

DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA
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May - July 2022

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*"Grace is ever present. All that is necessary is that you
surrender to It."*

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi



59. Om rjumarga pradasakaya namah

Revealer of the straight, direct path.

60. Om samadrse namah

Seer who sees only sameness, oneness, wholeness – with calm and impartial eyes.

61. Om satyadrse namah

Seer of Truth, one who sees what is.





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

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VOLUME XXIV ISSUE 2

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Call for Articles

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

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

We look forward to hearing from you!

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Giving Voice to the Voiceless

Advait Shrivastav



Many animals and birds have been associated with the deities of Sanātana Dharma, be it Vishnu’s eagle, Shiva’s bull, Kartikeya’s peacock, Ganesha’s rat, Saraswati’s swan, Durga’s lion or Bhairava’s dog. Every deity is related to at least one four-legged, finned or winged creature, signifying that animals are important in this world.

Compassion, a hallmark of Self-realized saints, is a quality that should be displayed toward everyone – from a mosquito to a human. Bhagavan loved every sentient entity unconditionally. By treating each equally, he showed that voiceless beings are on par with humans. The tombs of a crow, a deer named Valli, a dog named Jackie, and the special cow Lakshmi, in the Ramanasramam premises, stand as

testimony to the fact that many kinds of creatures were loved and honoured by Bhagavan. Such was the intensity of his affection towards the voiceless that the last words he uttered, in what must have been excruciating physical pain, were to ask if the peacocks had been fed.

Bhagavan’s simple life is replete with examples of his love and tender care of animals, birds, and even insects. While climbing the Arunachala hill, Bhagavan’s leg brushed against a bush containing a nest of hornets. He immediately wished to atone for invading their space and he let them sting his thigh as a well-deserved punishment.

Bhagavan could only see the same divine light in every entity. Once, when a dog who would sleep beside

Bhagavan was chased away by some people, Bhagavan said, “Just because you are in the body of a human you think you are a human being, and because he is in the body of a dog you think him a dog. Why don’t you think of him as a Mahatma, and treat him as a great person. Why do you treat him like a dog?”¹

Bhagavan’s compassion was not limited to humans. When told by a devotee about a group of veterinarians arriving in Tiruvannamalai to collect monkeys for research, Bhagavan silently communicated this to the mischievous yet innocent creatures near the window. All the monkeys went into hiding for days. The vets and their team returned with empty cages.

It is a fact that some great souls take birth as animals or birds to have darshan of a saint. Lakshmi was not an ordinary cow. To get what she received from Bhagavan is possible only for a highly evolved consciousness.

Bhagavan once said, “When I was on the hill, a crow used to keep me company. He was a rishi in a crow’s body. He would not eat from anybody’s hand but mine.”² On another instance, a white-breasted eagle flew

into the Hall and sat atop a cupboard near Bhagavan. “He is a siddha (a saint endowed with supernatural powers) who came to pay me a visit,”³ Bhagavan said.

Once a little deer found her way to Bhagavan and would not leave him. She would gambol up the hill with him and he would play with her for hours. About a year later she ran into the jungle. She was found severely wounded with broken legs. She was brought to the Ashrama. Bhagavan kept her near him, dressed her wounds and a doctor set her broken bones. One midnight the deer crept onto Bhagavan’s lap, snuggled up to him and died.⁴

Humans have evolved by taking copious births as insects, birds, and animals. By harming them, humans are harming their past, thereby making their future grim. Animals and birds are as significant as humans, notwithstanding difference of brainpower. True, our scriptures say that a human birth is the best for self-realisation, but the role of animals in the world is like salt in a cooked dish. In harming the voiceless, we are stripping this world of its rich diversity.

While slaughtering animals to

1 Ramana Smriti. Part 2, Chapter 10.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

satisfy taste buds has been rife for centuries, today, animals are also being tortured. No wonder there is a backlash, and we are being taught stern lessons by the tiniest of creatures – a virus – that has made us prisoners in our own homes after we have ransacked theirs. In our hubris of feeling superior to the animal kingdom in governing the world, we ‘modern’ and ‘technologically advanced’ humans are being reduced to cold cadavers by a microscopic entity that appears again and again to remind us that we are just a part of Nature, not its owners.

The famous words ‘vasudhaiva-kutumbakam’ are fallaciously under-

stood to mean that only humans form one family. In truth, ‘vasudhaivakutumbakam’ means that all sentient beings on this planet – insects, trees, birds, animals, and humans – belong to one family. Bhagavan, being directly connected to the powers of this universe, was one of the mightiest humans to have graced the earth. By giving the same intensity of love to the voiceless as he gave to humans, he reaffirmed what our scriptures have said so pervasively. We humans must remember that no creature is pariah; each is a member of this family of the universe. ■

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The special events of Mahasivaratri and Bhagavan’s 72nd Aradhana Day were successfully organized at Ramana Kendra, Delhi. Mr. Michael James and Raghav Kumar continued their series of satsangs on *Upadesa Saram* and *The Song Celestial* respectively. The recordings of all these events and talks can be watched on the Kendra’s YouTube channel. In May, the Kendra took the initiative of conducting Narayan Seva on the first Sunday of every month. Important events (from Bhagavan’s time) falling in the current issue (May - July 2022) are as follows:

- Punarvasu Day: 7th May
- Maha Puja: 24th May
- Punarvasu Day: 3rd June
- Punarvasu Day: 30th June
- Cow Lakshmi Day: 10th July
- Guru Poornima: 13th July
- H C Khanna Day: 23rd July
- Kavya Kanta Ganapati Muni Day: 25th July

Tracing Bhagavan's Upward-Leading Path: Part I

Michael Highburger



In late 1963 Arthur Osborne was getting ready to inaugurate the Ashram's first journal and came up with the title, *The Mountain Path*. This archetypal image, a path up the proverbial mountain of life, conjures the narrow, arduous, and sometimes perilous trajectory that threatens to change everything, leaving us no available means of return. It is the metaphorical path that denotes leaving behind the comforts of the world in favour of the happiness within, happiness that doesn't depend on what happens but that is innate, inherent, and ever present. It points to a journey in the footsteps of Bhagavan which leads away from the delusion of worldly life to the freedom of the Self that is Arunachala.

In the opening article of the quarterly's first issue, the then Chief Minister of Madras, M. Bhaktavatsalam, interprets this phrase:

*The 'Mountain' in the caption denotes 'Arunachala'; and the 'Path' is the Ramana-Path, i.e. the Path of Self-Inquiry. The Mountain Arunachala is the achalatattwa, upon which, as the screen, runs the entire panorama of manifestation. Seeing the pictures, forgetting the screen, he who sees is in delusion. With the realisation that the screen alone IS, comes the Peace of Being, born out of the understanding of Truth.*⁵

Here, the word 'mountain' is iconic and indicates that which is unchanging and eternal, the still point at the

5 Entitled 'The Mountain Path' from the January 1964 issue of *The Mountain Path*, p. 20.

centre of the cosmos around which the phenomenal world revolves and has its being. The unchanging, unmoving *achala* is the domain where true happiness originates.

In the monastic traditions of India, mountain is sometimes used in the formal title of a monk (e.g. monastic orders that suffix a sannyasin's name with the word *Giri*). The same applies in monastic orders of ancient China where the names of great meditation masters were taken from the mountain on which they lived and appended with the word *shan* meaning 'mountain'. Such monikers suggest the monk has attained a state unaffected by the pull of *samsara*.

The second part of this title is 'path' which is likewise iconic, a simile for the spiritual search. Therefore, the path up the mountain is the journey of fulfilment.

The path invites one and all – none are excluded. However, leaving behind the lanes and highways of the world means abandoning our attachments to the comforts of the sense realm. The one who is determined to scale the path up the mountain is sure to be rewarded, but not without a struggle. A proverb reads: *Do you think you shall enter the garden of bliss without such*

*trials that have come to those who have passed before you?*⁶

While everyone is opting for the broad bustling boulevards of the world, the path up the mountain is lonesome. The world does not look further than the immediacy of sense experience while the inner path is absent of worldly consolations. But what does it mean to seek worldly consolations? And why would the most common response to human suffering be indulging precisely that which brings more suffering, namely, the hollowness of worldly pursuits?

Generations of seekers have misunderstood the phrase 'worldly pursuits', imagining it to refer to the activities of anyone living in the world with a family earning a living. But this is not what is intended. Worldliness refers to the organism's habit of ever seeking to have our immediate experience be an enjoyable one – moment by moment – and avoiding every hint of unpleasantness, no matter how short-lived. At first, this may not sound so bad, but worldliness proves itself to be an attachment to pure momentary sensations. It is related to addiction born of the sense of relief that, say, a lover of chocolate would feel when biting into a piece of chocolate. It is not that

6 *The Koran.*

it is wrong to enjoy chocolate or any other food item, but are we making a refuge out of such experiences, and then going from one thing to the next interminably?

Worldliness begins with the desire to have each moment be easeful, imagining this to be a viable path to lasting happiness. Inquiring inwardly, by contrast, is born of the longing to see things as they are, truly and clearly, irrespective of the immediate sense response brought about by, for example, confronting the less flattering aspects of ourselves, viz., our mistakes, regrets, and conceits. Worldly pleasures allow us to cover these over and hide them from view. The path of inquiry, on the other hand, exposes them and even compels us to look squarely at them.

If Bhagavan never emphasized *sannyasa diksha*, it is because he knew that the crucial renunciation was overcoming the addiction to pleasant feeling states. The renunciation he was advocating was very subtle, albeit decisive. When we look honestly at the motivations of our thoughts, words and deeds, and when we inquire into the ultimate nature of the possessor of such motivations, we unravel the fool's game of clinging to short-lived experiences, of investing in the fragile

notion of a separate self. Typically, we shy away from the mountain path because we want to avoid the poignancy that comes with inquiry, preferring a modicum of happiness that can be gained without delay, discomfort or exertion.

