

DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA
DELHI

November 2022 - January 2023

Vol. XXIV, No. 4

*"Eventually, all that one has learnt will have
to be forgotten."*

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi



65. Om sukumaraya namah

Comely Son, Muruga, ever fresh, ever fair, ever
fragrant, ever young.

66. Om sadanandaya namah

One whose bliss is perpetually renewed.

67. Om mrdu bhasine namah

One whose speech is sweet and gentle.





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

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Call for Articles

As the journal depends on articles from volunteer writers, we 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 longer format (around 2300 words). Please send in your contributions through e-mail to editor.dp@rkdelhi.org

We look forward to hearing from you!

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Birth! Birth?

Advait Shrivastav



On 31 December 1879, Thomas Alva Edison showcased incandescent lighting to the masses. A landmark indeed, in the history of the world but this was not the only luminous phenomenon to happen this year, this month, this week. One day before, on 30 December, in the south of an enslaved country, the Light took a human form to dispel sorrow and ignorance.

Human beings are born every day. Great saints are not. They are born in a specific age for a specific purpose. For example, many saint-poets adorned medieval India and infused the country with devotion even amidst the tumultuous political and social upheavals of those times. Many had come before them, many came after them. Each one of them had a special purpose. Ramana

Maharshi was one of them.

The twentieth century was very different from the preceding late nineteenth. When Maharshi was born, the world saw an increasing shift from rural to urban landscapes. Machines were replacing arms and legs. Kings and queens now made way for presidents and prime ministers. Doubt challenged faith. Spiritual belief was filtered through the spectacles of science and technology. A new credence in rationality lived side by side with naive superstition and ignorance.

Maharshi's birth brought unique benefits to the age in which he lived. The spiritual wealth of India lay concealed in mystic texts accessed only by a few. In 1920, Sudhei Babu rightly said to Paul Brunton, "The time will come before long when the ancient philosophies and inner knowledge of India shall unite

with the practical sciences of the West. The secrecy of past times must give way to the needs of this century. I am glad that all this will happen.”¹

Maharshi revealed the Truth in a manner both simple and profound, both rational and consistent with ancient scriptures. Bhagavan’s birth brought about a spiritual revolution and His silence and the power of His presence were even more effective than his speech. His devotees included people from multiple professions and nationalities: the rich, powerful and learned as well as the simple and unlettered.

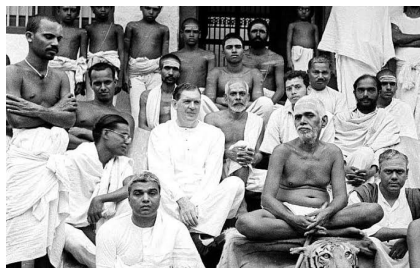
Through the path of *vichara*, self-enquiry, Maharshi gave seekers a simple, yet effective method to experience Self-realization. Scholarly knowledge and other prerequisites were not required to tread on this path. He made available to everyone the spiritual truth that the individual soul is not different from the One eternal Self. This Self is ever present so it is not something that can be

attained. When the wrong identification with the body is renounced, the ego is struck down and That which is always there, shines forth. Bhagavan’s birth paradoxically, led many egos to their deaths!

The blessed birth of Maharshi has gathered many to the holy land of Tiruvannamalai. The motionless hill of Arunachala has witnessed the circumambulation of millions from all corners of the world.

This month, those of us who have been drawn to the feet of this great Sat-guru celebrate, with renewed wonder and joy, the great gift of Bhagavan’s birth and life. He was manifest in human form for seventy years and blessed in that shape those fortunate enough to receive his darshan. But many, who have seen only his photograph or a dream vision or merely heard of his name, have reported the same transfiguring grace and responded to the reality of his protection and inner guidance at Ramanasramam and elsewhere. As his devotees, we remember that He was ever one with the Self and the terms ‘birth’ and ‘death’ cannot be applied to him. Ever living presence, He is our own beloved Self and the Reality within which we live. ■

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¹ Twelfth chapter of *A Search in Secret India*, written by Paul Brunton, published by Rider.

Bhagavan's Advent Day and the Kendra's foundation day were celebrated with talks and music.

Michael James and Sri Raghav Kumar rendered deep discourses which were hosted online by the Kendra. The recordings of all these wisdom laden lectures are available at Ramana Kendra, Delhi's YouTube channel.

Important events (from Bhagavan's time) falling in the current issue (November 2022 - January 2023) are as follows:

- Annamalaiswami Day: 9th November
- Karthigai Festival commences: 27th November
- Maha Deepam: 6th December
- Bhagavan's 143rd Jayanthi (Gregorian): 30th December
- Lucy Ma Day: 31st December
- Bhagavan's 143rd Jayanthi (Vedic): 07th January

A visitor: Should I give up my business and take to reading books on Vedanta?

Bhagavan: If the objects have an independent existence, i.e., if they exist anywhere apart from you, then it may be possible for you to go away from them. But they don't exist apart from you; they owe their existence to you, your thought. So, where can you go, to escape them? As for reading books on Vedanta, you may go on reading any number of them. They can only tell you, 'Realise the Self within you'. The Self cannot be found in books. You have to find it out for yourself, in yourself.

In the afternoon G.V.S. asked, "What is the difference between *manasajapa* and *dhyana*?"

Bhagavan: They are the same. In both, the mind is concentrated on one thing, the mantra or the Self. *Mantra, japa, dhyana* — are only different names. So long as they require effort we call them by these names, but when the Self is realized this goes on without any effort and what was the means becomes the goal.

Undulating Nature of Life – A Non-Negotiable

Prof. Vijay Vancheswar



The phenomenal world expresses itself through uncertainty, turbulence, and chaos interspersed with doses of pleasantness and happy occurrences. As we stay immersed in this we suffer since we seek permanence in impermanence. Much as we long for it, this is next to impossible. Consequently, we go through this cyclical existence, affected by events and deeds: many of which strike us unannounced. This could be in the form of the death of a near and dear one, the affliction of a disease, the betrayal of well trusted people, or the financial and psychological trauma experienced due to trying circumstances.

How then does one maintain a balance amidst such outbursts that impact us out of the blue? Spiritual texts rein-

force the fact of the impermanence of what we as mortals experience. Sri Ramana mentions that while happiness is our birth right and true nature, we mistakenly seek it in the external world. The solution given is to seek our true state through an inner quest and by non-identification with what happens to us and around us. Indeed, great souls like Sri Ramana have lived by this and given us a proof that this state is difficult but doable. Nonetheless, most of us are unable to demonstrate this resoluteness and strength of mind, when tested. Perhaps it is nature's way akin to the burnishing of gold in fire, to refine it. The process does appear very daunting and many times unfair. Take the case of innocent children dying of hunger or unnatural deaths of young or promising individuals. The impact and

effects of these are magnified when it affects those who are near and dear to us. Sri Ramana's analogy is that it affects us so long as we identify the people as mine. He illustrates this with a person crying out that he has lost his child, only to awaken and find that it is only a dream or a situation where one mistakenly identifies someone else's loss as one's own. But this throws up a paradox – an implication that innately we are all self-centred, affected deeply when things impact us directly; and markedly different when it happens outside our circle of concern or influence. This is the practical situation that we largely encounter.

Rationalising after reading spiritual texts and messages of saints can downplay the intensity of the occurrence to a certain extent; not fully. And yet, we do find some individuals who are better able to handle crisis and mishaps. What is it that distinguishes them from the milieu? The one thing that is deeply imbedded in 'responsible' people who are least affected by what happens to them personally and to those around them is a firm and absolute conviction that they as individuals and others around them are not the doers of deeds. The word 'responsible' is important, as irresponsible and insensitive individuals can also be least concerned with the

happenings to themselves or others. For instance, a drunkard or a person of unsound mind would neither care or be affected by the events he or she experiences or witnesses! Such individuals live an 'animal life' so to say – very much in the moment but without the least of awareness about the pursuit or goal of life – to make it fulfilling and worthwhile by pursuing latent and higher order demands of human existence. This would include sincere spiritual keenness and an earnestness to go beyond the mundane routine of daily living. The ability to not only intellectually accept but live by the truths of spiritual teachings demands the strength of unconditional surrender and the absence of the sense of individual volition or control. We observe that this is a very rare quality found among few. To fully acknowledge and live by the dictum of Lord Buddha (purportedly in the Lanka Sutra) that 'Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual doer of any deed' demands a rare quality and gift to be a perpetual witness to what happens around oneself. This non-action is again different from inaction as inaction is just not feasible. By our very nature we are compelled to act. Ramana Maharshi had at different times highlighted the inconsequential role of '*kartutva*' (sense of individuality

and doership). Said He, “The purpose of one’s life will be fulfilled whether you will it or not. Let the purpose fulfil itself.” Arthur Schopenhauer (the German philosopher) maintained that as phenomenal objects appearing to a viewer, humans have absolutely no freewill. They are completely determined by the way that their characters react to motives. He has famously said, “A man can do what he wants, but he cannot will what he will.” For example, if one wills one can give everything one has to the poor and thus become poor oneself! But according to Schopenhauer one cannot will this, because the opposing motives have much too much power over the individual for the person to be able to do it. On the other hand, if an individual has a different character, even to the extent of being a saint, then he would be able to will it. Despite this, one cannot help from willing something! This underscores the significant role played by one’s genes and conditioning (both of which are primarily imposed on an individual). For instance, we do not choose our parents or the social condition in which we are born and many of the environmental orientation that we are subjected to. Not surprisingly, we find markedly different characteristics exhibited in terms of temperament and inclinations amongst children of

same parents brought up in similar environment.

