

# DIRECT PATH

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*"The Guru does not bring about Self-realisation.  
He simply removes all the obstacles to it.  
The Self is always realized."*

*Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi*



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2019  
YEAR OF SOLUTIONS  
*Complexities Simplified*



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

# Direct Path

VOLUME XXII ISSUE 4

NOVEMBER 2020 - JANUARY, 2021

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# Call for Articles

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

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

We look forward to hearing from you!

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# Glimpses of Arunachala

*Swagat Patnaik*



**M**y first trip to Arunachala in August 2019 etched many deep impressions on my heart. The old city of Tiruvannamalai which emerged near the sacred mountain has many charming sights and sounds. But almost all that can be seen in the city pales in comparison with the majesty of the mountain. This odd-looking hill not only fills the landscape but also the hearts of millions of devotees who seek refuge at its feet. It is only due to the torrential grace of the mountain that it attracts seekers from across the world, quenching their thirst for the Absolute.

Given that I had read and heard so much about Arunachala, I was quite restless to see it with my own eyes. I had always imagined the mountain to

have holy reverberations. But, looking at it as a simple mortal in the dead of night blew my image of it. It was grander than anything I had imagined. While at Tiruvannamalai, sacred Arunachala would beckon me in my dreams: to wake up, go to the rooftop and converse with its presence. In the star-filled night, the silent glow from the mountain would completely engulf me. One is taken into the realms of wonder and gratitude when one can't help but wonder at how many *jivas* would have witnessed the mountain and its grace – each *jiva* with a lifetime of impressions witnessing one of the pinnacles of mortal experience. One can't help but feel awe at the good fortune of seeing such a sight in this life.

I had started for Tiruvannamalai

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on a bus from Bangalore. Even before reaching the city, my heart was filled with anticipation. I kept looking at each passing mountain thinking this might be holy Arunachala. But finally, I managed a glimpse when the driver stopped for some refreshment. I could only glimpse its summit, yet I could feel some purpose of many lifetimes of travel reaching fulfillment. In fact, I had felt the mountain's holy reverberation much before I glimpsed its outline. The mind had gradually started quietening despite its many fixed habits.

As soon as I reached Tiruvannamalai, I was enamored by the place's distinct smell. Strangely the smell brought a feeling of both nostalgia and reverence as if I had been here before. This stoked my curiosity and I kept wondering how a place like this could have such a reverberation. My curious self kept observing all the details of the place: the grand old temple, the little shops, the bustle of the people, and the remarkable mix of modernity amid the ancient. Above all, like a child in a play store, I kept searching for my beloved toy which I knew I would find here.

I switched off my mobile and retired to a place called Atithi Ashram which is a five minute walk from Sri Ramanasramam. It followed

Ramanasramam's timings and thus had strict guidelines for its boarders. Further, it had a meditation hall along with a small library. The place was quite clean and minimalistic, ideal for *sadhakas*.

After a few hours of rest I started for Ramanasramam while figuring out the general spatial orientation of the place. A couple of inquiries led me to the Ramanasramam gate which I recognised from photographs. Entering the ashram gave me sudden respite from the bustle outside. The old tree, the earthy style of construction, and the bustle of devotees were just as I had imagined them to be. One could easily imagine how Bhagavan must have walked all around the ashram as one could feel his presence everywhere. I moved around a bit before finding a place to sit for meditation. I went to the Matrubhuteswara temple, sat in the nearby granite hall, then saw the Samadhi hall where I attended the evening *veda parayana*. Apart from the *parayana* there were other recitations at other times. For example, right next to the Samadhi hall were a couple of small rooms where an elderly gentleman was reading from 'Talks' over a microphone. I saw the Mahanirvana room, shrines of the devotees, the bookstall and the office area. I also glimpsed the dining hall

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and cowshed from a distance.

All the places in the *ashramam* had a distinct feel to them. Even if one were to close one's eyes one could still feel the distinct reverberation of each place in the *ashramam*. One could feel which buildings were relatively new and those which were older. But overall, all the places in the *ashramam* put me in a contemplative or sometimes devotional mood. One would feel awe at all those who had given up their worldly desires, attempting to get a glimpse of themselves. Another thing that struck me was that so many of my questions got answered while meditating in the hall. I would get very specific answers to my few questions. Other times my mind would quieten and forget the question. Such is the grace of Bhagavan that even now his presence guides many *sadhakas*.

After a couple of days of dividing my time between Ramanasramam and Atithi Ashram, I decided to visit Skandashramam, Virupaksha cave and the majestic Arunachala temple. Both caves were primitive compared to the more developed Ramanashramam. Skandashramam only had a few basic amenities but care had been taken by the administration to maintain the original quality of the place. While Virupaksha was even more austere and one had to bend low even to enter

the cave, its emanation was divine. It was a place where it was difficult to maintain a non-meditative state. I saw many *sadhakas* spending hours in meditation with unflinching austerity. To this day I remember the intoxicating nature of the cave.

After spending many hours in the cave I made my way to Arunachala temple. I remember my mind was distinctly quiet. Because of this, the color and the grandeur of the Arunachala temple made an even more vivid impression on me. The immense gopuram, exquisite carvings, and the general atmosphere of the temple seemed overwhelmingly pleasant. I could see many sadhus, families, workers and priests moving around in reverence. There was festivity in the temple with the enchanting sounds of *nadaswaram* and *mridangam*. After walking around a bit, I discovered the Devi and Shiva *garbhagrihas*. Ah, I wish I could describe the sweetness of the bliss I felt there. I feel that many lifetimes of longing must have worked in me to present me with the opportunity to prostrate at their holy feet. I wish I could have sat there longer; I wish I could have kept my eyes on their feet for some more time.

As I write this article, many sweet memories of Arunachala bubble in

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me. I am already planning my next visit. The taste of Tiruvannamalai's sweet nectar of grace, once tasted, is indeed difficult to forget. Thus, even amid the multitude of worldly affairs, a part of me hopes for another visit

to Arunachala. I also hope that next year millions more are able to visit Arunachala once again. Further, I hope Bhagavan's grace grants each a visit to our Arunachala. ■  
[e-mail: editor.dp@rkdelhi.org]

There have been many positive changes in the Delhi Kendra since the publication of the last issue. On COVID-19 related developments, although there has been relaxation in the lockdown, for the safety of staff and devotees the Kendra's public functioning has not been resumed. Thus our usual satsangs have adapted well to the digital medium. Several very interesting online satsangs are now being organized regularly.

On the magazine front, due to the constraints of COVID-19 related challenges, we have decided to publish only the digital version of our magazine for the time being. We hope to resume printing and distributing the hard copy of the magazine from mid next year.

There have been many positive developments in vaccination development. Many countries have started giving the initial rounds. Let Bhagavan's grace guide us smoothly out of this pandemic. Important events (from Bhagavan's time) falling in this current issue (November 2020 - January 2021) are as follows:

- Deepavali: 14<sup>th</sup> November
- Karthigai Festival commences: 20<sup>th</sup> November
- Deepam: 29<sup>th</sup> November
- 141st Jayanti of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi: 31<sup>st</sup> December
- Lucy Ma Day: 31<sup>st</sup> December

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# Gurubhavam of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

*Kiran Chandra*



In “Letters from Ramanasramam”, a compilation of letters written by Suri Nagamma to her brother, Shri D.S. Sastri, we get an exquisite picture of Bhagavan’s love for all sentient and insentient beings. We also sense the profound depth of the grace and love he showered upon one and all. In another book, “Ramana Maharshi – His Life” by Gabriele Ebert, there is special mention of the different animals and birds that were part of the ashram. It shares innumerable glimpses of Bhagavan’s *Gurubhavam*, love and compassion towards all living beings.