From a biological point of view, we might understand the inclination to worldly enjoyments as a disordered homeostatic mechanism. Micromanaging feeling states could be seen as the biological system's effort at self-regulation. Compulsive thinking could be understood as a maladaptive mechanism for altering our moods and maintaining the internal biochemistry of the brain. If all systems of the physical organism, (even at a cellular level) follow in-built laws of *homeostasis*, and if physical matter at the gross level is subject to Newton's Third Law, *the law of inertia*, then the inclination towards the stability of feeling states in the human psyche should be quite strong. Might our worldliness have its origins – rather innocently – in the laws of nature?

Even if this turns out to be the case, Bhagavan directs us to push back on such influences, after all, *we are not this body*. The body's craving for sense comfort and its resistance to any form of discomfort is *natural*. But

the Law of God is *supernatural* and beckons us up the mountain, rocky and rugged though it be. Bingeing on thought, media input and device use can bring momentary relief to unpleasant feeling states such as grief or distress, worry or anxiety, but such coping mechanisms are maladaptive. By contrast, the force that draws us up the mountain is not deterred by hardships of the body or the mind. It intuits that the *cure for one's pain is in the pain*.⁷ It intuits the great rewards that lie further up the path.

As for the laws of nature, they are preserved. After all, Bhagavan's realisation is the ultimate *homeostasis* and the upward path leads nowhere else than to the Heart of Arunachala, whose very name means *homeostasis*.

Not Knowing

The therapy for addiction to the sense realm and overcoming the pull toward worldly pursuits is climbing the mountain. Ascending the upward-leading path just means inquiring into the one who would have each experience be an agreeable one. Indeed, who is this internal psycho-pharmacologist seeking to improve his or her mood moment by moment? Is this the Self?

Inquiry compels us to look at the

life of the mind and its impulses and motivations. Inquiry means listening and searching deeply within. It is the ultimate simplicity where former claims to knowledge are dispensed with. In its place comes the profound recognition that all knowledge is misguided.

There's a story from Tang dynasty China where a pilgrim-monk who is at a very critical stage in his spiritual training meets Master Jizo. The master asks him, 'Where have you come from?' 'I am on pilgrimage,' replied the monk. 'What is the purpose of your pilgrimage?' asked the master.

With gentleness in his eyes born of long years of silence and meditation, the monk replies in all sincerity, 'I don't know.' The master looked upon the monk with great affection and said, 'Ah, not knowing is most intimate.' At that, the text tells us, the monk experienced enlightenment.⁸

So what is this *not-knowing* the master speaks of? Well, it is a little like inquiry. In the language of the British anthropologist Victor Turner, inquiry is a *liminal* state. From the Latin *līmen* meaning 'threshold', liminality is the quality of ambiguity that occurs between a previous way of structuring

⁷ Rumi.

⁸ Case 20 in *The Book of Serenity*.

one's identity, worldview and social standing, and a new way, which is yet to be discovered. *Not-knowing is most intimate* because nothing is being clung to and thus the conditions for transformation are optimal. Liminal states brought about by *atmavichara* and surrender promote dissipation of conceptual grasping and a more fluid, malleable state wherein a new understanding of self and other emerges. By contrast, fixation on ideas and opinions or coveting information is the source of the veiling of the steady resonant flow within us.

Listening and Wondering

Inquiry fosters insight and curiosity. Not-knowing is the ground of unitive wisdom, silent and amorphous. At the heart of every religious teaching, it has been said, is a paradox because that is what is required to free us from the tyranny of conceptual thinking. Truth does not always come in clear, logically graspable terms. Inquiry is the simultaneous acceptance of paradox and the renunciation of the false security that comes with received knowledge, which is really just borrowed knowledge, i.e. having names and labels for things without necessarily knowing them in any intimate way. If *it is the province*

*of knowledge to speak and know, it is the privilege of wisdom to listen and wonder.*⁹ Received knowledge is basically worldly knowledge – data and information lacking the quality of an intimate relationship with the knower. Enquiry, on the other hand, is investigating first-hand and knowing in a direct way. When we search for the one who is climbing the mountain, we cannot find them; when we look deeply within the climber, the whole universe appears. So who or what is this climber?



The great blunder of us modern climbers is turning away from the mystery of not-knowing in favour of certainty born of content knowledge – the written or spoken word – and inferences born of rumination. We are keen to acquire new knowledge, calling it wisdom; we are keen to move about along the shiny new avenues of the world, calling it the path; we are keen to accumulate new experiences,

⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes.

calling it life. We would like it if the path were clearly lighted and straight-forward, but, alas, it is not like that and when we turn our backs on the wonderment that enquiry engenders, preferring instead tenets or doctrines that can be memorised and recited (in lieu of being practised), we lose our way devastatingly and find ourselves again at the bottom of the mountain.

The German poet Rilke once celebrated finding the true path which turned out to be counter to all he had until then assumed: *You darkness from whom I am born, I love you more!*

What is the darkness the poet is speaking of?

It is the obscurity of spiritual wisdom, the indistinctness of intuition which is quite different from tangible content knowledge. Sadly, most of us live our lives without ever accessing this hidden cache of knowledge born of intuition. Tradition talks of *bhavanamaya jnana*¹⁰, the knowledge that comes through the cultivation of contemplation. Bhagavan calls it *aparoksha jnana*, the knowledge of direct experience.

But what is direct experience an

experience of? It is seeing within and accessing hitherto unknown realms within the Heart.

Direct experience sounds magical, even miraculous, and we imagine that this mystical knowing is somehow the province and sole prerogative of saints and sages. But Bhagavan repeatedly endeavours to pull us out of this mistaken view. He tells us that accessing our intuition is very ordinary and simple. He tells us that intuitive wisdom is the natural endowment of all seekers irrespective of their vocation or station in life. How tragic that most sadhakas called to *jnana marga* live out their spiritual call in a career of investigation that never gets beyond overt learning (*sravana*) or mental reflection (*manana*), never reaches the treasure house of innate wisdom born of intuition and deep enquiry in the meditation setting (*nididhyasana*)¹¹. This is why Bhagavan was so persistent in advocating inquiry and expressed disappointment that devotees were in the habit of dallying in the domain of worldly knowing even if their devotion was genuine.¹²

But if intuition is ordinary and

¹⁰ See, for example, *Sri Tantraloka*, v. 13.

¹¹ See *Talks* §294 where Bhagavan says, *Meditation on forms or concrete objects is said to be dhyana, whereas the inquiry into the Self is vichara or nididhyasana.*

¹² We recall here the conversation from *Talks* when Bhagavan was asked about the measure of progress in the spiritual life to which he responded, *The absence of thoughts in the mind is the measure of progress in the spiritual life. (Talks §618).*

available, then what's the hitch?

The hitch is silencing the mind, exercising the patience and care that is required to overcome the lifelong habit of giving ourselves over to involuntary sequential thinking (conceptual proliferation). The challenge is in being able to doggedly come back to contemplative inquiry over and again in the face of repeated failure.

The darkness Rilke revels in is the Silence that Bhagavan extols, i.e. the inner Silence of the Heart that is perfectly still. In this simple state, new worlds spring up, and we discover new ways of knowing far beyond any book knowledge or knowledge gained by thinking, reflection or reasoning. Inner stillness is key in tracing the upward-leading path.

There's a story from the 8th century when Joshu asks his guru, Nansen, 'What is the Way?' Nansen replies, 'Ordinary unobstructed seeing is the Way,' 'How shall I seek it?' the disciple queried. 'If you try to seek it, you go away from it.' 'But how can I know the Way unless I try to find it?' persisted Joshu. Nansen said, 'The Way is not a matter of knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion.

When you have reached the true Way beyond doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as outer space. How can it be talked about on the level of right and wrong?'¹³

Perfect Prayer

In true inquiry, the mind cannot think; in inquiry, we are *not*. What we imagine ourselves to be is merely the thought content of the mind, whereas in fact we are the Container, vast and formless. Only in inquiry, can we access the pure space beneath thought, a place (epistemologically) prior to all concepts. This is the ground of true intelligence. It is here that we find true *homeostasis*. Bhagavan tells us:

*When there are thoughts, that is distraction: when there are no thoughts, that is meditation... The fruit of Self-enquiry is the realisation that the Self is all there is and that there is nothing else. For those who follow this method no other sadhana is necessary.*¹⁴

In inquiry, we become pure receptivity. If practised rightly, inquiry is not just prayer but *perfect prayer*, prayer of the highest order, the entry point into the resonant field we share with Bhagavan. The operative word here is 'prayer' because inquiry en-

¹³ Case 19 of *The Mumonkan*. The verse to this case is beautiful and reads: Spring flowers, the autumn moon, summer breezes, and winter snow; If useless things do not clutter your mind, no season will be too much for you.

¹⁴ See *Talks* §68 and the book's Foreword.

gaged in only mentally as a formal teaching is of little use. It is in embodying it that its power unfolds and divulges itself as pure contemplation.

In a perfect world, we would focus entirely on this path, for in inquiry, compassion becomes a living reality. The first duty of the seeker is to listen. In contemplative listening, all friction in the medium of the human collective drops away. What is the source of the friction in the human field? It is our

fixation on the narcissistic impulses of a disquieted mind. When we penetrate our disquietude, when we override it and tame it by a simple act of inquiry, all is set right. True knowing thus comes to us in faint whispers, softly and gently, and the upward-leading Ramana-path is discovered to be a path of honest, caring, and persistent investigation. ■

(to be continued)

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Talk 481.

