

DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA
DELHI

Aug - Oct 2020

Vol. XXII, No. 3

"God will bear whatever burdens we put on Him"

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi



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We welcome 2019 as the YEAR OF SOLUTIONS, as a year-long reminder to keep this spirit of quest alive.



2019
YEAR OF SOLUTIONS
Complexities Simplified

38. Om trigunatigaya namah

One who has transcended the three gunas.

39. Om virupaksa guhasaya namah

Dweller in the Virupaksha cave.

40. Om virajadacalakrtaye namah

One whose form is radiant stillness.





Original ink sketch of Arunachala by Sri Ramana Maharshi from Kunju Swami's notebook

Direct Path

VOLUME XXII ISSUE 3

AUGUST - OCTOBER, 2020

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Call for Articles

As the journal depends on articles from volunteer writers, I would appeal to you to send in articles for our consideration. We wish to keep the range of subjects both wide and diverse covering aspects such as: Bhagavan's life, teachings and experiences related to the practice of his methods; life, teachings and experiences related to the practice of methods taught by other spiritual Masters; teachings and stories from religions other than Hinduism; interpretations of sacred texts and verses; spiritual travel and insights; poetry; feedback and suggestions.

As a guideline, articles can be short (around 750 words), medium (around 1500 words) or in a longer format (around 2300 words). Please send in your contributions through email to editor.dp@rkdelhi.org

We look forward to hearing from you!

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A/c No : 10049504677

IDFC First Bank Ltd,

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IFS Code: IDFB0020137

Schedule of Rates

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Satsang Sponsorship: Rs 3000/- per Satsang

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Thoughts on Bhakti Yoga

Swagat Patnaik



Bhakti yoga or the path of devotion often escapes the attention of the modern mind. Being more materialist (or possibly more ignorant), Bhakti yoga tends to make modern people a little uncomfortable. The myriad incredible stories don't appeal to the modern practical man. In fact, like many modern youth, I went through a phase of being a somewhat inactive rebel. In my youthful freedom, little did I realize that I was missing out on developing a very fundamental expression of the human soul. Now as the years have taken their toll, I truly believe I thus missed out on developing something incredibly sweet. I have now started putting in efforts to understand a Bhakta's point of view. Such efforts

are indeed limited given the long road left to be traveled. I hope that the grace of Bhagavan guides my heart towards my Arunachala.

Apart from the rudimentary ideas I learned in childhood about Bhakti traditions, my understanding of Bhakti or the devotional path had been very limited. The inspiration to learn more about it came to me fairly recently – 2 years ago. Despite being an avid meditator till then, I had often shied away from the devotional elements of religion and tradition. I reasoned that the devotional aspects of many traditions are just inessential. I believed that the real core lay in the sitting meditation practice.

But a couple of years ago, I chanced upon some charming stories and anec-

dotes of Sage Ramana Maharshi and my perspective gradually turned. At first, I found the anecdotes to be interesting because they reminded me of a bygone era like the famous ‘Malgudi Days’. But very soon the devotees’ tender stories melted my heart. The devotees’ simplicity and gentle grace despite many hardships; the stories of harmony between animals and humans in the presence of the sage; our ever benevolent Bhagavan clarifying devotee’s doubts; the egalitarian conduct and environment in the ashram, giving a glimpse into Bhagavan’s day-to-day activities won over my skeptical self. It convinced me that divine play can certainly create a small heaven on earth. Furthermore, such divine play is possible even in this day and age. Above all it showed me how a devotee once in the ambit of Bhagavan’s grace is like prey in the jaws of a tiger — there is no escape possible.

Reading the many stories and anecdotes left me in a state of sweet afterglow. Even if I had tasted only a few drops of nectar in my study, I knew that I was motivated to go to its source. This meant visiting the nearby Ramana kendram or Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai for interacting with devotees through *satsangs*, and above all, learning from teachers who understand the essence of

Bhagavan’s teachings. In my quest, I started attending the wonderful weekly *satsangs* at the Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad. Much of the talks there were in Telegu, a language I didn’t understand. Nevertheless, attending the *satsangs* did give me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get a glimpse into the ways of outstanding devotees. Eventually, the conscious and unconscious learnings from these briefest of interactions became more valuable than my bookish study and my practice of meditation. It is only after seeing such exalted devotees who are living only by the master’s grace that one gains the inspiration to start traveling one’s own journey. Overall, the many brief interactions I had there left an indelible impression on me. Even today, the memory of these exalted *satsangs* puts me in a sweet nostalgic state.

One of the first things I noted in my interactions there was: Bhagavan and his teachings were always at the center of almost every conversation. In fact, in the many conversations I had, I observed that small talk was largely considered unimportant and the conversation would quickly steer towards Bhagavan and his teachings. Interestingly, I observed this with everyone I interacted with at the Kendram. This showed me how a Bhakta’s heart is

always directed towards his master. The disregard for the mundane, and, in a more exalted state, a disregard for one's own body and mind is a sign of true *bhakta*. This attitude was even more palpable in the more senior devotees. Even being in their presence pushed one's mind automatically towards Bhagavan. One could feel a distinct unearthly glow in their eyes, a gentle smile on their lips, and Bhagavan's name pulsating in them.

My interactions also gave me a glimpse into the service-minded nature of the devotees. No task was ever too menial to these devotees. Let it be distributing *prasadam*, performing administrative work, miscellaneous tasks or helping other devotees with their needs. Each task was an expression of love and completeness. I observed that there was a distinct lack of strain in their working style. This further points to the automatic divine play that gently guides devotees. Interestingly, many of the devotees themselves would report that the task was not done by them. This was often visible when

credit was given to them. They would simply direct them towards Bhagavan as if he himself did the entire the work.

In fact, they showed a similar indifference towards their own achievements as well. Many devotees had gained immense knowledge on a variety of topics related to Bhagavan, yet they were ever so humble in their interactions. The talks given by senior devotees were often very informative and showed their depth of understanding and intellect. No minor information about Bhagavan or his teachings was of less value to them. Each word, each context and each sentence of Bhagavan were valuable pearls. Many were gentle giants in their knowledge of Bhagavan's life, Bhagavan's devotees' lives, Bhagavan's teachings, and shastras. And they also had mastery over many languages like Sanskrit, Tamil, Telegu, English, Malayalam, etc. Most importantly, their intellectual knowledge was in balance with their own experience-based wisdom. Thus, they showed great discernment and understanding. They could answer the most difficult questions with relative ease, with great compassion towards the questioner.

The many virtues that these devotees exemplified are, of course, difficult for all of us to inculcate. But I believe even the briefest of inter-



actions with such devotees is quite beneficial. Their lofty ideals inspire us all to begin our arduous journey. Further, they perfectly mirror our innermost imperfections, thus making us aware of our ignorance and the infinite distance left for us to travel. Their grace acts like cool moonlight as we gradually walk towards ourselves and cast off what we are not.

Bhagavan describes this journey of a *bhakta* in Talk-28: the 'I' approaches *Ishwara* and prays to be absorbed in him. The 'I' then surrenders itself in faith and through concentra-

tion. And finally, in place of the 'I' in perfect self-surrender, the 'I' is lost in a residuum of God in which the 'I' is lost. This is the highest form of devotion (*parabhakti*) which is the same as the height of *vairagya*. Bhagavan further clarifies that in this journey *guru* and *Ishta Devata* are very powerful aids but self-effort is absolutely necessary. After all, it is us who wish to see the sun for ourselves. I sincerely hope that we all come in contact with such generous souls who help us see the Sun for ourselves. ■

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The lockdown due to the COVID-19 virus has further been relaxed in Delhi, and many of the regular activities in the city have been resumed. But overall, there has been an alarming rise in the number of cases in most parts of India. Thus, the more vulnerable people like the elderly are still required to exercise precautions. I hope Bhagavan's grace not only protects them during this time, but also helps our healthcare researchers in the development and production of the vaccine.