This seems extremely difficult for us to digest as we are steeped in the strength of one’s volition and control to manage and address life’s complex and compelling circumstances and challenges. For life to go on, we are compelled to believe that we have the freedom to change its course. This indeed is the cornerstone of hope, aspiration, and accomplishments in the phenomenal world. How many of us honestly are able to, without an iota of doubt, accept Maharshi’s words (as quoted by Devaraja Mudaliar in his book ‘Gems from Bhagavan’) that, “Success or failure in life is not due to hard work, it is due to *prarabdha* karma.” Most will try to reconstruct and interpret this firm statement to suit what he or she wants it to mean. It is for this reason that Sri Ramana mostly advocated silence. Discussions, he said, would lead to needless diatribe and arguments. Devaraja Mudaliar mentions that often Ramana quoted Saint Thayumanavar. One of the quotes he has referred to is with respect to the vexatious topic of freewill: “This subject (absence of freewill) should not be discussed. Those who are incapable of digesting this will never accept it, even if we speak about it, needless arguments will result, the

wise do not need any convincing; hence it is best to remain silent.”

Suffice to abide by the wise counsel of the German theologian, Eckhart Meister, “In life act as if you have freewill, knowing fully well that what

happens is never ever in your hands, things unfold as per a cosmic plan. All one can do is marvel at the mysteries and wonders of creation.” ■

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Bhargava: What is awareness and how can one obtain and cultivate it?

Bhagavan: You are awareness. Awareness is another name for you. Since you are awareness there is no need to attain or cultivate it.

This was obviously a bit too much for Bhargava and he was wondering how it was an answer to his question, but Bhagavan came to his help by adding: “All that you have to do is to give up being aware of other things, that is of the not-Self. If one gives up being aware of them then pure awareness alone remains, and that is the Self.”

Talk 604.

A certain lady was singing a devotional song. It said among other things:

“Thou art my father,

Thou art my mother,

Thou art my relations,

My possessions and all,” and so on.

Sri Bhagavan remarked with a smile, “Yes, Yes, Thou art this, that and everything except ‘I’. Why not say ‘I am Thou’ and finish it?”

Talk 590.

Two ladies, one Swiss and the other French, visited Maharshi. The younger of the ladies asked several questions, of which the most important was: “Brahman is the same as *jiva*. If the *jiva* be under illusion it amounts to saying that Brahman is under illusion. How is that possible?”

M.: If Brahman be under illusion and wants disillusionment let Him raise the question.

Remembering Mani Anna

Neera Kashyap



My first recollection of Mani Anna is during one of my early trips to Ramanasramam in the early 2000s. As a part of the Delhi Ramana Kendra, I was asked by our then Secretary, Shri N.V. Krishnan to start contributing articles to our bi-monthly journal, *Direct Path*. It was during a visit to the Patala linga shrine in the Arunachaleshwara temple, where Bhagavan spent the first eighteen months of his life in Tiruvannamalai that the idea came of writing about some of the places that Bhagavan lived in before he moved to Skanda ashram. Mani Anna liked the idea, and introduced me to a long-time devotee-resident of Tiruvannamalai, who helped me with information and logistics. So I visited Gurumurtham, a small temple on the town's outskirts,

Pavalakundru, a small shrine located on a rocky outcrop, and Arayaninallur Temple near Tirukkivilur, about 35 kms away from Tiruvannamalai.

Since Mani Anna knew me as a part of the Delhi Kendra, his engagement was one of interest and helpfulness in the Kendra's developments, its outreach and activities. It was only when he and his wife, Ramani di visited the Delhi Kendra about six years ago, that the relationship became more personal. He was visiting Delhi after some 20 years, and we were honoured to have them among us one October evening. Thereafter, they proceeded to visit Adarsh Bhatiani (currently the Kendra's Vice President and Treasurer) and his wife, Lekha – inter-generational family devotees – in their second home in Rishikesh. Brahmasri

Nochur Venkataraman was holding a 5-day long satsang there in those days, so I also seized this opportunity to be at Rishikesh. It was over a gracious lunch hosted by the Bhatianis in their apartment overlooking the coursing Ganga, that we felt a kinship, reinforced by our attendance together of Sri Nochur's satsangs, held in town on a covered deck just above the Ganga.

Though in previous years I had often seen Mani Anna and Ramani di take their evening walks in the lanes and grounds opposite the ashram before the Tamil Parayana, it was only after their Rishikesh visit that I began to see them as a single unit – her trust in him, his solicitousness towards her, subtly manifest. On occasions, when Ramani di was missing during the evening Parayana, and I would ask after her health, she would laugh over her infirmities, referring to them as ‘her many children with whom she must live!’ One January, I stood alone with her after the puja and offerings had been made at Ramaswami Pillai's shrine on the day of his Aradhana. We waited for an auto rickshaw that had been booked, and would take her to a pathology lab for blood tests. It was here that she spoke of how she could express pain, physical pain when it became difficult to bear. But not Mani Anna. “He endures, endures it all. He

will carry on work as if there was no pain.” This made me think of Mani Anna's inspiration for this when he spoke of Bhagavan's great endurance of physical pain.

In a video interview to Dr. Sarada Natarajan, President, Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bengaluru, in January 2022 (released this September on Advent Day), Mani Anna expressed how moved he had felt when he met Dr Raghavachari, the surgeon who did Bhagavan's final surgery on his arm. Bhagavan had refused amputation and general anaesthesia but allowed local anaesthesia. Having conducted innumerable surgeries, Dr Raghavachari's impression of Bhagavan's response was one of amazement: that a human being could transcend pain and suffering was a revelation. There was no change of expression. He looked as if he looked at eternity. Mani Anna also spoke of Bhagavan's other plaguing ailments which he bore with ease: eczema, stomach ailments, asthma.

In a tribute to his father documented in Arunachala Ashram's Sept-Oct 2022 issue of the newsletter, ‘The Maharshi’, Mani Anna's son, Ramanan spoke of his father's indefatigable stamina for ashram work spanning 11 to 12 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. “This persistent

dedication to serving the ashram and the devotees was the very core of his being,” he said.

When Ramani di mounted the auto rickshaw and waved goodbye, little did I know that I would not see her again. Her passing came as a shock, in itself and also on behalf of Mani Anna. I was in Ramanasramam when I heard he had just returned from a visit to his son in the US following Ramani di’s passing. He and his daughter were doing a *pradakshina* of the temple complex when I met them. I could only join my hands and bow. His smile remained the same: warm, glad, natural. Later when we were able to speak about grief, it was of the necessity to allow grief its full emergence and then, through enquiry, returning it to its source. Else, like glass splinters, grief would continue to spurt up and hurt in small unknown ways. His smile remained the same: warm, glad, natural – with the added sense of an absorption of empathy conveyed.

Mani Anna continued to help institutionally. We needed a priest in Delhi who could follow the Ramanasramam puja traditions for Bhagavan’s special occasions. He arranged for me to meet the head priest of the Veda Pathshala from whom I got the contact details of Ramanasramam-trained priests

who had re-located to Delhi. He also arranged for me to meet Sri Raghav Kumar who was addressing the Delhi Kendra devotees through online satsangs, and was an already familiar and well-regarded figure.

Mani Anna had a special feeling for old devotees. He could quote letter and spirit their interactions with Bhagavan. A writer friend, Gita Vishwanath had requested me to trace some written material on her uncle, Ramaswami, who had once been a professor of biochemistry at Madras Medical College but had given it all up at the feet of Bhagavan, living thereafter on a cement bench for over 40 years for which he came to be called Tinnai Swami. Mani Anna had the material traced to an article in Mountain Path written by Michael James. The link was soon delivered to me on WhatsApp. Meanwhile, Mani Anna recalled the story for my benefit.

