeing this Bhagavan directed Madhava Swami to find a peacock feather and give it to the child. Bhagavan then cautioned the little boy not to go near the peacocks, telling him that they could poke his eyes. Also Bhagavan asked the people around to keep an eye on the little boy in case he went too near the well.

In the early months of 1950 when Bhagavan was very ill I was at Lucknow. My grandmother Venu Ammal asked his permission to visit me at Lucknow and intended to see Kasi as well. She received his blessings and Bhagavan told her that when she took a dip in the Ganges, she could perform the ceremony on his behalf too. After a few days at Lucknow, she went to Kasi and had a dip in the river one night whilst thinking 'Ramana'. At that very moment, somebody told her to look up. She saw a large star trailing its light across the sky. The next day she learnt that Bhagavan had shed his body. She was lucky to see the star rising up and trailing across the sky. This happened at the exact time of his Mahanirvana. Thus Bhagavan blessed her even at the time of his departing from the body, by enabling her to see the star.

Now I am 87 years old and live in Chennai with my sons. I lost my husband in 2000 when he was 84 years old. I have 5 children, 12 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren and everybody is doing well by the grace of Bhagavan Ramana. All the time, Bhagavan's name is on my lips and I consider him as my Guru and God. My family and I enjoy the full grace (*paripoorna arul*) of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.



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I, V.S. Ramanan, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

31/03/2008





## KEYWORD

# Samadhi

**Sanskrit:** Absorption of mind into the Self; resolution of mind in Self-Knowledge.

When queried about the relevance of samadhi in sadhana, Bhagavan said, “*Samadhi* alone can reveal the Truth. Thoughts cast a veil over Reality, and so It is not realised *as such* in states other than samadhi.”<sup>1</sup> This is in accord with Sankara’s assertion that “the true nature of Brahman manifests itself clearly and definitely in *nirvikalpa samadhi* and never otherwise; for then the mind, being unsteady, is apt to be mixed up with other perceptions.”<sup>2</sup> He defines samadhi as “the state of undifferentiated abidance in the awareness of one’s total identity with Brahman.”<sup>3</sup> The third aphorism of Patanjali Yoga Sutras also says, ‘the seer then abides in his primal svarupa.’

Etymologically ‘samadhi’ is derived as *samyak aadheeyate cittam atmani iti samadhihi* where ‘samyak’ means ‘very well’ and ‘aadheeyate’ comes from the passive voice of the verbal form ‘aadhaanam’ which

<sup>1</sup> *Maharshi’s Gospel*, p.23, Part One, Ch. 6, ‘Self-realisation’. 2002 edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, verse 366.

<sup>3</sup> *Panchikaranam*, v.49. *brahmaiva ahamasmi iti abhedena avasthanam samadhihi*.

means ‘to firmly place’. So ‘samadhi’ means ‘a firmly and very well placed mind in the Self.’<sup>4</sup> It is used in the sense of pure Self-awareness where the mind is unwaveringly fixed, freed of the turbulence generated by inner and outer distractions. These include doubts regarding the nature of the Self, which inevitably arise during persistent discrimination between what is real and what is false. The value of samadhi cannot be sufficiently emphasised in altering one’s empirical personality. Even though, as the mind emerges out of the stillness of the samadhi state, the body-consciousness reappears along with the ego (*dehatma buddhi*), there is a profound change, however subtle. The samadhi experience is so vivid that it weakens the grip of vasanas on the mind and encourages the subsequent practice of samadhi, until *manonasha* is accomplished and one is established in *sahaja nishtha*.<sup>5</sup> Samadhi eradicates our ignorance at the *experiential* level and promotes our appreciation of the Self in its true nature. The immense merit that accrues from samadhi is described as: “He whose mind has been absorbed in samadhi even for a brief while in the appreciation of Brahman has bathed in the holy waters of all the sacred rivers; has performed countless sacrifices and has worshipped all the deities.”<sup>6</sup>

Sankara explains how Vedantic meditation (*nidhidhyasana*) culminates in samadhi, which when consolidated by constant endeavours, bestows *aparoksha jnanam*, the direct liberating knowledge of the Self.<sup>7</sup> He says by the persistent practice of the *brahmakara vrtti* (‘I am the limitless Brahman’ thought), the mind is cleansed of the impurities created by the three gunas and restored to its natural state of inner freedom. This alone is true meditation since it gives a taste of the inexpressible joy of limitless svarupa. When the *brahmakara vrtti* is constant and not disturbed by inattention (*pramada*), then as a consequence even this thought drops off its form. The result is a supreme

silence of the mind, namely, samadhi, which reveals the knowledge of one’s svarupa. As long as the *brahmakara vrtti* retains its form as a concrete thought of identification with the nature of atma, it is *savikalpa samadhi*. This is because the subject-object difference (*jnatru-jneya bhedom*) is still alive. It is *nirvikalpa samadhi* when this division is completely resolved (like salt dissolved in water) and leaves behind only the pure appreciation of the Self, without even the ‘individual entity as the sadhaka’ to claim such recognition. There is then neither differentiation of any kind nor the slightest doubt regarding one’s knowledge. That is why such knowledge is extolled as *purely experiential*, direct and immediate knowledge (*vijnanam, sakshatkaram, aparokshanubhuti*). This is in contrast to the indirect, mediated knowledge gained from scriptural testimony through listening and reflection. The experience of samadhi is considered by sages and scriptures as a legitimate and indispensable means to convert *paroksha jnanam* (indirect knowledge) into *aparoksha jnanam* (direct knowledge).

However, for *aparoksha jnanam* to take place in the state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the senses, the mind and the intellect must cease functioning and remain totally *still but alert* to gain the intuitive recognition of the supreme reality shining as the spiritual Heart, the Self.<sup>8</sup> It is in such a unique state of external and internal actionlessness and stillness, imbued with the spirit of enquiry, that self-realisation takes place. It is important to appreciate this prerequisite very clearly as there may be some confusion even among learned Vedantins with regard to the role of samadhi in enlightenment.

In the realm of *aparoksha jnanam*, what is sought is the ‘direct apprehension’ of the Self which transcends the senses and the mind. For example, to recognise the innate tastelessness of the tongue in its natural healthy condition, it should cease to have contact with any edible stuff. In the same way, for Consciousness to recognise Itself in its pristine purity, we need to set in motion a process of complete *disentanglement* from all empirical transactions with the external world

<sup>4</sup> See Sankara’s *Bhagavad Gita Bhashya*, Ch.2, verse 53.

<sup>5</sup> “Accomplished yogis who have gained Self-knowledge extol samadhi practice as a rain cloud of *dharma* (pure merit) showering ineffable bliss.” *Panchadashi* 1.60.

<sup>6</sup> *Sutasambhita* 2.20.45.

<sup>7</sup> *Aparokshanubhuti* v. 123–124. Verses 125–126 further glorify samadhi.

<sup>8</sup> See *Katha Upanisad* 2. 3.10.

(*vyaavahaarika*) as well as the subjective experiences of the internal imaginary world (*praatibhaasika*). For Consciousness to get dis-involved from all external and internal transactions, the agents for its involvement must necessarily be pulled back from the objects in which they are engaged. Thus, the senses must be withdrawn from all preoccupations with sense objects and the mind must give up its compulsive, mechanical thinking mode of existence. When Consciousness thus remains totally 'functionless', there emerges another dimension of pure vibrant existence where there is no involvement, modification or reaction in Its primal essence *even in an 'apparent' sense*. It is only then that Consciousness *as it were* turns its light of attention upon Itself.<sup>9</sup> Because its very nature is that of knowing (*jnaptisvarupam*), It then comes to cognise itself (technically called *pratyabhijna* or Self-recognition) in a spontaneous and direct manner. That is why for a ripe soul with a well-trained mind, Bhagavan sings in *Atma Vidya Kirtanam* that 'Self-Knowledge, aye, is indeed very easy to accomplish!' and 'the very process of sadhana is joyful.'

To understand *samadhi* is easy and it is quite feasible to practise too. But when we actually undertake the task, great hills of difficulty loom large and dishearten us. We must resolutely recognise that the difficulty lies in our mindset and our own inertia — our resistance to courageously take up the challenge. Consider, is there any mountain which is inherently easy or difficult to climb, independent of the climber? For a child, even a little hillock is impossible to crawl up to the top. But the well-equipped, well-trained and willing mountaineer is enthused by the prospect of Mount Everest! In spiritual pursuit, Self-knowledge being the loftiest summit, should we not make the attempt sooner rather than later? With faith and devotion sustaining our pursuit of *atma vichara*, *samadhi* is bound to 'happen', for it is the birthright of every living being and the pinnacle of all *sadhana*. Grace must eventually triumph! Bhagavan has assured us, 'Grace is ever present but practice is necessary'. ▲

<sup>9</sup> *Ulladu Narpadu* verse 22.

# Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's  
Commentary

## Verse Eighteen

S. RAM MOHAN

18. The world is real both to the ignorant one and to the sage. The former looks upon the world as all the reality there is. To the sage, the reality shines (unhindered) as the formless substratum of the world-appearance. Such is the difference between them.

### Commentary

The previous verse spoke of the difference in perception between the *jnani* and *ajnani* regarding the body. The present verse speaks about their differing perceptions regarding the world. To the *jnani* as well as to the *ajnani*, the world is real. However there is a great difference in their understanding and their attitude towards it. To the *ajnani* (the

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine *Ramanodhayam* dedicated to Bhagavan.



unrealized one), the world is the only reality. To the jnani (the realized one) reality is much more than the world. The Real, for the ignorant man is identical and co-extensive with the world. For him, the Real, Brahman, is concealed by and lost in the world. Only the names and forms are real for him and therefore the nameless and formless Self which transcends forms, thoughts and words, is not cognized by him.

The realized one says that ‘the world is real’ and not that ‘reality is the world’. But the unrealized one believes that the world is the only reality. The world is called *prapanca* (world appearance). It ordinarily means that the universe is diffused or well-spread. It can also be said that the world is called ‘prapanca’ because it has five characteristics, that is, existence (*asti*), manifestation (*bhati*), lovability (*priyam*), name (*nama*) and form (*rupa*). Of these five, the last two characteristics, namely name and form, vary from entity to entity. They fluctuate and are the products of *avidya* or *maya*. Ajnanis accept these two characteristics as intrinsic to the world’s existence. The first three characteristics constitute the essential and unchanging nature of the Self which is existence-consciousness-bliss (*sat-cit-ananda*). The realized ones know that this is the Reality, the substratum or basis of the world of which the world is only an appearance. In fact, the realized one is the true believer (*astika*); He says that the Self alone is real and acts accordingly. For him the Self is the sole Reality.<sup>1</sup>

An ignorant man takes the seen world, which is just an appearance, to be real as he is unable to see beyond it. But a realized jnani can see beyond the apparent world of name and form. He has seen beyond the world as a result of the enquiry, “What is the world? Can anything that constantly changes be the ultimate Reality?”

Let us follow the process of this enquiry. In his search, he has started first by trying to find the Reality outside himself. Failing in this attempt, he pursues a different line. He queries, “How has the world come into being?” After intense vichara or enquiry, he learns that the world is experienced only as long as the mind is functioning and that it ceases

to exist when the mind ceases to function. Then he tries to trace the origin of the mind itself. In the process, he sinks into the very source of Being. Then the mind itself dissolves in the Self (*mana-nasa*) and the experience of abidance in the Self or samadhi (*anubhava*) flowers then and there. When he remains in that state, the world is not seen or sensed. When he comes out of that state, the mind reappears, and along with it, the world-notion also reappears. But there is a significant difference. Now he cognises the world as nothing other than an expression of pure Consciousness. He sees the entire world as the manifestation of his own Self. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna says that he sees his own Self in everything and everything in his own Self. That is, even when he sees the world, he does not see it as the ignorant one sees it. His vision is totally transformed and sublimated. In this world of names and forms, he sees the nameless and formless Reality, which is the eternal and imperishable Brahman. He ever rejoices in this understanding of the Reality.<sup>2</sup>

Such being the enormous difference between the sage and the ignorant one, some who are incapable of understanding this fundamental difference, attempting to estimate the state of the sage by the power of their own finite intelligence, come to an altogether wrong conclusion, about the sage. They describe the state of the sage thus: “He sees differences in non-difference!” This is an utterly meaningless description, which Bhagavan himself has refuted. In truth, he does not see the differences (*bhedha*), nor does he see non-difference (*abhedha*). Non-difference is not something to be seen. What then is the significance of the statement, made in Vedantic literature, that the sage has the ‘vision of non-difference’? The answer given by Bhagavan is that not seeing difference is itself the ‘vision of non-difference’.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the fact that the substratum and the superimposition conceal each other, it follows that the two, the real Self and the world,

<sup>1</sup> See Sankara’s *Drik Drisya Viveka: Asti bhati priyam rupam/nama ceti amsa pancakam/ adya trayam brahma rupam/jagad rupam tato dvayam*.

<sup>2</sup> “That from which all these beings arise, that by which having arisen, they exist and that into which at the end, they enter — That is Brahman.” *Taittiriya Upanisad* 3.1.1.

<sup>3</sup> See *Ulladu Narpadu*, verse four and *Arunachala Astakam*, verses three and four.



cannot shine simultaneously, just as in the case of the rope and the snake (which do not appear simultaneously).

It will seem to most people that the knower of the Self, who is called a *jivamukta* (liberated-in-body), sees the world and acts accordingly. But in truth, this is only apparent, not actual. He does not consider himself as the seer or as the doer of actions. Though from the standpoint of the onlooker he seems to have a body and mind, in truth, that which earlier was his causal body (the *anandamaya kosa* or bliss sheath containing the *moola avidya*, the primal ignorance), has been destroyed by his right awareness of the real Self. He remains as the eternal Self, unidentified with the subtle and gross bodies. Whatever he seems to say or do in the world are really said and done by God, just as all actions of the ignorant also are done by Him alone residing in the Heart, though the ignorant one is not aware of it. Since the sage has no ego sense, the Divine Power does all actions admirably through him, without hindrance.

For the ignorant person the five elements of creation — earth, water, fire, air and sky — cover up the supreme Reality. From his standpoint *existence* appears as a quality belonging to the world and the things seen in it. Existence is not a quality. It is the substantive Reality, the Brahman, on which the world is superimposed. Existence is Being. On that One, due to deluding maya, the world-forms are superimposed. By right awareness the forms vanish and then the Brahman shines in its pristine pure *kevala* (state).

The substance of what has been taught so far is this: right Awareness does not mean ‘knowing’ the Self in a literal sense: it means Being the Self. Ignorance is seeing the Self as the separate, unreal body and the world.

The second part of the verse says, “To the sage the Reality shines in the formless substratum of the world-appearance.” As it is said that the Reality shines formless, it follows that forms, that is, differences, are not seen by the sage. If he does not see forms, it means that he does not see the world. How can he describe as real or unreal, what he does not see? Therefore, the statement “The world is real” made by the sage has a different meaning; it means that the substratum of the world-appearance is Real. Both the

statements, that the world is real and that the world is unreal, are two aspects of the same truth. Hence the Vedanta describes the world as not lending itself to definite description by the word, *anirvacaniya* which means indeterminable as either real or unreal; it is inexplicable.<sup>4</sup>

Someone asked a Zen master, “How can we transform mountains, rivers and the great earth and reduce them to this Self?”

The master replied, “How can we transform this Self and turn it into mountains, rivers and the great earth?”<sup>5</sup>

One becoming many is due to the play of mysterious maya. There is no other source for the universe except the Self. The Upanisads call this *atma-Brahma*. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* states that the Self, having been differentiated into name and form, entered into the differentiations upto nail-tips as it were, like a sword that fits its sheath or like a fire that resides in its source. In the mundane world, the Self is not recognized because it is mistaken for one of its aspects and is thus incomplete (*akrtsnah*); when it performs the function of living, it is called the vital force (*prana*); when it speaks, the organ of speech; when it sees, the eyes; when it hears, the ears; and when it thinks, the mind. These are only its different manifestations according to various functions. The Self is that in which all these are united. It is the Self that should be deeply meditated upon.<sup>6</sup>

The saint explains that from the standpoint of the Sun there is no day or night. Yet, without the Sun, there is neither day nor night. It is from the perspective of the earth that day and night have meaning. They are superimposed on the Sun. Similarly, in the pure Self, there is no knowledge and no ignorance. These relate only to the finite intelligence. They acquire meaning only when superimposed on the Self. The Self in Itself is unchanging and eternal.<sup>7</sup> ▲

<sup>4</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, verse 111.