This precaution has also affected our Kendra's activities. We have not been able to open our Kendra to visitors till date. Furthermore, due to restrictions on postal services, we have not been able to send out hard copies of the magazine to our subscribers and contributors. But on a positive note, we were able to celebrate Bhagavan's Advent day online through a zoom meeting.

Some of the important events (from Bhagavan's time) falling in this current issue (August-October 2020) are:

- *September 1st: Advent Day*
- *October 17th: Navratri Festival*
- *October 26th: Vijaya Dashami*

Obituary: Shri V Mahalingam



Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

On behalf of the President (Justice Ramamoorthy) and the Managing Committee of Ramana Kendra Delhi, I am pained to share that on September 8th, 2020, Shri V Mahalingam, an ardent devotee, merged at the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. He was 98.

Shri Mahalingam was one of the strong pillars of the Kendra and served Bhagavan for many decades. His contribution as a Committee Member of Delhi Ramana Kendra will always be cherished. He shall be missed by all.

Namo Ramana

Anuraag Sunder

Secretary

Ramana Kendra Delhi

The World and I

Bharati Mirchandani



When I was in school, every essay I wrote concluded with the words, ‘... (to make) the world a better place.’ I included this, year after year, whether I was assigned to write about ‘My summer vacation’ or ‘A day in the life of a street’. Although the essays were appreciated, different teachers over the years remained unaware of this repetitive pattern. Eventually, I came to accept that I had a deep need to serve the world in some way.

Yet years later Ramana’s teachings gave this deep rooted conviction a severe jolt:

1. You cannot help the world before you know yourself.
2. Your own self-realization is the greatest service you can offer

the world.

3. Transform yourself, and only after that decide whether the world needs your help.

This set me off into exploring how the world and I are linked. We are often told that the world is maya, illusion, unreal. Adi Shankara is quoted as having said ‘Brahma Sat, Jagat Mithya...’ and it was surprising to discover this common quote was only part of his statement. I memorized the vital omitted part, ‘...jiva brahmaiva na para’ - there is no difference between the individual and the divine creative power, Brahma. This meant that there was no difference between the creator of the world and me. Suddenly both Brahma and the world became open to anthropomorphic

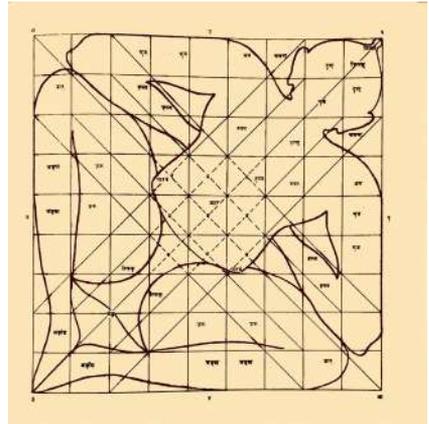
interpretation. Simultaneously, the 'I' got prized open to the possibility of being not just the earth but even the unmanifest, indivisible, eternal or unknowable Unity.

There is much information available to corroborate the similarity between earth and I. For example, tears, sweat and blood have the same level of salinity as ocean water. Also, 70% of the planet's surface is water and the same percentage of our body is fluid. Furthermore, lunar movements not only the control ocean tides but also our biological cycles and moods. The most astounding for me was the recognition that just as the earth's horizon is where earth and sky meet, so my body is also where earth and sky meet. I am my own horizon!

Furthermore, many of us also grew up with the poignant image of Sita emerging as an infant from a furrow in the earth. Later she returned to the lap of mother earth at will. This also led to the widespread idea that if a woman prostrated *shashtaang* like men do, the strength of her bond would cause her to meld into the earth the moment her chest (heart centre) made contact. Even her sari *palla* should never brush the earth, because the *palla* is

what nurtures and protects, so it has a greater concentration of this feminine earth connect.

The seers of Vedic times believed that the visible world was important only to the extent that it pointed to the patterns of the unmanifest. They used their highly refined sensibilities to find these patterns, which have come down to us in the form of yantras. Of these, the *vastu purusha mandala* (picture attached) forms the basis for designing temples, secular buildings, even cities. Modelled on purusha or the cosmic man, a grid of identical perfect squares numbering 4, 9, 16, 25 ... upto 1024 are arranged to form a larger square (each side having from 2 to 12 squares each). This yantra is not a plan, rather it indicates the location of different en-



2 Daniélou, Alain. Shiva and the primordial tradition: From the tantras to the science of dreams. Simon and Schuster, 2006.

ergies, each represented by a different deity. At the exact centre is Brahma, the supreme principle, represented by a dot which is similar to a black hole in outer space, simultaneously both *shunya* (void), and *bindu* (source of all creation).

Such was the vision of the Vedic seers that from the tenth century onward, cathedrals in Europe followed the plan and proportions of Indian temples². The harmonies of these patterns resonate across cultures because these yantras are drawn from universal and timeless truths.

Kabir expressed this link of man to earth another way in his famous doha, '*mati kahe kumhar se, tu kyo rondhe moy?. Ek din aesa aayega mai rondhu ki toy*'. Clay says to the potter, 'Oh potter, why do you knead me? A time will come when I will be the one shaping you!' Over time the elements that make up the body return to the earth, and then earth becomes plant, then food and then man again in one continuum. Only the permutations and combinations change which make some objects seem alive and the other inert.

Many of the tribal myths also link humans with nature. For example, Mizos of the north-eastern Himalayas

believe there was a time when humans could commute freely between heaven and earth. When they were tricked into cutting their sacred tree growing on the top of a hill, they unwittingly destroyed the ladder linking the realms, and humans were cut off from heaven for ever after. Hills and trees here symbolize the vertical axis connecting the individual and the sacred.

Interestingly, halfway across the planet, a Navajo prayer for healing also consists of offering precious gifts to the sacred pine tree. This tree's roots are believed to touch the centre of the earth, its trunk reaches up to heaven and its branches stretch like arms bestowing blessings. 'We bow to this representation of mighty powers that create the cosmos; in humility and love we offer our precious mundane things (pretty stones, shells and feathers) so that in turn we may be obtain the heavenly blessings of healing, harmony and beauty³.'

Roots of my vertical axis touch the fiery molten iron in the planet's core which contain tremendous dormant *shakti*. Just as the base of the *havan kund* has a ring of water as a security moat, a safety ring, we have the *svadhishttana* centre of great fluidity. Rising up the axis is the region,

3 Navajo Prayer - May it be beautiful, English version by Gladys A. Reichard

arena, field of great activity at the gut, diaphragm, *manipura*, where dancing flames are most visible, where energies get expressed. Higher still is the vast sky, cool, blue, *anahat* with its capacity to absorb so much — all the noise, smoke, and ash cools and clears here. Further up, only the purest is allowed to pass. A fragile and subtle filter keeps the light above the *anahat* white and clear. When light in the third eye (*ajna*) increases in intensity, it cannot be seen separate from light of the infinite. Then the levels below also get flooded with this intense cool white light. Top and bottom, in and out, become one unified whole.

Sri Ramana said, ‘The emergence and disappearance of the world are like the spider producing a gossamer web and then withdrawing it. The spider here underlies all the three states — waking, dreaming and sleep; such a spider in the person is called Atman (Self), whereas the same with reference to the world is called Brahman (Supreme Spirit).’⁴

In Islamic culture, bowing to the earth is a sign of humility. Some even use a tablet of earth called *turbah* as a symbol while offering prayers. Etymologically, *turbah* means soil, the

material God used to create the cosmos. Soil therefore is so sacred that it may be used for ablation when water is unavailable, in practice called *tayammum*.

In Christianity too, the ‘dust to dust’ refrain is ubiquitous at burial services. Only temporarily does dust take human shape and dance on the earth, like a wave on the sea, before it merges back to where it came from. Here as in Judaic beliefs, man is the master, but not without responsibility towards caring for the land in all its aspects. Seen as distinct from the earth, we build up ideas of improving, helping, changing the world, and not ‘being the change’.