It was Ramaswami’s fourth visit to Tiruvannamalai – a longish stay towards the end of which he sent his pregnant wife and three children to his father-in-law’s home. He came to Bhagavan to seek his permission to leave so he could apply for a job in Pondicherry. Bhagavan replied, ‘Iru’, a Tamil word which literally means ‘Be’, but in this context could

be taken to mean ‘Stay’. This single word had such a profound impact on Tinnai Swami that he simply stayed and never left Tiruvannamalai till his passing in 2003. Mani Anna’s parting shot: “Tell your friend Gita to come here to pay her respects to her sage uncle, Tinnai Swami.”

Another friend Chitra Gopalakrishnan sent me an article on her aunt titled, ‘The first playback voice of Tamil cinema’. The voice turned out to be Lalitha Venkatram’s. I quote from this article written by Krishnan Sriram in ‘The Verandah Club’: “Having grown up in Tiruvannamalai where her engineer-father Manavasi V. Ramaswamy Iyer was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, she had the good fortune of receiving the saint’s blessings and love in no small measure. There’s an interesting account of how a white peacock gifted to the Maharshi by the Baroda royals used to dance when she played the song, *Adu Mayile* composed by her father on the *Veena* in the ashram. When she had finished playing, the peacock came and pecked at the *Veena* strings. This prompted the saint to exclaim that the bird wanted her to continue playing. ‘We’ve all been transported to *gandharva loka*’, the sage remarked. Her rendering of her

father’s compositions in praise of Ramana Maharshi became very popular, in particular the song, ‘Sharanagati’, so much so that her father began to be called ‘Sharanagati Thatha’, and to this day it’s on the lips of many a Ramana devotee.”

Mani Anna responded to this article through this WhatsApp message, referring to Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer as Thatha: “Ramaswamy Thatha loved my mother. He used to be fond of all of us as children, often teaching Carnatic music to my sisters. My late wife Ramani had great love and respect for him. Once we had gone further south, perhaps for *bhoomi* puja for Muruganar Mandiram at Ramanaapuram. On our return journey by car, we passed through Manavasi village. It was noon, the sun was blazing. Still Ramani insisted on seeing the small Ganesha temple worshipped by Thatha.”

Mani Anna’s response to contemporary devotees was also one of kindness and solicitude. He drew people to him with his social skills and management efficiency. In an article in the Sept-Oct 2022 issue of ‘The Maharshi’, Marye Tonnaire who knew Mani Anna for nearly 40 years and refers to him as her elder brother writes: “What is amazing about Mani

Anna is that everyone he touched felt that they were extra special in his eyes.” She concludes with these words, “We speak a lot about Mani Anna’s seva and his bhakti, but there was also a profound meditative side to him which was discreet, in keeping with his humility and deep reverence for Bhagavan.” In his video interview to Sarada, when probed about the prac-

tise of self-enquiry, he was quiet and said simply, “I don’t put any time aside for self-enquiry. It is simply a part of my household, a part of me.” My last memory is of him carrying back from the meditation hall an orange mat, which he held folded in his hands as he chatted to various people en route to his office chair. ■

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Talk 563.

A group of people came on a visit to Sri Bhagavan. One of them asked: “How can I keep my mind aright?”

M.: A refractory bull is lured to the stall by means of grass. Similarly the mind must be lured by good thoughts.

D.: But it does not remain steady.

M.: The bull accustomed to stray takes delight in going astray. However he must be lured with luscious grass to the stall. Even so he will continue to trespass into the neighbour’s fields. He must gradually be made to realise that the same kind of good grass can be had in his own place. After a time he will remain in the stall without straying. Later a time will come when, even if driven out of the stall, he will return to the stall without going into the neighbouring fields. So also the mind must be trained to take to right ways. It will gradually grow accustomed to good ways and will not return to wrong ways.

D.: What are the good ways to be shown to the mind?

M.: Thought of God.

Reminiscences of Mani Anna

Prof. Vijay Vancheswar



Mani Anna, as we affectionately and reverentially called him, combined the two qualities of compassion and efficiency. In fact, the first thing that struck me when I met him during the late nineties-early 2000 period was his ability to relate to people and the ability to get to the root of an issue and solve it with the preciseness of a project manager. Perhaps his career as a Project Engineer with ACC, the Indian cement manufacturing major, helped him apply these skills in the administrative matters and challenges that confronted Ramanasramam.

I recall sometime during the late nineties when my wife Annapurna and I discussed the management of environmental issues at the ashram. Annapurna's work centered on issues

of environment. Mani Anna took time out and showed us how the ashram was implementing environment conservation measures through use of solar lighting, good waste management practices, and the internal sourcing and management of the *goshala* for meeting the daily needs of milk for the ashram. One could sense the dedication and involvement of Mani Anna to make sure that the ashram's affairs were handled efficiently and professionally.

Interestingly, while reading one of the old issues of Mountain Path, I chanced on a remark made by Bhagavan about Mani Anna (he must have been three or four years old then!). Bhagavan had remarked in Tamil, "*Payyan* (little fella) *rombo chiduk nu irukane* (is very sprightly; *chiduk*

in Tamil means sprightly). Indeed, as always, Bhagavan was so perceptive. Till the very end Mani Anna displayed a sense of purpose and focus – qualities so essential for managing the day to day demands both internally and outside of Sri Ramanasramam.

In later years, in fact as recent as just a few months back, when I visited the ashram from Coimbatore (where I have a base), he took pains to connect me with devotees in Coimbatore and suggested that we should activate the working of a Ramana centre in Coimbatore. Perhaps with Bhagavan's blessings this wish of his would fruc-

tify over time, sooner than later.

Mani Anna showed an equal interest and involvement in ensuring that the needs and support for the Delhi Kendra and its members were readily available

In his passing away, the Delhi Kendra, its members as well as the many devotees of Bhagavan, who have met and interacted with him, will miss his reassuring presence, timely counsel and wise guidance. May Bhagavan give strength to his near and dear ones to bear his loss and peace to his soul. ■

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Janaki, daughter of Mr. A. Subbarayadu, the Deputy Superintendent of Police of this place, asked Bhagavan, "I want to do *nama smarana* always. But I am also keen on getting higher education. (She is in the first year College class). What should I do?"

Bhagavan: There is nothing contradictory between the two desires.

Janaki: If I am always doing *nama smarana*, how can I carry on studies for which the mind is required?

Bhagavan did not answer. But Frydman and I told the girl, "It was said both could be done at the same time." Frydman added, "Give the mind to studies and the heart to God."

Talk 19

Mr. Grant Duff asked: Where are memory and forgetfulness located?

M.: In the mind (*chitta*).

Names and News

Sharada Bhanu



Prakash Bhogle finished his tea and looked at the clock. Four in the afternoon. Yes, it was an appropriate time. He could call Mrs. Mahajan. They had both worked for the State Government in the same office but in different departments and had never been even moderately friendly before their retirement when they discovered for the first time that they would retire in the same month. They had little in common, but struck up a quiet association of convenience that year and processed pension papers, made visits to government offices, and traded information together. He was usually the better informed. She drove a car and would drop him home.

Ten years had gone by since then. He now lived alone, with his only son

settled in Melbourne. Vanaja Mahajan lived with her husband, father-in-law, son and his wife and grandchild. They met very rarely but rang each other now and then, exchanging news, general as well as familial. She no more than glanced at the headlines but followed national TV channels and MSN with interest. He watched the regional language TV channels and read every page of the newspaper with care. Prakash reflected on the day, months ago, when his choice of topic hadn't gone down too well. "This man had an old mother sick with Covid. He packed her in the car and dumped her at the door of his sister and ran. She refused to take the old woman in either and she died in the street."

"How dreadful, Mr. Bhogle. Where did you get this? Was it a forward on

WhatsApp?”

“No, no. Saw it in the newspaper.”

“It’s completely ghastly, I won’t sleep tonight thinking of it. Can’t you find some good news for a change. Tell me something cheerful. Is your son well? And Ruchika and the children?”

“Well, he rings only once a week, but yes, they are all well. Australia escaped the worst of covid.”

“That’s good, isn’t it? Now you just keep giving me news like that each time. Select out the miserable stuff.”

“Madam, that is the reality after all. When millions have died and the economy is hard hit, I will have to manufacture this good news that you want. And it is definitely illegal to circulate fake news.”

“Useless too, Mr. Bhogle! Only the true is good enough.”

But since then, it had become a little game with them, to find something pleasurable to communicate. A pill to build some resistance against the vicissitudes of life. Against the fear, loneliness, and boredom. The hardship when her son lost his job, and he could not tenant his flat; when his niece died and her father recovered but ran up an eleven-lakh hospital bill. Against the darkness of a world where bodies had been loaded onto the rivers

and corpses set fire in car parks. A time which they hoped had now ended.