In a letter written by Suri Nagamma to her brother on 20th February 1947, she recalls a discussion on the Guru’s

form, in which Bhagavan says to a seeker, “If you want to perceive the true *Guru svarupa* you must first learn to look upon the whole universe as *Guru Rupam*. One must have *Gurubhavam* towards all living beings... you must look upon all objects as God’s *rupa*”. With deep veneration for this teaching and with gratitude to Suri Nagamma, Shri D.S. Sastri and Gabriele Ebert, I present this article describing instances of Bhagavan’s interactions with animals. Bhagavan never made a distinction between animals, trees, birds and people, caring equally for their feelings and their ultimate goal of *mukti*. Both writers have brought out this facet of Bhagavan’s *samatva* or the equal regard Bhagavan had for

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all forms of life. Suri Nagamma writes that we should consider ourselves fortunate if we can imbibe even a thousandth part of this spirit of equality and renunciation. (letter dated 29th November 1945, titled *Samatvam*)

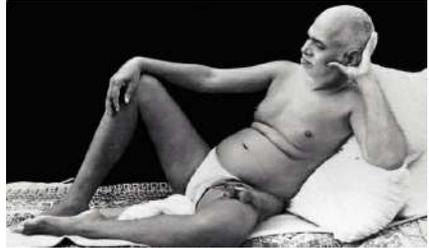
Suri Nagamma's letters are of great relevance as they were reviewed by Bhagavan before being mailed to her brother. The letters cover the last five years of Bhagavan's earthly life, a period when Ramanasramam was bustling with activity. Sitting at the feet of Bhagavan, Nagamma felt an irresistible urge to record the daily discussions devotees had with him as well as events in the ashram. This became her sadhana, and for those of us who read her letters today, they help us understand Bhagavan's incomparable compassion and radiance. Various incidents and anecdotes about Bhagavan's compassion towards animals, birds and trees described by Suri Nagamma's letters are echoed in the work of Gabriele Ebert.

She asks, what else can we do but depend upon Bhagavan's Grace? This is a crucial point. If one surrenders at the feet of Bhagavan, his "automatic divine activity", as described to Arthur Osborne by Bhagavan himself, begins to take place. Here are some glimpses of Bhagavan's *Gurubhavam*, his *samatva bhava* described in the anecdote

about the Squirrel, the Mango Tree, and Lakshmi, the Cow.

### The Squirrel

Suri Nagamma writes that squirrels would often build their nests in the ceiling of the room where Bhagavan usually sat on a couch doing his work and meeting visitors. The squirrels would freely run around the room, even playing on the sofa. With a breeze, things from their nests like coconut fiber and string would fall everywhere.



Bhagavan would sometimes feed them with his own hands. One mischievous squirrel would not eat anything unless Bhagavan himself held it to his mouth. One day when that squirrel came for food, Bhagavan was busy and there was some delay in feeding him. So, the mischievous squirrel bit Bhagavan's finger. Bhagavan refused to feed him with his own hand for some days. Suri Nagamma writes, 'Would that fellow stay quiet? No, he began begging Bhagavan for forgiveness by crawling hither and thither. Bhagavan put some nuts on the window sill near

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the sofa and told him to help himself. But no, he wouldn't touch them. The squirrel would do many things to attract attention like crawl or jump on Bhagavan's body'. Bhagavan pretended to be indifferent and not notice his activities. Bhagavan pointedly pushed the squirrel away for some days, telling him this was his punishment for biting his finger. The squirrel would not give up his obstinacy either. Suri Nagamma says, Bhagavan finally had to admit defeat because of his mercy to devotees. She adds, it then occurred to me that it was through pertinacity that devotees attained salvation.

In the biography, Ramana Maharshi – His Life, Gabriele Ebert narrates an episode about some newborn squirrels in the context of the compassion Bhagavan had towards all creatures.

One day in the Ashramam, some newborn squirrels fell out of their nest and landed on the couch of Bhagavan. Bhagavan made a soft bed for them and with great care fashioned a cotton drip to feed one weak baby squirrel milk till it gained enough strength to be independent.

We are also unaware of the myriad ways in which Bhagavan teaches us, each according to our need, on the path of Self Enquiry. The Squirrel who bit Bhagavan's finger may well be a story about ordinary people lost in the

coils of *samsaric* life, who are self-centered, always in need, and who end up disregarding their teachers in their ignorance and befuddlement. Even on such a one, Bhagavan bestows grace and showers *kripa* or mercy.

### **The Mango Tree**

Shri D.S.Sastri, the brother of Suri Nagamma, has translated her letters written to him. He says that though he had read the letters over and over again, he realized the depth of knowledge and wisdom contained in Bhagavan's cryptic sayings only when he tried to translate them.

Letter number 42 has an episode about the Mango tree. It is titled *Abhayam Sarva Bhutebhya* (Compassion Towards All). Suri Nagamma describes the incident in her simple, heart-rending devotional style. Laborers had been deputed to gather mangos from the tree near the steps leading to the mountain. They began to knock down the fruit by beating the tree with sticks instead of climbing the tree and picking the mangos one by one. Bhagavan, while seated on the sofa, could hear the sound of the beating and sent word to stop the work. When he went out as usual, he saw the mango leaves lying in heaps. Suri Nagamma writes that he was unable to bear the cruel sight and asked the laborers to leave.

“When you are to gather the fruit,

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do you have to beat the tree so that the leaves fall off? In return for giving us fruit, is the tree to be beaten with sticks? Instead of beating the tree, you might as well cut it to the roots.”

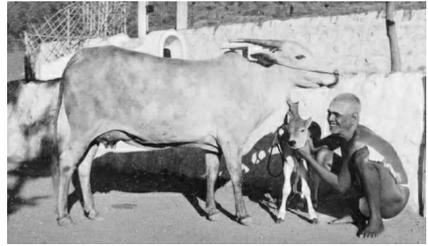
Saying this, Bhagavan asked the laborers to go away. His voice was like thunder and made all those present tremble with fear. The laborers stood with folded hands like statues.

Seeing this personification of kindness in an angry mood, Nagamma said her heart began to beat violently and her eyes filled with tears. She writes, “Can one who is so moved by the falling of the leaves of a tree, bear pain in the minds of human beings? Bhagavan Ramana is indeed *karunapoornasudh-abdhi*, the ocean filled with the nectar of compassion.”

The story about the Mango tree could be for those of us who see divisions between so-called sentient and insentient beings though Bhagavan in his compassion towards all shows that no such distinction exists. It is as though while walking in the dark, a beacon of light in the hands of Bhagavan illuminates the way for us.

### **Lakshmi the cow**

The anecdote about Lakshmi, the cow is about an inner nature that recognizes and responds to the divine call and touch. One of Suri Nagamma’s



most moving letters is one dated 16th January 1946 titled “Worship of the Cow”. It describes the events of *Mattu Pongal*, the day when domestic animals are decorated and fed pongal. Suri Nagamma tells us that Lakshmi’s grandeur was worth seeing. She was adorned with *kumkum* and her forehead smeared with turmeric powder; garlands made of roses and other flowers, edibles, sweets, sugarcane, and *murukku* were hung around her neck and horns. Thus decorated, Lakshmi looked like *kamadhenu* and Suri Nagamma’s joy on seeing her knew no bounds. When the arati and vedichanting of hymns were over, devotees wanted to take a photo.

Lakshmi was led to the center of the ground and stood there, tossing her head, gracefully. Bhagavan, who had been sitting by Lakshmi’s side, enjoying the sight of her beautiful decorations, came and stood by her side, patting her head and body with his left hand. When he said, “Steady, please be steady,” Lakshmi slowly closed her eyes and remained absolutely still, as

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if she were in samadhi.

On another occasion, Suri Nagamma writes that when she saw Bhagavan standing among the cows in the *Gosala*, she was reminded of Lord Krishna in *Repalle*. Standing with his body bent slightly to the left, with the walking stick in his right hand, looking as if it was a flute. He had a sparkling smile on his face like foam on the waves of *ananda*. With a compassionate look towards the group of devotees gathered there along with the herd of cows, it was not surprising to be reminded of Lord Krishna.

Suri Nagamma writes, “It is no exaggeration to say that we, with human eyes, saw in that congregation what is beyond human sight... a world of cows and its overlords, *Prakriti* and *Purusha*... you would laugh at my foolish fantasies, but take it from me, that sight was so lovely”. She recounts, Bhagavan had told us long ago: “Any living being that comes to me, it is only to work out the balance of his karma. So, don’t prevent anyone from coming to me...”

Stories are narrated in the letters of Suri Nagamma about how pigeons and baby cheetahs who came to the Ashram, became quiet and happy with the touch of Bhagavan’s hands. With cheetah cubs there, squirrels came and

ate nuts, and sparrows came and ate broken rice as usual. Suri Nagamma compares this to ancient stories from the ashrams of *rishis* where animals and birds of all sorts moved together without enmity.

Suri Nagamma witnessed the compassionate giving of *Videha Mukti* to Lakshmi by Bhagavan. The deliverance of Lakshmi, her burial and also her history are described in Suri Nagamma’s letters numbering 193 to 195.

When it became known that Lakshmi may not be able to make it through the day, Suri Nagamma went to where she lay on a bed of hay. She says that when she chanted the 108 names of Ramana and the 12 letters of Ramana Mantram, Lakshmi appeared to be listening attentively.

