

DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA
DELHI

Nov 2019-Jan 2020

Vol. XXI, No. 7

*"Silence is ever-speaking; it is a perennial flow of language;
it is interrupted by speaking."*

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi



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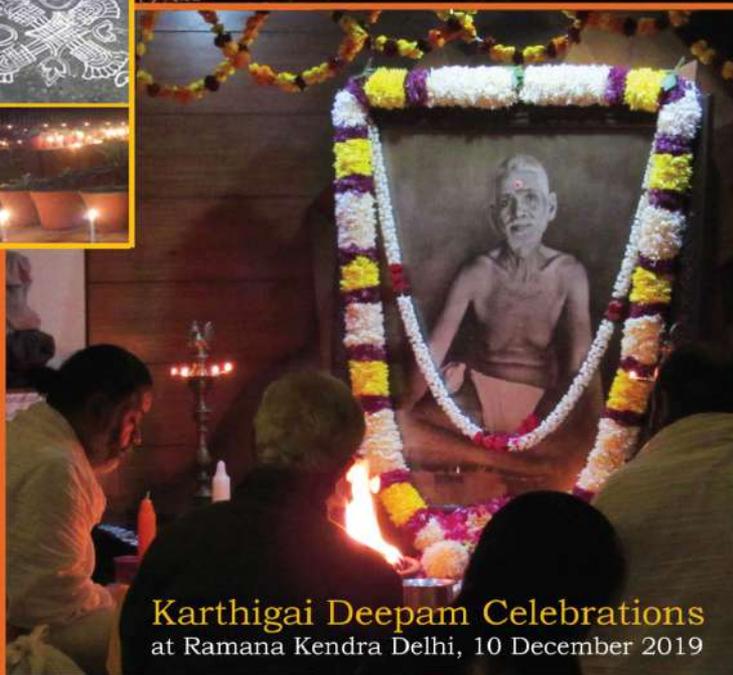
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Ramana Kendra, (Regd.) 8, Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110003, Ph: 24626997
at Calcutta Girls Halftone Co., D-20, South Extn.-I, New Delhi-110049. Ph: 24616829



Karthigai Deepam Celebrations
at Ramana Kendra Delhi, 10 December 2019

29. Om savitre namah

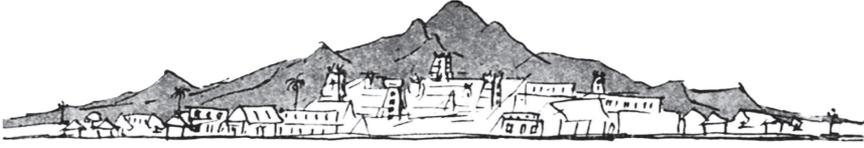
Sun of Awareness

30. Om sthiraya namah

Firm, unmoving

31. Om tapah ksapita sarvangaya namah

One whose whole body had shrunk by tapas



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

Direct Path

VOLUME XXI ISSUE 7

NOVEMBER, 2019 - JANUARY, 2020

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Editor's Note

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!

SUBSCRIPTION/DONATION

Ramana Kendra, 8 Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003

Bank Details

“Ramana Kendra”

A/c No 149801000026733

Indian Overseas Bank, Lok Kala Manch Branch, New Delhi

IFS Code: IOBA0001498

Schedule of Rates

Direct Path: One Year: Rs 100/- Life: Rs 2500/-

Satsang Sponsorship: Rs 3000/- per Satsang

Kendra Membership: Rs 2000/-

Special Events Sponsorship: Jayanthi/Aradhana/Advent/Karthigai
Deepam/Poor feeding Rs 5000/- per Event

Self Enquiry: Practice

Swagat Patnaik

In the last issue we saw how Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi invariably responded to devotees' spiritual questions by asking them to study themselves more carefully. Some of his more mature devotees would immediately take this as an *updesa*, become stilled and carry on their *sadhana* (practice). Others would be propelled to ask more questions and become more confused. But given enough time such devotees would experience a certain peace which would leave them satisfied. Finally, there are also those who never make it to the practice during their entire lifetime.

All these different responses of the seekers to Ramana Maharshi, show that from the point of view of practice (*sadhana*) there exist different grades of *sadhakas* or practitioners. The highest would require a mere look or just the presence of a *jnani* to crossover, whereas others would require years perhaps decades of practice to even have a glimpse. And some others would require several lifetimes to even begin the practice. Given the different grades of *sadhakas*, this article and infact most of written material on *sadhana* caters to only those

who require a few years or decades of practice. As it is only for these serious *sadhakas* guidance, effort and learning from many failures are required. In contrast the highest of the adepts and the ones completely uninterested in the practice don't require any guidance.

So, to begin, how does one know to which grade one belongs? To really know it accurately one should devotedly associate with a *jnani*. A close association would act as mirror to one's practice and one would soon realize the depth of one's own ignorance. At first one may even feel that yes, my progress is not too shallow. May be a few years of practice and one would definitely gain some understanding. But, if one is honest and has really met a *jnani*, one will realize that one's ignorance is endless. Thus, realizing the one's feeble efforts towards knowledge are insignificant when compared to the tremendous grace of guru, god or the self. One's own effort is a mere paddle in the ocean. Without the strong winds of grace, it is almost impossible to reach any shore. Only after surrendering to this realization does one really begin

matured sadhana. It is only then one asks with utmost sincerity what is it that one needs to do? But even then Bhagavan would usually ask them to simply carry on whatever practice they have been doing. For example:

#5-1-46 Afternoon

The same visitor asked, “I do Omkara puja. I say ‘Om Ram’. Is that good?” Bhagavan: Yes. Any puja is good. ‘Om Ram’ or any other name will do. The point is to keep away all other thoughts except the one thought of Om or Ram or God. All mantra or japa helps that. He who does the japa of Ram, for example, becomes Ramamaya. The worshipper becomes in course of time the worshipped. It is only then that he will know the full meaning of the Omkar which he was repeating.

The excerpt shows Bhagavan’s non-interfering attitude towards devotee’s existing practice. He firmly believed that any sincere sadhana will eventually lead one out of ignorance. In fact, he would even suggest that *japa* and *puja* are all good. They lead to a stage where unceasing *japa* goes on effortlessly which is same as ‘Realization’. Furthermore, from his point of view events go on in accordance with one’s destiny. So, he would refrain from pressing his view on the devotees.

But despite this the real gem of Bhagavan’s teachings is inclined towards *Atmavichara* or self-enquiry. So, assuming someone is vaguely interested in pursuing self-enquiry, his first question would be ‘how does one do the practice?’. To that Bhagavan may mildly respond, ‘Find out who is asking the question.’ One may respond by stating one’s name, perhaps with a mix of confusion and minor annoyance. After all it is such an absurd question to ask, it is of course me who is asking this question! Briefly pausing at this juncture, if one analyzes the answer, one can see how the person subtly forms a momentary identity as a response to each cycle of questioning.

Continuing with the enquiry one would ask, who thinks that the question is absurd? Then a form of response can be: this body and this present emotional state. Even after enquiring a couple of times one can clearly see that the answers to the questions keep changing with further questioning. So now let us go to the next level of questioning while minutely observing the questioning and answering process. Who says that the body is asking the question? At this stage, if the questioner is alert he would see that he is stuck in a conundrum. Neither he can satisfac-

torily answer the question, nor can he question more without observing the present moment and questioner in absolute stillness. Perhaps the mind wanders and comes back to the enquiry ‘who wandered?’. This cycle of staying with the enquiry and the mind wandering intermittently continues.

As one can see from even a bit of self-enquiry, the practice seems very simple but unceasing questioning is difficult to sustain. As one starts doing the practice, a strange mix of emotions, memories, anxiety, bliss, aches keep bubbling up and

one realizes the difficulty of doing self-enquiry. With conflicting desires and tendencies running amok it is a rare for an individual to engage in such *sadhana*. And adding further difficulty to the enquiry, Bhagavan insisted that one should be engaged in *sadhana* all the time (not just as a sitting practice). This indeed requires a lifetime of sincere effort.

(In the next article on self-enquiry, we will dive more into the details of self-enquiry and study his direct *upadesa* on the matter.) ■
[e-mail: editor.dp@rkdelhi.org]

I would like to give my regards to our contributors, who painstakingly create such wonderful articles for our humble magazine. It is only due to their creative efforts that we can sustain this magazine.

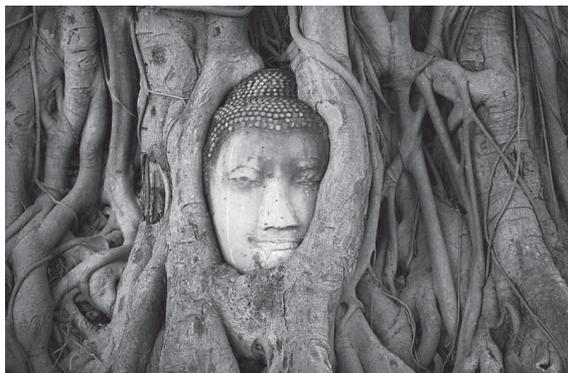
Furthermore, I would also like to mention that from the auspicious advent day (1st September) our kendra has started a small study circle for understanding Bhagavan’s teachings. The circle gathers in our library every 1st Sunday of the month to listen and share their personal understanding of Bhagavan’s works. More information on the circle can be found in the article ‘Circular Satsang’ written by Bharati Mirchandani.