Today he was primed. “Ah, Mrs. Mahajan, I have something good to share, in fact two items.”

“That’s marvelous, come now, out with it.”

“Yes, good news at last. We will get our DA.”

“Ah, nice. My father-in-law noticed it too and told me this morning. It will come in handy. Luckily Vasanth is now back at work. My domestic help has been hard hit, she lost two of the houses she worked in. I can raise her salary.”

“Of course, that is the drawback of being a government employee. People always know when we get a small raise and hold out their hands.”

“Well, I feel we are really lucky. We have had a secure income to fall back on through covid and now, threats of recession. Unlike the waiters in the hotel where my son was working, who were all sacked two years ago. And unlike my poor Sandhya.”

“I thought your daughter- in law is called Naina?”

“Yes, that’s right. Sandhya is my domestic help. Naina is all right. She doesn’t earn much but teaches special needs children and her work is not

likely to vanish. But what's the second bit of good news?"

"This one is personal. You remember I told you I had a plot of land which I have been trying to sell? At last I have a buyer and one who is willing to pay in white."

"Congratulations! How wonderful. So many years..."

"There is still work, but my agent assures me this will go through. I have all along been very nervous. Now Mrs. Mahajan, it's your turn. What are you going to tell me?"

"Let's see. Talking of a plot of land, I saw this really inspiring news today. There's an old woman called something Chodri who owned some agricultural land in a Karnataka village. She had lost her husband and had no children. She donated half the land so the village children could have a school and then the other half also when the school needed a playground. She works as a cook at the midday meal scheme in the same school. The land is worth a crore. She says she doesn't need the money and is happy feeding 300 children who call her 'Aiji' grandma."

Prakash felt indifferent. "You cannot believe everything you read, especially on social media. They will say anything for a thrill."

"I mentioned it because I wondered whether you wouldn't like to do the same, that is, donate it. I mean you have done without any returns for so many years now, you may not miss it. And at least, well perhaps you would be spared the worry of dealing with the problem anymore."

Prakash was incredulous. Only a complete fool would suggest such a thing, he thought. "Madam, the land is valuable. And I have a son, after all." But even as he spoke, he wondered, whether his son would care. Certainly, he had no current plans to live in India and use it.

And there they dropped the matter. He hastened to finalize the deal, settling at a price that was, he felt, lower than its worth. He would feel safer once it was out of his hands. When it was done, he felt a huge relief and accepted the congratulations of his agent. "You are a lucky man, sir. You should do a special prayer at your family temple. And maybe make a donation. You will save on tax." Prakash felt he could afford to spend some portion of his new wealth. Already the money was worrying him, and the thought of the tax was an added burden. He remembered Vanaja Mahajan and made a call that evening. "Yes, Naina works for an NGO that runs this school. You can speak to her."

He met the daughter-in-law, a cheerful young woman. The institution needed some furniture, equipment and learning aids and he agreed to finance. He was invited to the school when the items were installed and after some hesitation, he agreed. The experience was as bad as he had feared. He felt overwhelmed by the sight of these children. Their faces, their bodies, their gaze. Down's syndrome, autism, multiple sclerosis, ADD, these were hazy names and had been very peripheral in his consciousness. How much was education going to do for these children? Would they ever be able to function? Independence might be a never-accessed dream. How did the parents cope? They saw these faces every day. Were they in permanent depression? Who would look after these children when they grew up?

He went home shaken and humbled. That weekend he connected with his grandchildren on a video call and felt a profound gratitude. They were normal. He would never go to that school again. That daughter-in-law, that girl Naina, must be remarkable. But he kept thinking about the children. The rest happened almost by accident or so he told himself. He found that when the bills were paid, he had not quite spent what he had set aside and he rang again to ask whether

he could buy clothes, anything useful. Naina laughed. "How about some toys?"

Toys. He considered. "What kind would be suitable?"

"Very sturdy. Safe surfaces and colours. That would mean expensive toys of good quality." He spent time, researched, and selected five sturdy items. A truck, a doll, a train, an 'engineer' set, a kitchen set. He decided they could each choose one so he bought many more than he needed, thinking he could return the ones that were left. He had thought that he would never revisit this school. But he found he wanted to hand over the toys. Vanaja offered to pick him up and his toys and accompany him to the class. Nothing happened as he expected. Most children couldn't choose. Some wanted all. One little boy ignored all except the doll. A little girl peacefully lined all the vessels of the kitchen set in a row. Another used the plastic pliers of the engineer set and pulled apart a discarded doll and then wanted it put together. Prakash wandered around bemused and finally settled down beside a boy and his train. He asked him his name, but the child did not look up. "He's Surya," Naina called out. Surya seemed wordless, but utterly content as he pushed his engine along, reached the wall

and ran it back and forth endlessly till Prakash, responding to Naina's signal, detached him and they returned to attaching the carriages. It was more than an hour later when Vanaja came up and asked him whether he would stay on or leave with her. "I'm coming," he said and got off the floor, startled to note the time. He was moving away when he found Surya was holding on to his trousers. He looked down and the boy met his gaze for the fraction of a second and said, quite clearly, "I like you..."

He sat beside Vanaja in the car and found he had nothing to say. He had no names for most of his emotions and would have been hard pressed to recognize, let alone articulate this awareness. These children...special

needs...No, they were just special. Just children. And when the heart expands to include children, one is specially fortunate. Vanaja turned to him and asked twinkling, "What's the good news?"

"What? Oh, news." Prakash reflected, searching. "I won't have to go back to the store to return the extra toys." She burst out laughing. "Were you really expecting to do that? Too bad. Is that what you were brooding about?"

"No, actually I wanted to ask you something. That woman you told me about some time back, the one who donated her land. What was her name?" ■

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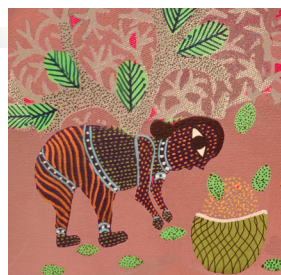
An elderly gentleman and a young man were sitting in front of Bhagavan. A little before Bhagavan was about to start for his evening stroll, the young man approached Bhagavan and said that his companion had lost his eyesight. Bhagavan nodded, as usual. Soon after, Bhagavan got up and told us, "He says he has lost his eyes. I have lost my legs. He comes and tells me. To whom am I to go and complain!" For nearly a month or more Bhagavan has been having more than usual trouble with his legs, either due to rheumatism or deficiency of B Vitamin. But how serious it is may be realised from his saying he has 'lost his legs'. This is not the first time he has said, "All of you come and complain to me. To whom am I to go and complain?" This is quite consistent with his teaching, that there is nothing but the Self and that he is That!

1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
 SELF + IMAGININGS = THE WORLD

Keeraipaati



If she walked down your street, chances are you might not notice her – an old woman, with thick matted hair, poor even by the standards of people who lead narrow lives of careful economy.



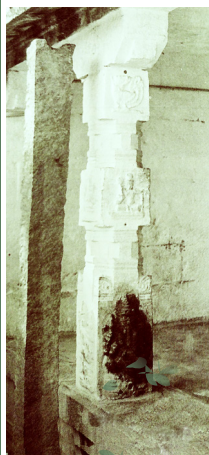
She lived on the Annamalai hill more than a hundred years ago, survived by gathering and begging and was known as Keeraipaati, Granny Greens. Outwardly her life was little different from that of our remote ancestors who lived forty thousand years ago. Yet a special grace illumined her life. She had the rare privilege of daily feeding Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and he gave her his loving protection.

She was living on the hill even before Bhagavan came as a boy to Tiruvannamalai and used to visit him at the temple. When he shifted to Virupaksha cave, feeding him became a daily feature of their lives. She stayed in the mandapam at the Guhai Namasivayam temple. Active even in her old age, she wandered all over Arunachala every day, bundling fuel – dry sticks, cow dung – on her back and different kinds of edible green leaves tucked into folds of cloth at her waist. She had a single pot in which she first heated water for her bath and then prepared her food.

