

DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA
DELHI

Feb - Apr 2022

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*"The body dies, but the spirit that transcends it cannot
be touched by death."*

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi



56. Om vimalaya namah

The flawless One.

57. Om dirgha darsine namah

Far-sighted seer.

58. Om aptaya namah

Near and dear one.





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

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VOLUME XXIV ISSUE 1

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Call for Articles

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

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

We look forward to hearing from you!

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The Wisdom of Innocence

Advait Shrivastav



Due to their innocence, children are linked with the Almighty, and enlightened saints are one with the Almighty. Thus, the similarity between children and saints is acknowledged by many and a bond with children is often visible in the lives of jnanis. Bhagavan's presence was paramount in shaping the lives of several children. A notable example is Arthur Osborne's son, Adam Osborne who developed *Osborne 1*, the first commercially successful portable computer and became an icon in Silicon Valley. He was indeed blessed; he spent his childhood at Ramanashramam, basking in Bhagavan's and Arunachala's grace.

A few mischievous children used to pelt stones at the young Bhagavan, who sat in deep meditation, in the

Great Temple a few months after reaching Tiruvannamalai. While an ordinary person might have developed a prejudice against children owing to such incidents, Bhagavan's relationship with children remained unaffected. Blessing each child who came to him, he saw the same divine spark differently manifested.

Children often listen with delight to stories. Sometimes stories have the power to mould them into good humans. For example, by entwining esoteric lessons with interesting stories, the Panchatantra was supposedly written by one Vishnu Sharma to shape the character of three princes who were growing up neglected and had become dull and incapable of ruling the kingdom. Moral lessons presented through stories are easier

to remember than when expressed through the dry pages of a spiritual or philosophical book. Stories have the power to impact the human mind, especially the sensitive consciousness of a child, in such a way that a message gets engraved on it. Psychic imprints left by the story help one recall it and its message immediately.

Saints have often used parables to convey the higher Truth of one's existence in such a manner that it can be easily comprehended by all, children as well as adults. Bhagavan too, did the same in his own simple way. He possessed narrative skills of a high order which aided him in communicating his spiritual message to any audience. Kunju Swami once said, "Such was the attraction of these stories that when we heard Sri Bhagavan beginning a story, even if we had heard it numerous times before, we would literally stop whatever we were doing and run to his side to hear it again!"¹ Adults might hear with the same delight as children; children might hear at one level but remember the story and understand at a deeper level years later.

Stories are a mere play of illusion; but whatever happens in this world is also nothing but an illusion. Thus, if we look around and observe keenly,

every entity appears to be a story. The wise treat every real-life event whether tragic or comic, as a mere story. They are constantly in search of the one and only storyteller, who has written each story.

Each human life is a story – birth and death are the beginning and end, and reincarnation is a sequel. The stories of our previous births are deleted from our memory to give us another chance to rewrite our lives, even as we evolve. Likewise, this world, too, is an ongoing story. It is a mistake to assume that a human being is either a Krishna or a Kamsa. We must not forget that people are constantly changing and evolving and characters who transformed themselves, such as Valmiki and Angulimala, have also existed.

Sanatana dharma has a rich tradition of building stories around spiritual lessons. The Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Katha Upanishad – all present the Truth in the form of narratives. Devout believers are of course convinced the Ramayana and Mahabharata are based on historic events and these magnificent epics will continue to serve as the pillars of sanatana dharma.

In the spiritually dark age of Kali-yuga, owing to the legacy of colonial

¹ Joan Greenblatt's preface to *Spiritual Stories As Told By Ramana Maharshi*.

rule and the decadence brought about by stark materialism, our scriptures are being gradually reduced to mere “stories”, and many have lost contact with the underlying essence.

Deprived of spiritual understanding, existential crises and mental illnesses have become common in this fast-paced world. The human family is like a tree without roots and it is as if the conclusion of Earth’s story is being written. The future of civilization rests in the hands of our children. It is up to them to transform into characters who can add many meaningful paragraphs to the saga of Bhu, the blue planet.

Talking of children, how can one forget the most enlightened child who graced the holy land of Tiruvannamalai, the Son of Arunachala, Bhagavan

Ramana Maharshi? He was a mere lad of sixteen when he entered the highest state without any conscious effort. He re-acquainted the sleeping world with his Father, adding immense spiritual richness to Earth’s story. His narrative flows on.

It fills me with joy to introduce a new feature in our journal, Direct Path. Titled “One Plus”, this feature targets a universal audience of both children and adults. This issue offers a re-presentation of one of the luminous stories told by Bhagavan; a tale which may appeal to children as well as spiritual *sadhakas*. I am grateful to Bharati Mirchandani and Sharada Bhanu for their efforts in creating this two-page feature. ■

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The auspicious days of Deepam and Jayanti were blissfully celebrated at the Kendra. Swami Sarvapriyananda graced the screens of devotees by delivering a talk on the occasion of Bhagavan’s Jayanti. Sri Raghav Kumar continued the chain of lectures on The Song Celestial, and Michael James started a series of enlightening talks on Upadesa Saram. All these satsangs are available on the Kendra’s YouTube channel.

Important events (from Bhagavan’s time) falling in the current issue (February - April 2022) are as follows::

- Munagala Venkataramaiah Day: 1th February
- Sundaram Iyer Day: 21st February
- Maha Sivaratri: 01st March
- Jagadish Swami Day: 02nd April
- Sadhu Arunachala’s Aradhana: 17th April
- Bhagavan’s 72nd Aradhana: 28th April

Deepam 2021



The Kendra celebrated Karthigai Deepam on 19 November 2021. The raging wave of COVID-19 had prevented Deepam celebrations in 2020, but, this year, the zeal of devotees surmounted the tumultuous chaos orchestrated across the globe by a microscopic entity. Deepam, being a celebration of the manifestation of Shiva as a column of light, became a beacon in these gloomy times, assuring devotees that divine light is ever-present.

The fervour of dedication of the Secretary, Delhi Kendra, Anuraag Sunder, was apparent, as was that of two adults who added devotional breath to that of the appointed priests. With them was a young boy, whose eyes gleamed with delight at being

able to chant as well as his mentors. The chanting, which entered through the physical ear, reached deep into the soul.

The quiet dignity of the gathered devotees, and their humility at being permitted to be physically present at the altar, was palpable. Also faintly palpable, in the flickering shadows of the lengthening winter evening, was the heavy drumbeat of time: Shiva's dance that recycles everything, ensuring return to the Source, continued.

The flame is lit to remind us that it is always waiting, waiting, waiting to be lit. Waiting inside us, to just turn within, to focus our energy at the only place that matters. The light that promises to pierce through the dark night of ignorance that surrounds us.



With continuous chanting, replete with deep devotion and high surrender, the lighted lamp was carried up to the pinnacle of the mountain-shaped Kendra by Anuraag ji. The flame was visible from afar.

Heart-warming Responses to Deepam Celebrations at the Kendra

Thanks to Bhagavan's blessings, I could watch the celebrations at both Tiruvannamalai and Delhi, and felt happy. I was pleased with the way you (Anuraag) led it at the Kendra and lit the lamp on top. My congratulations to all who made this possible.

N. V. Krishnan

The devotees who participated in Karthigai Deepam celebrations are blessed. Transporting the deepam to

the peak of Ramana Kendra's shrine – with dedication balancing fearless truth of fire – is sheer joy, and you (Anuraag) did it.

I guess I was the one and only still-alive yesteryear devotee to watch yesterday's Deepam celebrations.

Dharma Chatterji

Anuraag, thank you so much for sharing the sublime moments of devotion. The decoration, pooja, and your carrying of the flame were entrancing. May you always stay blessed.

Tuktuk Ghosh

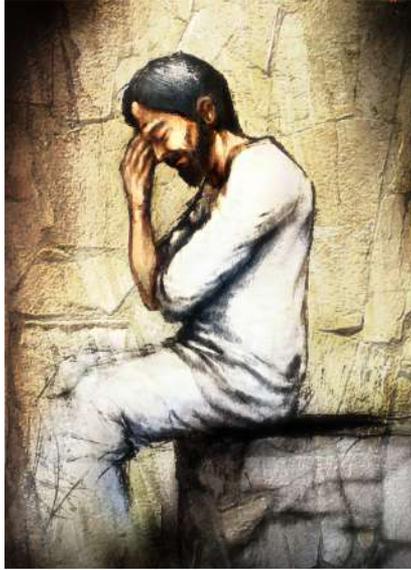
We enjoyed the very well organised Deepam ceremony on 19 November 2021.