Some of the important events (from Bhagavan’s time) falling in this current issue (November 2019 to January 2020) are:

- *November 8th: Masthan Swami Day*
- *November 9th: Annamalai Swami Day*
- *December 10th: Deepam Festival*
- *December 31st: Lucy Ma Day*
- *January 11th: Jayanthi Day*

The Spell of Delusion

Tuktuk Ghosh



It will not be incorrect to state that many of us move along the humdrum rhythm of everyday life in some form of an induced spell, which has at its core a delusion. This delusion posits the centrality of one's imagined self in defining the myriad and deeply complex facets encompassing one's thoughts, feelings, emotions, beliefs, rituals, customs etc. It keeps us going through predictable and unpredictable ups and downs. It acts as the invisible, yet powerful, navigator on an unknown and unknowable sojourn. Because of its overwhelming hold, there is a near total surrender to it and an acceptance of it being the unassailable reality.

While there are attempts made to understand and analyze this reality, more often than not they do not lead

anywhere and the weary trudge continues, at best with an added spring and boost. Many sages, savants and teachings are sampled and tested and then given up. The quest continues.

In this seemingly endless endeavor, Bhagavan Ramana's "Upadesa Saram" stands out as a beacon of light. It contains a pronouncement of the highest reality, based not on second hand knowledge, but on direct experience. This text may be regarded as a scripture in the tradition of the Vedas.

It includes the teachings of both *atma-jnana* and the varied means of *sadhanas* for realizing it. They are the three classical yogas of karma-yoga, bhakti-yoga and jnana-yoga. Karma-yoga calls for a change of one's outlook on God from that of

a mere wish fulfiller to Ordainer of the outcome of all actions. One is enjoined to accept with equanimity the good and not-so-good results of one's actions, regarding them as God's gifts, thus steering clear of worldly attachments. It arrests the slide into the ocean of samsara (transmigratory existence) and inspires a move to the higher *sadhanas* in the direction of the final triumph of *moksha* (liberation).

The sublime idea of God inherent in karma yoga gently blossoms into a more close or intimate feeling for God in the next phase of bhakti yoga. Consequently, the requisite efforts shift from the body to the mind and the struggle against *mula-avidya* or primordial ignorance is carried inward from the gross body to the subtle one. It also marks the end of what are known as preparatory *sadhanas*.

The next and final step is transcending of the subtle body or mind. Since the mind is the only instrument with which to make the effort, it may apparently be next to impossible to hope to transcend it, while still using it. Bhagavan enunciated two methods to get around this apparent conundrum. These were meditation (verses 7-15) and self-enquiry (verses 16-20). Meditation

has been alternatively described as *Dhyana* or *Eka-chintana*. Self-enquiry has been presented as *Vichara*, *Atma-vicharana* or *Nididhyasana*. These together are higher *sadhanas*, as distinguished from preparatory *sadhanas*.

Verse 21 proclaims the Self as the sole Reality on account of its being non-intermittent and, by implication, self-evident and changeless.

“Idam-aham-padabhikhyam-anvaha-m Ahami linakepyalaya-sattaya”.

Self-enquiry consists in withdrawing the mind from its preoccupation with the world and directing it on to the crucial question, “Who am I?” In order to pursue the enquiry properly, it is important to know what one must look for in the word, “I”. If this is not known, one may end up identifying it wrongly with attributes of name, gender, family, caste, ideology, religion, region, language, nationality or life's acknowledged milestones, referred to above, in a comprehensive sense, as the spell of delusions.

Usually a person associates himself/herself with a physical body in the waking state and with a subtle body in dreams. Since the Self can only be one, it follows that the bodies are extraneous to the Self. The sense of being, shorn of the body

construct, is the true self, devoid of individuality. It is the self that is common to all and thus appropriately, the universal self, Sat or Being.

This, then, constitutes the essence of the ultimate answer to the eternally vexing question of one's role in the cosmic opera, breaking the

spell of delusion and concomitantly, remains the unquestioned challenge to humanity, of its realization in real time experience through pure dedication, devotion and ennobled sadhana. ■

“Jai Shiv Arunachalaya”.

[e-mail: tghoshk@gmail.com]

Kavyakantha [Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni] approached the Virupaksha cave where the young Swami [Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi] was staying, and prostrating himself before him, said in a trembling voice.

“All that has to be read I have read. Even Vedanta Sastra I have fully understood. I have performed japa to my heart's content. Yet I have not up to this time understood what tapas is. Hence have I sought refuge at thy feet. Pray, enlighten me about the nature of tapas”.

For fifteen minutes Sri Raman silently gazed at Kavyakantha. He then spoke:

“If one watches whence this notion of ‘I’ springs, the mind will be absorbed into that. That is tapas. If a mantra is repeated and attention is directed to the source whence the mantra sound is produced, the mind will be absorbed in that. That is tapas”.

The scholar was filled with joy and announced that the upadesa was original, and that Brahmin Swami was a Maharshi and should be so called thereafter. He thus gave the name of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi to the young Swami, whose original name had been Venkataraman (named after the Lord of Tirupati). Kavyakantha was now the foremost disciple of Sri Ramana. His disciples also came to the Maharshi. They sought and obtained clarification on many doubtful points. His Sri Ramana Gita recording these questions and answers (between the years 1913 and 1917) is divided into eighteen chapters like the Bhagavad Gita and is a great source of inspiration.

[From “*Ramana Smriti*”, *Kavyakantha : A colossus of Learning and Tapas* by Sri K. Natesan]



Mercy Less "Me"

Finally we must wisely
Abandon hopes of a "me being
cured".

The trap's there:

Wide open to persCyst

The lure...micro must rust

The macro one

Must trust.

Alert then to notice

To shut the out word trap

For heaven's sakes cut

The C(for complaints)-rap

Man's addiction to speech is
under Understood

Transcend the "yes but.." question

Fatal food self-feeding

Challenging

God's fairplay

Transcend the dualist brood and
begin

To make hay

While the son yet shines

Renounce thy whines, night and
day



Exercise the unique inner talk
muscle

Reverse sing it to lie limp sans
twitch

Or tussle

However sharp, an axe couldn't
split a hair

Or a wavering light fix

An amœbig wiggle's flair

For that: Human

Build thy aadhar muscle of mauna

Surrender to intial sweaty sauna

Quietly see

From the pervasive place

Of childhood's discovery

Of the "visiting card" of Discon-
tent's will

Thence labelled "Me"

Who could arise and How and
from Where? Just be

To the faceless one must

Faceless bee.

-- J Jayaraman

Librarian, Sri Ramanasramam



Pradakshina

Michael Highburger

Part V

The young sage's love for Arunachala was infectious and those who gathered round him in the early years took to the Hill like ducks to water, following the master's every move on or about the Hill. Young Ramana modelled for them the manner in which they should reverence Arunachala and sparked in them a keen interest for the bygone tradition of Arunachala pradakshina. He went for regular circumambulation, setting out in the morning and returning in the evening to Virupaksha, the cave on the eastern slopes of the Hill where he took up residence in 1900. On some days he might start for pradakshina in the evening and return at daybreak. On other occasions his roundings would last two or three days, involving long halts. He would walk slowly, stopping to contemplate the surroundings or just to sit in silence. On the occasions when Arunachala's holy presence engulfed him, the young adept would fall into a deep samadhi.

For devotees, such excursions were precious beyond description. To be in the sage's intimate presence, to walk with him, to hear his voice, to drink in his stillness, was an untold



delight. On such trips they got to witness the gracious manner with which he responded to the locals who came forth at shrines and *mantapams*, offering food and water, vying with one another to extend their hospitality. Bhagavan was ever gracious in obliging them, boundless and untiring in his generosity and not allowing anyone's kindness to go unnoticed.

As the small band from Virupaksha made its way round the hill, members sang verses from the Veda, Gita, Bhagavatam, Thevarum and other Saivite hymns and verses. On other occasions they shared the stories of the Puranas and other ancient lore. Sometimes they gave discourses, elaborating on sacred texts.

Once, devotees persuaded Bhagavan to explain the meaning of his *appalam* song. Citing texts for each image in the song, Bhagavan's commentary was not finished before they had completed the circuit. While going another time they sang a song from *Thirupagazh*, whose lines ended with *kavalane*, a word which in Tamil means 'king' or 'master' but in Telugu signifies, 'I want'. Whenever the singer uttered *e*, a Telugu member of the party named Kambli Swami made a light-

hearted pun on the word, chuckling as he sang, ‘vadai kavalane’ or ‘*dosai kavalane*’ or ‘*iddli kavalane*’, etc. But as unexplainable things could happen in Bhagavan’s presence, the party was met at various junctures by devotees offering the very food items Kambli Swami had jokingly said he ‘wanted’.