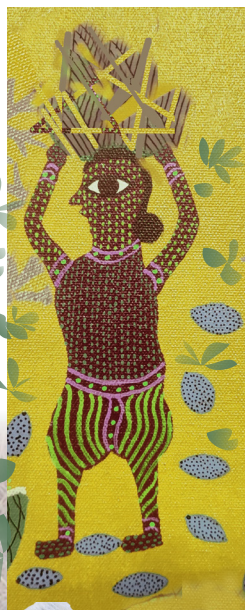


1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
 EGO + THOUGHTS = UNIVERSE of MAYA

1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1
SELF + AWARENESS = ONENESS



The priest would come to the temple daily and offer puja in the inmost shrine to the deity. She offered her humble broth of greens to the gods more easily accessed, those carved on the walls of the old, ill-maintained temple. And then she would take her dish to the embodied Divine, Bhagavan. If on some days, she could find nothing at all, she would sit depressed. Bhagavan would climb a tamarind tree and pluck the tender leaves growing at the top and there would be something to eat for the two unconventional friends, the silent young man and the eighty-year-old 'Spinach Granny'.



On some days a little broken rice and perhaps dal would be added to the slender meal and with it, would come the explanation: "A very good lady gave me this today..."

Bhagavan knew her little secret. In an earthenware jar she bundled and stored a few provisions; odds and ends obtained by begging through the streets of the town of which she knew every house.



Even such meagre possessions attracted a thief. One night he crept into the mandapam where she slept and was going through her bundles in the jar. He tried to choke her cries with his hand over her mouth, but she broke free and screamed for help, "Oh, Arunachala! Thief, thief!"

No one sleeping in nearby caves heeded, but Bhagavan Ramana at Skandashram heard and shouted, "Here I am! I am coming!" and raced down the hill. His shouts scared away the intruder and the old woman and her belongings were rescued in time.

The Lord to whom she cried out had listened and responded, said devotee Suri Nagamma years later, when Bhagavan narrated this incident and the story of her life with affection.

Does an old woman gathering plastic or wastepaper walk past your home? Perhaps you could look at her again today... and greet the Divine who is everywhere.



1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1
SELF + AWARENESS = CONSCIOUSNESS

The Ramana Effect

Bharati Mirchandani



When I googled ‘The Ramana Effect’ I got two descriptions. 1. Raman effect: change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules in the medium it is passing through. 2. The effect the recent Chief Justice of India, Shri N V Ramana has had on the judicial climate.

The story that follows shows the amazing effect that Ramana Maharshi has on people and events. This effect cannot be contained by any scientific formula, accountants’ audit, or even any painting or poem. Certainly not even this story, this recounting of events, that did occur, with me as party, so I have to believe it. Please read, and do share your experiences of the Ramana Effect; or else dismiss

this one as just a ‘story’.

January 2000. I was leaving Sri Ramana Ashram at 2 am to allow an extra 4 hours for unforeseen contingencies on the way to catch my flight from Chennai to Delhi. This had been a very short ‘touching base’ at the ashram. I was returning to my home after a two-month tough but satisfying assignment in the Maldives. Tiruvannamalai is positioned directly on the way to Delhi from Male. International travel is not really logical, but I just had to stop at home before I went home, if you get what I mean.

At the ashram a little child, Sabrina, took a liking to me and, unknown to me, followed me everywhere, even watching me as I meditated. She recounted to her parents whatever I did, so they approached me to make friends

for the sake of their shy daughter. The father worked at Chennai Airport, and they had their residence within the Meenambakam complex. They were leaving the ashram a day before my flight and offered to give me a ride and bed for a night at their home before my flight. I was unwilling to cut my short visit shorter by a full 25%, but I sent my big heavy suitcase with them. I planned to travel light by bus the following day, and have breakfast with them before boarding the plane.

During my last evening at the ashram, Sushila manni, the then President's wife, came to me with a bundle of *prasadam*. She told me that all who worked at the ashram had been given gifts as *prasadam* for Bhagavan's Jayanti a few days earlier. They had one sari left, and she offered it to me. She apologized that it was a nylon sari. If she had known it was for me, she would have arranged for a cotton one, but this was the only one left. A sari as prasad! I was thrilled.

Now packed and ready to leave the ashram with my backpack (an enormous multiple sectioned one I had bought recently keeping in mind future trekking trips), on an impulse I pulled out the sari and wore it over my trackpants. No one who knows me will see me at this time, I thought. It

just felt perfect to be wrapped in Sri Ramana's blessing.

Soon I was peacefully settled in a window seat staring into the dark nothingness, with a pleasant breeze blowing all cares away. But then the bus stopped. It seemed there was a queue of large trucks and buses all waiting patiently. The charm of the ashram and the sari were still on me so I sat peacefully for an hour, and then another. Then I noticed cars and two wheelers zipping past while the line of big vehicles had not moved one inch. All motors were switched off in surreal silence. Oh, silly me! Just to save some money I did have to travel by bus. See how the taxis race by and I could have been at Meenambakam having hot breakfast with Sabrina's parents by now! When three hours of my 4-hour buffer time were over I realized I had to try doing something. Not knowing Tamil, I hadn't understood the problem. Accident is the only word I caught.

With the backpack on my back, I decided to walk to the site of the accident and take another transport from beyond the jam. Glad for walking shoes and that the sari had been tucked in rather high, I was able to march quite briskly for 3-4 Km. The darkness was now less dense and I saw

that all the cars and scooters that had zipped past the orderly line of heavy vehicles had totally clogged the road around the accident site. Highways are generally high, with bush-covered embankments sloping down either side. I had to get down this slope to get beyond the accident site. By now my buffer time was pretty much spent so I did not try discover the cause of the jam but held out my thumb for a ride to each vehicle that extricated itself from the choke. The first was a truck which swerved toward me only for the folk inside to jeer and speed off. Then a bus with passengers, and then two cars, but these were so relieved to be finally moving that they didn't heed me at all. The fifth vehicle was a cream-coloured ambassador car. It stopped and the man in front said, get in quick.

I got in and shut the door, but what had I got into? The car was cream coloured inside as well, with rexine upholstery. Two large men sat as though drunk in the rear seat. Safari suits that powerful mafia kind of people wear, and dark glasses! There was a wide armrest between them, and they had not budged a millimeter to accommodate me. I tried to wriggle but realized my backpack was caught in the door so I couldn't move. I sat perched with my back fastened to the door, but facing

the window across the two men, a cool and enormous red rising sun looked lovingly at me. Ramana, you are the sun, whatever is happening I know it is just as you want it to be.

The man in front seemed to be the owner of the car, and the one in command. The driver was relatively the slimmest of the four men, and totally loyal to his boss seated next to him. The boss was trying to find out what manner of creature was in the car seated right behind him. He didn't know English or Hindi but he understood that I was coming from Sri Ramanasramam and heading for the airport. So he said he too was from some ashram but the name was not any I knew. I think he then said the names of various deities, but those too were unfamiliar to me. So he gave up and popped a cassette of Tamil bhajans into the player. "Ah, Annamalai," I said, glad to catch one word. But he wasn't impressed and switched off the music.

Then I ventured to tell the man the time of my flight. "Oh, no problem," he said as we cruised along the rather empty highway. But the day was now awake, and the city closer, traffic kept increasing and our pace kept slowing. The boss got increasingly excited. He kept finding gaps in the traffic to the left and the right, and like young

boys do at gaming stations, he barked, “Left overtake! Right overtake!” The driver obeyed. We drove on and off the road, through bushes that could easily have thick woody branches hidden within, frightening trucks and buses by squeezing past them, but when we grazed past two trucks and the car rocked like a cradle with the impact, the two men beside me woke up.

They tossed aside their dark glasses to understand what was happening. “Stop the car, stop the car,” they both chanted in panic. I said, “Please, it is only one plane ticket I will lose. Life is more precious.” But the two men in front were not listening to us. The man behind the driver started to hit the driver’s head keeping time to his chanting, and the man next to me tried to do the same but couldn’t reach. In this confusion I managed to reach out and push the wide armrest up into its slot. The man next to me shifted and was able to also drum on the driver, who drove unaffected by anything other than his boss’s instructions. Now that I had a little space I quickly opened the door, pulled my bag fully in and shut the door again without being flung out by a sudden swerve. This wasn’t even noticed by those in the car.

Now that my body was relatively comfortable, I focused on pleading for

sanity, for safety, for a missed flight being better than a bunch of dead bodies. But we were speaking different languages. The boss only said, “This clock! Too much tension!” And he pulled out the clock from the fancy dashboard and placed it face down so he would not be distracted by the seconds ticking. Enthusiastically and expertly, we continued to weave, and graze, past many other vehicles. Soon one could sense the airport was near. Time was exceedingly short so there was no way I could get off outside and find a cab to take me to Sabrina’s house to collect my bag. So I took out the slip of paper with their address and asked the boss to read the paper. He understood what needed to be done and we reached the house.

As the car stopped all of us spilled out in sheer joy to be alive. I took out my wallet and opened it to show the currency notes inside, saying, for car damage.

Boss replied, “Nothing, nothing. Little painting, little denting.”