Muruganar asked what *prajnana* is.

M.: *Prajnana* (Absolute Knowledge) is that from which *vijnana* (relative knowledge) proceeds.

D.: In the state of *vijnana* one becomes aware of the *samvit* (cosmic intelligence). But is that *suddha samvit* aware by itself without the aid of *antahkaranas* (inner organs)?

M.: It is so, even logically.

D.: Becoming aware of *samvit* in *jagrat* by *vijnana*, *prajnana* is not found self-shining. If so, it must be found in sleep.

M.: The awareness is at present through *antahkaranas*. *Prajnana* is always shining even in sleep. If one is continuously aware in *jagrat* the awareness will continue in sleep also.

Moreover, it is illustrated thus: A king comes into the hall, sits there and then leaves the place.

He did not go into the kitchen. Can one in the kitchen for that reason say, "The king did not come here"? When awareness is found in *jagrat* it must also be in sleep.

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

The Story of Arunachala

Once Vishnu and Brahma had an argument.

I am the greatest!



What! No, I am greater than you!



So began a great fight.



Suddenly Shiva manifested as a pillar of light before them. The pillar was a burning brilliant flame, so bright it dazzled all eyes. It rose from earth to sky, without a break. No one knew where it began and no one could see where it ended.

Whoever can find out where the pillar begins or where it ends, he is the greater of the two.

I will find the beginning. I will dig underground and soon reach the spot.



After all, Vishnu had been a boar in the Varaha avatar and plunged into the ocean to save the earth. He now assumed that form again, to burrow through the earth.

I will fly into the sky and within seconds I will find out where the pillar ends!



Brahma assumed the form of a swan and flew high into the sky. But the pillar underground went deeper and deeper, while in the sky it soared high and higher.

Vishnu dug furiously but no matter how deep he dug, there was the light. At last, he grew tired and stopped. He sat down and meditated. This was a very wise thing to do. When there is a problem which cannot be solved then it is good to close one's eyes, stop all thought and let the light illumine our hearts.

Vishnu sat still in meditation. He realized, "This pillar which is Shiva is everywhere. Shiva is without beginning or end. He is in my own heart. He is my own SELF too. So the beginning cannot be found. And there is no end. It is best to go back."

So Vishnu quietly returned, did namaskaram to the pillar and waited for Brahma to return. Thus Mahavishnu is the first devotee of Shiva.

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 1
SELF + AWARENESS = ONENESS

Brahma flew very high but he spotted no end to the light. It streamed ever higher. The poor swan grew tired and his wings were weary.

Brahma saw a flower falling from a mountain. He caught the flower and returned, saying, "I have visited the top of the pillar of light and plucked this flower which was growing there."

He showed the screwpine flower, called ketaki, even kewra, the sweet smelling thazhampoo.

Brahma had not meditated, so he had not understood the nature of the light that was Shiva.

Shiva was angry at this lie, with Brahma, and even with the flower. Some say that Brahma has so few temples in India because he told a lie.

Vishnu was pronounced the greater of the two.

But Bhagavan Sri Ramana said Brahma was told to pray and to meditate, and one day he too understood that the light was endless.

The pillar of light was too bright for ordinary eyes.

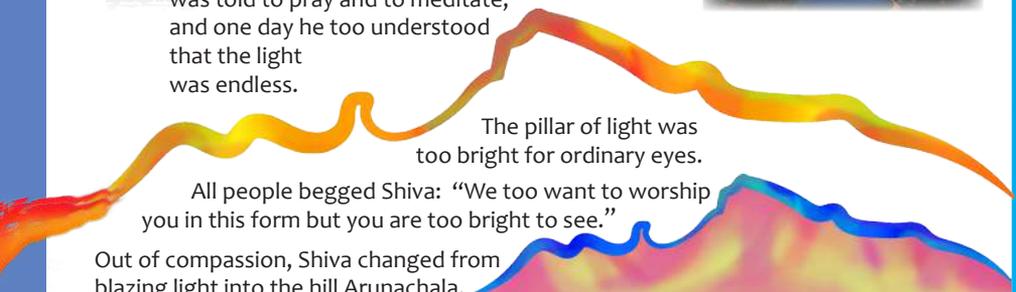
All people begged Shiva: "We too want to worship you in this form but you are too bright to see."

Out of compassion, Shiva changed from blazing light into the hill Arunachala.

It stands silent, endless, mysterious, awesome. It brings peace and wisdom without saying a word. It is the holiest place in the world. Even if we think of it, it brings eternal joy and freedom! One day, perhaps, we will go there and walk around the hill. This is a sacred circumambulation, called girivalam or pradakshina. Lakhs do it and receive Shiva's grace and Bhagavan's darshan...

Come, Arunachala waits for you.

I have to find some way to win! Or Vishnu will be declared greater than me!

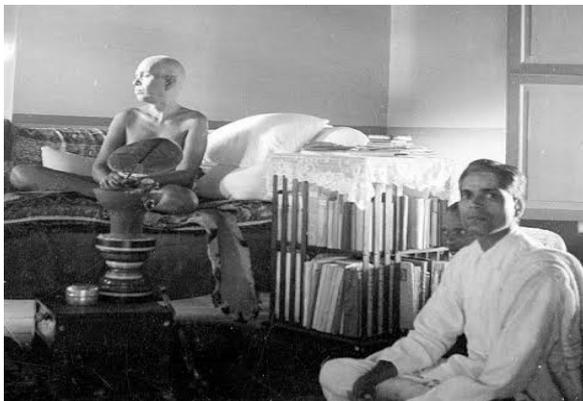


1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 0 0 0 0 0 0 1
SELF + AWARENESS = CONSCIOUSNESS

TEXT : SHARADA BHANU DESIGN : BHARATI MIRCHANDANI REFERENCE for Images : WIKICOMMONS

Reflecting on *The Technique of Maha Yoga*

Swagat Patnaik



‘The Technique of Maha Yoga’ by Narayana Aiyer is a gem of a book that gives a lucid explanation of Bhagavan’s Sri Ramana’s teachings on self-enquiry. In a very gentle fashion, Narayana Aiyer, who had the privilege of being a direct disciple of Bhagavan, puts forward various practical aspects of his guru’s teachings. Often, the chattering mind of a seeker has its own momentum and it may lead to numerous challenges and confusions. During such periods, when the knowledge of Bhagavan’s teachings becomes occluded and difficult to follow, a book on the practical struggles of a seeker becomes an invaluable guide.

In this book, Narayana Aiyer explores several topics and, in the process, helps seekers cut through some of their dilemmas and return to Bhaga-

van’s refuge. Some of these topics are the definition of *maha-yoga*, *jnana yoga* and its stages, the terms guru, grace, *vasanas*, breath control, *japa*, the types of *samadhi* and its effects, etc. Lucid commentary on these topics not only helps seekers understand more about the practice of *jnana yoga* but it also inspires them. They realize that many people have undertaken this journey and gather more faith in the teachings of Bhagavan. Finally, the author breaks down several instructions given in *Talks* and *Ulladu Narpadu* into smaller steps which facilitate the practice of a new aspirant.

Aiyer says that the practice of Jnana yoga can be divided into *dhyana* (concentration) and *vichara* (enquiry). Bhagavan, who calls *vicharamarga* as *maha-yoga*, recommends this because

it is direct and leads to concentration, eradicating all *vasanas*. He quotes Bhagavan and says that the constant practice of enquiry eventually results in the extinction of the mind. Narayana Aiyer mentions seven stages of spiritual discipline: *Subechcha* (intention to study the sastras), *Vicharana* (association with the wise), *Tanumanasi* (weakening of desires), *Sattvapatti* (mind getting fixed in the Heart), *Asamsakthi* (mind getting absorbed in the Heart), *Padharathabhavana* (finding delight in atman), and *Turiya* (immutably abiding in atman).

After defining maha-yoga and its stages, the author comes to one of the most important aspects of sadhana. He quotes Bhagavan's famous declaration that God, Guru, and the Self are the same. He impresses upon us the importance of a guru, saying that one meets one's guru after lifetimes of motiveless actions. After which, going through intense practice, one gets liberation. Only a few individuals can carry on their sadhana without a guru and even this may be possible only owing to the upadesh they had received in previous lifetimes. Finally, he also implores us to look within ourselves for answers during the deep silence of meditation. This way we are guided by our inner guru or inner voice. He further says that the grace of the guru

is like the ray of sun: it is always functioning; but its degree of efficacy varies with the individual's receptivity which in turn depends on *sudha chittam* (purified mind) and *shraddha*.

He states that everyone experiences a loss of the primal state of oneness, of which we have a glimpse in deep sleep; because of our ignorance and mental *vrittis*, thoughts spring up and cause misery. These thought waves are due to *vasanas*. Whenever a thought occurs and passes away, it leaves an impression on the subconscious mind. This way the impressions get deeper and become tendencies which are carried over to the next birth. These latent tendencies which sprout are called *vasanas*, and they can only be drained away by concentrating on that which is free from *vasanas*. This is the direct method. If the mind is introverted through enquiry into the source of the I-thought or *ahamvritti*, *vasanas* become extinct and Reality shines forth.