<sup>5</sup> *Living by Zen* by D.T.Suzuki. p.29. Rider 1950.

<sup>6</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* 1.4.7.

<sup>7</sup> Sankara states in his commentary on the *Taittiriya Upanisad*, “Knowledge and ignorance belong to the realm of names and forms. They are not attributes of the Self...And, they [name and form] are imagined, even as day and night are, with reference to the Sun.”



# A Tribute to Swami Ramananananda

*A major event occurred recently in ashram history with the passing of Swami Ramananananda. It happened on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2007, the day after Bhagavan's Jayanthi, at around 8:15 pm. Swamiji was feeling unwell, and, soon after, effortlessly attained samadhi. Many commented on how bright and peaceful his face was in the hours that followed. Numerous devotees came from Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad to pay their respects to this great man. He was interred next to his father in front of the temples of Bhagavan and the Mother. Further details can be found in the Ashram Bulletin.*

Most evenings in the samadhi hall of Sri Ramanasramam devotees would see an old man dressed in ochre robes sitting on a chair near the entrance to the Mother's shrine. This old man was so much part of the scenery that many people didn't even wonder who he was; nor did they stop to think that he had always been 94 years old. Sometimes he would talk to those who passed by and give them his blessings. At other moments he would be quiet and reserved, looking into the distance. This old man with long hair tied in a knot was once an exuberant and carefree young man who took upon his shoulders

the burden of holding the ashram together in the years following the death of his father, Niranjanananda Swami, in 1953. His name in the *grahasta ashrama* (householder stage) was T.N. Venkataraman but for most of his life he was affectionately known as Venkitoo.

In the aftermath of the Mahanirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1950 the ashram had a deserted look because many devotees thought that since Bhagavan was no longer there in a physical body his guidance was no longer available. His younger brother, Niranjanananda Swami or Chinna Swami, as he was commonly known, had been worn out by his efforts during Bhagavan's lifetime and barely held the ashram together in the face of fresh and pressing challenges. Three years after Bhagavan's mahasamadhi, his younger brother also left this world.

The management then devolved on Venkitoo. He had joined the ashram in early 1938 and assisted his father. He spent twelve years under Bhagavan's direct supervision and was a mature, capable manager when he assumed responsibility for the ashram in 1953. He had to deal with the day to day problems which this entailed, at a time when the ashram was physically at its lowest ebb. Money was very short, if not entirely absent and there were bills to be paid. The ashram dependents had to be fed and clothed. The responsibility rested entirely on his shoulders and all in all, he did not have an easy task. At times there were not even sufficient funds to pay for the rice and vegetables for the next day's meals. Venkitoo set about stabilising the ashram's financial and legal position with few resources other than his boundless enthusiasm, indomitable will and unwavering devotion to Bhagavan.

T.N. Venkataraman was born on 26th May 1914. He was the only child of Nagasundaram (as Chinna Swami was called before he took sannyas) and his young wife Mangalam. Nearly three years later his mother died and he was left by his father, who took sannyas, in the care of Bhagavan's younger sister Alamelu and her husband who were childless. In the years to come Venkitoo was often at Tiruvannamalai to visit Bhagavan. He did not receive the normal spiritual instructions and guidance that Bhagavan gave to those who came to him, it was almost as though the young man had been reserved for a special task.

Bhagavan trained him from his earliest years and was always interested in what was happening to Venkitoo after he married and worked for a bank. Later, Bhagavan readily agreed to the suggestion that the young man should be called back to the ashram in order to help in the administration. Venkitoo never pretended to be other than what he was. He was a plain-speaking and straight-forward man who enjoyed life and relished a challenge. His persistence and strength of personality were well-known. Every devotee felt that Venkitoo was especially kind to him or her. He always felt that Bhagavan was present in a radius of 100 feet around him, granting him protection. And he also never forgot Bhagavan's advice to him: "People may sometimes be adversely critical. We should patiently put up with all that."

Today the ashram is flourishing and does not face anything like the problems that Venkitoo had to deal with. For nearly forty years he toiled with whole-hearted commitment, fending off the chronic paucity of funds, administrative problems and unending legal disputes. It was said that after many years of this type of activity he was, although completely untrained, a formidable store of legal knowledge. He squarely faced the problems he encountered and the ashram gradually prospered. The gates of Bhagavan's and the Mother's samadhis were always open. When he took *sannyasa* in 1994 from the revered Swami Chidananda of Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, and relinquished charge of the ashram in favour of his eldest son, the ashram had at long last attained some degree of financial and legal security. It is now known and respected the world over, due in no small part to the efforts of this remarkable man who had Bhagavan's Grace in abundance.

Aside from dealing with the problems of the ashram he also brought up a family of three sons and four daughters. His three sons are all in Tiruvannamalai today and are fully involved in maintaining the ashram, to enable all sincere devotees to come and receive the gracious blessings of Bhagavan that are available in such abundance at this holy place.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Those who have not read the *My Reminiscences of Sri Bhagavan* by Swami Ramanananda published in the last edition of the *Mountain Path* (Jayanthi2008) will find a more complete picture of Swamiji's life in his own words.





John Maynard

# On Not Living Through Concepts

MUKESH ESWARAN

The greatest spiritual traditions of the world appear to prescribe rules to live by that are mutually conflicting. Judaism and Islam prohibit idol worship, for example, whereas Hinduism not only tolerates it but also finds no reason to discourage it. A sincere devotee of God who seeks to find common ground between the various traditions may well be confused by the apparent contradictions in the rules they lay down for seekers of Truth. The testimonies of the greatest sages and saints unanimously state that God is One. And since there have been enlightened sages in all the different religious traditions, we can infer that these traditions are merely alternative paths by which we may arrive at first-hand knowledge of Truth. None of them can legitimately claim to be the sole means to Self-Realization. Nor can they actually be contradictory in any fundamental sense. When reduced to their bare essentials, they must share a *common essence* that constitutes

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their heart, their core teaching. If we grasp this core teaching, we can feel assured that it will surely lead us to God.

What is that essence? What is the core precept that is common to Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Zen Buddhism—this list is not exhaustive—and which takes us to the threshold of Truth? If we identify this, we can seek Truth in a truly non-doctrinaire manner for we will have embraced the spirit of every religious tradition but the dogma of none.<sup>1</sup>

This core injunction seems to be: *Refrain from living through concepts*. The purpose of this essay is to argue that this constitutes the essence of spirituality and that this principle, if sincerely implemented in a spiritual aspirant's life, will lead him or her to Truth. We shall then also see why Sri Ramana Maharshi's favourite prescription, self-enquiry (vichara), is such a powerful method for approaching Truth.

To start at the beginning, what exactly do we mean by a concept? A concept is an idea, a mental construct, an object conceived by thought. A concept, in other words, is either a thought or a product of thought. When the word 'bus' is mentioned our minds conjure up what is obviously not a real bus but a visual image of one. That is, our minds serve up a visual concept when we hear the word. Concepts can be very functional—they are useful aids to us in going about our daily lives. The image of a bus, for example, may remind us that we should hurry up and get ready or else we will miss the bus that takes us to work on time. The innumerable concepts that have been conceived of in the arts, the humanities, and the sciences are powerful means by which we make sense of, and navigate, the world around us. Conceptual thought would not have evolved in Nature were it not so useful in enhancing our survival in a harsh world.

But thought, unfortunately, has also made possible the creation of an artificial, conceptual world—one that rivals the real world for our attention. We spend much of our time dwelling on the past and on the future, though only the present truly exists. The past and the future are unreal—they exist in our minds. As Sri Ramana has said, "There is

<sup>1</sup> Recall St. Paul's maxim: "The letter kills; the spirit keeps alive." [2Corinthians, 3:6]

neither past nor future. There is only the present. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will also be the present when you experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists."<sup>2</sup> That is, we are merely invoking concepts in the present while pondering the past or future. When engaged in this manner we see objects as they once existed or as we imagine they will exist, but not as they actually are at this moment. To see things as they are now, we do not need to think; we only need to be aware in the present moment.

Thinking, then, can be an escape from the real world into a conceptual world. While thinking, we abandon the real world for an imaginary one that *we create*.

Unfortunately, the temptation to live in our own conceptual world is very strong, as shown by the amount of time we spend thinking when there is no need to. There is something seductive about thoughts. They capture our attention without us even so much as noticing it. As a result, everybody engages in this habit almost compulsively. Now God is That Which Is (that is, Truth or Reality) and, therefore, can be known only in the present moment. If we believe that Krishna or Christ or Buddha is a special avatar of God we should seek to know him *in the present*, not merely in his historical context. If we indulge in thoughts when we are not required to, we are not attending to the present moment. But if God resides in the present, how can we expect to know him by absenting ourselves from the present? Knowledge of God, therefore, requires us to cease dallying with thoughts and concepts.

Does this mean that we are to never to use concepts, that we are never to think? Certainly not! Thinking is very useful and if the present moment calls for us to think, then we should think. But the trouble is that we are usually thinking even when we are not required to. Most of our thoughts, in fact, serve no useful purpose at all—they are not functional. In this sense, thinking is usually a flight from reality—a

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in David Godman, *Be as You Are: The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, Ch. 18, Arkana Paperback, London, 1985, pp. 195-196.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

flight from God. Our conceptual world thus becomes a serious impediment to establishing conscious awareness of God.

We now come to the issue of why refraining from living through concepts is the essential wisdom of all the major spiritual traditions. To begin with, consider one of the most revered scriptures of Hinduism, *The Bhagavad Gita*. In this scripture, Krishna repeatedly exhorts Arjuna to be even-minded in all circumstances. For example, he says:

Nerve thy heart to meet  
As things alike to thee—pleasure or pain,  
Profit or ruin, victory or defeat.<sup>3</sup>

When we feel exultation in victory or humiliation in defeat, we are essentially reacting to concepts. We are getting away from the reality of the situation by putting a label on it like “Victory” or “Defeat”. In other words, we are taking an *impersonal* outcome and giving it an *interpretation* that is personal, such as, “I have been defeated.” It is this interpretation that is our undoing. For we then react to our own interpretation and feel either exultation or humiliation. An impartial observer or one to whom the concepts of winning and losing mean nothing would feel neither exultation nor humiliation because, to her or him, the event does not come with the loaded labels ‘Victory’ or ‘Defeat’. Krishna’s emphatic counsel to Arjuna that he should be indifferent to victory and defeat or pleasure and pain, we see, is really an exhortation to live beyond concepts.

We are victims of our interpretation of outward events that, in themselves, carry no intrinsic meaning. We give them meaning through our interpretations. When this is pointed out we might admit it, and perhaps even grudgingly agree that we are victims of the concept of ‘Defeat’ because we find humiliation unpleasant. But we might yet deny that we are victims of the concept of ‘Victory’. If so, we delude ourselves. Krishna frequently refers to the “twin dualities” (as he terms them) of victory and defeat, honour and dishonour, heat and cold,

<sup>3</sup> *The Song Celestial*, Ch. 2, verse 38, translated by Edwin Arnold, Roberts Brothers, Boston, 1885.



John Maynard

etc. These concepts necessarily come in pairs. It is impossible for us to subscribe to the concept of victory without simultaneously subscribing to the converse concept of defeat, because the one has meaning only in relation to the other. If we feel exultation in the one state, we will inevitably feel humiliation in the other; we cannot experience the one without the other. However, if we drop *both* of the twin concepts, we are not victims of the outcome. We are free.

Sengtsan, a sixth century patriarch of Zen Buddhism, also dispensed the same wisdom that Krishna emphasized:

Do not seek for the truth;  
Only cease to cherish opinions.<sup>4</sup>

In the same vein, the Greek philosopher Epictetus, said, “True instruction is this: to learn to wish that each thing should come to pass as it does. And how does it come to pass? As the Disposer has disposed it.”<sup>5</sup> By cherishing opinions we put an interpretation according to our whim on what we see. By wishing for something contrary to what God disposes, we struggle to change reality into something other than what it is. God is before us as Reality, but we ignore his presence by preferring something that we have conceived. We ignore the fact in front of our nose and embrace the fiction of our belief instead.

In Islam and in Judaism, as we have noted, there is a rule that strictly prohibits the worship of idols—something that would puzzle a devout Hindu. This rule is not often understood the way it is intended. It is usually assumed that an idol is some manmade object representing God. And since no created object can substitute for God, the worship of idols is prohibited. Strict adherents of this rule are often misled by its intent because they interpret the letter of the law instead of its spirit (to use the words of St. Paul).

<sup>4</sup> Sengtsan, *Verses on the Faith Mind*, translated by R. B. Clarke. This book can be viewed online at the website <http://www.texaschapbookpress.com/magellanslog5/Saltlick/hsinhsinming.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Saying XXVI in *The Golden Sayings of Epictetus*, translated by H. Crossley, 2006. This book can be viewed online at the website <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/871/871-8.txt>

In reality, every concept is an idol—for it is a poor substitute for reality. When people pursue honour, they are really worshipping the idol they have made of honour. When they covet wealth, the concept of wealth is the idol they prostrate before, and so on. Idol worship, rightly interpreted, is really the worship of concepts that we have put in the place of God. The greatest idol is the concept of “I”, the person we take ourselves to be. We cater to this idol day in and day out, putting our whole lives at its disposal. Sri Ramana Maharshi has emphasized that this particular concept (“the I-thought”) is the source of all the others, and that is why he proposed a technique to destroy it. Idol worship (in the inclusive sense described here) is disastrous to us because it clouds the presence of God, who is beyond concepts.

It is for this reason that the scriptures in Hinduism and Buddhism urge seekers of Truth to become desireless. Krishna repeatedly tells Arjuna that enlightened sages (*stithapragnas*) are completely desireless. Buddha identified desire as the cause of all sorrow. Being desireless means being free from the tyranny of concepts. For to have a preference for victory over defeat, as we have seen, is to remain a captive of both concepts. Preferences keep us mired in the world of illusion because they keep us straining for what we desire and rejecting what actually exists in the present moment.

The ban on idol worship in Islam and Judaism is really a dictum to cease idolizing concepts, for they are empty substitutes for God. The important point to note, however, is that we may put away images, statues, and paintings of our conceptions of God, but unless we firmly renounce our continual homage to concepts (especially the “I”) we remain idol worshippers.<sup>6</sup>

One might object to the claim made in this essay that the precept of not living through concepts is the common essence of all the major

<sup>6</sup> Hinduism finds idol worship perfectly compatible with the worship of God because here the image of God (be it Ganesha or Shiva or Kali) is seen not as a substitute for God but merely as a reminder of God. It was thus that Sri Ramakrishna, by ardently worshipping an image of Goddess Kali, quickly achieved enlightenment. This underlines the fact that the efficacy of any spiritual practice depends on the intention or spirit with which it is done; merely performing it mechanically counts for nothing.



spiritual traditions. One might, instead, reasonably say: “Is not surrender the last word in spirituality and, therefore, central to all traditions?” In fact Krishna closes *The Bhagavad Gita* with the declaration that surrender is the highest yoga. The Bible and the Koran consider surrender to God as our highest duty. How can one reconcile this with the claim made in this essay?

It is indeed the case that surrender is the last word of all true spirituality. But the purpose of this essay is to identify the *common essence* of all the major spiritual traditions. In Buddhism and Zen Buddhism there is not much talk of surrender (because there is no mention of God), and yet there are countless enlightened sages in those traditions too. Can we reconcile this with the pivotal role given to surrender in Self-Realization?

We can. *The abandonment of concepts and thoughts* takes one to the same place that *surrender* does. In fact, we cannot truly surrender to God unless we have first surrendered our reliance on concepts. This is why in *The Bhagavad Gita* Krishna tirelessly harps on the point that an enlightened sage is beyond the dualities. This important lesson can also be gleaned from the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Recalling his days of sadhana, he once told his devotees, “Taking flowers in my hand, I used to say to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, here is Your sin and here Your holy deeds. I want neither; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your good and here Your evil. I want neither good nor evil; pray grant me pure love and devotion....’”<sup>7</sup> In his characteristically childlike—but highly original and effective—way, the sage broke free from the hold of concepts: he handed them over to Kali. With his peculiar genius, he had instinctively zeroed in on the same profound insight as the medieval English mystic who emphatically declared: “By love may He be known and held, but by thinking never.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, recorded by Mahendranath Gupta, V. 3, Sec. XVIII, Ch. 2. This book can be viewed online at the website <http://www.kathamrita.org/kathamrita3/k3sec18.htm>

<sup>8</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, author anonymous (14th Century), translated by Clifton Wolters, Penguin Classics, 1961, Chapter 6.