I touched his feet. He had truly been Ramana’s instrument for me. Total strangers still. We did not even really get to see each other’s faces. Unlikely to ever meet again. But we do. Each day. The divine comes to us all the time, clothed in different guises. Some

even seem like mafia dons. Others like shy little girls with soft straight hair, or parents of little girls who honour their children's wishes. Each acts out the Ramana Effect.

My suitcase was ready at the door but so was a lovingly made breakfast. I did disappoint them by having to rush to the plane. They had a uniformed escort and some kind of official buggy

to guide me straight to where I had to board my flight. The check-in and departure gate info, etc. had all been already arranged by Sabrina's parents. Within 15 minutes of having alighted from the car I was seated in a plane taxiing for takeoff.

My sweat-soaked clothes had not yet dried when I landed in Delhi. ■

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This morning the Dowager Rani of Vizianagaram with two or three others came to the hall, having arrived at the Asramam last night. Dr. Srinivasa Rao was massaging Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan told Dr. Srinivasa Rao, "You go and sit; otherwise they would come and ask what is the matter with Bhagavan's health." Doctor accordingly stopped massaging. Bhagavan does not like any fuss to be made about him on any account.

In the afternoon I showed a book called *Wonderful India* to Bhagavan. It contained many pictures and Bhagavan went through the book for more than an hour, looking at the pictures.

This is Bhagavan's *Jayanti* (65th birthday). The crowd of devotees is greater than usual, many of them having come from distant parts. There were the usual decorations, music, feast and feeding of the poor. In the afternoon a number of prayers and verses in honour of Bhagavan specially composed for the occasion were read out. A message sent by Swami Sivananda (of Rishikesh) was also read out.

Talk 35

An educated visitor asked Bhagavan about *dvaita* and *advaita*.

M.: Identification with the body is *dvaita*. Non-identification is *advaita*.

Tap

Rachna Joshi

Waking up after nightmares
The word tap escapes my lips.
Is this tapasya?

(Inspired by a passage in the Rigveda on tap)
rachna.iic@gmail.com

Bhagavan's Rest in Times of Restlessness

Michael Highburger



In the turbulent 1940s when war was raging in Europe, Bhagavan was quite at ease. He knew India would be impacted and that millions around the world would be losing their lives. It wasn't that he was complacent or uncaring, far from it, Bhagavan was the embodiment of compassion. But Bhagavan knew that these events would of necessity play themselves out. He never felt any inclination to worry unduly about the conditions of the world because, despite appearances, he knew that all was ultimately at rest in the Self, and no phenomenal occurrence could ever reach or taint that fundamental reality.

After the Covid pandemic lockdowns, we find war is once again escalating in Europe and with it, mounting global economic uncertainty.

Covid continues its spread, even if in slightly weaker variants, nevertheless wreaking havoc on the lives of many of its victims and in some cases, ending lives of those who, though aged, were otherwise living vital and productive lives. If one feels a little uneasy, the future is indeed unclear. In digging down within our hearts which Bhagavan ever urges us to do, we uncover the root uncertainty that comes as a matter of course in every human birth, namely, *the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the time of death*. We do not like to accept the fact of inevitable loss and separation from those we love. We do not want to accept that our fortunes will surely change somewhere along the way.

Some have said we do not really know ourselves until we go through

a crisis. Now we are getting to see ourselves in what is shaping up to be a crisis. How will we respond when we are on a beleaguered ship at sea on the Atlantic Ocean in a violent storm? Where will we place our hopes when all avenues of escape are cut off, when as far as the eye can see it is just rain, clouds, lightning, and the billows of an angry buffeting sea? In such a situation we may chance to spy a small duck or waterfowl riding out the storm in perfect ease and are amazed by his resilience and yet do not know how to imitate him.

The Covid pandemic helped us to wake up to the reality that is already part and parcel of earthly existence. If restlessness preponderates and with it, stress and worry, if experts point out that teen suicide is at an all-time high, or that depression and anxiety are occurring in epidemic proportions around the world, these facts will not surprise us. Their causes are numerous. If we look back at the stresses and ultimate collapse of previous civilisations in history, we worry what the current signs might be telling us about the fate of our own. In the midst of it all, our unsettledness pervades, and we grope for the insight that would grant relief

and assist us in making sense of our fragility. If we find ourselves leaning ahead of each passing moment with the unconscious wish to dodge it and get to the next moment, this would be understandable. If we ramp up the urge to flee increasingly uncomfortable conditions, pining for another ‘world’, it is because this one appears too demanding.

But now, where and how does this predicament and related sets of concerns intersect with the life and teaching of Sri Bhagavan?

Among the accounts Kanakammal gave during her lifetime, she describes a scene from the hall where Bhagavan counsels a gentleman who is facing troubles in his life. Bhagavan asks him to respond to his difficulties by seeking ‘the help of the Divine or simply surrendering to Him’. The man protests that such is not possible for him. Bhagavan then says, ‘In that case, do one thing. Pray to Him to help you surrender.’

This sounds straightforward enough, but then Bhagavan adds the following:

‘If you cannot do even that, then *simply suffer what comes your way!*’²

This concluding statement of

2 ‘Encounters with Bhagavan’, Part II, *The Mountain Path*, July 2006, pp. 31-32.

Bhagavan's is very powerful. At first glance it may look as though Bhagavan is making a casual, if even harsh, remark but on closer examination, we see he is giving us a potent teaching. When Bhagavan says 'suffer what comes your way', he means allowing ourselves to be present to conditions without trying to get them to be otherwise. This would have been challenging enough in Bhagavan's presence, but now eighty years later in a world that appears to be in freefall with the velocity that only a digitally saturated age can offer, we find this simple practice nearly out of reach. Why? Because inadvertently we find ourselves in a world gripped by restlessness. But then, what is restlessness?

Restlessness, if observed at close range, is the longing to get from the present juncture in thought or feeling to a new juncture in thought or feeling. It is dissatisfaction with the current set of circumstances and the desire to replace them with something better. Restlessness has the element of expectation about what will come next, eager that the next set of internal conditions and outward events will be an improvement over the current ones.

Restlessness, it might be said, is caused by flitting attention – the wilful diverting of attention as a means of

deflecting negative experiences in the form of thoughts, feelings, images, or memories. If anxiety is intimately bound up with the urge to come free of some unpleasant internal experience, each new effort to wiggle free of the discomfort is tainted by the original fear, resulting in a chain of reactive escape. This is the mechanism at work in restlessness.

Bhagavan tells us that *whatever comes to us in time will pass away in time*. In other words, whatever we seek at any given moment as a remedy for our distress cannot be a permanent solution. In restlessness, we seek to evade the discomfort of the previous few moments, but are driven to repeat the exercise endlessly, like a dog chasing its tail. If samsara as traditionally understood pertains to the cycle of endless wandering through multiple births (*samsara* means 'wandering' or 'to keep moving'), restlessness is a sort of micro-samsara wherein *successive states of mundane existence* take place on a minute time scale – one new mind-generated world after another in rapid succession. This is plain to see in the meditation context when the mind is still but may not be evident at the gross level of consciousness in daily life. The digital era prompts us to take samsara to the next level by 'incarnating' moment

by moment, ever seeking a new 'existence' in the subsequent digitally driven preoccupation. High-speed 'samsara' is the compulsion to flee an experience – the previous sensation, feeling, or condition – in order to take shelter in the next sense experience. Of course, Bhagavan's path has no interest in strategies that involve acquiring something new as a means to spiritual freedom. Whatever new comes to us can only benefit us in the short run but can never help us in the journey to fulfilment. True happiness cannot come to us in time, no matter how rapid the rate of turnover:

*When there is contact of a desirable sort or memory thereof, and when there is freedom from undesirable contacts or memory thereof, we call this happiness. But such happiness is relative and is better called pleasure. The fact is, people want absolute and permanent happiness. This does not reside in objects, but in the Absolute. It is Peace free from pain and pleasure. It is a neutral state.*³

The habit of trying to create new conditions is almost always unconscious. It is so ordinary because it has become normalised, even

culturally sanctioned, and thus, is not necessarily perceived as something that needs remedial care. We neither recognise that we are seeking relief, nor even that there is anything out of the ordinary going on. In other words, restlessness has become *a way of life*. Our restlessness has become fully assimilated and standardized as a feature of our lives in the modern world. But Bhagavan asks us to see the maladaptive dimensions of restlessness. He wants us to encounter directly the conditions life presents us with at any given moment and engage them consciously. If restlessness is future-oriented, if it has a utopian element, then it is always looking for the next thing that is going to improve us and our circumstances. Genuine self-improvement, by contrast, is not born of acquiring anything new but in having nothing left to get rid of. It is self-emptying. As has been said, *all you have is what you are*,⁴ and it might be added, *all you need is what you are*. All else is extraneous and burdensome.