Bhagavan came in around 9.45 am and, while sitting on the hay by her side, lifted her head with both his hands. He passed his hand lightly over her face and throat, and then, while placing his left hand on her head, began pressing a finger of his right-hand from her throat down to her heart.

He then addressed Lakshmi, “What do you say, mother? Do you want me to stay here alone? I could stay, but what to do? All people could be around you, as in the case of my mother. Even so, why? Shall I go?” Suri Nagamma

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writes, “Lakshmi remained calm, devoid of all bonds of this world and pains of her body, as though she were in samadhi”. Bhagavan sat there, unwilling to move, and with a heart full of compassion.

Suri Nagamma says she was overwhelmed at the sight and exclaimed involuntarily, “Oh! Mother Alagamma had the greatest luck. So has Lakshmi now”. Bhagavan looked at her with a smile. We can only imagine once again in our hearts, Bhagavan’s beautiful smile which lies eternally embedded in our hearts and minds.

Bhagavan once again asked Lakshmi and on being told there was no immediate danger, again addressed her: What? May I go?

Suri Nagamma says we don’t know what reply he got, but Lakshmi looked at him proudly, and thus, after his reluctant departure, due to Bhagavan’s divine touch, Lakshmi’s breath began subsiding and her body movements began to decrease. The doctor came and gave her an injection, but Lakshmi remained unaffected, as if the body were not hers. There was no death agony. Her sight was calm and clear...

When Suri Nagamma and others tried to support her head, Lakshmi’s tongue was found to be icy cold. Suri Nagamma says, it thus became known

that Lakshmi’s life had reached the feet of Ramana and had been absorbed in him.

Ten minutes later, Bhagavan came into the shed saying, “Is it all over?”. He squatted by her side, taking her face in his hands, as if she were a little child, lifting her head, saying, “Oh, Lakshmi, Lakshmi”, and then controlling his tears, said, “Because of her, our family, (the Ashram) has grown to this extent”. As he left, he quoted what a devotee had been saying, that a good tomb must be built for Lakshmi.

The burial took place near the hillside where the tombs of a crow, a dog, and a deer were erected earlier. The final epitaph on Lakshmi was written by Bhagavan, “It is hereby recorded that Lakshmi’s the cow was liberated under the star of *Visakha* on Friday, the twelfth day of the bright half of *Jyeshtha* in the year *Sarvadhari*”.

As we meditate on Bhagavan’s smile and share the radiance of his presence, we marvel at our good fortune in learning about him. Our hearts are full of gratitude towards those such as Suri Nagamma, Shri D.S. Sastri, Gabrielle Ebertand before and others, who have shared with us what Bhagavan is, through their narratives, books, letters, translations and films. ■

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# Incandescence

*Neera Kashyap*



*Ramana* expounds:  
*The process of purification is unseen.*

Coal takes long to ignite.  
Charcoal kindles sooner.  
And with gunpowder,  
it is spontaneous.

I am stone, barely warmed by the fire.  
Sometimes, a moth—  
spiraling towards the radiance.

Will it hurt? Will I scream?

Delicate wings crisp to cinders.  
The blaze commands self-destruction—  
of a patterned body hiding in the day—  
of a moth brain spinning in the night. ■  
*[e-mail:neerak7@gmail.com]*

--First published in *Shimmer Spring*, an anthology of prose and poetry, Hawakal Publishers, November 2020.

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# Chasing the Sucrose Gradient in the Age of Pandemics

*Michael Highburger*



**F**or more than a century, microbiologists have observed the movements of single-celled organisms under microscope and noted their preference for certain areas of a given medium. Motile single-celled (or multi-celled) organisms, even when lacking anything that could be called a cerebrum, are able to detect chemicals in their environment and adjust their movements. Bacteria, for example, gather around an attractant such as sucrose, and move away from a repellent such as phenol or other toxins. Non-scientists might look at seeking the sucrose gradient in a medium as a kind of microbial ‘intentionality.’ Indeed, such behavioural responses to chemical stimuli, known as *chemotaxis*,

make one wonder about the origins of consciousness. At a human scale, we might ask if human wanting and desire have their roots in cell biology?

This may not be such a crazy idea. The fossil record reveals that microbial life has existed on earth for about 3.5 billion years while advanced life only came much later in Earth’s history. With that deep ancestry, it would be hard to rule out the possibility that such phenomena in nature play a role in human psychology. So, while chasing the sucrose gradient is a matter of survival for microorganisms, in more recent human history, it may be about something quite other than mere survival.

Spiritual teachers have warned

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about transient pleasures and the persistent drive to seek them. Microbial chemotaxis gives us a metaphor for understanding such impulses in the human heart as the root mechanism in samsara. It is not that seeking pleasurable experiences is wrong, only that depending on them to save us brings hardship and disappointment. Bhagavan says:

“Pleasures do not form happiness ...

When there is contact of a desirable sort or memory thereof, and when there is freedom from undesirable contacts or memory thereof, we say there is happiness. Such happiness, [however,] is relative and is better called pleasure. But 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.<sup>1</sup>”

Raj Raghunathan’s recent book challenges the reader in the title itself: *If You’re So Smart, Why Aren’t You Happy?* The reason is quite simple: cleverness cannot bring happiness. Smart may help us work out strategies for getting to the sweet spot — *sukham* means ‘sweet’ or ‘pleasurable’ — but the familiar disappointment crops up every time as the pleasure of each new

dose of sweetness fades away.

The French novelist Guillaume Apollinaire once said tongue-in-cheek, “Now and then it’s good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy”. But if these had been Bhagavan’s words, they would have meant “give up seeking pleasures from without and rest in the bliss of the Self within, for the search without is the very cause of our unhappiness”.

For Bhagavan, sense pleasures center on the unconscious seeking of short-lived experiences, whereas the first steps to the bliss of the Self involve inquiring into the futility of seeking short-lived pleasures. Indeed, the chase is futile for it never delivers on its promises. Chasing the sucrose gradient is what the Middle-age Christian mystics warned against in respect of taking refuge in worldly consolations, i.e. pinning hopes for true happiness on the fleeting joys of egoic achievements. The egoic project is all about stringing together as many moments of satisfaction as possible. In time, an entire personal identity and worldview is erected around this mechanism and a person’s every hope hangs on obtaining a shot of *sukham* followed by the run-up to getting another shot. Working the treadmill

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1 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §27, §28.

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to keep these conditions in place amidst the changing circumstances of a changing world is however a source of anxiety. As internal and external environmental conditions change, the effort needed to repeatedly reestablish and maintain the illusion of okayness becomes wearisome and can even enervate the system in the long run. It is not that Bhagavan is opposed to *sukham*, on the contrary, he is guiding us to the true *sukham*. *Sukham* sought outside only increases wanting and enhances the sense of unfulfillment while spiritual *sukham* found in faith, sadhana, prayer and meditation brings lasting happiness. If, as Shakespeare once said, “it is a bitter thing to look into happiness through another man’s eyes”, for Bhagavan, the ‘bitter thing’ is looking for it anywhere except within oneself. Looking within includes being present to the conditions and circumstances of daily life in each moment, with neither grasping nor rejecting anything. This is the path to peace. Bhagavan says:

“[Everyone] wishes to rush out. There is no limit to going out. [But] happiness lies within and not without... You do not acquire

happiness. Your very nature is happiness. Bliss is not newly earned<sup>2</sup>”.

For Bhagavan, there is no ego. Rather, ego is the name we give to the futile search for happiness through incessant wanting — wanting what we do not have and wanting to be free of what we have that causes us displeasure. We assume if there is wanting, there must be a ‘wanter’. But Bhagavan asks us to inquire into the wanter. When we bring attention to it through inquiry, the wanter or what we commonly call the ego disappears because ego has no reality of its own:

“Let us search for the root of the ego. Where from does this pseudo-I arise? At the end of this quest we shall find that the ego disappears letting the eternal Self shine. So the best discipline is the inquiry: ‘Who am I?’”<sup>3</sup>

Freedom from wanting is true freedom. This is counter intuitive because the logic of the consumer age is that freedom is born of the freedom *to* want, whereas Bhagavan teaches us that true freedom is born of freedom *from* want.

The word ‘I’ means ‘looking

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<sup>2</sup> *Talks*, §229, §290.

<sup>3</sup> *Talks*, Foreword.

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outward’, it means, ‘I want’. What does it want? It wants the sucrose gradient in every instant. The I is born anew with each moment of wanting. When we are free of wanting, when the mind is empty, free of thoughts, there is no I. The drives behind chasing the sucrose gradient congeal into a nexus of unconscious wanting, taking the name I, ever longing to depart the here and now to find something else, something better in the next thing, in the next future moment.