On another pradakshina, it was suggested that one among them should act as chairman and that the others take turns as speakers, alternately delivering one-hour lectures on spiritual themes. The first speaker was Ramanatha Brahmachari, known for his meek, soft-spoken manner. Devoted to Bhagavan but lacking formal education, he was not known to be skilful with words. Yet once he started his exuberant discourse, replete with quotations, imagery, poetry and allusions to the sastras and scriptures, there was no stopping him. After having repeatedly appealed to the ‘chairman’ for time extensions, he could only be brought to conclude his charged performance after three hours had elapsed¹. Devotees agreed that it was only his devotion to Bhagavan and Bhagavan’s ‘reciprocal grace’ that could have inspired

such a rare presentation.²

Penning Aksharamanamalai

On other pradakshinas, members of the party traded verses or goaded each other to invent their own. Eventually they prevailed upon Bhagavan to compose hymns they could sing on the pradakshina path. It was nowhere else but on the rough-hewn hill-round road that couplets in praise of Arunachala began to pour forth from the sage’s lips³. At devotees’ prompting, Bhagavan scribbled but a single word, “Arunachalam”, with a pencil and paper one of the devotees had carried along with him. This was enough to initiate a spontaneous, tear-filled outpouring of devotion that became a lyrical garland of 108 couplets. Like Manikavachakar centuries earlier, Arunachala pradakshina drew forth the ecstasy of devotion in an effulgence of uncontrollable verse, fueled by the vicarious longing of the seeker after truth or of a forlorn maiden seeking her beloved. Bhagavan halted along the route to jot down the cascade of lines flowing forth from his heart.

Aksharamanamalai would become the paradigmatic hymn of pradakshina (and too, the begging song used by

1 Later Ramanatha Brahmachari penned a song (appended to his *Stotra Anubhuti*) summarizing his pradakshina discourse. (see Devaraja Mudaliar’s *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, ch 3).

2 The foregoing from Devaraja Mudaliar, *Call Divine* vol. 6, 1957, pp. 85-91.

Bhagavan’s sadhu-devotees during their *bhiksha* rounds). The signature song of Ramana devotees, it went on to become the pre-eminent canticle of praise to Arunachala.

Later when asked to explain the meaning of the text, Bhagavan replied, “Why don’t you explain its meaning yourself? Like you, I would also have to ponder over it in order to explain it. Had I premeditated on it in advance, I would be in a position to explain its meaning. But [as it was], the verses came forth of their own accord. Reciting [them] repeatedly is [their] meaning.”⁴

And so, devotees understood that Lord Arunachala sang through his human form, Sri Ramana, in the 108 couplets of *Aksharamanamalai*.

Night Pradakshinas

On the occasions when the group went for nighttime pradakshinas, they would only reach the Ashram at sunrise, and being tired, would all take naps—all except for Bhagavan. Bhagavan did not have the luxury of sleep as visitors would be ever seek-

ing his darshan. If a visitor came and asked him to go round the Mountain that same evening, Bhagavan would not refuse lest he cause disappointment. So it happened that Bhagavan sometimes did not sleep for two or three days at a stretch.

Moving Down from the Hill

In 1922 Bhagavan’s mother left the body and he shifted down from Skandasramam to take up residence near her shrine, the site that was to become Sri Ramanasramam. Now more accessible, devotees from town and the surrounding areas, Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu, arrived in ever increasing numbers. With the growing need for a gathering place, the Old Hall was established in 1926. Soon it became more difficult for Bhagavan to go for pradakshina as his presence was required in the Hall. Finally that same year, when a dispute erupted between those who got to go with Bhagavan on pradakshina and those who were required to stay behind to look after Ashram work, Bhagavan made up his mind not to go for pradakshina anymore, ever keen to avoid causing

3 *Aksharamanamalai* was composed, Bhagavan says, “partly at Virupakshi and partly on my walks round the Hill.” (*Day by Day*, 7-12-45).

4 *Commentary on Arunachala Stuti Pañchakam*, T. R. Kanakammal, p. 27. It has been said that the only fitting commentary for *Aksharamanamalai* is the Hill Itself (Nochur Venkataraman, in a talk at Sri Ramanasramam, Jan 2014). If this is so, then the only fitting manner to ‘read’ the commentary is Arunachala pradakshina, so why not, devotees might argue, chant the 108 verses while going?

inconvenience to others. In lieu of going round the Hill, he thus commenced daily walks to Palakotthu and up the Hill, all the while avidly encouraging others to go for pradakshina.

Exhorting Devotees

Bhagavan pressed even those who doubted the efficacy of pradakshina, even those who were weak or infirm or otherwise seemed ill-fit for it. If someone returned from pradakshina with bodily pain, Bhagavan would encourage them to go again the following day.

Once a physician named Sadhu Bramaniam returned from pradakshina with blistered feet. When he entered the hall limping, Bhagavan suggested he bathe his feet in warm water and go for pradakshina the following day. He advised him to go yet a third time the day after that. After the third pradakshina, the kindly doctor reported that his feet were healthy again. From that time onward, his feet gave him no more trouble.

Another time Muruganar asked Bhagavan to tell of the benefits of going round the hill. Bhagavan suggested that he first go round the hill and then inquire of its benefits. The poet dutifully followed the advice and the next day reported to Bhagavan something quite

remarkable: shortly after starting off on the hill-round path, he completely lost body consciousness (*dehatma buddhi*), only regaining it after reaching Adi Annamalai. Sri Bhagavan smiled and asked, “Now do you understand?”

Countless other devotees heard Sri Bhagavan esteem pradakshina above all other forms of worship. G. V. Subbaramayya records Bhagavan’s words in the Hall: “Other sacred hills are described as the abodes of some Deity. But Arunachala is God Himself in the shape of the Hill. So special sanctity attaches to going round it. It has been said that the one who has completed the round once in the proper way remains as *brahmakara* i.e. the ‘Absolute embodied’. The red sores on the feet caused by pricking stones along the way, it is said, will become diamonds in the crowns of Gods.”⁵ And to Devaraja Mudaliar, who initially expressed skepticism regarding the merit of, “It does not matter whether one has faith in pradakshina or not; just as fire will burn all who touch it whether they believe it will or not, so the Hill will do good to all those who go round it. Go round the Hill once. You will see that it will attract you.”⁶ ■

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5 *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G. V. Subbaramayya, p. 38.

6 Devaraja Mudaliar, *The Call Divine* vol. 6, Nov. 1957, p. 86.

Karthigai Deepam-Devotional Joy

P.N.Vijay



Karthigai Deepam is a festival celebrated in the month of *Karthigai* when the full moon is in conjunction with the constellation of *Karthigai*. This year it falls on Tuesday 10th December. It is celebrated as the birthday of Lord *Shanmuga*, the son of *Siva* and *Parvati*.

There are several legends associated with this auspicious day. One relates to the six faces of Lord *Shanmuga* (The Six-faced One). Legend has it that a demon called *Tarakasuran* had acquired a boon from *Brahma* that he would only be destroyed by a power equal to *Siva* but not by *Siva* himself. After acquiring the boon, he still had doubts about him outsmarting the gods (de-

vas). Hence, he asked *Brahma* who could be equal to *Siva*? *Brahma* told him that a son born to *Siva* would be equal to *Siva* in all aspects and he could destroy *Tarakasuran*. This relieved *Tarakasuran* as *Siva* at that time had become a recluse after the loss of his consort *Sati*. Thus, believing that son would never be born to *Siva*, he started tormenting the *devas*.

But by grace *Siva* eventually married *Parvati*, who was *Sati* reborn. Despite the wedding, there was still a difficulty before *Parvati* could bear a child. Manmadan - the Love God — was burned down by *Siva* when he had tried (at the request of *Devas*) to induce lust in *Siva*'s mind for *Parvati* when she was still serv-

ing him as a devotee. In grief at the loss of her beloved, Manmadan's wife Rati had cursed *Parvati* that she would never be able to bear *Siva's* child even if she won *Siva* and married him.

Now, *Tarakasuran* had to be destroyed but Rati's curse also had to materialize and come true. How could a child then be born to *Parvati* if she could not physically bear the child of *Siva*? Then all-knowing *Siva* found a proper way. The five faced (*Tatpurusam*, *Aghoram*, *Sadyojatam*, *Vamadevam* and *Eesanam*) *Siva* grew a sixth face *adho mukha* and created *Shanmukha* (the six-faced lord) himself.

Six sparks emerged from the forehead of six faces of and were reverentially carried by *Agni* and *Vayu* to river Ganga. Where six wives of the *Sapta rishis* (seven holy sages) held them in their wombs before depositing them on six lotus flowers at the *shara vana* (the forest of reeds). These six holy ladies who nurtured the sparks (*Karthikeya*) became the constellation of six stars in the skies. It is said on *Karthigai Deepam* Day, these six babies coalesced into *Shanmukha* — the six-faced lord who is considered as the son of *Siva* and *Parvati*. then destroyed

Tarakasuran and his two brothers *Simhamukhan* and *Surapadman* and freed the *Devas*.