Of course, there is subtlety here that needs teasing out. There is something beautiful in striving for greatness and moving out of one's fragility

³ Talks §28.

⁴ From a talk by Bruno Barnhart, OSB.CAM.

in the direction of confidence and wholeness. Arguably, the life of faith and the spiritual journey is just such an endeavour. But the confusion comes in respect of what we are trying to improve. Often, we are just indulging longings that need to be let go of.

There's a Chinese proverb, *the family treasure does not come in through the front gate*. In other words, the Self does not come to us from without in time and any asset or benefit that comes to us from without in time, no matter how satisfying in the moment, cannot ultimately fulfil us. Acquisitions, whether possessions, knowledge, ideas, or the next experience, cannot ultimately save us. If what comes to us in time leaves us in time, as Bhagavan tells us, then we need not put our trust in it. For Bhagavan, freedom can only be found within and *must needs already be there*. Hence, we see the futility of restless grasping after future possibilities or any other mind-based solution to our difficulties:

The mind is by nature restless. Begin liberating it from its 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 the obstacles to peace of mind... Peace is the absence of disturbance. The disturbance is due to the arising of thoughts in the individual, who is only the ego rising up from Pure Consciousness. To bring about peace means to be free from thoughts and to abide as Pure Consciousness. If one remains at peace oneself, there is only peace all around.*⁵

Restlessness and Sorrow

If we find ourselves experiencing restlessness, it's a clue to look for something we're not accepting, something in the heart that is being resisted and turned away from. Restlessness is never the root cause but merely a symptom of something deeper.

Suppose in grieving the loss of someone close to us, restlessness arises to shield us from the sorrow. (This is restlessness's root function). But as it would turn out, the restlessness is more disruptive and painful than the sorrow itself. As soon as we embrace the sorrow, our restlessness drops away. In being present to the root sorrow we find it is not so dreadful after all and need not be run from. The impulse to run away from the

⁵ *Talks*, §26, 453.

sorrow is what causes our sorrow to be prolonged. In neglecting the core condition, we inadvertently cause it to continue which seems to confirm the unconscious fear that it would become permanent and would never depart if we were to let it run its course. The opposite is the case. In facing the core condition, it along with our restless mind and attendant fears resolve themselves on their own:

[It is] the mind that obstructs innate peace. Our investigation is only in the mind. Investigate the mind and it will disappear. There is no entity called 'mind'. Because of the emergence of thoughts, we surmise something whence they originate which we term mind. When we probe to see what it is, there is nothing [there]. After it has vanished, [only] peace remains.⁶

Reframing

Restlessness could be seen as originating from a distorted frame of reference. If we expand the frame, we overcome the contraction that leads to restlessness. Let us take an example from science. Consider the following: we live our entire lives on a 7800-mile-wide piece of rock rotating on its axis at 1000 mph, orbiting its sun at 67,000 mph, moving together with

its solar system around the galactic centre at 500,000 mph, all of which is being hurled through intergalactic space at a velocity of 1.33 million mph, destination unknown. This is just a fact of nature. Whether or not we find it comforting, at least it gives needed perspective in countering the constriction involved in restlessness. But here's the thing, Bhagavan offers an even more comprehensive frame: *All the Earth, including the stormy seas and the storms of the heart, as well as all of intergalactic space and all the known cosmos with its 100 billion galaxies, is contained within the Self; and the Self, Bhagavan tells us, is what we are.*

From this vantage point, every worry seems trivial. In the overall scheme of things, how consequential can our restlessness ever be?

Conclusion

Bhagavan's rest and the catharsis born of surrender originates in turning toward our skeletons in the closet and making friends with internal unrest. But what keeps us from surrender? It is running after the next thing in thought or deed. On the other hand, when we allow ourselves to experiment with *not* running, we find that no inner discomfort is too

⁶ Talks §238.

much for us if we are willing to be present to it when it appears. We learn that by bringing our inner discomforts into the light of awareness, either through self-examination, *vichara*, or by communicating them to others, we overcome the tendency to fall into restlessness. When we lean on trusted devotees by virtue of a shared faith in Bhagavan, we discover – perhaps to our surprise – that they will stand with us. A German proverb goes, *Geteilter Schmerz ist halber Schmerz, geteilte Freude ist doppelte Freude*. ('Shared pain is half-pain. Shared joy is double joy'). When we share our uneasiness openly, we avoid reacting unconsciously and our burden is lightened.

Bhagavan's rest means giving up the standard defences and letting go of mechanisms designed to protect us from the discomfort within. Indeed, nothing can heal our trouble more readily than being present to it, or as Bhagavan says, *suffering what comes our way*. Each time we muster the courage to greet a moment of discomfort, we learn to let go a little, and Bhagavan's surrender begins to take root in us. When we are able to avoid being force-marched into complete identification with our mental states, our enquiry practice is transformed and begins to look like

surrender. Here the usual worries of the mind drop away and even if some of the tug-of-war between being caught up in uncomfortable mental states and being detached from them continues, we incrementally gain ground through ongoing efforts.



In time we find that our surrender becomes a way of life and we learn to greet the tempests of the heart non-reactively. In time, we see that the only demon that can ever really harm us is the one we run away from. In time by carefully observing the little duck caught in the waves of the stormy Atlantic as it heaves to and fro, we discover who *we are* by what *he does*. Amid the torrent and uproar of the stormy seas, amid the commotion and tumult within and without, amid the chaos surrounding him on all sides, what does this little five-pound waterfowl do, we ask?

He sits down in it. ⁷ ■

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⁷ Donald Babcock, Professor of Philosophy, 'The Little Duck'.

Bhagavan speaks of Arunachala

Once a devotee asked,
“How did
this mountain
get the name Annamalai?”



* That which is not reachable
by Brahma or Vishnu
is Annamalai.

That means it is the embodiment of
the Jyoti
which is beyond word or mind.

Anna means unreachable.

...the mountain is Ishwara's sthula sariram
(gross body).

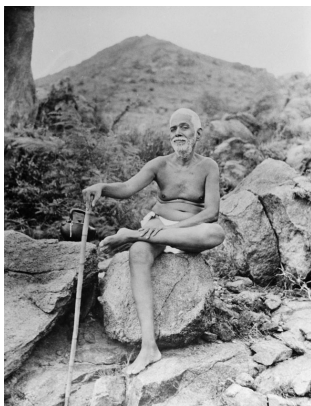
Jyoti itself
is the sukshma sariram
(subtle body)...
beyond all these bodies
is the Reality.

PAGE MONTAGE BY B. M. STORK PHOTOGRAPH BY ANIL MANSUKHANI

* *Suri Nagamma, Letters From Sri Ramanasramam*
Published by Sri Ramanasramam, 1970, p310

The Essential Teachings of Sri Ramana

Michael James



A friend wrote to me recently saying, ‘My humble opinion with total respect: far, far too many words. Can you indicate the essential succinct truth’, to which I replied and tried to give a simple summary of the essential teachings of Sri Ramana.

Sri Ramana’s teachings are actually very simple and can therefore be expressed in just a few words, but since our minds are complicated, sometimes many words are necessary 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 certain that *I am*, it is not clear ‘what I am’, because we experience a body and mind as ‘I’, yet we have good reason to doubt whether either this body or this mind is actually ‘I’.

In the waking state we experience the physical 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 the physical body was actually ‘I’, we wouldn’t have experienced ‘I’ when we didn’t

experience this body.

In the states of waking and dream we experience our thinking mind as 'I', but in dreamless sleep we do not experience this mind at all. The mind disappears in sleep but we are able to experience its absence. Thus, 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.

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 an 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 experi-

ence 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 not of any gap between every 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. The mind can never be what we actually are.

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. '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'. Though one knows for certain that *I am*, one doesn't know for certain 'what I am', and hence it is necessary for one 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 *atma-vichara* (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 every person has their own preconceived ideas, beliefs, and values, and they ask a wide variety of different questions. Thus, 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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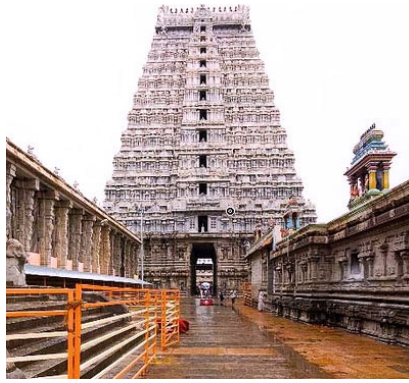
Talk 568.