Practitioners of inquiry often assume that the inquirer is the Self. But Bhagavan says no. The Self is altogether beyond desire, intention, and every strategy of self-improvement.<sup>4</sup>

The inquirer is at root the wantor.<sup>5</sup> What makes the inquirer useful is that in the desire to know, it inadvertently uncovers the game of incessant wanting and the vacuity of its own identity — this is where Bhagavan brings in the image of the stick used to stir the funeral pyre.

If chemotaxis of the heart, the perpetual chasing after the sucrose gradient, is unconscious, reflexive, and automatic, then the seeker is enjoined

to bring awareness to the process by inquiring into it. When revealed for what it is, the inquirer begins to replace unconscious wanting with the awareness of wanting. Through the healing power of awareness born of vichara, we see the unreality of what we habitually long for day in and day out. We learn to unravel age-old habits of striving outwardly and begin to make peace with the ‘neutral state’, i.e. neither chasing after the wanted nor running from the unwanted, allowing what is in each given moment to be as it is. This is what Bhagavan calls surrender.

Surrender is no small matter and when we practice inquiry in earnest, we are often shocked to uncover deep-seated unconscious habit forces governing our mental life. We are led to inquire into the motivations behind our actions in daily life, especially the need to get on our cell phones and send an SMS or an email, or to surf the web, to check *Facebook*, to scroll through our phone messages, to phone someone up to chat or to make a trip to the cupboard to have a snack. If we inquire honestly, we will begin to see that most of these

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<sup>4</sup> One of the definitions of samskara is ‘volition’.

<sup>5</sup> What Bhagavan says about the witness when asked if ‘the Self is the witness only’, could also be said of the inquirer:

*Witness’ is applicable when there is an object to be seen. Then it is duality. The Truth lies beyond both. (Talks, §466)*

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actions are not born of genuine needs. We further discover that most of the impulses of daily life are so deep-seated and unconscious that we are no longer in touch with what our true needs actually are. This is because we have become very proficient in covering up our discomfort and suffering. Bhagavan tells us that suffering can help us if we do not push it away.

Devotees may remember Bhagavan's response when someone asked, "Why does God permit suffering in the world? Should He not with His omnipotence do away with it at one stroke and ordain the universal realization of God?" Bhagavan replied, "Suffering is the way for Realization of God." "But," the questioner persisted, "should He not ordain [it] differently?" Bhagavan responded, "[Suffering] is the way".<sup>6</sup>

Chasing the sucrose gradient is a means to escape suffering. But it is not a cure for suffering, rather only a temporary stop gap measure. Accessing the sucrose gradient cannot save you, says Bhagavan, but abiding in the space before the chase.

Of course, the system has reasons for chasing the sucrose gradient. As an organism, the human body self-regulates when environmental

conditions are adverse. And still, we must sometimes override the impulses of the reptilian brain, which is capable of misreading threats in the environment, internal or external. The body seeks to regulate dysfunction in order to adjust to conditions and find the place of ease. In the modern world, however, seeking the place of ease can be done to an excess and can become compulsive. Here are the beginnings of obsessive behaviors. Developing the capacity to distinguish between harmful and benign conditions, between maladaptive needs and genuine needs is one of the touchstones of authentic living.

Sucrose means 'sugar' and comes from *sukham*. But the craving for excessive sugar, like chasing the sucrose gradient, betrays an underlying unease. Some research shows that sugar can be as habit-forming as cocaine. Sugar releases opioids and dopamine which can lead to compulsion. There's no mystery in this. There are multiple ways, however, we medicate emotional discomforts, not just chemically, but behaviorally, even at the minute scale of compulsive thinking, the greatest addiction of all, Bhagavan argues. Living our lives vicariously through unremitting thinking, the virtual reality

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<sup>6</sup> Talks, §107.

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it engenders disconnects us from people and life in the world in real time.

Any compassionate view of addiction would have to consider the plight of human existence, namely, being born with the instinct for self-preservation while possessing self-awareness and the knowledge of our eventual physical demise.<sup>7</sup>

The angst this generates can push us toward seeking respite through diversion of one sort or another. Crisis times, such as the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, bring the sucrose gradient into sharper focus, and make clear how it is used as a means for down-regulating existential anxiety. Bhagavan suggests a different approach:

“As long as one is confusing the body with the Atman, Atman is said to be lost and one is said to seek for it, but the Atman itself is never lost.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Alone in a Room**

The reader may remember this line of Blaise Pascal: *All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone*. Sitting in a room alone requires discipline, patience and even courage. When sitting in a room with our cell phones switched off, we mark the inescapable pull of the

sucrose gradient. We become acutely aware of how we inhabit a culture that has normalised chasing the sucrose gradient at high speed, and how difficult it can be to distinguish a genuine need to do a simple task online from the compulsive cell phone use that has become the norm in the hyper-digital age. The courage to sit in a room alone without a cell phone is the first step toward bringing the chase into the light of awareness. If Terror Management Theory argues that pervasive anxiety is born of the ongoing awareness of our mortality, Bhagavan might well reply, “That’s not quite the whole of it”. The real source of our anxiety is not just the anticipation of our physical death but the egoic self-view born of illusion, namely, that *we are the body that dies*, that we are the wave that got separated from the ocean, so to say. He adds:

“All are in the Self. It is wrong to imagine that there is the world, that there is a body in it and that you dwell in the body. If you are the body, why do they bury the corpse after death? [You come to] see that you are really formless; but you are at present identifying yourself with the body... You are not physical. Why worry about what you are not.

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<sup>7</sup> A basic tenet of Terror Management Theory.

<sup>8</sup> *Talks*, §186.

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The Self has no form, therefore it is immune from contact with things.”<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

If our lives have been disrupted by extended home confinement during pandemic lockdowns and quarantines and if this has increased domestic conflict and emotional distress, we may find ourselves gravitating toward the internet and to our cell phones, performing e-actions reflexively. This would be completely understandable. While it is not to be condemned, such trends provide us with unique opportunities for inquiry. We might nudge ourselves toward awareness of internal conditions and rather than addressing unconscious anxiety by indulging in the sucrose gradient, we instead inquire into the impulse itself.

When the virus spreads and ends up on our doorstep, we will be in an optimal position to inquire into our clinging — clinging to this body and to the world we knew before SARS-CoV-2. If someone in our midst, not even 70 years old, contracts COVID-19 and dies within a week’s time and then is denied traditional funeral rites because of the risk of contagion, we will feel deeply the tragedy of it. But we may think to

ourselves, “Well, this won’t happen to me.” And we could actually believe this, either because of the statistical unlikelihood of it or because we are younger than the person in question or because we are invested in a self-narrative that assumes in advance our protection born of merit we imagine we have accumulated in this or in former lives, a kind of ‘salvational fantasy’ that exempts us from such a fate. But this line of thinking is born of the logic of the sucrose gradient. If we resist taking that route and instead, bear the brunt of the discomfort and the uncertainty, we have a chance to penetrate and see through the fundamental delusion that has plagued us our whole lives. Bhagavan repeats emphatically, “you are not the body; you are not the one who dies”. By extension, you are not the corpse that undergoes cremation or burial, with or without rites.

Indeed, COVID-19 can kill the body and with it, the personality, its wants, desires, and fears. But COVID-19 cannot kill the space in the Heart of the Lotus, imperishable and immortal, for “the Self has no form, and is therefore immune from contact with [all] things”,<sup>10</sup> including SARS-CoV-2. ■

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<sup>9</sup> *Talks*, §121, §106, §164.

<sup>10</sup> *Talks*, §164.

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# Sahib Kareem Maalik

*Bharati Mirchandani*



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**S**ahib Kareem Maalik, a sufi saint, lived in Rohri, Sindh, in undivided India. He remains a continuing presence in our family, so I venture to document some fragments of his being. These glimpses are only those experiences that were shared with me. He is not featured in any book,<sup>12</sup> nor yet by ‘Dr. Google’. Perhaps this publication will help me gather more information about him.

My *nani*, Satbhama, was a direct disciple, as were her father-in-law,

many uncles, and cousins. I am not sure my mother ever met him, but most of what I record was told by her. Being surrounded by those whose lives were guided by him, she grew up believing god was a member of her family. Later, her understanding of god deepened from that of a personal protector and invisible elder to the all-embracing unity of Sahib Maalik’s teaching.