There is another popular legend why this particular day is so auspicious. It is said, Lord *Siva* appeared as an endless flame of light before Lord *Vishnu* and Lord *Brahma*. Then to test the superiority between lord *Vishnu* and lord *Brahma*, they competed in searching the head and feet of this light. Lord *Vishnu* took the form of a boar and delved deep into the earth but was unsuccessful; Lord *Brahma* took the form of a swan and flew towards the skies. Lord *Vishnu* failed in his search and returned. But Lord *Brahma*, chanced upon a piece of *Thazhambu* (a flower) to trick Lord *Siva*. He learned from the flower that it had been dropping down from Lord *Siva's* head for thirty thousand years. He seized upon this information and claimed to Lord *Siva* that he had seen the light's top. Lord *Siva* realized the falsehood and pronounced that there would never be a temple of Lord in this world and he also forbade the use of the flower *Thazhambu* in his worship. As Lord *Siva* had appeared as a flame, this auspicious day is called as *Karthigai Deepam*. It is stated that *Siva* resides as a flame in the

Arunachala Hill in Tiruvannamalai and greets the devotees once a year on *Karthigai Deepam day*.

In Tiruvannamalai, *Karthigai Deepam* is a ten-day festival and is known as *Karthigai Brahmotsavam*. On the first day, the Temple flag is hoisted in a ceremony called *Dhvaja Rohanam*. In the morning and night, Lord Arunachaleswara is taken out in a procession. Furthermore, *Panchmurtis* (five idols) of Lord *Ganapati*, Lord *Murugan*, Lord *Chandikeshwara*, Lord *Arunachaleswara*, and Goddess *Parvati* are also taken out in a procession.

From the second to the ninth day, the *Panchmurtis* are taken in grand processions in *Indira Vimhanam*, *Simha vahanam*, *Rishabha vahanam*, *Kamdhenu vahanam*, *Rajata vahanam*, *Maharatham* (The Huge Temple Car which almost occupies the whole road), *Ashva vahanam* and the *Kailasha vahanam*.

On the tenth day, early in the morning, *Bharani Deepam* is lit at the Temple and in the evening the *Maha Deepam* is lit on the top the Arunachala hill at about 6'o clock. A huge gathering lost in devotional joy, views the spectacle, chanting '*Arunachalanukku Arohara*'. The *Brahmotsavam* ends with the Lord being taken out in procession in the night in *Rishaba vahanam*, which is made of pure gold.

While in Ramana Kendra Delhi, the devotees assemble in large numbers to recite the *Ashtotaram*, and *Aksharamana Malai* and take a flame in procession three times around the shrine chanting '*Arunachala Siva*'. Then the flame is hoisted on top of the Shrine. Then devotees go out to the road get the darshan of the flame.

May Lord Shanmuga, the six-faced God, bless us all with Health, Wealth and Happiness. ■

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Just the spider draws out the thread of the cobweb from within itself and withdraws – it again into itself, in the same way the projects the world out of itself and absorbs it back into itself.

-Sri Ramana Maharshi-



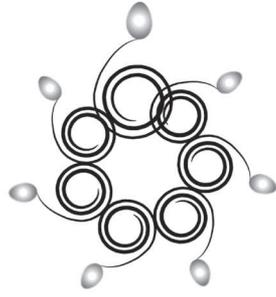
Circular Satsang

Bharati Mirchandani

A circle is a stable eternal entity, with empty vastness as its core. Any point in the circle is undifferentiated from any other, it flows along as an unending continuum.

A Ramana Study Circle has taken tentative roots at the Library Hall of the Ramana Kendra, Delhi. The first Sunday of each month suddenly became available for starting this experiment. The very first study circle was very auspiciously hijacked by Sri Ramana himself! 1st September Advent day was celebrated with a special anointing of *jnana* and *vidya* energies with *pujas* in *bhakti bhaav*. Later that month, the first day of the Navratas, Devi energies fostered the formal launch of the Study Circle.

The topic for in-depth exploration was Bhagavan's five stanza poem, *Arunachala Pancharatnam*. One verse from the work was taken up at each session. The first two verses were written without any topic been posed to Bhagavan. The three remaining verses were written based on Kavyakanth Ganapathy Muni's suggestions of illuminating the paths of yoga for seekers. Furthermore, Ramana's total commitment, identification, and love for the mountain



(Arunachala) inspired this topic. The paths of *bhakti yoga*, *raja yoga*, and *jnana yoga* in the last three verses all lead to union with Arunachala.

Bhagavan starts by saluting the overflowing grace and pleads with Arunachala to shine on the ripening lotus bud of the heart cave, unfurling its petals till it is fully bloomed and radiant. Just two terse lines and a whole of enlightenment are beautifully expressed. The second verse goes on to cite the creative, sustaining and reabsorbing powers of Arunachala. In other words, citing the God of the holy trinity of Brahma Vishnu and Maheshwara, who create, maintain and destroy the entire cosmos. This holy eternal dance goes on in the cave of the inner being; verily Heart is the name of the Lord Arunachala.

So, we gather in a circle, a bunch of earnest plodders on the path. We bring our queries, our limitations, and also all our bookish knowledge. More than that, we bring our devotion, our individual views, and experiences. We sit in a circle like a pond lotus buds yearning to open up. We sit like miniature Arunachalas, feeling the glorious energies flowing in barely perceptible vibrations.

Each session starts with AUM chanting. Then the verse for the study is read aloud. So far none of us in this circle are proficient at chanting either Sanskrit or Tamil, so we do the best we can, and play J Jayaraman's rendition. He very kindly recorded this for us as well as presented a delightful overview and brilliant insights into the whole composition. His discourse on the first Sunday of October was not confined to the Study Circle, though integral to it. A large number of people attended his talk in the hall upstairs.

Our circle discussed the two verses studied so far. We clarified the meanings of each word and the brief synopsis has been given to the Ashram publication as the launching pad. We hope these explorations will lead us to transcend the literal meaning of the book to a more personal and lived insight into the material. It is so precious that each one attending the circle listens and shares to unravel the realms beyond. Formulae and clichés that serve as protection fade and our rough-edged lived truths emerge. The energy generated allows insights to bubble up that are not easy to put down in words.

However, below are a few small insights from the communication:

1. When we talked about decreasing one's identification with

things and situations around us, body identification was observed to be the biggest block. Then someone pointed out that the tangle of subtle thought waves was the densest obstacle!

2. Discussing the description of Grace as overflowing waves, different voices expressed Grace as appearing in unpredictable forms. When Grace is sought for with some preconceived ideas, disappointment often follows. Yet uplifting Grace appears unexpectedly; in the form of a message printed on a mug; as a strong urge to go in one direction rather than another; even a child's insistence that parents take only new clothes to Tiruvannamalai! These whimsical and even funny divine interventions proved to be major spiritual turning points in their lives.

This study circle so far has no adept guide or leader; much like the parable of blind people feeling only one aspect of the elephant and then trying to understand it as a whole. The vital difference is that here we are sharing what we have grasped, and it feels like we are helping each other understand the Whole. Ramana has created this space, and His love and guidance are palpable. I leave the room with Ramana's eyes and smile in my heart. A Circle whose center is everywhere... ■

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Morning Poem

Every morning
the world
is created.
Under the orange
sticks of the sun
the heaped
ashes of the night
turn into leaves again
and fasten themselves to the high branches—
and the ponds appear
like black cloth
on which are painted islands
of summer lilies.
If it is your nature
to be happy
you will swim away along the soft trails
for hours, your imagination
alighting everywhere.
And if your spirit
carries within it
the thorn
that is heavier than lead—
if it's all you can do
to keep on trudging—
there is still
somewhere deep within you
a beast shouting that the earth
is exactly what it wanted—
each pond with its blazing lilies
is a prayer heard and answered
lavishly,
every morning,
whether or not
you have ever dared to be happy,
whether or not
you have ever dared to pray.

--Mary Oliver

God's creation does not bind

God's creation does not bind: only the jiva's creation, which is mental conception, binds. This is illustrated by the story of the father of the dead son being happy while the father of the living son lamented.

The story mentioned in this verse is as follows: Two neighbours called Rama and Krishna, who lived in a small village in South India, went on a pilgrimage to Kasi. On the way Rama died of fever, and Krishna continued alone on his pilgrimage. While proceeding to Kasi, Krishna met another pilgrim who was returning to the South and asked him to convey the news of Rama's death to his parents. The pilgrim duly came to the village, but while telling the news he said, due to forgetfulness, that Krishna had died and that Rama was proceeding towards Kasi. The parents of Krishna wept and grieved over the loss of their son, who was actually alive, while the parents of Rama were rejoicing over the welfare of their son, who was actually dead. Now, was not the wrong knowledge of the parents the cause for their respective misery and happiness? In the same manner, the cause for the miseries of birth and death experienced by the jivas is only the wrong knowledge, the wrong mental conception, that one is the body. Therefore, the conception 'I am the body', which is only a creation of the mind or jiva, is the sole cause of bondage. This is why Sri Bhagavan says in this verse, "Only the jiva's creation, which is a mental conception, binds". According to their maturity, does not God bestow upon jivas their allotted *prarabdha* – the selected and arranged fruits of good and bad karmas – for their own uplift?. All that we see as our life in a body and as a world in which we live, is nothing but our *prarabdha* karma. Do we not think that such a world, which is arranged according to our karmas and vasanas, is the creation of God? Thus the very purpose of the appearance or creation of the world which we see, is to teach us *vairagya* (dispassion) by making us experience pains and pleasures and thereby to turn our mind towards Self. The state in which the mind is ever turned Self-wards is liberation or *moksha*. Therefore the very purpose of the world, which is said to be God's creation, is not to bind us but only to liberate us. That is why it is said in this verse, "God's creation does not bind." –

[Source: *Guru Vachaka Kovai, Verse 669*]

Thirst for “Self-Knowledge” – Jignasa

Shiromani Vijay

Desire for any knowledge is *jignasa* or *vividisha*. In fact, *jignasa* has gone into our language – in Bengali one would say ‘*jigish karo*’ for enquiring or asking which is our desire to know. However, in *Vedanta Sastra*, *jignasa* refers to the desire for Self-Knowledge, not just a desire or curiosity but an intense and persistent thirst. In fact, the Brahmasutra opens with the Sutra “*atha to Brahmajignas*”.