The Book of Job in the Old Testament provides a deeply touching story of a man of faith. Job was visited by the worst sorts of physical afflictions that covered his body from head to toe with sores. His relatives and close friends, rather than being sources of solace during his time of trouble, taunted him instead and attributed his afflictions to divine retribution for his sins. But even in his moment of greatest trial, when overwhelmed by physical suffering, Job’s response to his plight was: “Shall we receive good from the hand of God, and shall we not receive adversity?”<sup>9</sup> This degree of detachment from the twin dualities of pleasure and pain reveals Job as one of the holiest people chronicled in the Bible.

Sri Ramana Maharshi pointed to the necessity of relinquishing concepts when he said, “There will come a time when one will have to forget all that one has learned.”<sup>10</sup> In the final analysis, what we learn are only concepts. But concepts are merely thoughts and, as long as we live through thoughts, we are frittering away our lives in an illusory world of our own creation. Sri Ramana’s technique of self-enquiry for arresting thoughts is well known. By persistently asking ourselves “Who am I?”, we are forced to abandon our fictitious worlds to remain with the real one. Self-enquiry releases us from the compulsive habit of conceptualization by first ensuring that we always remain in the here and now, and then dissolving the very concept of self (‘I-thought’). With one stroke it demolishes all our assumptions, mental constructions, beliefs, conjectures, theories, and fantasies. Self-enquiry thus brings us to the surrender of concepts.

In Zen Buddhist practice, aspirants are asked to relentlessly work on a problem (‘koan’) that is not solvable by the conceptual mind. (One such koan is ‘Who am I?’). The koan neutralizes the thinking process by tying it up in knots. After struggling with the koan, the aspirant’s (egoistic) mind finally gives up. This surrender of the ego

<sup>9</sup> *Job*, 2:10.

<sup>10</sup> This quote is contained in *Who Am I?* (translated by T.M.P. Mahadevan), in answer to Question 23, namely, “*Is it any use reading books for those who long for release?*”. This book can be viewed online at the website <http://www.arunachala-ramana.org/whoami.htm>



## MOUNTAIN PATH

results in enlightenment. In the Theravada Buddhist practice of mindfulness (*vipassana* meditation), one is required to observe all that transpires in one's inner world with detachment and without converting what is witnessed into concepts. In the end, the ego collapses for want of a role to play. So in Theravada Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, too—though they make no explicit reference to surrender—enlightenment is the outcome of the ego's surrender. But this surrender is forced by requiring the aspirant to abandon all concepts. ▲

## VERSE

### The Names of Siva

RAMESH MENON

O *Tamohara*,  
in the all-sinister heart,  
you hunt the darkness.

*Pushpalochana*,  
who watch nebulae unfurl,  
such flowers your eyes!

Fathomless *Pushkara*,  
manna in the wilderness  
of anguish and mercy;  
with lives and deaths through kalpas,  
Father, you nurture our souls.

Blind *Uttarana*,  
on a plain raft you take us  
across all despair,  
across the sea of judgement,  
to a bright shore of freedom. ▲

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of 5 lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra 7-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.

# Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam

SRI MURUGANAR

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

The excerpt given here is section 18 of Chapter Two, *The Rapture of the Guru's Grace*, entitled: *Instruction to the people of the world (enquiry)*. *Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam* is principally a work of devotion, but as the current extract clearly shows, the paths of *jnana* and *bhakti* are entirely convergent in the heart of the true devotee. Muruganar's devotion is no airy mysticism but is here seen to be entirely consistent with the sound rational principles that underlie the method of self-enquiry. The book will be available for purchase from online bookstores and, in a special Indian edition, from Sri Ramanasramam bookstore in early 2008.

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18. *Instruction to the people of the world (enquiry)**The enquiry that is true knowledge*

551. The network of thoughts that fills the mind branches out from the perception 'I am the body'. The proper course of action is to ask the question: *What is the place in which this 'I am the body' idea has its source?* and thus reach and become established within the heart.
552. Know that the method of teaching which goes straight to the heart is that of self-enquiry, when in response to the question: *Who in reality is this flawed 'I'?*, the truth is revealed in a sudden inward illumination, like sunlight flashing in a crystal of glass.
553. Ignorance is the state of forgetting the Self, true knowledge, and becoming intoxicated with the differentiated awareness that is of the form of the mind. This ignorance is a delusion that will be dispelled by the enquiry that is true knowledge.
554. Since his nature dwells inseparably within every incarnated soul, shining out as the 'I', even if we merely repeat it over and over again as a mantra, it will transport us to the seat of the heart that is union with the Self.
555. The Self that is revealed as our true nature within the heart through the power of self-enquiry is none other than the peerless reality of the supreme, which alone remains after this worldly illusion has faded into nothingness.
556. Thus, taking refuge within the heart, all conditional awareness will be expunged, and the knowledge of the real, the summit of the Vedas, shining forth as 'I-I', will illuminate the cave of the heart like the rising sun at dawn.

557. When through self-enquiry the 'I' suddenly expands to embrace the infinite fulfilment of the supreme, the mind, previously weakened by suffering, will be revived, as it experiences its natural state, the peace of being merged in the heart.
558. If the form of the mind is closely investigated, the form of the mind will be resolved into consciousness, giving way to the divine silence of final liberation in the unalloyed clarity of the Self.
559. 'Who am I?' is the source of all acts of questioning. If in silence we enquire inwardly into the place of its arising, so that its truth is known, the dispute that gave rise to the question will be ended completely.
560. When we examine all the objects we hold on to, rejecting them one after the other saying: *not this, not this* until none is left, the one rare thing that remains is the truth, reality, the 'I' that is merged in the divine hall of the heart.
561. Like bees intoxicated by the sight of honey, whatever they perceive, they rise up without so much as a thought, and rush towards it, so that that which they perceive becomes their very form! Know that this is the nature of our inherited dispositions [*vasanas*].
562. That which reveals the truth in which there is no room for duality, and shines as the inner Sadguru within the hearts of the superior ones [*jnanis*] so that they have merged with it, is the 'I', reality, the supreme reality that is without equal.

563. To realize through investigation that the nature [of reality] is beyond the reach of thought, and to slough off that treacherous mental imagination, making the heart our permanent place of abode — that indeed is the pellucid state of supreme knowledge.
564. Due to its false understanding, the mind perceives as foreign to itself that which is not in fact different from it. The practice of abidance in the Self is to firmly hold the mind in abeyance with the heart. It is not an act of thinking.
565. Shining within the 'I' and inseparable from it, the reality of Brahman is the light which illumines mind-consciousness. To control that mind-consciousness so that it is checked and restrained within that Brahman is the true mark of Sivahood.
566. The truth of the Self will become established through that powerful state in which the mind subsides in the state of samadhi, which occurs when consciousness is firmly rooted within the heart through the means of severing all connection with the mind that goes out through the sense organs.
567. When the love accumulated over many births from ancient times fills our hearts and a clear understanding arises there through the power of his grace, so that we become one with the Self, never leaving its embrace, then indeed have we attained the sublime reality of union with God.
568. The fitting form of worship to the Lord who bears a third eye in his brow is to immerse oneself in the heart. This state, in which the heart is kept free from the taint

- of thoughts, is the straight path for those who seek the highest fulfilment.
569. In performing the sacrificial rituals contained in the sastras, the final oblation most worthy of praise and which brings joy to Lord Siva whose judgment is unerring, is to offer up in fitting manner one's own self.
570. Know that those who have fully accomplished that one thing have fully accomplished all their religious duties, because its greatness far exceeds that of any other offering, and after it nothing whatsoever remains to be done.
571. That which is spoken of as the life of life itself is the true life. That other 'life' is merely the body. That illusory knowledge mediated by the senses [*suttarivu*] is nothing but delusion. The pure consciousness that underlies it alone is true consciousness.
572. All that is perceived as being separate from consciousness is insentient. It will prove to be a mere error and cease to exist. Therefore since the indivisible true reality that dwells within is consciousness itself, you should firmly reject as unreal anything which appears separate from that consciousness.
573. Realizing that the power of thought could never truly grasp That [the Self] whose beauty shines out through its very nature in the heart, the centre [of all], so that all thought subsides, you should abandon all such conceptualisation.
574. Is it fitting that we should seek to embrace our own self by means of intellectual effort mediated by the senses,

rather than by becoming a prey to the supreme reality that shines as that Self, and being annihilated through merging with its non-dual nature?

575. Whatever it is that attracts the mind will always cause a disturbance within it, giving rise to the cycle of pleasure and pain. Will this happen if, turning inward, the mind attains the realization of the reality which lies within the heart?
576. To become established in the heart where one remains as the pure 'I', unruffled by the fierce gale whipped up by all the various branches of knowledge that are apprehended in the world through this physical body and cause us agitation — that indeed is the enduring attainment.
577. All universes are contained in that infinitesimally subtle awareness, without marks, without qualities, without any attributes whatsoever and free of all defects, which is the all-pervading and indivisible Sivam.
578. All dualistic concepts such as 'this world' and 'the next world' are merely unreal mental creations. Know that when these fall away and are no more, the one true reality underlying all worlds is none other than the unalloyed supreme intelligence of Sivam.
579. The supreme reality, in which flourishes the noble nature of pure grace, and which merges with us so that all the many false appearances such as 'this birth' and 'the next birth' cease to exist, shines out as the truth-imbued and flawless 'I'.

580. In the unreal state where our true nature is veiled, the creations of the mind that swirl about are mere names and forms, but even these will be revealed as being of the form of pure consciousness in the state of peace that prevails as the nature of Sivam, the Self.
581. The reason why the world is apprehended as separate from Sivam is the error of knowledge mediated by the senses [*suttarivu*], which fails to turn inward by engaging in spiritual practice, occupying itself fruitlessly with mental concepts which are the cause of birth.
582. The soul is nothing other than the Siva lingam itself. It is a grievous error for those who are unable to concentrate their attention and realize this through the subtle awareness that enters the heart and asks: 'Who am I?', to wail and lament as if they were sinners.
583. Those who pursue the enquiry 'Who am I?' until the last vestige of identification with the physical body is eradicated from their hearts will gain the treasure that, like the sky itself, pervades all things as the Self, Sadasiva, shining as itself alone.
584. In the time of their enquiring into their wrongdoing, expiation for living beings is to abide steadfastly in the reality of the heart, the unwritten lore of the Vedas, through the self-enquiry that asks: *For whom is the sin?* ▲





# Using Sri Ramana's Teachings in Yoga Practices

GARY WEBER

Sri Ramana's teachings, particularly those focused on direct enquiry with questions such as 'Who Am I?', 'Where am I?' etc., have primarily been 'worked with/on' by most Westerners in a traditional seated meditation approach. Depending on the sophistication and inclination of the practitioner, the meditation posture may be more or less rigorous, but it is usually done seated. The accessibility and impact of these wonderful teachings can be expanded by incorporating them into many traditional 'yoga' approaches, like asana, pranayama, and chanting. The great mass of Western students of yoga is attracted primarily by asanas, fewer to pranayama; many never go beyond asanas to the other limbs of yoga and move toward Self Realization.

To address this opportunity, a range of enquiry, meditation, negation and affirmation approaches have been incorporated into asanas and

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pranayama, particularly asana flows (*vinyasas*) to turn them into a highly effective approach to Bhagavan's teachings. In several instances, Bhagavan did not advise doing asanas as he felt that asanas could lead one into attachment to the body; this can certainly happen. Since many Westerners are not going to abandon asanas for seated meditation, this approach of integrating Sri Ramana's teachings into asana and pranayama offers the opportunity to make lemonade out of lemons.

The key concepts used in these approaches are drawn from three verses of Sri Ramana's *Upadesa Saram*:

11. Control the breath and you control the mind, like throwing a net over a wild parrot.

12. Mind and breath, consciousness and action, are joined like two branches on a tree, both with the same root.

14. Lasting absorption of the mind can be accomplished by first stilling it through breath control, and from that state, contemplating That.

Many practitioners of asanas have found that the body lives in the mystery of the Reality in a more immediate and intimate way than does the mind. As the I/mind/ego is the source of the problems arising from attachment, working with the body may be a more effective way to unwind the 'I' without having to use the clever, tricky mind to fix 'itself'. Working with the body can represent for many folk a door to realization that is easier to open. My own turning of the page occurred while doing an asana sequence using a meditative enquiry and affirmation.

Asanas are what most in the West think of when they hear the word 'yoga'. In the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, in Chapter 1, Verse 2, 'yoga' is described as *yogas chitta vritti nirodaha*, often translated as 'yoga is the stilling of the modifications of the mind'. Yoga is not about physical performance or bodily perfection; yoga is about stilling the cacophony of thoughts and achieving unending, natural, uncaused happiness and peace.

In most yoga classes in the West, there is great attention paid to physical improvements and achievements, while little attention is paid to the core of what yoga actually is.

In constructing vinyasas for this work, the critical components are a) the sequence of asanas; b) the coordination of breath with movement; c) the smooth flow from one asana to the next; and d) coupling enquiry, negation or affirmation with the breath and movement. There are many different vinyasas which are useful; several are described in my book *Happiness Beyond Thought: A Practical Guide to Awakening*.<sup>1</sup> One is shown on the internet at [www.happiness-beyond-thought.com](http://www.happiness-beyond-thought.com)

Vinyasas which alternately expand and contract the breathing apparatus result in a natural movement from inhalation to exhalation. As the arms are lifted, or one bends backwards, the front of the body stretches leading naturally to inhalation. Lowering the arms, or forward bending, leads to exhalation.

Vinyasas, whenever possible are done with the eyes closed. With the eyes open, we are more easily assailed by thought streams stimulated by interesting visual objects and associations. Vinyasas are done in a meditative way that is well within your breath and physical capacity, akin to a Tai Chi practice.

Start with counting your breaths. While this is often given as an introductory meditation practice, particularly in Zen, it is powerful beyond its simple appearance. Simply count your exhales. Inhales or inhales and exhales both can also be counted, but counting exhales works best for deepening the work.

In doing a flow, count every exhale in the flow. If you are holding a particular asana in a vinyasa, count every exhale until you finish your holding or reach ten. If you reach ten, then restart at one. If you lose track, go back to one.

After you have become comfortable with the breath counting, move on to integrating Bhagavan's powerful enquiries. Enquiry is merely

<sup>1</sup> *Happiness Beyond Thought: A Practical Guide to Awakening* by Gary Weber. iUniverse Inc, 2012 Pine Lake Road, Lincoln, NE, USA. 2007. [www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com)

asking at a deep level a simple question which attracts your interest and which probes your commonly held assumptions and beliefs.

The question you select is important. Consider as possible choices, 'Who am I?', 'Where am I?', 'When am I?', 'What is doing this asana?', 'What hears?', 'What feels these sensations?' etc. You can come up with others, but the most important consideration is to determine which one is YOUR question. Some questions may feel too 'philosophical', 'equivocal', or 'psychological'. Others are too 'obvious' or 'uninteresting'. Your question will have a 'feel', an energy that gives you a sense of rightness, of 'yes' arising out of your own deep intuition that this is THE question for you.

'Where am I?' was particularly useful in my practice and it has been for many others as asanas are done in space by an apparent body-mind and an apparent doer. As sensations are constantly originating from different places in the body-mind, seeing the I appear to move and appear and disappear, can be a powerful vehicle for awakening.

Once you select a question, it is important to continue with it for a while. You may become bored, want another question, or consider abandoning the practice. Persistence is the key. The mind, which doesn't want to be investigated, probed or threatened, will develop many reasons as to why this direct enquiry is a bad idea. Only by continued practice will the I loosen its hold. The I has held sway for a long time with much external reinforcement; surrender will not occur without a fight.

During inhalations in the vinyasas, silently ask your question and allow it to sink deeply into your consciousness. This is not about getting the right intellectual answer, or saying it over and over again as a mantra. It is about feeling the question deeply within. With time, the enquiry will become a feeling, an intention, a deep questioning that is more a presence or energy than a thought. Moving into this phase takes the enquiry out of something that the mind is trying to understand and into the very structure and energy that is the 'I'.