If there is no world other than of my own creation, can there be any hope for the world to be saved? Someone asked Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj just this. His answer makes me smile, but I am sure those in his presence, within the aura of his power, must have been stunned as their inner blockages got zapped into smithereens. His answer: ‘What business have you with saving the world, when all the world needs is to be saved from you? Get out of the picture and see whether there is anything left to save’. ■

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4 Talks 4 Feb 1935

Mulam

Neera Kashyap



He was the *mulam* of the project.

When invited to be guest of honor at the function, he said:

“If I am *mulam*, I should never be exposed.

What can be exposed are the tree’s flowers and leaves and branches and trunk
like skin, but never its root.

A building’s surface can be painted.

But it’s foundations? Can they be dug out and painted?

Roots exposed, the tree will rot and die.

Instead,

pack more mud on the roots so

they are buried deep out of sight,

so they spread and do the work that they must do –
nourishing, sustaining, strengthening the whole tree,

its skin,

its organs,

its life-breath. ■

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[The inspiration for this poem came from Sadhu Om’s response when asked by the ashram to be guest of honor at a function for the release of the first volume of *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, a compilation of Murugunar’s previously unpublished verses which Sadhu Om had himself collected, arranged and edited.

Source: The Paramount Importance of Self Attention by Sadhu Om, Mountain Path Vol.54, No. 3]

Maurice Frydman: A Retrospective

Michael Highburger



Part one

Most devotees know Maurice Frydman as the editor of *Maharshi's Gospel*, the small collection of conversations held between Bhagavan and visitors during the late 1930s. But not all devotees may be aware of how extraordinary this modest and humble man actually was, nor of his place in Indian history. A polymath, Frydman's interests and talents were so diverse that, even his close acquaintances and colleagues in any given field were often unaware of his achievements in other disciplines.

Born a Polish Jew in Warsaw in 1901, Frydman learned Russian, German, Polish and Hebrew in school until he migrated to Paris to take up study at the Sorbonne, where he learned French and English in order to complete his

degree in electrical engineering. After graduation he took up a position as a research engineer in a large Paris manufacturing firm. It was during this period that a fateful encounter took place between Frydman and Sir Mirza Ismail, the Dewan of Mysore. When Frydman began enthusiastically questioning the Dewan about India, Sir Mirza proposed that Frydman come to live in India to organise and manage the State Government Electrical Factory in Bangalore. Frydman accepted this offer immediately and soon was in India as head of the Mysore Electrical Industries, Ltd.

It was during this period of the early thirties that he met Gandhiji and began to visit Wardha. Frydman made use of his engineering genius to help the Mahatma create several new types

of *charkha* (spinning wheel), in the hope of finding the most efficient and economical spinning wheel for India. It was Gandhi who gave Frydman the name Bharatananda (after Frydman took *sannyas*), the name by which he was known in Gandhian circles.

In September 1935, Frydman came to Tiruvannamalai to meet Bhagavan for the first time. Immediately taken with Bhagavan, he became a regular visitor and even took up residence in the Ashram for three years. Many of the questions published in *Maharshi's Gospel* (some of which also appear in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*) were posed by Frydman directly, and Bhagavan seems to have delighted in Frydman's queries, born of a penetrating insight into the teaching.

It was also during this period that a number of the younger Ashram inmates such as T. K. Sundaresa Iyer's son joined Frydman to work in his firm at Bangalore. On Saturdays, Frydman would come to the Ashram and go back to Bangalore the following day in his jeep along with the Ashram youngsters who were working with him. When once asked why he spent so much money on weekly (instead of monthly) visits, he replied: "What to do? My battery can only last a week, then it dries up. I have to come to Bhagavan to get it recharged!"

In 1937, after meeting the son of the Maharaja of Aundh, Apa Pant, and bringing him to Bhagavan, Frydman was invited to visit Pant's princely home and meet his father, the Maharaja. Once there, in the spirit of the Gandhian revolution underway in India, the three decided that the Maharaja would hand his kingdom over to the people, with Frydman acting as provisional administrator. In 1938 Frydman drafted a declaration which the Maharaja and his son presented to Gandhi in Wardha. Based on this, the Mahatma drew up a new constitution for Aundh, effectively handing over the rule of the state to its residents in 1939.

Part two

In 1935, after Maurice Frydman had first met Bhagavan, K. Ramaswamy immediately noticed a change in him. For example, he started to dress more simply, began to share his food with his workers and ate his own food with little concern for taste. Frydman told Ramaswamy that it was all due to Bhagavan's influence and invited him to come with him on one of his week-end visits to Ramanasramam. Indeed, Frydman began to encourage others to experience the marvel that was Bhagavan, and Ramaswamy, for his own part, having availed himself of Frydman's invitation, became a

lifelong devotee of Bhagavan.

Soon after returning after four years at Oxford, Prince Apa B. Pant first met Maurice Frydman at his electrical plant in Bangalore. The two quickly became friends and Frydman took Pant to Tiruvannamalai for his first darshan of Bhagavan in what would prove to be a life-changing moment for Pant.

Later the prince made an appeal to Sir Mirza Ismail, the Dewan of Mysore, who had hired Frydman in Paris to manage his factory, asking if he would be willing to “loan” Maurice to him for six months to assist his father in working out a plan for the villagers of Aundh. Sir Mirza refused the request. But not long after this, Maurice turned up in Aundh anyway, with his ‘clothes at the end of a stick’, saying, “Sir Mirza cannot dictate to me. I am nobody’s slave. I have left Mysore and come to stay with you permanently. Let’s get to work!”

Appealing to the Gandhian sensibilities of Apa Pant’s father, the Raja of Aundh, Frydman asked: “Raja Saheb, why don’t you go and make a declaration to Mahatma Gandhi that you are giving all your power to the people because it will help in the freedom struggle?”

As it turned out, it was the pen of

Maurice Frydman that formalised these three men’s ideas for a decentralised democracy in Aundh, a decision that, while winning favour neither with the British nor with the feudal rulers of nearby states who were content to maintain their imperial reign, nevertheless, received Gandhiji’s imprimatur. Soon enough, Maurice found himself sitting in a mud hut face to face with the Mahatma who lightheartedly addressed him saying: “So you have caught hold of the poor Raja of Aundh now and left the rich one in Mysore to his destiny?”

After returning from the meeting with Gandhiji, Frydman struck out on foot through the wilderness of Aundh, visiting each of its 75 villages, and setting up a ‘headquarters’ without even as much as a straw hut. According to Apa Pant, Frydman relied on the scant shade of a single acacia tree to protect him from the sun in the extremely inhospitable climate of Western Maharashtra, where temperatures sometimes reached 120° F. On winter nights when the thermometer plummeted to 20° F, Frydman relied on bamboo matting and coarsely woven wool blankets for warmth. For the next three years, in his capacity as both a *tapasvin* (ascetic monk) and acting Dewan of Aundh, Frydman implemented his

decisions from this barren locale. At the outset, Frydman compelled the Raja to abolish capital punishment in the State, and when the Swaraj Constitution of Aundh became law in 1939, Frydman set about establishing the first ever “Free Prison” in India. Swatantrapur or “City of the Free” was made up of the most ‘dangerous’ of Aundh’s prison convicts, who were allowed to bring their families with them during their parole. These “free” citizens dug a deep well and struck sweet water in the sandy soil of this otherwise waterless terrain. So extraordinary was the find that hundreds of villagers from distant villages came by foot to behold firsthand the miracle brought forth by this unusual foreigner in ochre robes. As it was, Swatantrapur would continue to survive long after Frydman had moved on to other projects.