Among the four *Purusharthas* (those actions that are proper and correct) namely *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* (liberation). *Moksha* from the cycle of birth and death arising out of Self-knowledge is the greatest referred to as *paramapurushartha*. This is rightly so as when we pursue other *purusharthas*, the pursuing or seeking never ends – there will always be something we can get beyond what we already have. On the other hand, puts an end to all seeking. It is the culmination. As in Bhagavad Gita 6th chapter, Krishna says *Yam labdhva chaparam labham manyate na*

param tatah... “upon gaining this, he thinks there is no greater gain”. It is *nirathishayam* – that which cannot be excelled and the absolute fulfilment. For a wise man, there is no other choice. Why would he go after impermanent, useless cheap pursuits, when *moksha* can give permanent happiness.

Means for *moksha* is *jnanam* – *jnanaadeva kaivalyam* (*kaivalya* and *moksha* are synonyms). Desire for *moksha* is *mumukshutva* and



person desiring *moksha* is a *mumukshu*. Therefore, if one is seeking *moksha*, there must be an intense desire for *jnana* – self knowledge. Though the desire for

moksha is not difficult to get as everyone wants lasting happiness and freedom. It is not easy to obtain the thirst for knowledge – *jignasa*. The thirst for *moksha* has to be so very intense that *jignasa* will come automatically. As it is said in the text *Vedantasara, Deeptashira jalarashimiva* – like a man with a burning head will go to any extent to find a body of water to dip his head.

The superficial curiosity in *jnana*, leads one to gather information and most often this information makes one egoistic with earnestness missing. However, when there is an intense desire for *jnana*, the knowledge gets assimilated with clarity – just like the food eaten only by a person with good appetite gets assimilated.

How does one improve *jignasa*? There are basically two means: one is cognitive and the other is purificatory.

The mind desires an object only when it is convinced of its value. When we are convinced about the futility and limitation of objects, we get *vairagya*. If we have to be convinced that is of value and *jnana* is the means to attain *moksha*, we get *jignasa*. We can hope to get this conviction by sincerely exposing ourselves to Vedanta and noticing



the positive changes in our lives. This will propel us to become serious seekers. It is our *pr-arabada* which guides to walk this path!

Just as appetite indicates a healthy body, *jignasa* indicates a pure mind. Our mind is full of desires which leads to impurity. *Putraishana* – seeking relationships, *vittaishana* – seeking wealth and *Lokaishana* – seeking power and status. These undue desires arising out of , leads to other impurities of the mind - anger, greed, delusion, pride and jealousy. Then how does one purify the mind? In the 18th chapter of Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says *yagno danam tapah caiva paavanani mainishanam* – sacrifice, charity and penance are purificatory means even for great people. And *Briharanyaka Upanishad* gives the *vividisha vakya* – *tametam vedanuvachanena vividishanti, yagnena danena tapasaa...* - by *yagna, dana* and *tapsas* one gets *jignasa (vividisha)*. Connecting the two, we know that these purificatory actions lead to thirst for self-



knowledge. *Dharmasashtra* shows us what we should do and what we must eschew. Leading our life on the path of Dharma, we must do *yagna*, *dana* and *Tapas*. In *Treta yuga*, they were *mumukshu* and hence were seeking jnana straight away, in *Krita yuga* they used to do severe tapas, in *Dwapara yuga* people performed complex yagnas, in this *Kali yuga* *Dana* is prescribed which is the simplest of all - we must have the attitude of a giver

and when we share what we have, it gives us a lot of peace and joy. The tapas for our age, is sticking to the values of *satyam*, *Ahimsa* *Brahmacharya*, *Astheya* *Aparigraha* - without yielding to temptations and overcoming our natural impulses. Yagna for our age is *Japa Yagna* -as Krishna says in *Bhagavad Gita*, *yagnanam Japayagnosmi*. May this information culminate in *jignasa* leading to *moksha*. ■

Based on a talk by Swami Shivaprakasananda on the same subject

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You have to ask yourself the question, “Who am I”? This investigation will lead in the end to the discovery of something within you which is behind the mind. Solve that great problem and you will solve all other problems thereby.

-Sri Ramana Maharshi-

When the goal is reached, when you know the knower, there is no difference between living in a house in London and living in the solitude of a jungle.

-Sri Ramana Maharshi-

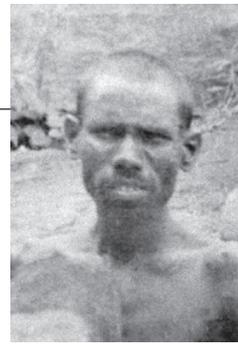
Masthan Swami

Masthan Swami was born and brought up as a staunch Muslim. However, since his childhood, he would enter into samadhi without knowing what it was. He also studied books like Kaivalya Navaneetam and Sukar Vashista. Tamil poems of the nineteenth-century Sufi mystic, Gunangudi Masthan, which were vedantic in nature; moreover Thayumanavar's songs also made a great impression on him.

Masthan Swami was taken to meet Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave by Desurammal who hailed from his village of Desur. In his words the darshan was mesmerizing. 'He was seated like a rock. His unswerving gaze was filled with grace, compassion and steady wisdom... After giving me a look, he opened the gate of my heart and I was established in his state in the very first encounter.'

Bhagavan expounded to Masthan that 'the Guru lives eternally in your heart. Heart is Allah. Heart is Jesus Christ. Heart is Buddha. Heart is Bhagavan. Live in the Heart as the Heart, by diving into the Heart'.

It is said of Masthan Swami that he was the Kabir of Bhagavan. He was totally devoted to the master and



came to him regularly, giving up his profession of weaving. He only wove for Bhagavan. Being a true ascetic, he did not marry and begged in the streets.

Masthan had many conversations with Bhagavan. Of one such conversation, he recounts, "once, while on my way to see Bhagavan, I prayed for his grace. On arrival at Virupaksha Cave, he asked me, "do you like *saguna upasana*— worship of God with form— or do you prefer *nirguna upasana* — worship of the formless God? "I replied, "I choose *nirguna upasana*". Bhagavan then gave me this beautiful instruction. "Fix the mind in the Heart. If you keep your attention on the source from where all thoughts arise, the mind will subside there at the source and reality will shine forth". Bhagavan thus guided him to be established in the Heart.

Masthan Swami was very humble. Bhagavan himself said that except for Kunju Swami and Viswanth Swami, the other devotees never knew about him. He preferred to remain unobserved.

When Masthan Swami became ill, he moved from his village to another village because he did not want to trouble anyone. Bhagavan instructed Desurammal to look after him. His last days were very beautiful, as described to Bhagavan by Desurammal. “We thought he may be in a delirium. He was saying, Nandi has descended and Siva’s celestial devotees, the *bhutas*, are dancing, saying, come, come to us. In his last moments, he stood up and then with tears in his eyes said, Apeethakuchambal has come to receive me, I am going, and he dropped dead”.

Bhagavan commented, “maybe the Universal Mother personally came to take him. All his descriptions tally with the world of Siva as narrated in the Puranas”. He then picked up a copy of the 2500-year-old Tamil book, Tirumandiram, which has instructions on how a realized being’s body is to be buried. Bhagavan marked those passages and sketched out how the tomb had to be built and the body entombed with sacred ash, camphor, and other ingredients. Following these clear directions, the samadhi was built.

The whole village turned out that day despite the pouring rain. The local temple, even though it was a

simple one, gave the temple chariot in which God’s image was carried, for the final journey of a Muslim. Most Hindus will appreciate the profundity of this magnanimous gesture. Amidst chanting, the body was carried into the samadhi. It is said that whoever goes there and offers prayers, has his wishes granted.

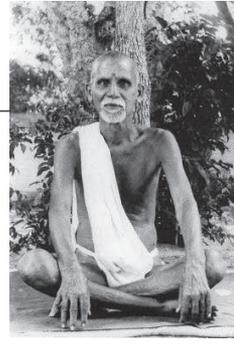
Masthan Swami had a disciple named Sambhandam from whose notebook these details have been gathered. In a song dedicated to him, he says, “Oh Masthan, the liberated sage ... you are ever a good and pure renunciate, who remained forever like a child, who roamed like a ghost and who lived without a trace of worldly desires. Precious gem, who obtained the sacred grace of satguru Ramana adored by all, praise to your fullness and salutations to your holy feet.”

From Masthan Swami we learn the definition of a living Guru. Self-effort and self-realization are nouns. Self-realizing is a verb because it is always happening. We have the liberty to make the effort. The result is always in the hands of God and it is always for our good. ■

Source: Ramana Periya Puranam by V. Ganesan

November 8th is Masthan Swami’s Aradhana Day.