He taught total acceptance of divine will, combined with inner courage in

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11 This photograph showing Sahib Kareem Maalik is the only one I had seen in a relative’s home. Eighteen months later it reached me by post. The envelope had no covering letter or return address. I believe my relative had mailed me this photo so precious to him, a few days before he left his body.

12 A few days ago I found a tiny blurred print of this same picture reproduced in *The Amils of Sindh* by Saaz Aggarwal where he is referred to by name as being a saint and guru for a family that I hope to locate. Pg 206, ed. 2019

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action. Prayer was always an option, as was sitting in silent contemplation, and depended on one's inner calling. However, an absolute essential in his view was to make every action an act of worship. Whatever one chose to do was to be done with the attitude of being an offering to divinity, making the fact of living into a form of steady prayer. Attachment to material things and yearning for fame or praise for one's actions were not acceptable. Celibacy, vegetarianism, depriving oneself of luxuries were not encouraged. Sahib Kareem himself was married with three children that I heard of, two boys and a girl. Till 2019, his children were still living in Rohri.

In our family's homes, most altars held statuettes placed before an assortment of framed pictures of gods, saints and other people. 'Who are these?' I asked as curious children do. 'All are aspects of god,' I was told. 'If you like any of them, choose that one to worship. If you can't choose one, pray to all, or none. It's up to you, but never forget to bow your head to the lord in your heart.' This was Sahib Jin's philosophy in action: the concept that life is sacred; that each manifestation is of the same creative power; each person a temple; that none is better or worse than another; that one's personal incli-

nation is the voice to be heeded.

Being Muslim himself, he was recognized as a guru by both Hindus and Muslims. He felt no need for conversion, and his disciples bonded with each other as guru-bhais. They would partake of each other's festivals, joys, and sorrows. However, he did not allow them to share utensils for cooking. Different faiths have different foods that are permitted. He explained that the subtle essences of animals and their emotions are retained in the utensils even after scrubbing. These subtle energies can be extremely disruptive to the inner equilibrium, unless one has been reared in a system where these particular energies are rendered ineffective. He taught that sense organs are curtains; correct seeing, hearing, etc., are perceptions of the open heart. Through the practice of looking inward, we become increasingly sensitive to subtle energies that are far more real than the outer spectacle.

His link with his disciples was intense. Once he was talking to a group of disciples when he suddenly paused as though in pain. People noticed blood seeping into his kurta. He told them not to worry; he was merely helping a disciple who was calling out to him. Later they learned that the man was attacked from behind by a

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bear while walking through a forest. The bear was clawing at his shoulders when suddenly it seemed to change its mind and turned away.

Satbhama's father-in-law called 'Vado Baba' or elder father, was a leading lawyer in pre-partition Sindh. He often had to travel to courts in other towns. He would often cross the desert sands on camelback. Once bandits on camels surrounded him, getting menacingly close, forcing him off the route. All of a sudden, a happy tinkling of bells and a cart were heard approaching. Vado Baba's heart was warmed by the sight and sound: a spritely cow with bells on each foot appeared dancing by with a little cart. They rode ahead, leading the way to the town. The bandits had dropped away to avoid witnesses.

When Vado Baba returned after the trip he told Sahib Jin, 'You don't know what an adventure I had! Anything could have happened to me!' Maalik said gently, 'You didn't wonder how a cart pulled by a cow was running on sand...'

Another time Vado Baba was walking in a crowded bazaar when he realized that he had been encircled by a gang of thieves. A wealthy man appeared nearby. The thieves sensed a richer catch. Vado Baba realized his

guru had come to his rescue again. Smiling, he watched the band of thieves being led away.

Vado Baba was very regular with prayers. At 4 am and 4 pm he would sit on the ground to connect with the earth and close his eyes in silence for a few minutes. As his work involved a lot of travel, at times he would be on a train at this set time. The train would stop of its own accord, he would alight for his routine. Only when he climbed on again would the train resume the journey. He never worried about his belongings or of being left behind in the middle of nowhere. It was just normal for him that this would happen.

When one writes about highly evolved persons, it is easier to recount events that seem miraculous. It is very difficult to capture in words their simplicity, purity, ordinariness, or the power that blends into their aura which transforms everything around them. Living in harmony and awareness of the subtle is perhaps the most appropriate way I can describe Satbhama, who was more a friend than a grandmother. This is remarkable is because she never played with me, scarcely spoke, and left her body when I was entering my teens. It was her gentle smile, intense eyes that conveyed attention deeper than

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normally experienced that made each person feel special. Each person, if asked, would have claimed to be her favorite, as did happen when some cousins were competing as kids often do in play.

I was in my late 30s when I visited Sri Ramanasramam for the first time. Satbhama had not been much on my mind as she had passed away decades earlier. Yet for a few days, I saw her face everywhere. I figured that was because her features, especially her eyes, were much like Ramana's. On my third day there I made my big discovery: the meditation room. The next morning as I was returning to that room from the direction of the pond, her face appeared on the west-facing wall. She was smiling broader than I'd ever seen her smile before. She said to me, 'Now that you are here, I'm freed of my responsibility to you.' She has not appeared before me again.

Another cousin had a similar experience. At Hemkund Sahib, as is normal in a gurudwara, a *granthi* sat reading the Guru Granth Sahib. My cousin was aware of this, but despite repeatedly blinking his eyes, he saw only Satbhama reading the holy book. This vision persisted for at least fifteen minutes. I'm convinced that she is

guiding the spiritual growth of each of her descendants. Time and distance mean nothing where there is love.

Never one to push things, Satbhama allowed buds to open and petals to unfurl at their own pace. Her eldest daughter was 18 and another 16 when she took them to meet Sahib Jin for the first time. When they returned, my mother, then a child, heard them chiding their mother for not having taken them earlier. She said, 'Me? Advertise for a being (she used the word *shaks*) like him! Only when he calls ...'

What kind of mother could restrain herself from sharing with her beloved children that which is most precious to her? Only one whose wisdom tapped eternity, whose love had risen beyond the 'me and mine'.

Decades later, the guru, Vado Baba and Satbhama passed on. Satbhama's nephew, Kaku, then quite old himself, lived in Pune with his daughter, a senior finance officer with a multinational company. A junior colleague accessed her files and pilfered a huge amount of money. Being the one in charge, she was accountable. Police investigation, litigation, headline news and social ignominy followed. Kaku cried in despair, 'Maalik, I faced all hardships without complaint; remained cheerful, dutiful. I lost my

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father as an infant; my family, home, and property were scattered by the partition of India; my wife died young; I ensured that my child grew up honest and hardworking. In old age I have to see shame heaped on my jewel-daughter! How could you abandon me like this?’ That night Sahib Maalik appeared to him, counseled him, consoled him; and after that appeared each night in his meditation.

Kaku also contacted Maalik’s successor in Pakistan and got this message, ‘Don’t worry. Not a hair on your daughter’s head shall be harmed. A *diya* will be offered at the dargah each evening in her name.’ In January 2019, the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. Not once in the 25 years the case lasted, did it come up for hearing in court. ■  
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A question was asked about the Upanishadic passage, “The Supreme Spirit is subtler than the subtlest and larger than the largest.”

*M.*: Even the structure of the atom has been found by the mind. Therefore the mind is subtler than the atom. That which is behind the mind, namely the individual soul, is subtler than the mind. Further, the Tamil saint Manickavachagar has said of the specks dancing in a beam of sunlight, that if each represents a universe, the whole sunlight will represent the Supreme Being.

“What is Karma?” asked someone.

*M.*: That which has already begun to bear fruit is classified as *prarabdha* Karma (past action). That which is in store and will later bear fruit is classified as *sanchita* Karma (accumulated action). This is multifarious like the grain obtained by villagers as barter for cress (greens). Such bartered grain consists of rice, ragi, barley, etc., some floating on, others sinking in water. Some of it may be good, bad or indifferent. When the most potent of the multifarious accumulated karma begins to bear fruit in the next birth it is called the *prarabdha* of that birth.

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# Transcending Karma

*Kanta Ramchandani*



**K**arma is the chain of cause and effect operating ceaselessly in the universe. We are born in this world with a huge burden of karma from innumerable past lives. Further, for each person karma is the consequence of actions in this and previous lives. Since we are born as human beings, we cannot be free from desires. We act through our desires and all our actions bind us to the cause and effect of these actions. We cannot escape karma so we must try to deal with it as best we can, to ultimately become free from it. Our great spiritual teachers have been telling us that it is meaningless to move from life to life (or death to death) endlessly. With spiritual knowledge

we realize this, and the desire rises to transcend karma and discover God which is our own true nature.