Asha Dhingra and Wing Commander S. C. Dhingra (V) ■



Mending Affliction and Defilement through Bhagavan's Vichara

Michael Highburger



[Bhagavan's inquiry is not difficult to understand, but for many of us, it is challenging to practise. Reducing the sheer incline of the vichara that Bhagavan taught involves searching for accommodations that help us gain purchase on its steep slopes. Directing vichara towards afflictions, defilements, and unwholesome mental states—though not something Bhagavan ever discussed at length—might serve as one such adaptation, while nevertheless preserving the spirit of Bhagavan's inquiry. Such an undertaking can be powerful,

not just in cultivating an effective vichara practice but in learning how more easily to conduct our lives. The following few pages centre on ways to make use of Bhagavan's vichara to heal the afflictions and entanglements that engulf us in daily living.]

Sometimes we find ourselves overwhelmed by the circumstances in our lives with no adequate means for addressing them. We feel threatened by the demands made by the world, as though we were trapped in perpetual opposition to inner afflictive states.

Anxiety, fear, anger, jealousy, and depression may assert themselves and so beleaguer us that moving through our daily lives feels like wading through molasses, each step draining every ounce of power. When we find ourselves besieged by these mental states, we can remind ourselves of the tools Bhagavan gave us for navigating samsaric confusion.

Compassionately working with afflictive emotional states is often not a question of *trying harder* but *trying different*. Afflictions are not something to be destroyed or eliminated through coercion or by a force of the will but are healed through sympathetic attention in the context of steady inquiry. If afflictions thrive in non-awareness, then bringing them into the light of alert attention through regular inquiry helps heal them. We need not strive to get rid of them. We need only recognize them as and when they emerge. The old paradigm is fraught because it makes the same mistake every time: in reifying our defilements, that is, in making them into something that appears real and substantial, we fall into the trap of imagining that there is a little man or little woman in there that is tainted, calling him or her ‘ego’, whereas Bhagavan tells us there is no such entity. He points to this as the root

delusion in respect of bondage, namely, imagining that there is *someone* in bondage:

‘Identity of the Self with the body is the real bondage. Leave off the false notion and perceive intuitively the Real. That alone matters.’ (Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi §32)

When we see defilements as they really are, namely, unreal, all bondage disappears. But how do we do that? Bhagavan’s inquiry helps us break up the aggregate of afflictions into its constituent parts, and thus see how reification is the source of our trouble. When we concretize the ‘deluded self,’ make it a thing, we give it a reality it doesn’t deserve. But rather than speaking of ‘ego identity’ or ‘deluded self’, we opt for a more accurate language and speak of ‘defilements’, ‘*kleshas*’ and ‘afflictive emotions’. This helps us avoid a problem that is not there.

Vichara helps us unmask the deception. Instead of quarrelling with our conceit, as if it belongs to us and defines us, we simply identify conceited behaviours as behaviours born of affliction and defilement, naming them and nothing more. We do not *personify* behaviours, make them into the behaviours of a *someone* but instead, just name them non-

judgmentally. If, on the other hand, we try to get rid of them willfully all at once, we inadvertently strengthen them by creating samskaras of opposition. The great trap is imagining that our freedom hinges on being free of unwanted impulses. Rather, the art is identifying such impulses without evaluation or loathing. If aversion for them arises simultaneously, we identify the aversion *as* aversion. Here we can talk of micro-vichara which helps us break up the objects of our inquiry into smaller bite-sized parts thus diminishing their mayavic hold over us. Vichara does not necessarily usher in a wholesale understanding of our true nature all at once but helps us see through identification with negative impulses.

The old paradigm is a demon's trick. The 'demon', as it were, gets us to imagine that we need to be cleansed of negative impulses once for all, causes us to imagine that we are the ego that must be destroyed at all costs. But Bhagavan says the 'destroying' is nothing more than 'seeing through' the delusion that there is such an entity. Bhagavan tells us, 'The *jnani* sees no one as an *ajnani*. All are only *jnanis* in his sight ... The Self is all-shining and only pure *jnana*. So, there is no *ajnana* in his sight ... There is only the Self'. (*Talks* §499, §157).

Samskara Duhkha

The old paradigm lacks light-heartedness. It takes defilements too seriously, calling them 'myself', and then imagines that one should get rid of this 'self'. But such a method forever grants this 'self' (which is only a conglomeration of defilements, samskaras, purvavasanas, and mental afflictions) renewed vigour and strength. The attempt to root out defilements by resolve is like a mange-infested dog scratching at his naked skin. Even if he gets momentary relief, the itching sensation just keeps coming back. By focusing our attention on banishing defilements, they remain ever one step ahead. No matter how much we try, we can never overcome them. Why? Because we are pitted against them in an adversarial relationship. What we resist, persists, and opposition to our afflictions is the very thing that gives them the power of continuance. Why is that? It is because reactivity can never be a vehicle for freedom; in reacting, we create further defilements born of the antagonism. The tradition calls this *samskara duhkha* which is just reactivity toward our deluded conditioning and habits of mind. Such reactivity in turn generates second-order entanglements. Arguably, the very origin of defilement, affliction,

and impurity is reactivity itself. As our defilements colour our vision of the world and the people in it, further reactivity accumulates in layers. Whether we call it externalisation, superimposition, or psychological projection, such reactivity amounts to *colouring the world by and through the filter of our afflictions*. When seeing the world thus coloured, we reject it, imagining thereby that we have gotten free of the original affliction, whereas in fact it remains concealed within the newly generated layers of samskaras within us. Such layering takes place below the threshold of ordinary consciousness. Projecting our pain onto others, onto the world or onto an imaginary ego appears to get us off the hook of having to feel our pain. But it only delays the inevitable.

As this process unfolds, the layering of unhealed afflictions constellates, taking on a life of its own. What are in reality disparate orphaned bits of psychic material imbued with a sense of lack, fear, and reactivity, begin to communicate with one another. Their fragmentation is the operative mechanism that leads to their bonding with one another. They form a nexus, and the nexus feels solid. We mistake this aggregation as an entity and so give it a name – ‘deluded mind’, ‘small self’, or ‘manas’ – and imagine

it as having an independent reality. Here is where Bhagavan asks us to insert our investigation. To be clear, the *who* in ‘Who am I?’ is negatively positioned, is not meant to identify an entity but rather to reveal precisely that *no such entity is there*. Like monkeys grasping at reflections, our entire lives have been spent groping after a delusion and calling it ‘self’. Bhagavan’s vichara is designed to clear up this delusion.

The irony is that our defilements and afflictions are the portals that lead us to freedom if we would just face them, accept them, and work compassionately with them. The reader may remember that Bhagavan once said, ‘suffering is the way [to the] Realisation of God’ (*Talks* §107). But how mysterious this statement is. How could suffering be the way? Is suffering not something we should avoid at all costs?

If suffering is born of wanting things to be other than they are, such wanting places us in an adversarial relationship with our lives day to day, causing further suffering. Many times, suffering is the only means for toppling our delusions and thus, can serve as a catalyst for helping us to face what is not true in us. Mental suffering, afflictions, and defilements are not monsters to be run away from,

but little children crying out for our help. The old paradigm greets their cries with reactivity, judgment, and aggression while vichara investigates them with non-resisting non-evaluative attention. We cannot know the Self until we identify the neurotic impulses that keep us in the cycle of delusion. Displacement narratives born of deficit thinking, samskaras centred on lack, and perpetual clinging to the notion of a separate self, engender insecurity. The delusion is self-confirming: a non-existing illusory self cannot be gotten rid of by force precisely because in battling it, we give it strength, whereas all the while there is no such entity. The illusion takes on clever forms: false humility, inverted egoism, and narcissistic remorse. False humility and inverted egoism boil down to obsessing on our shortcomings. Narcissistic remorse, masked as moral shame, is the endless repenting of wrongdoings from the past. At first glance, inverted egoism and narcissistic remorse look like healthy instincts. But compulsively scrutinizing deluded selfhood in the spirit of aversion, regret, and hatred has the reverse effect. Heaping aversion upon defilement only strengthens the defilement (and increases our conceit) even if, in this instance, narratives of unworthiness seem to resemble humility.

When we investigate defilements and afflictions as mental states, the opaque ego is revealed to be only a collection of conditioned phenomena. Micro-vichara and beginner's inquiry are means for peeling back the layers of this conditioned phenomena, probing whether there is anything of enduring substance in them. The object of inquiry, Bhagavan tells us, is to find the true nature of 'the Self as Awareness'. He says, 'Let [us] practice inquiry so long as separateness is perceived'. (*Talks* §454) The key word here is 'separateness'. By making our afflictions into a person, we mystify them and make them into something they are not.

Grief of the Lost Son

An image from real life to illustrate this would be the mother who is notified by the government that her soldier-son has been lost in battle. For years she grieves the loss until one day, the boy, having been a prisoner of war all the while, is released by the enemy, very much alive. Her joy knows no bounds. But was her anguish all those years mistaken? The grief was real, but it was based on erroneous information. Likewise, suffering born of defilement and affliction has its root in the mistaken notion of a separate self. While the notion is erroneous, the grief is real, and thus deserves our compassion. If the mother had had direct contact with the enemy,

she might have learned of her son's true status earlier. But communication had been cut off between the warring factions. If we have communication with the enemy of defilement through inquiry, we have a better chance of knowing our own true status.