During exhalations or holding in asanas, a second meditative approach can be used; negation, or 'not this, not this' (*neti, neti*). Though Bhagavan did not specifically recommend this practice because

of its limitations, it can be an effective subsidiary practice. This practice has been done for millennia and is a cornerstone of conventional non-dual/advaitic awakening.

With your eyes closed and your breath smooth and steady, during exhalations notice sensations or thoughts as they arise. As they arise, mentally repeat 'Not this', or 'I am not this'. If you notice tightness or a sensation somewhere, note it, open to it, accept and welcome it with 'not this'. If a thought stream arises, again 'I am not this'.

A starting point of this work is the realization that if you can recognize something else, or objectify it, you can't be that. You can't be the object you observe. You can't be in two places at the same time. You cannot feel the tension in your shoulder and be that tension. The focus is on which 'you' are, the changing sensations and thoughts or the constant presence which witnesses those changes.

Don't resist the sensation or thought as if you were afraid of it, as that will only strengthen and validate it. Welcoming and acceptance softens the edges around the thought or sensation and opens the way for it to dissolve, to be absorbed in awareness.

As with the enquiry during inhalations, negations during exhales or holding will move from a mental process to becoming a feeling, an intention, operating in a deeper space. Negations will naturally evoke the question as to whether or not this is really true, opening into an enquiry.

Try substituting *Koham?* (kho hum) for 'Who am I?', or *Kutam?* (khu tum) for 'Where am I?' for inquiries. For negations, try *Naham ayam* (nah hum ah yum) or *Na aham* (nah ah hum) for 'I am not this'. Your intellectual left brain enquiry may be integrated and deepened with the sensing of the right brain triggered by the phonically-active Sanskrit.

A deep release into an asana often occurs with the 'not this' approach. This is not surprising as much body tightness is the result of an I holding some emotion, pain or experience in the body.

It can also be a powerful practice to simply focus on the breath during vinyasas. Watch the inhales and exhales closely. See if you can find where the inhale and exhale start and then where they go when

they end. Is there a space between breath cycles? Watch that space. Where are you when this space is there? If you are there, is the space there?

This approach can lead to the fundamental understanding that ‘I am not this body’, not as a mental concept but as your lived reality. Few understandings will so surprisingly and dramatically alter the operation of thought as this clear and deep recognition.

A useful marker as to how you are doing is whether you can go through simple vinyasas in continuous awareness without having thoughts. Can you be naturally and totally open and aware, just stillness, presence and emptiness throughout a flow? While these markers can give rise to dualistic comparisons and goals, this work is about stilling the mind. If the mind isn’t stilled, work needs to continue.

If your practice focuses on physical benefits and diversions rather than deep enquiry, the mind will return in full when practice is over. Your asana practice, like your life, can become naturally peaceful and effortless, not through suppression or replacement, but through enquiry and understanding. If you cannot have a still, alert and clear awareness during asanas, there is no chance that you will have it in your daily life.

The creation of the I and its perceived mission of protecting the body, which it regards as itself, from real and imagined physical and psychological dangers is the basis for most thought. In today’s complex world, it is a strategy that is no longer useful or successful. Surrendering your manufactured fears and the I that holds them is critical to creating a more effective and holistic approach. Using a sequence of asanas, coupled with breath watching, enquiry and negation can produce a deep enquiry into the structure of the mind/ego/I, and open the way to awakening into the Self that you truly are. ▲

# Remembering Narayana Iyer

T.R. KANAKAMMAL

Narayana Iyer was a devotee who came to scoff, but remained as a worshipper. He was an out and out sceptic with no religion in him. He considered *sanyasins* and *sadhus* to be impostors and parasites and no one, however great, had the right to accept the homage of others. But a chance meeting with Bhagavan wrought a complete transformation in this doubting Thomas and turned him into a staunch devotee.

Dr. Ramakrishna Iyer, his friend, philosopher and guide who like Narayana Iyer was also working in Chetpet,<sup>1</sup> was well acquainted with Bhagavan, being the son of Lakshmi Ammal of Tiruchuli and one of Bhagavan’s childhood playmates. He invited Narayana Iyer to go with

T.R. Kanakammal is a respected senior devotee and author of several books on Bhagavan.

<sup>1</sup> A town some 30 miles from Tiruvannamalai.



him to Tiruvannamalai during the Deepam festival and his invitation was accepted although Narayana Iyer disliked crowds and temple festivals had no attraction for him; he agreed on the condition that he would neither come inside the ashram nor prostrate to the Swami if perchance he met him.

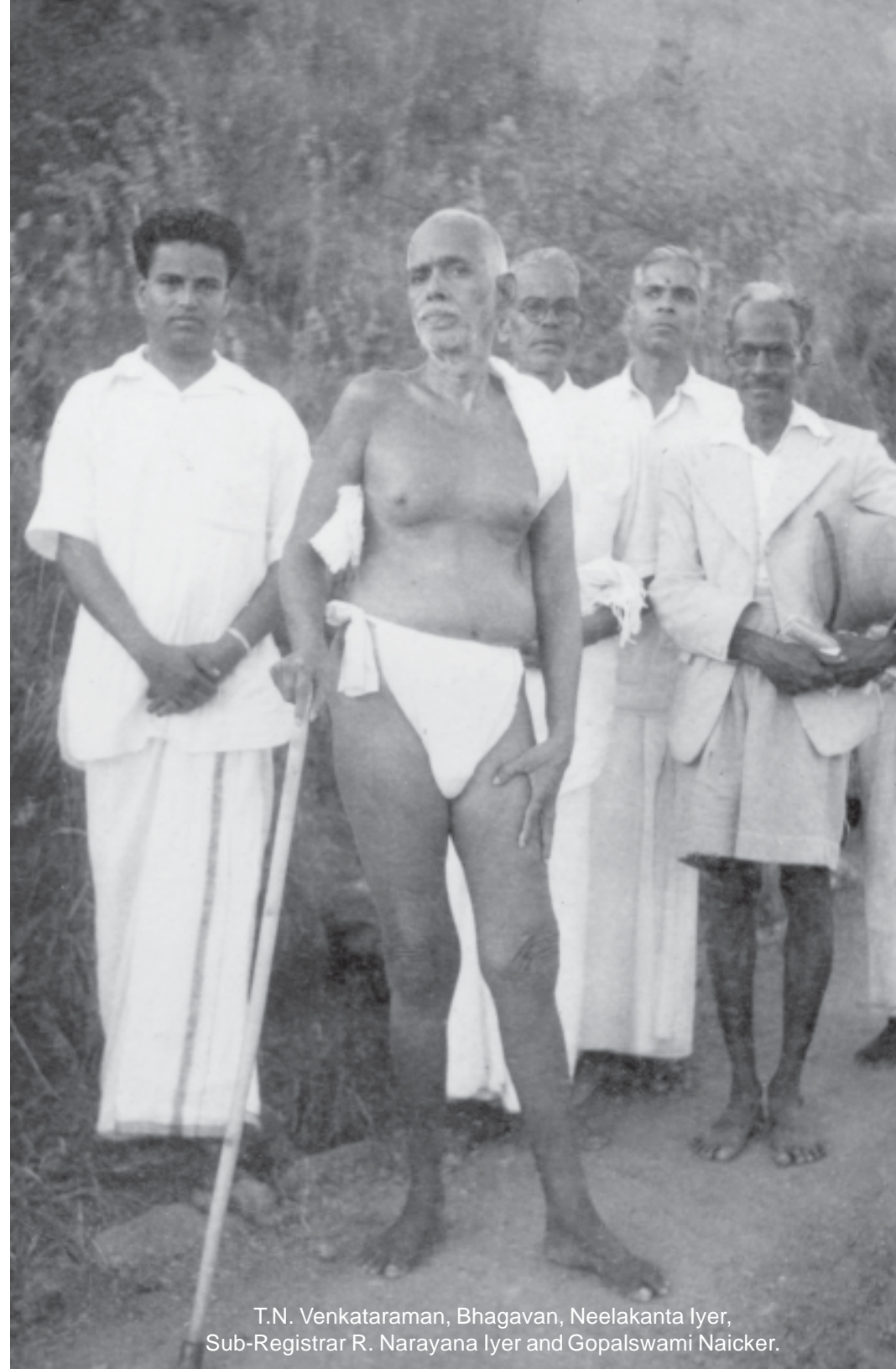
Circumstances forced him to accompany his friend into the ashram. As they were coming inside a person clad only in a white loin cloth, a towel on his shoulder, a *kamandalu* (water pot) in one hand and a walking stick in the other stopped in his walk in the opposite direction on seeing them. He spoke kindly to the doctor inquired about his mother and brother. Though Iyer guessed that this must be the Maharshi he did not look up, thinking that after all, he was a complete stranger to him. On being introduced as the sub-registrar of Chetpet, out of courtesy he looked up. Let us hear him now in his own words:

“What a wonderful face and what a welcoming smile! Bewitching, fascinating and a powerful look too! In a moment I was at his feet on the gravel ground.... He is not bogus.... looks genuine.... but has he solved the mystery of life, of the universe that we see around us? If not, I withdraw my homage and go my way.... I tried to find out if he had written any books. I got a copy of *Ulladu Narpadu* (Reality in Forty Verses) in Tamil just published.”<sup>2</sup>

As he tried to read the first stanza he was confounded and filled with dismay at the repeated use of the word *ulladu* which seemed too closely packed. The pure language embodying the essence of Absolute Reality, would drive even pundits of Tamil prosody to despair. Someone nearby said that the Maharshi himself would explain to them the forty verses that night. In anxious and eager suspense Narayana Iyer waited for the night.

“A solemn stillness pervaded the air. There was absolute silence. The Maharshi read the first stanza. The mere reading of it made the meaning as clear as clarity itself. Stanza by stanza he read and explained

<sup>2</sup> How I Came to Bhagavan by R. Narayana Iyer in *Fragrant Petals*, A Representative Anthology on Sri Bhagavan, Published by Sri Ramanasramam, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2005, page 80-81.



T.N. Venkataraman, Bhagavan, Neelakanta Iyer,  
Sub-Registrar R. Narayana Iyer and Gopalswami Naicker.

in a voice so sweet and melodious that it seemed to come from a transcendent being. The climax came when explaining a verse and he said ‘God cannot be seen with our eyes and known by our senses. This is what is meant by saying, “To see God is to be God.”’<sup>3</sup>

Suddenly the stentorian voice of Dandapani Swami boomed from out of the listeners, “Is Bhagavan saying this out of personal experience (*swaanubhava*)?”

The question asked with such naiveté was answered with equal candour. “Else would I dare to say so?”

It flashed upon Narayana Iyer instantly that if He whom all religions acclaim as God were to appear before him in flesh and blood, here He is. Successive waves of bliss flooding from within shook his frame. He went outside to compose himself. He says, “I came, he saw, he conquered.” The spell was thus cast. To him henceforth Bhagavan was his God, Bhagavan was the way and the support on the way as well.

To Narayana Iyer the content of *Ulladu Narpadu* became a Vedic verity and its verses veritable *mantras*, and he took to chanting them as *japa*. From then on nothing could stop him from frequenting the ashram.

His job entailed frequent transfers however, there was no let up in his regular visits. Never a Sunday passed without Narayana Iyer arriving at the ashram and he always had some delectable snacks with him which were prepared by his wife Lalitha Iyer who believed that she was cooking delicacies for God. These were savoured by everyone as Bhagavan would never accept anything unless there was enough for all. Once when Shantammal enquired of Bhagavan whether she could prepare some snacks in the ashram Bhagavan replied, “Tomorrow is Sunday. Narayana Iyer will be arriving and will surely be bringing something to eat.”

In the afternoon devotees bringing snacks would offer the entire lot, in their containers, to Bhagavan. After a quick look around the hall, Bhagavan would pick up a little and hand over the rest to the attendant nearby, to be distributed in equal measure among those present. Muruganar, a keen observer of Bhagavan’s ways, used to recall with wonder that if the attendant gave each one present exactly the

same amount that Bhagavan had taken, it would just suffice for all, whether the number present was great or small. This was found to be unfailingly true; whatever the quantity Bhagavan allotted for himself was found to be the right measure for distribution that day.

In those days (the early thirties) the area surrounding the ashram was very bare. Mother’s shrine was yet to be constructed. Anyone approaching the precincts of the ashram could be easily seen from the old hall. Once, between two successive weekend visits by Narayana Iyer, the ashram administration, feeling that Bhagavan needed some rest in the afternoon after lunch, had imposed a restriction that none should be allowed to disturb him between twelve noon and two pm. Neither Bhagavan nor Narayana Iyer was aware of this new decree. The following Sunday afternoon as usual, Iyer arrived with *omappodi* in hand.<sup>4</sup> As he approached the hall those strategically positioned to deflect the would-be visitors until two pm, the new receiving hour, apprised him of the rule. Iyer, though still at a great distance from Bhagavan, made his customary prostration from where he was, retraced his steps and waited until the appointed hour.

At two pm he came before Bhagavan. Bhagavan had spied him on his arrival and disappearance. As soon as he entered the hall Bhagavan asked him, “Didn’t you come at one o’clock? I saw you through the window and was expecting you to come to the hall at any moment. But you didn’t come. Did you have to go elsewhere?”

Narayana Iyer, who had no idea that Bhagavan was not supposed to know of the new arrangement, replied in all innocence, “My train arrived late and I could come only at 1 o’clock but was informed that Bhagavan nowadays rests in the afternoons and is not to be disturbed until two pm, hence I come only now.”

Bhagavan listened without any comment, other than his customary, “Oh! Is that so?”

The next day after lunch, instead of going into the hall, Bhagavan sat outside the hall. The attendant very hesitantly suggested that he go inside, as it was becoming very hot.

<sup>3</sup> *Fragrant Petals*, page 81. *op cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Omappodi* is a snack made of gram flour and spices.

Bhagavan said, “Nobody is allowed to enter until two pm. Is there also a rule that I should not come out until two?”

Then Bhagavan the very embodiment of compassion added, “People come from far-away places by various means, suffering innumerable hardships in order to get here. How can they be sure of the exact time of their arrival? When they come after all that, how fair is it to deny them ready access?”

Hearing this, the management immediately revoked the new rule.

Owing to the profound grace of Bhagavan, in due course, Narayana Iyer was posted to Tiruvannamalai itself. He was the first in a long line of devotees to have had the rare privilege of establishing a residence near the ashram in order to be in the holy presence of Bhagavan on a regular basis. His entire sadhana comprised of simply remaining with Bhagavan whenever possible, in the hall or in the kitchen, cutting vegetables, grinding chutney and preparing breakfast in the wee hours of the morning.

Prior to constructing the house Iyer took the plans to Bhagavan to have them blessed. After careful perusal Bhagavan observed, “The plan is alright, but where is the well?”

Though Iyer had a location in mind, it was not marked on the blueprint. This turned out to be a benediction, as Bhagavan selected the site and marked the exact location. Later one could see what a blessing it was; not only was the water as sweet as tender coconut water, but the well never ran dry and was thus a source of succour for the entire neighbourhood in times of severe drought.

His wife was a truly sattvic woman, given to dharmic ways and scrupulously adhering to the *sastraic* injunctions pertaining to a housewife. Simple, carefree and unattached, she ran the household with a contented mind and to the satisfaction of the entire family, making optimum use of the resources available to her.

Narayana Iyer derived inordinate pleasure in serving his cow. Tending his garden was also dear to him. The occasions when his cow was about to give birth were significant enough to merit a day’s leave from his work; this exclusive privilege, Mrs. Iyer humorously used to remark was the cow’s alone, and not extended to his wife for her deliveries.

Iyer’s one passion was to chant *Ulladu Narpadu* unceasingly. Neither conventional Vedic duties nor extravagant ritualistic observances had any attraction for him. The constant chanting of *Ulladu Narpadu* was all the religious observance known to him. It would start right from the morning.

Dyed in Brahminical custom, Narayana Iyer looked forward to his invigorating cup of morning coffee. The person who milked the cow used to turn up at 5:00 am announcing his arrival by ringing his bicycle bell. Iyer, who would invariably be chanting *Ulladu Narpadu* loudly, would open the gate for him. The day would, therefore, begin with *Ulladu Narpadu*, a routine so predictable and punctual, that the neighbour opposite him, an Andhra lady, remarked that she could safely set her clock by his recitation in the morning. His chanting continued throughout the day while he watered the plants or gave the cow a bath.