Additionally, with respect to the practice, the author suggests that when one tries to meditate, waves of thoughts rush out to occupy the clear field. Without entertaining any of them, one must ask the question 'To whom has this thought come?'. Then, when the answer comes 'To me', one must question 'Who am I?', and search

for the source of the ‘I thought’. Such frequent dives destroy that particular thought and one gradually gains mastery over such thoughts. Although the instructions for doing self-enquiry are quite minimal, it requires a lot of perseverance. It is very difficult to stick to the instructions when troubled by the onslaught of thoughts. Thus, the author breaks the instruction into simpler steps which help the seeker follow it smoothly. Furthermore, he has also beautifully commented on other spiritual practices such as *bhakti*, *japa*, breath control, etc. This helps the seeker understand the significance of other practices and relate them to self-enquiry.

Coming to the effects of self-enquiry, Narayana Aiyer has cogently collected and put forward Bhagavan’s teachings on this matter. He states that real *atmavichara* begins only when one stays away from mental waves and abides in the Heart. Such an abidance is called *samadhi*. Once there is constancy in Self abidance, it generates *nirvikalpa samadhi*, which is the goal of a yogi. In *maha yoga* there are four

types of *samadhi*: *kevalanirvikalpa samadhi*, *savikalpa samadhi*, *nirvikalpa samadhi*, and *sahaja samadhi*. These *samadhis* have been discussed in detail in this book, illuminating the seeker. Finally, he states that *nirvikalpa samadhi* leads to realization, where one feels one with existence. When this *samadhi* is continuously practiced it eventually leads to the *sahaja* (effortless) state.

Like some other books, this one too reached me under special circumstances. I was traveling in Tiruvannamalai and found this volume in the bookstore. Initially, I did not think much of it but as I casually turned a few pages, it got me hooked. I read it incessantly and it instantly quenched a thirst, answering questions that had been burning in me for many lifetimes. This book, through Bhagavan’s grace, has given me guidance and strength amidst many troubles and challenges. I pray to Bhagavan that such books reach may reach many seekers and satisfy their deep-seated yearnings for realization. ■

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Talk 5.

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

Talk 479

D.: Which is the best of all the religions? What is Sri Bhagavan's method?

M.: All religions and methods are one and the same.

D.: Different methods are taught for liberation.

M.: Why should you be liberated? Why not remain as you are now?

D.: I want to get rid of pain. To be rid of it is said to be liberation.

M.: That is what all religions teach.

D.: But what is the method?

M.: To retrace your way back.

D.: Whence have I come?

M.: That is just what you should know. Did these questions arise in your sleep? Did you not exist then? Are you not the same being now?

D.: Yes, I *was* in sleep; so also the mind; but the senses had merged, so I could not speak.

M.: Are you *jiva*? Are you the mind? Did the mind announce itself to you in sleep?

D.: No. But elders say that the *jiva* is different from *Isvara*.

M.: Leave *Isvara* alone. Speak for yourself.

D.: What about myself? Who am I?

M.: That is just it. Know it, when all will be known; if not, ask then.

D.: On waking I see the world and I am not changed from sleep.

M.: But this is not known in sleep. Now or then, the same you remain. Who has changed now? Is your nature to be changing or remain unchanging?

D.: What is the proof?

M.: Does one's own being require a proof? Only remain aware of your own self, all else will be known.

D.: Why then do the dualists and non-dualists quarrel among themselves?

M.: If each one minds his own business, there will be no quarrel.

Communion, Union

Gayatri Majumdar

Those hills still stand dreaming in all their grandeur,
across sunsets, milky ways and speckled nightlights,
now at a great distance – far away –

Green paddy fields undulate terracing beneath a pinkish-orange sky
we glide across another reality, taking one cautious human step at a time. . .

Water-loving Brahmi leaves around our Crocs, sneakers
relieving stress; tasting them, I'm able to balance between the elements;
peahens scamper, oaks support pepper creepers – tenants embracing
ornamenting their extended trunks with awe and gratitude;
trees, always bountiful, make excellent neighbours.

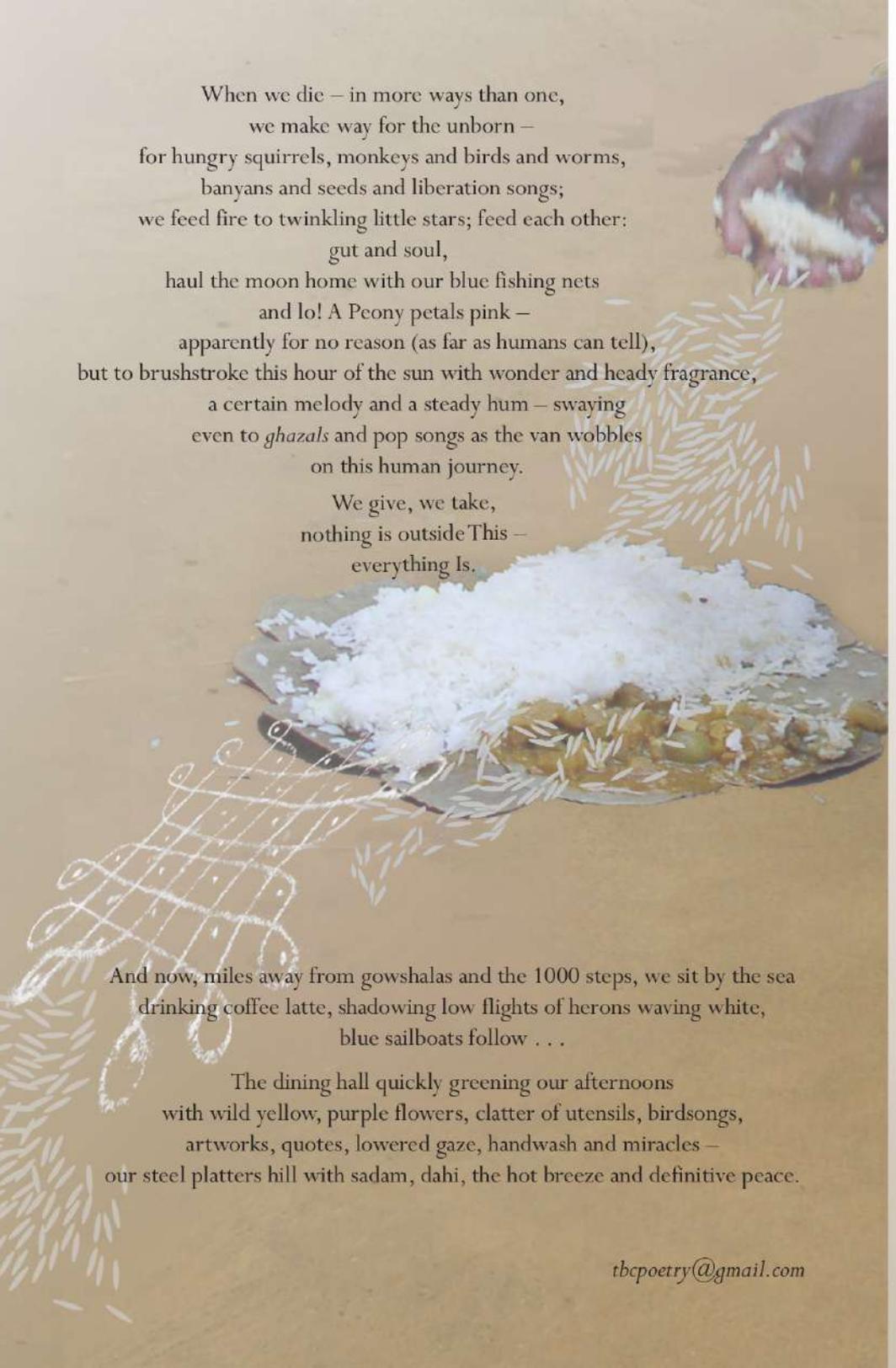
No words as we know need be uttered . . .

The faithful queue outside the dining hall
with hunger mostly in their soul;
grace of sages, ghee liberally poured over spoonful of sadam;
dal, sambhar, dahi, (occasional jaggery) follow –
one mouthful at a time we consume
the heart-centeredness, quickening palms, the goldening of grains
harvesting the wind, waterfalls and time
of unmarked paddy fields –
coffee, peppers, melons, cows with painted horns,
hairpin bends and consciousness. Pineapples!

The one who gives does so with immense gratitude,
so do the ones who consume.

What is that path up the hill trailed with silence and solar flares

A guru's grace – His unwavering smile
dissolves the heart – no words are spoken yet.
How can we even think of letting this moment
slip through our innumerable lifetimes even as we
are bound to let go?



When we die – in more ways than one,
we make way for the unborn –
for hungry squirrels, monkeys and birds and worms,
banyans and seeds and liberation songs;
we feed fire to twinkling little stars; feed each other:
gut and soul,
haul the moon home with our blue fishing nets
and lo! A Peony petals pink –
apparently for no reason (as far as humans can tell),
but to brushstroke this hour of the sun with wonder and heady fragrance,
a certain melody and a steady hum – swaying
even to *ghazals* and pop songs as the van wobbles
on this human journey.
We give, we take,
nothing is outside This –
everything is.

And now, miles away from gowshalas and the 1000 steps, we sit by the sea
drinking coffee latte, shadowing low flights of herons waving white,
blue sailboats follow . . .

The dining hall quickly greening our afternoons
with wild yellow, purple flowers, clatter of utensils, birdsongs,
artworks, quotes, lowered gaze, handwash and miracles –
our steel platters hill with sadam, dahi, the hot breeze and definitive peace.

Manifestations of Divinity in Human Forms – A Glimpse of One

Bharati M



Saints cannot be recognized by any special visible symbols. What they have in common is invisible: an aura that extends to every corner of the planet, and beyond. This aura is all-knowing and very powerful. It works like an eagle, diving silent and swift, catching a rat with its claws, giving the hapless creature a brief experience of flying; of freedom, light, and immensity of space.