Now let us take our investigation a step further and inquire into the motivations behind our thoughts, words, and deeds. Invariably, we will learn that our assumed intentions and motivations rarely correspond to our actual intentions and motivations. As we investigate, we expose false assumptions we have about who we are and why we do what we do. This is where true humility begins. The old paradigm got corrupted by the convenient assumption that our defilements were coming from outside us whereas in fact they are born of present and past actions, i.e. from this life, from our ancestral line, and from past lives. But in thinking that someone or something outside us is the source and cause of our affliction and suffering, we not only disempower ourselves in respect of healing them but compound our suffering by creating new karma, namely, in blaming the innocent and neglecting to take responsibility for our unwholesome motivations and actions. Directly seeing the source of defilements is the first step toward any

genuine vichara practice. A Japanese saying goes, 'We use the ground we fall on to get up again.'

A Banquet of Consequences

Afflictions and defilements are the gateways to knowledge of the Self. If 'sooner or later we must sit down to a banquet of consequences', as Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote, vichara practice is deliberately taking a seat at the banquet table. Instead of blaming our afflictions on others or just ignoring them, instead of allowing our defilements to catch us off guard in times of stress, we go after them in advance – proactively, intentionally, and courageously – inquiring into their nature and trusting in the healing power of vichara to scour away all that is unwholesome within us. It is the uncomfortable material of the psyche that steers our inquiry inward, the last place we want to look. We find that the very thing that would seem to impede our path turns out to be the doorway to our deliverance.

The reader may recall the legend about a jealous Brahma trying to keep humans from discovering their divinity. Brahma called a council of the gods to help decide on the right place to conceal their divinity. 'Let's bury it deep in the earth,' said one of the gods. But Brahma said, 'No, that will not do because humans will eventually dig into

the earth and discover it.’ Then another said, ‘Let’s hide it in the deepest part of the ocean.’ But Brahma said, ‘No, they will eventually dive down into the ocean and will discover it.’ Another said, ‘Let’s take it to the top of the highest mountain and hide it there.’ But once again Brahma replied, ‘No, that will not do either, because they will eventually climb every mountain and will find it.’ The assembly fell silent. Brahma sat quietly and thought for a long time and then said, ‘Well, there is one place they will never look’. ‘Where’s that?’, the gods queried eagerly. ‘They will never look inside their own hearts,’ said Brahma. ‘If we hide it there, they shall never find it!’

Differentiation

Bhagavan urges us to make the 180-degree turn to investigate our own heart, which is the source of our affliction, but too, the site of its redemption. We turn inward to glimpse the place we most fear – beneath the shadowy regions of the unconscious, beneath painful memories, innumerable disappointments, and endless vexations – so that we may find freedom and live. This is the work Bhagavan is calling us to. In taking up this work, we learn to cultivate the capacity for *differentiation*, not least of all, distinguishing an aggregation of orphaned psychic loose-ends from a so-called separate self. Differentiation

is not the *fruit* of enquiry but rather *the very process* itself. But what is differentiation? It is like what we do when we make use of the observing power of the visible eye, namely, the faculty of sight, to distinguish the green of a tree from the blue of the sky. But differentiation in *vichara* is more subtle and centres on making use of the observing power of the *inner* eye, namely, the faculty of intuition, to distinguish Self from non-self. If the keenness of the faculty of ordinary sight has a relatively fixed value, our inner sight grows sharper with use. Bhagavan calls us to *aparoksha*² in order that we ‘gain knowledge of intuitive experience through spiritual practice’ (*Letters*, 28 September 1947). By it, we come to see that *vichara* hinges on non-evaluative observation brought about through the faculty of discriminative wisdom.

Differentiation means observing the subtle nature of mental phenomena, not in order to catalogue their infinite varieties but to know their nature directly, one by one, through illuminating the objective field. Differentiation means cultivating the capacity to deconstruct the labels we use to define ourselves through a direct encounter with our inner landscape. This is where our divinity

² *The knowledge of direct experience. It is seeing within and accessing hitherto unknown realms within the Heart.*

lies, Bhagavan tells us. It is also the place where we mend our afflictions and defilements.

Conclusion

In day-to-day living, we have virtually endless opportunities to do this work. When we hear sharp words from our spouse, vichara assists us in catching ourselves right before we go into damage control, reacting with the usual defenses. Vichara allows us to savour the flavour of the blow, instead of pushing it away. Hafiz once wrote: ‘Don’t surrender your heartache so

quickly. Let it cut you more deeply. Let it ferment and season you as few human or even divine ingredients can’.

Bhagavan’s vichara helps us gain the needed fortitude to bear the brunt of what life dishes out, so that what has been injured can be seen through. If we had always depended on the standard defenses to protect ourselves, now, through inquiry, we give ourselves over completely, and in such giving-over, begin to discover a whole new world opening up within us.³■

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³ This article is an expanded rewrite of two short articles that appeared in the October and November, 2019 issues of *Saranagati*.

Talk 109

Two gentlemen from Ambala (the Punjab) had been here for a few weeks. Just before taking leave of Sri Bhagavan one of them asked how he should remove the spiritual drowsiness of his friends or of other people in general.

M.: Have you removed your own ‘spiritual drowsiness?’ The force which is set up to remove your own ‘drowsiness’ will also operate in other centres. There is the will-power with which you can act on others. But it is on a lower plane and not desirable. Take care of yourself first.

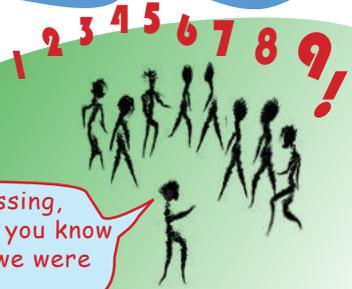
D.: How to remove my own ‘drowsiness’?

M.: Whose ‘drowsiness’ is it? Enquire. Turn within. Turn all your enquiries towards search for Self. The force set up within you will operate on others also.

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

Once ten foolish men  went on a journey. They had to cross a river. As it was shortly after the rainy season, the river was full and the crossing was difficult.

When they finally reached the other side they wanted to be sure that all had arrived safe. So one of them started counting the members of the group. He counted each of his friends. He shouted in a panic.



"Here, let me count & check," said another.

He counted his friends and reached the same figure.

One of us is missing, I get only nine, and you know when we started we were ten!"

Who is missing? Is it Sethu?



"No, I am here!" said Sethu.

Nine! I too get only nine! One of us is missing!

"Not me," grunted Bharat.

It must be Bharat then, he was the last into the river.



I am wet and dirty, like most of us, but I am here all right!



Well, whoever he is, he must have drowned in the river. I have counted too, and I make it only nine!

They all set up a howl at this and started weeping. "ONE OF US IS DEAD!"

A passerby stopped and asked them what was the matter and they explained that there had been ten of the group but one was now missing.

"It's a tragic mystery! No one saw him drown & we can't spot who is gone. But alas, dead he is!"

The new arrival could easily see that there were 10 men in the group.

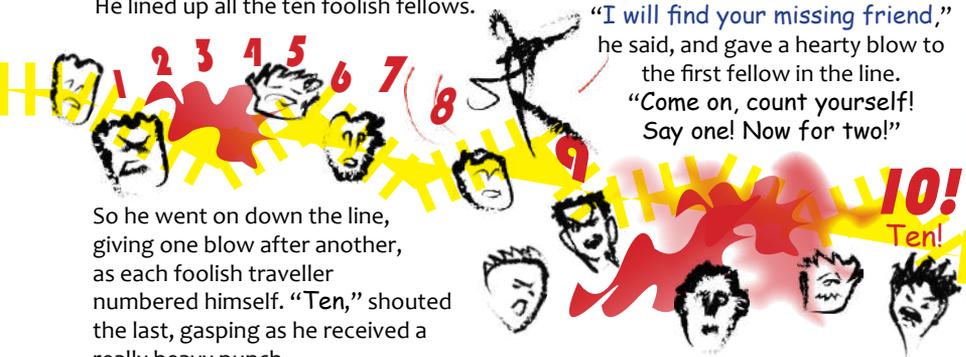


"Have you really counted?" he asked. "Oh, yes, several times! Each one who counted has found only nine."

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

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

The passer-by realized that each man who had counted must have forgotten to count himself. So he decided to solve the problem and have some fun. He lined up all the ten foolish fellows.



"I will find your missing friend," he said, and gave a hearty blow to the first fellow in the line. "Come on, count yourself! Say one! Now for two!"