If ever he were to hear a voice raised in argument among the children, he would simply raise his voice and chant even louder. It was a wonder to see the children immediately quietened, as if the mesmerizing spell of this powerful mantra made them aware of Bhagavan’s very presence.

Iyer had the unshakeable conviction that *Ulladu Narpadu* was verily the Upanisadic truth. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* of the ashram’s morning Veda Parayana (chanting) extols the greatness of the syllable *Om*. As per Vedic tradition the sacrificial fire, during *havan*, is ignited with this single syllable; permission to offer the oblation is sought with ‘*Om*’ and granted with ‘*Om.*’ *Ulladu Narpadu*, for Iyer, enjoyed similar exalted status.

I (Kanakammal) stayed in Iyer’s compound occupying a small cottage for nearly ten years. He looked upon me as his own daughter. He always made himself aware of my requirements when he procured groceries for his own household and would always meet my needs.

Nights were an ideal time to be with Bhagavan though the ladies were not allowed this privilege. In the sweet and silent hours of the early night, permeated by the powerful presence of Bhagavan, those around him never knew the passage of time. That was when Bhagavan regaled devotees with the most interesting stories and soul-stirring

incidents immersing them all in waves of bliss. And what bliss it was to be alive then! To be in the Presence was heaven indeed. These few devotees had Bhagavan exclusively to themselves, for even the attendants who had been present the whole day, on seeing these close devotees would quietly depart, leaving them to be alone with Bhagavan.

As Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana* approached Narayana Iyer never moved away from the vicinity of Bhagavan. At that time Bhagavan's water pot (*kamandalu*) and walking stick were in his room as he could not use them anymore. Iyer sensed that several people had secret designs on them wanting to take them away and preserve them as private, sacred relics. After the Mahasamadhi *abhishekam*, *alankaram* and *arathi* were performed and the holy body was taken in procession in a small ratha around the Mother's shrine. Iyer took this opportune moment and picked up the walking stick and *kamandalu* and slowly walked ahead of the ratha up to the Samadhi chamber where Bhagavan's body would be enshrined. He descended into the chamber where the body was placed and laid Bhagavan's walking stick and *kamandalu* on either side of the body. The Samadhi pit was then slowly filled in.

In the aftermath of Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*, Iyer did not give up his earlier routine of having Bhagavan's darshan daily. He had darshan of Bhagavan at the Samadhi shrine and continued to visit the old hall. The Iyers stayed on in Tiruvannamalai as did Chadwick who for a time, took up residence in the Iyer compound in a small thatched-roof cottage until he was invited by the ashram management to move back there again. Later in life, they moved to Madras where their children took care of them in their old age.

Narayana Iyer and his wife were in the *grahasta ashrama* (householders) and followed that dharma meticulously. Yet mentally both had donned ochre robes and their lives, the way they lived was a penance (*tapas*) requiring no other spiritual practice (*sadhana*). Wherever Iyer went his continued recitation of *Ulladu Narpadu* made the air around him vibrant with the holy Presence of Bhagavan, compelling an inner response from all. ▲

# Practical Instruction

## Part One

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA

*The following is adapted from a recorded satsang of questions and answers concerning practical instruction regarding abhyas (spiritual practice). The questions were by Mr. Paul Loke, author of Tat Twam Asi. The answers by Swami Ramanananda of Sri Ramanapadam, were brief but inspiring. The truths conveyed in the original satsang were pointers regarding spiritual practices that are of great practical value to all who seek to find the 'pearl of great price'. The discussions were later edited and elaborated by Swami Sadasivananda Giri.*

### Introduction

Why has Satsang been deemed to be essential for the spiritual progress that leads to Realization? What is the task of the guru, if not to show us the way and patiently lead us towards it.

During the blessed years of Bhagavan's physical sojourn amongst us, those who took shelter at his lotus feet were daily inspired to

Swami Sadasivananda first came to Arunachala in 1970. After that initial darshan of Bhagavan he became a monk under the direction of Ananda Mayi Ma.



continue in the ‘practice that makes perfect’. This was a true example how history repeats itself since the ancient times of *sanatana dharma*, the religion where men have eternally sought God, their effort only to be outdone by God’s longing to become manifest within man.

When Lord Rama lived on this earth, he once asked his guru Sri Vasistha why it was that when they were together his knowledge and experience of the Self was undiminished, but when they were apart forgetfulness obstructed the vision of his divinity? Sri Vasisthadeva simply, but with great profundity, declared that the reason for forgetfulness was “Lack of *abhyas* (spiritual practice)”. Bhagavan echoed the same Truth when answering a devotee’s comment that “Bhagavan’s Grace is needed in order that meditation (and thus remembrance) should become effortless”. Bhagavan replied, “Practice is necessary, there is Grace”.<sup>1</sup>

Though God and His Truths never change, we seem to have wandered somewhat astray. Assuredly, this ego of ours is perverse and habitually and dangerously errant, and deserves to be disowned. In fact our liberation demands it! A great scholar of Vedanta, and devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Yatiswarananda, has stated clearly, “We all know that the ego is perverse and how it is constantly changing its centre of gravity. It is now identified with outside things, next moment with the body, then with the senses or the mind. It is mad and runs the risk of tumbling down any moment. How at times it becomes too one-pointed, centred on itself! We forget that our individual consciousness is part of an infinite consciousness; we forget that the welfare of our fellow beings is inseparable from our own; we become egocentric, selfish and mean — a danger to ourselves, to our family and to society.”<sup>2</sup> The complete eradication of this ‘habit’, and the state of perfection that we must strive for is exemplified completely with every detail of the life of Bhagavan. He has made the mold, now we must cast the image in his likeness.

<sup>1</sup> *Guru Ramana* by S.S. Cohen, p.76. Sri Ramanasramam, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Meditation and Spiritual Life* by Swami Yatiswarananda, p. 241. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore. 2001.

In our own era the ‘winds of change’ blow with gale force, they toss the externalized mind about like a boat on a stormy sea. With even greater force our heedless impatience impels us to seek the easy or royal road to Realization, a way that avoids and even denies the need for a path that skillfully trains one to overcome the mind by turning within. Bhagavan emphasized this clearly when he stated, “How to transcend the mind?” The master answers: “Mind is by nature restless. Begin liberating it from restlessness: give it peace; make it free from distractions; train it to look inward; make this a habit. This is done by ignoring the external world and removing all obstacles to peace of mind.”<sup>3</sup>

These words of Bhagavan are in perfect keeping with the tradition of the eternal religion of India. He at once declares the goal, and then proceeds to show the way to get there. He reveals to us that we habitually live in the shadow of an awareness of a distracted externalized mind, and that training is needed to remove these ingrained obstacles. We must begin our *sadhana* (practice) with an unshaken understanding that for the vast majority of us this condition, though admittedly in actuality is only a superimposition on our real nature, is exactly where we stand. We must recognize that as Sri Ramana’s predecessor, Sri Krishna, exemplified to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*; there are enemies (obstacles) and the training of a skilful warrior is needed for victory (liberation from restlessness).

So the first question for us is “Where do we stand”? Perhaps the magnitude of the grace and compassion of Bhagavan Sri Ramana is demonstrated by the fact that although his incarnation focused on revealing to us “Who we are”, it was said that he seemed to like nothing better than helping to deal with the obstacles and clearing the doubts of those who came before him. Perhaps the hidden efficacy of this fact is born out by one of the truly essential statements of Bhagavan recorded by his close disciple Sri Muruganar. “If we perform *sadhana* to the limit of our abilities, the Lord will accomplish for us

<sup>3</sup> *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* by S.S. Cohen, #26, p.129. Sri Ramanasramam, 2006.

that which is beyond our capabilities. If we fail to do even that which is within our capabilities, there is not the slightest fault in the grace of the Lord”.<sup>4</sup>

Though Bhagavan began walking amongst men now over a century past, his life was very much in our ‘modern times’. Thus one of his close disciples wrote, for us to consider while we analyze ‘where we stand’, words that give a clear description of what we all face.

“This is the age of shortcuts. Time has shrunk and space more so, and the dual inconvenience has affected men’s moods and temper. Even the supreme Knowledge has nowadays to be given in massive doses and has to produce quick results too, or they will have none of it... The result is that we return from the guru (the qualified teacher) and his Ashram with our doubts still in our heads, uncleared, and our minds, about truth and untruth, still befogged.”<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this text is to bring before those who ‘seek the Truth’ clear and practical examples of how the traditions of sanatana dharma and the teaching of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi stressed practice that produces purification (removal of that fog, the obstacles and habits which diminish our pure vision) as well as the grace of the Knowledge of the Self as the eternal companions of those of the Ramana Way.

## The Satsang

**Question:** Why is it that the wise say that hearing alone can create a distorted understanding of any profound Truth. Why are we told to first hear, then reflect and assimilate so that knowledge can become experienced?

<sup>4</sup> *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, edited by David Godman, p.186. Avadhuta Foundation, 2004. (Reference to *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, vol. 8, verse 192).

<sup>5</sup> *Advaitic Sadhana :The Yoga of Direct Liberation* by S.S. Cohen, p.1-2. Sri Ramanasramam, 2007.

**Answer:** What we hear must be heard and digested within, and then it becomes distilled wisdom. Like the cow eating grass, first in a hurry and then meditatively sitting in the shade and only then does she convert it into milk. So how man extracts wisdom out off all talk and reading is to think deeply about it and then dive deeply within in meditation. In that way he really digests what he has heard or read and then it flows into him as an experience and becomes a storehouse of knowledge.

**Question:** Is it the *real* experience as *anubhava* that is difficult to achieve?

**Answer:** Yes, for the experience one gets by reading is only theoretical. *Anubhava* is living every movement of your life with what may come and to face it and act accordingly in concord with what you have actually heard and read or seen in the lives of great Gurus and Saints. All these things put you to the test, moment by moment, in your own life. Nothing in life goes by a pattern, nothing is a copy, each one of us is given experience in his own individual way, and to the limit of his own endurance. There is no similarity, absolutely no similarity. What may happen to somebody, a lesson through some incident that may seem insignificant to others, will be to him a lesson by which a tremendous insight is comprehended. The insight may have an impact that causes real spiritual growth. To him a real experience ensued, to the onlooker nothing at all occurred. There is no way to know when and where such insight will occur, one should only at all times maintain and preserve a keen lively awareness and receptivity, to become a worthy vessel for the touch of the divine, for it is the divine alone who knows where to kindle and light up the explosion that brings about real change and transformation. The impact of grace in our lives is irrefutable; the consequence of it, the degree of absorption and transformation depends on the intensity of our sadhana and meditation. God never denies us, we deny Him! ▲



# Enlightenment: the Path Through the Jungle

DENNIS WAITE

*The following selected notes are extracted from the book Enlightenment: the Path through the Jungle — a criticism of non-traditional teaching methods in advaita, ISBN 9781846941184, to be published in August 2008 by O-Book. The book is formatted as a series of short statements each of which is denoted by a number. The Sanskrit words are set-up in the ITRANS scheme. A copy of the EBook can be obtained upon request at [www.advaita.org.uk](http://www.advaita.org.uk)*

## Key Definitions

Enlightenment: This term is much confused and misused. It is self-ignorance that prevents recognition of the truth about our nature and that of reality. Enlightenment takes place in the mind of a person when self-ignorance has been eradicated. It is true (in absolute reality) that we are already 'free' — there is only ever the non-dual reality so how could it be otherwise? It is not true that we are already enlightened (in empirical reality), as the seeker well knows. Enlightenment is the event in time when the mind realizes that we are already free.

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Self-knowledge: It is only self-knowledge that removes self-ignorance; and that removal is termed 'enlightenment'. But it needs to be understood from the outset that this is not objective knowledge about the nature of the body and mind (which we are not), or pointers to the nature of the Self or Brahman (which we are). Self-knowledge is the very specific recognition that I am already That which I have been seeking.

Neo-advaita: the style of teaching that purports to express only the final, absolute truth of advaita. It does not admit of any 'levels' of reality and does not recognize the existence of a seeker, teacher, ignorance, spiritual path etc. The statements of one neo-advaita teacher are essentially interchangeable with those of another, with only personal style and coined phrases differing.

### Advaita —Non-duality

22. The ultimate non-dual reality is referred to by many different names and not all teachers use these words for that purpose. Examples are: Absolute, Self, Consciousness, Awareness, Truth, Knowledge, Presence, Love. Whichever word is used, what usually gives it away is the capitalization. But the safest way of avoiding misunderstanding is to stick to those terms that have been used for thousands of years in the advaita tradition, namely Brahman (when speaking in general terms) or Atman (when referring to this principle in reference to an apparent 'person'). These are the terms used in this book.

### Direct/Indirect knowledge

37. In the case of 'worldly' knowledge, we have to apply the knowledge, once it has been obtained, in order to achieve a particular goal. With self-knowledge, the knowledge itself brings about the goal automatically — we do not have to do anything because we are already the non-dual Self.

### Self-Ignorance

46. Traditionally, the root cause of the beliefs that we are separate, that there is a dualistic world, that we are unhappy and so on is self-ignorance — avidyA.

49. Only self-knowledge can dispel self-ignorance.

51. In truth, we are already the Self; it is the mind that thinks otherwise.

### Self-knowledge

62. Knowledge about oneself, subjective knowledge or 'Self-knowledge', could be regarded as a synonym for 'enlightenment'.

74. As indicated, the preferred, traditional explanation is that liberating 'knowledge vRRitti-s' occur in the mind of the seeker as the words of the teacher are heard. The traditional teaching literally takes us to the goal.

This is illustrated by the following metaphor of a road-map. If I want to drive from A to B, I might well make use of a map. Initially, I will simply look at the map, noting the relative positions of A and B and the roads that join them. Indeed, in my mind, I might actually follow the route on the map that I need to take. But this will not get me to B. I actually need to drive the car along the physical roads. This is not how the scriptures function as a pramANa. The scriptures function as the actual road that the mind needs to take. The guru acts as the guide, having already travelled the road previously. The journey is not metaphorical. If we follow the scriptural route, using our reason, referring to our own experience and asking the guru for clarification when necessary, it will lead us to the goal of self-knowledge.

### Enlightenment

100. The neo-advaitin claims that 'we are already enlightened'. This is a fundamental error, which results from a failure to define terms clearly, and causes much confusion. It is true that we are already Brahman, the non-dual reality, because there is only That. The point is that we do not realize this. Enlightenment takes place when we do. This is why the term Self-realization is also used — it is the direct knowing of the Self that we already are.

101. The error may well arise from the use of the Sanskrit term mokSha for enlightenment. Strictly speaking the word means 'liberation', which is misleading because we are already 'free' in



reality. What it refers to is liberation from the mistaken belief that we are not free.

### The ‘person’

107. Subsequent to enlightenment, that ‘person’ is known not to exist as a separate entity at all; it is known that ‘I am That (i.e. Brahman)’.

108. Consequently, statements such as ‘there is no person to become enlightened’ are willfully ignoring the context in which these terms are used. At the level of empirical reality, which is all that the seeker initially knows, there is most definitively a person to become enlightened.

### Ego

113. Similarly, the mind does not have to be literally destroyed in order to become enlightened —if it were so, how would the j~nAnI [one who knows the truth, i.e. someone who is ‘realized’] subsequently function in the world? What is required is that it be metaphorically destroyed by self-knowledge. This is achieved by realizing that the mind is mithyA and does not have a separate existence.

### Neo-advaita

158. Effectively, it states the ‘bottom-line’ conclusions without having carried out any of the intervening stages. Instead of systematically undermining all of the seeker’s pre-existing beliefs, it attempts to supplant them with a radical new belief. This new belief is contrary to everyday (i.e. dualistic) experience and there is no rationale given in justification.

159. Neo-advaita has no methodology, since its teachers explicitly reject the scriptures as a pramANa along with everything else. This aspect is the key to the essence of traditional teaching. Just as the eyes are the means for acquiring knowledge of form and colour, the ears the means for acquiring knowledge of sounds and so on, so are the scriptures (together with a teacher who understands the methods) the means for obtaining Self-knowledge.