There are three ways to deal with karma successfully in order to ultimately be free of it. The first way is to perform actions in a spirit of detachment. We must not be attached to the results of our actions. Normally we spend more energy thinking of the result than in doing what has to be done. The spiritual attitude is that this is a duty that has come, let me perform it with responsibility and love without caring for the result. In this way, we become calm and ready for spiritual insight. We find that although we are doing many things, there is a feeling of peace in our minds.

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In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna declares that the wise ones who cast away their desire for the fruits of their actions become free from the bondage of rebirth, and ultimately attain the Supreme state. Again, He states that the karma yogi who gives up attachment to the fruits of action attains to peace as a fruit of his *sadhana*. The one who is not a karma yogi and is eager to attain the result is bound to birth and death.

The second approach to neutralizing karma is to have the firm faith that it is God who moves all things. All activities of the universe gain their power and energy from God. Understanding and believing this, karma becomes a spiritual practice. For example, if I have been able to produce some good work, as a devotee of God I will remember that it is by God's power that this wonderful work was possible. Whatever a faithful devotee of God does, he or she knows that it was done by God's grace and the result has also come by His grace.

This path of devotion simply means involving ourselves with God in every activity throughout the day. As soon as we rise in the morning, we ask for His blessing for the day. We invite Him at mealtimes and offer Him the food we eat. We ask for His grace before any work, and thank Him for its success-

ful conclusion. Again, at bedtime, we thank Him for everything. This kind of involvement keeps the devotee in constant remembrance of the Lord. He hands over the doership of actions to God and thus becomes free from incurring any karma.

This way of living is the *Bhakti marga* explained beautifully in the Gita where Krishna says that "for one who is exclusively devoted to Me and remembers Me at all times unceasingly, I am easy to attain".

On this path, it is very helpful to keep repeating the Name of the Lord which we love most. It is an obvious truth that our mind thinks most of the object that we love most. So, if our mind is filled with an intense love for the name, this love will automatically enable us to repeat the name constantly and thus keep us in close touch with the Lord.

The third way to deal with karma effectively is through knowledge. Those who follow this path of wisdom are conscious of their own nature as the ever free, pure spirit. They can separate their actions and sense organs from their true nature. Their perspective is that they are unaffected by all the world activities because they know that they are the Self. They see their actions as part of a play of which they are the eternal witness. Just as an actor

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knows that he is just acting in the role temporarily — the man of knowledge knows that he is really the Lord Himself acting out different roles in the world. He lives like ordinary folk — singing, dancing, eating, and doing many things, but he is able to separate himself from karma by witnessing it.

All the above ways of transcending karma are efficient. Only they are meant to suit different temperaments. In fact, aspirants use all the methods in varying degrees according to their temperament. All the methods spring from different bases but all end alike in Supreme realization, conferring unalloyed and unending bliss.

Whatever method we follow to neutralize karma spiritually, we must feel love for our goal or there will not be much intensity in our spiritual practice. If we keep our spiritual perspective focused, the very pattern of our life becomes different. Our faults, which are the outcome of ignorance like pride, greed, anger, jealousy and pettiness gradually disappear. This is because our goal is God, who is peace, light, free and immortal. When we sincerely pursue the ultimate purpose of life, karma loosens its bonds and al-

lows us to achieve oneness with God.

Here I wish to share how Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba compares the 3 paths of selfless service, devotion, and knowledge and tells us how they help us tear the curtain of maya or delusion that keeps us away from God.

1. In the case of the karma yogi or the man of selfless service who works in the world with love, without caring for the result, the curtain of maya is rent asunder bit by bit until it is completely erased.

2. The man of devotion or bhakta, who remembers God ceaselessly and dedicates all actions to Him with love, moves the Lord to compassion, so much so that He is compelled to come and lift the curtain Himself.

3. As for the jnani, the man of wisdom, the curtain just does not exist. He knows that he is already one with God, and for him, *maya* is only a temporary delusion that cannot keep him away from God.

We are all pilgrims on the way to God and our journey ends only when the curtain of delusion called *maya* is lifted, and we become one with God. ■

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# Bhagavan's Teachings for Covid times

Satsang with Michael James

Documented by BM



**B**hagavan Ramana is the perfect spiritual doctor. And like any good doctor, he treats not just symptoms, but goes to the root cause of all problems, the ego. In deep sleep, we have no problems. As we wake up, problems arise along with the ego. So, according to Bhagavan, the rising of the ego is the root of all problems and the way to solve them is to eradicate the ego. All Bhagavan's teachings aim at eradication of the ego.

The very first verse of Aksharamanamalai is a plea to Arunachala, 'Eradicate the ego of those who meditate on you'. The word 'ahamaye' here can be interpreted to mean those that meditate on Arunachala in the heart,

or, Arunachala shines within the heart as 'I'.

Bhagavan offers two ways to eradicate the ego: *atmavichara* and *atmasamarpana* (self-inquiry and self-surrender). Ultimately these two paths become one, but in the early stages, self-surrender may not necessarily involve self-inquiry. Bhagavan expressed this beautifully and clearly in verse 26 of Ulladu Narpadu: investigating into the ego means giving up everything. In the previous verse he had explained that if we investigate the ego, it takes flight and vanishes! But to investigate deeply enough for this to happen we must have intense *vairagya*. Even the slightest trace of

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attachment or desire will prevent a deep investigation into our real nature.

This is explained again in the conclusion of Nan Yar (Who am I?): If one's self (here implying ego) rises, everything rises. If one's self subsides, everything subsides. How we must conduct ourselves in this world is also expressed: be humble. If one is continuously subduing the ego, one can avoid getting entangled in any problem, no matter what the circumstances.

It is the nature of the body to be imperfect. It is healthy for some years, then infirmities set in as it ages. Some suffer from disease or have accidents. But even for those for whom all seem to be going well, everything is transient, nothing lasts. So, life is a challenge for each of us. The problem facing all of us right now, though for some more than others, is the coronavirus. Some may get it, others not. Some may recover fast, others may suffer 'long covid'. Some may even die. Many are living in fear of illness. That is not the only fear. Livelihoods have been affected in all parts of the world.

We have been relatively lucky; there has been no major pandemic for nearly a hundred years. The last major one was the Spanish flu that killed an

estimated 18 million people in India alone, at a time when the Indian population was much smaller than now, and many died around the world as well. But there always have been epidemics on a small or large scale. Now we live in a globalized world so we have a global pandemic. Even in Bhagavan's time, there was a cholera outbreak, and once the plague caused the whole town to be evacuated. That time Bhagavan got special permission to stay on in the outskirts of Tiruvannamalai.

What Bhagavan taught us in Nan Yar about self-surrender is particularly useful when we are faced with problems in life. Without giving even the slightest room for any thought other than *atmachintana*, (self-attendance), one establishes oneself in one's real nature which is the same as giving ourselves to God. We begin by trying to surrender attachments and desires, but we cannot be rid of them completely till the ego is erased. So ultimately, surrender requires an inquiry into the nature of the ego, which is found to be unreal, revealing the ever-present real Self.

With the ego, one is always entangled with the thought: I am this body. Pure awareness, 'I am' gets knotted with the body which is merely *jada* with no awareness of its own. It is

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clearly stated in verse 22 of Upadesha Undiyar that all 5 sheaths of the body: physical, life force, mind, intellect, and will, are *jada* and have no actual existence of their own. The ego is neither Reality, sat-chit, nor is it of the body but something that arises between the two by borrowing the quality of awareness from sat-chit, and limitation of form from the body. Bhagavan calls ego a phantom that comes into existence and flourishes by grasping form – by leaving one form and grasping another it takes birth. It has neither form nor substance of its own

Because our real nature is pure awareness, we can be rid of this false existence (holding on to something other than what we actually are) only by knowing our real existence – possible only through self-investigation. Pure awareness is that which is aware of nothing other than itself. Bhagavan says in Verse 2 of Nan Yar, the ego exists so long as we see anything other than ourselves. In the Sanskrit version he says: leaving aside all phenomena, the mind sees its own quality of light, it sees Reality.

Avidya can be removed only by vidya, true knowledge of ourselves. Sentence 1, Verse 13 of Ulladu Narpadu explains: Staying without any

thought other than the Self is the same as giving oneself up to God or self-surrender. However, we feel it is necessary to think about our many concerns. This is addressed by Bhagavan's subsequent sentence: Leave all thinking also to him. Whatever action or speech needs to be done; the body will be made to do them. He had said this also to his mother: The will of the guru resides in the heart of each, making them dance. However many burdens we put on the Guru, we can be assured that body, speech, and mind will do whatever needs be done.