So he went on down the line, giving one blow after another, as each foolish traveller numbered himself. "Ten," shouted the last, gasping as he received a really heavy punch.

"Why that means we are all here! No one is lost!"

They enthusiastically thanked the wayfarer for his help and greatly rejoiced.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana used this story to show that we are all like the ten foolish travellers. We forget to take our SELF into account. We look at others but forget the Self exists. And yet unless the Self existed there would be no one to count.

Here you are, Always Aware. Even when you are asleep without any dreams, you are aware. Awareness is Consciousness.

Consciousness never stops. In deep sleep you are NOT aware of your body. You have no thoughts at all. So your mind is not present, either.

Yet you exist.

The SELF is amazing. Take a minute to marvel at yourself. Here you are. Alive. Has there ever been a time when you were not? If so, you don't know it! For all you know is Being.

Did anyone have to go somewhere to trace the missing tenth man?

No, he was always here.

So you too can discover an amazing secret by paying attention to your own Self. Watch the "I" feeling.

Isn't it strange? Wonderful?

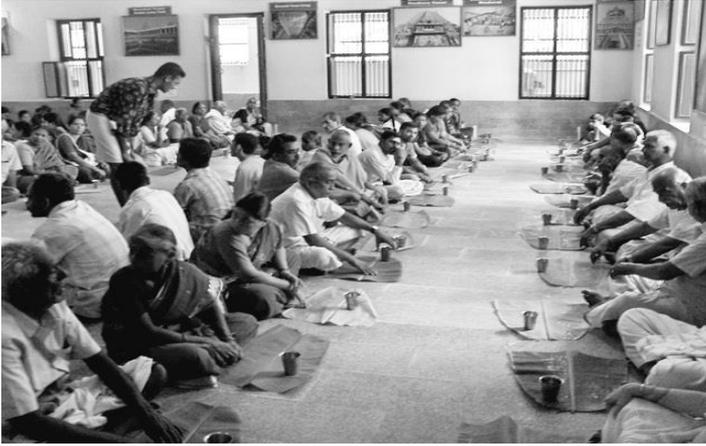
WHAT is it? WHO is it?

Keep watching...

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

In the Crucible of the Kitchen

V. Bharathi Harishankar



The seven-volume compendium *Arunachala Ramana: Eternal Ocean of Grace* encompasses different facets of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's life and works. The fourth volume is focused on Bhagavan's devotees who came "from all backgrounds and from all walks of life"⁴. While the devotion of the male and female devotees has been well-documented, Bhagavan's interaction with the women in the ashram's kitchen offers interesting spiritual insights. For women like Sampurnamma, Shantammal, Subbulakshmi Ammal, and Lokamma Patti, the ashram's kitchen not only gave

proximity to Bhagavan but also acted as a crucible to shape their spirituality.

First Meeting with Bhagavan

A common thread that unites the lives of these four devotees is that they were widowed and had experienced a state of futility of life. As Sampurnamma states, "When my husband died, I fell into a state of deep despair in which I thought that life was no longer worth living"⁵. In Subbulakshmi Ammal's case, widowhood meant following the prescribed religious rituals. "I lost my husband when I was sixteen years old. From then on, I tried to live the traditional life of a widow by going back to my mother's house

⁴ *Arunachala Ramana: Eternal Ocean of Grace* (published by Sri Ramanashramam, 2018), Volume 4, pg. vii

⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 472

and devoting my life to prayer and meditation on God”⁶. The very first meeting with Bhagavan lifts the veil of sorrow and despair from them. As Shantammal reminisces: “I bowed reverently to him and said, ‘The dream of my life has come true. Today I am blessed. Grant that my mind does not trouble me any more’”⁷.

Welcome to the Kitchen

Bhagavan Ramana’s invitation to each of these four devotees to join the “kitchen brigade” is an *upadesa* in itself. Following the *marjara nyaya*, like the cat carrying its kitten in its mouth, Bhagavan held them in his protective fold. His grace worked in myriad ways. While he was stern in reproaching them from holding on to orthodox beliefs, like their internalized caste hierarchy, he firmly guided them to look beyond material concerns. Subbulakshmi Ammal reports an interesting incident.

“Orthodox Brahmins and widows will not eat food that has been prepared from rice whose grains have been obtained by boiling them while they are still in the husk... One morn-

ing Bhagavan asked Shantammal to give some idlis that had been prepared from the ‘wrong’ sort of rice to Venu Amma.”⁸.

When it is pointed out that the orthodoxy would not permit *idlis* made from boiled rice to be consumed, Bhagavan terms it “a foolish scruple”⁹. This incident brings about a change in perception for Subbulakshmi. She remarks, “Full of remorse, I ran to the kitchen and stuffed an unorthodox but perfectly good *idli* into my mouth”¹⁰.

Another incident from Sampurnamma’s life stands out as a ready instance. She recalls how she “sat in a stone shed outside the ashram” because “during their periods, women were not given ashram food to eat, nor were they allowed to enter the ashram”¹¹. Bhagavan’s response was an order – ‘Bring her in and feed her decently’¹². When the ashram residents protest citing the traditional belief of *theetu*, which considers a menstruating woman as impure, Bhagavan’s questions: “Who is pure and who is impure? All are one, all are the same!” Through this interrogation, he taught

6 *Ibid*, pg. 509

7 *Ibid*, pg. 509

8 *Ibid*, pg. 509

9 *Ibid*, pg. 509

10 *Ibid*, pg. 509

11 *Ibid*, pg. 509

12 *Ibid*, pg. 509

an important lesson that “in spirituality the human being comes first and that compassion is the supreme law”¹³.

Food as a Leveler

Bhagavan’s simple dictum concerning food was to serve all and shun none. Shantammal describes an instance when she “served a few extra pieces of potato” and earned Bhagavan’s displeasure. When she justifies her act of omission as an expression of her “love and devotion”, Bhagavan is forthright in his response. “Is this the way to please me? Do you hope to earn grace through a potato curry? ... The more you love my people, the more you love me.”¹⁴ Subbulakshmi Ammal reports similar incidents like serving Bhagavan curd instead of buttermilk and more rasam than to others. The singular message that is conveyed is that “God is present in every being in all his glory and fullness, and that all forms of him must be given equal reverence”¹⁵. Nipping any preferential treatment in the bud, Bhagavan reiterated “the law is that what cannot be shared must not be touched”¹⁶.

Cooking as Bhakti Yoga

A strict adherence to “no waste” policy was followed in the ashram kitchen. “Even a grain of rice or a mustard seed lying on the ground would be picked up, dusted carefully, taken to the kitchen and put in its proper tin.” Even the brinjal stalks were not wasted but cooked into a delicious curry. This was because Bhagavan believed that “this is the property of my father Arunachala. I have to preserve it and pass it on to his children”¹⁷. As Sampurnamma explains, “In the kitchen he was the master cook, aiming at perfection in taste and appearance.”¹⁸. However, in reality, cooking “was an opportunity to teach us how to live. For those who worked in the kitchen, cooking became a deep spiritual experience”¹⁹.

Culinary Vedanta

While Bhagavan’s culinary skills and the perfection he taught to his devotees in the kitchen would give an impression that he was a connoisseur of food, his eating practices belied this. As Sampurnamma explains,

13 *Ibid*, pg. 481

14 *Ibid*, pg. 505

15 *Ibid*, pg. 517

16 *Ibid*, pg. 517

17 *Ibid*, pg. 476

18 *Ibid*, pg. 475

19 *Ibid*, pg. 475

“when meals were served, he would mix up ... everything together and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth”²⁰. His reasoning explicated the high philosophical thought “Enough of multiplicity. Let us have some unity!”²¹. It is interesting to note that Bhagavan, who embraced diversity in his devotees and empathized with the differing concerns of the destitute and the disadvantaged in his daily life, practised and taught the non-dualistic principle at a spiritual level effortlessly.

Every day occurrences in the kitchen acquired deep spiritual meaning because Bhagavan bestowed the grace of the guru on these women. Sampurnamma describes how Bhagavan would insist on “covering the vegetables” while cooking. “Only then will they keep their flavor and be fit to eat. It is the same way with the mind. You must put the lid over it and let it simmer quietly. Then only does a man become food fit for God to eat.”²² In this instance, the material food has served as an instrument to prepare the individual for the final soul offering.

The practice of cooking and serving

food also provides avenues to realize the highest spiritual potential. Shanthammal reveals this realization when she talks about the preparation of snake gourd curry. Bhagavan simply tells her that “the curry is noiseless. It’s time to add the spices.” Instantaneously, she realizes that “when the curry of the mind is silent, then is the time to add the spice of wisdom”²³. We cannot but recall the cooking recipe and its spiritual implications in *appalappattu*²⁴. Day to day happenings take on special meaning and Shanthammal sums it up succinctly: “Our sense of ‘I’ [ego] would hurl itself against the rock of truth, but the rock would not yield. The ‘I’ had to yield and in that yielding was the highest blessing (...) Bhagavan makes me and unmakes me. Who am I, a simple old woman, to choose when all comes from him only?”²⁵ This complete surrender is what makes their work in the kitchen a significant spiritual *sadhana*.