Annamalai Swami



An astrologer had predicted that Chellaperumal (Annamalai Swami) was destined to become an ascetic, a *Sadhu*. Since his father wanted to prevent it, he did not send Chellaperumal to school. He thought that if he didn't get a chance to learn to read he would not be able to read the spiritual texts and hence would not become a renunciate. His father being a simple farmer made Annamalai Swami work in the paddy fields. Despite this Annamalai Swami managed to learn and read all the alphabets. This was primarily due to his tremendous sense of perseverance.

When Chellaperumal was still very young, he was fascinated by few nearby sadhus. He started visiting them and reading spiritual books. He was helped by a neighboring woman in obtaining Tamil texts on *advaita*. Interestingly, despite being a very young lad, he could read the texts and somehow explain it to the village women who were not able to read or comprehend it. Soon his readings of the scriptures started attracting several women in the vil-

lage. All this happened for about six years right under his father's nose.

As he grew to be a teenager, Chellaperumal became determined to become an ascetic. He initiated himself into *sanyasa* on his own and undertook a number of charitable works in the village. He would for instance distribute water to thirsty travellers and give gruel to the poor. Alongside this Annamalai continued his spiritual practice. He even managed to have a meeting with Shankaracharya of Kanchi Mutt and get his blessings for continuing his work.

While continuing with such works, a wandering sadhu gave him Bhagavan's compilation – 'Updesh Undiyar'. This featured thirty verses of the highest spiritual *vedantic* instructions and also contained a picture of Bhagavan. As soon as he saw the picture, he became certain that he was his Guru, even though he could not fully comprehend the commentary detailed in the text. With some financial help from villagers, he arrived at Thiruvannamalai and began his learning under Bhagavan.

Interestingly, upon his arrival he met Sheshadri Swami, a maverick sadhu of sorts, but highly respected and regarded. Seshadri Swami blessed him (by abusing him – as was his strange ways) that his endeavor would be successful in Thiruvanamalai.

His first interaction with Bhagavan was in the old hall, where Annamalai gave some raisins to him. As soon as Bhagavan had those raisins, Annamalai felt a sliver of thrill passing down his spine. He felt as if Siva himself had accepted his offering. Great emotions and tears welled up in him. He prostrated Bhagavan and completely surrendered to Him. Many years later, he would relate this meeting as a wonderful coolness pervading in his body as if he had immersed himself in a soothing pool after getting scorched in the hot sun. Furthermore, he even managed to secure the job of Bhagavan's attendant just after the first meeting. Within a few days he was named Annamalai Swami by Bhagavan as he purportedly reminded Sri Ramana of another Swami, by this name. At this point it must be noted that Bhagavan responded to Annamalai Swami with utmost attention because his surrender to Bhagavan was total and unconditional. A *jnani* is like a mirror, the way he responds

to you reflects the way you approach him. If the surrender is complete, then the blessing is also complete.

One of the first and most significant *upadesa* given by Bhagavan to him was 'Go inwards and always hold onto the 'Self'. Annamalai Swami, would later recall he never could understand the significance of these first words. But he spent the rest of his life based on this very first *upadesa*. In the beginning his *vasanas* would sometimes try to derail his efforts. His latent tendencies would bubble up and he would at times feel that he should instead go and do his spiritual practices elsewhere. In fact, once he walked out of the ashram. He travelled nearly twenty miles and when he felt hungry he begged. But as destined divinely, he could not even get a morsel of food during this time. When in great suffering he related this story to somebody, he realized his foolishness. Miraculously as soon as he realized his mistake an hotelier gave him food and furthermore he even managed to get back to Tiruvannamalai on a train without a ticket. On reaching the ashram, he fell at Bhagavan's feet and begged him for forgiveness. Bhagavan's reply was, 'How can you escape? You have work to do here. If you

try to leave without doing the jobs destined for you, where can you run away? Stay here’.

The next day Annamalai Swami was asked to go and supervise the mason work. It is only then Annamalai Swami, realized that Bhagavan wanted him to do an avalanche of back breaking construction work. Annamalai Swami was given construction work, one after the another. He managed to complete them with utmost sincerity. Even today one can see many of his constructions in perfect shape. (eg. the revetment work inside the ashram compound, various samadhis, the storeroom and the dispensary among others). These remain as a testament Annamalai Swami’s devotion and dedication to Bhagavan. Oddly, despite his tremendous work, other people at the ashram did not recognize his contribution during his time. The only relief given to him was Bhagavan’s encouraging *updesa* ‘Annamalai Swami, you are not the body, you are not the mind, you are pure Consciousness – the all-pervasive Self’. Annamalai Swami diligently adhered to the instructions of Bhagavan. By diligently carrying out his work as directed by Sri Ramana and in a spirit of total surrender, Anna-

malai Swami succeed in washing out his *vasanas*.

Finally, after years of toiling Bhagavan finally said to him ‘You are now a free man. All your *karmas* are finished.’ He even hugged Annamalai Swami, which put a full stop to his destiny. Many years later Annamalai Swami would relate this incident that after the long hug he completely lost all awareness of the body and the world. After the initial euphoria, he did not retain this sense of euphoria. The very next day he went to Bhagavan and asked him for his blessings to go and stay in Palaakothu. Interestingly, after Annamalai Swami moved to Palaakothu, Bhagavan guided him spiritually by visiting him almost everyday. Interestingly He even advised him not to come to Ramanasramam, even for *darshan*. or move towards the road. Bhagavan however mentioned that he was free to move towards the Hill.

After getting firmly established in the self, Annamalai Swami started his new phase of life. He started teaching aspirants, the path of Self Enquiry. An interesting aspect of his approach was that he even taught this to lay people, when it was widely believed that it was

only for intellectuals and scholars. His teachings were filled with vivid examples which were very easy to grasp. For example, he would often stress that one should stick with one method of sadhana based on one's temperament. In other words, in case someone sticks with self-enquiry as the route to realizing one's true nature, he or she should not change it abruptly it become challeng-

ing to practice. As an example, if one wants to become a good violin player, one must go to a good master regularly and sincerely practice the teachings. He should not for instance change his mind and practice clarinet for some time and lose track. ■

Source: Ramana Periya Puranam by V. Ganesan

November 9th is Annamalai Swami's Aradhana Day.

Compassion of Sri Bhagavan

A devotee Eknath Rao, brought into the hall a bowl filled with fruits cut into pieces and placed it before Sri Bhagavan. Within the large bowl was a smaller bowl with pieces cut specially for Sri Bhagavan. Bhagavan's sense of equality was total and although his tolerance towards devotees was immense, he would never permit anything special for himself.

When Bhagavan noticed a separate bowl for himself, he was annoyed and pushed the big bowl aside roughly. A few pieces of fruit spilled on to the floor and were left there. The devotee then began to distribute the pieces to all in the hall. Everyone sat with a few pieces in their hands, not wanting to eat since Bhagavan himself did not have any. Out of compassion for the devotees, Bhagavan reached down, picked up the pieces that had fallen on the floor and began to eat. The rest of the devotees were then able to eat too".

[Source: Ramana Periya Puranam]

Lucy Cornelssen: A True Mystic

By Joan Greenblatt



There are a few individuals who come into this world, live a remote, almost obscure life, yet radiate a special presence. They are like a little lantern on a worn path that, if one stumbles across, lights one's way. Lucy Cornelssen was one such lantern. She was a true mystic, born with an intense inner calling, the gift of compassion, and a smile that melted one's heart.

We met her when she was in her mid-eighties and knew her well into her nineties. Lucy spent her last decade living in a small, one-room, thatched-roofed cottage at the foot of the sacred hill, Arunachala, in the South Indian town of Tiruvannamalai. She possessed the rare quality of grace and resignation and permeated the space around her with the magic

of inner silence.

Her outer life was nondescript. In her later years she rarely left the cottage, yet she was always an inspiration to be with. At least once a week over a period of several years, my husband and I would visit her modest cottage. Often, we would simply sit quietly together, with the silence broken by stories from Indian lore or pieces from the colourful quilt of her life. The most memorable scenes were of her young days as a German mother taking refuge from World War II in the depths of the Black Forest of Southern Germany. It was during these years, living like Thoreau, that awakened her sense of "living in the moment," of becoming truly quiet. It was here that she listened to the sounds of nature and the

rain tapping on the roof—she simply became one with nature. In the forest, Lucy learned the art of waiting without expectation and living one day at a time.

Through her mother, she came to learn of Indian art and philosophy. One day when entering a room in her Mother's house, her eyes fell upon a bronze figure of *Nataraja*, the Hindu deity *Shiva*, in its dancing aspect. Immediately she felt a previous or *karmic* connection and became unconscious to the outer world. From that time on, she lived as one who felt the presence of *Shiva* in her heart.

As a trained journalist, Lucy Ma (as she was affectionately called) translated the *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* into German. Her translation became widely read by those interested in the teachings of this great sage. This attraction to Ramana grew into a deep mystical relationship with the Arunachala Hill, for this sacred hill is considered to be the physical manifestation of *Shiva* himself. To Lucy Ma, Arunachala was not merely a hill of red boulder and stone but the living presence of *Shiva*, a place that radiates silence and peace, turning one's mind toward the Self.