165. Neo-advaita is a belief-system without a system — i.e. no structure, no method, no practice; the ‘bottom line’ without any preceding text.

### Reality

171. Neo-advaitin teaching states that reality is non-dual; that we are already Brahman and therefore there is no one to do anything and nothing to realize.

This is effectively nihilism. Here is the definition of that term from the New Oxford English Dictionary: “The rejection of all religious and moral principles, often in the belief that life is meaningless; (in Philosophy) the extreme skepticism maintaining that nothing in the world has a real existence.”

172. The inappropriateness of this can be illustrated by a metaphor. Telling students that there is no creation, that there are no objects and no separate person, without having unfolded this gradually and logically, is like telling them that a lump of iron is mainly space. It is true (at a certain level of teaching) that iron is a lattice of iron atoms and that each atom consists of a central nucleus of protons and neutrons surrounded, at a relatively vast distance, by electrons of differing energy. Proportionately, the main ‘content’ of the atom is space. So, says the student, there will be no adverse effect if I hit you over the head with this lump of space!

### What Enlightenment is not

213. Enlightenment has nothing to do with ‘merging with the Self’ or ‘becoming one with God’. In reality, we are already the Self so that these expressions could have no meaning. Nor is it a ‘feeling of unity’.

When a pot is broken, the ‘pot space’ does not merge with the ‘total space’; the ‘total space’ is entirely unaffected by the presence of the container and remains the same before, during and after the temporary appearance of the pot.

226. Those teachers (principally neo-advaitin ones) who claim that there is no such thing as enlightenment are trying, as always, to speak from the absolute reality standpoint. But this should be made very

clear. If they say that, for example, ‘here and now, for the seeker, there is no enlightenment’, then they are wrong and are deluding themselves, as well as the seeker.

259. Becoming enlightened does not mean that the world ceases to exist.

The advaita theory of ajAtivAda means that there has never been any creation, but the world as an appearance of name and form continues as before; it is simply now known to be not other than our Self. This is widely misunderstood.

### What Enlightenment is

264. In truth, there is only the non-dual reality —call this the Atman. Nevertheless, there is usually a firm belief that ‘I am a separate person’. The ‘entity which has this thought’ is called the jIva in traditional advaita. You, the jIva, are clearly not enlightened while the Atman is already free. Enlightenment occurs when you, the jIva, realize that you are in fact the Atman (and simultaneously cease to believe that you are a jIva).

In the metaphor, the snake does not have to become the rope — there never was a snake. What is needed is knowledge of this.

286. Neo-advaitins repeatedly tell us that ‘I’ cannot become enlightened since ‘I’ does not exist. But there is very good reason why ‘I’ am unable to accept this. The simple fact is that I know that I do exist —it is the single thing about which there is no possible doubt. The problem is that the mind is mistakenly identifying who I really am with the body and mind — the ‘person’ — this is the ignorance that needs to be corrected. When this occurs, it is not ‘I’ who becomes enlightened, since I am already Brahman; it is the mind (buddhi) that realizes this truth. Enlightenment is the dissociation of the truth of ‘I’ from the prior identification with mind and body.

Sankara says: “It is to the intellect and not to the Self which is immutable that the knowledge ‘I am Brahman’ belongs.” ▲

# Journey Into Oneself

T.C. GOPALAKRISHNAN

This world offers many opportunities, both outwardly and inwardly. Most human beings, however, are lost in the outward ones and remain unaware of their inner realms. While religious practices do take us somewhat inside, they too soon become organized into mental patterns that feed the ego. Thus, notwithstanding the true import of religions, externalization of the mind continues under the facade of inner life. Then there are the meditative systems which do better than the religions, in the sense that ‘Group Fanaticism’ is not so strong under them. It is true that the meditative systems put a brake on the incessant swirling of thoughts and thus help produce a calmer mind. Their beneficial effects are seen in the realms of both mental and physical health. However, unfortunately, the meditative systems too

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feed the 'I' in the form of expected achievements in the spiritual realm. It means that the ego gains ground while giving the impression that it is getting dissolved. This self-deception seems to escape notice in the vast majority of people.

Such observations as above can be quite unpleasant to those who have invested psychologically in their attachment to religions or meditative systems. Those who are bold enough to acknowledge the above facts are the ones who can appreciate the value of aloneness and how it can guide us in the journey into oneself. They ask a fundamental question, "Can there be a truly inward movement that does not feed the ego overtly or covertly?" It is interesting to note that such people don't ask, "How am I to dissolve the ego?" Those two questions are indeed significantly different.

The difference between the above two questions can be seen in their respective emphases. The first reflects an eagerness to understand oneself while the second emphasizes an achievement by the 'I'. This is where Ramana Maharishi's query "Who am I?" is relevant. Without understanding who or what the 'I' is, to let it chase some achievement is obviously an unintelligent thing to do. When one senses this, the attention automatically turns inward to discover the source of the 'I'. People who have gone that far know that the question "Who am I?" has no answer within the intelligibility of the thought-ridden mind. They know that the answer is experiential and so, non-verbal. The inward dive begins with that understanding.

Dissolution of the habit-ridden, externalized state of mind takes place when there is simple self-awareness. It is a spiritual awakening not based on any man-made system.

The inward dive is not one of psychological introspection, nor is it one of intellectual analysis. During the inward journey, deep passivity characterizes the mental state. Its quiet potency is observed in its ability to melt the crystal into which the mind is hardened by repetitive thought in the form of 'I', 'me' and the 'mine'. It is something like the iceberg. When that crystallized entity melts under sunshine and dissolves in the surrounding water, its contents return to the source and the crystal disappears. This may sound enigmatic in the beginning

but inquisitiveness keeps us at it and the associated expanding awareness (the sunshine!) gives us the impetus to melt.

The journey into Oneself cannot proceed through any formula. This is because formulae are routed in the past and the Journey requires absolute spontaneity. The deeper Self is in the eternal now and anything from the past can only serve to cloud the situation and defile the pure witness attitude in the now. Once we sense this, we move away from all systems that promise a reward at the end of a road. As J. Krishnamurti points out, Enlightenment is not a result, is not a reward. Bhagwan Rajneesh asks what validity can there be in struggling to find a road that will lead us to the house in which we are already sitting! Such attempts can only take us away from the source. Not trying to move away creates a situation in which the natural gravity from the source pulls us in.

That says something about what triggers and sustains the journey into Oneself.

We realize that the inward journey is not in time. It is a matter of the centre of consciousness in us expanding in the now so that the center disappears. There is an intuitive sensing that what transpires is intrinsically healthy and does not become meaningful through an expected end-result. The process becomes all important and any value for results recedes into nothingness. There are many issues in our lives that can give us a push in that direction. They serve as guide-posts and keep us focused on the intriguing puzzle of the inward journey. Some of these arise as questions in the following manner:

1. Why is it that, even after practising a religious system for years, freedom from fear, attachment and hatred does not take place? The practice only puts a lid on them and makes it appear as if they are gone. (Hope is fixed on the future through conceptual expectations. Smug satisfaction may be there in the thought that one's seat in heaven is confirmed!).

2. Why are the antagonists too – the atheists and agnostics – who put themselves against the 'religionists', do not find that freedom?

Both the protagonists and the antagonists of religion seem to be barking up the wrong tree!

3. Do the shocks in life point to something that we are unwilling to see or acknowledge?

4. Can the philosophical content of Death serve as an affectionate teacher?

5. What roles do light-heartedness and cheerfulness play in the inward journey?

6. Is the beckoning of sorrow in life an invitation to visit the hidden corners of ourselves?

7. Unknowingly, we build a psychological wall around us through the thought of 'I', 'me' and the 'mine'. Are there pointers in our daily life that can alert us to that fact and, perhaps, open a door in that wall?

A strange self-awareness begins to settle in us as we apply ourselves to these puzzles. A natural tenderness towards everyone and everything becomes a concomitant factor to this journey of discovery. One realizes rather early that arguments and debates have no place in that exalted movement. However, discussion with others, even if it may appear to be only intellectual, is not considered anathema. Metaphors and paradigms seem to aid the unravelling process. In this connection, a book self-published by the writer of this article may be found interesting. It is entitled *In Quest of the Deeper Self — A Joyous Adventure*.<sup>1</sup> The book is meant to be a wayside companion to those who would find the above puzzles interesting. A new theme, outlined as the Esoteric Field, is presented for the readers to reflect on. The topic of death and the message from near-death experience (NDE) are also looked into. The following lines occur in connection with those esoteric themes:

“Investigation of death and after-life is helpful in understanding who we are beyond the thought projected image of us; that is, moving from the form to the formless. This understanding takes place as a growing intensity of spontaneity when there is no moving away from the ‘Now’. The moving away causes one to hold on to un-substantial

<sup>1</sup> *In Quest of the Deeper Self — A Joyous Adventure* by T.C. Gopalakrishnan. Sudarshan Graphics, Chennai. 2007. 165pp, Rs280. gkrish2005@yahoo.co.in

things and so it sustains a disturbable state of mind. Death reminds us of the un-substantiality of mind-projected things and thus can urge us to pay attention to what lies beyond the apparent and outside the transient. Anything ephemeral cannot be intrinsically substantial.”<sup>2</sup>

Taking the inward journey does not mean that the person becomes an ascetic in the conventional sense of the word. It means an inward asceticism that does not in any way dilute a healthy practical life. On the contrary, it helps one apply oneself spiritedly to all aspects of life. That is how joviality and mirthfulness too find a place in it. Such comprehensive attention brings about wholesome living.

We are all on a sacred journey of life. Is this a fact? Each one has to discover the truth behind this. The noisy mind and its obstruction to the inner dive will be sensed during this discovery. Movement towards the inner silence is the essential feature in the quest towards the deeper Self. In the process of this movement, we come up on a pervasive background serenity. To lead one's daily life from that serenity somehow makes it all very meaningful. ▲

<sup>2</sup> *In Quest of the Deeper Self — A Joyous Adventure* by T.C. Gopalakrishnan. p.108.



## VERSE

## Bhagavan in Sussex

ALASDAIR BLACK

Sagely,  
 By the margent of the field,  
 Ponders the Self-knowing Seer,  
 Where dappled, wind-blown hassocks murmur,  
 Down-sown showers of fresh-mown hay —  
 Alike indifferent to the spike grass, tares,  
 Brambles and toils;  
 Himself also of this seeming-tranquil,  
 Breeze-blown summer scene.

The rose and the thorn  
 Touch but the eye and skin —  
 Not the deep-dove Self  
 Where He abides,  
 Where we abide —  
 And all of us,  
 Where Oneness is.

Can we but remember this —  
 Uncover, dis sever  
 From the lower-thorn, spiked  
 Unsightly things  
 We most times are?

Yes, we can  
 Re-ascend that unity  
 We sometime were,  
 And there stead fast abide —  
 All of us,  
 And all of us.



## BOOK EXCERPT

## Ways to Truth

## A View of Hindu Tradition

ANANDA WOOD

*The following is an excerpt from Ways to Truth: A View of Hindu Tradition. It gives us a perceptive and wide-ranging guide to the basic principles which underpin Hinduism in a language which is both authoritative and modern. The author, born in Kerala, studied mathematics at Cambridge and anthropology at Chicago University. This book is published by D.K Printworld (P) Ltd, Delhi. [www.dkprintworld.com](http://www.dkprintworld.com). The cost is Rs.320/-. ISBN 81-246-0439-8. Most of the author's books and articles may be accessed at [www.advaitin.net/Ananda/](http://www.advaitin.net/Ananda/)*

## Vibration and Light

In traditional learning, with its intensive use of recitation and memory, experiences of listening and speaking are central. A student learned by hearing and reciting, far more than by reading what was written down. Thus it was only natural to make a profound investigation into the microcosmic and macrocosmic experiences of sound.

In that investigation, sound is taken to be a special kind of movement, called 'vibration'. This is a repeated movement, about a central point of origin. In this kind of movement, there is a repeated

cycle of disturbance: from an originating, central state of equilibrium and rest.

As our bodies speak and hear, we experience physical vibrations in our chests and throats and ears. At the lower notes of sound, the frequency is slow; and so we notice the throbbing movement of individual cycles that make up the vibration. As the pitch of sound gets higher, the frequency increases, and we are less able to notice the individual vibrations.

When the pitch is high enough, we do not notice the individual vibrations at all. There, we only notice shapes and meanings and qualities of sound, produced by vibrations whose movements are too fast for us to perceive directly. Thus we conceive of subtle vibrations – which our senses cannot see directly, but which produce perceived effects in our experience.

Like modern physics, traditional conceptions make much use of this idea of subtle vibrations, behind the forms and names and qualities that we perceive. In particular, forms are conceived to be made up from pulsating currents of vibrant energy; names are conceived to achieve their representation and meaning through a radiant resonance of sympathetic vibration; and qualities are conceived to show a vibrant swinging to and fro between opposites (like pain and pleasure, depth and height, heat and cold).

Thus, beneath apparent forms and names and qualities, more subtle vibrations are conceived. But where do they take place? At their most subtle, they take place beneath the changing surface of appearances, in the background continuity of space and time. This background continuity is called 'akasa' or the 'ether'.

But there is an inherent problem here. Whatever changes and movements occur, the background continuity persists beneath them. In its underlying nature, there is no change, nor any movement. To understand the changes that occur, some kind of disturbance must be conceived as added on to their unchanging background. That disturbance is its subtle vibration. From that vibration comes the entire universe of differing appearances, of changing qualities and names and forms.

In modern physics, the concept of sound is restricted to physical vibrations, in various bodies and substances that are externally perceived. But, in older traditions, this is not so. Concepts of sound and vibration are extended into mental experience: to include what we hear and perceive and think and feel within our minds. And further, there is a questioning of how these concepts extend beyond the mind as well: to a background continuity beneath all physical and mental appearances.

There, at that background continuity, it must be understood that sound is not a vibration in any object or substance which is physically or mentally conditioned. The background continuity is neither physical nor mental. It is itself beneath all changing attributes, of body or of mind. By conceiving a vibration there in it, we are adding something quite extraneous to what it is itself. It is this added on vibration that makes the continuity appear to be conditioned and changeable.

Hence the inherent paradox. The concept of vibration has been extended to the point where it is breaking down. The concept has been extended – beyond the physical and mental – to a subtle vibration that produces the world's appearances. But it produces them from a changeless background, where there is neither movement nor conditioning. So then, beneath all movement and conditioning, from where does this vibration come?

It is conceived to come from underlying consciousness – which is the essence of both light and sound. That consciousness is the essential principle of seeing and illuminating. And it is also the essential principle of hearing and speaking.

- By its very nature, of illuminating knowledge, consciousness illuminates appearances. From that illumination, all perception comes.
- By its very nature, of manifesting expression, consciousness vibrates with life. It keeps on bursting out into perceived appearance, and drawing back again. The cycle keeps repeating: projecting out and then immediately drawing in, as each appearance is perceived. From that vibration, all manifestation is expressed.

Seen in the world of appearances, illumination and vibration are actions, involving change and movement. But in consciousness itself, they are not so.

The illumination of consciousness is not a changing act, which is put on at one time and taken off at another. No action needs to be put on, for consciousness to shine. It does not shine by any changing act, but just by being what it always is. Its shining is thus changeless, and involves no movement in itself. Appearances are lit by its mere presence, as it stays unmoved within itself.

So also the vibration of consciousness. As it bursts out into appearance or draws back in, it seems to change; but the change is only in appearance. Outwardly, a change appears; but in itself, consciousness remains unmoved and unaffected, just as it always is. As differing appearances keep getting manifested forth and drawn back in, each manifests the unchanged nature of consciousness. As the cycle keeps repeating, it is just a repetition of that unchanged nature, over and over again.

To the apparent world, consciousness vibrates forth into change. But, for consciousness, that vibration is just its own nature, remaining utterly unchanged. Thus, consciousness is pure activity: the unmixed principle from which all acts arise and change is brought about. And that pure principle of all activity remains itself unmoved by change.

### Shining Out

This concept, of pure illumination as the source of all activity, is expressed in the Sanskrit words 'sphota' and 'sphurana'. The word 'sphota' conveys a sense of sudden blossoming or bursting forth: from uncreated timelessness into the created appearances of passing time. And it combines this sense of bursting creativity with a further sense of clear illumination that makes things evident. The word 'sphurana' conveys both these senses; and it adds a further sense of continued repetition: so as to imply an activating vibration and an unceasing brilliance.