The transforming experience of the ashram kitchen and working with Bhagavan is a tutelage that these four women devotees have lived and experienced. As Lokamma Patti puts

20 *Ibid*, pg. 474

21 *Ibid*, pg. 475

22 *Ibid*, pg. 475

23 *Ibid*, pg. 499

24 *Spiced papadams made with crushed black gram.*

25 *Arunachala Ramana: Eternal Ocean of Grace, Volume 4, pg. 509*

it, “One had to live and work with him to know what a great teacher he was. Through the trifles of daily life, he taught us Vedanta both in theory and practice. He led us with absolute wisdom and infinite kindness.”²⁶ As “simple and uneducated women” they offered their unconditional love. “For him we gave up hearth and home and all our earthly ties. We only knew that we were safe with him, that in some miraculous way he could take us to our goal.”²⁷ Much like Guru Dakshinamurthy enlightening the four Kumaras – Sanaka, Sananda, Sanathana, and Sanatkumara, Bhagavan Ramana has patiently and persis-

tently worked with these four women devotees “to enlarge [their] attention to the manifestations of the Self.”²⁸ Lokamma Patti serves as a veritable mouth piece for these devotees when she states, “We experienced ecstasy in grinding, rapture in cooking, joy in serving idlis to devotees. Why? Because while we were doing these things, we were experiencing the state in which the mind is in the Heart.”²⁹ Undoubtedly, it is the infinite grace of Bhagavan, which had transformed the kitchen into a crucible, in which self-realization was made possible for these four devotees. ■

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26 *Ibid*, pg. 529

27 *Ibid*, pg. 529

28 *Ibid*, pg. 529

29 *Ibid*, pg. 530

Talk 115

Mr. M. Frydman: Even without any initial desires there are some strange experiences for us. Wherefrom do they arise?

M.: The desire may not be there now. Enough if it was there before. Though forgotten by you now it is bearing fruit in due course. That is how the *Jnani* is said to have *prarabdha* left for him. Of course it is only according to others’ point of view.

Presence

Neera Kashyap

“Has anyone fed the peacock yet?”

the sage had asked,

breathing his last.

A peacock had landed on the tiled roof
with restless rattle and clatter
to devotees’ ravaged chants of Arunachala Siva.

Over seventy years later peacocks still land
on the temple gopuram, on the roofs of the shrine,
the meditation hall, the cottages
strutting past like sarvadhikaris on inspection.

This is home.

He made them at home: peacocks, cows,
monkeys, squirrels, dogs
all fed from his hand,
understood his words,
heeded his chides,
revelled in his touch.

Dogs sprawl on cool floors, listening to chants,
eyes droop before his lamp-lit photo
in blissful doze.

I follow a peacock through a shady grove of interlocked trees.

It turns around, fans out its tail
in iridescent glimmer – a thousand green-blue eyes,
a thousand unknown lives, a thousand seething energies.
Abruptly, the fan is gone, the tail flails, straightens.

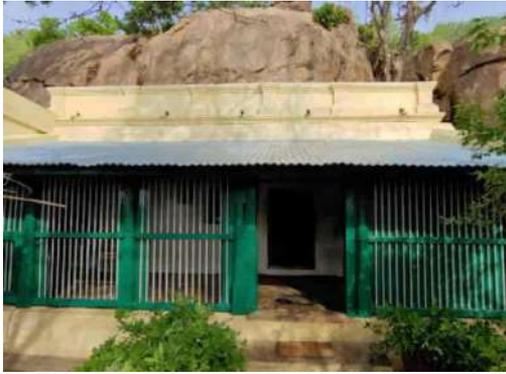
The bird leads me sure-footed
to the hall with the lamp-lit photo.

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Tales from Arunachala: Part 3

Swagat Patnaik



Ramana Maharshi said that the world is like a dream. Life at Arunachala, in many ways, feels like a dream. Events unfold, activities happen, and the entire world keeps changing in front of our eyes till sleep takes hold of us. Yet a faint awareness of Arunachala and Bhagavan accompanies us throughout. We often miss this subtle thought and find ourselves embroiled in life till we find the grace of Arunachala soothing us again. We discover that the grace of Arunachala was always there. It was only we who had forgotten to notice it.

After staying in Tiruvannamalai for three days, I woke up with a strangely vivid dream about visiting a saint with some of my longtime friends. The dream had a blissful ethereal feel with many dramatic turns for me to

ponder. Thus, I woke up in a sublime mood and planned to start the day with a visit to the mountain. As usually happens, the mood of the morning continued and stayed with me while I sat outside Virupaksha cave. Many people passed by, and some would chat a bit before moving on. I met a couple from Bangalore who described seeing the enchanting morning ritual prayer at Arunachaleswar temple. I heard a bit about their experiences, and then they left.

I was in a contemplative mood. As I sat outside Virupaksha cave I ruminated over the many leelas of Bhagavan that this place must have witnessed. At Arunachala, even the simple act of sitting with no particular agenda can put one in a sublime mood. And if one closes one's eyes

then one is thrust into bliss, only to fall again into ignorance, on opening them. As I was sitting there, I longed to enter Virupaksha or Skandashram (they were closed due to COVID restrictions) to capture the essence of the place with my eyes. With this in mind, I decided I should at least visit Skandashram gate and from there go downhill for my lunch. As I reached the entrance to Skandashram, I found a group of devotees sitting there discussing Tiruvannamalai and Bhagavan. The group was led by an elderly gentleman who was instructing some youngsters on the importance of *giri-pradakshina*.

He said that in the ancient days Tiruvannamalai was a great center of learning for Saiva Siddhanta. In those days ardent seekers would start their *giri-pradakshina* from the temple, visiting the *asthalingams* (eight lingams) on the route. At each *lingam*, a specific part of Saiva Siddhanta would be taught, and only on mastering the subject, the student would move on to the next *lingam*. Thus a student might stay at a particular *lingam* for many months and finally complete the *giri-pradakshina* after a few years. This interesting bit of information fascinated me, and I started thinking about all the tapas aspirants did to acquire knowledge.



The elderly gentleman was kind enough to answer some of my questions related to *sadhana*. He even reprimanded me gently for being a little impatient. He said that while associating with senior devotees one should listen attentively even if their advice doesn't make sense right away. He said that many a time they speak in a divine rapture and their words bring enormous benefits to the seeker who dwells on them with faith. After conveying a few tenets of Bhagavan's teachings, to my great joy, the gentleman asked me to join the group and enter Skandashram. He knew the caretaker and gave us a brief tour of the *ashram*, and enriched our knowledge by offering a few more details about the place.

Visiting Skandashram with him was a delightful experience and the divine stillness of the place lingers in my memory to this day. Furthermore, being guided around the *ashram* by

a devotee was truly fortunate. The sincere love in his voice and the glimmer in his eyes really enraptured my heart. It is due to interactions with such devotees that novice seekers also develop love for Bhagavan. Once the visit to Skandashram was over, I returned to the gate of Virupaksha cave and again sat down for meditation. The interaction had left me in a blissful state. I sat there in absorption for quite some time till some monkeys tried to steal my bag and woke me up. Thus, to avoid disturbance by monkeys, I went into a small Devi temple nearby.

Meditation at the Devi temple gave me protection from both monkeys and the elements. In Mother's sanctuary, I sat for a considerable time gazing at her image. Curiously, meditation at this place brought out a different bhava in me. Sitting there in my Mother's presence, I could easily feel that Mother had always been protect-

ing me, yet I had never realized the magnitude of her protection and that it had led me safely to Arunachala. Further, my Mother subdued many of the ever-tormenting questions from which seekers often suffer. Finally feeling content, I came down from the Devi temple and ordered some food at a restaurant. Still dazed after the visit to the temple, the food tasted heavenly as if I was partaking of prasad.

Such is life at Arunachala; even the most mundane of incidents feel like a dream and explode in our awareness. Being in Arunachala automatically diminishes worldly pulls enough for all *sadhakas* to find some quietude. Such respites not only give us glimpses into our real nature but also encourage us to continue seeking despite many frustrations. I hope our beloved Arunachala keeps drawing us into its fold to eventually burn our egos in its fire of jnana. ■

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Talk 111

A Telugu gentleman asked about *Brahma bhavana*.

M.: Not to think "I am Brahman" or "All is Brahman" is itself *jivanmukti*.

He asked about inspired action.

M.: Let activities go on. They do not affect the pure Self.

Helping the World

Bharati Mirchandani



Sufi Art: A Painting by Shafique Farooqi

Ramana said, to know your Self is the best service you can give to the world.