November 1993. I was visiting Mt Abu. Each morning I would buy delicious custard apples freshly harvested from the surrounding hills. One day an exceptionally large and beautiful fruit suggested that it was meant as an offering. I felt certain that when I had five such fruits I would meet a saint. Two days later, with the fruits, I set off to find a saint! I was drawn to a

huge Shivalingam that towered above the trees near where I was staying. Till then I had found it too big, too flamboyant, to consider holy! Now like a magnet it drew me to itself.

A downward bend in the road led to a gate marked: Shankar Math. Ahead, a lock shone on the temple door, so I sat on a step outside. Barely five seconds passed when someone said, ‘You want to meet Maharaj? Go there...’ The direction indicated revealed a path to a private garden with a bungalow beyond. All seemed quiet and closed. But again, a monk passed briskly saying, ‘Don’t sit here, go up!’ and disappeared to the side of the building. A narrow doorway led to a flight of stairs. Soft sounds of conversation drew me up another flight. At the second landing, a little way down a

corridor, some monks beckoned me to approach. There was Maharaj in *gerua* seated on a cane chair, having tea from a bone china teacup.

He took the proffered bundle, smiled at what was inside, broke one fruit in two, and spooned the pulp from the bowl-shaped piece. I was glad that my offering was accepted with such natural simplicity. He passed the remaining fruit to the monks standing by, telling them to share it. “*Tum chai piyogi?*” He asked me. I nodded eagerly. I had imagined receiving a piece of the fruit as *prasad* from his hand. Instead, I was led to the staircase landing and handed a huge steel tumbler of *chai*. In those days I had not yet begun to drink *chai* or coffee. Of course, I finished every drop. It was *prasad*. As I was leaving, I was told that *arati* was conducted in the temple every day at 6 PM, after which Maharaj usually stayed half an hour to meet visitors.

I waited near the temple. The doors opened to reveal a giant *lingam*, about twice my height and so wide that the ambulatory path extended beyond the width of the hall. Made of black and white veined marble, it had a natural ingrained whorl forming a kind of eye. The whole *lingam* and ambulatory path were enclosed in a structure also shaped like a *Shivalingam*, which is

what loomed above the trees. Gradually a few other people trickled into the temple hall. The *arati* began with rhythmic beating of gongs and other percussion instruments, in a powerful symphony that gathered volume with mesmerizing *Shiva* chants. When it finished everyone went up to the *lingam* to receive a benediction of *amrit* and *misri*, circumambulated the *lingam*, washed hands, and reentered the temple hall.

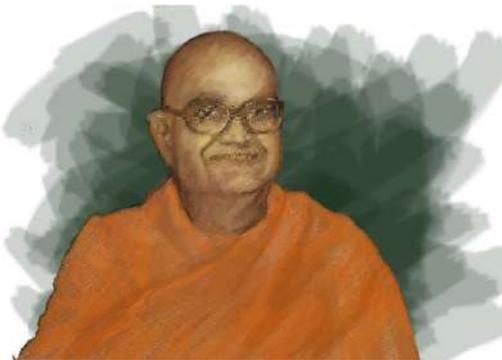
There Maharaj was already seated on an upholstered chair toward the rear half of the hall. People gathered on the carpeted floor around him while the monks who had led the *arati* silently left. We chatted about this and that, mainly just Maharaj and I. I have to admit I behaved as though we were two schoolboys joking about everything, while others listened and joined in the laughter. In the midst of light banter, he'd toss tiny power-darts that penetrated my thick coverings: ‘Be alert always; not a single breath should be inhaled or exhaled without attention.’ To prevent getting stuck at mere focusing on breath: ‘Remain alert to every nuance around you. Notice even the slightest draft touching any part of your body.’ ‘You don't have to do anything. Just allow the peace inside you to grow. Do nothing to disturb that.’

On the third evening of this happy routine, he told me I could join a Gita class for ladies at 10 each morning. So, I did. That evening he asked why I had left after the class, as another class followed. The next day was to be my last in the town. After the Gita class, when the ladies had left, three or four monks entered and sat down. A discussion on the *aranyaka* scriptures began: the ancients used animals and plants from the forests around them as metaphors to explain *advaitic* truths. Modern prudery had not limited their thinking. The red bottom of a female monkey in heat was used to describe the colour of eyes; the excrement of a crow conveyed the unimportance of things. Discussion moved to the first recorded use of the word *hiranyagarbha* to explore the nature of creation; what the term meant then, and how the meaning changed in different texts over time. Maharaj quoted texts without hesitation. I was over-

whelmed by his extensive knowledge. The monks were also very erudite as they discussed, in Sanskrit, nuances of the shifts of meaning. I seemed to understand every word. I do not know Sanskrit.

Years later, after he had left the body, one of his disciples talked of the futility, the feeble quality of communication without 'the presence'. I was enquiring about books and digital communication. Casually, he commented that a person as evolved as Maharaj could communicate one-to-one with up to 8000 persons at a time. 'Even he could not go up to 10,000' I was told. Only then did I realize that the Sanskrit discussion had been transmitted directly into my understanding!

But, returning to 1993, it was after I had basked a few days in the '*maitreya*' so generously bestowed on one who had till then no clue what an erudite scholar this evolved soul was, that I told my guru, Vimala Thakar, about this friendship. I learnt his name, and more, from her: Mahamandaleswar Maheshanand Giri; highly educated, including a stint at Harvard University, extremely well versed in Sanskrit scriptures, and very liberated in his thinking. Apart from heading several traditional establishments in Varanasi, Kolkata and Delhi, he had set up schools and other educational



institutions, and this Shankar Math with his beloved Shivalingam, at Mt Abu. It was here that he had organized a confluence of spiritual masters to explore the theme, 'Vedanta for the Modern Age'. Pontiffs from various *maths* including many of the Shankara lineage, arrived for the *shivir*. Vimala Thakar had also been invited.

Vimalaji did not belong to any order, and did not wear *gerua*. She was also the only woman among the acharyas on the dais. A group of them protested and left the stage. Vimalaji took her chair down and sat facing the audience, seating herself at the same level. But Maharaj-ji would not accept that. He felt adapting to the modern age involved not blindly clinging to customs. He suggested that the objecting acharyas question Vimalaji on *advaitic* philosophy and gauge if she was in any way lesser than them. Also, she was his guest and he could not seat her below the stage, but if they still chose to leave rather than share the stage with her, he would make arrangements as soon as possible. Meanwhile they would be looked after in their accommodation at the *math*. Some of the acharyas returned to the dais, while some left.

When I first met him I had no idea what a *mahamandaleshwar* was, or even

that he was one. With such an air of ease he had responded in a similar vein to my casual banter. Not once then or later did he rebuke my childish behaviour. He saw in me only the latent divinity he saw in everyone, and clothed in the simplest language, in line with my attitude at the time, he gave guidance and direction to my awareness.

We did meet again, in Delhi. Again, by miraculous chance. I was invited to a wedding at Dhaula Kuan. My sister needed to be picked up from the airport that night. Managing to get two things done made driving that distance worthwhile. Dressed for the reception in a dramatic silk sari, wearing 'make-up', I looked very different from the jeans and T-shirt 'travelling Bharati'. Standing among crowds outside the Passenger Exit, I noticed someone wearing *gerua* coming out. I moved closer to see if it was anyone I could recognize. Suddenly the crowds parted like the Red Sea for Moses. From a hundred feet away, in the dark, Maharaj looked straight at me, nodded, and then vanished into the crowds. For one instant there had been no darkness, no time or distance.

It was quite tough to find out where he resided while in Delhi. Though I didn't get to talk to him in Delhi, I learnt much by spending hours each

day watching him interact with disciples, many more than surrounded him in Abu where also we met again a few times.

Many years later, I still have no idea why he sent so much love my way. He would only occasionally look at me, most often he'd look past into some space beyond. Now, when I despair

how little inner transformation has taken place, I visualize the lustre of his face, the slightly crooked pan-stained smile, the reedy edge to his voice, and as much love as one could drink flowing unceasingly. I feel blessed and become, yet again, a recipient of his generosity. ■

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Talk 483.

Mr. Sitaramiah, a visitor: What does *samyamana* mean in Patanjali Yoga Sutra?

M.: One-pointedness of mind.

D.: By such *samyamana* in the Heart, *chitta samvit* is said to result. What does it mean?

M.: *Chitta samvit* is *Atma jnana* i.e., Knowledge of the Self.

Talk 484.

D.: I think that celibacy and initiation are prerequisites even for a householder in order that he may succeed in self-investigation. Am I right? Or can a householder observe celibacy and seek initiation from a master on occasions only?

M.: First ascertain who the wife and the husband are. Then these questions will not arise.

D.: Engaged in other pursuits, can the mental activities be checked and the query "Who am I?" pursued? Are they not contrary to each other?

M.: These questions arise only in the absence of strength of mind. As the mental activities diminish its strength increases.

D.: Does the Karma theory mean that the world is the result of action and reaction? If so, action and reaction of what?

M.: Until realisation there will be Karma, i.e., action and reaction; after realisation there will be no Karma, no world.