Around this time, Frydman met Umadevi, the Ramana devotee who appears in *Talks* (see *Talks* no.s 278 and 450). Born Wanda Dynowska in St. Petersburg and of aristocratic Polish parentage, Umadevi was a writer, translator and social activist who had come to India a couple of years before Frydman. The two cooperatively established the Polish-Indian Library in Madras and took up the task of translating into Polish some fifty

sacred texts (including the Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata and Ramayana) as well as contemporary Indian poetry and literature from Sanskrit and other Indian languages. They also translated the great Polish poets into English and Indian languages.

It was during this period that Frydman and Umadevi successfully secured the release of a large number of Polish orphans who had been displaced by the Soviet annexation of Eastern Poland in 1939, and subsequently interned in Siberia. Through the efforts of these two expatriate Poles, thousands of Polish internees made their way from Siberia through Iran to India before being repatriated to Poland. (See *Day by Day*, 11-10-46, where Umadevi visits Bhagavan with 25 girls from the camp where 5,000 Polish refugees were stationed in Kolhapur State).

The translations done for the Polish-Indian library, having overtly religious themes, would have been illegal in communist Poland. Thus the books had to be smuggled into the country, a task that was accomplished chiefly through these Polish orphans and prisoners of war at the time of their repatriation in the mid to late 1940s. Frydman’s letters were key in securing the release of his Polish compatriots, an exercise in statecraft

that would later prove to be of great consequence for a much larger group of refugees — those fleeing Tibet.

In 1959 with the Chinese invasion of Tibet, some 100,000 people began to pour into India, among them the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan clergy. Nehru was at a loss as to what to do for the refugees. Relations between India and China were at a breaking point and settling the refugees near the Indo-Tibetan border was out of the question, given the number of spies in the area. Openly inviting the Tibetans to remain in India would further complicate the hostile Indo-Chinese relations. Seeing the plight of the homeless, penniless Tibetans, Frydman drafted a letter to Nehru and carried it to Delhi. He then sat in the Prime Minister's office until the latter agreed to write appeals to various state governments for grants of land. With these letters,

Frydman travelled for two long years around the whole of India seeking suitable sites for the stateless Tibetans. In 1960, the Government of Mysore (now the State of Karnataka) granted 3,000

acres of land for the first of the Tibetan exile settlements. In time, Frydman and Umadevi would help establish four other sites, among them the Dalai Lama's home-in-exile at Dharmashala, where Umadevi helped to organize schools and a social infrastructure.

The historical significance of these efforts can hardly be overstated, given, on the one hand, Beijing's intolerance of religious life in Tibet during the decades that followed, and, on the other, the democratic liberties — such as freedom of speech — that life in India afforded the exiled Tibetan clerics and scholars, in both voicing the concerns of a displaced people as well as disseminating Tibetan cultural and religious thought for the benefit of posterity — a cultural legacy that might have otherwise been lost to the outside world.



Part three

Maurice Frydman reached Ramanasramam just six months after arriving in India. This first visit of three days began with his coming before Bhagavan in the hall, his hat in hand and his shoes on, not having yet learned the local customs. Already on this first day he seemed eager to learn from Bhagavan and asked why there should be illusion if the individual soul is identical with the Supreme. A devotee recounts the details of the conversation:

Bhagavan gave him the usual answer and then began to chew betel leaves. In the meantime, Mr. Frydman was ruminating and, with dramatic gestures, wanted to know why the ego should not be cut down at one stroke and destroyed so as to gain Supreme Bliss. The Maharshi stopped chewing his betel leaves long enough to smile and then broke out into laughter and asked the questioner to hold out his ego so that the Maharshi could strike it down. Everyone in the Hall laughed including Mr. Frydman, and at the conclusion of the

laughter, Mr. Frydman addressed the Maharshi and said, "Yes, now I understand."⁵

Though somewhat shy by nature, Frydman mustered the courage to speak up in the hall and even from the first days, a congenial familiarity developed between him and Bhagavan. A devotee narrates the following humorous anecdote:

Once Maurice Frydman appeared in the Hall with a huge glass of fruit juice and offered it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan said: "There's not enough". Thinking that Bhagavan wanted more juice for himself, Frydman said, "Please drink this and I will get you more." "Good, will you give everyone in the hall a big glass of juice just like this?" Frydman responded, "They don't need it." "Neither do I," came Bhagavan's response. Frydman persisted, "But, you're so pale!" Bhagavan replied, "You are much paler than I, so you must drink it yourself!" Everybody laughed. The pale-faced Frydman took the words of the Master literally, went to a

5 Mountain Path, April 1981, p. 69.

6 *Mountain Path*, 'Kinder Far than One's Own Mother—Ramana', V. Ganesan, January 1985, p. 32.

corner and drank the full glass of juice all by himself!”⁶

It was during the years of residence at the Ashram that Frydman began recording Bhagavan’s responses to devotees’ inquiries. It is these exchanges that would eventually form the content of *Maharshi’s Gospel* and even parts of *Talks*. Frydman was one of Bhagavan’s favourite interlocutors and, once someone commented to Bhagavan on the brilliance of his questions in the hall, Bhagavan replied that Frydman didn’t pose his questions for his own benefit but for the sake of others. Such was Bhagavan’s estimation of Frydman’s selfless service.

Meeting Bhagavan engendered in Frydman the determination to change his life and to take up the spiritual path in all seriousness. He begged Bhagavan to give him *sannyasa diksha* but Bhagavan, in his customary way, refused the request: “I have no ochre robes for you, Sir, and you do not need any!”⁷ But Frydman, for the time being, missed the profound wisdom in Bhagavan’s words and carried through with his decision, taking *sannyas* from Swami Ramdas in the late 1930s. When he subsequently met Gandhiji, the latter began calling him

Bharatananda (‘Bliss of India’), an acknowledgement of Frydman’s love for his adopted country in a time of struggle. But as the manager of a large manufacturing firm, Frydman had difficulties winning over his superiors to his newly acquired renunciate status. The conflict of interest it seemed to pose was made more palpable when Frydman started his begging rounds in the evenings, often to the very households of his own employees. Apa Pant writes:

When it was reported to Sir Mirza Ismail that his brilliant engineer-director had shaved his head and taken sannyas, went to work in saffron robes, begged for his daily bread and gave away all his wages (Rs. 3,000 per month) to the poor and needy, the Grand Vizier was furious. He sent for “that Mr. Frydman” to remind him that he was hired as an engineer, not as a sannyasi and forbade him henceforth to wear ochre robes. Maurice offered his resignation on the spot, saying that how and what he ate or wore was a personal matter, and that he must be free to follow his own way of life so long as he satisfied those concerned with the quality of his

7 *Mountain Path*, ‘Maurice Frydman’, Apa Pant, Aradhana 1991, p. 35.

work as engineer and manager. A compromise was finally reached; Maurice would have to wear European or Mysore dress only when VIPs visited the factory.⁸

In time, Frydman began to reassess the outward aspect of *sannyas* and the attachments that can form around such identities. Perhaps recalling Bhagavan's earlier refusal to give him robes, Frydman decided to resume wearing normal dress, maintaining inwardly the spirit of monastic renunciation and selfless service, while outwardly blending in with the crowd. But from this time onward Frydman refused to accept his monthly salary, even though the management insisted on holding the unretrieved funds in escrow for him till a later date. When Frydman left the factory for good, he still refused to accept the accumulated back-pay, which was by then considerable, and had the money divided up and distributed among workers at the factory.

Part four

Born around 1900, Maurice Frydman was the eldest son of a poor Jewish family living in the ghetto of Krakow. His devout father worked in the synagogue and had always hoped

that his son would become a rabbi.

The boy's intellectual gifts were evident from an early age. His facility for rapid learning was remarkable and he mastered the Cyrillic, Roman and Hebrew alphabets and became fluent in Russian, Polish, French, English and Hebrew before the age of ten.