This appears so counterintuitive that many new to his philosophy misunderstand this to mean that being selfish is being recommended. However, it is true that Sri Ramana did not appear to pay much heed to the tumultuous world events of his day. The second world war, India's freedom struggle, and the partition of the country find barely any mention in the records at the ashram. Little is spoken about Gandhi, and what is recorded about Hitler is too enigmatic to understand. Anyone who came to Sri Ramana full of questions and fretting about worldly affairs, was quietened and automatically turned inward, and

worries faded instantly.

Despite years of trying to turn my focus away from the world outside to dive within myself, I remain largely extrovert, pondering on the world and events taking place around me. The world is what it is: *jagat is jagrit*, alive and kicking, constantly turbulent and changing, throwing up fresh challenges and an ever-continuing series of novel situations and particulars. This has led me to understand Sri Ramana's words in a fresh light.

We all are aware of Ramana's tiger-grip even on those of us who never had contact with his mortal frame. What did he do? He just realised the Self and then spent half a century apparently doing very little. Yet he transformed the lives of more people

than can be counted, and continues to guide and shape lives over half a century after his body was discarded. None can define or measure his influence in shaping the world. I agree with what Vimalaji³⁰ said, that with time, Ramana would draw more and more people from across the oceans, and Sri Ramanasramam would become a spiritual centre for the world, as he offers a rare methodology that does not have the doors, any of the bars and filters that all religions prescribe to divide people into those who belong and those who do not.

Those who visit Arunachala and Sri Ramanasramam, again in millions, experience some undefined, indescribable pull that brings them there repeatedly in body and mind. Not merely on getting there physically, but even before the journey begins, small miracles and strange coincidences begin to occur. By realising the Self, Sri Ramana continues to this day to effect changes in the world.

My ancestors belonged to Sindh, now in Pakistan, and formed part of the landed gentry who wore values, education, and refined aesthetic as badges of honour. Deeply steeped in the philosophy of Sufi saints such as Shah Latif, Mast Qalandar, Baba Karim Maalik, people of many faiths

lived in amity in Sindh. Hindus formed a mere 15% of the population there. I grew up in Delhi, hearing of the upheavals of the partition of the country. Rivers of blood flowed from wounds slashed into the east and west of India, but Sindh was spared. Looting and loss of property is traumatic enough, but, in the main, women were not raped, people were not slaughtered. This, I was told, was the effect of the saints who had blessed the land.

In Sindh, so many followers of these saints dotted the land, that every few generations the 'surname' by which the members of a particular family were known would change to the name of the family's most recent saintly person. My maternal grandmother, although wed and now a member of another family, would not sit on a chair or bed, only on the floor, in her own father's house, after he returned from his transformation during a retreat at Amritsar's golden temple. Such was the sensitivity to the inner glow; an entire society honoured and accorded great respect to the spiritual path. Saints did not need to leave home, change names or clothing to be recognised.

One day an ancestor asked his guru to grant him the boon that he spend his entire life in pursuit of the divine. His

30 Vimala Thakar

guru responded, ‘You have chosen the path of *fakiri*. For seven generations your progeny will be attracted toward spirituality. They will not be rich, but their basic needs shall be taken care of.’ The spiritual wealth of one strong person lives on within many generations that follow.

When I was nine, my father died suddenly and we were tossed into decades of very trying circumstances. I would hear Ma say, ‘*vadan jo hath aahe...* (We have the protection of evolved elders; troubles may come, but no grievous harm will ever dent our *izzat*³¹...).’

Partition itself was cruel, yet it was just the beginning of a period of terror and violence. Anis Kidwai lost her husband, a civil servant posted in Mussoorie, to mob violence. He was murdered in October 1947, after facing months of threats while he held his post, trying to restore peace and save lives. He remained true to his values and served his god till the end. His wife, far away in Lucknow, was distraught. To save herself from sinking into despair, she decided to dedicate her life to the nation, and travelled to Delhi to work with Mahatma Gandhi. He assigned her the task of serving

refugees and displaced persons. She recorded her work during the turbulent first two years of independent India in her 1949 memoir, *Azadi Ki Chhaon Mein*. I extract some lines from the English translation, *In Freedom's Shade*³²:

‘Built by Shah Jahan, Jama Masjid (had) no lore of love and loyalty associated with it so why did rays of love, instead of hate, emanate from it? Why did poor innocents live in its shade, clinging to it for security? ...The Hindus and Muslims that lived here were still alive, still humane. In Jama Masjid, it was as if they were held in an embrace in the arms of its tall white minarets raised to the heavens in a proclamation of peace; in Nizamuddin, they were cradled in the unseen hands that reached down to gather up the scattered beads of a *tasbeeh*³³. Into these two sanctuaries, watered by springs of love and compassion, from villages, towns and principalities, the beleaguered and besieged streamed, seeking asylum...’

‘There was a third! Birla House, the home of peace and a vibrant living truth, where lived the father of India; his eyes filled with tears, he was battling for his children’s lives, salvaging

31 *Honour/prestige/self-respect.*

32 *Penguin books, 2011, translated by Ayesha Kidwai, pp 66-67*

33 *String of prayer beads.*

their sorrows, mending their broken hearts...’

Anis Kidwai seems unaware that two Sufi saints had lived on the steps of Jama Masjid. Hazrat Hara Bhara Sahib was a contemporary of Emperor Shah Jahan, while Shaheed Sarmad, an Armenian Jew turned Sufi Fakir, was beheaded by Emperor Aurangzeb, perhaps for not following prescribed protocol while offering prayers. The simple dargahs of both saints grace these steps, their presence still lingers.

When Ramana says know yourself, he means that self-inquiry will make us realise that there is none other than

the Self. The world and its situations, relationships, thoughts, emotions, the ego itself, are all discovered to have no reality of their own. They only appear alive and concrete by borrowing energy from the Self. They have no existence other than that provided by the Self.

And those of us who live in ignorance, yet bask in the radiance of saints, we see repeatedly how these realised souls do change the world, add beauty, peace, harmony, healing, and hope to every cell and atom of anything animate or inanimate around them. ■

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Talk 117

A Ceylonese: What is the first step for Realisation of Self? Please help me towards it. There is no use reading books.

Another: This one man’s request is that of us all.

M.: Quite so. If the Self be found in books it would have been already realised. What wonder can be greater than that we seek the Self in books? Can it be found there?

Of course books have given readers the sense to ask this question and to seek the Self.

D.: Books are utterly useless. They may all be burnt. The spoken word alone is useful. Grace alone is useful. Others spoke according to their own light, until finally they returned to the original question, but Sri Bhagavan remained silent.

Ramanashramam

Advait Shrivastav



Samadhi hall; Mother's shrine;
The blessed land of the Divine;
Smiling animals, dancing birds:
This soil transcends all words!

Nineteen hundred twenty-two
Was when it was established;
Here, infinity will capture you
As finite egos are demolished.

Though its area is finite in size,
Here manifests an infinite Om;
It pulls entities who are wise:
Our beloved Ramana's home!

Where ignorance always dies;
Where the holy Arunachala lies;
Where He lived in man's guise;
Welcome to earthly paradise!

Here unreal identities will die;
Here the bird of Truth will fly;
Here, answered is each 'why';
I will come here to dispose "I".

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Love and Loss: Learning Another Language

V. T. Tripurari



I am nervous about sharing the secrets of those I love and respect, for I fear some may be offended. That is why I have hidden behind borrowed words and disguised details. But the basic story is true, and illustrates things Sri Ramana taught through the way he lived – importance of giving love, and allowing love to guide our lives.

To speak this truth, I borrow the words of the great historian Sir Jadunath Sircar: ‘I would not care whether truth is pleasant or unpleasant, and in consonance or opposed to current views... If necessary, I shall bear in patience the ridicule and slander of friends and society... But still I shall seek truth, understand truth, and accept truth.’

Please keep this in mind as you read this first person ‘fictionalized true story’ that follows.

--- Author’s Note

*Dewdrops adorn
the morning rose.
My fragrance lifts
for another’s nose. Oh!
Why do I tremble so?*

I had never written poems. I am not even sure if this is a poem. But whatever it is, such word patterns suddenly appear and I write them on whatever paper is at hand. Now these

sweet words turn up in my handbags, jump at me from books, folded bills and used envelopes, in a tiny script and neat short lines. Words I wrote are strangely fresh and startling each time I read them. They quicken my heartbeat, my breath.

I have fallen in love.

This is a feeling so sweet, so unexpected and, I know, it is a gift from my gracious, kind, all-knowing guru. But let me explain. I am a widow. I have two grown children. I have not hidden anything from them, but they are children, innocent. Like many of us in life, they know everything and also don't know anything.