While her philosophical outlook was resolutely non-dualistic, her devotion to *Shiva* was deeply interwoven into her nature, revealing a beautiful balance of head and heart. Lucy Ma loved stories, especially allegorical ones, and would always see the teachings within them rather than the theory. Often she would entertain us from her endless source of stories, and each story seemed to be appropriate for us at that moment. When she sensed we were taking events around us too seriously, she would often tell us a story to put us back on track. One of her favorites was about a King who asked the spiritual teachers of his land to give him something which would make him happy when he was sad and sad when he was happy. After much deliberation they presented him with a ring on which was inscribed the saying: "This too shall pass."

The last time we saw her we knew it would be our last. She was eating very little then, and we knew she would effortlessly slip away in a silent, graceful manner like a butterfly whose purpose has been fulfilled through metamorphosis. She stood at the entrance to her small cottage waving and smiling radiantly. I turned to look just before entering

the main road and saw her gazing at the peak of her beloved Arunachala.

For a number of years, while living in the United States, we had a regular correspondence. Even though she became frailer and found writing difficult, she continued. Lucy Ma's last letter to us was written a few weeks before her passing, in 1990, and contained a very

pointed and strong admonition to be at peace with whatever life brings, that the secret of true peace lies in acceptance and letting go. For Lucy Ma these were not mere words but a living testimony of her life. ■

Source: <https://www.innerdirections.org/lucy-cornelssen/>

Lucy Ma's Aradhana day is 31st December.

Prof. N.R. Krishnamurti Aiyer (1898-1994), who in his old age stayed with his son at Tiruvannamalai told the following to Shri V. Ganesan:

In Bhagavan's daily life one noticed personal cleanliness, tidiness of dress, habitual wearing of vibhuti and kumkum on the forehead; equal sharing of all enjoyment with those around him; strict adherence to a time schedule; performing useful work however 'low' it may be; never leaving a work unfinished; the pursuit of perfection in every action; incessant activity except while sleeping or resting after a spell of hard work; never considering oneself superior to others; speaking the truth always, or strict silence if the expression of truth would hurt or lower the reputation of others; perfect self-help never asking another to do a piece of work which can be done by oneself; taking full responsibility for failure, if any, without shifting the blame on others; accepting success or failure with equanimity; never disturbing the peace of others; leaving the leaf-plate clean after eating; complete non-interference in the affairs of others; never worrying about the future.

These are the lessons Sri Ramana taught by example to his devotees.

[Source: Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi, p.48]

Musings on matters of life and death

Bharati Mirchandani

Last month, I went to an art exhibition titled Journey of Life. On display were rather introspective portraits purportedly depicting life's many moods; all the moods seemed to be sad, grim, troubled. In conversation the artist came across as exceptionally honest and joyful. He cheerily talked of suffering immense pain and how creating art had helped him survive obstacles on his life's journey.

The very next day I was at the opening of an exhibition where the artist wrote, 'I paint so that I don't end up painting my own hands with blood.' She had a history of venting frustrations with a sharp cutter on her wrists. The artist was very young, vivacious and pretty; and so were her works depicting nature, colourful flowers and trees. There was scarcely any trace of the mental anguish she'd written in her invite.

The simultaneity of viewing these works reminded me of how cathartic the process of creating art is. Also it hit me that only one who is sane can face insanity! So great was one person's inner anguish that her works had to be

pretty, harmonious, pleasing.

A person prone to epilepsy has trouble coping with strobe lights, flashing traffic lights or LED clock display. So too, only when an addict trying to regain self control is able to look at temptation, stare at it, and still not succumb can the person be deemed recovered. This ability to balance opposites is the ultimate enabler. If we extend this matrix to the art of living we find: Only death help us live. Only by facing everything death means to me physically, mentally, psychologically, can I claim to be truly living.

Ramana was a young boy, 16, usually the age of outgoing energies and exuberance, when he experienced death processes by sincerely acting the role and holding his breath. What dies, he inquired. And he discovered that which doesn't die with the body.

After this deep and profound inner discovery, he went on to live, and here I use an inadequate word, 'fully'. Total, complete awareness defined his existence thenceforth. For over half a century after that he lived as the light that lifted others to greater understanding, glimpsing their inner

truth for themselves in the presence of his radiance. He lived in this all encompassing all compassionate state even when his physical frame was attacked, by insects, robbers and later, carcinoma.

Why did so many saints of recent years get cancer, considered by many to be a death warrant? Is it a coincidence that jivanmuktas, Sri Ramakrishna, J Krishnamurtiji, Sri Ramana, Nisargadatta Maharaj, all suffered this same disease of the body. This must be to teach us something: Perhaps that one may live a full radiant and inspiring life even when the body is being ravaged; Perhaps that realizing the permanence of consciousness, torment to the impermanent can no longer overwhelm.

My friend Myna (name changed) did not know of saints, scriptures and philosophies. She belonged to a family having simple Gandhian life style, high values and tradition of creating art, loving and laughing. She died last year. She was no saint. Just Myna. Yet behaved like a jivanmukta, living loving and laughing. She too battled the same disease. Thirteen years of constant fight using knives, radiation, drugs as well as every form of positive therapy she could. But greatest was her inner determination to live fully till the

inevitable end.

Over these years I was privileged to witness her personal journey from an ordinary person to the level that *sadhakas* aim to reach. She did this through facing fully what life offered, constant watchfulness to identify anything that did not augment her in any way, and to eliminate negative factors to whatever extent possible.

For example, she had to steel herself to ignore her doctors when they averted their eyes and behaved ‘as though I am dead already!’ New symptoms of the disease would be pointed to the doctors for follow up action, but not allowed to stop her from doing what she wanted to. I remember when her fingers lost their grip, she carried a pile of beautiful ceramic plates to the table using her forearms. Could she not express a complaint or plea for help? Such determined adherence to standards she set herself!

So we can surmise that we can achieve a fuller existence just by facing and including all opposites into our awareness. Face insanity to become sane, face fears to become fearless, confront weaknesses to overcome them, admit failure to taste victory, turn our attention to darkness to find the inner light, and face death to live. ■

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Kendra Bulletin

Satsang summaries: September to November 2019



September 8th

Swami Prabuddhanandji explained the famous verse ‘*Uttishathat Jagrata...*’ from Kathopanishad which literally means: ‘Get up, wake up and prepare yourself to reach your ultimate goal in life.’ He dwelt deeply on its esoteric meaning: goodness in deed and thought ensure for us mental peace, sense control, values such as honesty and dutifulness, and help us accept the difficulties that accrue from our destiny (*prarabdha*). This goodness prepares us for wisdom; the more prepared we are the more peaceful will we be.

Said Swamiji: Wake up to see the value of your existence. Our love should be not for doing but for Being which will lead to happiness. The desire for happiness stems from the fact that it is our very Nature. No desire can ever be fulfilled; desire can only flare up by seeing and thinking of objects of the world. Hence seek the feet (*sharan*) of the scriptures which show the way to a knowledge that culminates in right thinking, taking you back to your Self. Understand that you can’t be dispossessed of your Existence, It can only be objectified. All noise resolves in silence (the empirical term for Peace). God didn’t create silence - IT IS. Serenity is the nature of Truth.

Through the next verse Swamiji emphasized the need to reach a realized teacher and to listen to Vedanta which is like listening to your own Nature. Studying the scriptures will help one reflect upon the difference

between form and substance, i.e, I can look at form but form can't look at me. When the dissimilarity is absolute, there can be no parallels. Water and wave or ornament and gold are unlike each other but not independent of each other: one is form while the other is substance. Upon developing good qualities, put them to good use through understanding the secret of Being and serving others.

-- *Rashmi Vyas*

September 22nd

Taking up verses 6-9 of Bhagavan's selection from the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Ambarish Daveji detailed various aspects of the Atman. In verse 6, the Gita says Atman is neither born nor dies. This Atman is not produced (*utpanna*), nor does He come and go. Unlike objects, He is not subject to *vastu vikara* or the modifications that take place to the body between birth and death. He is unborn (*ajo*), eternal (*nitya*), Truth as it is (*sasvato*), so ancient that He has no beginning nor end (*purano*). He is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. This Atman, Self or I resides in the spiritual heart.

Taking up further characteristics of the Atman in Verse 7, Ambarishji spoke of Him being invulnerable for He cannot be burnt nor wet nor dried. The five *panchabhutas* (five elements) can destroy each other but the Atman can neither be destroyed nor destroy itself. Since He is eternal, He is also all-pervading (*sarvagatah*). Just as the space in the pot permeates the pot, He permeates the entire *jagat*. He is unchanging (*sthanur*), immovable (*achala*), ever was and ever will be (*sanatanah*). Verse 8 reiterates the all-pervading and indestructible aspects of the Atman and its irreducible nature. Using the example of water droplets manifesting themselves in sunlight as a rainbow, Ambarishji spoke of Brahman manifesting Himself as *jagat* from Himself. While rainbows come and go, Atman is immutable. Explaining the complex verse 9, Ambarishji said that while the non-existent has no existence, the existent has no non-existence. The stuff of Brahman can never be non-existent. A pot or brick made of clay can break but nothing can happen to the clay – for Brahman is like clay, beyond shape or form.