Poland, at this time, was occupied by Russia and the Jews of Krakow suffered persecution under Tsarist rule. Racial intolerance forbade Jewish boys to enter the Russian school in Krakow. But Maurice's exceptional abilities were recognized by his teachers. Having stood first among 500 boys in his high school final examinations, he sat for the Central Scholarship Examination and got 95%, standing first in all of Poland. He then received a state scholarship and took a course in electrical engineering. By the age of 20 he had about 100 patents to his name for his electrical and mechanical inventions, among them, his "talking book". Soon he was picked up by laboratories and research institutes, and by 1925 had already travelled much of Europe, working in German, Dutch and Danish industrial establishments.

At the age of 25, however, what was to be his life-long urge came rushing

⁸ *The Mountain Path*, Aradhana, 1991, p. 32.

to the fore: to “see God”. He had studied the Talmud and other Jewish scriptures, yet Judaism did not satisfy his incisive, non-dogmatic mind. He converted to Russian Orthodoxy and became a monk, retreating to a solitary monastery in the Carpathian mountains in southern Poland. One day “Satan” tempted him to jump over a mighty waterfall to “prove his faith”. He leapt from the 100-foot precipice. But as providence would have it, he was uninjured owing to some shrubs in which his cassock fortunately became entangled.

By 1926 he was tired of orthodox dogmas and found his way to the Theosophical Society where he met Annie Besant and J. Krishnamurti. In 1928, when he was ready to emigrate to France in search of a job and “new adventures”, he saw an advertisement in the *Paris Soir* about a new electrical factory being started on the outskirts of the city. He applied and was immediately hired; by 1934 he had become the plant’s General Manager.

In 1935 Sir Mirza Ismail, the Dewan of Mysore, was touring Europe in search of engineering/managerial talent for the projected Government Electrical Factory in Bangalore. When he met Maurice at his Paris factory, the two immediately struck a chord and it

was soon decided that Frydman would come to India.

It was in India that his spiritual longing truly awakened. His explorations led him around the subcontinent to meet with the great teachers of the day, and finally, at Bhagavan’s feet, to a three-year stay at Ramanasramam.

After Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana, Maurice involved himself in various undertakings around the country. By 1970 he was living in Mumbai and sitting with Nisargadatta Maharaj. Among other things, he translated and edited recorded talks with Nisargadatta Maharaj that were published under the title *I AM THAT* and soon became a modern *advaitic* classic.

In 1976, towards the end of his life when he was sick and mostly bed-ridden in his flat in Mumbai, an unknown woman turned up at his door. She introduced herself, explaining that she was a registered nurse and that she had been instructed by a man in a dream to come and offer nursing care to Maurice. The dream had been repeated and when she had the dream the third time, she decided to act on it, mustering up the courage to come knocking. Though taken aback by her story, Maurice was won over by her sincerity and granted her entrance to

his flat. After entering, her eyes landed on a photo on the wall of one whose name she had yet to learn. Seeing the photo of Bhagavan, the nurse exclaimed, “That’s the man who came to me in my dream!”⁹

Of Maurice’s final days, Apa Pant had the following to say: “One day I received a phone call: ‘The sage is dying’, whispered a soft, sad voice over the trunk phone from Bombay. ‘He is asking for you. Come as soon as you can.’

“So my wife and I rushed, with Avalokita our youngest, Maurice’s favourite. When we arrived, Hilla Petit — an elderly Parsi friend, who helped care for Maurice, and her adopted daughter, Babulal, as well as the doctors and the nurse all complained that Maurice was refusing to eat or take his medicine. Hilla and Babulal were in tears. They implored me to ‘make’ Maurice eat and take his medicine, as if anyone could ever

make him do anything that he didn’t want to do! For Maurice’s part, he only said, ‘Apa, who is dying?’

“The next day he drove everyone out of the room, ordering them to leave him alone with me. Then he said, ‘Apa, I hear the music, I see the bright light. Who dies? No one is dying. This diseased body is keeping me away from that harmony and beauty. Do not let them keep me in this body. Go now in peace.’

“The next day as Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and we sat at his bedside, he quietly breathed his last three breaths uttering these soft simple words — ‘Hari Om!’”¹⁰ ■

[We thank Michael Highburger for this brilliant informative article on Maurice Frydman. It is indeed a privilege to publish such well researched article. Do reach out to Michael highburger at mhighburger@gmail.com for sharing your comments on this article.]

9 This anecdote is related by Ashram President, V. S. Ramanan. See also, Moments Remembered, p. 123.

10 This account is adapted from *Mountain Path*, 1991 pp. 31-6, 125-8.

Talk 57

Sri Bhagavan said that *sushumna* is the name mostly mentioned in scriptures. Other names also occur; e.g., *para*, *atma*, *amrita*. It is also stated that *sushumna* becomes *leena* (merged in *para*). So it may be said that *para* is the terminology of *jnana*, whereas *sushumna* is that of Yoga.

Sacred Arunachala

M Balaji Prasad



Oh Arunachala

The wondrous mountain of mystic fire
Through its five peaks
Emanates wild and consistent spiritual force
That burns the cyclicalty of birth and death
Identified with the here and now
A reality
Many come and reign
In deep reclusion
With unpopulated path
Leading to self
Experience of something
Mysterious and awe-inspiring
Transmutes one
Into Interior realization
I circumambulate around your nest
Henceforth my mind can merge
Into tranquil rest
And emptiness
Ignite my heart
That throbs with
Your sacred drumbeat. ■

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Embracing Challenges

Kanta Ramchandani



It was the summer of 1990. I was on the hospital bed, just out of surgery for removing the tumor on my left thigh. As I opened my eyes and met the stricken expression on the faces of my family members, I understood that the doctor's verdict was 'malignancy'.

I was 58 years old and looking forward to retirement from service soon. I had plans in my mind to travel. Also, to do service at Sathya Sai Baba's ashram at Puttaparthi where I had already been allotted a flat. With one blow, many dreams were broken and plans shattered. Strangely though, I felt no distress at that moment, only a calm acceptance of the situation. In my humble understanding, this resulted from my long-standing spiritual aspi-

ration that had led me to spend years in spiritual study, prayer, and meditation. I genuinely believe that in this adversity, my past spiritual effort surfaced naturally to grant me strength.

To get back to my story, I underwent grueling sessions of chemotherapy and radiation which removed my tumor. During this harsh treatment, I remained in good humor throughout. I remember when, as a result of the therapy, one fine morning I discovered most of my hair on my pillow. I found this sight so hilarious that I called up my friend and joked about it only to find a shocked silence followed by the words: "Kanta you are laughing about it!" After the treatment the tumor receded, and I moved about normally for the next three years, but with a

slight limp.

Then came the big challenge!

The nasty tumor returned and I was bluntly told by the doctor that if I wished to live I would have to forego my left leg completely. This did frighten me initially, but I soon realized that the best course of action was to resign to God with full trust. The amputation of my limb took place in March 1995. To the relief of family and friends, I remained in good humor, while spending a month or so in the hospital. I remember, as per their policy, the authorities sent a counsellor to help me cope emotionally with the trauma of amputation. The lady left within 10 minutes saying, “My dear girl you don’t need counselling”. She apparently found me in good spirit, discussing with her some ideas from Deepak Chopra’s book which I had been reading before she came in. Thus, the month sped by easily with prayers, books and jocularities with the doctors, who visited daily. Finally, I was back home in a new physical avatar.

Ever since, for almost a quarter-century now, I have lived with crutches, wheelchairs, walkers, and more. I realized early that life was all about taking challenges and developing one’s abilities en route. A new way had to be learned to navigate

simple everyday activities like bathing and dressing, or to pick up and keep things while hands gripped crutches. The placement of furniture had to be changed to allow easy access to items of daily use that required minimum movement. For improving safety, grab bars had to be installed wherever needed. All this and many more changes were gradually accomplished.