Being married to an army officer, I was accustomed to packing, shifting, adjusting and making life happy and comfortable with whatever was available. Wars, dangers, death, were a constant background like a wallpaper that moved house with us. The support of a larger community was also part of our existence. My husband was tall, athletic, handsome, and fun loving. My daughter, Bindiya, looked like a princess from the day she was born; and Vidur, who followed four years later, was a true prince.

Everything was happy and peaceful for us till the world shattered one crisp and cold winter morning. Photographs

show us stoic and brave with the coffin draped in tricolour at the solemn ceremony. Invisible are our mental imaginings of horrors within that box we were not allowed to open; a future as dark and bleak.

Bindiya had the support of a fine boyfriend. They were planning to wed as soon as she graduated a few months hence. Her situation helped her cope with the calamity that had shaken us. Vidur was in his crucial last year of schooling, with board exams and the pressure of feeling he had to be 'man of the house,' brave and in command. I made it a point to hug him tight and ruffle his hair each night before I went to bed. Though he protested each time, I knew we both needed this charade of keeping alive bygone carefree times.

Always fond of cooking, I became more careful about having delicious meals on a festively laid table. I smiled a lot and chatted lightly as I acted out the person I remembered myself being. But I knew that I was crying and crumbling inside, and my acting could not be sustained. I had to find a way to take hold of myself.

I am so grateful that my marriage had brought their family guru into my life. Whenever we could manage, we would make a trip to the ashram and sponsor a puja, offer bhiksha, and do

Narayan sewa, serving food ourselves. I could not abandon the children at such a time and escape to the ashram alone. I picked up the books I loved: *Talks, Day By Day*, and *Nan Yaar*, but now the words meant nothing. I opened any page and my eyes would well up. I would stare at the beautiful framed photo on the wall, and Ramana too wept with me.

I had to seek help in some place which was free of memories of all I had lost. Near to my house was the Soviet Cultural Centre which offered Russian language classes. I had absolutely no connect with that language or culture; no need to learn any language other than the Hindi-English-Punjabi-Urdu combo I had grown up with. I looked at my guru's face. His smile was more radiant than ever. I went across and enrolled.

Carefully finishing all household chores, I turned up at the class punctually each day. Other students seemed to be closer to my children in age, and I was surprised to see that at least half the kids were very poorly dressed. I began to take clothes for them, clothes my children no longer wore, and it became quite regular for me to distribute bags of clothes and special snacks or pickles I had made at home. This made me very happy.

One day, after class, the teacher asked me to join him for coffee in the canteen. He talked of my cooking, which he had tasted at times, of my always smiling face, and finally, of my utter lack of progress in learning the language! He offered to revise the day's lesson with me, one on one, each day in the canteen after class. He was keen on not failing as a teacher and I was happy to have extra time in this alternate world that facilitated my sheer survival. I agreed.

I began to notice how good looking he was; how he was surrounded by many layers of fragrances: unknown detergent, aftershave lotion, shampoo; different movements brought different whiffs which would excite me in ways I had never felt before. He always addressed me as Madam, and I always said 'Mister --;' and each time I articulated the 'zh' sound of his name as 'j' or 'z', though at home I could pronounce it correctly with ease. And instead of homework, it was these patterned words I wrote:

*Slurpy, sumptuous,
watermelon, smile-shaped slice;
lick my lips for salt that lingers,
surprised,
salt makes sweetness sweeter.
So innocent is my love. Not a*

trace of lust and yet profound surges of emotion, that I could also sense in Bindiya, my princess, welled up in me. I had missed out on this in my youth, as I had slipped easily into an arranged marriage where everything had worked out smoothly and well. Yet my guru knew what I did not: that there was an unfulfilled desire in me that I had to live through before it dissolved. He released me from the vice-like grip of false security, of trying to freeze the flow of time and events. At a time when I felt my world had collapsed and I had nothing to live for, I 'fell in love' and entered a space where nothing could grow beyond the NOW. I was made to realise in cold practical terms, that what I thought of as my whole world, was a mere ripple on the surface of the Self.

I watched myself falling in love as I am now watching myself exit out of it, confident that 'I' am not touched. Just another surface ripple to watch and let go. I now love my children with arms wide open; as ready to embrace as to let them fly away. And I am sure these arms are wide open for others as well.

I have learnt to love without attachment. I have learnt that fear and mourning are a waste of energy. I have learnt that the guru knows what one needs for one's growth, and can be counted upon to send it at the divinely precise time and place. I have learnt that none can judge others, or say what is correct or improper behaviour. What I have not learnt is the Russian language! ■

[e-mail:tripurarivt@gmail.com]

Talk 118

Mr. Rangachari, a Telugu Pandit in Voorhees' College at Vellore, asked about *nishkama karma*. There was no reply. After a time Sri Bhagavan went up the hill and a few followed him, including the pandit. There was a thorny stick lying on the way which Sri Bhagavan picked up; he sat down and began leisurely to work at it. The thorns were cut off, the knots were made smooth, the whole stick was polished with a rough leaf. The whole operation took about six hours. Everyone was wondering at the fine appearance of the stick made of a spiky material. A shepherd boy put in his appearance on the way as the group moved off. He had lost his stick and was at a loss. Sri Bhagavan immediately gave the new one in his hand to the boy and passed on.

The pandit said that this was the matter-of-fact answer to his question.

Special Satsang on Bhagavan’s Jayanti

Rashmi Vyas



On the auspicious occasion of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s 142nd Jayanti on 21 December 2021, a special puja and *satsang* were conducted at the Delhi Kendra with many from around the globe participating via the internet. After the Ganesh puja, Dr Anand Ramanan, President, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, introduced the much-revered speaker, Swami Sarvapriyanandaji. On this occasion he used a verse from the *Ashtavakra Gita* to explain Bhagavan’s central message of Self-inquiry which leads to Self-knowledge. Below is a synopsis of his inspiring talk.

All Vedanta teachers have said that the root of maya or samsara is the ‘I-thought’ expressed as the ‘*aham*’

and ‘*mama*’ *vrittis* – I and Mine. The ‘I-thought’ becomes very strong when tied to the things we consider ours, such as body, relations, persons, property, fame, etc. Its roots sink deep within us and strengthen the tree of the ego (*aham*). To rid oneself of this ego, the *Ashtavakra Gita* recommends that we follow the idea of ‘*nirmama*’ – not mine. An interesting association here is the Sanskrit salutation ‘*namah*’ meaning not mine. In the Vedas, a phrase ‘*idam-na-mama*’ (this is not mine) is pronounced while making an offering into the sacrificial fire to help transcend the sense of mine.

The devotional approach of offering everything we consider as ours to God weakens the ego which binds us to the world, resulting in relief and

lightness. The act of offering all to God is an acknowledgement that actually everything belongs to Him, including our body, achievement, belongings, mind, and experiences, both positive and negative.

Another fact to notice is that all that we consider as 'mine' is passive, temporary, and transient; things and people come to us, stay for some time, and then disappear. They are flowing in the stream of time. So, while we are flowing together it appears to belong to us but it isn't really so; it flows towards us and, in time, will flow away. Between the eternal and non-eternal there can be no relationship. The whole cosmos is built on these non-eternal materials including body, mind, and objects of the world. We own neither the body nor the mind and we have no control over them, or over events and relationships. In effect we get associated with them for a very short period of time to work out the fruits of our past karmas, both good and bad, and then move on.

As far as the body is concerned, we know nothing about 99.9% of the biological processes going on in the organs, tissues, and cells (both inter-cellular and intracellular). If Nature hands us the control of our bodies, we will immediately collapse. In fact, Nature does a tremendous job

of running the body-mind complex even while giving us a pleasing illusion that we are in charge. As Shri Krishna explains in the *Bhagavadgita*, Chapter 13, one who understands this Truth, that Prakriti (material-nature) does everything, realizes that the self is not the doer (*karta*). One does not do, or needs to do, and one cannot do. One only watches. The same is true of thoughts, emotions, and feelings. On tracing them back to their source, we find they come from the depths of the subconscious like bubbles rising in a lake. We are not aware from where they come! They then take over our lives and make us do things in a certain way. Our mistake is we take a tiny slice of what is presented to us in our awareness (one lifetime) and get deluded by the mind. On careful contemplation, we realise '*na mama*,' all these are not mine, and thereby the 'I' thought is weakened.

Our life is nothing but a series of experiences, and we are conscious and aware of them. Awareness is constant and unchanging, but objects of perceptual experience – emotions, thoughts, desires, memories – keep changing. Awareness is always present. This Conscious Awareness lights up all our experiences in all the three states – waking, dream and deep sleep. This Awareness reveals

the activities of waking and dream as well as the absence of the activities of the mind and the senses as blankness in deep sleep state. So, if Awareness is constant then even the *ahamkara*, ego, or ‘I’ thought, which is a function of the mind, is revealed by Awareness.