The one supreme ruling power, *parameshwara-shakti* is the power driving all that happens. Since that is the case, there is no need to worry about what should be done. We seem to be faced with dilemmas and choices when we should just leave all to god. Like in a train carrying the whole burden, travelers suffer by keeping their luggage on their heads! We believe God is all-knowing, all-loving, yet we don't act accordingly. We unnecessarily burden ourselves with worries because we have not yet developed *vairagya*. The more we practice the more our thinking subsides. The more we yield ourselves to him, the easier it will be for us to face all difficulties.

So how do we apply this to the

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current covid situation? As Bhagavan said to his mother: According to the *prarabdha* of each, so we will act. What is not to happen will not happen, regardless of how much effort we make. Whatever is destined will happen no matter how much we try to obstruct it. Therefore, it is good to remain silent. Remaining silent means remaining without rising of ego. It does not mean we remain inactive. Rather, we do nothing of our own will, which yields fruits of action which then get stored as *sanchita prarabdha*. We cannot change the course of events at all, yet by persisting in ‘carrying our luggage on our heads’ we are increasing our suffering by worrying about things like whether we will get ill. What has to happen has already been determined. Bhagavan is omni-benevolent, he doesn’t see us as other than himself, so he loves us as himself. He knows what is best for us. We cannot see what is ordained for our spiritual well-being. He has the long-term view, he wants us to reach the *param-sukham* of our original state. The more we surrender to him the more we are free of our likes/dislikes. This is happiness. Even the worst calamity of life we accept as a gift of his grace.

Bhagavan teaches that if we can curb our ego, we can be happy wher-

ever we may be, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. The analogy I like to use is that of a playful rabbit who wants to leave its hole to run outside where dangers lurk. When the rabbit sees us keeping an eye on the hole it turns back in. If our attention wanders, the rabbit runs out.

This pandemic is not the worst thing that can happen. There have been wars and worse situations. If we follow Bhagavan’s teachings of self-surrender and self-investigation, we can cope not merely with covid but with every kind of problem.

**Q & A that followed:**

**Q** Is there a transition from self-inquiry to self-surrender or do they converge at some point?

**A** We start by trying to surrender our will. We find we are not able to do this completely. When we seek how to take our effort further, God appears in the form of a Guru and teaches that we can only surrender completely if we surrender the ego. So self-surrender leads to and merges in the path of self-investigation so the ego can be ultimately eradicated.

The pinnacle of all spiritual practices is bhakti, the pinnacle of the path of bhakti is surrender, and the pinnacle of the path of surrender is self-investigation. So self-surrender becomes

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complete only in self-investigation. We must be in the state where there is not even the tiniest thought other than *atmachintana*.

**Q** The ego or sense of doership rises even when doing trivialized work like cutting vegetables, for example. So, is self-inquiry only for when we sit for meditation?

**A** Doership and ego are one and the same thing. As long as I identify with this bundle of five sheaths of the body as myself, every action is experienced as ‘I am doing the action’. Only the body is cutting vegetables. We cannot overcome doership without eradicating ego. Bhagavan in Verse 38 of Ulladu Narpadu says: if we are the doer of actions, we experience the results as fruit. When we investigate and discover who the doer is, we know our Self, the ego is eradicated, and we abide in realization. This awareness is not merely when we sit in meditation but in knowing who is doing anything, retaining our attention on investigating the doer.

Again, in Verse 16 of Nan Yar, he defines self-investigation as retaining focus on the doer. There is no need to imagine that we have to attend to work because whatever needs to be done (ref Verse 13) the one *paraneshwara shakti* is doing according to one’s *pr-*

*arabdha*. Because our sense of ego is so strong, we find this difficult in the beginning, but little by little, despite many failures and however many thoughts arise, Bhagavan says, just pull the mind back to seeking who is thinking these thoughts. Patient and persistent practice is needed to strengthen our ability to abide in steady Self-awareness.

Like Krishna said in the Gita, you have the right to action, but not to the fruits thereof. So, we have to make effort and then leave the result to Bhagavan. Our only responsibility is to follow the path laid by Bhagavan who is both God and Guru. He has assured us that those who are caught in the jaws of the tiger, who have been attracted by the glance of the Guru will never be forsaken. Nevertheless, we have to be consistent on the path shown to us. If we don’t follow the path, we just delay being saved. It is ok to fail many times, but we have to unflinchingly keep trying.

Even someone who becomes an Olympic runner had to learn to walk as a toddler!

**Q** Did Bhagavan focus on the practice of meditation as a way of making our day meditative?

**A** Meditation is a term that includes many things. Bhagavan never discour-

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aged anything anyone was doing, but the only type of meditation he actively promoted was *atmachintana*, *svarupadhyana* or meditation on one's real nature. These are just synonyms for self-investigation. Verse 8 of Upadesha Undiyar says: Rather than meditating on anything that is other than what we are, we should meditate on He as being the same as I (*soham*, *I am That*). The more we focus on ourselves, the more the mind will subside, and our whole life becomes meditative. We remain in the meditative state of just being.

**Q** When we surrender ego, humility comes. What can one do when the world takes advantage of one's humility?

**A** Leave it to Bhagavan! If the world wants to take advantage of you, that is his will. If he wants to protect you, that too is his will. Our only concern is to follow the path shown by Bhagavan. But I must say one thing: humility does not mean only an outward show; it means the inward subsidence of the ego. When there is real inward humility there may arise some circumstances when the body needs to behave in a certain way. An example from Bhagavan's life will illustrate this. He saw people hitting

branches of a mango tree to knock off yet unripe fruits before the monkeys came and ate them all. Bhagavan got very angry. The monkeys were here before us, he said. We come and occupy their place and then say they are stealing our mangoes! The tree is kindly bearing fruit, and instead of gratitude, it gets beaten!

Bhagavan translated from Yoga Vashishtha: Oh Rama, having understood the truth of everything, continue to play your part in the world. As a king, as a husband, he had the duty to protect his wife when she was abducted by Ravana. He could not say: I surrender and let Sita remain abducted. In the same way, we each have our dharma to play in the world that is apart from the *svadharmā* Bhagavan has prescribed, of knowing the Self. Outwardly the body, speech, and mind have certain obligations and we must act accordingly, knowing which, if we surrender our body and mind, they will be made to do what they are destined to do.

If it is good for us that the world takes advantage of our humility, he will allow that to happen. Our only duty is to surrender to Bhagavan. Nothing else is of any concern to us. ■

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# Kendra Bulletin

November 2020 – January 2021



December 13<sup>th</sup>



Swami Chidrupananda, Acharya Chinmaya Mission, Noida addressed an online satsang which focused on two main themes: ego as the basis of *samsara* and the methods for its dissolution. At the very outset he said that the basis for all our problems is the ego experienced through the senses in

empirical or conventional reality and seen as compellingly real. Yet every Master has pointed out that these problems are simply illusions of the mind. Guruji Swami Chinmayananda has explained that the cause of our problems is trying to get full satisfaction from the external — objects through our body, feelings through our mind and thoughts through our intellect. It is impossible to achieve happiness through all three, for not only do these change, but the world too changes — both being in constant flux.

Vidyaranya's Panchdasi also gives us a base for understanding: *Isvararishti* is God's creation — Brahman being one but wishing to be many. *Jivasrishti* is Man's creation triggered by *vasanas*. By superimposing

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the attraction-repulsion principle on *Isvarasrishti*, we project our *vasanas* onto what is a metaphysical existence, thereby creating *samsara*. Swamiji explained this through an example: In my initial perception I simply see a flower. But within seconds, this perception gets converted to *rag-dvesa* (attraction-repulsion) – I want the flower or I don't want the flower. Projection follows perception and creates *bhoga buddhi*. What prompts *bhoga* are *vasanas* which are *anadi* extending over countless *janmas*. Identifying this problem – ego as the cause of *samsara* – is a big leap into which Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi provides direct insight, his teaching of self-enquiry for the ego's dissolution serving as the direct path.

Not all are eligible for this path for if there is too much *rajas*, self-enquiry is not possible. Hence the need for purification of the mind through all means – *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* – so that the ego's final dissolution can be made through *jnana*. Swami Tejomayananda would say: ritual practice will destroy sins, but not the sinner. For dissolution of the sinner is possible only through *jnana*, other means only aiding the process of mental purification.