To start with, it seemed that I would now be living with little scope for activity. But here I am at 88 reporting that I have lived a peaceful and contented life, undertaking various homebound activities like helping students with studies, contributing to the housing society work, and, most happily, sharing spiritual thoughts from time to time with those interested. I may mention here that I live alone in my flat on the 1st floor, while my brother’s and sister’s families stay on the 3rd floor. The remaining members of the family also live close by and I say, with gratitude, that I have had all the needed support from these dear souls. I have had my share of outings, including outstation ones with their help. I feel truly blessed with this divine bounty in my life.

Now let me talk a little of the wondrous happenings that have come my way on this journey of 25 years. I have

experienced about a dozen falls so far, some of them quite nasty, but none led to a fracture. There have been many other moments when unexpected help arrived suddenly to rescue me from tricky situations. Of course, many will see these as mere coincidences, but for me, it has been a steady stream of miracles bestowed by the Almighty. I have been asked why I did not opt for an artificial limb. Well, I did try, but I was not destined for it. This was because the amputation extended up to my pelvis, making it impossible to create a stump to fit an artificial limb.

Friends, if we reflect on the effect that misfortune has on the people experiencing it, we find that, usually, a person does not learn from the suffering. Hit by misfortunes, he cries helplessly for some time and then tries to laugh and dance, getting back to worldly pleasures. For a spiritual seeker, on the other hand, suffering becomes a door to spiritual growth. This frustration itself becomes an occasion to withdraw the mind from the external world and go deeper internally. The spiritual aspirant learns to face suffering with the right attitude and as a means to a higher end. From suffering is born the conviction of life's fickleness. Also is born strength, the power of judgment, and calmness of

temper. One learns to remain pointed towards the eternal, living life with as much detachment as possible.

The question often arises in the minds of people whether there is any real gain or bliss in going inwards. They wish to know what is the happiness and contentment that one can hope to get from this struggle to transcend the contradictions of life and touch the eternal. The answer that would readily come to my mind would be that prayer and meditation help the aspirant develop inner joy and peace. This in turn, gives the capacity to disregard suffering, which becomes instead the blessedness of the experience of God. No more is God an empty concept as he becomes more and more real. God is now joyfully included in every activity, realizing the truth that it is he who is motivating, guiding and protecting at every step. One learns that whenever faced with an insoluble problem, the wisest course of action is to surrender to God with full faith, for is he not the most capable, compassionate, and all-wise force running the Universe.

Friends, with my own life experience, I am convinced that such a God is within our grasp, ready to offer all help and protection if we only remember to turn to him with confi-

dence. When we are traveling down a particular road, suddenly, we may find our way blocked. It may be God saying, “I cannot let you go further that way”. But he may also be saying “I have another way for you”. God’s way never comes to a dead end. He may change our direction but there is always a door open for us.

Cherishing such thoughts, we can surely live our lives in joy and peace notwithstanding challenges, exactly like a child holding the mother’s hand in the carefree awareness of full protection and love. Bhagwan Sri Satya Sai Baba gives us the uplifting motto:

With God endless hope
Without God hopeless end.

Finally, let me share the inspiring words of St. Teresa of Avila from her poems:

Possessing God
Naught does one lack
Alone God suffices. ■

[We thank Smt. Kanta Ramchandani for her incredible personal story about her journey. It is truly inspiring to witness such grace in the face of adversity. Please feel free to reach out to her close relative Sonalini (sonalinim@hotmail.com), if you wish to share any comments with her.]

Talk 161

An elderly man from Ananthapur, after hearing the *Vedas* recited in the hall, stood up and asked:

“It is said that the non-Brahmins should not hear the recital of the *Vedas*.”

M.: Mind your business. Take care of what you came here for. Why do you waste your time in these matters? “I heard the recital,” you say. “Who is that ‘I’? Without knowing the ‘I’ you are using the word. If its significance be known there will be no doubt. Find the ‘I’ first and you may afterwards speak of other matters.”

Continuing,

Sri Bhagavan said: “The *smritis* say something. They are not appropriate now. I will reform the world, rewrite the *smritis*.” Saying so, people are cutting capers in the world from time immemorial. Such reformers have come and gone; but the ancient *smritis* still stand. Why waste time over such matters? Let each one mind his business. All will be well.

Maun – A Spiritual Sadhana

Virender Kumar



Tapas is a practice of self-control; it is mostly self-denial or curbing of one's urges. It takes a lot of self-control to garner, conserve, and use one's energy for achieving our spiritual objective. The practice of *Tapas* (self-control) is said to be of three types: *shareera* (body), *vani* (speech), or *man* (mind). Furthermore, it should be noted that *Tapas* is not just self-inflicted painful discipline but is in reality a thoughtful process taken up for attaining *Maun*.

Besides *Maun*, other methods for self-control are *Tyaga* and *Sanyasa*. *Tyaga* is duty-driven action without attachment to a specific outcome. Thus, *Tyaga* is giving up attachment to the outcome, while *Sanyasa* is giving up or *tyaga* of all desire-prompted action.

Sanyasa results in becoming free from desires and thoughts, also known as *Samadhi*. In this current article, we will mainly focus on the practice of *Maun*.

Thought flow or mental activity is strongly related to one's state of being. As is the state of our mind, so are we. *Vani* is the first perceptible expression of our thought world, and if we bring it under control, then our thoughts and our being can be molded towards more happiness. *Maun* sadhana, if practiced, can help us achieve not only discipline but also the inherent potentialities of the human mind. *Vani Tapas* reins our action and stores our energies for steady future use.

Mental peace and quietude achieved by *Maun* practice can be used for the

dual purpose of meditation or silent work. Mahatma Gandhi was a great advocate of *Maun* and practiced it very effectively in personal and public life. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was also an epitome of quietude, and even in silence, he could read, answer and satisfy a seeker by a mere glance.

Is *Maun* sadhana practical in the hustle-bustle of the life of a householder? Possibly or possibly not. But we should deeply introspect when one should speak and when keep *Maun*, what one should speak, and how one should speak, while at the same time being effective and at peace .

Bhagavan Krishna says, in chapter 17.14 to 17.16 of Gita that one should speak only what is a) self observed/ experienced truth; b) beneficial to other(s); c) spoken softly & sweetly. If these three conditions are not satisfied then it is better to keep *Maun*. We should engage in active listening and give up talking ill of others, engaging in idle gossip, offering unsolicited advice, and speaking out of turn.

Bhagavan Krishna says, in chapter 17.17 to 17.19 of Gita, that *guna* is of three types: *Satva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. Furthermore, their karma outcomes are also of three types: intent, spirit and practice. Thus, *guna outcomes* are also expressed in thought, speech,

and action. In a peaceful and happy person, thought, speech, and action will have commensurate qualities. *Maun* or control of speech gradually integrates all three actions and makes the practitioner attain *dhyana* in the long term. In fact, the practitioner should put in effort to attain *dhyana* while practicing *Maun*.

The best ways to practice *Maun* to ingrain peace and serenity in oneself are:

a) Staying focussed on the work at hand in meditative silence

b) When not engaged in work, practice *dhyana* on Self or *Atman*.

But such practice, in reality, is easier said than done. If we forcibly impose *Maun* on a chaotic mind, it will actively rebel against our efforts. In some circumstances, it may just lead to temporary suppression. Often, these suppressed tendencies can erupt like a latent volcano at a later time, causing great harm. When practicing *Maun*, if a strong distraction bubbles up in us then one should engage it with our intellect to ward it off with *jnana* (self-enquiry). Further, *Karma yoga* (selfless *Seva*) and *Bhakti yoga* (devotion) can also help the devotee gain strength for *Maun*.

Maun sadhana not only quietens the mind, but also helps it engage in

the task at hand with greater focus and satisfaction. Maun sadhana quells distractions and thus results in reduced anxiety, finally dissolving our false self-identity. We all have a certain freedom of choice in thought, speech, and action. We can sow the seeds and nourish the saplings of karma which

lead us to *Ishwara*. *Ishwara* is karma Phall-datta, with the power to convert this seed to fruit as per the law of nature. Man and God are partners in *jagat*, and nothing happens without the other. As man proposes, so He disposes. ■

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Talk 168

It was mentioned to Sri Bhagavan that a Self-realised being needs no food, etc.