A Road Turns – A Haibun

Neera Kashyap

The first thing I notice about him is that he is old and barefoot. I expect his shoes to be in the car for we have a four-hour drive ahead, from the airport to Ramanashram. Though I have made this trip every year for eighteen years, I have never seen this driver before. As we crawl out of the city snarl and hit the highway, the landscape changes to the familiar winter rice fields. My eyes close half in prayer, half in doze. When they open, it is to see the driver hurtle headlong into a truck speeding just ahead. Before we smash into it, I get no chance to assess if the driver had fallen asleep at the wheel or had yielded to some blind uncontrolled impulse. All I know is that this would be a serious accident. I am surprised to find myself fall almost gently to the car floor, roll over once and hit my knee against the door. This doesn't feel like death. Both my body and mind are still and aware. It is the driver who helps me out. Except for my throbbing knee, we are both unhurt. The windshield is in smithereens and the engine flat as unleavened bread. When a replacement car comes for me, my last view is of an old man standing beside a metal wreck – just beyond a scatter of broken glass – barefoot and bewildered.



in the long shadow
of the hill
shade

– First published in *Poetry Pea Journal*, Autumn 2021
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The Twin Towers of Tiruvannamalai

Natarajan Venkatesan



For nearly sixty years, from 1890 to 1950, Tiruvannamalai, a small quiet temple town in southern India, was blessed with the incarnation of two sages, namely, Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Seshadri Swamikal, colloquially referred to as Ramana and Mahan respectively. Speaking of these two spiritual giants, Sri Ramanan, the late president of Ramanasramam, had observed: “It’s known that two suns cannot shine in the same firmament. However, two spiritual suns ‘brighter than thousand suns’ shone in the sacred sky of Arunachala during this period.”

Although Ramana has received considerable attention globally, recognition of Mahan is mostly limited

to South India. Here is a brief look at their life stories and the interaction between them¹⁵.

Mahan Seshadri was born in January 1870 in the temple town of Kanchipuram also known as ‘Varanasi of the South’ and extolled by Kalidasa as ‘*Nagareashu Kanchi*’, the best among cities. Centuries earlier, Adi Sankara had founded Kamakoti Peetam dedicated to Goddess Kamakshi in Kanchi and recruited families living on the banks of Narmada river to serve as priests. These families came to be known as Kamakotiars. Seshadri was born into one such illustrious family.

Being a gift of the Divine, Seshadri was an extraordinary child. When he was four years old, the ‘Golden Hand’

¹⁵ Partly based on *Arunachala A Pilgrimage* by Sita Kangovi and *Ramana’s Arunachala Ocean of Grace Divine* by Ramana’s Devotees.

incident, a harbinger of his greatness, occurred. One day, on the way to the temple with his mother Maragatham, he picked up a tiny idol of Krishna from a store and the vendor refused to accept payment. The next day, as Seshadri and his mother were going to the temple on the same route, the vendor prostrated at Maragatham's feet saying "This boy is not ordinary but baby Krishna. Usually, I sell about two dozen idols a day; however, yesterday after your son touched the idol, I sold my entire stock of a thousand idols! He's Lord Krishna with golden hands." From that day onwards, he was known as 'Seshadri with the golden hands'.

At an early age, he acquired knowledge of Sanskrit, the Vedas and other spiritual texts, as well as music from his father Varadarajan, mother, and grandfather Kamakoti Sastrigal. However, tragedy struck the young Seshadri in rapid succession: At the age of eleven, his father passed on followed by the passing of his grandfather and mother. Minutes before her passing, Maragatham placed her hand on Seshadri's chest and recited the verse which states that mere remembrance of Arunachala assures mukti (liberation).

The word 'Arunachala!' coming

thrice from the lips of his dying mother went straight to his heart and firmly planted itself. Although he had not even seen a picture of the mountain, he could draw an exact reproduction of the five-peaked mountain! Having lost the guiding lights of his life, Mahan faced a challenging and difficult transition. Every day without fail, he would go around the Kamakshi Temple reciting mantras. He would shed copious tears and call out in anguish: 'O Arunachaleswara! O Shonadrisha! Mother Kamakshi, when will Thou appear before me?' Living with his guardians proved to be a hurdle for his sadhana. He stopped coming home altogether, spending his time under the shade of a tree at a deserted corner of a temple and the funeral ground.

A few months later, he became a disciple of Balaji Swamigal and was initiated into formal *sannyasa*, opening the final gates of liberation. By the grace of Kamakshi, he realized Brahman, the ultimate truth. In 1889, at the age of 19, he set foot on the sacred soil of Tiruvannamalai during the auspicious Ratha Saptami Festival and immediately went to the Arunachala temple to offer his prayers. A great sense of peace pervaded him and he knew he was home.

In Tiruvannamalai, he had no fixed

home and was constantly on the move. He spent most of his nights absorbed in *samadhi* at the Kambattu Illayanar Shrine within the Arunachala Temple. He would usually walk down the market street at least once a day, mingling with storekeepers and devotees. He had conquered hunger, sleep, and other bodily needs and would distribute most of the *bhiksha* that he received to needy persons.

He was a master of *siddhis* and had an astonishing power of clairvoyance. He performed miracles not to gain fame or to seek personal glory but out of his sheer benevolence for the suffering. Reinforcing man's faith in God was the reason for his miraculous feats. Whether people sought him out for material benefits or for spiritual uplift, Mahan's objective was the same: to elevate them to higher levels of spiritual consciousness. His teachings were in line with the highest principles of *advaita* vedanta and did not endorse any particular method of worship. His kindness extended to animals also. Numerous cows were cured of the terrible '*komari*' disease because of his grace.

Now we turn our attention to Sri Ramana.

Venkataraman was born on 30th December 1879 in Tiruchuzhi on the

auspicious day of *Arudra Darsanam*. His family belonged to an illustrious lineage going back to the ancient sage, Parashara, the father of Maharshi Vyasa. After his father Sundaram Iyer passed on, Venkataraman moved to his uncle's home in Madurai. On hearing the name of Arunachala from a visiting relative in 1895, something stirred deep within his heart and from that moment on he was not the same. A year later, he was suddenly seized by an uncontrollable fear of death and he dramatized the occurrence of death. On inquiring "Is this body that is dying, I?", some mysterious force rose within him and took possession of him. Instantaneously, he had realized the Self.

Within his heart, Arunachala beckoned and he could ignore it no more. On 29th August 1896, he left a note for his relatives, headed for the Hill and reached Tiruvannamalai four days later. He went straight to the Temple, offered his prayers and thereafter spent his time absorbed in *samadhi* at different places within the temple. To escape physical abuse by mischievous children, Venkataraman moved to the Patala Lingam Shrine underground and became absorbed in meditation, oblivious to attacks by insects and vermin. Sometime later,

Mahan Seshadri had him removed to safety and was one of the first to recognize the eminence of the young Swami. Yogi Shuddananda Bharati, one of Ramana's biographers writes: "The whole world must be grateful to this Mahan for his rescue of the sacred body of Ramana".

In 1899, the young lad moved to several caves and finally to Virupaksha cave on the slopes of the hill. He replied to questions asked by Gambiram Seshayayya in 1900. These were published as the book, *Self-enquiry*, and in 1902 answered Sivaprakasam Pillai's questions. These answers formed the basis of *Who Am I. Aksahara Mana Malai* (Marital Garland of Letters) was composed by him in 1914 for devotees to chant while going around in the town seeking *bhiksha*.

In 1907, a momentous meeting occurred between the yogi and Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, a well-known Sanskrit scholar and poet who conferred the title of *Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* on him. In 1916, Ramana moved to Skandasramam along with mother Azhagammal. Six years later in May 1922, by his grace, she was liberated and absorbed in Arunachala. In December of the same year, he moved down the hill to the present site of Sri Ramanasramam.

Mahan himself had declared that

he was Goddess Parvathi, and that Ramana was his child Skanda. Theirs was a lifelong association filled with mutual love, respect and admiration. Often Mahan would go up the hill to visit Ramana and share a meal. Mahan would send a devotee to Ramana on occasion and sometimes Ramana directed his devotees to Mahan. The experience of Ardhanari, a cook in the palace of Mysore kings is a case in point. His stomach ailment was cured after worshipping Subramanya at Palani and drinking the milk used for *abhishekam* and this ignited his spiritual interest. Eventually he came to Ramana at Skandasramam hoping to receive *upadesa*. Ramana ignored him and said "Go Down". At the same time, Mahan came up the hill, hugged him and then blessed him when he recited a verse from *Thiruppugazh* (a massive compendium of Tamil verses on Lord Murugan composed by Arunagiri Nathar centuries earlier). Mahan initiated him and said 'Every verse in *Thiruppugazh* is a *mantra*. Go and spread it everywhere'. It then dawned on Ardhanari that Ramana had indeed sent him down the mountain to find his own *Sadguru*. He assumed *sannyasa* under the name of Sachidananda Swamy and spent the rest of his life spreading the verses, and was popularly known as 'Thiruppugazh

Swami’.

Speaking in spiritual terms, Mahan once told a disciple, “I am only a retailer earning thousand rupees, while Ramana is a wholesaler earning ten thousand rupees. Shouldn’t you try and get at least ten rupees from Him?”. A devotee told Ramana that everyone called Mahan a madman. Ramana smilingly replied that there were three mad men in Arunachala: One was Mahan, the second was Arunachala, and the third was himself. Once Mahan remarked that “There are three lingams in Tiruvannamalai. One is the Jyotirlingam; Ramana Swamy and I are the other two.”

In the year 1929, Mahan was 59 years old when he decided to shed the mortal coil. He developed fever which persisted for more than forty days. Extremely debilitated, he went into a state of *yoga nidra*, the deep sleep of the *yogis* which lasted a few days. Some days before Mahan’s passing, Ramana guided the construction of a *samadhi* shrine for Mahan on the land

adjacent to Ramanasramam.

Devotees flocked to have Mahan’s *darshan*, the crowds exceeding the ones on Deepam festival day! He took *samadhi* on the day after the shrine was completed. Ramana added solemn dignity to the occasion by his august presence. Upon the recommendation of the presiding pontiff of Kanchi Peetam, the house where Mahan lived with his uncle and aunt in Kanchi, was acquired by Kanchi Peetam and converted to a shrine for him. According to the legend of Arunachala, Goddess Parvati descended to the Earth, began her *tapas* in Kanchi, and completed it in Tiruvannamalai. In going from Kanchi to Tiruvannamalai, Mahan had retraced the Devi’s steps!