Self-enquiry is a 24x7 exercise. Meditation is employed to get into

the mood of the quest but the quest is a continuous exercise: observing and becoming acutely aware of one's jealousies, anger, attachments till these slowly weaken and this attitude of enquiry ends in realisation. By enquiring into the 'I' behind these states, we begin to see them as shadows that cannot bear the light of enquiry. In observing the dance of the 'I', I may yield to it, may fall prey to it but this should not mean demeaning oneself, for in essence, we are divine.

Referring several times to verse 29 of Bhagavan's *Saddarshanam*, Swamiji emphasised the need to search for the place where the ego emerges – *taccoday-sthana-gavesanena* – for the ego will not perish without this hunt. Hence the need to search with an inward-diving mind, for if the ego does not perish, can there be oneness with the Self – *svatmaikya-rupa katham-astunistha*? Our suffering is directly proportional to the dimensions of our ego – the greater the ego, the greater the suffering. If bondage is real, there can never be liberation. If the dream is real, we would never wake up. The fact that we wake up is proof that we can awake to liberation in this very life.

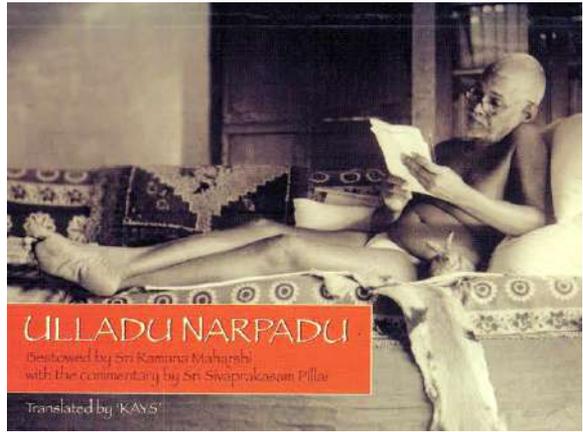
For Bhagavan, there was no scope even for *mukti* for there was nothing

other than the Self – forever free. Hence our need to shift focus from the ego to the Self, enquiry being essential due to our strong identification with our body-mind-intellect which focuses on the outer. Swamiji quoted Shankaracharya, '*Ekan-teysukhmasyatampar-tarechetasamadhiyatam* – Enjoy in solitude, meditate on the Lord, search for the Lord'

Citing the methods advocated by Vedanta of *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* for removing contrary perceptions of the mind, Swami Chidrupanandaji's own advice was two-fold: without shirking your duties, use the moments of solitude that come to you in the course of the day to sit quiet, to practice self-enquiry; if you are not able to sleep at night, sit quiet again, observe your mind, enquire into the 'I'. Only **we** can discover ourselves, for this is each person's own search and discovery.

In conclusion, Swamiji invoked the Lord's grace in bestowing upon us the stamina necessary for the search and for Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi to shine gloriously in our hearts.

-- Neera Kashyap



## December 20<sup>th</sup>

Michael James, a London based devotee cum scholar, delivered an online discourse explaining the central role that ego plays in Bhagavan's teachings. According to Bhagavan, the root obstacle is ego; and, *avidya* (ignorance) and *maya* (illusion) are the very nature of ego. In sleep, when we don't rise as ego, there's no problem at all since *avidya* and *maya* are non-existent. Only when we rise as ego in waking and dreaming, the dualities come into existence.

Throughout the discourse, Mr. James explained the verses of Bhagavan's *Ulladu Narpadu* (*Forty Verses on Reality*), in which Bhagavan deals with ego either directly or indirectly, expounding on the nature of ego and the means to get rid of it.

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Bhagavan says that each religion initially accepts three fundamentals i.e. world, soul, and God. All disputes between different religions and philosophies take place only when we rise as ego. We all seek the blissful state in which ego is annihilated. Our real nature is formless awareness, the world of names and forms becoming evident only when we identify ourselves with the form of the body.

Generally, when we talk about the body, we think about the physical body, but Bhagavan goes deeper, and says that the body comprises of five sheaths: physical, energy (*prana*), mind, intellect, and the subtlest sheath of all, the darkness of self-negligence that prompts the ego to grasp outward forms instead of turning within to see what it itself actually is. Hence, the world is nothing but five kinds of sense impressions: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Since the mind alone perceives the world through the five sense organs, there is no world without the mind. What Bhagavan refers to here as mind is ego, Mr James pointed out. Citing verse 18 from *Upadesa Undiyar*, he explained that mind is a term used to refer to all thoughts, the root of these being the first thought, “I-thought”.

That which exists without appear-

ing and disappearing is the fundamental awareness which always shines in our heart as “I am”. When we turn inwards and investigate this Reality we dissolve in the pure awareness, “I am”.

The dyads (e.g., knowledge and ignorance, fate and will, bondage and liberation) and triads (e.g., knower, known and knowledge) exist only because of ego and disappear when we investigate it. Using the analogy of ornaments which are unreal but for gold, Bhagavan asserts that only the awareness “I am” is real and all forms unreal.

Touching on the famous debate on destiny and free will, Mr. James said that according to Bhagavan, the dispute exists only for those who don’t discern the root of destiny and free will – ego. The one who has seen the origin of ego has seen God. The ego wants to see God, but we can see God only when we are swallowed by God, since God is nothing but the pure awareness “I am”.

Bhagavan says that a sharpened mind, which restrains speech and breath helps us to investigate the source of ego. As soon as the mind reaches the heart and ego dies, it spontaneously appears as ‘I-I’. Ego is the doer of all actions, as all karmas are

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done by mind, speech and body. Thus, we, as ego, must experience the fruits of all actions. On knowing our real nature, we realise we are not the doer of actions, thus dissolving both doership and the experience-ship of karma. In the final verse of *Ulladu Narpadu*, Bhagavan talks about liberation and says that annihilation of ego is true liberation.

The crux of Bhagavan's teachings is that the very nature of ego is to rise and flourish by grasping other things, itself subsiding and disappearing when it grasps itself. Therefore, self-inves-

tigation is the only way to overcome ego. In all sacred texts nowhere has it been made so clear as in Bhagavan's teaching that the ego, being a shadow, cannot withstand investigation – enquiry into it being the only way to dissolve it.

Towards closure of the discourse, Mr. James addressed questions from devotees. To an interesting question – What is the state of body and mind in a medically unconscious condition? – he replied: like sleep, in which the mind is temporarily dissolved.

--*Advait Shrivastav*

A letter was received containing some learned questions pertaining to memory, sleep and death. It looked, at first sight, that they were cogent yet baffling to answer. But when the Master was approached on the subject he disentangled the skein very nicely, pointing out that all such confusion was due to the non-differentiation of the real 'I' from the false 'I'. The attributes and modes pertain to the latter and not to the former. One's efforts are directed only to remove one's ignorance. Afterwards they cease, and the real Self is found to be always there. No effort is needed to remain as the Self.

All are aware of their own Self only. Wonder of wonders! They take what is not as what is, or they see the phenomena apart from the Self. Only so long as there is the knower is there knowledge of all kinds (direct, inferential, intellectual, etc.); should the knower vanish they all vanish together with him; their validity is of the same degree as his.

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## 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](mailto:editor.dp@rkdelhi.org) with the subject line: 'Letters to the Editor'

Many congratulations!!

"Read Latest DP issue leisurely yesterday. Enjoyed doing so. It has come out nicely with lot of interesting, innovative and informative contents. The editorial board and all associated with its production deserve our congratulations. Namu Ramana"

*N. V. Krishnan.*

[Mr Krishnan was former Secretary of the Kendra for twelve years]

It's been wonderful working on the illustrations of Direct Path with Swagat Patnaik and the editorial team. The articles and poems by contributors have been unique and awe-inspiring, making the process of looking for suitable illustrations a deeply enriching experience.

We aim to publish illustrations that have a spiritual resonance and are visually appealing. Images should tell a story at first glance so readers can relate to them instantly. Illustrations are chosen based on the salient ideas of articles or their main themes. I'm thrilled to be associated with the editorial team whose valuable guidance and suggestions help me in finalizing illustrations for each issue of Direct Path.

We share our views openly and in the process learn from each other's. Our vision for Direct Path stems from our devotion and love for Bhagavan. It's by His grace that we have the blessing of being associated with this spiritual magazine.

Namu Ramana

*Marie Elangovan*

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*The results of Karma (Action) pass away,  
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Karma yields no salvation*

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***41. Om uddipta nayanaya namah***

He of lustrous eyes.

***42. Om purnaya namah***

The perfect one.

***43. Om racitacala tandavaya namah***

Dancer dancing the dance of stillness.