Mr. V. G. Sastri showed a cutting to Sri Bhagavan. It contained some prophecy of Sri Rama Tirtha that India would reach the full height of her former glory before 1950 AD

Sri Bhagavan said: Why should we think that India is not already in the height of her glory? The glory is in your thought.

Advent Day, 2022

BM



Advent day was celebrated at the Kendra on 1 September 2022. Since the day Sri Ramana first reached Tiruvannamalai in 1896, planet earth has already circled the sun 125 times. Inevitably, another circumambulation has begun, and this day reminds us of the enormous forces that move us, oblivious of our individual volition. What seems a momentous occasion like the appearing of a divine being is but the stage after the phase of budding, as the entire world gently prepared to receive the manifestation of divinity.

At the Kendra special decorations and pujas began the celebrations. Sri Vijay Vancheswar reminded us of the biblical origin of the word ‘advent’, which is supposed to bring shanti,

a combination of hope, love, joy, and true inner and outer peace. Sri Ramana was an avatar of Shiva. He had no sankalpa or desire of his own, yet he travelled to Tiruvannamalai where he stayed for 54 years, only to give mankind a concrete experience of the consciousness that is always everywhere.

This day is also the foundation day of the Kendra. Sri Vancheswar recounted how tremendous efforts by Prof. K Swaminathan and steady flow of Bhagavan’s grace brought together many professionals to contribute to the creation of the Kendra in Delhi. The Kendra is designed to represent the spiritually charged Virupaksha cave set within Sri Arunachala. Virupaksha cave was where Sri Ramana lived from 1899 till 1916; and where,

although he hardly spoke then, he composed many of his poems and other compositions. The years have seen the Kendra 'grow from strength to strength.'

The President of the Kendra, Justice Ramamoorthy spoke next. With much passion he recounted how a young boy who did not know how to get from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai was guided by the unseen force to reach Sri Arunachaleswar temple at 1:30 in the morning. After he entered the outer gate, a sudden short shower bathed the lad before he entered the main shrine. The doors of the sanctum were wide open and miraculously, at 2 am, no one was around. Ramana walked in and hugged the shrine. He had reached his father; he was home.

The next speaker was Sri Raghavji. He described how the Advaita philosophy, which is abstract, was given a tangible form through Sri Ramana's life journey. For 5-6 months before the boy Venkatraman had the spontaneous experience of the Self that is famous as 'The Death Experience', he was getting deeply affected by the life stories of the 63 saintly devotees of Shiva recounted in a book he was reading, Periyar Puranam. His heart burned with devotion and there was a growing mismatch between his inner

and outer life. School, homework, and reprimands no longer fit, yet some traces of dichotomy remained as is evident in the note he wrote as he left home: 'I have, in search of my father and at his command...'

Raghavji said that Ishwara made him undergo the outer journey to facilitate integration with the inner realisation. Physical contact with the idol of the Lord at the temple dispelled the burning inside. Now he had no interest in doing anything more. He did not go to the sanctum again, and remained absorbed in the Self, and as far as possible, secluded, living within the temple premises over the next 3 years.

'Inner maturity validates outer life-style,' Raghavji said as he explained that all Ramana did was to abstain from resistance and move with the divine flow. Just as Lord Shiva manifested as Dakshinamurthi to give the four Sanat kumaras liberation, so too we have been provided an ashram, a kendra, with surroundings conducive to our inner blossoming; where the energies are waiting for us to surrender to their play. The talk concluded with a recounting of Sri Murugunar's poem 'Saranagathi' which describes the mighty Shiva carrying us all towards our liberation, yet we do not

understand that, and continue to carry heavy loads instead of just keeping them down, abandoning our luggage and ourselves to Shiva.

Jayanthy Aiyar sang bhajans and Aksharamanamalai, allowing the import of the three talks to filter deeper into our awareness. It is helpful to celebrate special occasions as a group activity as the collective energies support and boost us in ways that counter the fake world of distressing cacophony with the sound of singing, chanting, and tinkling of bells. The beautiful eyes of Bhagavan that

shine their love toward all, making each person feel especially ‘the chosen one’. Through love, and through understanding, divine energies surely unravel our knots and take us deeper into the embrace in ways our minds and as yet limited hearts cannot begin to understand.

Every year this day provides another chance, another reminder, that the advent is only a precursor to the unveiling of the Self in our own hearts. ■

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Bhagavan asked Mr. T.P. Ramachandra Aiyar to read out a letter written by Mr. Subramania Iyer (Dindigul), a brother of our Viswanatha Brahmachari. It gave an account of the grand way in which Bhagavan’s *Jayanti* was celebrated at Tiruchuzhi on the 21st instant. Mr. Subramania Iyer was writing a letter to Mr. S. Doraiswamy Iyer, giving an account of the conversation between Georges Le Bot and Bhagavan. It was read out in the hall for the benefit of all assembled. I also read out the account of the same happening recorded in this diary.

A visitor asked if he could do both *pranayama* and *dhyana*. Bhagavan said, “One is a help to the other. Whether one need do *pranayama* depends on one’s *pakva* or fitness.”

Talk 5

Mr. M. Frydman, an engineer, remarked on the subject of Grace, “A salt doll diving into the sea will not be protected by a waterproof coat”. It was a very happy simile and was applauded as such. Maharshi added, “The body is the waterproof coat”.



14th August

Michael elucidated verses 21-22 of *Upadesa Saram*. He said that when ego subsides in deep sleep, the fundamental awareness ‘I Am’ remains. Thus, even after the absence of ego, one doesn’t cease to exist. He also mentioned about the chit-jada-granthi: the chit aspect of ego is ‘I Am’; the jada is ‘I am the body’.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB4sxfiduDo>

21st August

In the penultimate session of the series of lectures on *The Song Celestial*, Raghavji said that Vedavyas and Krishna were of the same essence. By compiling these forty-two verses, Bhagavan has given us the essence of the essence. Arjun converted his temporary situation into a deep enquiry. Like Arjun, we move towards God whenever we face challenges.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTnqP742ieQ>

28th August



Concluding the enlightening discourses on *The Song Celestial*, Raghavji said that Krishna does not underestimate the disciple and gives the highest teaching pertaining to the Self, without laying any clauses or qualifying adjuncts. One gives one's greatest contribution to the world by being sincerely committed to the path of Self-enquiry.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmmtdeaNcm0>

11th September

Michael threw light upon verses 23-26 of *Upadesa Saram* and said that what actually exists is pure awareness. Everything other than it is dependent on it. God and soul are one because they have the same nature. Knowing God means being aware of 'I Am'. We know ourselves by being how we actually are.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aISxBp_eK2Y

9th October



Michael explained the 27th and 28th verse of *Upadesa Saram* and said that both knowledge and ignorance exist only with ego. They cease to be in the egoless deep sleep wherein only 'I Am' shines. In this state, there is nothing left to be known because one becomes infinite and undivided.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsuukMWNBVY>

Talk 11

“Can destiny (*karma*) ever come to an end?”

M.: The *karmas* carry the seeds of their own destruction in themselves.

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 Advait,

The August - October issue is very well designed, professionally done, and looks quite impressive. Compliments on the good work!

Prof. Vijay Vancheswar

Talk 255.

D.: If the Self be always realised we should only keep still. Is that so?

M.: If you can keep still without engaging in any other pursuits, it is very good. If that cannot be done, where is the use of being quiet so far as realisation is concerned? So long as one is obliged to be active, let him not give up the attempt to realise the Self.

Talk 259.

Nada, *Bindu* and *Kala* correspond to prana, mind and intellect.

Isvara is beyond *nada* (sound).

Nada, *gyoti* (light), etc., are mentioned in Yoga literature. But God is beyond these.

The circulation of blood, respiration of air, and other functions of the body are bound to produce sound. That sound is involuntary and continuous. That is *nada*.

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Talk 257.

D.: A certain young man from Dindigul spoke to Sri Bhagavan, saying that he had learnt by his stay for a few days; that all that he need do was to enquire, "Who am I?" He wanted to know if any discipline was to be observed and started with the question: "Where should I do the enquiry?" meaning if he should do it in Guru sannidhi (the presence of the Master).

M.: The enquiry should be from where the 'I' is.

D.: People labour for gaining the summum bonum of life. I think that they are not on the right track. Sri Bhagavan has made considerable tapas and achieved the goal. Sri Bhagavan is also desirous that all should reach the goal and willing to help them to that end. His vicarious tapas must enable others to reach the goal rather easily. They need not undergo all the hardships which Sri Bhagavan has already undergone. Their way has been made easy for them by Sri Bhagavan. Am I not right?

Maharshi smiled and said: If that were so everyone would easily reach the goal, but each one must work for himself.

"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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*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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