In the Bhagavadgita Shri Krishna says, “Know Me alone to be the consciousness in all beings – One Knower of the field in all fields (each body and sensory system)”. Swami Vivekananda says, “One alone exists, it appears (*variously*) as Nature, Soul/subject, and the objects of the world;

there is only one Awareness underlying it all”.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi teaches us that this Consciousness/Awareness is realised when one quietens the mind and even the ‘I’ thought has vanished. Then only the light of Consciousness remains as ‘*I am*’ – the light that illumines all our experiences, activities of the mind, as well as actions dictated by activities of mind. When this experience is constant, the *jnani* lives in an exalted state of peace and happiness even while performing the day-to-day duties and activities of body and mind. ■

Bhagavan spoke about the way in which in the old days he used to climb to the peak at any time he felt like it, and that by any route or even no route. He said only the grasscutters knew some of the routes he used. “Sometimes people would come from Madras and other parts and, setting out to reach the top of the hill, would stray near Skandasramam. Finding me seated there, they would ask me for the route to the hill top. When I told them the route was to their right and turned northward, some would say. ‘Do you know who we are and wherefrom we come? We are from Madras. None of your tricks with us. The top is here straight above us and you want to lead us astray.’ I used to keep quiet. They would try to climb in a straight line, and after a long time, they would return tired out, finding that all their efforts to reach the peak were in vain. Nearing me, they would bow their heads in shame and go away, avoiding me.”



14th November

In a Q & A session, Michael James said that clinging tenaciously to self-attentiveness helps in avoiding all obstacles; Bhagavan's grace always shines in our Heart as "I"; the more we turn within, clarity of Self-awareness increases; and on genuinely following Bhagavan's path, we won't see any difference between vichara and bhakti.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p200nlmnt04>

21st November

Covering verses 15/16, Shri Raghav Kumar said that one who sees the indestructible principle in destructible beings alone sees rightly. This is attained through bhakti which culminates in jnana (true knowledge). Following injunctions of dharma-shastras, one's conduct is aligned with cosmic order, mind gets purified through Self enquiry, and establishes in advait-jnana.

--- Rashmi Vyas

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb7xkNtjChU>

28th November

Shri Raghav Kumar expounded on verses 17-18, describing how one's pre-existing tendencies determine one's shraddha. This in turn governs one's priorities, forms of worship, and spirituality. By following the guru's instructions, shraddha becomes increasingly satvik. This transformation gradually disentangles one from worldly existence, bringing in grace, knowledge, and supreme peace.

--- Rashmi Vyas

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ff_f0IQmSww

12th December



While answering questions, Michael James shared nuggets of wisdom such as: *Drig Drishya Viveka* is a text that describes another method of Self-investigation; the role of an external guru is to help one turn within; all that happens in one's life is a result of one's prarabdha; and true surrender means holding fast to *I Am*.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MywWgw-RSY>

19th December

Shri Raghav Kumar continued explaining Gita Saar, emphasizing that by listening, chanting, and dwelling upon the glories of the Lord, one is blessed with 'buddhiyoga' – alignment of attitudes and emotions with the higher I. The compassionate Lord lodged in the heart then destroys the darkness of ignorance and wrong knowledge, and illuminates the mind.

--- Rashmi Vyas

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9d_yS6lyjM

26th December

Throwing light upon verse 21, Raghav Ji said that the source of human suffering is avidya, which is destroyed by atma-jnana. Like the sun illuminates the entire world, jnana reveals that everything is illuminated by the Self alone. The

ideas presented by the mind, intellect, and indriyas result in confusions which are then resolved by jnana.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKRywEri8AM>

09th January

Explaining the first three verses of Upadesha Saram, Michael James said that karma is powerless on its own since the fruits of actions are entirely in God's hands. God chooses the kind of fruit a karma will bear. Vasanas obstruct the path to liberation whereas actions done without desire make the journey easier.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqJnnA0i1EM>

16th January



Raghavji explained that the cause of ignorance is believing our source of happiness lies outside. This gives rise to many desires to fill that false sense of lack. The aspirant must experience that the Self is perfect and complete. Transformation of buddhi comes through self-inquiry and faithfully following the guru's instructions.

--- Deepti Bhaduria

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgSegy2-Pnk>

23rd January

Shri Raghav ji explained the role of atma-vichara in quelling desires. Ignorance is the root cause of kama (desires) which leads to krodha (anger) and then to sorrow. Chronic sadness becomes depression. Non-clinical depression is easily overcome by following the guru's teachings. Even a few minutes of atma-vichara are beneficial.

--- Ajith Kumar

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWycgyy87tM>

Letters to the Editor



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

Dear Advait,

I greatly enjoyed reading the lively issue. The art work was so beautiful. I was deeply interested to learn of your inner spiritual development and the role of Bhagavan in leading you from depression to a life of joyful service. I’m very glad to realize that you are gratefully composing poem after poem celebrating His divine guidance. Bharati’s thought provoking article made me ponder issues of man and machine, body and spirit. How many miracles Bhagavan has wrought in the lives of his devotees!

Sharada Bhanu

Hello Advait,

The issue has come out really nicely. Good to see many new writers contributing to the magazine. The wonderful little section containing anecdotes of Bhagavan’s grace was very inspiring. Good work!

Swagat Patnaik

(Former editor of Direct Path)

Hello Advait,

You and the other devotees in Delhi are doing an amazing work. I really liked the outlook of Direct Path. It has much improved from previous editions, including the editing part.

Dr. Sanjay Raghav

Hello Advait,

I am a regular reader of Direct Path for the past few years. All articles

published in this issue of Direct path are excellent. A special mention to your article ‘A Diamond Amidst Coal’, where you have shared your experience with Bhagavan. You are really blessed by Bhagavan at this young age.

K. Shankar

Dear Advait,

Direct Path is a beautiful publication. It is wonderful to read of the grace of our guru, Sri Bhagavan.

Anil Sharma

Talk 99

A sannyasi asked: It is said that the Self is beyond the mind and yet the realisation is with the mind. *Mano na manute, Manasa na matam,* and *Manasaivedamaptavyam* (The mind cannot think it. It cannot be thought of by the mind and the mind alone can realise it). How are these contradictions to be reconciled?

M.: Atman is realised with *mruta manas* (dead mind), i.e., mind devoid of thoughts and turned inward. Then the mind sees its own source and becomes That. It is not as the subject perceiving an object.

When the room is dark a lamp is necessary to illumine and eyes to cognise objects. But when the sun is risen there is no need of a lamp, and the objects are seen; and to see the sun no lamp is necessary, it is enough that you turn your eyes towards the self- luminous sun.

Similarly with the mind. To see the objects the reflected light of the mind is necessary. To see the Heart it is enough that the mind is turned towards it. Then the mind loses itself and the Heart shines forth.

Views expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Ramana Kendra Delhi. No material can be reprinted without the approval of Ramana Kendra in writing - Editor

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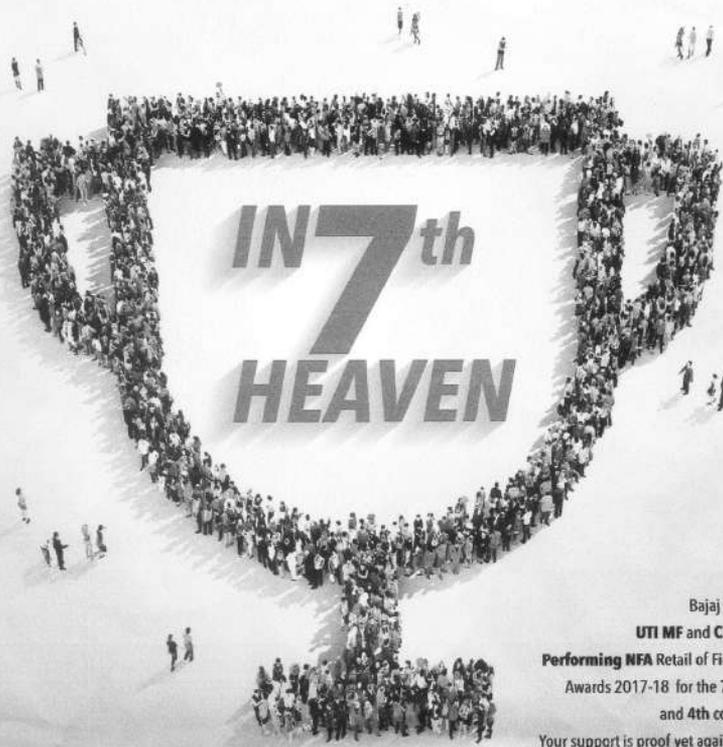
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(Signature of the publisher)



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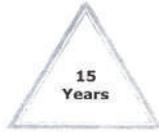
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*The results of Karma (Action) pass away,
and yet leave seeds that cast the agent
into an ocean of Karma.
Karma yields no salvation*

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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