Twenty-one years later, on April 14 1950, Ramana entered *samadhi* and simultaneously a shooting star with a luminous tail came from the south, moved slowly across the sky, and disappeared behind the top of Arunachala. ■

[e-mail:nvenky30@yahoo.com]

Talk 1.

A wandering monk (sannyasi) was trying to clear his doubt: “How to realise that all the world is God?”

Maharshi: If you make your outlook that of wisdom, you will find the world to be God. Without knowing the Supreme Spirit (Brahman), how will you find His all-pervasiveness?

untitled

Rupa Anand

it is in deep-sleep,
that the soul
reveals itself
and breaks
into song,
of undiluted
non-difference,
unconnected with
body, mind, intellect,
and memory.

tell me,
don't we all
universally,
on waking,
say:
"i was,"
"i knew that i was,"
and
"i was happy
and contented."

if we were unconnected
to our body, mind and intellect,
who was it who experienced this?

do we know who we are?

Mahasivaratri 2022



In March 2021, night long rituals were observed for the first time at the Ramana Kendra, Delhi. This year too the four prahars, or yamas, of Mahasivaratri were celebrated at the Kendra. From 6 pm on 1st March, to 6 am, 2nd March, the shrine reverberated with ringing of bells and chanting of powerful Sanskrit mantras. There was

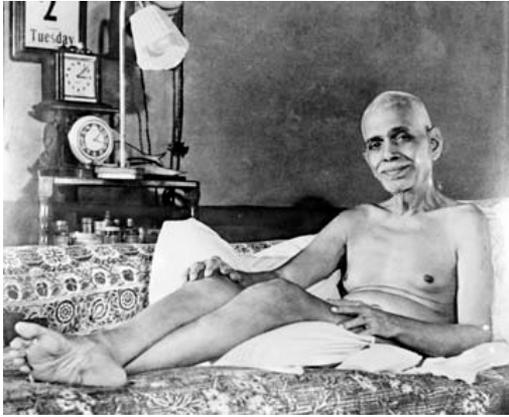
an atmosphere of serene power and bliss. More than 80 devotees attended this event in person, while around 450 watched on YouTube. Live-streaming of the entire puja had been arranged.

The potent ritual – abhishek of the Sivalingam with sandal paste, curds,

honey, ghee, milk, water, bilva leaves and flowers, was performed following the traditional four yamas of three hours each. The Secretary of Ramana Kendra, Delhi, Anuraag Sunder, at whose instance these pujas have been initiated here, participated enthusiastically in the entire Rudrabhishek rituals. ■



Bhagavan's 72nd Aradhana Day



Ramana Kendra, Delhi held a special *satsang* on 14th April to commemorate Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's 72nd Aradhana Day. Recitation of mantras, shlokas, Ramana Ashtottaram, and *Upadesa Saram* by Narayananji set the tone for the wise words uttered later in the evening. Raghav Kumarji was invited to grace this special occasion virtually. He gave a beautiful talk which has been documented below.

Bhagavan was an unprecedented centre of energy and knowledge who blessed us by being with us for nearly seventy years. The traditional texts and acharyas tell us that the jnani, like Ishvara takes a human form to bless devotees. Bhagavan was one such embodiment of wisdom and compassion. Bhagavan, occupying the small

frame of a mortal being, was actually much more than what we can imagine of Ishvara. The deepest longings were dissolved and the deepest griefs addressed by his mere presence. All that was needed was to be receptive to his grace and to be patient without trying to mentally formulate how his grace would come to us.

Many of us might feel if only we were alive during Bhagavan's time how wonderful it would have been, but we should remember that the fact that we are still able to access his teachings indicates that this is what is best for us. There were many who physically came to Bhagavan but were unable to tap into his grace.

Eleanor Pauline Noye, an American, and one of Bhagavan's early devotees, was very upset and emo-

tional on separating from Bhagavan when she was going back to her country. Bhagavan affectionately said that he would be with her irrespective of where she stayed.

It is said that a jnani doesn't come and go. Bhagavan did not go anywhere because he is everywhere. While this understanding may at first seem abstract, it is interesting to see how the closest devotees of Bhagavan experienced a moving transition when the saint dropped the body. From regarding him as identical with his form they shifted to recognizing that he was still very much alive and present, though physically absent.

Bhagavan's grace is always here. It is up to us to make use of that ever-available grace by taking his name and practicing Self-inquiry. One must remember Bhagavan's assurance given to Kitty Osborne – that if Kitty thinks of Bhagavan, Bhagavan thinks of Kitty. Thus, if we recall Bhagavan, Bhagavan and his grace will stay with us. By practicing Self-enquiry and allowing to the mind to resolve into silence instead of believing its stories, we can pay homage to Bhagavan. Bhagavan hasn't gone anywhere. He is right here and now, and it is incumbent on us to tap into his presence.

The assurance Bhagavan gave to G.

V. Subbaramayya is worthy of being highlighted. This earnest devotee went to Bhagavan and said, "Bless me with fearlessness." Graciously, with sublime compassion, Bhagavan gave his assent. This assurance is available for everyone.

We only see the physical body of the guru and get attached to this form. It is interesting to note an incident narrated by another great devotee N. Balaram Reddy in his book "My Reminiscences". A day before Bhagavan shed his body, his sister and her child got permission to see the guru. As his sister greeted Bhagavan, her child started crying. Bhagavan, amidst excruciating pain, disregarding his own condition, started pacifying the child by making endearing sounds with his lips. On the last day, when Reddy, along with a minister of the Tamil Nadu government, went to have darshan of Bhagavan, he found a very soft splendour enveloping the entire room as he entered it. He was astonished by the remarkable experience of luminosity surrounding Bhagavan instead of melancholy or any other signs of someone suffering with a fatal disease. He wondered whether it was a subjective impression, as his devotion might have made him experience Bhagavan's last moments in this manner. Then, the minister who

accompanied him asked him whether he noticed the brightness in the room. Reddy now had no doubts about the objective reality of his experience.

Reddy later quotes a stanza by Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni (written in the Ramana Upanishad) which describes this very aspect of Bhagavan. It says that an ocean of light was covered by Bhagavan's physical body. The bright Sun sometimes gets enveloped by a few clouds. Similarly, during the seventy years of Bhagavan's journey on Earth, a cloud in the form of his physical body covered him. After the

body fulfilled its role, it dissolved and light now freely emanates out of Bhagavan.

We are blessed to be in an age which is not very long after the time when Bhagavan was physically present. In the form of his teachings, he has given the biggest gift to the modern world. Bhagavan accepts each one of us as we are, no matter what our social status or past.

The event concluded with Jayanthi Aiyarji singing the Ramanapada-Pancharatnam and Aksharamana Malai in her mellifluous voice. ■

Talk 488.

A group of young men asked: "It is said that healthy mind can be only in a healthy body. Should we not attempt to keep the body always strong and healthy?"

M.: In that way there will be no end of attention to the health of the body.

D.: The present experiences are the result of past Karma. If we know the mistakes committed in the past, we can rectify them.

M.: If one mistake is rectified there yet remains the whole *sanchita* which is going to give you innumerable births. So that is not the procedure. The more you prune a plant, the more vigorously it grows. The more you rectify your Karma, the more it accumulates. Find the root of Karma and cut it off.

Talk 505.

Babu Rajendra Prasad said: I have come here with Mahatma Gandhiji's permission and I must return to him soon. Can Sri Bhagavan give me any message for him?

M.: *Adhyatma sakti* is working within him and leading him on. That is enough. What more is necessary?



13th February

Covering verses 3-8 of Upadesa Saram, Michael James said that the actions done without desires, as an offering to God, purify the mind and lead to liberation. The more our mind is purified, the more the inner Light will shine. Puja, japa, and dhyana purify the mind in ascending order of efficacy.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_zjr6c7SXI

20th February

Continuing the series on *The Song Celestial*, Raghavji explained that wrong knowledge is the root cause of misery. With right knowledge, the grip of emotions and desires is loosened. Realizing that the world cannot offer lasting happiness, the mind turns inward. The jnani abides in the Self, the abode of true happiness!

--- Rashmi Vyas

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

27th February

Carrying on his lectures on *The Song Celestial*, Raghavji said that one must deal with obstacles to Self-enquiry by practicing abhyasa and vairagya. Staying rooted

in sadhana with shraddha and following the guru's instructions with conviction removes impurities of the mind which are alien to our true nature of ananda.

--- Rashmi Vyas

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng2nHV3kOc8>

13th March

Discussing the ninth and tenth verse of Upadesa Saram, Michael James said that when one meditates on *I Am*, the mind subsides as by being firmly self-attentive, one gives no room to ego to arise. The mind, when turned within, becomes as it actually is and stays in the Heart as the fundamental awareness.

--- AS

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ehzr2nSa7w

20th March



Presenting a talk on *The Song Celestial*, Raghav Kumar said that it's the tendency of the mind to go outward. He explained that with resolute firmness, one can direct the attention within, towards the spiritual heart which is the seat of consciousness. Through the paths of self-enquiry and meditation, one can enjoy a blissful state as the mind resides into the Self.

--- Marie Elangovan

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11-moDL5Kcc>

26th March

After a long hiatus, an intimate personal satsang was conducted at the Kendra, with the immediacy of the Here and Now, devoid of any digital interventions. Sri Raghavji chanted shanti mantras and explained how mantras become efficacious. He also answered questions within an aura of simplicity, honesty, love, and trust.