Here is the report of a conversation in which Ramana Maharshi describes 'sphurana' as 'I'-'I': as a repetition of the true, unchanging 'I', which is pure consciousness:

"M: ... 'I AM that I AM' sums up the whole truth.... any form or shape is the cause of trouble. Give up the notion that 'I am so and so.' Our *sastras* [scriptures] say: *aham iti sphurati* (it shines as 'I').

D: What is *sphurana* (shining)?

M: (*Aham, aham*) 'I'-'I' is the Self; (*Aham idam*) 'I am this' or 'I am that' is the ego. Shining is there always. The ego is transitory. When the 'I' is kept up as 'I' alone, it is the Self; when it flies at a tangent and says 'this', it is the ego."<sup>1</sup>

And here is the report of another conversation, in which Ramana Maharshi talks of '*Aham sphurti*' as an 'incessant flash of I-consciousness'. 'Aham' means 'I', and 'sphurti' is just another grammatical form of 'sphurana':

"M: Yes, when you go deeper you lose yourself, as it were, in the abysmal depths; then the Reality which is the *Atman* [Self] that was behind you all the while takes hold of you. It is an incessant flash of 'I-consciousness'; you can be aware of it, feel it, hear it, sense it, so to say. This is what I call '*Aham sphurti*'.

D: You said that the *Atman* is immutable, self-effulgent, etc. But if you speak at the same time of the incessant flash of I-consciousness, of this '*Aham sphurti*', does that not imply movement, which cannot be complete realization, in which there is no movement?

M: What do you mean by complete realization? Does it mean becoming a stone, an inert mass? The *Aham vrtti* ['I'-acting] is different from *Aham sphurti*. The former is the activity of the ego, and is bound to lose itself and make way for the latter which is an eternal expression of the Self. In Vedantic parlance this *Aham Sphurti* is called *Vrtti Jnana* [the pure activity of knowledge].... *Svarupa* [the true nature of reality] is *Jnana* [knowledge] itself, it is Consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

In these conversations, Ramana Maharshi is speaking of an ultimate subjective principle, which is the essence of both knowing and doing. It is at once pure illumination and pure activity, unmixed with anything physical or mental. Each personal ego is a confused mixture of consciousness with body and mind. Beneath the confusion, the real 'I' is unmixed consciousness, the changeless source and essence of all

<sup>1</sup> §363, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Sastri, Kapali: *Sat-darshana Bhashya and Talks with Maharshi*, page xxi, Sri Ramanasramam, 1993.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

apparent activity. All seen activities and happenings are its expressions. Accordingly, all the entire universe may be conceived as its speaking: as what it says to us.

That source is common to each one of us and to all else. It's only by returning there that our confused activities, of body and of mind, can come to knowledge and clarity. It's only there that we learn anything. Traditional conceptions of learning are thus centred upon that source, where doing and knowing come together.

In particular, that source is the meeting point of sound and light. Here is Ramana Maharshi's description:

"In the course of conversation, Maharshi said that the subtle body is composed of light and sound and the gross body is a concrete form of the same.

The Lecturer in Physics asked if the same light and sound were cognizable by senses.

*M*: No. They are supersensual. It is like this:...[see figure below].

They [sound and light] are ultimately the same.

The subtle body of the Creator is the mystic sound *Pranava* [the mantra 'Om'], which is sound and light. The universe resolves into sound and light and then into transcendence – *Param*.<sup>3</sup>

|        | ISVARA [God]<br>UNIVERSAL                           | JIVA [personality]<br>INDIVIDUAL                    |
|--------|---|---|
| gross  | Universe  | Body  |
| subtle | Sound and light<br>- <i>Nada, Bindu</i>             | Mind and <i>Prana</i>                               |
| primal | <i>Atma</i> (Self)<br><i>Param</i> (transcendental) | <i>Atma</i> (Self)<br><i>Param</i> (transcendental) |



<sup>3</sup> §215, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, 1984.

# SRI ARUNACHALA VENBA

SADHU OM SWAMI

TRANSLATION BY SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

## Arunachala Dhyanam

This is Arunachala Siva who being the ocean of Grace bestows liberation upon mere remembrance!

## Prefatory Verse

Sadguru Bhagavan Sri Ramana took us as His own protégé and fed us with the great *mantra upadesa* of 'Arunachala Siva'. With this name of the supreme Lord, vouchsafed to us by the grace of Sadguru Ramana, this Arunachala Venba [a hymn of 100 verses] is composed to the sweet delight of our tongues that chant it, for the purpose of attaining salvation.

## Invocation

Sadguru Ramana himself manifests before me as Lord Ganesha with his eyes overflowing with love and grace. Thus, may his holy feet which trod upon the blessed earth remain as the protection and refuge for composing this hymn on Arunachala.



## Text

1. For liberation from bondage, life on this earth is most conducive among the three worlds [heavens, earth and netherworlds]. Upon the face of this earth itself, India that is Bharath is most favourable for gaining salvation. Within the Indian sub-continent, there are several holy centres (*kshetras*) shining with manifold spiritual glories. The foremost among such exalted *mokshapuris* is the peerless Arunachala.

2. *Puranas* assure liberation for any soul who takes birth in the holy town of Tiruvarur Thyagaraja or to anyone who visits Chidambaram and has *darshan* of Lord Nataraja or who sheds his mortal coil in the holy city of Kashi. However, they assure liberation to anyone who merely thinks of Arunachala!<sup>1</sup>

3. Arunachala possesses ten divine faces, out of which eight are the slopes of this holy Hill facing the eight directions; while the remaining two are the *saguna* aspects in the form of *Arunachaleswara* and his holy consort *Apeetakuchambal* in the great temple, distinct from the Hill at the gross physical level.

4. The holy mountains of *Meru*, *Mandara Giri*, the sky-high *Kailas* of the Himalayas, the *Vindhyachala* etc., are glorified as the dwelling places of Lord Siva. However, unlike the above abodes of Siva, Arunachala Hill is unique and most glorious as It is the very form of Siva!<sup>2</sup>

5. Lord Siva who has been worshipped in most loving hymns by such exalted saints as Tirunavukkarasar (Appar Swami), Karaikkal Ammaiyar and Sundaramurthy Nayanar and who resides on the summit of *Mount Kailas* with the holy *Ganga* adorning his head as the crown jewel, shines here in the form of Arunachala Hill.

<sup>1</sup> Not everyone can have the blessed *prarabdha* merit of taking birth in Tiruvarur or visiting *Chidambaranatha* or dying in Kashi. But anyone can remember Arunachala! Therefore, self-effort [*purushartha*] is best invested in being devoted to Arunachala, thus bypassing the crutches of *prarabdha* boon.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavan has said Lord Siva identifies with this Hill as His very body just as we identify ourselves with our body.



6. Brahma and Vishnu with the duties of creation and sustenance of this manifest universe once forgot their source which is the supreme Brahman and got perturbed with a rising ego, each claiming to be the foremost power. Then the supreme Self (*paramatma vastu*) manifested as this Hill of Fire (*Agni lingam*) Arunachala upon this earth and nonchalantly quelled their egos by turning their minds inwards.

7. If a spiritual aspirant (a *tapasvi*, *sadhu*) yearns to become a *sthithaprajna* (that is, a *jnani* of steadfast intellect) by dissociating from the dreadful temptations of sense objects worse than poison, then this *Arunachala kshetra* is the most conducive place of residence for such a *tapasvi* (as staying near the Hill, going round the Hill as *pradakshina* etc. are powerful modes of *satsang*, association with *sat vastu*).

8. Lord Siva first manifested in the form of an infinite column of fire as the primordial Linga (*Lingodbhava*) which subsequently settled in the form of Arunachala Hill. Upon mere remembrance of the name or form of Arunachala, the Lord bestows liberation to devotees. Sadguru Sri Ramana declared authentically to all his devotees that A-ru-na-cha-la is the incomparable holy five-syllabled *mantra* [*panchakshari*] by chanting which liberation is gained easily.

9. When a sincere seeker feels helplessly stranded and stunned as to what else to do for attaining liberation, when he finds finally that even mastery of all scriptures and practice of all austerities are all futile in gaining Self-knowledge, and thus yearns intensely for Grace alone in total surrender, then the holy Hill of Arunachala beckons him to Its lap (as the unfailing means of liberation).

10. For those devotees who lovingly seek refuge in Arunachala, the Hill becomes the guru who enters their hearts and annihilates all the tormenting *vasanas*, causing the bliss of grace to well from within and eventually swallowing their misery-causing individuality.

11. “Do not delude yourself that I am merely this finite human body but know Me to be the supreme Self by turning the mind inward; the consciousness that is shining as ‘I’ is My real nature

(*svarupam*)” — thus saying Sri Ramana, the supreme space of pure consciousness, bestowed his Grace upon us of his own accord and took us in his fold. He is none other than the human manifestation of this Arunachala.

12. Having composed the ‘Bridal Garland of Letters’ and offered it to the bridegroom Arunachala in celebration of their wedding and then by virtue of merging into him, Bhagavan Sri Ramana became my loving mother and Arunachala my father. Thus for my eyes, this Arunachala Hill ever shines as Lord Siva with his consort Mother Parvathi.

13. If we deem ourselves to be this perishing body, surely we shall die. However, Arunachala accomplishes the union of the mortal *jiva* with the immortal Siva by bestowing the immediate and non-dual knowledge that ‘I am Siva’. Lo! There is not an iota of doubt that Arunachala is the supreme Lord who converts our mortality into his own immortal essence.

14. This little separative ‘I’-thought (ego) assumes myriad roles one after another as its mask and shelter, thus perpetuating *samsara*. Arunachala is the compassionate Lord who isolates the ego from its myriad false identities and finally extinguishes it without a residue, leaving only the Self that ever shines without a veil in the heart.

15. This separative I-thought, limiting itself to a finite mortal body suffers endless misery through sheer alienation from the all-pervasive Lord. Arunachala absorbs this divisive ego unto Itself and eliminates once for all the entirely false notion “I am separate from the Lord”. Achieving such a wondrous seamless fusion, Arunachala alone remains as the non-dual Self, in pure *kaivalya sthithi*.

16. At the tender age of a mere sixteen years, Maharshi Ramana attained the purest supreme Knowledge as his own real nature and thus became the embodiment of absolute bliss revelling ever as Siva-consciousness. Surely, the divinely austere life of Sri Ramana is suffused with Arunachala.

17. To those seekers who surrender to Arunachala as the ultimate refuge, in sheer despair with the thought: “I am such a wretched *jiva* whose lot is to suffer unendingly; is there any hope at all for me?”, Arunachala bestows the happiness of such freedom that is far superior to all heavenly pleasures by revealing to them the supreme Self-knowledge. Arunachala is indeed the *jnana-kalpataru* (the famed wish-fulfilling celestial tree).<sup>3</sup>

18. Arunachala wears the hymn-garlands strung by the famed *saiivite* saints viz., Appar, Jnana Sambandar, Sundarar and Manikka Vachakar in the divine outpourings of Thevaram and Thiruvachakam. In recent times, Arunachala shines with added lustre by wearing one more of such divine garland in the form of “The Bridal Garland of Letters” [*Akshara Mana Maalai*] that poured forth from the divinely sweet countenance of Sri Ramana.

19. Great saints practising intense devotion to Lord Siva in different births and thereby attaining the *siddhi* of composing heart-melting hymns in countless variety and offering those hymn-garlands to Arunachala, and thus stay clinging to his lotus feet which are littered with such glorious garlands.

20. Many seekers crying in anguish “O Lord! I am crushed in suffering by my lot of *prarabdha karma*; I am unable to endure them any longer. Please protect me!”, take refuge in the proximity of Arunachala. Arunachala enters the hearts of such sincere seekers and roots out all the types of *karmic* misery without any vestige and bestows liberation. Thus Arunachala is indeed the ultimate refuge surpassing all. ▲

(To be continued)

<sup>3</sup> By granting ‘jnanam’, the individual ‘who rises to wish’ is swallowed and there will not be anyone to wish further.

## RAMANA KIDS' CORNER



I hear that all over the world, people are trying to solve problems such as pollution and global warming. What about at Bhagavan's Ashram? Did you know that Ramanasramam has many extensive recycling programmes?

**B**hagavan would allow nothing to go to waste. Even a grain of rice or a mustard seed lying on the ground would be picked up, dusted carefully, taken to the kitchen and put in its proper tin. Once when Bhagavan was asked why he gave himself so much trouble for a grain of rice, he replied,

“This is the property of my Father Arunachala.

I have to preserve it and pass it on to His children.”

In the same spirit, Ramanasramam uses methods such as solar power, rainwater harvesting, and wastewater treatment and much more to help preserve the world's natural resources. Here is a report from Tara Adiseshan, who gathered the information by interviewing Sri V.S. Mani and Sri Rajamani.

In Tiruvannamalai, for almost three-hundred days in a year, there is abundant sunshine. Therefore, it is very beneficial to harness solar power for daily use. Ramanasramam depends on two deep bore-wells for



meeting its water requirements and these borewell submersible pumps are operated by solar energy. And the ashram uses solar power to heat water. Four state-of-the-art solar panels are located on top of the kitchen. These panels provide energy to the kitchen for the cooking vats and for preheating the boiler. Hot water for the common bathroom and the guestrooms is also provided by solar panels that are located at appropriate points in the Ashram. Solar power is also harnessed to provide energy for solar lamps at strategic locations. Ramanasramam also uses waste wood to supplement heat in the winter time. Four boilers get heat from waste wood. The waste wood is collected from the garden and then burned in boiler tanks.

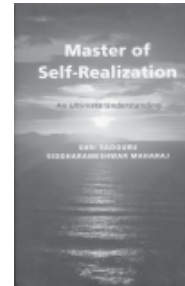
Biogas (essentially methane) obtained from two biogas plants, whose input is mainly cowdung from our gosala, supplements fuel needs for the kitchen.

Rainwater harvesting is another way to conserve natural resources. Rainwater that is collected in pipes from rooftops and the courtyard is sent to the Pali Tirtham tank. Another type of rainwater harvesting is also called macro-rainwater harvesting. Macro-rainwater harvesting is conducted on a much larger scale. Rainwater from Arunachala drains into a ditch and also ends up in the Pali Tirtham tank. Pali Tirtham tank is a percolation tank. This means that if the tank is full, the water is distributed throughout the neighborhood. Rainwater harvesting is beneficial to Ramanasramam and the vicinity!

A wastewater treatment facility is being developed at the Ashram! Waste water from the kitchen, dining hall, Veda Patashala, and common bathrooms and gosala drains to a settling tank. The treated water is used to water the gardens.

**Arunachala Patti:** Wow! That is amazing! Ramanasramam is doing a lot to conserve Mother Nature's wealth. All of what we have is from Bhagavan. We have to do our utmost to respect His gifts to us all. We should follow Bhagavan's example and help preserve the environment! Children, what can you do? Here are some ways that you can help: Follow the 3Rs: *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle* — Reduce consumption, Reuse manufactured products, and Recycle raw materials. ▲

## BOOK REVIEWS



**MASTER OF SELF-REALIZATION.** An Ultimate Understanding. Shri Sadguru Siddharameshwar Maharaj. Shri Sadguru Trust. Trans. by Diwaker Ghaisas. 2006. Rs200. 508pp. Copies available with Satishji Avhad, C-11 Vishwajit Co-Op Hos. Soc., Veer Savarkar Marg, Thane (West) 400602. (For readers in India please add Rs.100 for postage.)

This book will be welcomed by those who admired *I Am That*, which brought Nisargadatta Maharaj to prominence in the 1970s. Its main body is a collection of 130 discourses given by Maharaj's guru, Siddharameshwar Maharaj which was recorded in the mid-1930s by Maharaj himself when he was still his sishya. The Marathi edition entitled *Adyatmadnyanacha Yogeshwar* (The Spiritual Science of Self-knowledge) was published 1961-62 and it is now available in English for the first time.

The Navnath Sampradaya, the lineage of the nine gurus originating from Dattatreya, to which Nisargadatta belonged, stresses simplicity both in theory and practice. Rituals are considered superfluous, and devotion and dhyana-yoga are emphasized. The purpose is the purification of the mind. The principal practice of the sadhana is focusing the mind on 'I am', which results in abidance in pure-consciousness or *nirguna Brahman*.