M.: You understand according to your state only.

Talk 173

D.: Lord, how can the grip of the ego be slackened?

M.: By not adding new *vasanas* to it.

D.: Any amount of *japa* has not slackened the grip!

M.: How so! It will duly slacken and vanish.

Talk 179

Mr. Frydman had asked Swami Ramdas something, to which he replied that there would be no more births for himself. The engineer had pointed out there should be no anxiety regarding rebirth. There will be the same Rama, the same Ramdas, the same search for Rama and the same bliss of realisation. What objection could be there for the repetition of this Rama-Lila? Ramdas had admitted that there could be no objection, that it would be an enjoyment and a game. The engineer further said that Ramdas added that Ramdas had found Rama merged in Him and happy in that union. They are the same, still there was Ramdas, there was Rama, there was the union, there was the Bliss. That is eternal. Saying it, he asked what Sri Bhagavan would say to it.

M.: It is all as true as the present events.

Glimpses

Rupa Anand



Come, sit by my side
in the verandah,
overlooking the verdant green, comfortable and easy.
just sit and do nothing,
abandon thought and
wish worry away.
delete lists and
drop all agendas.
not imagine at all.
cancel purpose and
expunge all goals.
see what happens -
the whistling magpie,
the flit of the butterfly,
the flutter of doves,
the yellow marigolds,

the movement of leaves,
a hibiscus in full bloom,
the humming of bees,
the clouds overhead,
the fragrance of frangipani,
appear painted upon the inescapable screen of tranquility.
all is flawless.
an overwhelming aura of
quiet stillness
seems to come upon me-
unmasked and unaided,
talking, caressing, saying -
this is It – this is ‘**what I am**’ - intense and enigmatic,
touching the very core
of my Existence.
the ‘**who I am**’ retreats
into petty oblivion,
allowing all to be,
exactly as it is.
but alas!
the ‘**who I am**’
makes a u-turn -
bombarding,
jolting, rattling the cage.
yelling: “look at me,
acknowledge me,
listen to me,
let me run your life.”
I smile,
sigh, ignore it
and
try to abide in that
Self Knowledge that
I am totally free. ■

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The Essential Teachings of Sri Ramana

Michael James



Sri Ramana's teachings are actually very simple, and can therefore be expressed in just a few words, but our minds are complicated, so sometimes many words are necessary in order to unravel all our complex beliefs and ideas and to arrive at the simple core: 'I am'.

'I' is the core of our experience (since whatever we experience is experienced only by 'I'), and is also the core of his teachings. Everything that we experience could be an illusion, and everything that we believe could be mistaken, so it is necessary for us to doubt everything, but the only thing we cannot reasonably doubt is 'I am', because in order to experience anything, to believe anything or to doubt anything I must exist.

However, though it is clear and certain that I am, it is not at all clear or certain what I am, because we now experience a body and mind as 'I', yet we have good reason to doubt whether either this body or this mind is actually 'I'.

Though we now experience this body as 'I', in dream we experience some other (mind-created) body as 'I'. Therefore in dream we experience 'I' but we do not experience our waking body, so this body and 'I' cannot be identical. If this body was actually 'I', we could not experience 'I' when we do not experience this body.

In both waking and dream we experience our thinking mind as 'I', but in dreamless sleep we do not experience this mind at all. But though the

mind disappears in sleep, we are able to experience its absence then, so we must exist and be aware of our existence in sleep in order to experience the absence of the mind or anything else in that state.

Though we generally believe that we are not aware of anything in sleep, it would be more accurate to say that we are aware of nothing. The difference between what I mean here by ‘not being aware of anything’ and ‘being aware of nothing’ can be illustrated by the following analogy: if a totally blind person and a normally sighted person were both in a completely dark room, the blind person would not see anything, and hence he or she would not be able to recognise that there is no light there. The normally sighted person, on the other hand, would see nothing, and hence he or she would be able to recognise the absence of light. The fact that we are able to recognise the absence of any experience of anything other than ‘I’ in sleep clearly indicates that we exist in sleep to experience that absence or void.

The fact that we do actually experience sleep can also be demonstrated in other ways. For example, if we did not experience sleep, we would be aware of experiencing only two states, waking and dream, and we would not be

aware of any gap between each successive state of waking or dream. But we are aware that sometimes there is a gap that we call sleep, in which we experience neither waking nor dream. We do not merely infer the existence of this third state, sleep, but actually experience it, and that is why we are able to say after waking from a period of deep sleep: ‘I slept peacefully and had no dreams’.

Why it is important to understand that we do actually experience sleep, even though sleep is a state that is completely devoid of any knowledge of multiplicity or otherness, is that our experience of sleep illustrates the fact that we do experience ‘I’ in the absence of the mind. Therefore the mind cannot be what I actually am.

The only experience that exists in all these three states is ‘I am’. It is I who am now experiencing this waking state; it was I who experienced dream; and it was I who experienced the absence of both waking and dream in deep sleep. Therefore ‘I’ is distinct from anything else that we experience in any of these three states.

Once we have understood this, it should be clear to us that our present experience of ‘I’ is confused and unclear, because we now experience this transitory body and mind as ‘I’.

Therefore though we know for certain that I am, we do not know for certain what I am, and hence it is necessary for us to investigate this 'I' in order to ascertain what it actually is.

In order to experience 'I' as it actually is, we need to experience it clearly in complete isolation from everything else. And the only way to isolate 'I' is to focus our entire attention on it, thereby withdrawing our attention from everything else. This is the practice of *ātma-vicāra* (self-investigation), which Sri Ramana taught us as being the only means by which we can experience what this 'I' actually is (which is why he also called this practice 'investigating who am I').

This is the sum and substance of Sri Ramana's teachings, and is all that we need to understand in order

to start investigating what we actually are. However, people approach this teaching from different standpoints, and each person has their own pre-conceived ideas, beliefs and values, and they ask a wide variety of different questions, so this same teaching can be expressed in different ways to suit the needs of each person.

This is why so many words have been written and spoken by me and others on the teachings of Sri Ramana, but whatever may be written or said about them (provided of course that it does accurately represent what he actually taught), it should all focus on, lead back to and boil down to the simple and compelling need for each of us to investigate and experience what 'I' actually is. ■

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Talk 207

Deep sleep is only the state of non-duality. Can the difference between the individual and Universal souls persist there? Sleep implies forgetfulness of all differences: This alone constitutes happiness. See how carefully people prepare their beds to gain that happiness. Soft cushions, pillows and all the rest are meant to induce sound sleep, that is to say to end wakefulness. And yet the soft bed, etc., are of no use in the state of deep sleep itself. The implication is that all efforts are meant only to end ignorance. They have no use after realisation.

Extract from Maurice Frydman's poetry



I am at the end of the tether
and can't break the cord

All my going ahead
is a deceitful dream,

All my thinking not true,
all my feeling not pure,

All my doing not right,
all my living not clear.

I am tied to myself
by myself through myself,

The knot out of reach,
I am in your hands.

There is a Heart and a mind,
and a body and soul
Waiting for you.

You will come when you choose,
And whatever you like
you are welcome to do. ■

Source:

'Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi' – by Laxmi Narain – (Sri Ramana
Kendram, Hyderabad)

Advent Day Celebration

Marie Elangovan



Under the initiative of Shri Anuraag Sunder, Secretary, Ramana Kendra, Advent day was organized for devotees as an online event on 1st September. Several devotees joined the event via Zoom, receiving Bhagavan Ramana's grace through the darshan of his portrait, beautifully decorated with a garland and flower offerings. The familiar sight of our devout Manager Shri Narayanan performing puja before Bhagavan's shrine, evoked a familiar feeling of belonging to this sacred space at Ramana Kendra. The shrine's quietude was palpable, quickly invoking a meditative mood.