--- BM

27th March



Raghavji explained that we can create the ground for self-enquiry by keeping external things in their own place. What we are is pure 'I'; we just have to remove those obstacles which mind assumes through different roles and responsibilities. Atma-vichara is the easiest process through which we can recognise our true nature.

--- Deepti Bhadauria

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

10th April

Talking about verses 11-15 of Upadesa Saram, Michael James said that restraining breath through pranayama restrains the mind since both have the same root. But the only means to bring about the permanent dissolution of mind is self-investigation. All other means can only temporarily prevent the mind to take any form.

--- AS

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

17th April

Continuing with *The Song Celestial*, Raghavji explained that when one views evil persons without developing any emotional reaction to them, then one is open to recognizing the Self in them, experiencing oneness along with objectivity, just the way one protects oneself on seeing a predatory animal, without developing hatred.

--- AS

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

24th April

Raghavji said that Ishvara looks after the welfare of those who remain ever connected and completely surrendered to Him. One can surrender by contemplating upon the Self, which is same as Ishvara. Explaining the four types of bhaktas, Raghavji said that a jnani bhakta embodies Ishvara.

--- Ajith Kumar

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0wNpKkSUJc>

C. Rajagopalachari, former Governor-General of India, was a well-known Congress leader of India.

I first visited the Ashram in January 1936. Besides Indian devotees of Bhagavan, I found some foreign devotees also seated in the Hall. I was struck by the high spiritual atmosphere of the place surcharged with deep silence; Bhagavan radiating love and simplicity.

I am a person belonging to the *Visishtadvaita* [qualified *Advaita*, expounded by Ramanuja] school of thought. Being impressed by Bhagavan I asked him how to reconcile it with the *Advaita* school. After a pause, Bhagavan said, “You have to workout your *karma* anyhow and you are saved.” Ever since I have been pondering over that *upadesa* and felt benefited.

The *moolasthanams* [sanctum sanctorums] of temples are places where saints lived and had visions of Him. The Ashram is such a place and I feel convinced that the aura that was there continues today.

Morarji Desai, Prime Minister of India (March 1977 to July 1979), was President of Ramana Kendra, Delhi, 1968-70.

I had the privilege of seeing Ramana Maharshi in August 1935 in the hall in which he usually sat. He was sitting on a sofa and wore only a loincloth. I could see an aura on his face, which was glowing with peace and joy. I sat opposite to him but did not ask him anything. He too did not say anything to me. I sat just over an hour and just looked at his face. Till today I have not seen that aura, that joy or peace on anybody else’s face. That hour of perfect stillness in that silent presence has been a precious memory ever since.

While I sat there, no questions arose in my mind, nor did I feel any desire to ask anything. I was at complete peace with myself. It was this experience which convinced me that Ramana Maharshi had realized God or Truth. Some of his disciples who were present asked him some questions, which he answered. He, however, said nothing of his own accord.

I had to leave the place next day by train at about twelve. About an hour-and-a half before the time of departure, I approached Ramana Maharshi for permission to leave. He told me that I should go after I had eaten. We sat down for lunch along with the Maharshi, at about eleven O’clock. After lunch, I bowed down to him and left.

The visit left an abiding impression on me and convinced me that Ramana Maharshi was a realised soul and that the ideal of ‘action in inaction’ as propounded in the Gita is really attainable.

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@rkdeldhi.org with the subject line: 'Letters to the Editor'

Dear Advait,

Very nice issue! *One Plus* captured my attention this time. I am sure children will enjoy such illustrative and engaging content.

Swagat Patnaik

(Former editor of *Direct Path*)

Dear Advait,

Congratulations on a lively and interesting issue. Both articles by the two Bharatis read well. Michael Highburgher's was valuable. The colourful poetry pages look good and make a difference.

Sharada Bhanu

Dear Advait,

I read the whole issue, cover to cover, and, as always, enjoyed every word. Of course, it was a different experience to find a familiar name and familiar words in one small section. I greatly appreciate the illustration accompanying my story. The roses are the most intuitive choice for their inherent symbolism.

V. T. Tripurari

Dear Advait,

I enjoyed the content and art work of *One Plus*. It is a profound concept which has been explained in an easily understandable manner. This will appeal to children.

Natarajan Venkatesan

Dear Advait,

I found several meaningful points in the editorial: if we lose our stories, we lose our moral purpose; today we lack stories so we are like trees without roots. Yet stories are ultimately illusory, just like every life story is illusory and a passage.

Michael Highburger wrote a very significant article, especially for these times. It is significant that Bhagavan treated depression/ mental defilement as we would treat any other thought. That's why Highburger emphasises Bhagavan's teaching: treating even these strong volatile states as shadows and essentially insubstantial. But this is very difficult to do. Because these are strong and volatile states, they grip you. So the advice of treating them with compassion and not as demons is compassionate in itself, for they are often products of old old samskaras – the deeper their roots, the stronger their hold. The visual chosen by Marie Elangovan is powerful, rendering the impression of a jailbird.

Helping the World is a very complete article. Its range is wide including personal and general history; sages and their lives and views; lively anecdotes; personal confession and a self-reassurance that the lives of the realized impact those who live under their protection in salutary ways, well after they have left their bodies. This article provides reassurance not only to the writer but to the reader as well.

In the Crucible of the Kitchen is a very moving piece. It not only shows us Bhagavan's dismissal of caste and ritual orthodoxy as non-essential, but underlying it is his compassion for the disadvantaged; and his love for the simple uneducated woman who could work and learn in his proximity, absorbing into the heart his teaching through simple love and devotion. We need more such articles that mine treasures from long volumes, giving readers the essence of what Bhagavan represented: humanity and compassion.

It is wonderful to see a short story in *Direct Path*. *Love and Loss* is a very heartening story. It exhibits the capacity to move on, to make an incomprehensible move to learn the Russian language, to love others through it, even feel and observe a physical attraction, and to let it go, as perhaps, a more material basis for the love that has stirred and found its way to others. It's amazing how the Guru's teaching is revealed through a story: physical attraction provides freshness like the fragrance of a rose, but can be laid to rest like any other

pleasant thought. Hence the appropriateness of the visual of a rose.

There is a freshness to Swagat's experiences at Arunachala which is intriguing. The simplest events take on aspects of wonder, even bliss. The visuals chosen by Marie Elangovan of Skandashram are so appropriate: a gate, then a photographic world that opens up, besides other practices that exist!

One Plus is a most delightful inclusion to *Direct Path*. As the editorial notes, this timeless story – and others to come – will be appreciated, with gratitude, by both children and adults – pulling them back to read and absorb the words and visuals – as both together travel easily to the heart!

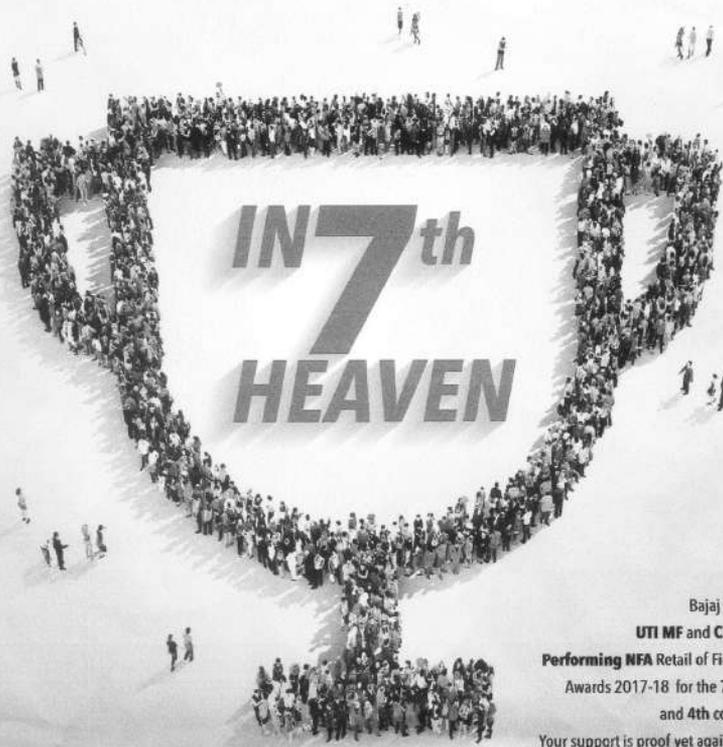
The poetry pages designs are exquisite. They lead one straight to the doorsteps of the ashram revealing the beauty that lies there and beyond. Kudos to the artist, Bharati Mirchandani.

Neera Kashyap

Talk 494.

Sri Bhagavan had gone through “Turn Eastwards” - the whole book of Mademoiselle Pascaline Maillert - and spoke for about an hour on that book. He said that the writing is full of feeling and the writer is sincere. The book is written in simple style and finishes off with remembrance of Himself. A few errors here and there might be pointed out to be corrected in subsequent editions. Nandanar Charitra has been repeated twice under the mistaken notion that the incident was on two different occasions. *Prithvi*, *Ap*, etc., *lingas* are wrongly located. Sri Bhagavan thinks the book well-written. He interprets “Turn Eastwards” as “Turn to the Source of Light”. This book is a good supplement to Mr. Brunton's book.

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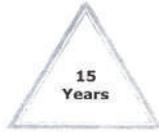
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*The results of Karma (Action) pass away,
and yet leave seeds that cast the agent
into an ocean of Karma.
Karma yields no salvation*

Ramana Maharshi {Upadesa Saram (2)}

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

Ramana Maharshi (Upadesa Saram-16)

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Sivaratri 2022