---*Neera Kashyap*

October 6th

A resident of Sriramanasramam for nearly 35 years, Shri. J. Jayaramanji (JJ) visited Delhi after 40 years. Invited to hold a satsang at the Kendra, his choice and exposition of Bhagavan's composition, *Arunachala Pancharatnam* began with prayers in Sanskrit accompanied by Tiruvannamalai resident-devotee Anubodh Shakti's serene flute play.

JJ described in detail the subtle role of consciousness in our everyday existence. Owing to unending desires, *jiva* constantly feels a sense of non-fulfilment. If a desire is fulfilled, we want the experience to continue or repeat itself. This creates memories of *ananda* from worldly *bhog*, resulting in the body being taken as the real "me" with its sense of doership that continually wants to experience worldly fulfilment. Thus, a confrontation arises between our sense of Being (free from intellect) and our addiction to doership through our five *karma indriyas* — which boil down to the use of our hands, feet, and speech. If the mind can control these — our grasping, our movement and our spoken words, a vast mind control would be achieved.

Our Existence (Being) and Knowledge of It are not separate. In fact, they are inseparable just as wood and fire are inseparable, fire being innate in wood. Similarly, consciousness is our very Being and a mere witness to *jiva's* existence. In explaining Bhagavan's composition of the five verses of *Arunachala Pancharatna* — verses in praise of *Arunachala* — JJ revealed how Bhagavan has extolled the greatness of the blissful light of the Self, revealing how we can experience the truth that this light is ever our own nature. In the very first verse, Bhagavan addresses *Arunachala* as the supreme spirit of compassion itself. If we focus our attention only on the Self, the bright light of *Arunachala* will dawn on us, swallowing the darkness of ignorance. The whole triad of world, God and *jiva* would merge as one. This experience is possible only when the light of *Arunachala's* Grace makes the heart lotus bloom. In this poem, Bhagavan makes this earnest prayer that the all-pervasive rays of *Arunachala* make this happen.

Next, Bhagavan explains the appearance and disappearance of the world as a play of *Arunachala*, even as *jiva* feels this play in the mind. So long as the mind is not merged in the light of *Arunachala*, the appearance of the world will continue. Bhagavan pronounces *Arunachala* as the heart itself —

as the ‘I’ dancing within the heart as the Self — Arunachala being synonymous with the Self, God, Heart.

JJ went onto explain that the rising of the ‘I thought’ gives rise to the rising of all *vrittis*. This rising ‘I’, if merged into the unlimited ‘I’ becomes the true ‘I’ just as the river merging into the ocean loses its individuality. To know the Self we must give up attending to external objects and, with a pure mind turned inwards, meditate upon the consciousness ‘I’ that shines in the heart. In this way, our mind will cease to exist as a separate entity as it merges in the Self — the ocean of bliss.

--Indra Sharma

October 20th

Shlokas 19 & 20 of *Saddarshanam* together examine differences between *jnani*s and *ajnanis*. In Shloka 19, which explores the relationship with one’s own body, Bhagavan states that both *jivanmuktas* and ignorant persons have a similar identification with the body. The *ajnani*’s knowledge of the Atman is limited to a body within form, time and space. The *jnani*’s knowledge is awareness of the self-effulgent Atman within the heart whose brilliance engulfs the body and all creation. He is *svayam prakashit*, Self-illuminated. This radiance is unsurpassed and unsurpassable. The sun and moon pale to nothing in comparison.

Shri Shankar Narayanji used references to illumine the subtle aspects of different meanings. He described how *Taittiriya Upanishad* discusses at length the quest for Brahman, which is that *sat-chit-anandam*, knowing which, nothing remains to be known. This is enunciated by Bhagavan in just two words, *Hridi Deeptam*. Shankar Narayanji also mentioned Talk 383 where Bhagavan is quizzed: in having no ‘I-am-the-body idea’ does a mosquito bite still hurt? Bhagavan affirms that there is sensation together with body identification, but the *jnani* is also aware of That which is beyond the senses and mind, which is not produced through action, nor out of anything. That is *param-atman* which manifests as all creation. All appearances are mere bubbles shimmering on the surface of the limitless unchanging Self.

The Q&A session revealed that many had glimpsed self-expansion to in-

clude others through love or meditation. May these insights and explorations inspire a full expansion of consciousness.

-- Bharati Mirchandani

November 10th

Swami Prabhuddhananda on Kathopanishad

Addhyaya 1 Valli 3 verse 15,16,17 and beginning of Addhyaya 2

Swami Prabhuddhananda said: 'It is important to study vedanta in traditional manner'. Here's a traditional swami, proficient in *advaita* scriptures, addressing a motley group gathering periodically under the benign portrait of Sri Ramana propped on a symbolic mountain. There is no watchful prodding of a gurukul environment. It is up to each to make these teachings a living truth in our lives.

Swamiji described us as waves fearing death, till another wave comes along and says: why do you identify with the form and think you have beginning and end? Please know you are water all the time! In Nachiketa's story, freedom from death is only when death is understood by locating that eternal existence (*anaadhyant sanatanam dhruv*). Sounds exist in Silence. Sounds have beginning and end, but Silence is ever present, ever fresh. An intelligent person (*medhaavi*) hears this and understands, but the rest also have the seed sown in us. With time and repeated *satsang*, understanding ripens. When we eat, it takes many mouthfuls to make the tummy feel full.

Swamiji said that even teaching without understanding can help gradual fruition. But he warned that the slightest error can prevent understanding. Any problem that appears is a sign of misconception, of misunderstanding oneself. A common erroneous tendency is to mystify. A simple fact, for example we come and go, we layer with theories making Truth the deepest secret (*param guhyam*). We flow on tides of emotions because we look outward. A rare person turns gaze inward, and through self-effort, begins to swim against the tide.

-- Bharati Mirchandani

November 17th

Shri Anil Sharmaji, a long-time devotee of Bhagavan runs a centre in Sydney called Sage Ramana Maharshi Centre of Learning and has recently started a second centre in Melbourne. He spoke on the topic, 'Living in Self abidance'.

Referring to Bhagavan as 'The Sage' or 'Sage Ramana', he encouraged devotees to look beyond 'images' or constructions of the mind to find the true unchanging Reality within. Instead of directing the mind towards outer objects, if we direct it inwards and fix it on the Self, the Reality of the Self alone would remain. For Bhagavan has said, 'Reality is simply the loss of ego. Destroy the ego by seeking its identity. Because the ego has no identity, it will automatically vanish and Reality will shine forth by itself.'

Shri Anilji gave the example of devotees visiting Arunachala Hill and finding bliss at the sight of the holy hill, but on return, losing this state of joy in worldly preoccupations once again. He emphasised the need to look at the Source from which that peace and bliss come — the source of everything as explained in the book, 'Who Am I'?

Why are we lost? His answer: because we live in a world of images, our thoughts and feelings prevent us from living in the Reality. 'The Self doesn't speak, that is Its beauty,' said Anilji, echoing the divine words of Bhagavan: 'The only language able to express the whole truth is Silence'.

He spoke with conviction of the fact that the Self reveals itself when there are no expectations and when our lives are surrendered. Hence the need to learn to live in Self abidance. He wished all devotees the same state of happiness that he has realised by the grace of Sage Bhagavan Ramana.

--Marie Elangovan

November 24th

After briefly recapitulating the earlier verses of Vivekachudamani, Swami Durgeshanandaji elaborated on verses 98 to 107 which negate the subtle body and the functions of Prana and Ahamkara, these being distinct from the pure blissful Atman.

The five organs of action, the five organs of sense perception, the five

functions of Prana, the five basic elements (*Mahabhutas*), *Antahkarana Chatushtaya* (*Ahamkara*, *Buddhi*, *Manas* and *Citta*), Avidya, Desire and Action are the eight cities – ‘*Puris*’ which make up the subtle body. This subtle body, also called the *Linga* body is produced from the five elements before their mixing and subdivision into making the gross body. It is desires that fill the subtle body that make the soul experience the fruits of its actions. These desires are superimpositions (*Adhyas*) on the Atman due to Avidya which is beginningless.

Next, Swamiji explained that the Atman is distinct from the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep — *Avastha-trayee*. Though the subtle body serves as the instrument for carrying over our past desires and the fruits of our actions, it is totally different from the non-attached Atman.

The *antahkarana* or inner organ connects the sense organs of the body with the sense objects, identifying itself with them. When egoism (*ahamkar*) identifies with the body, it becomes both the doer and enjoyer (*karta* and *bhogta*). It is happy when sense objects are favorable and unhappy when unfavorable, thus happiness and misery being the characteristics of egoism and not of the ever-blissful Atman which is indeed the substratum of all that is.

Swamiji ended the *satsang* by quoting a verse from Chapter 4 of the Bhagavad-Gita: ‘*Gyanaagni dagdhate akhil karmani*’, meaning the fire of Knowledge burns up all actions. Knowledge can be gained only by having total faith (*Shraddha*) in the Guru, scriptures and *devtas* and in surrendering to them.

-- *Rashmi Vyas*





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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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its source, consciousness. This is Self-abidance.”**

Ramana Maharshi (Upadesa Saram-16)

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“The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature. What are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts, but not himself.”

Ramana Maharshi



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