What is fascinating for those of us who do not read or speak Marathi is the fact the second half of this book is a translation of Nisargadatta's own notes. The English translation is excellent and it obviously has been a labour of love.

The book also includes *The Master Key to Self-Realization* written by Siddharameshwar Maharaj. This section of some 107 pages is alive with common sense, insight and has the stamp of authority only a master of his subject could bring to bear on the subject. There is an authentic

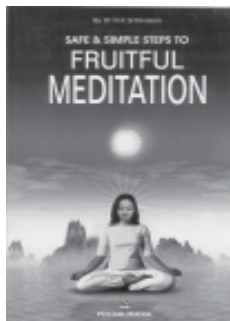


ring to the flow of ideas. Though simply written in a homily and accessible manner one cannot but admire the trenchancy of his arguments and the apt illustrations employed to drive home the intention of awakening the reader. These are no idle writings but the living words of a master which will certainly inspire a receptive mind. I had gone straight to the discourses recorded by Nisargadatta, not realising the importance of the smaller, first section. I would recommend that readers begin with this text.

It is obvious to anyone who has extensively read spiritual literature that we are in the presence of a master. There is a flavour to his writing which is direct and original. Siddharameshwar Maharaj writes with that rare authority of one who goes to the heart of the matter. I would like to quote a section but each paragraph is interlocked with the previous one and the one to follow. It is all one of a kind which indicates a master of his subject. What is impressive is the fresh nourishment one derives from following the arguments. This is no idle chatter or playing to the gallery. It is serious and reminds one of the atmosphere in Maharaj's small loft at Khetwadi.

Nisargadatta followed with complete conviction his guru's instructions to concentrate on the feeling 'I Am' and all his spare time was consumed by looking deep within even though his external life demanded his attention to support a family. He maintained this one-pointed sincerity in the following years by practising meditation and singing devotional bhajans. Nisargadatta's notes contain an urgency and one cannot but compare them with the vapid ramblings of many modern so-called advaita masters particularly in the West. We hope to publish a book excerpt in the July edition of the *Mountain Path*. Copies of the book may be obtained directly from the publisher as stated above.

— Christopher Quilkey



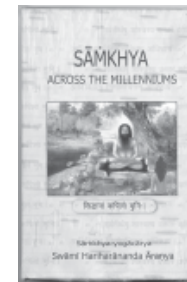
**SAFE & SIMPLE STEPS TO FRUITFUL MEDITATION** by N.K. Srinivasan. Pustak Mahal, Delhi. 2007. 93pp Rs80. ISBN 978-81-223-0891-4 [www.pustakmahal.com](http://www.pustakmahal.com)

It is rare to read any type of spiritual literature which focuses on the practical nature of meditation. Mostly we are exhorted with rhetorical gestures to seek ourselves but really they leave much to be desired if there is

no practical instruction. A gap has been filled with this modest but authoritative guide. The author starts with a simple definition: "Meditation is consciously directing your attention or thought to alter your state of consciousness." He then proceeds to layout the methods by which one can accomplish it, namely posture, breathing, concentration, mantra and other forms of meditation. With each method he gives practices to develop one's skill in harnessing the chattering mind. This is a manual anyone with sincerity can follow.

Dr. N.K. Srinivasan is a former engineer and teacher with impeccable credentials in academia. His book is a gentle and convincing introduction and those who are anxious about their abilities to quieten the mind will find it an admirable guide.

—Andrew Clement



**SAMKHYA ACROSS THE MILLENNIUMS** by Swami Hariharananda Aranya. Kapil Math, Madhupur, Jharkhand. 2005. 318 pp, Rs200. ISBN 81-87928-26-1 [www.samkhyayoga-darshana.com](http://www.samkhyayoga-darshana.com)

The theoretical and practical basis of Patanjali's Yoga is the Samkhya *darshana* or philosophy. Lord Krishna began the proper teachings in the *Bhagavad Gita* with Samkhya.

Though Advaita Vedanta is regarded by many as the ultimate teaching in the *santana dharma* it can only be understood in the light of Samkhya. For those who wish to further their conceptual knowledge of Advaita a study of Samkhya is necessary. Our knowledge of *Purusha*, *Prakriti*, the *gunas*, the *tattvas* and *moksha* are all based on Samkhya.

The name is derived from the word 'number' because the system catalogues all that exists into 25 fundamental principles. It is said to be the oldest system in India. According to Samkhya, the efficient cause of the world is the first principle, *Purusha* 'Supreme Self' and the second, the material cause called *Prakriti*, or 'Matter'. It divides all things into two fundamentally different categories: i) things which possess consciousness or rather are constituted of consciousness (*cetana*); and ii) things which are unconscious (*jada*) but are objects of (or for) consciousness.

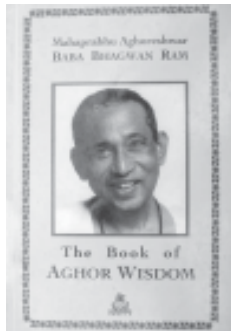
Swami Hariharananda (1869-1947) devoted his life to a revival of the Samkhya school. He founded the Kapil Math, at Madhupur, Jharkhand in north India which is devoted to its dissemination.

The book under review consists of commentaries on the *Samkhya-sutras of Pancasika* and *Isvarakrsna's Samkhya-karika*; and an original work by the swami entitled *Samkhya-tattvaloka*.

For those who are willing to make the effort it is worthwhile. It is technical and elaborate in detail but it is a valuable tool for understanding how the mind functions, particularly the subtler aspects of *buddhi*.

This book, as well as the swami's imposing interpretation on Vysya's commentary on Patanjali's *Yogasutras*, deserves to be better known.

— Amrit Ray



MAHAPRABHU AGHORESHWAR BABA BHAGAWAN RAM The Book of Aghor Wisdom. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. India. 2007, 410pp, Rs395. indicabooks@satyam.net.in

The Aghor path was said to have originated with Dattatareya. It was revived by Baba Kinaram, a Benaras saint who was purported to have lived from 1530 to 1714. The emphasis was on seeing the divine in everything and everybody. It was non-discriminatory and was open to all castes, both men and women. In the twentieth century Baba Bhagwan Ram was recognised to be a great exponent of the tradition. He was said to be enlightened at the age of fourteen and dedicated his life to the service of others. He founded the Shri Sarveshwari Samooch to help the poor, the disadvantaged and in particular, lepers for whom he established a leprosy hospital.

The book at hand is a compilation of his conversations and claims that he changed the way the Anghor ascetics are viewed by society and how he integrated them into the mainstream for the benefit of all.

It is a book to be opened and read for spiritual inspiration. The short, numbered paragraphs are dense with useful advice and wisdom. It is a weighty tome in more ways than one.

The introduction is excellent and gives a succinct biographical account of Baba Bhagwan Ram and the Anghor tradition with its various saints and gurus around Varanasi.

— T.V. Ramamurthy



CONFLUENCE by Makarand Paranjape. Samvad India Foundation B-1 Khasra No. 1668, 111/9 Kishan Garh, Mahrauli, New Delhi 110 070, 2007 76 pp., Rs 250. ISBN: 81-901318-7-7

Makarand Paranjape is currently Professor of English at J.N.U., New Delhi. With four previous collections of poetry, a book of short stories and a novel to his credit, *Confluence* is his fifth book of poems. Using water as a metaphor, this rich little collection reflects the very nature of this fluid and forceful medium. Like water, it has flow, power, mystery, destructiveness, wishfulness, death and longing. The three sections, 'Rain', 'River' and 'Ocean' build up to a climax in which merger and melting are the cherished outcomes of an intense and timeless longing. Throughout, the poet searches, surrenders, finds.....searches, surrenders, finds..... till in the last section, 'Five songs to Arunachala' comes the intimate dialogue of seeker with his Lord culminating in the impassioned plea of the final verse:

Alone, eternal, immense, immovable Arunachala-Shiva,  
end this play of you and me; let peace prevail, O Arunachala!

Though the first section on 'Rain' touches significantly on the terrestrial - rain as saviour for crops and as 'the yearly scourge' of floods and destruction, it is also an anguished prayer: *Where were you then, O Giridhari? / Why did you not come/ to hold up the mountain on your little finger / to shelter us underneath?* Rain also resonates in sensual awakening, in a child's release of wish boats in a flooded lane, in a boy's glazed listening to it as to the subconscious and as every person's unconscious: *There is no shelter or escape from rain. / Like a secret, incurable disease/ you carry it within yourself.* Inevitably, the seeker emerges and, like the lights that dance across the lake waters, strains *to reach the other side, / to understand, / to connect.* And finally, the knowledge: *It hardly matters if you agree/ or disagree with its refrain. / The rain's utterance is entire/ and sufficient in itself.*

The last section, 'Five songs to Arunachala' resounds with a familiar impassioned beseeching for union. Passion spent, yet hope alive, Paranjape expresses with utter beauty the hopeless hopefulness in a devotee's heart.

— Neera Kashyap





The Samadhi of Swami Ramanananda.  
Work in progress.

## Swami Ramanananda

Swami Ramanananda attained *mahasamadhi* on 26th December at 8:30 in the evening. He was 94. Though physically weak in the prior weeks he regularly came to Bhagavan's samadhi and listened to the Tamil Parayanam in the evening and attended all ashram functions. He generally walked unassisted. He witnessed the 128th Jayanthi celebrations in the Samadhi Hall the day before but was conspicuous by his absence at the Tamil Parayanam that evening. He felt weak and rested in his room. The end was sudden and peaceful. After his passing the body was propped up in his room and devotees felt they were beholding a sannyasi in deep meditation. There was a glow of peace about him.

From the evening of 26th December devotees started coming to pay their last respects. Garlands of various sizes were brought and offered before Swamiji's body. Odhuvars chanted Tiruvachakam and selections from Ramana Sannidhi Murai. Other devotees chanted Arunachala Aksharamanamalai throughout the night.

A large crowd of hundreds had gathered the next afternoon, 27th December 2007 and his sacred body was taken in procession amidst the chanting of Arunachala Aksharamanamalai and was kept near Bhagavan's Nirvana room in the passageway in front of Bhagavan's and Mother's shrines. He was buried with full sannyasa rites. Abhishekam was performed with milk, curd, fruit juice, holy ash (*vibhuti*), sandalwood paste and water from the Ganges. The body was then dressed with new ochre robe and taken to the samadhi pit dug and prepared in a proper manner, in accordance with tradition, adjacent to Chinna Swami's samadhi. It was lowered into the pit in a cloth bag and was set facing the Hill. Heaps of sand, red brick powder, camphor, bilva leaves, vibhuti and salt were offered into the pit which was then covered with granite stones and a *baana* lingam was temporarily placed and puja was performed to it. The entire ceremony came to an end by about 5 p.m.

It was an impressive, solemn ritual and the priests continued to do puja to the lingam now until the 9th January. There was a great sense of occasion because Swamiji was a major influence in the ashram and

a direct link to Bhagavan. He was an outstanding figure and we are indebted to him for the sterling work he performed over forty odd years guiding the ashram through many a troubled time. He was dauntless in protecting the ashram and said he always felt Bhagavn's protection. Though there was sadness in the atmosphere there was also lightness — a devoted servant of Bhagavan had attained absorption in Arunachala. The final ceremonies concluded with Aradhana observed on the 8th February which was attended by a large number of devotees.

### High Priest of Bali

On 13th January Pedando Made Gunung, the high priest of all Bali as well as the Soma Temple in Bali, visited the ashram with an entourage



of some 15 Balinese Hindus, including priests and Sri Prana, former chief of the Tourism Board of Bali. The high priest paid his respects to the shrines of the Mother and Bhagavan. He had been dreaming of Arunachala for many years but didn't know where it was until he came across a book with a photo of Bhagavan. He said, "To go to Arunachala is for me to come home," and he often said that Ramana seems like his Father to him. All were impressed by the dignity and devotion of the party.

### Sri Vidya Havan

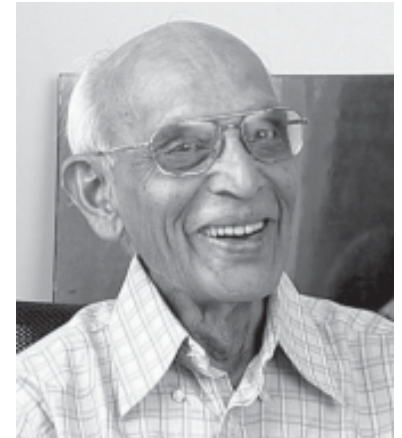
This annual full-day Homa or fire-ritual, which is a mini-kumbhishekam done for the Sri Chakra Meru installed in the Mathrubhuteswara temple, was conducted on Wednesday, the 30th January. The programme consisted of *Navavarna puja*, *Lalita Sahasranama homa*, *Lalita Trisati homa*, *Kanya homa* and *Saraswathi puja*. It is an important ritual that has been observed for many decades

now. While Sri Ramanasramam is dedicated to the practice of jnana yoga by self-enquiry, this ritual along with the weekly Sri Chakra puja dedicated to Sri Vidya in the form of Tripurasundari, bless all who attend with intelligence and wisdom.

### A.R. Natarajan

Sri A.R. Natarajan the founder-president of Sri Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore, left us on the 23rd January 2008. He was enmeshed by Bhagavan's grace after reading *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* in 1956 and from then on love of Bhagavan consumed him entirely.

He visited Sri Ramanasramam regularly along with Smt. Sulochana Natarajan. It was Devaraja Mudaliar who revealed many treasures of Bhagavan's life and teachings to them. Sri Natarajan had total faith in Bhagavan's will and was one of the principal supporters of the then president, Sri T. N. Venkataraman, and helped the ashram through thick and thin. He helped in raising funds for *Mountain Path* in its early years and was its Editor from July 1982 to July 1985.



In 1965 Sri Natarajan was posted to Delhi and, along with his family, was an unfailing participant in the Ramana satsangs at the Delhi Kendra. Prof. K. Swaminathan was a great inspiration for him at this stage. As Secretary of the Ramana Kendra, Delhi, Sri Natarajan played a key role in acquiring the land and building the Meditation Hall and Library complex at New Delhi. The Meditation Hall came up in 1972 and the Library complex was inaugurated in 1975. Bhagavan's Meditation Hall was the fulcrum of his life in Delhi and it was with a very heavy heart that, due to an official posting, he left for Bangalore in 1977.



He began organizing a Ramana Centre there, so that devotees had a place to attend satsang, and had it registered as a Society. He started *The Ramana Way* initially as a family journal, but soon it became a regular monthly magazine about the life and teachings of Bhagavan. He was forever seeking new ways of celebrating the glory of Bhagavan's life and teachings and it was his wish to keep writing about Bhagavan till his last breath, a wish Bhagavan fulfilled. He is the author of 56 books on Bhagavan's life and teachings, well-known among them, being the biography, *Timeless in Time* and the book of photographs, *Arunachala from Rigveda to Ramana Maharshi*. He had felt that devotees should have more awareness about Bhagavan's Mother, Azhagammal, and the significance of the Mathrubhuteswara temple.

In 1981, through his resolute efforts the Ramana Maharshi Centre acquired land on lease from B.D.A. on which the Ramana Maharshi Shrine and Meditation Hall were constructed and opened in 1982. The *panchaloha vigraha* of Bhagavan was installed there in 1997. In 2001 the Ramana Maharshi Heritage Building including the Auditorium was inaugurated and currently Sri Natarajan was having a new Research Block constructed, which is almost completed. It was his brainchild to produce television serials related to the life and teachings of Bhagavan in order to take Bhagavan to many homes "to sow the seeds of happiness in those homes" — as he joyously declared.

He had no thought other than of Bhagavan and service to Him. His love for everyone was a spontaneous overflow of his bubbling love for Bhagavan. He would look at Bhagavan with care, talk to him and sing to him as much as he would talk about him to anyone and everyone he met. He was completely enchanted by Bhagavan's name and form and would exhort everyone to drown in that infinite beauty.

A tribute by his daughter Sarada, will appear in the July edition of Mountain Path.

#### **H. Ramaiah**

Sri H. Ramaiah who was an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan since his childhood, was Absorbed in Ramana on 14th February 2008. He was 90. His wife, Hamsa, is a grand daughter of Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer. The entire family is devoted to Bhagavan. ▲