The session began with an introductory address by the Kendra's Vice-President Shri Vijay Vancheswar. He spoke of the importance to yearn for self-realisation as it was at the heart of Bhagavan's own experience. He explained the significance of Advent for all Ramana devotees, as it was on this day, in 1896, that Bhagavan Ramana set foot on Tiruvannamalai, the sacred abode of Lord Shiva. As a young lad, Venkatramana realised that his father was Lord Arunachala and following His divine will, he travelled to Tiruvannamalai and stayed there for 54 unbroken years till his Mahaparinirvana in 1950.

Shri Vancheswar provided thoughtful insights on how we could observe this special day. He said, 'To my mind, on this day we need to reinforce our faith, belief and practice in the words of Shri Bhagavan Ramana, keeping our attention centered on the Self. We all know the difference between a home and

a house. In the phenomenal world, what we call home is our own house but in the context of Bhagavan Ramana, our real home is within us, the most sacred place of our Being'. Bhagavan's Tamil words for this are: 'Vandha Vazhiyileye Thirumbhipo' which means: 'Retrace your path from the path you came from' or simply put, 'Go back to the place where you came from'. This place can be referred to as 'Svasthana', the place which gives tranquility and peace. Reiterating the spiritual significance of Advent Day, Shri Vancheswar concluded: 'On this day, it's important to remember that our duty in life is to focus and look within and understand who we are. We need to investigate, experience and dwell within to remain united with who we really are, thereby getting over the duality of happiness and sorrow'.



Swami Prabhudhanandaji spoke next, sharing his spiritual guidance and thoughts that have always been uplifting to devotees. He began by saying: 'Advent Day, in my view means, when the divinity appeared on Earth in the form of Bhagavan Ramana. Although Bhagavan Ramana was born in a Brahmin family, he was free of the caste system. Therefore, he was unaffected by the sociological system not divine in essence as 'created by men'.

Added Swamiji 'We are divine, we are the Truth. To those expressing their desire to see him, Bhagavan used to say: Whatever you see, without knowing yourself, is invalid. First, look into yourself. In order to understand yourself,

you need to discern between the Self and the non-self, the conscious identity of the Self and the form, the non-self’.

Swamiji concluded his brief address by extolling the virtues of a good human being as exemplified by Bhagavan Ramana. Bhagavan worshipped as ‘Puru-shottamaya Namah’, the last name given to Bhagavan in Ramana Ashtotaram, meaning ‘The Supreme Person’. Swamiji explained the two qualities needed to be a good human being: To be capable of peaceful interaction with people and to have the wisdom for inner peace.

The function continued with the rendering of a soulful bhajan composed by the great Ramana devotee, Mahalakshmi Suryanandan in praise of Bhagavan Ramana, and sung with devotion by senior devotee and classical singer, Smt. Jayanthy Aiyer. The song’s lyrics included these words: ‘The illusion that I am the body must go. Investigate ‘I am not the body’. How to get liberation? How to attain the lotus feet of Ramana? How not to get rebirth? Please Bhagavan, guide us’. Following this musical offering, Smt. Jayanthy chanted the first fourteen verses of Aksharamanamalai.

An old Tamil saying states: ‘To see Chidambaram, to be born in Tiruvarur, to die in Benaras or even to think of Arunachala is to be assured of Liberation’. Calling Arunachala the spiritual Heart of the world, Bhagavan wrote, in the first verse of Aksharamanamalai: ‘Oh Arunachala, you root out the ego of those who think Arunachalam in the heart.’

The Advent Day Celebration ended with the traditional *arti* after which devotees were invited to meditate on Bhagavan’s radiant portrait till the session lasted. ■

[e-mail: marie.elangovan@gmail.com]

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M.: To imagine *Muladhara* at the bottom, the Heart at the centre, or the head at the top or over all these, is all wrong. In one word, *to think is not your real nature.*

Letters to the Editor



We have started this new segment, Letters to the Editor with the aim of relating more closely with our readers. We would truly welcome feedback and suggestions. These should be sent directly to the Editor: editor.dp@rkdelhi.org with the subject line: ‘Letters to the Editor’

Dear Editor,

I wish to express my appreciation for introducing a sense of friendship into the Direct Path since you have taken over. This is significantly due to the personal explorations generously shared in your editorial pieces.

Some articles also share contemporary journeys on the path and convey a feeling of friendship and bonding among those attracted to Sri Ramana. Others explore different forms of sadhana, often of people no longer with us, which still communicate a freshness and immediacy. One outstanding piece that immediately comes to mind is Sharada Bhanu's Sundarar (issue May-July, 2020), one of the Shaivite saints extolled by Bhagavan; recounted poetically and playfully while also being deeply philosophical.

The restrained yet appropriate choice of illustrations adds to the appeal of the publication.

Another feature that I truly appreciate and now miss is the synopsis of the lectures and weekly

satsangs. These served as reminders for attendees, and summarised points for those unable to attend. During this time of social distancing, this online Direct Path feels like a blessed lifeline.

--Bharati Mirchandani

[Response to the issue May-July 2020.”]

Dear Editor,

I read the article, “Meditation and Addiction” in Direct path (Feb-April, 2020 issue) by Neera Kashyap. It's really encouraging for me to continue meditation as the article cleared some fog of confusion in my mind.

Thanks a lot to you and the magazine.

K. A. Singh

[Response to the article ‘Meditation and addiction’ by Neera Kashyap published in the issue Feb-April 2020.”]

Dear Editor,

I thoroughly enjoyed your editorial on meditation. I had no idea that meditation stimulates the left brain or that it is the happy side of the brain.

I felt you were right in emphasizing that spiritual results may take time, though some benefits may materialise quickly. Thank you for enriching my understanding. A very good editorial and the manner in which it has been conveyed. Also, a good selection of articles.

Sharada Mahalingam

[Response to the article ‘Meditation benefits: a practical discussion’ by Swagat Patnaik published in the issue May-July 2020.”]

Nice article this time in Direct Path. Nice selection. Very good editorial and way it has been conveyed. Keep it up. God bless you.

Mahalingam

[Response to the issue May-July 2020.”]

To the Editor,

Bharati Mirchandani's article, Darkness in the Time of Light ..(May-July 2020 issue) is an original view of looking into darkness for light. It was strikingly well exemplified through examples that were personal, from science, from the Masters and from energy cycles of sattva, rajas and tamas.

- *Neera Kashyap*

[Response to the article ‘Darkness in the time of light’ by Bharati Mirchandani published in the issue May-July 2020.”]

Dear Swagat,

I was re-reading the last issue of DP and I saw the statement that JJ had held a talk at Delhi Kendra. My interest was piqued and as I scrolled down, I saw Bharati Mirchandani's illuminating summary. Thanks again.

I went back to her piece on 'Darkness in the Time of Light' and found it deeply moving. What an interesting counterpoint to the article on Light by Geetha Ravichandran. I loved the way Bharati had skillfully walked away from the binary concept that darkness is the opposite of light, and always negative while light is understood as always positive. Instead she posits a much more subtle vision where the dark is the hidden fullness from which light emerges. I felt the essay communicates a gritty courage, puts forward the wisdom of an artist and someone who loves life, and lives and loves with joy.

I liked all the little excerpts from Bhagavan that are used in the issue. They are not very well- known and merit your highlighting.

Warm regards,
Sharada Bhanu

[Response to the article ‘Darkness in the time of light’ by Bharati Mirchandani published in the issue May-July 2020.”]

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*The results of Karma (Action) pass away,
and yet leave seeds that cast the agent
into an ocean of Karma.
Karma yields no salvation*

Ramana Maharshi {Upadesa Saram (2)}

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**“When the mind turns away from the objects, it beholds
its source, consciousness. This is Self-abidance.”**

Ramana Maharshi (Upadesa Saram-16)

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